INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES' PERSPECTIVES: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

EXPERIENCED WHILE WORKING WITH TEACHERS

by

ANGELA K. HAMLIN RAINWATER

(Under the Direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

Research findings have established the important role coaches play in professional

development for teachers and the strategies and characteristics coaches should

demonstrate for effective practice. Following the strategies outlined in the literature does

not guarantee coaches' success in assisting teachers in transforming instruction. The

information on instructional coaching has stopped short of examining the perspectives of

instructional coaches related to their experiences in supporting teachers in professional

learning.

This study explored instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and

challenges experienced while working with teachers. Specifically, this study sought to

answer the overall research question: What are instructional coaches' perspectives about

the successes and challenges they experience while working with teachers? This

qualitative research study used a case study design that included data from semi-

structured one-on-one interviews, journal entries, and documents. Data were analyzed

using the constant comparative method.

Albeit a small sample size of instructional coaches from a single rural school system participated, several themes emerged from the data: 1) Instructional coaches self-identify their roles based on their beliefs about how the instructional coach position should meet the needs within their respective schools; 2) Instructional coaches feel comfortable in their position when the coaching structure framed by the school's principal aligns with their strengths; 3) Barriers such as expectations of self, content knowledge, and other teachers affect instructional coaches' confidence within the job; 4) Instructional coaches maintain credibility of the instructional coach position by understanding the work of a classroom teacher and teaching students.

INDEX WORDS: Instructional coaching; Coaching relationships; Instructional

coaching roles; Coaching structures; Credibility in coaching;

Instructional coach confidence

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2016

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December 2016

DEDICATION

For Blake ~ Without you, this accomplishment would not have been possible…this is ours to share together. *"Always and Forever"*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Being a doctoral student was a journey of ups and downs and I could not have made it to the finish line without the many people who supported and guided me along the way.

To Dr. Zepeda – I feel like my words are so inadequate in expressing my thanks for the mentoring and coaching you provided. I cannot thank you enough for your encouragement and toughness through this process. Somehow you knew exactly what I needed to hear and when it needed to be heard. I admire your work and have learned more under your leadership than I could ever explain. Thank you for your advice, guidance, and all the time you spent reading and providing feedback. I greatly appreciate you!

To my committee members, Dr. Gayle Andrews and Dr. Katherine Thompson – Thank you for the time, wisdom, and expertise you shared. The insight you provided ultimately added significant value to my dissertation. I appreciate your willingness to serve on my committee.

To Blake and Mackenzie – Thank you for understanding the importance of the amount of time I spent working and writing to complete this dissertation. You know every feeling I had along the way, and shared in the tears and celebrations. Now it's your turn. Love you more!

To Mom and Dad – Thank you for always supporting my endeavors and "praying me through it." You have no idea how blessed I feel by your love and always being there when you know I need you. I love you!

To the many friends and family who supported me through this process – I greatly appreciate your friendship, love, and understanding. Thank you for keeping me focused on moving forward and ultimately finishing this dissertation. I am a lucky girl to have all of you in my life!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For many years, a frontline debate of educational policy has been the quality of

education that students receive in America's schools (Cross, 2015; Ikpa, 2016).

Education was propelled to the forefront with the publishing of *A Nation at Risk* (1983).

Since that time, policy efforts such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the

federal Race to the Top (RTTT) competition have recognized the urgency of employing

quality teachers (Garrett & Steinberg, 2014). These policies, along with the most recent

policy, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), mandate the credentials a teacher must

acquire and maintain to teach in a U.S. public school system. Earlier research studies

shared by Schumacher, Grigsby, and Vesey (2012) identified teacher quality as "the

single most important determinant of student achievement…and the common

denominator in school improvement and student success" (p. 2). They also note that

"effective teachers have a lasting positive impact on students; ineffective teachers can

have a lasting negative impact" (p. 2). Parents, practitioners, and policymakers agree that

the key to improving public education in America is placing highly skilled and effective

teachers in all classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

There are several elements to consider about quality teaching because when

teachers struggle with the work of educating children, it is to the detriment of student

learning (Zepeda, 2012). Professional learning, supported by a coach, allows teachers to

reflect on their teaching practices and to strengthen their pedagogical beliefs about

effective teaching (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Knight, 2007). In a study conducted by

Coburn and Woulfin (2012), it was noted that teachers were more likely to make

substantial changes in their classroom practice when they learned from a coach about

skills related to content rather than from other sources such as school leaders and system

administrators. In an additional study, Elder and Padover (2011) indicated a 95%

implementation rate of new practice when coaching was provided. It appears from the

fields of practice and research that the support from a coach enables teachers to

understand better the connection between policy and practice, which leads to

improvement in teaching practices.

Background

There is a large body of literature about the mandates of past educational policy in

relation to highly qualified teachers. The term *highly qualified teacher* originated and

was defined by Title II of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 as a teacher

who earned a bachelor's degree, was certified or licensed to teach in the state employed,

and could demonstrate knowledge of the subject matter he or she was teaching. The

NCLB definition leaves room for interpretation by individual states about identifying a

teacher as highly qualified. Under the current definition, a beginning teacher can be

categorized as a highly qualified teacher as can a veteran teacher. While mandating that

teachers meet the requirements of NCLB is commendable, there is no mention of teachers

being required to demonstrate pedagogical or assessment knowledge.

More importantly, "The lynchpin to improving teacher quality and seeing gains in

student achievement rests, in part, to the overall professional development made available

to teachers" (Zepeda, 2012, p. 6). The positive connection between educational

outcomes, teacher quality, teacher effectiveness, and professional development is that professional development is imperative to teacher and student success.

Learning Forward (formerly known as National Staff Development Council) defined professional development as a "comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement" (Definition of Professional Development section, para. 3). In other words, teachers should grow and change in their professional practice as a result of professional development because "Professional development is about learning — learning for students, teachers, and other professionals who support children" (Zepeda, 2012, p. 5), and professional development is needed because "in the end, the quality of education that will be available in our public schools will depend on the quality of professional learning opportunities available to teachers" (Randi & Zeichner, 2004, p. 221).

Learning is about change, and it is reasonable to expect that teachers engaging in professional development would change their instructional practices, which would lead to shifts in students' learning outcomes. However big or small the shifts, the change should positively affect teacher and student performance and quality (Zepeda, 2015). Not only is change expected, Fullan (2007) shares that change is "inevitable" and "necessary" because "students' lives in school are far less than they should be" but also because "teachers are frustrated, bored, and burned out" (p. 138).

A common teacher support component in the professional development literature includes coaching. Heineke (2013) indicated that the interest in coaching has been ongoing because it emerged from the intersection of rising expectations for student achievement, research indicating the strong relationship between teacher quality and

effectiveness and student achievement, and a new paradigm for teacher learning.

Heineke (2013) also noted that coaching blends well with the newly revised Standards for

Professional Learning, which calls for job-embedded professional learning (Learning

Forward, 2011). School reform researchers, Fullan and Knight (2011), indicated that

many comprehensive reform efforts fall short of real improvement without the support of

coaching.

In school settings, coaching is viewed as a way of supporting teachers in their

efforts to provide high quality teaching (Denton & Hasbrook, 2009) and also enhances

the teachers' implementation of skills in class (Barkley, 2010). To support teachers in

their practice, coaches involve teachers in activities such as modeling, demonstrating,

sharing research of best practices, observing teachers, and providing professional

development (Zepeda, 2015). Within the activities coaching involves:

- Supporting teachers in the development of deeper understanding of content
  knowledge;
- Extending thought processes needed to see different points of view about
  strategies;
- Helping develop critical thinking skills through problem posing and problem-
  solving to get at looking at the impact of instruction on student success;
- Helping teachers boost student performance;
- Providing translations of research and making connections to classroom practice;
  and,
- Giving feedback on performance to answer the question, "Are we getting closer to
  meeting the objectives?" (Zepeda, 2012a, pp. 65-66)

Coaches work to make new strategies as easy as possible to implement, provide teachers with dedicated implementation support materials, and remove as many as possible barriers to implementation (Devine, Houssemand, & Meyers, 2013). Coaches collaborate and build trust with teachers by supporting the practice of new strategies and the use of new information in teaching without fear of evaluation or repercussion from administration (Zepeda, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, professional development involved teachers going to meetings and workshops with little follow up to connect theory to practice. That pattern of practice assumed teachers only needed support in knowledge of effective teaching strategies. To the contrary, "research shows that the greatest challenge for teachers doesn't simply come in acquiring knowledge of new strategies, but in implementing those strategies in the classroom" (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 36). Recent research has illustrated that more effective professional development strategies exist. Devine, Houssemand, and Meyers (2013) found evidence that professional development programs were more effective when they involved intensive forms of support. Sparks (2013) further shared that professional development that occurs without intensive and sustained small-group dialogue, in-classroom coaching, and just-in-time problem solving is educational malpractice.

Even when teachers do not struggle with effective teaching practices, professional development is still necessary because of education reform, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) that requires all teachers to participate in sustained, job-embedded, data-driven professional learning. Finding the best ways to implement professional

learning activities are up to support personnel, such as instructional coaches, in schools. Discovering the instructional coaches' perspectives of the successes and challenges they experience while working with teachers is important for acquiring a deeper understanding of coaches' practices while working with teachers.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and challenges experienced while working with teachers. To inform this study, five instructional coaches at the elementary school level were interviewed to understand the successes and challenges of supporting teachers with their instructional practices. The five instructional coaches interviewed for the study were selected from a rural school system in Southeast United States.

Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and challenges they experienced while working with teachers. This study examined instructional coaches' perspectives to understand how instructional coaches perceive their work with teachers as they provide job embedded professional development. The guiding research question in the study was:

1. What are instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and challenges they experience while working with teachers?

Theoretical Framework

To study instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and challenges they experienced while working with teachers, an interpretivist epistemology for this qualitative study was the guide to uncover the perspectives of instructional coaches and to understand the successes and challenges they experienced while working with teachers. Central to the interpretivist paradigm is the belief that individuals construct meaning. When individuals are involved in experiences, they construct their own meaning from those experiences, which is described as constructivism. Seimears, Graves, Schroyer, and Staver (2012) indicated that the constructivist model of learning "contends that learners actively construct knowledge" (p. 266). Learners do not learn through collecting information, rather they learn by actively participating, critically thinking, and processing information in relation to what they already know (Bruner, 1966).

The constructivist approach was important to consider within coaching because individuals were engaged in collecting evidence of their own coaching practices and were engaged in reflecting on what they understood from their own coaching experiences. This study sought to learn from coaches' perspectives about the successes and challenges while working with the teachers they coach.

Significance of the Study

Despite positive outcomes, inconsistencies in the literature exist related to the work of instructional coaches. Research findings show that improvement can happen within teaching practices when highly qualified instructional coaches are in place, when they focus on the right teaching methods, and when they take a partnership approach (Knight, 2005). However, the unfortunate reality is that following the strategies outlined

in the literature does not automatically guarantee success with change initiatives. Additionally, information is lacking about the experiences and perspectives of instructional coaches who are actually working with teachers and how those coaches believe they are most effective in supporting teacher learning (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Heineke, 2013).

Because coaching is a common teacher support component found in the professional development literature, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 becomes significant to consider. The ESSA of 2015 mandates a broader approach to professional learning than has been previously outlined in any other federal policy. The updated definition calls for activities that are "sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused" (ESSA, 2015, p. 295). Additionally, the ESSA promotes personalized plans for each educator that addresses specific learning needs identified by teachers. These specific elements found in the ESSA directly relate to the work of coaches that has been outlined in prior research (Joyce & Showers 1996; Knight, 2007; Zepeda, 2015).

There is very little question that effective coaching can promote teachers' effective implementation of curriculum reform and new teaching practices (Bruce & Ross, 2008; Campbell & Malkus, 2009; Knight, 2005; Wang, Lin, & Spalding, 2008). Researchers have drawn conclusions that highlight the important role coaches play in determining the varied outcomes (Campbell & Malkus, 2009; Manno & Firestone, 2008; Taylor, 2008) and identifying areas that impact instructional practice (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002), focusing on the characteristics of effective coaching (Knight, 2009).

There is significance in this study based on the new professional learning mandates outlined in ESSA, inconsistencies and lack of information in the literature, and what can be learned through the perspectives of instructional coaches' about the successes and challenges they experience while working with teachers. The findings of the study could potentially contribute to the instructional coaching literature and could provide support for program improvement to systems that employ instructional coaches. Others who may benefit from the study include instructional coaches, principals, and other school administrators who work directly with teachers to improve teaching practice and professional development personnel at the system level.

Assumptions of the Study

It was assumed that all participants were trained in working with teachers and understood what was involved in coaching teachers. It was also assumed that because these participants were coaches, they had a high level of curriculum knowledge and effective teaching strategies. Additionally, the assumption was made that instructional coaches would be open to discussing their experiences among themselves, the teachers they coached, and the researcher.

Definition of Terms

The following key terms are defined in relation to the present study and its purpose:

Instructional Coach – An instructional coach is an onsite professional developer who teaches educators how to use evidence-based teaching practices and supports them in learning and applying these practices in a variety of educational settings. According to Knight (2009), "An instructional coach partners with teachers to help them incorporate

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research-based instructional practices into their teaching which help students learn more effectively" (p. 30).

Coaching – Coaching is the act of supporting teachers on site through various activities to improve teaching practice. Instructional coaches use a variety of professional development procedures to encourage the implementation of effective teaching practices. The procedures used in coaching could include holding one-to-one or small group meetings to discuss teachers' concerns; guiding teachers through instructional materials; collaboratively planning with teachers to identify when and how to implement effective instruction; preparing materials for teachers prior to instruction; modeling instructional practices in teachers' classrooms; observing teachers when they use interventions; and providing feedback to teachers (Knight, 2005).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations exist when conducting any type of research study. The nature of this topic focused on the perspectives of five instructional coaches in a particular school district that was a rural one. Expectations placed on and practices of instructional coaches differ from those in other school districts. This study was limited to the findings of this one group of participants and cannot be generalized to a larger population, as every instructional coach and school setting is different.

Overview of the Research Procedures

The interpretivist epistemology is based on the premise that human action is inbred with meaning for that action and seeks to analyze meanings people give for their actions. Central to the interpretivist epistemology is constructivism, which explains that individuals create their own meaning from the experiences in which they are involved.

Constructivism is connected to the methodology of this study, a case study. Based on the study's purpose of uncovering instructional coaches' perspectives about working with teachers, a case study methodology was used. The principal aspect of the case study is the specific, identified case. In this study, the case is the instructional coaches in the Harborview School District.

The study intended to describe the perspectives of instructional coaches within the case. Researchers using case study look for what is common as well as what is particular about the case, but in the end the research product regularly displays the uncommon (Stake, 1995). Additional to the identified case, an issue must be identified. Within case study research, issues are "complex, situated, problematic relationships, which pull attention both to ordinary experience and also to the disciplines of knowledge" (Stake, 1995, p. 126). In this study, the issue is identified as the coaching of teachers.

To fully examine the issue of coaching teachers within the case of instructional coaches, multiple forms of data were collected to verify the description of the case. In this case study, data were collected from semi-structured interviews, reflection journals, documents, and field notes. The goal of the study was to provide a thorough understanding of the perspectives of instructional coaches about the successes and challenges they experience while working with teachers. Data were collected during the spring semester of the 2016 school year. The research site was the Harborview School District. This school district was selected because of the instructional coach framework that is implemented in the school system.

Purposeful sampling is the strategy used in which participants are identified for a study based on criteria particular to the research question, and purposeful sampling was the best participant selection strategy to use in the present study since the researcher sought to gather the most rich, descriptive data related to experiences of instructional coaches.

Through purposeful sampling, five instructional coaches were selected for the study. Each participant was interviewed, wrote reflection journals, and provided documents associated with her work with teachers. The semi-structured interviews were the primary research method for this case study. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Journal reflections provided information about specific work sessions with teachers and documents provided additional information directly related to that work.

Once collected, the researcher analyzed the data using the constant comparative method. Member checks were conducted with each participant to ensure that information had been properly interpreted. Information was then reported in the dissertation.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study is organized in five chapters. Chapter 1 describes the background of the study and presents a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, guiding research questions, significance of the study, assumptions underlying the study, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant literature for this study. Detailed in this chapter are the instructional coach, the context for coaching in K-12 schools, effective coaching characteristics, and coaching models.

Chapter 3 describes the theoretical framework and research design of the study. The research methods are detailed, data collection and analysis strategies explained, as well as explaining how quality was built into the study.

Chapter 4 reports the study's thematic analyses of findings. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, a discussion of the study's contributions to the research literature, and implications for both further research and practices of instructional coaching as related to successes and challenges in working with teachers. In this chapter, recommendations are also included.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Research is available that identifies areas that impact teachers' instructional

practice (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Instructional coaches use the information

from research related to instructional practice to provide professional development for

teachers that is directly related to the teachers' daily work and designed to improve

teaching practice (Knight, 2005). For instructional coaches to positively impact

teachers' instructional practice, effective coaching characteristics must be present and

implemented (Knight, 2009). Research shows that effective coaching can promote

teachers' effective implementation of curriculum reform and new teaching practices

(Bruce & Ross, 2008; Campbell & Malkus, 2009; Knight, 2005; Wang, Lin, & Spalding,

2008). Instructional Coaching is a coaching model that was developed through research

related to the inclusion of added supports within professional development activities for

teachers, and research indicates best practices for implementation of that model (Knight,

2005; Knight, 2009). However, information is lacking about the experiences and

perspectives of instructional coaches who are working with teachers and how those

coaches believe they are most effective in supporting teacher learning (Coburn &

Woulfin, 2012; Heineke, 2013). Therefore, this study is significant and timely.

The purpose of this study was to investigate instructional coaches' perspectives

about the successes and challenges they experienced while working with teachers. The

study examined how instructional coaches perceived their work with teachers as they provided job-embedded professional development in their school. The guiding question was:

1. What are instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and challenges they experience while working with teachers?

A qualitative approach, using case study methodology, was used in this study to uncover instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and challenges experienced while working with teachers. This chapter outlines areas of related literature important this study—the instructional coach, the context for coaching, and coaching models.

The Instructional Coach

An instructional coach, as defined by Knight (2005), is "an on-site professional developer who teaches educators how to use proven teaching methods" (p. 17). These coaches collaborate with teachers to identify practices that will effectively address teachers' needs and help teachers implement those practices and any newly learned skill (Joyce & Showers, 1996, Knight, 2005). Together, the teacher and coach set goals and develop a plan to meet those goals with a purpose "to improve instructional practices of teachers in order to increase student learning" (Oliver, 2007, p. 2).

When a coach works with a teacher, the work is directly related to the job of the teacher, happens during the day while on the job, and should take into consideration the experience, maturity, knowledge, and career path of the teacher (Zepeda, 2015). Zepeda (2015) further specifies that coaching "is concerned with:

1. supporting teachers in the development of deeper understandings of content knowledge;

2. extending thought processes needed to see different points of view about strategies;

3. helping develop critical thinking skills through problem-posing and problem-solving to get at looking at the impact of instruction on student success;

4. helping teachers boost student performance;

5. providing translations of research and making connections to classroom practice; and

6. giving feedback on performance to answer the question, 'Are we getting closer to meeting the objectives?' (pp. 65-66)

To carry out these characteristics of coaching, a coach engages teachers in various professional development activities of modeling effective teaching practices, observing teaching practices, discussing effective teaching, and providing feedback (Knight, 2007). Depending on the need of the teacher(s) being coached, the professional development session could be one-to-one or happen in a small group setting. It is important for the coach to know how to structure the professional development and possess the characteristics to deliver effective professional development that is appropriate for teacher learning and will enhance instructional proficiency (Knight, 2005).

Characteristics of an Effective Instructional Coach

Although research saturates the professional development arena, many providers of staff development do not possess the knowledge base and skills needed to support teachers in reform efforts (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Hill, 2009). For

example, a survey of mathematics professional development leaders revealed that in some cases, their knowledge of mathematics was below that of their teacher audience (Hill, 2009). Similarly, studies have found that fidelity with which coaches implemented workshops was no greater than that of their teachers in implementation of classroom practices (Bach & Supovitz, 2003; Powell & Diamond, 2013). With instructional coaches being providers of professional development, these studies draw attention to the characteristics coaches must possess to lead professional development opportunities that effectively foster new understandings, learning of content and pedagogy, and promote a collegial atmosphere. As a result of research, three key areas have been noted in which instructional coaches should have expertise. Those are the areas of subject specific content and pedagogy and communication skills (Borman & Feger, 2006; Kinkead, 2007; Knight, 2007; Kowal & Steiner, 2007; Saphier & West, 2010).

Content and Pedagogy

According to a review of successful math coaches, Kowal and Steiner (2007) noted that no matter the subject area focus, effective coaches needed to have a thorough understanding of the content of the subject they were coaching as well as familiarity of the curriculum. Kowal and Steiner's finding supports the idea that competence in content and pedagogy is imperative for effective professional development to occur. It is critical that coaches are content specialists who have the ability to support teachers in deeper understanding and use of the content to lead to improved practice (Kinkead, 2007).

Data analysis is a way for teachers to understand the effectiveness of their use of content in instruction. With the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), data analysis has become an expectation of professional learning that all teachers should

receive. For coaches to provide support to teachers in data analysis, they should have deep experience in and thorough knowledge of data analysis and differentiated instruction strategies and methods (Feger, Woleck, & Hickman, 2004; Kowal & Steiner, 2007). Further, coaches need to have a thorough understanding of how children learn so they can pass on to teachers the most appropriate and effective pedagogical strategies that data analysis indicates is needed, and support teachers in implementing those strategies in their own teaching practices (Kowal & Steiner, 2007; Pomeranz & Pierce, 2013). Having the knowledge of content and pedagogy is only a starting point for an instructional coach. Effective communication and interpersonal skills are imperative to impart content and pedagogy knowledge.

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Communication and interpersonal skills are important elements in effective coaching (Borman & Feger, 2006; Guiney, 2001; Kinkead, 2007; Knight, 2009). As part of that, coaches must be capable of creating teacher dialogue, understanding teacher thinking, and facilitating learning opportunities that support teachers in transforming their practices (Schifter & Lester, 2003). The idea is confirmed by West and Staub's (2003) finding that coaches who used effective communication and interpersonal skills were attuned to teacher needs and were able to make necessary adjustments to address and support particular needs within the classroom.

Effective coaches must be able to create an atmosphere of open and safe learning (Knight, 2007). According to research regarding coaching and communication, effective coaches actively listened, built trusting relationships, fostered safe learning environments, communicated effectively with school personnel, employed reflective questioning

strategies, and provided constructive feedback for improvement (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Kinkead, 2007; Knight, 2009; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). A survey used in a research review by Kowal and Steiner (2007) found that a characteristic of an effective coach most frequently mentioned was people skills; including building relationships, trust, and credibility. Knight (2011) added that people skills were the foundation to being a change agent in education reform. An instructional coach may have content and curriculum expertise, but without effective interpersonal and communication skills, professional development efforts would be squandered and result in ineffective outcomes (Knight, 2009; Perkins, 1998).

Communication skills are needed not only to build relationships that foster an effective working environment between teachers and coaches, but are also needed to foster effective learning environments for teachers. A study by Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) found that instructional coaches needed to develop communication strategies that focused on facilitating teachers' reflective thinking rather than providing feedback to teachers. By using communication skills to foster reflection, instructional coaches can guide teachers toward self-directed learning and problem solving that set classroom structures to foster student's development of ideas (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015).

Research has shown that coaches must have expertise in the areas of curriculum, content and pedagogy, and communication skills (Borman & Feger, 2006; Kinkead, 2007; Knight, 2007; Kowal & Steiner, 2007; Saphier & West, 2010). Employing a coach without expertise in those areas dissipates improvement efforts and results in professional learning that is ineffective for the purpose of instructional improvement.

Knowing the characteristics of coaching is important for a coach to understand and be able assert so the work with teachers is effective. The job of a coach is important to the needs of the school and the needs of the teachers in the school (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Knight, 2005; Zepeda, 2015). Coaches work within the context of schools; therefore the context for coaching is important to understand.

The Context for Coaching

Education reformers in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s emphasized indications of teachers' inability to transform teaching as one of the many critical factors in the declining academic performance based on comparisons of American high school students' test scores with other countries (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Roberts, 2001). At that point the need for effective professional development strategies increased and coaching began to develop.

The Introduction of Coaching

According to Joyce, Showers, and Bennett (1987), the 1980s was a time that produced enough research on the topic of professional development to form a theoretical hypothesis about how teachers learn about and implement new practices through presentations of new knowledge and skills. The research resulted in the theory that when coaching followed initial training, a greater transfer of new knowledge would result when compared with training alone (Joyce & Showers, 1981).

During the 1980s the theory of coaching was investigated, and with the publishing of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, attention was called to the quality of teachers and teacher training programs. Joyce and Showers (1996) led research regarding professional development that involved exhibition of new learning followed by observation and

feedback. The research confirmed that coaching was a promising remedy to bridge the gap between new knowledge and the transfer of that new knowledge into classroom instruction. With the introduction of coaching, there was an increased awareness of the need of peer specialists who could successfully observe classroom instruction, provide feedback, and model new strategies for teachers within the classroom (Joyce & Showers, 1981). Even with this information, coaches were seen as a support in the classroom for providing direct instruction for students rather than being a support for teachers' professional learning (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009).

The use of coaches in school systems began to be a focus of professional development reevaluation with the findings from the 1995 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) indicating that U.S. students' academic performance was mediocre (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). The reasoning for that mediocre performance was blamed on teachers' inadequate implementation of the national standards. From that study emerged several national efforts to improve teachers' instructional practices. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* outlined professional development programs, such as coaching, to be implemented consistently (Kowal & Steiner, 2007). Also, the Common Core Standards movement and the federal program, *Race to the Top* (RTTT), have raised the expectation for mastery of content in every grade level. Hence, professional learning for teachers became a more structured focus in schools to improve instruction as a means to increase students' mastery of content (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Professional Learning

The primary focus of professional development is the transfer of newly learned skills to the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Joyce & Showers, 1981; Knight, 2009). A vital element of effective professional development lies in the power of collaboration (Fullan, 2007; Knight, 2009). Teachers in a study who received professional development on Cognitively Guided Instruction reported that sustained improvement was due to the support they received from colleagues and it was extremely difficult to implement the learning without the collegiality of peer teachers (Franke, Carpenter, Levi, & Fennema, 2001). A study by Bruce and Ross (2008) found that a teacher who received positive and constructive feedback from a respected peer had greater potential for goal setting, risk taking, and implementing the new or challenging teaching strategy.

Teachers value and learn from peers with whom they can relate to their specific context and who offer meaningful feedback (Knight, 2005). In two additional studies, intense reflection with, and feedback from a peer resulted in teachers' implementation of a new practice or strategy at a high quality (Bruce & Ross, 2008; Joyce & Showers, 1981). In another study, teachers who received support from colleagues who were experts in their content area gained new information (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013). When the support allows time for discussion and reflection as it relates to teachers' daily instruction, collaboration and collegiality is beneficial (Knight, 2005).

Two studies found that collegiality is only beneficial in teachers' increased learning and adoption of reform if certain conditions are in place, such as internal peer supports having a level of expertise that fosters new learning, providing opportunities for meaningful and helpful reflection, and giving feedback that is helpful to teachers' improved practice (Franke et al., 2001; Roehrig, Kruse, & Kern, 2007). When the conditions were not in place, collective collaboration became the arena for unfocused discussion unrelated to learning and practice. Rather than simply collectively meeting, the structure, purpose, goal, and focus of the collaborative efforts must be a priority for teacher learning to occur (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Guskey, 2000; Roehrig et al., 2007).

In studying collegiality and collaboration, much has been learned about the important role that the collaborative form of professional development plays in teachers' ability to transfer the new strategy or practice to the classroom. Research by Joyce and Showers (1981) has shown that the intensive, short term-workshops are ineffective without additional job-embedded collegial support within the professional development. Another study, conducted by Bush (1984), investigated teachers' transfer of strategies learned during a workshop into classroom instruction. The results of Bush's study revealed that approximately 95% of the participants, who were provided with additional site-based support from a peer after the workshop, implemented and adopted the strategies in their classrooms. Fewer than 20% of teachers who did not receive the additional job-embedded support adopted the strategies. Bush's study added to the literature reinforcing the impact site-based peer support had on teachers' implementation of new strategies and practices.

Since that time, other research also found the need for site-based peer support within teachers' professional learning activities (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Knight, 2009; Zepeda, 2015). Additionally, Truesdale (2003) conducted a study to investigate whether there was a difference in the level at which a teacher who was part of a peer coaching team as an element of professional learning transferred new strategies or practices in the classroom compared to a non-coached teacher. The study confirmed that when teachers received peer coaching in addition to a workshop, the transferability of the new strategy or practice was higher than the non-coached teacher. Teachers in the study noted that the ability to practice what was learned, receiving feedback from peer observations, and having the opportunity for reflection were key in the implementation and transfer of the strategy into their classroom practices.

A common component in professional development literature is the importance of added peer support within professional learning activities (Bush, 1984; Joyce & Showers, 1981; Trusdale, 2003). Instructional coaching is a type of peer support that has gained attention as the focus on professional development for teachers has grown (Knight, 2009). Heineke (2013) indicates that "continued interest in coaching emerges from the intersection of three developments in the field of education: rising expectations for student achievement, research indicating the strong relationship between teacher quality and student achievement, and a new paradigm for teacher learning" and that "coaching harmonizes" with the newly revised Standards For Professional Learning, which calls for job-embedded professional learning (p. 14). Fullan and Knight, leading researchers of school reform and instructional coaching, state, "Without coaching, many comprehensive reform efforts will fall short of real improvement" (2011, p. 50). These findings support

the idea that traditional professional development methods that only rely on intensive, short training programs are ineffective in increasing teachers' implementation of new strategies; however, merely implementing reform-oriented methods does not guarantee effective professional development (Campbell & Malkus, 2009; Guskey, 2000; Penuel et al., 2007; Perkins, 1998; Roehrig et al., 2007). Trusting the results without thorough knowledge as to the specific conditions that will foster effective implementation leads to school leaders wondering why simply placing a coach in the building is not gaining desired results. To correspond with the purpose of instructional improvement, school leaders should choose and implement the appropriate coaching model for maximum benefit to teacher learning.

Coaching Models

The practice of coaching as means to improve or learn a skill can take many forms. The form of coaching used in particular settings is dependent on several factors. According to Zepeda (2012), coaching should take into consideration the needs of the organization as well as the needs of the individual being coached. Zepeda also states that when used to support teaching, "regardless of the structure, all models and configuration of professional development can be enhanced with a strong coaching component" (p. 143). This section describes in further detail the forms of coaching related to the study.

Content Specific Coaching

It is widely recognized that teachers tend to teach content in the way they were taught (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Kennedy, 1991). The issue is that traditional ways of teaching and learning, such as lecture and textbook reading, are in

stark contrast to the modern teaching methods, such as hands-on and problem-based learning; hence the need for professional development to support teachers as they learn more about specific teaching strategies in their content area. One way to do that is through the support of content specific coaches such as math coaches, literacy coaches, and science coaches.

A vital dimension of effective professional development is helping teachers understand more deeply the content they teach and effective ways students learn that content (Guskey, 2000). Professional development research from Guiney (2001) indicated that mathematics reform calls for teachers to teach students not only procedurally as in the past, but conceptually as well. The study further explains that although teachers' awareness of the need to teach differently is present, a level of frustration also exists for those who did not learn the concepts conceptually and are unable to explain thoroughly the reasoning behind procedural algorithms. Without content specific professional support from coaches, teachers will either not try new teaching concepts because they view them as too difficult or they will try to do better what they have always done.

Within coaching literature related to content specific coaches, studies show that teachers' instructional implementation is correlated positively to the support received in the use of materials that are specific to their particular content curriculum (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005; Penuel et al., 2007; Powell & Diamond, 2013). In a study of the impact of professional development on teachers' implementation of science curriculum, findings show that teachers who received support from a coach on the use of specific resources were more likely to implement the use of those resources in their own practices (Penuel

et al., 2007).   When the content of a professional development session focused on teacher behaviors rather than subject knowledge, the impact on student learning was not as significant (Kennedy, 1998).

Bruce and Ross (2008) also found that it is highly probable that teachers did not experience significant growth in their knowledge construction because the professional development focus was not content related. The study indicated that content discussed during professional development is more of a determinant of the transfer of newly learned skills than when form, time and duration, and other organizational features are considered. Based on this study, if instructional change by teachers is the goal, subject specific content and pedagogy should be the focus.

Research has shown it is important to not only provide teachers with opportunities to engage in professional development related to content and pedagogical knowledge, but also to foster opportunities for them to link new knowledge to their current foundation of knowledge (Lampert & Ball, 1998). Linking new knowledge to a current foundation of knowledge allows teachers to understand better the rationale of specific teaching strategies and techniques to be able to make lasting changes in their practice (Kennedy, 1991; Knight, 2009). Additionally, findings show teachers value opportunities to engage in relevant tasks aligned with specific grade level curriculum, discuss student progress, and reflect on instructional practices as keys to altering teaching practice (Kennedy, 1991; Knight, 2009).

For professional development to impact instruction positively, it must be aligned to the curriculum, applicable to the academic needs of students, and provide necessary tools to support teachers in implementing instruction (Darling-Hammond & Richardson,

2009; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey &Yoon, 2009, Knight, 2009).   Therefore, it is critical

that professional development providers specialize in the content area, have a thorough

understanding of general pedagogy and content specific pedagogy, and be curriculum

specialists to be able to support effectively the teachers in the specific content areas.

Merely exposing teachers to new material without facilitating effectively the

understanding of the new material as it relates to their curriculum is a waste of time and

resources (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Without effective coaching, reform

efforts within teaching practice will fall short of real improvement (Fullan & Knight

(2011).

Peer Coaching

Within an organization, it is important for professional learning to be authentic for

the teachers, specifically having a structure in place for that learning. Zepeda (2012)

suggests having "mechanisms in place to support teacher choices about learning such as

peer coaches and study group members" (p. 60). Those quality experiences, in turn,

maximize the output in terms of instruction for students, which will reach the ultimate

goal of affecting positively the student learning (Joyce & Showers, 1981).

As a multifaceted tool, peer coaching can be implemented as an instructional

strategy, a professional development strategy, and a supplement to instructional

supervision (Zepeda, 2012). In a peer coaching model, teachers work together in

partnership with each other to question and provide feedback related to elements of

teaching (Joyce & Showers, 1996). A more recent study shows this is a supportive

relationship that has led teachers to realize the value in collaborating with peers and the

importance of feedback accompanied with critical reflection (Wilkins, Shin, & Ainsworth, 2009).

Within this collaborative model, peer coaching pioneer researchers Joyce and Showers (1996) share principles that should be maintained for successful implementation. They explain that teachers must agree to be members of a coaching team and support one another in the process of planning instructional objectives, developing materials, and collecting data about the peer coaching implementation process and its effects. Not only do teachers need to agree to support one another, but there must also be trust between the team members (Zepeda, 2012). Secondly, teachers must be open to accept that practice may need to be modified, extended, or replaced. "Teachers must also trust that the feedback they receive as part of coaching is constructive, based on best practice, grounded in research, and not in any way a personal attack" (Zepeda, 2012, p.173). Joyce and Showers (1996) further share that the primary activity of peer coaching groups is planning and developing curriculum and instruction related to the set goals rather than focusing on verbal feedback. Subsequent research (Elder & Padover, 2011; Wilkins, Shin & Ainsworth, 2009) supports this principle in finding that feedback from teachers tends to be superficial in nature and that teachers are not trained and feel reluctant in providing effective verbal feedback.

A third principle of peer coaching from Joyce and Showers (1996) states that the work of peer coaching teams is much broader than observation and conferences. The extensive learning happens when teachers collaboratively plan instruction, develop support materials, watch one another work with students, and think together about how their actions impact students' learning. The conversation between coaching partners are

based on understanding and questioning how and why teaching practices should be carried out.

Benefits of Peer Coaching. Research has shown an abundance of benefits of the peer coaching model (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Elder & Padover, 2011; Zepeda, 2012). Due to the flexibility of its implementation, peer coaching can be used in varying contexts and fields. Peer coaching has been used in many professional fields including the fields of education, business, and medicine. Particular to education, a study by Elder and Padover (2011) indicates peer coaching can be used at the differing levels of preparation and experience. In the study, preservice teachers, as well as novice and experienced teachers, took part in peer coaching activities to improve teaching practice and implement professional learning strategies. It was found that all who participated, coaches and coachees, felt that the experience helped improve their teaching practices. The participants who coached learned from observing and giving feedback to the coachees, and the coachees appreciated the feedback and having someone available with whom to talk about instructional practice.

Zepeda (2012) suggests that to foster conversations, a coach should suspend judgment by being honest and refrain from making evaluative judgments about the coachee, listen carefully and critically to reflection focused discussion, and avoid trust blocking responses that will limit and stop the conversation. In a study by Wilkins, Shin, and Ainsworth (2009), participants of peer coaching shared that "receiving feedback from peers was less stressful and nonthreatening compared to being evaluated by supervisors" (p.89). Because of the collegiality nature of peer coaching, teachers believe that their peers are not judgmental, are supportive in their progress, and the presence of peers is

less intrusive than the presence of administrators.

Planning and discussing teaching practices with peers introduces teachers to new ideas for better practice. Research shows teachers also gain a greater confidence in their teaching due to the support they receive (Elder & Padover, 2011; Wilkins, Shin, & Ainsworth, 2009; Jewett & MacPhee, 2012). In some instances, teachers became more comfortable with opening their classroom doors to peers and other observers for professional learning experiences (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012). Teachers allowing their classrooms to be open to peers and other outside observers for professional development activities allows for even more opportunities for professional learning and the sharing of effective teaching practices with larger groups to extend and expand the learning.

When given the opportunity to provide feedback within peer coaching, the coach observer is provided various opportunities to reflect on instructional practices. In studies where teachers participated with a peer coaching team, it was found that when in the coaching role, they were more reflective about their own teaching practices (Elder & Padover, 2011; Wilkins, Shin, & Ainsworth, 2009). In the same studies, when observing for the purpose to provide feedback, teachers were able to view the classroom through a different lens. They became the observer rather than the participant and were able to notice strategies that were effective and not effective. Being in that role allows a teacher to learn what to do and also what not to do in the areas of teaching and which strategies are appropriate for particular situations.

Cautions Within Peer Coaching. When peer coaching is implemented, several cautions should be considered. When it is expected for feedback to be provided among the peer coaching team, training should be conducted to ensure the participants

understand the most effective and appropriate way to provide that feedback and how to conduct themselves when in the role of the coach. In previous studies, the lack of training in providing feedback and the lack of understanding the expectations when in the role of the coach were listed as limitations (Elder & Padover, 2011; Wilkins, Shin, & Ainsworth, 2009). Zepeda (2012) explains that follow-up support is needed to refine coaching skills in the areas of human relations and communication, classroom observation processes, and data collection techniques. For learning to happen and continue long term, teachers' thinking must be pushed and that will not happen without opportunities to allow the development of analytical and critical thinking skills and training on appropriate coaching practices.

In the coaching role, coaches influence teachers' instructional practice by helping them learn new approaches and assisting in integrating those approaches into the classroom. However, in a study by Coburn and Woulfin (2012), coaches also influenced teachers through pressure; shaping how they saw and understood the new policy and guiding them in which aspects of the policy to focus on and which aspects to ignore. In this particular study, reading coaches invoked power over teachers at a time when a new reading program was being implemented. At times, the coaches explicitly directed teachers to change their practices or implement certain components in a specific way without allowing teachers to understand the rationale behind the new reading program or how to connect it to their existing instructional practices. As a result, teachers were more likely to reject the new program. This study highlights the importance of teachers understanding the connection between policy and practice and the theory and rational behind new policy and its implementation. When teachers have the opportunity to

understand the policy to practice connection, they are more likely to be open to learning new practices (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012).

Instructional Coaching

The school system in the study employs an instructional coach in all eight elementary schools. To frame the coaching program, the work by Knight (2007) and his book *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction* is used as a guide. Knight (2011) states, "next to the principal, coaches are the most crucial change agent in a school" and goes on to say that "good coaching gets results-and it gets them fairly quickly" (p.50). However, coaches can easily get overwhelmed with the expectations and responsibilities that are involved in the role of instructional coach (Knight, 2005). The Big Four framework organizes interventions and provides focus for the work of coaches (Knight, 2007).

Along with colleagues at the University of Kansas, Knight conducts research on instructional coaching as a means to effective professional development. The research has indicated four areas of teaching practices that have a positive effect on teachers' teaching practices and the way students learn (Knight, 2009). The four areas are identified as:

1) Behavior: Classroom management involves areas such as articulation of expectations for activities, reinforcement of students adhering to those expectations, observing time on task to monitor student engagement, ratio of teacher – student interaction regarding praise and correction, and opportunities for student response to learning (Sprick, Garrison, & Howard, 1998).

2) Content Knowledge: Planning for content includes supporting teachers in creating rigorous curricula aligned with national standards, including components of unit questions, essential knowledge, understandings and application of learning targets, and learning maps.

3) Direct Instruction: Instruction involves sharing strategies and methods of quality instruction and a range of practices to support different learning styles. Practices include effective questioning, thinking devices, stories, cooperative learning, experiential learning, project-based learning, and reflection learning.

4) Formative Assessment: Assessment for learning consists of guiding teachers in the creation and use of formative assessments ensuring that students can monitor their own progress and have a part in the control of their own learning, and providing data to realign instruction practices with results (Stiggins, 2005).

Knight identifies these areas of teaching practice as the Big Four and has used them in developing a comprehensive framework for instructional excellence in the role of instructional coaches.

Additionally, instructional coaching is based on a partnership approach developed by Knight and colleagues at the Center for Research on Learning of the University of Kansas. Knight (2011) indicated "a partnership is about shared learning as much as it is about shared power" (p. 20).

The corpus works by Knight (2007, 2009, 2011) indicates instructional coaching is based on the principles of:

1) Equality: In a partnership, both partners share ideas and decision-making and work together as equals. With the principle of equality, coaches are not seen as

better than ones they work with and have faith that the teachers with whom they collaborate contribute greatly to the interaction. In this principle of equality, mutual respect is given.

2) Choice: When the principle of choice is implemented, teachers set their own goals of learning. They decide on the coaching goals and which practices to adopt and how to interpret data. By not following the principle of choice, teachers are more likely to resist change initiatives. Within choice as well is the expectation of teachers being actively engaged in their own professional growth.

3) Voice: In the partnership model, each voice, opinion, perspective, and point of view is valued. Teachers feel free and are encouraged to express their concerns as well as views and enthusiasms. When coaches implement the principle of voice, teachers share their views of what is being learned and are able to find their own voice in the professional arena.

4) Reflection: The pleasure of professional learning comes when there is reflection on what you're learning. In contradiction, when told what to do, there is no room for individual thought. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on ideas and practices before adopting them as well as participate in reflective practices as they are implementing those new practices.

5) Dialogue: Goal of dialogue used in instructional coaching is for the best idea to win – not for my idea to win. This happens best when both partners think through a discussion together. Paulo Freire's (1970) work sets groundwork for much of the understanding of dialogue within instructional coaching. He describes dialogue as a discussion with humility and that dialogue is described as a

humanizing form of communication. Coaches and teachers who engage in this

form of dialogue do so not only to impart their opinion on others but to also hear

other's opinion as well. An open ended and authentic dialogue is needed so that

all involved can engage in open honest reflection about the information being

learned and applied.

6) Praxis: Praxis describes the act of applying new knowledge and skills. Praxis is

the core of new practices. When learning about a new strategy and then reflect on

it and decide whether or not to incorporate it into practice, praxis is being

engaged.

7) Reciprocity: The principle of reciprocity supports the notion that all involved

benefit from the process of instructional coaching. Each learning interaction is an

opportunity for everyone involved to learn from the experience.

Knight (2007) has found that following these elements of the partnership approach leads

to more effective professional development and higher implementation rate of new

teaching practices.

Benefits of Instructional Coaching. Instructional coaching requires dedication,

persistence, and meaningful collaboration with all those involved in the coaching process.

Early research conducted by Knight (2005, 2007) has shown benefits of instructional

coaching when these aspects are included as part of the coaching practices. When highly

qualified instructional coaches are in place to support teachers using the right teaching

methods and the partnership approach, improvement can happen (Knight, 2011).

Researchers for the Kansas University Center for Research on Learning (KU-CRL), directed by Knight (2005), studied instructional coaches who work with Kansas University's Pathways to Success and Maryland's Department of Special Education's Passport to Success. The research suggests that there are three reasons coaching is a good element to include when looking for school improvement initiatives. First, when conditions are right, coaching leads to implementation of effective teaching practices. In those projects, implementation rates were consistent at 85% implementation with well-constructed coaching programs. Second, they found that with the consistent support from a coach, teachers' fidelity to proven instructional practices increases. Thirdly, the research shows coaching promotes positive conversations in schools. With coaches providing support to teachers and taking the lead in starting positive conversations, teachers have positive conversations in return. Through positive support and healthy conversation, the research concludes that coaches help move teachers away from regression in practices and negative interactions.

Cautions Within Instructional Coaching. Research by Knight (2005) shares the importance of effective coaching but cautions that if the principal and instructional coach does not work together in partnership, professional learning can be negatively impacted. Knight found that in the Pathways to Success program, principals and instructional coaches must be in agreement about how the coach will bring interventions to the school. Secondly, it was found that the principals and instructional coaches should have a relationship where both work together to identify teachers who will receive particular services from the instructional coach. Thirdly, Knight's study cautions that the principal and instructional coach must be careful to work together in partnership to

reduce teacher resistance to new programs and interventions. Overall, it is important that all parties involved in the coaching process work collaboratively for the purpose and goal that has been decided.

Chapter Summary

Research illustrates that significant improvements in teacher practice require additional on-site job-embedded support such as a coach (Bruce & Ross, 2008; Campbell & Malkus, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Greene, 2004; Guskey, 2000; Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein, 2006; Cornett &Knight, 2008; Penuel et al., 2007; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).   Coaching as a tool for professional development has been the focus of much research since the 1980s. Studies have found that professional development positively impacts teachers' instructional practices when the added support of a coach is incorporated into learning for adults (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Knight 2009). Research by Knight (2005, 2007, 2009, 2011) outlines a framework of effective coaching through instructional coaching. The framework provides strategies, based on research that should be present in an effective coaching program. Although the framework shows positive impacts on coaching practices, information is lacking in the area of instructional coaches' beliefs and experiences of their practices and their perceptions of their teachers. Therefore, a study that examines the perspectives of instructional coaches about their work with teachers is of importance.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The role of instructional coaches within education is to support teachers in professional development with the goal of improving instructional practice. Information is lacking with regard to experiences and perspectives of instructional coaches working with teachers and how those coaches believe they are most effective in supporting teacher learning (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Heineke, 2013). This study examined instructional coaches' perspectives of the successes and challenges they experienced while working with teachers. Results of this study could serve to inform educators about the successes, barriers, and supports necessary to provide effective coaching experiences in schools. The researcher chose a research design and methodology appropriate for the goals of the study.

The research design and methodology provided in this chapter details the research process from beginning to end and is divided into five sections. The sections included are (a) purpose of the study and research questions, (b) design of the study (c) data sources, (d) data collection, and (e) data analysis.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to investigate instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and challenges they experienced while working with teachers. The guiding research question in the study was:

1. What are instructional coaches' perspectives of the successes and challenges they experience while working with teachers?

A case study design was used to address the overall research question through semi-structured interviews, journal reflections, and documents.

Design of the Study

The choice to use a qualitative or a quantitative research design depends on the topic that is being researched, and the overall research questions. Schwandt (2007) and Patton (2002) stated that qualitative research is a form of social inquiry designed to provide descriptions that offer insight into the experiences of participants, and unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies uncover how parts work together to tell a story (Merriam, 2002). It is through the philosophical and theoretical inquiries of qualitative research design that insight is gained into a particular area of interest, with the researcher being the instrument through which the area of interest is investigated (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). For this study, the researcher's interest in understanding the perspectives of instructional coaches required a qualitative design with the researcher being the instrument by which the instructional coaches' perspectives could be more deeply examined and then understood through the uses of methods, primarily data from interviews.

Merriam (2009) describes qualitative research as being richly descriptive, being an inductive process, and focusing on meaning and understanding. Additionally, Stake (2010) described qualitative research as being interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic. Research having the personalistic characteristic focuses on meaning and understanding of human interaction from multiple views and perspectives (Stake, 2010).

Within interpretive research, reality is socially constructed and is revealed through the efforts of the researcher (Andrade, 2009). For this study, the researcher was the instrument for data collection and analysis and used semi-structured interviews and text from journal reflections to understand more fully the instructional coaches' perspectives about their work with teachers.

Qualitative research is an inductive process, meaning the "researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research" (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). In this study, the researcher worked with data gathered from instructional coaches to arrive at themes related to successes and challenges of working with teachers. The themes emerged from a bottom up direction using collected data that was rich and descriptive. Participant interview transcripts, field notes, and participant reflection entries were the data used which provided complexities and details of coaches related to their work with teachers.

Overall, the qualitative research design was flexible and responsive to the changing conditions in the study (Merriam, 2009). This design was selected giving thought and consideration to the purpose, research questions, and the audience; however, the study remained emergent. Patton (2002) stated that, "a qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry" (p. 255). This design allowed for needed changes as the study progressed; therefore, a qualitative research design was best for uncovering instructional coaches' perspectives of successes and challenges while working with teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Within the qualitative research design, interpretivism was used as the theoretical lens to uncover instructional coaches' perspectives. Interpretivism is an approach to studying social life that assumes the meaning of human action is inherent in that action, and the task of the inquirer is to unearth that meaning (Schwandt, 2007). Interpretivism seeks to understand and to explain social interactions by analyzing meanings people give for their actions (Lichtman, 2010). The interpretivist approach "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). The cultural context in which an experience was created as well as the context within which it is interpreted determines meaning (Patton, 2002). Interpretivism further explains that people create their own meaning from experiences, and although there may be shared experiences, different meanings of those experiences may be created (Crotty, 2005). The interpretative framework will allow for an understanding of ideas, issues, and concerns as well as identifying patterns, themes, and relationships within the data (Thomas, 2003).

Central to the interpretivist paradigm is the belief that people construct meaning. When individuals are involved in experiences, they construct their own meaning from those experiences, which is described as constructivism. The interpretivist paradigm is akin to constructivism. Constructivism is important to consider in this study, which aims to uncover the perspectives of instructional coaches. According to Seimears, Graves, Schroyer, and Staver (2012), the constructivist model of learning "contends that learners actively construct knowledge" (p. 266). They go on to say that:

The construction of knowledge is a lifelong process and at any time, the body of

knowledge individuals have constructed makes sense to them and helps them

interpret or predict events in their experiential worlds. In constructivism,

knowledge does not represent reality; rather, knowledge represents the dynamic

coherent organization of individual or group thinking. A metacognitive design or

approach monitors one's memory in two ways: conscious/factual knowledge and

unconscious/implicit knowledge. In constructivism, the mind is constantly

constructing new knowledge from experiences; therefore, implicit knowledge is

seen as lifeless. (p. 266)

This constructivist approach is important to consider within coaching given that

individuals were asked to reflect on what they understand from their own experiences,

and by doing so, they are creating meaning and understanding from their reflections.

Research Methodology – Case Study

Based on the study's purpose of uncovering instructional coaches' perspectives of

working with teachers, a case study methodology was employed. A case study is an "in-

depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p.40). It is also

described as a type of qualitative inquiry that supports studying a particular phenomenon

within the real-world context used to answer "how" or "why" something happened (Yin,

2009). In this study, elementary level instructional coaches in the Harborview School

District (pseudonym) were the system, or "case," being studied with the issue of the

instructional coaches' perspectives as the main focus of investigation.

Researchers using case study methodology examine a case to uncover new and

unusual interactions, events, explanations, and interpretations (Hays, 2004). The social

nature of the research made case study methodology appropriate for the design of the study while still acknowledging the differences that could be present. Creswell, Hanson, Clark, and Morales (2007) further add that for complete examination, case study research relies on multiple data sources to build an in-depth, contextual understanding of the case. By using semi-structured interviews and journal reflections as main data sources, along with other instructional coaching documents, the researcher was able to understand phenomena that occurred within instructional coaches' work with teachers.

Case study research is further characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) explains that a case study has a particularistic nature that makes them good for exploring questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences of practical problems that arise in everyday practice. Working with teachers is one aspect of an instructional coach's everyday practice. While participants shared similarities, experiences were also diverse within the case. The researcher believed that a more comprehensive understanding would result from studying the same phenomenon—experiences of instructional coaches working with teachers—through the multiple perspectives of the five instructional coaches within the case. The researcher sought to answer a practical question by identifying common occurrences within instructional coaches' work with teachers.

A case study is descriptive meaning that the end product has rich, thick description (Merriam, 2009). The study included multiple participants who were interviewed twice and provided journal reflections and documents. The findings from the study were descriptive and detailed. A rich description of coaches' perceptions after coaching sessions, in addition to the interviews, made the case study methodology further

fitting for this study. Finally, being heuristic in nature, the case study should guide

readers to new understandings or expand or confirm what is already known. Readers

bring their own experiences to the research, as do researchers. The study was designed to

allow readers to construct their own meaning from the research rather than being

designed to impose preferred knowledge. The investigative nature of the study supported

the reader in understanding the phenomenon examined—experiences of instructional

coaches working with teachers.

Data Sources

The purpose of this study was to investigate instructional coaches' perspectives

about the successes and challenges they experienced while working with teachers.

Therefore, sampling and data collection was purposefully done. Details about the

sampling process, research site, and participants are provided.

Sampling

The participants in this study included five instructional coaches. The researcher

used purposeful sampling to determine participants for the study. Participant selection is

vital to providing information-rich cases (Patton, 2002; Springer, 2010). By selecting

participants who could provide rich information, the researcher was able to gather more

robust data. To begin the selection process, criterion regarding characteristics or

attributes a participant must possess was constructed. The selection criteria for the study

were as follows:

1. Participants were elementary instructional coaches in the Harborview School

   District for at least two years;

2. Participants were willing to be interviewed by the researcher;

3. Participants were willing to complete journal reflections after coaching sessions; and,

4. Participants were willing to provide requested documents to the researcher.

Instructional coach participants were recruited through e-mail. The researcher shared the purpose of the research, data collection methods, and participant expectations in the email sent to all possible participants. The five instructional coaches who volunteered and met the selection criteria were selected for and completed the study.

Research Site

The research site is the Harborview School District (pseudonym) that is located in a rural area of the Southeast United States with about 43,000 residents. The population of the city is majority Caucasian. The school district operates 14 schools and employs approximately 668 teachers who serve about 6,840 students. The schools in the district include eight elementary schools, three middle schools, one ninth-grade academy, one high school, and a Success Academy.

Of the elementary schools in the Harborview School District, all are Title 1 funded with free and reduced lunch percentages ranging from approximately 50% to 90%. The enrollment at the elementary schools ranges from approximately 200 to 600 students. Participants in the study are instructional coaches who serve six of the elementary schools. Table 3.1 provides a profile for the schools at the research sites involved in the study.

Table 3.1

Profile of Research Site

Name	Grade Levels	Number of Certified Teachers (including support teachers)	Number of Students Enrolled (approximate)
Wayside Elementary (pseudonym)	Kindergarten – 5th	17	191
Harbor Cove Elem. (pseudonym)	Kindergarten – 5th	17	223
Morgan Elementary (pseudonym)	Pre K – 5th	30	418
Price Elementary (pseudonym)	Pre K – 5th	41	491
Riverside Elementary (pseudonym)	Kindergarten – 5th	33	419
Creekview Elem. (pseudonym)	Pre K – 5th	48	607

The Harborview School District previously employed Literacy Coordinators, who served as literacy coaches, until 2009. At that time, it was decided to employ instructional coaches in the elementary and middle schools who would not only focus on literacy, but also on all aspects of instruction. Some of the literacy coaches transitioned to instructional coaches, while the position at other elementary schools was vacant. Applicants who were deemed best suited for the position by the administrators at each school filled those positions.

Participant Profiles

There were five instructional coach participants in the study. Instructional coach participants each brought unique experiences to the study, which helped in providing rich descriptions of their experiences in working with teachers. Table 3.2 provides a profile of the five instructional coach participants.

Table 3.2

Profile of Instructional Coach Participants

Participant	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Coaching Experience	Degrees Earned
Betty (pseudonym)	27	5	- B.S. Education - M.A. Middle Grades Language Arts and Social Studies - Ed.S. Early Childhood - Leadership endorsement - Gifted Education endorsement
Heather (pseudonym)	26	3	- B.S. English with minor in Education - M.A. Early Childhood Education
Marsha (pseudonym)	22	4	- B.S. Education - M.A. Early Childhood Education

Participant	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Coaching Experience	Degrees Earned
Sonya (pseudonym)	13	3.5	• B.S. Early Childhood Education • M.A. Early Childhood Education • Ed.S. Curriculum and Instruction

Betty

Betty was in her fifth year as a coach. She had previous experience teaching in a large metropolitan city in the Southeast before coming to work in the Harborview School District. Betty has had experience teaching struggling learners as well as gifted learners. Her administrative experience as an assistant principal prepared her for the instructional coach role in which at times she performs administrative duties.

Heather

Heather has a background in education from teaching high school English to elementary grades, and she was in her third year of being an instructional coach at the time of this study. She took the Literacy Coordinator position after teaching elementary grades and went back to teaching in the elementary classroom full time when the Harborview School District moved from employing literacy coordinators to instructional coaches. After being back in the classroom for several years, she accepted the Instructional Coach position at Morgan Elementary School.

Suzanne

Suzanne had four years' experience as an instructional coach. She previously taught elementary grades in public school as well as private school and has been a teacher of special education classes. Suzanne also had experience as a Literacy Coordinator. When the Harborview School District moved to employ instructional coaches, Suzanne went back into the classroom full time teaching elementary grades. She became an instructional coach when offered the position after the job became vacant at her school.

Marsha

At the time of the study, Marsha was in her fourth year of being an instructional coach. Before becoming an instructional coach, Marsha was a classroom teacher and a Reading Recovery and Early Intervention Program small group teacher. Marsha had only taught lower elementary grades before becoming a small group teacher. Being a small group teacher helped Marsha in the instructional coach role by giving her in-depth experience in reading strategies that she can use in professional development sessions with teachers.

Sonya

Sonya had three and a half years' experience as an instructional coach at the time of the study. She has previous experience as an elementary grades teacher as well as experience in being an immersion teacher. As an immersion teacher, Sonya would work with students who did not have English as their first language and were learning to speak and read English. She is the instructional coach at Creekview Elementary School, which is one of two schools in the district with a large Hispanic student population. With the

experience as an immersion teacher, she is able to support teachers in working with

students who do not have English as their first language.

<div align="center">**Data Collection**</div>

Multiple sources of data were used in triangulating data to get to an in-depth

analysis and a complete understanding of the instructional coaches' perspectives.

Creswell (2013) shares that triangulation of data is the process that sheds light on a topic

of study using "corroborating evidence" from difference sources and is important in

providing validity and reliability to the findings of the study. The research methods used

in this study included two semi-structured one-on-one interviews; three written

reflections in journals from each participant; and other documents such as e-mails,

coaching forms, and coaching schedules. These methods were chosen to provide the

most useful and thorough data for the study investigating instructional coaches'

perspectives.

Interviews

This method included initial interviews and follow up interviews with each of the

five participants individually. The semi-structured in-depth interview method was best

for this study because it helped give an accurate description of the situation being studied

(Pascale, 2011), and according to Berry (1999), "in-depth interviewing is widely used in

educational research and is generally regarded as a powerful tool in extracting data"

(para. 31). It is "the type of interview which researchers use to elicit information in order

to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation" (Berry,

1999, para. 3) and allows the researcher to "deeply explore the respondents' feelings and

perspectives on a subject" (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2012, para. 2). An in-depth

interview was appropriate for this study because it is an effective method that encourages participants to talk about their feelings, opinions, and experiences and allows the "opportunity to gain insight into how people interpret and order the world" (Milena, Dainora, & Alin, 2008, p. 1279).

Conducting interviews allowed the researcher to learn about what cannot be seen in instructional coaches' practices (Roulston, 2010) and was the primary research method for this study. A preliminary semi-structured interview guide (Roulston, 2010) was used which allowed the freedom to change the interview questions as needed, depending on the answers and direction of the participants' responses. Although questions were carefully crafted to obtain the best data possible from participants, Glesne (2011) explains that within interviewing, questions emerge that may be added or even replace the questions pre-established in the interview guide. Those questions should be asked to completely understand the information provided by the participants and explore their particular insights. The data collected through interviews was in the form of audiotaped interviews, transcripts of interviews, and notes written on a printed interview guide.

Instructional coaches were interviewed twice using an interview guide (Appendix A & B). The first interview was held for introductions, gaining informed consent, building rapport, and asking general questions about instructional coaches' background, role, duties, and feelings about their job. A time was also set for a follow up interview to go more in-depth about the participants' experiences. It is important to build rapport and learn about the specifics of the instructional coach's role so that the subsequent interview can be better constructed (Glesne, 2011).

Each of the first round interviews, lasting approximately one hour in length, was held to learn about the instructional coaches' role and practices. The purpose of this interview was to understand the context of coaching practices, expectations, and the professional development that is involved. Before the interview began, the researcher gained informed consent from the participants, and a copy of the signed consent form was provided. The interview was audio recorded with the participants' consent, and notes were taken during each interview on the printed interview guide. Each interview was transcribed verbatim immediately following the interview. As the data were transcribed and analyzed, notes were taken of any follow up questions to be asked or any clarifications to be made in the second interview. Once all participants had been interviewed and initial interview transcripts were analyzed, follow-up interviews were held.

The follow-up interviews with the instructional coaches were also audio recorded and sought to obtain more in-depth data about professional development that was provided, specific experiences with teachers, and the needs of the instructional coaches. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and new interview transcript data were analyzed.

Once data had been interpreted, member checks were conducted with each participant reading the transcripts to ensure that information was correct. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify any points they made during the interviews.

Documents

Documents were used since they can often be used as evidence or as a resource to support what is shared during interviews (Prior, 2008). Patton (2002) stresses that

documents provide foundational support, and that they add value to a study. Prior (2008) further states that it is important for organizational documents to be seen, not as individual tools, but as a piece linked to other information. Documents gathered to inform the study were used as links in the interviews to support questioning that led to a deeper understanding of the instructional coaches' role and perspectives. It was important to use available information to comprehensively inform all aspects of the study given the goal of a good interview is to produce good data, not good conversation (Glesne, 2011). Documents that were used are the written journal reflections from each participant, individual instructional coaches' schedules and newsletters, e-mails relating to work with teachers, resources used by instructional coaches to inform their work, and the researcher's field notes.

Journal entries. The first type of document used in data analysis were journal narratives completed by the participants. A journal prompt provided by the researcher was used to illicit instructional coaches' reflections on the successes and challenges of their own practices and the professional development of their role as coaches. The type of data elicited from the journal prompts was important in aiding the researcher to "uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem" (Merriam, 2002, p. 163). With the busy schedules of instructional coaches, an interview might not be the most opportune time for reflection. With journaling happening at a convenient time for the participants, richer descriptions and reflections could be obtained. The researcher captured the initial perceptions and reactions of instructional coaches as they did their work and reflected on successes and challenges they

encountered daily related to their own coaching practices and professional learning. The

prompts that were used to guide the instructional coaches' reflection were:

1. Describe the experience of your own practices that led you to feel success or
   disappointment.

2. If it was a successful experience, what part of your coaching practices led to that
   success?

3. If it was a disappointment, what part of your own practices would you change?

4. If applicable, what supports, resources, or information would you see as
   appropriate to aid in your coaching practice of this particular situation?

Table 3.3 provides a sample of data collected from journal entries.

Table 3.3

Data Samples from Journal Entries

Sample of Journal Text	Code
"I confirmed for her that 2 of the teaching points she was thinking about seemed perfectly chosen. For one, I helped her revise the statement so it was more about 'what good readers do' instead of about the book. Changing teacher language just this little bit has been proven to affect student growth in a positive way. She was very receptive and saw the difference immediately. 'I'm just going to have to slow down and think a little bit more then I have been when I plan my lessons.'"	Coach supports teachers choosing teaching points to improve upon Incorporates research into coaching Instructionally focused
"Mrs. T. and I have worked together on several occasions, so teamwork for us was not difficult. We briefly discussed the outline of lesson plan. The goal was to create a lesson that would look similar to the writing required by the state test, so the Milestone Guide was used to model our lesson.	Teamwork with teacher
To our surprise administration came in to observe our first lesson. We began with a brief introduction of descriptive narrative writing followed by a short story, a writing prompt, and lastly, gave the students 20 minutes	Administration involved in observing coaching process

Sample of Journal Text	Code
to type. Unbeknownst to our principal, this approach was designed as a pre-assessment. Our administrator, after just a few minutes, began approaching students. She encouraged them to write a brief plan (many students were handwriting every word they would type) and modeled what a brief plan would look like on paper. As graciously as possible, I pulled her to the side and asked her to be patient. We had a plan. She held back and smiled. As the typing session ended, students moaned. They shared their disappointment in not completing the task. We gave them an opportunity to share what they would do differently if given another chance. Students recognized themselves that their plans were too long. They would need to put a brief plan on paper and begin typing."	Administration assists in instruction Administration did not know plan. Coach comfortable in asking administration to hold back. Students involved in providing feedback on their learning

Personal documents. The second type of document used to inform the study are the personal documents, such as emails between the coach and teacher; the instructional coach's schedule; coaching session forms that outline goals for coaching sessions; and any documents providing feedback. These documents outlined daily tasks and happenings within the instructional coach's position individually as well as those interactions with others. These documents, authored by the instructional coach herself, as well as those with whom she works, provided information about what duties she was performing, such as training sessions and meetings, along with thoughts and feedback surrounding those meetings and training sessions. Further, the documents informed progress of professional learning with teachers and interactions with the administration. These documents were vital in holistically understanding the aspects of the instructional coach's role. Table 3.4 provides an example of data collected from personal documents.

Table 3.4

Data Samples from Personal Documents

Type of Personal Document	Sample of Document Text	Code
Email (from coach to teacher)	"Thank you for inviting me into your room today. I enjoyed watching these kiddos participate in an IC. Be patient my friend. It will take some time to get things to the level we want them. Just keep intentionally planning for these and don't over do it or over think it. Some of my notes remind me that these can be the most difficult parts of an IC: -that students will only want to stare at you at first -the teacher still wants to talk too much. It's our nature though! We will all improve as time goes by. Nice work! - Keep up the hard work. It will pay off, I promise. Let me support you in any way that I can. Have a great day! :) :)"	Teacher initiated interaction Encouragement from coach to keep on working toward goal level Coach shares in difficult time of strategy implementation Used "we" - shows teamwork Coach reminds teacher of parts of strategy Coach offers support for any need
Newsletter to a grade level of teachers	**Mini-Lessons** --- I did mine at the carpet on chart paper so we could add to them the next day(s) and so that they become anchor charts to hang in the room. You could also use the SMART BOARD or just teach the first 10 mins. whole group. Doesn't matter. The key is MINI – Choosing your words carefully so that this is just a kick off to the workshop for the day. Sometimes I showed a Brainpop video or a video from LearnZillion as my mini-lesson.	Coach gives tips she learned from her experience - includes learning strategy Instruction focused Focused on mini-lesson Uses "I" and "you" Tip from coach's experience

Type of Personal Document	Sample of Document Text	Code
	I would also "de-bug" any tricky part of the seatwork for the day. We might do one in each section together, and then the understanding is to WORK INDEPENDENTLY."	Used "we" meaning student and teacher

The Researcher's Journal. During the process of the study, a researcher's journal was kept to document thoughts, questions, concerns, and reflections. According to Rossman and Rallis (1998), gathering data is deliberate and includes the information regarding the processes of the study so others can understand how the study was conducted. By using a research journal and documenting all aspects of the research process, the opportunity to be reflective and reflexive about the process of the study. "The insights and inspirations that occur during a study become part of the data of fieldwork and should be recorded in context" (Patton, 2002, p. 304). All interactions, feelings, reflections and actions were captured to document the personal and professional aspects of the study. Table 3.5 provides a sample of text from the researcher's journal.

Table 3.5

Sample Text from Researcher's Journal

Date and Participant	Journal Text	Codes/Questions for Follow-up
3/7 Betty	I arrived to meet Betty and had to wait for her to handle a student and parent situation because the principal was not in the building that morning. Betty apologized for being late to our meeting and seemed frazzled and in a hurry. We went to the media center for our meeting and teachers were in there talking loudly enough for us to hear them across the room. One teacher saw Betty come in and came over to us and started a conversation with Betty about a need that she had in her classroom pertaining to resources.	Administrative duties?

What is extent of work with parents and students? |

Date and Participant	Journal Text	Codes/Questions for Follow-up
	Betty said that she had the resource and would get back with her in just a little bit. Betty made a note to get back to the teacher. During our interview Betty talked quickly and did not reflect on answers, but gave quick responses. Betty did not have any questions for me and when the interview was over, she told me to email her to set a date for the second interview. She then quickly left the media center in front of me.	Provides resources to teachers

Data Analysis

Glesne (2011) shares that data analysis is the most time intensive and arduous phase of the research process. Data from this qualitative case study were analyzed through an interpretive lens. The researcher used the constant comparative method of data analysis to analyze interview transcripts, written journal reflections, and other documents collected during the study. By using the constant comparative method, data were broken into manageable pieces to be compared for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To analyze data, the researcher had to interpret each transcript, journal entry, and personal document that was collected. Stake (2010) asserted that qualitative research relies on interpretive perceptions throughout planning, data collection, data analysis, and write-up of the findings. During the data analysis phase, all data were viewed as an essential element in understanding instructional coaches' perspectives.

Constant Comparative Method

The constant comparative method of data analysis is a way to analyze data that is inductive and iterative (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). An experienced qualitative researcher initiates the data analysis process after finishing the first interview and continues analysis

throughout the entirety of the research (Maxwell, 2013). With multiple sources of data used, and analysis being necessary after each piece was collected, the researcher chose to use the constant comparative method to analyze data. The constant comparative method assures that all data are systematically compared to all other data in the set (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). By using the constant comparative method, the researcher was able to recode, re-analyze, and engage with the data (Charmaz, 2006).

The process of data analysis began after the first interview with the first participant and continued through the entire data set of interview transcripts, journal entries, documents, and researcher's notes. All types of data were compared against each other, not just within each type. For example, interview data were not only compared with other interview data, but was also compared with data from journal entries, documents, and researcher's notes.

The first round of semi-structured interviews with each participant took place in March of the 2015-2016 school year. The interviews were held at a time and place convenient to the participant. A researcher's journal was used to document the thoughts, ideas and reflections of each interview. Interviews were immediately transcribed by a professional after the interview and analyzed by the researcher. First, the researcher read through the interview to note any questions. Next the researcher reread the transcript highlighting text and assigning codes to chunks of data. Coding is the process of extracting concepts within data and developing them in terms of their characteristics (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and is a way to organize data and allow the researcher to make connections within the whole data set. During the process, the researcher again used the researcher's journal to note thoughts and further explore codes, categories, and themes.

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The same process occurred when analyzing data from the second interview. The second interviews were also held at a time and place convenient to the participant. While analyzing the interview data, journal entries and other documents were analyzed at the time they were provided by participants causing data collection and data analysis to simultaneously happen. By collecting and analyzing data at the same time, connections were made within and across the data sets. The researcher was careful to analyze data and create meaning within the correct context to maintain objectivity. While using the constant comparative method, data began to join together as larger units and other codes joined existing codes.

The initial codes and data chunks were recorded in a chart. Table 3.6 demonstrates an example of the coding process used in the study.

Table 3.6

Sample of Analysis from Interview Transcript

Code	Category
no training as AC. Self-taught	needs of coach support
many duties-try to support teachers in any struggle	needs of coach support
willing to work hard	willingness
tricky when seen as someone who gives people things to do rather than step in and do it with them	credibility in job; valid work
teachers see initiatives as having to prove they are doing their job	valid work
hard to make relationships so not seen as evaluative but supportive	roles of coach

Code	Category
teachers not confident with having someone in their room	needs of teachers
teachers don't have time to stop and reflect	needs of teachers
coach feeling insecure about teachers thinking work with coach and what they are doing is valid with mandates	insecurity of valid work
taking responsibility for what teachers are asked to do and make sure they see value in it	responsibility of value in work
AC role is different in each building and depends on principal's view and leadership style	lack of consistency among system

Similar codes were grouped together with the same conceptual heading. Similar concepts were then grouped together by the researcher to form categories and themes.

An inductive, thematic analytic approach was used to identify frequent, dominant, and/or significant themes generated from data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Roulston, 2010; Wolcott, 1994). As the researcher looked for themes within the data, descriptions and themes of the case were used (Creswell, 2013). Through case analysis, the researcher framed the analysis by looking at each participant's data separately, analyzing the data of individual participants first, then within the case. Within the case, comparisons were made, thematic analyses were conducted, and assertions and

interpretations of the case were made (Creswell, 2013). The researcher then began to write up the across case findings of the study.

Trustworthiness

Ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors within research. The word "trustworthiness" is used to specify credibility or believability of findings from the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is important within case study research to discuss the trustworthiness of the data collected and findings reported.

Researchers can ensure trustworthiness of their research by triangulating the data, using multiple methods to collect data, build an audit trail, collaborate with other researchers, and employ member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). In this section triangulation, member checks, and peer review are explained as trustworthiness in the study.

Steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness within this study. Before research could be conducted, approval was received from the Institutional Review Board of the university associated with the study. The researcher abided by all processes, procedures, and moral provisions of this board. Additionally, the researcher employed triangulation of data, held two interview sessions, conducted member checks, and consulted with peers to ensure trustworthiness.

Triangulation of data indicates multiple sources of data were used to lead to a more thorough understanding of the issue or phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 2009). Four types of triangulation recommended are: (a) multiple sources of data, (b) multiple methods, (c) multiple investigators, and (d) confirming findings with multiple theories.

In this research study, five participants were interviewed so that ideas and perceptions of a single participant were not used in representing those of the group. The data were cross-checked at various times during the study. Interview protocols were consistent across interviews, which further contributed to trustworthiness of data (Yin, 2009). Multiple sources of data were also used to gain the most complete information from the participants. Additionally, field notes were also used to support triangulation of data.

Member checks were held to gain participants' perceptions of the credibility of the collected data (Glesne, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). The researcher presented the collected data to the participants so they could judge the credibility of the information (Creswell, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that member checking is the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). By allowing participants to reflect on collected data, they were able to add, omit, and clarify responses. The process of member checking ensured interview data was credible and trustworthy.

Peer review, or peer debriefing, was also used to ensure the trustworthiness of data. Peer debriefing is described as "discussions with colleagues regarding the process of the study, the congruency of emerging findings with raw data, and tentative interpretations (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). Patton (2002) shares that credibility involves "intellectual rigor, professional integrity and methodological competence" (p. 570). Discussions with colleagues were critical to ensure credibility. Doctoral committee members, educational professionals, and researcher's writing group members served in the peer review capacity.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations exist when conducting any type of research study. The nature of this topic focused on the characteristics that make each instructional coach's practices different from others. As no two situations are exactly alike in needs or background, this study is limited to the findings being applicable to this one group of participants and cannot be generalized to a larger population, as every instructional coach and school setting are different.

The study was conducted during the spring semester of the school year, so the results were limited by time as well. Many instructional coaches are busiest in the spring because of the end of year testing schedules and some reflections and documents were strictly related to testing. However, time limitation was minimized as the researcher was cautious to make all interactions at a time that was convenient for participants.

Risk and Benefits

No risks are anticipated; however, being a former co-worker with most participants and living in the school district may cause some questions may be sensitive in nature. For example, asking participants to discuss coaching sessions that did not go well, and their feelings of expectations from teachers and administrators may make them apprehensive about disclosing sensitive information. With this awareness, participants were ensured that confidentiality would be maintained, and the researcher would remain emotionally neutral. Participants had the option, without penalty, to withdraw from the interview or decline to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to maintain confidentiality. Participants'

names, affiliated schools, and other identifiable information were not included in the final research findings.

The limitations of the study did not prohibit the researcher from conducting a study to inform practice and lead to future research. The overall research question was answered and the researcher was able to present the instructional coaches' perspectives through overarching themes and trends. Chapter 4 presents findings and analysis centered on the overall research question. The findings focus on three areas: 1) differing duties among instructional coaches; 2) confidence within the job; and 3) credibility within the instructional coach position.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that emerged during data collection as well as the analysis of the findings. First, the chapter begins with the purpose of study and research question, including an overview of the research process. Next, an overview of the context of the school district is presented, followed by characteristics of the study participants. The across-case findings from the face-to-face interviews and journal reflections are organized around the overall research question.

Purpose of Study and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to investigate instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and challenges they experienced while working with teachers. The study examined how instructional coaches perceived their work with teachers as they provided job-embedded professional development in their schools. The guiding research question in the study was:

1. What are instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and challenges they experience while working with teachers?

The qualitative case study design used semi-structured interviews and journal entries as the primary methods of data collection. Five instructional coaches were interviewed for this study. The instructional coaches were interviewed twice, with follow up questions being asked via e-mail in addition to the interviews. Journal entries were

recorded by the instructional coaches following coaching sessions as a way to capture their thoughts, experiences, and emotions regarding the coaching session. Various documents such as coaching letters, e-mails between coaches and teachers, and additional coaching session reflections were also collected to triangulate the data. The constant comparative method was used to analyze data. As codes and categories developed, the researcher gained clarity on instructional coaches' perspectives while also uncovering several overarching themes.

Context of the Study Site

The Harborview School District (pseudonym) is located in a rural area of the southeastern United States. The district employs approximately 668 teachers who serve about 6,840 students within 8 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, a ninth grade academy, success academy, and high school. Additionally, the eight elementary schools employ instructional coaches to provide professional learning activities for the teachers in each building. Six of the elementary schools each have a full time instructional coach assigned to the school with the remaining two elementary schools each having a half-time instructional coach. The half-time instructional coach is allotted at two of the elementary schools because the population of teachers and students is significantly smaller than the other six schools. Through purposeful sampling, five instructional coaches were chosen for the study. Table 4.1 provides an overview of demographics for the school sites that employ the study participants.

Table 4.1

School Sites of Study Participants

Name	Grade Levels	Number of Certified Teachers (including support teachers)	Number of Students Enrolled (approximate)
Wayside Elementary (pseudonym)	Kindergarten – 5th	17	191
Harbor Cove Elem. (pseudonym)	Kindergarten – 5th	17	223
Morgan Elementary (pseudonym)	Pre K – 5th	30	418
Price Elementary (pseudonym)	Pre K – 5th	41	491
Riverside Elementary (pseudonym)	Kindergarten – 5th	33	419
Creekview Elem. (pseudonym)	Pre K – 5th	48	607

Prior to Harborview School District incorporating the instructional coach position in 2009, Literacy Coordinators were in place to provide professional development for teachers in the area of literacy.

Characteristics of the Participants

Participants for the study were chosen based on the following criteria: a minimum of two years' experience as an instructional coach and a willingness to be interviewed, write reflections about coaching sessions, and provide documents related to coaching. The participants were diverse in their experience and professional background. Table 4.2 provides an overview of instructional coach participants' professional experience.

Table 4.2

Overview of Instructional Coach Participants' Professional Experience

Participant	Professional Experience	School of Current Employment	Years of Coaching Experience
Betty (pseudonym)	• EIP teacher • Middle Grades Language Arts/Social Studies teacher • Gifted Education teacher • Elementary grades teacher • Assistant Principal • Instructional Coach	Half time at Wayside Elementary School and half time at Harbor Cove Elementary School	5
Heather (pseudonym)	• High school English teacher • Elementary grades teacher • Literacy coordinator • Instructional coach	Morgan Elementary School	3
Suzanne (pseudonym)	• Elementary grades teacher (private school) • Special education teacher • Middle grades Literacy Coordinator • Instructional Coach	Price Elementary School	6

Participant	Professional Experience	School of Current Employment	Years of Coaching Experience
Marsha (pseudonym)	• Elementary grades teacher • EIP teacher • Reading Recovery teacher • Instructional Coach	Riverside Elementary School	4
Sonya (pseudonym)	• Elementary grades teacher • Immersion program teacher • Instructional coach	Creekview Elementary School	3.5

A total of five instructional coaches participated in the research. The participants'

experience as instructional coaches ranged between three and six years with two

participants having previous experience as a Literacy Coordinator.

Participant Profiles

      Betty, Instructional Coach at Wayside Elementary School and Harbor Cove

Elementary School. Betty is the half-time instructional coach at Wayside Elementary

School and the half-time instructional coach at Harbor Cove Elementary School. Each of

these two elementary schools is allotted a half-time instructional coach because the

population of students and teachers is significantly less than the other elementary schools

in the district. Betty travels between the two schools to fulfill her duties of providing

professional learning and coaching for the teachers in each building. Because of the

smallness of the schools' populations, neither employs an assistant principal, as do the

other six larger elementary schools. When the principal is not in the building, it is

Betty's job to be on call as a building administrator when needed. Betty states that, "My role is multi-faceted. Whatever I need to do to make our schools successful is what I do."

The first interview with Betty was set up to gain informed consent and to obtain demographic and background information, along with general information about her role as instructional coach. The meeting took place in the media center, which was busy with adult conversation. While meeting with Betty, several teachers noticed her and indicated that they needed her assistance. Betty was eager to offer her help and made a note to get back in touch with the teachers to inquire about their questions.

The second interview with Betty took place in the privacy of her office, located at the far end of the building away from classrooms. Her office was inviting, complete with a desk, rocking chair, and table for group meetings. Student work samples from her most recent co-teaching coaching session were on the floor. Betty was willing to answer all questions about her role as instructional coach and the enthusiasm she had for her work with teachers was evident. The interview lasted about an hour.

Heather, Instructional Coach at Morgan Elementary School. Heather is the full time instructional coach at Morgan Elementary School (pseudonym) with previous experience as a Literacy Coordinator. Heather's focus is to provide professional development for the teachers. She also teaches a small group of students who are struggling learners as well as a small group of students who are accelerated learners. It is her belief that she needs to work with students, in addition to providing professional development, to stay current on teaching strategies and earn credibility with teachers. Heather does not have administration duties and when the new principal came in she said to him, "My strength is instruction, and my strength is not administration. If most of my

focus can be on instruction, I feel like I'll do a better job for you." A main priority of Heather's is to make sure she is seen as someone doing the work along with the teachers.

The first interview with Heather was held in in the privacy of her office. Her office was a former special education classroom, so it is spacious. The office is cozy with the desk and large shelves of teacher resource materials on one side of the room. In the center of the room is a large table for group meetings. Stacks of data reports were on the large table, as Heather had been preparing for a meeting with teachers. During this meeting, informed consent was gained, and Heather provided demographic and background information about her career in education along with general information about her role as an instructional coach.

The second interview with Heather was also held in the privacy of her office. Heather was willing to share her perspectives as in instructional coach and thoroughly explained her beliefs behind those perspectives. Heather believes that the role of the instructional coach should focus on the teaching and learning that is happening in the school. Her goal in working with teachers is to guide the teachers in reflecting on their work and being intentional about the work they do with students. Heather's passion and commitment to her job as instructional coach was evident through her responses to the interview questions.

Suzanne, Instructional Coach at Price Elementary School. Suzanne is the full time instructional coach at Price Elementary School (pseudonym) who also has previous experience as a Literacy Coordinator. As an instructional coach, Suzanne feels strongly "that there's no one person that can be great in all areas." In fact, that personal belief caused her to initially turn down the instructional coach position when it was offered.

After deciding to take the instructional coach position, Suzanne created a community of mentor teachers and coaching teams within her school to tap into the strengths of master teachers.

The first interview with Suzanne was held in her office, which she shares with another support teacher. At this meeting, informed consent was gained and demographic information about Suzanne's educational career was collected. Suzanne also provided information about her role as an instructional coach. The office was located on a busy hall of the school. When the door was opened, her office was noticeably the size of a classroom, with her desk and the other support teacher's desk near the walls. A bookshelf of instructional resources was also along the wall behind Suzanne's desk. In the center of the room was a large table that was used for group meetings. A time was set to meet for the second interview.

The second interview took place in Suzanne's office as well. Lasting about an hour, the interview brought about detailed information regarding the collaboration between Suzanne and the community of teachers in the school. She sought to make clear that she was just as much of a learner as the teachers she supports. Her passion for being a continuous learner and supporting teachers was evident during the interview.

Marsha, Instructional Coach at Riverside Elementary School. Marsha is the instructional coach at Riverside Elementary School. Marsha feels that she is called to "inspire and serve" teachers with whom she works. She believes that knowing teachers and understanding what they are asked to do is of utmost importance. She says it is important to know teachers "because some teachers have things that stand in their way.

There are things that other people don't know about." Having this knowledge about teachers is the best way for Marsha to plan the type of support she gives.

The questions for the first and second interviews were discussed in the same afternoon because of testing schedules and personal family schedules. Informed consent was gained and demographic information about Marsha's experience in education was collected before the interview started. The meeting, lasting about two hours, was held in the privacy of Marsha's office, which was located in a room adjacent to the media center. The room was just big enough for Marsha's desk to be against the wall and a worktable in the center of the room. On the table were cards that Marsha had been creating for a grade level of teachers to use with students, and stacked on the floor against the wall were instructor manuals for a new program the school was going to implement. Marsha's friendly personality led to fun conversation with laughter about her experiences as an instructional coach.

Sonya, Instructional Coach at Creekview Elementary School. Sonya is the instructional coach at Creekview Elementary School, the largest elementary school in the Harborview School District. Creekview Elementary School has a diverse student population and because of diversity, Sonya's time is focused on professional development for teachers to meet the needs of students in the regular classroom; although, there is some time spent on other areas. Sonya admits to being very analytical and makes a conscious effort to be reflective and keep an open mind when working with teachers. In assisting teachers with answering questions and problem-solving instructional issues, Sonya stated, "I'll always try to have an open mind until I get all the information I need about whatever it is that we're dealing with so that we can make the

best decision." Sonya guides teachers' focus on student data to answer instructional questions and in using student data to drive all instructional decision-making.

The first interview with Sonya was held to gain informed consent and to collect demographic data and background information about her professional experience in education as well as general information about her role as an instructional coach. The meeting was held in the privacy of Creekview Elementary School's conference room. Sonya was willing to participate and was interested in the findings from the study.

The second interview was held in the media center of Creekview Elementary School after school hours. During the hour-long interview, Sonya shared her experiences of "having to be sort of a chameleon" when it comes to the different aspects of being an instructional coach. She shared that her duty is to be able to adapt quickly to teachers' needs ranging across all content areas, types of learners, and types of instructional practices. Sonya's analytical nature was evident in the interview and she was willing to provide information regarding all areas of her work.

Findings

The next sections present the case study findings that evolved during data collection as well as analysis of the findings centered on the overall research question. The findings from this case study are reported across three areas: 1) differing duties among instructional coaches; 2) confidence within the job; and 3) credibility within the instructional coach position.

Differing Duties Among Instructional Coaches

It is important to consider the instructional coaches' perspectives of their role. Within the case, instructional coaches had differing duties, which was expressed as being

beneficial to the teachers in the Harborview School District. The duties of the instructional coach depended on the needs within each school. Heather shared, "Every principal in every building has their own expectation of what this role is." Data revealed that each coach was comfortable in the expectations from their individual principals and in some cases, instructional coaches indicated they would not be able to work for a principal who had expectations that did not align with their personal beliefs about the purpose of the instructional coach role. Heather shared that she would not be comfortable as an instructional coach who was expected to have administrative duties. She feels strongly enough about the role of an instructional coach focusing on instruction that if offered the position in a school where administrative duties were the expectation, she would choose to be a classroom teacher. Suzanne also shared that her focus was not on administrative duties and that she would decline being an instructional coach if administrative duties became a requirement.

Instructional coaches in the Harborview School District meet together as a network once a month. At the meeting, they discuss the initiatives at each school and in the district. Marsha stated:

> It's funny how when we have coach's meeting, you can see the different roles that coaches play based on the administration. What my administration asks and expects of me is totally different than what somebody else's administrator may ask and expect of them.

While discussing what is talked about at the network meeting of instructional coaches, Heather shared:

I'm like, 'Oh my gosh! They're doing this. Should I be doing this here?' I have

to always sit back and think, 'I've got a handle on what we need here. I'm

working on what we need here. I don't have to be measuring up to everybody

else.' And they all say the same thing.

The instructional coaches use their network for support, but know that the instructional

coach role at each school is only appropriate for the administration and teachers at that

particular school. Marsha stated:

We all feel like we want to be on the same page as far as doing very similar

things, but them when you stop and think about the dynamics of your school,

maybe the things that one school really needs to focus on are so different than my

school, and that's not the way we need to approach it.

Table 4.3 provides an overview of the differing approaches and structures to coaching

found across the schools in the Harborview School District.

Table 4.3

Approaches and Structures to Coaching

Name	School(s)	Coaching Approaches and Structures
Betty	Wayside Elementary School and Harbor Cove Elementary School	• Plans for and provides professional development at both schools • Works with all stakeholders • Works with small groups of students if needed • Teachers' needs drive the daily schedule

Name	School(s)	Coaching Approaches and Structures
Heather	Morgan Elementary School	• Acts as administrator when needed • Provider of professional development • Works with administrators to plan professional development • Teacher of small groups of students • Feels the need to be close to the classroom so not to lose sight of what it is like to be a teacher • No administrative duties
Suzanne	Price Elementary School	• Member of instructional team with school administrators. • Facilitator of professional development • Mentors teachers to be coaches
Marsha	Riverside Elementary School	• Provider of professional development • Organizes school wide assessments and data from the assessments • Leader of grade level data discussions • Leader, mentor, and

Name	School(s)	Coaching Approaches and Structures
Sonya	Creekview Elementary School	counselor for teachers instructionally and socially • Freedom from administration to plan with and assist teachers in problem-solving • Provider of professional development • Analyzes data and guides teachers in reflection on data • Plans with administrators for grade level and teacher goals

Table 4.4 provides the self-identified roles the instructional coaches assumed in the

Harborview School District.

Table 4.4

Instructional Coaches' Self-identified Roles

Name	Self-Identified Roles
Betty	"I'm on call when an administrator is needed." "My role is multi-faceted." "Whatever I need to do to make our school successful is what I do."
Heather	"My bottom line is about teaching and learning in the building. I feel like the main purpose of school is the instruction." "I feel a little more able to be a coach to these teachers because I still teach kids everyday."
Suzanne	"I have a teacher's heart." "I feel I am called to mentor and teach teachers, find their

Name	Self-Identified Roles
	strengths, and help them to coach and mentor other teachers."
Marsha	"I am here to inspire and serve teachers. I think service above yourself is the phrase I would use." I am a leader, mentor, and counselor both instructionally and socially."
Sonya	"I have to be sort of a chameleon. I have to be able to adapt quickly to needs in the building."

Betty

Betty is in charge of all the professional development in her two schools. Within that professional development, she assists with data analysis to drive instructional decisions, instructional support, and the uses of resources. Betty is also expected to work with all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and students. She is part of Response To Intervention (RTI) parent meetings and grade level meetings about student progress. Betty provides resources to parents to help support their children academically. Additionally, Betty works with small groups of students, if needed, to assess progress or assist teachers. Because there is no assistant principal in either school, Betty said, "I do some administrative work. When the administrator is not here, I'm on call. I do what needs to be done." Betty is a former assistant principal and is confident in handling administrative duties. She said:

> I love [my job]. I never know what's going to happen during the day. I have a
>
> schedule but it could go off at any moment with whatever's going on. I don't
>
> really have a set schedule or a set this or that.

Betty is comfortable with a traveling back and forth between the two schools even if the trips are unscheduled and spur of the moment. Betty states that she starts her day by going in every morning and asking, "Do you need anything from me?' That pretty much drives my day. Whatever I need to do."

Heather

Heather is responsible for the professional development and also teaches two small groups of students who are struggling learners. Heather feels that her strength is in instruction, not in administration. With Morgan Elementary School having an assistant principal, the structure of her position does not include administrative duties. Heather is glad she does not have administrative duties and shares, "I feel like the main purpose of school is the instruction."

Like the other instructional coaches, Heather is responsible for professional development at Morgan Elementary School, and she tries to make sure her day is filled with helping teachers. Heather said, "I am really lucky here because the administrators allow me to be very instructional teaching and learning focused. A lot of my day is helping teachers problem solve with instructional questions." When the new principal at Morgan Elementary School told Heather that he was going to rely on her to help in understanding elementary education, she was forthcoming in letting him know what he would get from her would be teaching and learning related. Heather stated, "He was good with that." Because she and the principal have the same expectation of her position, she feels that in spite of the fact that every day is different and she has a plan, she is also free to go where her support is needed. She said, "I feel like I do know that my bottom line is about teaching and learning in the building."

Suzanne

Suzanne is responsible for organizing the professional development in her school; however, she prefers a team approach. Suzanne shared that her principal is very strong instructionally and is very much a part of supporting instructional practices at Price Elementary School. The expectations from administration are very clear. When administrators notice there is a need in the school in a particular area of instruction, Suzanne has the responsibility of planning how the need will be met. Suzanne does not deliver the training necessarily, but will arrange for the training to happen through Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) or will bring in leaders who specialize in the identified area of need to provide professional learning activities. Suzanne calls her principal "the scaffolding piece because she is very instructionally strong in what she sees and what she expects." The principal is visible in classrooms observing instructional development, so she knows what should be happening instructionally in each classroom.

Along with the principal and assistant principal, Suzanne is part of an instructional team that works together to develop coaching teams within the school. Suzanne feels strongly that she has been "called to mentor and teach teachers, and find their strengths, and help them to coach and mentor other teachers." This partnership approach at Price Elementary School, which is different from the coaching structure in other schools in the Harborview School District, was developed from Suzanne's strong belief that "no one person knows everything to appropriately provide coaching in all areas for all teachers in the school."

Marsha

Marsha provides the professional development in her school as well as organizes assessments and data from those assessments. She leads grade level conversations with teachers during meetings about the data and with the principal or assistant principal in attendance. Marsha's principal and assistant principal trust her to make decisions, and they have given her the freedom at times to work out instructional issues with teachers. She said, "I am trying to be the lead person in our school, instructionally speaking." Marsha wants to be a part of the students' education, so she interacts with students on a regular basis as well.

Marsha sees herself as a teacher leader, mentor, and counselor for the teachers in her school. She knows that teachers get bombarded with many duties and are stressed with the mandates from the state and local level, and she wants to be a leader and mentor for her teachers instructionally and socially. When the Common Core State Standards came out, Marsha had to be a proponent and shared, "I had to carry the weight on my shoulders by myself because I was the only person who believed in it." The teachers were a huge barrier for her, but she feels that because of her relationship with them and having the "inspire and serve" leadership style, she eventually got them on board with implementing the standards.

With being in a counseling role, Marsha said that she had to develop a "thick skin" and realize that when the teachers come to her with an issue, she cannot take it personally. She knows that they are just stressed about educational mandates. Marsha shared:

I have to inspire teachers constantly to continue giving all they've got to finish

strong, not to beat themselves up over things. I feel like I have to be an

inspiration and try to find ways to inspire them to keep on.

Marsha adds that she is also a servant and has been known to take care of a class of

students when the teacher needed a break. The administration in Marsha's school

supports her belief in the leadership style of inspiring and serving those with whom she

works.

Sonya

As the instructional coach at Creekview Elementary School, Sonya said her role

was "to support instructional strategies and success of students, but also the teachers who

are delivering that." Sonya spends a lot of time looking at data, comparing data, and

trying to find trends of what is working and what is not working. The data analysis

includes time for reflection with teachers to determine what to change and how to make

the learning environment more effective for students. Sonya's analytical nature fits with

the goals her principal and assistant principal have for the school. She meets with the

administration once or twice a month to discuss expectations and progress. At those

meetings, data are analyzed, goals are set for particular teachers and/or grade levels, and

plans are made to meet those goals.

With 48 teachers in the building, Sonya does not get to do a lot of one-on-one

coaching, but conducts most professional learning in small groups, which she considers a

piece of coaching. When teachers need follow up coaching to help in understanding the

implementation of the professional development topic, or just need assistance in a

particular area, Sonya is then able to do one-on-one coaching. All instructional coach

participants identified roles for themselves. The self-identified roles are linked to the personal belief each coach has about the job of an instructional coach and the confidence each has within the job.

Confidence Within the Job

All instructional coach participants indicated that they derive great "self-satisfaction" with the work of being an instructional coach. When discussing successes and challenges of their personal effectiveness and feelings about the job, the instructional coaches in this study focused on being critical of their performance and shared concerns of having a lack of confidence in their job at times. Although all participants had more than 10 years of experience as classroom teachers before being an instructional coach, and all have been an instructional coach for more than 3 years, being uncomfortable in certain situations was common. The participants shared that although they know what determines effective teaching and what is involved in effective coaching, doubts come in to play because everyone has an area with which they are not totally comfortable.

In a reflection Beth shared, "Some days I feel great. A lot of days I feel like, 'Oh, my gosh! I'm no good at this!'" Sonya expressed being uncomfortable with fifth grade math. She shared, "I don't have as much of an in-depth knowledge as [the teachers] do on how kids respond to a certain strategy." Marsha stated, "I don't feel as competent in my role as I would like to. I've always got a to-do list of what I need to be working on and what I need to be reading up on because things change so quickly." Marsha added, "I have to read, I have to learn, and I have to find people and sit around with people who do know what they're doing and go about it that way because there is so much."

Heather laughed, "[my confidence] depends on which teacher meets me in the hall with a question." Suzanne joked, "I don't think any one person is an expert in every area. I mean it's almost impossible." Suzanne also shared, "There's no one person who can be great in all areas." Although having training and knowing effective teaching and coaching practices, the participants shared reasons for insecurity in the position of instructional coach. The areas affecting instructional coaches' confidence included barriers such as; (a) expectations of self; (b) content knowledge; and (c) teachers as experts.

Barriers

All the instructional coaches identified barriers that affect the confidence they have in their job performance. The barriers that participants identified were not within their control. For example, Betty must travel between two schools, which was decided by district administration. Betty shared:

> My barrier is being at one school and then having to go to the other school.
> That's a big barrier, being half time at two schools, because as much as you can do in saying, "Text me. E-mail me. I'll be there. I can work on my computer from one place to the other," you still don't get that face-to-face time that you need with the teachers. So my biggest barrier is not having that time to be face-to-face with teachers when they really want that. I just try to make it better. I'll come back over to one school if there's a big problem. I just tell the principal, "I've got to go to the other school and help Suzy and I'll be back."

Betty adds that although traveling between the schools is tough, she tries to be positive and make "my coaching the best it can be."

Marsha stated that she experiences barriers when new initiatives are brought into the schools to be implemented. She shared that when the Common Core State Standards were brought to the schools, teachers were the barrier she had to overcome. She stated:

When common core was first initiated and brought out, there was a big difference between what the teachers thought the kids needed to know and what the standards were asking the kids to know. There was such a change in the level of rigor and the level of learning that the kids were going to have to do that higher order learning and the depth of that. I had to be a proponent of what's now the Georgia Standards of Excellence. I had to carry the weight on my shoulders by myself because I was the only person who believed in it. My teachers were snarling all the time about it. I said, "Guys, this is it. This is where we're headed. This is where we need to be going. The teachers were the barrier for me there. I had to get rid of their mindset of, "This is not going to work. My kindergarteners cannot do this. My first graders cannot do this," into saying, "yes they will. We have to. This is what we are required to do." So little by little, I chiseled away at them. I finally got them all onboard. But that was a huge barrier.

Marsha shared that she talked through and unpacked each of the standards with teachers, and she "went crazy providing resources" to "lighten the load" to help ease the minds' of teachers, things for her and the teachers went "much better."

Heather has a different perspective of barriers with new initiatives and mandates that are being implemented in schools. She explained:

There are a lot of changes going on as far as accountability with the Teacher Keys, the teacher evaluation, with the growth measures, with the SLOs, with the

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CRCT changing to Milestones. Last year I felt very…I don't want to say helpless, which sounds crazy, but I was frustrated because I was giving teachers information at the last minute before they needed to know, do, or carry out something. But that's because we were getting the information at the last minute. Then sometimes we would be told one thing and two weeks later it might change again. You know, the Milestones stuff, we found out two weeks before the administration it was all going to be done online. My teachers were panicked. I feel responsible because I have that luxury of sitting down and thinking. I don't have to keep a classroom going. I was thinking, "How can I frame this for them so that they don't feel so overwhelmed, or so frustrated?" That felt out of my control but I felt responsible for making it better.

To help overcome these types of barriers, Heather shared that she helped everyone keep perspective. She explained to the teachers:

Here's what you need to remember. We have been working on the next generation type of questions. No kid in Georgia can type any better than your kids. Our scores have always been "x." [Our scores] will dip, but probably not dip lower than anyone else.

Suzanne shared that grade levels of kindergarten and first were her barriers. She explained that the barrier with kindergarten was because she has not had experience teaching kindergarten level students. She explained:

In speaking with [kindergarten teachers] the first 2 years [I was instructional coach], that trust of me having the knowledge they needed was really not there. But because we have great relationships that we've built, their trust has moved.

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Recently we had a struggle about new site word lists. I had to go in from what I was told to do. I shared with kindergarten [teachers] what it was going to look like. It was awkward, because they know that's not my cup of tea. They were like, "No, we can't do this." I said, "Guys, if you will just say, 'This is what works and this is what doesn't,' so I can take it back, because you know this is not my strength. But I need to hear exactly. You need to be able to articulate to me why you think this is not going to work and why you think this does work." So, that has been a great thing for me. So, more and more I hear from kindergarten teachers. It's usually about data. It's usually about a student. But that's okay, because it's not my strength. They are masters. They could coach me. But kindergarten is a hard place for me.

Additionally, first grade is an area that is a barrier for Suzanne for a different reason. Suzanne explained:

A barrier with first [grade] is personality. In first grade, we have some very strong personalities. The team isn't always on the same page. So, it's already a little bit... It's not volatile. It's just awkward. So, probably first grade here, I seldom ever work with, seldom ever. They don't ask for anything. One of the things that I have tried to do to overcome that is we have some strong teachers [in first grade], some awesome teachers [in first grade]. One in particular I see being in a role like I'm in. So, I show her off as much as I can. I have brought many teachers into her classroom. Of course, I always ask permission, trying to help with the relationship little by little. But yeah. There are barriers there, but it has a

lot to do with that is not my strength. Kindergarten and first grade are not my

strength.

Although personality conflicts are not in her control, Suzanne still feels responsible for

the barrier in first grade because she has not had experience as a classroom teacher in first

grade. Sonya feels that the barrier for her comes with being the instructional coach at the

largest elementary school in the Harborview School District. She shares:

This is the largest elementary school. So I feel like just the sheer volume of

teachers is sometimes hard for me to fit in. Gosh, there are 48 teachers. Just

planning smart on how I'm going to get to everybody when there are certain

things I need. That's somewhat of a barrier for me. If I've booked time with a

grade level already and someone asks me to come in and model, but their time

overlaps with another time kind of thing, that's something I always struggle with.

I try to always be immediate. But sometimes your job doesn't allow you to

immediately address that. That's hard for me, because I want to address it

immediately.

Sonya adds that with so many teachers, she has to change her plan frequently to address

that barrier; however, she reported that she feels she has "gotten better at changing" her

plans to fit teachers' needs.

Expectations of Self

Having unrealistic expectations outside of goals set with a plan can cause a lack

of confidence in job related performance. Betty shared:

I am always striving to be the coach of the year, but you know that's not going to

happen all the time. I mean I'd like to be able to answer questions off the cuff.

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I'm not able to do that sometimes and I'll have to say, 'I'll get back to you.' I

guess that's normal.

In a particular situation of coaching a teacher who was struggling instructionally, Betty

was disappointed that she was not able to "save" the teacher and help to improve the

effectiveness of teaching. Betty said, "I felt like I was somewhat of a failure in that

instance. I did as much as I could, and it still wasn't enough." In a reflection, Betty

wrote that she determined her success by the success of the teachers she coaches. She

stated, "I determine my effectiveness if the teacher is applying what I've talked or

coached about. That is the proof in the pudding."

Marsha shared that she is "stressed out" by trying to make sure she meets the

needs of all staff members. Particularly, Marsha said that her stress comes in asking

herself if she is learning enough and sharing with teachers what it takes to make sure they

are instructionally sound to prepare students for 21st century learning. At times, this

perception Marsha creates within herself leads to a lack of confidence. She explained

that she is constantly questioning herself and focused on the fact that if she falters, then

there is a whole building of teachers and students who could falter because of her lack of

knowledge. She shared that "you get to an age where you're finished learning and you

don't want to learn anymore because your brain just feels like there's no more room."

Heather shared that at times, the confidence she feels in her work depends on

which teacher she is working with at the time. She said:

I feel like I can keep student learning in front of me. I feel like I can connect with

teachers and try to listen and understand where they are coming from. I also feel

like I'm pretty good at letting everybody know that I'll probably screw up, but it

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won't be for a lack of trying. There are days when I feel so responsible for so many layers of things across the building in the sense that, "I wish I could make this better, I know this teacher is frustrated, or why is this teacher doing this?' Even with the days that she feels less confident in her job, Heather likes to do whatever she can that will help teachers feel good about their work with the students who are "sitting in the desks of the teachers she coaches."

Suzanne has experienced instances that have caused her to question her ability to be an instructional coach. At certain times she hears a great idea from someone else and wonders, "Why didn't I think of that? That was so helpful!" She shares that at times when others have new ideas and creative problem solving strategies that were new to her, she feels incompetent. She stated, "You know, that's just my personality. I'm a sensitive person. So it works great for me in some senses. But in others it does not." At times when she is feeling incompetent, Suzanne goes to her administration for support and shares her feelings. She has even told her principal that she would be okay going back to being a classroom teacher if there was someone else needed in the instructional coach position.

Additionally, Suzanne shared in a reflection that she did not like to make even a small mistake that disappoints a teacher. She fears that credibility will be lost. In one instance, she had a coaching session set with a teacher to co-teach a lesson but forgot. She explained:

That teacher happened to be being observed on the day I forgot our coaching session. We had already had our day one and day two, and it was day three. I forgot. I just forgot. So to get that phone call, I could hardly recover. [The

teacher] was fine, but I could hardly recover. So for me to make a little mistake like that that's so simple was really difficult, because I think when you do something like that you lose credibility. The teacher said, "It's fine. Don't worry. But it wasn't fine. It wasn't fine to me.

Suzanne feels that letting teachers down for any reason is one of the most difficult circumstances to go through.

Content Knowledge

The feeling of having deficiency in content knowledge was found as a reason for a lack of confidence in the job as instructional coach. Betty shared that she is confident in her job most of the time, but is not as competent in math as she would like to be. She said, "I try to be, and I can fake, it but math is not my strength." Betty believes the professional development she provides in math is not as strong as professional development in reading. Betty also said that professional development provided to instructional coaches is more on the subject of language arts and not much in the area of math. Betty feels that she is in need of more professional development in math, but the opportunity is not often available.

In a similar vein, Sonya feels that she is not as comfortable in math as she is in language arts. She shared that she probably does not have as much in-depth knowledge in math as the teachers she is coaching. Sonya tries to make sure that any teacher who comes to her with a question is also involved in finding the answer to that question. Because instructional coaches are responsible for professional development in all content areas, Sonya feels that having both a math coach and literacy coach in each school would be very beneficial just because there is so much to work on in both of the heavily

weighted content areas. She believes that one person can coach in both areas, but all coaches spend more time on one or the other depending on the school's need and the coach's area of strength.

Marsha shared that she does not feel as competent as she would like in any area. She said, "I think I have learned more in the past 3 years than I have learned in the other 14 years in the classroom. I have had to become well-read on a lot of things." Marsha feels that the responsibility she has to serve teachers forces her to try to be on top of topics in education and content. She spends a lot of time reading and learning to be able to put the nuts and bolts of a concept together before having to provide the professional development on that concept. Marsha adds that she has a constant list of areas to research to keep up with content and issues in her school.

Teachers as Experts

Two instructional coach participants acknowledged there are areas in which they feel classroom teachers are more of an expert. Sonya has needed to include some grade level teachers in instructional decision making because she did not feel she had the expertise to answer the questions that were asked. Sonya said to her 5th grade math teachers when one of them had a question, "You're the experts because you live it every day." She added, "It's good to learn from teachers. You learn as much from them a lot of times too." Sonya explained, "You have to sometimes depend on grade level teachers who are very strong, just because you have to have those lead teachers. Because no one coach can be everywhere in every content at all parts of the day."

Suzanne believes strongly that there is no one coach who is knowledgeable and strong in all areas. Because Suzanne and her administration believe classroom teachers

can be strong instructional leaders and can also support other teachers in learning, a school community of mentors and coaches was created. At the first meeting with the researcher, Suzanne stated:

> You need to know this up front. Part of the model we have tried to design here is not the idea that I understand it all, and I know how, and I can coach you. Part of my role is finding very strong people within our community and using them to help and mentor teachers.

Suzanne further explained that although she is a strong teacher, she does not expect herself to be the guru for everything. She said:

> I know my strengths. I know my weaknesses. I'm building that in others because I want others to coach teams. If a team can get together and work well together and a team player comes in and goes in the classroom and watches her teammate, then we all become coaches of some kind with whatever or best strength is. That's always my ultimate goal.

Suzanne is an instructional coach who helps teachers find their strengths and facilitates and guides them in coaching and mentoring other teachers. For example, Price Elementary School has a new school wide reading initiative. As a coach, she felt that she needed to implement one part of the initiative before implementing other parts. One particular teacher took on implementing all parts of the reading initiative and was successful. Suzanne stated, "Man, she was flying! She should have been the one leading the parade here because you're getting it. You've got it!" This teacher was used as a support for other teachers working to implement the new reading initiative. In creating this design, Suzanne shares that the new teacher evaluation system fits in perfectly in that

the evaluation system includes an area to recognize teachers for being instructional leaders and mentors.

Credibility Within the Instructional Coach Position

While professional development is required for teachers, and is provided by instructional coaches in the Harborview School District, participants in the study found that they had to particularly work to keep credibility of the instructional coach position in the school, which was viewed as a challenge in the instructional coach position. In the interview, participants were asked, "What expectations do you believe the teachers in your school have of you in the instructional coach role?" Betty stated that the previous coach had lost trust with teachers, and when she was placed in the instructional coach position the teachers wondered "why are you even here?" Betty felt it was her duty to prove to the teachers that the position was important for the success of the school. To work on relationships and building back the trust that was lost, Betty would go by classrooms every morning and ask teachers, "Do you need anything from me?"

Likewise, Heather also shared, "When I first came, teachers didn't know what to do with me." She too continually asked teachers what she could do to help. Likewise, Sonya believed that understanding the teachers' personalities was the first step in earning trust, and having trust was necessary for teachers to be open to assistance from her in other ways. Participants shared that trust has been established between the instructional coaches and teachers in each of the schools, and data revealed that instructional coach participants maintain credibility of their position by having (a) understanding of a classroom teacher; and (b) teaching students.

Understanding of a Classroom Teacher

Participants indicated that it was important for them to have not only a current understanding of life in classrooms but also to keep live the memory of what it is like to be a classroom teacher. Without these understandings, they would not be able to connect with teachers; hence, diminishing credibility with teachers that would not be welcoming of the coaches in their classrooms. Heather indicated that the best knowledge an instructional coach can have is the understanding of what it is like to be a classroom teacher. She shared:

If you're too far removed from the classroom, it's hard to have credibility with the teachers and it's hard to kind of connect with them where they are and what's hard for them. Because so much about the work I love to do, and administrators and curriculum directors want coaches to do, is big shifts in thinking and teaching. The classroom teacher has to keep so many moving parts going day in and day out – behavior, grades, parent meetings, fundraisers, and all those kinds of things. For me to connect with them to think big picture, and paradigm, and why I do what I do, I have to really be mindful of what it's like in their day-to-day and what they have to do.

Marsha stated:

I've got to know what the teachers are being asked to do, not just from my end but from the county level, from the state level, all the way to federal. I've got to understand and realize what it is they are being asked to do. What are the standards they're being asked to teach? How rigorous? I have to know exactly.

Marsha went on to explain that she has to know more about her teachers than ever before because each teacher has a different hurdle in his or her way in getting to the point of most effective teaching.

Sonya said that knowing best practices and instructional strategies for different types of learners is necessary for instructional coaches to be seen as an effective support for teachers. Sonya shared that when teachers ask how to meet the needs of particular students or groups of students, "instructional coaches have to know what works best for those different types of learners."

Suzanne shared that if an instructional coach is out of the classroom for too long she loses credibility with the teachers. Suzanne added that it is important for teachers to see her as "a teacher just like they are." She states it is important for teachers to "…always see that I have their back. If they have needs and they want to face administration, but they need support, they know I'm going to be supportive in helping with that." It is important to Suzanne that teachers know she still has a teacher heart and that they are being represented well through her.

Heather additionally shares that she is able to be a better coach to teachers because she has struggled with implementing new initiatives when she was a classroom teacher. In a reflection, Heather reported:

My last year in the classroom (4 years ago), I not only taught math for the first time in years, but I was nudged (okay, dragged) into teaching it through a math workshop model. It took me a little while to get my head around how to set up the structure, and of course I had to adjust as the year go up and going, but math workshop turned out to be my FAVORITE time of day, every day.

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Heather openly shares with teachers her struggles as a classroom teacher along with how she overcame those struggles to connect with the teachers she is coaching. Heather believes that her openness supports her credibility as an instructional coach.

Suzanne also shares her struggles with classroom teachers. She explained that classroom teachers struggle when implementing a new strategy. Suzanne believes to really reach teachers, "I have to be vulnerable and allow them to see my own struggle." While practicing implementation of a new reading initiative, Suzanne was co-teaching a lesson while a group of teachers observed. She reported:

> We literally had clipboard in hand. Lesson plans were literally word for word. But it felt good because when teachers came in to watch us, we were vulnerable. We had to admit, we were vulnerable, too. So to me that made it stronger, because if teachers see that I'm willing to be vulnerable in front of you, and you get to see what I do well and give me hints to improve, then if I show that I'm willing, then I hope that catches on for others.

Suzanne wants to build that group effort and openness in others. Her ultimate goal is to set a team atmosphere where teachers can go in other classrooms and work with each other to grow in their instructional practices. Suzanne added that the debriefing with a group makes you stronger because of the constructive suggestions for improvement. Suzanne feels that what makes her role of coaching stronger is the willingness to go through the same struggles teachers experience and let teachers see the process and her own vulnerability.

Teaching Students

Participants' main duty is to provide professional learning to teachers; however, they have many other duties within the instructional coach position. A common duty among all the participants is to provide instruction to students in some capacity. The participants felt as though they still needed to be seen as a teacher and not completely separated from classroom instruction.

Heather said, "effective instructional coaches still work with kids an awful lot so that they don't lose sight of how hard the work is." Heather believes that working with kids gives her "credibility with teachers" so the teachers will feel comfortable coming to her and asking for assistance with instruction. She further shares that "if there is something that arises about a student being successful academically, I have to be ready to step in if a teacher needs me." Heather also stated, "I wanted the teachers to see me as somebody who does the work with them, not tells them what to do, or just gives them materials and says, 'Go do it,' or by any way evaluates."

With reference to teachers, Suzanne said, "I am a teacher just like they are. Experience in the classroom is huge because instructional practices are vital and important." Suzanne additionally shared that to reach teachers, "you have to be up and aware, and doing things that are appropriate for what's going on at that time. Staying fresh and working on those strategies yourself." Sonya goes into classrooms to teach so she can practice new strategies and teaching initiatives and to open the door for teachers to recruit her assistance in helping them learn new strategies and initiatives. Marsha goes into classrooms and teaches lessons to be present "just so [teachers] know that my main priority is trying to serve their needs."

Betty shared that working with students helps her work with teachers. In working with students of different ability levels, she is able to practice differentiating and keeping in mind that when she is providing professional development for teachers, she needs to also differentiate the work to match the strengths and weaknesses within the group with which she is working.

From the case analysis, four themes emerged through the constant comparison of the data. The themes were:

1. Instructional coaches self-identify their roles based on their beliefs about how the instructional coach position should meet the needs within their respective schools.

2. Instructional coaches feel comfortable in their position when the coaching structure framed by the school's principal aligns with their strengths.

3. Barriers such as expectations of self, content knowledge, and other teachers affect instructional coaches' confidence within the job.

4. Instructional coaches maintain credibility of the instructional coach position by understanding the work of a classroom teacher and teaching students.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, discussion of the themes that emerged related to the literature, and implications for future research and practice. Concluding thoughts close the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate instructional coaches'

perspectives about the successes and challenges they experienced while working with

teachers. This study examined instructional coaches' perspectives to understand how

instructional coaches perceive their work with teachers as they provide job embedded

professional development. The guiding research question in the study was:

1. What are instructional coaches' perspectives about the successes and

challenges they experience while working with teachers?

This chapter presents a summary of the study, a discussion of the study's findings

thematically situated in the literature, and implications for future research and practice.

Summary of the Study

This qualitative case study was framed within the interpretivist paradigm and

employed constructivism as the theoretical framework for the study. The researcher

recruited instructional coach participants from one school system. A total of five

instructional coaches met the criteria for the study and agreed to participate.

Data collection began with audio recorded, one-on-one semi-structured interviews

with the participants. Participants were interviewed twice using the interview guides

provided in Chapter 3, with the audio recordings transcribed by a professional after each

interview. In addition to interviews, participants agreed to provide journal reflections

that were written after coaching sessions were held. Coaching documents were used to

triangulate the data. After each audio recording of interviews was transcribed, the

constant comparative method of data analysis was used to formulate the initial findings.

Codes and categories were attached to the data. The researcher recognized

commonalities and trends across the instructional coaches' perspectives of their work

with teachers.

Discussion

Several themes emerged within the case via analysis of findings from collected

data. The discussion will address the four themes that resulted from analysis and

connections will be made to existing literature. The themes explored in this section are:

1. Instructional coaches self-identify their roles based on their beliefs about how the instructional coach position should meet the needs within their respective schools.

2. Instructional coaches feel comfortable in their position when the coaching structure framed by the school's principal aligns with their strengths.

3. Barriers such as expectations of self, content knowledge, and other teachers affect instructional coaches' confidence within the job.

4. Instructional coaches maintain credibility of the instructional coach position by understanding the work of a classroom teacher and teaching students.

Theme 1: Instructional coaches self-identify their roles based on their beliefs about how the instructional coach position should meet the needs within their respective schools.

Research by Knight (2007, 2009, 2011) identifies principles on which to build a

successful instructional coaching program. Those principles are—equality, choice, voice,

reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity. Each of the principles supports the

partnership approach and the idea that all parties involved are respected, important, and contribute to the learning of the other team members. Additionally, for a coaching program to be effective, research indicated that instructional coaches should have knowledge and expertise in the areas of curriculum, subject specific content and pedagogy, and communication and interpersonal skills (Borman & Feger, 2006; Kinkead, 2007; Knight, 2007; Kowal & Steiner, 2007; Saphier & West, 2010). Along with knowledge and principles of effective coaching, research shows that coaches play an assortment of roles (Borman & Feger, 2006; Killion & Roy, 2009). The self-identified roles the participants identified are connected to the research on instructional coaching partnership principles, knowledge, and the roles enacted in effective coaching. Table 4.2 in Chapter 4 provides an overview of the self-identified roles of the participants.

The primary goal of the work between a teacher and an instructional coach is to improve instructional practices with the purpose to increase student learning (Oliver, 2007). Coaches collaborate with teachers to address needs and to help teachers implement new skills (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Knight, 2005). Heather's belief is strictly aligned with the instructional coaching research related to purpose of the instructional coach role. She focuses solely on instruction and learning that is happening in the school, and makes sure that her day is filled with helping teachers meet instructional goals.

Along with partnership principles, instructional coaches play a variety of roles to meet instructional needs in the school. Betty's self-identified role aligns with research as she maintains that her role is "multi-faceted" and she does "what is necessary to make the school successful." Her experience in many different areas of education allows her to be comfortable in the various roles, including being an "administrator on call" when needed.

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Sonya goes so far as to call herself a "chameleon" when referring to meeting the needs within her school. She feels she must adapt quickly to fill the role that is needed in a moments' notice.

Collegiality is an element of the partnership between instructional coaches and teachers that is necessary for positive and effective coaching environments (Franke et al., 2001; Knight, 2005; Roehrig, Kruse, & Kern, 2007). Marsha believes collegiality is a foundational base for her role in working with teachers; however, she adds an additional foundational layer of collegiality. The quote that Marsha uses to describe her role is "service above yourself," and she believes it is her duty to "inspire and serve" teachers. The term collegiality includes more professional partnership in the meaning than Marsh indicates in her self-identified role. Marsha's role of partnership is in the form of providing for teachers when they need assistance such as in taking students to lunch, watching students on the playground, and teaching the class, rather than having a reciprocal partnership.

The instructional coaching literature indicated that an effective instructional coach has the characteristic of people skills; including building relationships, trust, and credibility (Kowal & Steiner, 2007). Knight added that people skills were the foundation to being a change agent in education, and without effective interpersonal and communication skills, professional development efforts would be wasted (Knight, 2009, 2011; Perkins, 1998). Marsha spends a lot of time developing relationships on a personal level. She believes an important characteristic in her role is to give teachers someone to talk to when there are struggles and "wishes coaching cycles were more of a priority."

Sonya believes there is a line between what she calls "light coaching" and "heavy coaching." She considers "light coaching" to be helping with copies and small duties of the like to get to know teachers and to build a relationship. Sonya shared that it is important to wean yourself off of those duties as a coach to get to the important "heavy coaching" of focusing on professional development and instruction. Building relationships is a critical piece of coaching and is just as important as providing professional development; however professional development is the purpose of coaching and should take up more of the coaching time. When there is an imbalance between using people skills on a personal level and using people skills to build the professional development atmosphere, effective coaching may not occur. Figure 5.1 shows the balance of using people skills in instructional coaching.
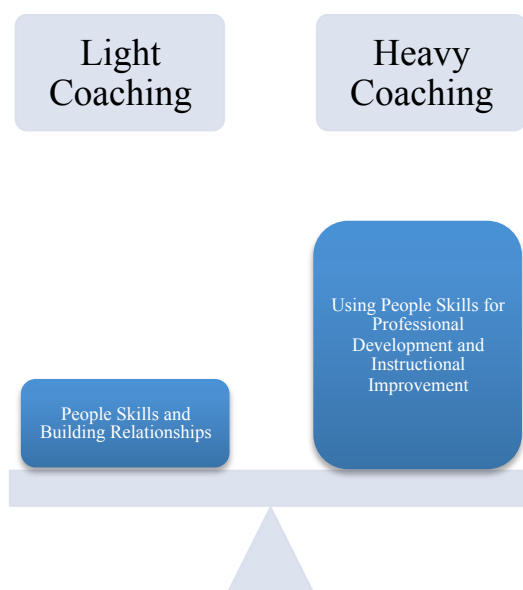
Light Coaching	Heavy Coaching

People Skills and Building Relationships

Using People Skills for Professional Development and Instructional Improvement

Figure 5.1. The Balance of People Skills in Instructional Coaching

Instructional coaches have teaching experience and should have a deep understanding of the four areas of teaching practices that have a positive effect on teachers' instructional practices and the way students learn (Knight, 2009). The four

areas are—behavior (classroom management), content knowledge, direct instruction, and formative assessment. Although Suzanne is an instructional coach, she continues to identify herself as a teacher. Suzanne uses her "teacher's heart" to create a positive coaching structure for professional development in her school. She works with teachers to find their strengths, then teaches those teachers how to share their strength by coaching and mentoring other teachers. For Suzanne, this structure alleviates the stress of having to be "a guru" in all areas while using other teachers as experts (discussion of Theme 3), which is an area that has affected the confidence of other instructional coaches.

Within Price Elementary School, the variety of teachers' strengths has become a great resource for learning. Those identified strengths were used in creating learning groups of teachers within the school for professional development. It is important to allow opportunities for teachers to learn from each other, which is accomplished at Price Elementary School by teachers being provided times to visit and observe classrooms of teachers who were identified as having strength in their area of interest. By doing this, an open collaborative atmosphere of teachers as learners and leaders is created, and professional growth is fostered.

Theme 2: Instructional coaches feel comfortable in their position when the coaching structure framed by the school's principal aligns with her strengths and beliefs of instructional coaching.

Regardless of the structure, professional development can be enhanced with a strong coaching component (Zepeda, 2012). The type of leadership from the principal and instructional coach partnership determines the effectiveness of classroom instruction (Balyer, 2012). Research by Knight (2005) underscored the importance of a positive

atmosphere between principals and instructional coaches. Knight found that professional learning could be negatively impacted if the principal and instructional coach did not work together in partnership. Within the Pathways to Success program (Knight, 2005), research indicated three practices to which principals and instructional coaches should adhere. Those practices are: 1) The principal and instructional coach should be in agreement on how the coach will bring interventions to the school; 2) principals and instructional coaches should have a relationship where both work together to identify teachers who will receive particular services from the instructional coach; and 3) the principal and instructional coach must be careful to work together in partnership to reduce teacher resistance to new programs and interventions.

The findings of this study are similar to previous research with all of the participants sharing they have positive relationships with their principals and work with their principals to set and carry out plans to meet professional development goals in the school. In relation to Knight's (2005) practice of the principal and instructional coach being in agreement on how the instructional coach will bring interventions to the school, Suzanne specifically discussed a particular time when she and her principal planned how to incorporate the use of a new book of reading strategies. The principal stated to Suzanne, "We're not going to hand out that book for teachers to have. Before it goes out, we need to have a plan." Further she asked Suzanne, "What do you think we need to do? I think we need a little bit more planning together so we can all decide what [the strategies] look like and that we are clear on what we want." Sonya also mentioned planning meetings with her principal. She stated:

We have weekly meetings. We talk about expectations. We talk about

instructional areas we need to work on. Right now I have a plan for certain grade

levels. Today, we worked on scheduling a reading block so that guided reading

stays in tact.

Marsha shared that her principal trusts her enough to give her opportunities to make

decisions at times. She further shared that they talk a lot about happenings in the school.

When Marsha is making certain decisions she will bounce ideas off the principal and ask,

"What do you think about this?" or "Is this a good time to roll this out?"

When identifying teachers who will work with the instructional coach, all

participants shared that the principal and themselves identify teachers. Suzanne

explained that the principal is in the classrooms frequently and may notice a particular

need. The principal then brings the need to Suzanne's attention; if the need is noticed

during an evaluation, the principal may ask the teacher to seek assistance from Suzanne

while also notifying Suzanne of the need. Suzanne may also notice a teacher who needs

support and will get advice from the principal about how to approach the teacher.

Marsha also discussed that her principal will ask the teacher to seek out assistance when a

need is noticed during an evaluation. Heather's and Betty's principals, however, will ask

Heather and Betty to approach the teacher who needs support.

In addition to the previous research, Suzanne also discussed that she and the

principal will bring to the attention of each other the teachers who are excelling in a

particular area, and talk with those teachers about modeling or mentoring another teacher.

In their coaching structure at Price Elementary School, the coach supports teachers who

need assistance, but also teachers who can give assistance to others.

School leadership is responsible for the professional growth that occurs in their particular school and much of what happens in a school is based on the culture that the principal and other people in leadership roles have created (Binkney, 1997). Additionally, effective coaching can promote implementation of curriculum reform (Bruce & Ross, 2008). In relation to the practice of the principal and instructional coach working together to reduce teacher resistance to new programs and interventions of curriculum reform, only Heather and Sonya discussed approaching administration about a teacher or teachers being unwilling to incorporate a practice. In both instances, the administrators and instructional coach together decided how to handle the situation. In Heather's case, it was decided that she would continue to offer assistance to the grade level of teachers who needed to incorporate guided reading into their instruction, but she found many excuses as to why it was not happening. In Sonya's case, the teacher adamantly refused to incorporate the new initiative. In that particular case it was decided by Sonya and the principal together, that Sonya would not continue to approach the teacher regarding support.

All of the instructional coach participants shared that the positive relationships with their principals, and they shared belief of the professional environment in their respective schools is a positive aspect of their position. Heather and Suzanne additionally shared that they would want to be in the classroom as a teacher if their belief about the instructional coach position and their principal's belief about the instructional coach position were not in alignment.

Theme 3: Barriers such as expectations of self, content knowledge, and other teachers affect instructional coaches' confidence within the job.

Barriers. Findings indicate that barriers, expectations of self, content knowledge, and teachers affect instructional coaches' confidence within the job. Most barriers were not within control of the participants. A barrier for Betty was the duty of having to travel between two schools and not being able to always have face-to-face time with teachers when needed. When teachers are not able to have her support as needed, Betty stated that she tries to make it better by staying positive. Having a positive attitude in difficult situations aligns with Knight's (2007) instructional coaching strategies. In the book *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction,* Knight (2007) discusses how an "infectious personality" is beneficial to an instructional coach. He wrote that an optimistic engaging personality is able to "draw in teachers" and "refuses to let the inevitable frustrations of life in a school destroy her commitment to improving instruction" (p. 189). Although the positive attitude helps Betty in relationships with teachers, she still feels the weight of not being at a particular school when needed which affects her confidence in her job.

Having an "infectious personality" also helped Heather when dealing with the barrier of new initiatives. Heather explained that she felt "frustrated" by the lack of information sharing that was happening between her school and information sources for Milestones testing. She was getting information about testing requirements and changes at the last minute and the teachers were panicked. Although there was nothing she could do to remedy her frustration, she felt responsible for the teachers' overwhelmed feelings. Heather was able to be positive with the teachers and bring perspective to them about the

situation, which corroborates research by Knight (2007) in relation to how an "infectious personality" is beneficial in calming a difficult situation.

Marsha explained that when the Common Core Standards were to be implemented, she got a lot of backlash from teachers and had to carry the load alone of trying to get the teachers on board. The literature on instructional coaching identifies the need of principals supporting the instructional coach when new initiatives are being implemented. Knight (2007) found that the instructional coach and principal must work together to reduce teacher resistance to new initiatives and programs so that professional development would not be negatively impacted. In Marsha's school during this time, the lack of involvement by the principal could have played a role in teachers' resistance to the new standards and the negative impact that resistance had on the professional development sessions.

Suzanne has also encountered teachers whose strong personalities can create barriers. She explained that a grade level of teachers in her school has strong personalities, which creates tension. Because of the tension, she rarely ever works with that grade level; however, one of the team members is a strong teacher, and Suzanne uses her as a teacher leader to spread ideas in the school. Suzanne's reaction to the uncooperative team follows research by Knight (2007) regarding strong teachers as informal leaders. Knight describes the necessity of an instructional coach knowing her organizational members and which members can be informal leaders. Informal leaders are the teachers in a school who are instructionally strong and "have authority by virtue of their personal characteristics rather than their position. When it comes to change in schools, teachers with informal power are very important because they can sway the

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opinions of many in schools" (Knight, 2007, p. 191). Knight shares that these teachers are important to an instructional coach because they are able to bring other teachers on board to implementing new programs and initiatives. Suzanne takes the notion of "informal leaders" to a higher level of usefulness by guiding the informal leaders to be coaches and mentors to other teachers in the school.

Expectations of self. The study also found that instructional coaches' expectations for themselves impacted the confidence they feel about the job. Betty stated that she felt like a failure when she could not "save" a teacher she was coaching. The coached teacher would not make an independent effort to implement effective strategies after being coached as was indicated in a directive from the principal. This teacher ultimately ended up leaving education.

Knight (2007) defines an effective coach as one who can guide a teacher to implement changes in his or her practice to improve instruction. Although Betty has had teachers implement new strategies and interventions into their teaching practices, the one instance she could not "save" the teacher stays in her mind and causes her confidence to waver. An instructional coach should not be considered ineffective or consider herself ineffective based on one teachers' unwillingness to improve instructional practice. Instructional coaching with all teachers in the school should be taken into consideration when determining effectiveness of the coach.

Suzanne shares that it is her personality of being sensitive that causes her to question her ability to be the best person for the instructional coach position at her school. She explained that when she hears great ideas or new problem solving strategies from others she wonders, "Why didn't I think of that?" At other times, Suzanne is afraid of

making a mistake for fear of losing credibility with teachers. Instances such as those mentioned can cause Suzanne to feel incompetent and she shared, "You know, that's just my personality. It works great for me in some in some senses. But in others it does not."

Similarly, Marsha and Heather feel overly responsible for success in their respective schools. Marsha gets "stressed out" by trying to make sure she is doing everything possible to meet the needs of all staff members. She feels the weight of responsibility of students and teachers failing because of her lack of knowledge. Heather feels responsible for many layers of the school, even being concerned about why a teacher may be frustrated or why a teacher may choose a certain resource when a better one was available. Although instructional coaching literature does not indicate personality traits that are best to have as an instructional coach, it does show that instructional coaches need supports in their work (Knight, 2007; Zepeda, 2015). Knight suggests for instructional coaches to have at least one confidant outside of the school with whom to share and discuss struggles as well as successes. The instructional coaches in the Harborview School District meet once a month to discuss their needs and lend support to one another if needed. At these meetings, the coaches are able to problem solve and discuss the happenings in each of the schools. During the interim between meetings, the coaches communicate via e-mail or phone when needed. When the instructional coaches have meetings, they discuss these feelings and give support to each other for problem solving in the future.

Content knowledge. Research shows that no matter the subject area focus, instructional coaches need to have a thorough understanding of the subject they are coaching as well as the pedagogy to teach the content (Knight, 2005; Kowal & Steiner,

2007; Pomeranz & Pierce, 2013). Findings show that participants feel it is not possible for instructional coaches to be content specialists in all areas. Sonya feels that having a math coach and a literacy coach would be more beneficial for teachers because although one coach can address both areas, one coach cannot coach both areas well because one area will be more of a strength over the other. Suzanne also believes strongly that no one coach who is knowledgeable and strong in all areas. Findings additionally indicate that each coach has areas of strength and weakness. Sonya feels that her area of weakness is fifth grade math. Betty also feels her area of weakness is math in general. She shared, "I try to be [good in math] and I can fake it, but math is not my strength." Suzanne feels more competent in math, while Marsha feels she is not as competent as she would like to be in any area. Betty specifically mentioned that she needs more professional development in the area of math. She stated, "As far as professional development, more math would be helpful for me." Suzanne explained, "It's all about instructional strategies and keeping up. We have to be one step ahead. [Professional learning for coaches] is all about instructional strategies." These findings support research showing that instructional coaches need professional development just as teachers (Knight, 2007).

Teachers as experts. Research indicated that strong teachers should be involved in the implementation of new strategies, initiatives, and programs in schools (Knight, 2007) and teachers who received support from colleagues who were experts in their content area gained new information (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013). Strong teachers are able to influence other teachers and sway them toward the desired outcome of implementing the new components. Suzanne and Sonya believe that because no one person is a "guru" in all areas, relying on the

strong teachers is key for implementing new strategies. Because Suzanne is not comfortable with fifth grade math content and pedagogy, she relies on the fifth grade math teachers to work together with her on new initiatives for their grade level and content area.

Suzanne takes a different approach than research has noted. Because she believes strongly that no one person can be great in all areas, Suzanne has created a learning community model at Price Elementary School. The professional learning model develops strong teachers into mentors and coaches for their peers with the guidance of Suzanne. The professional learning utilizes the strengths within the school and combines instructional coaching with peer coaching. This model alleviates the lack of confidence felt by the instructional coach because of feeling the need to be an expert in all areas. Additionally, the structure aligns with the Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) by allowing classroom teachers to be teacher leaders and foster Figure 5.2 shows the learning community model of coaching used at Price Elementary School.
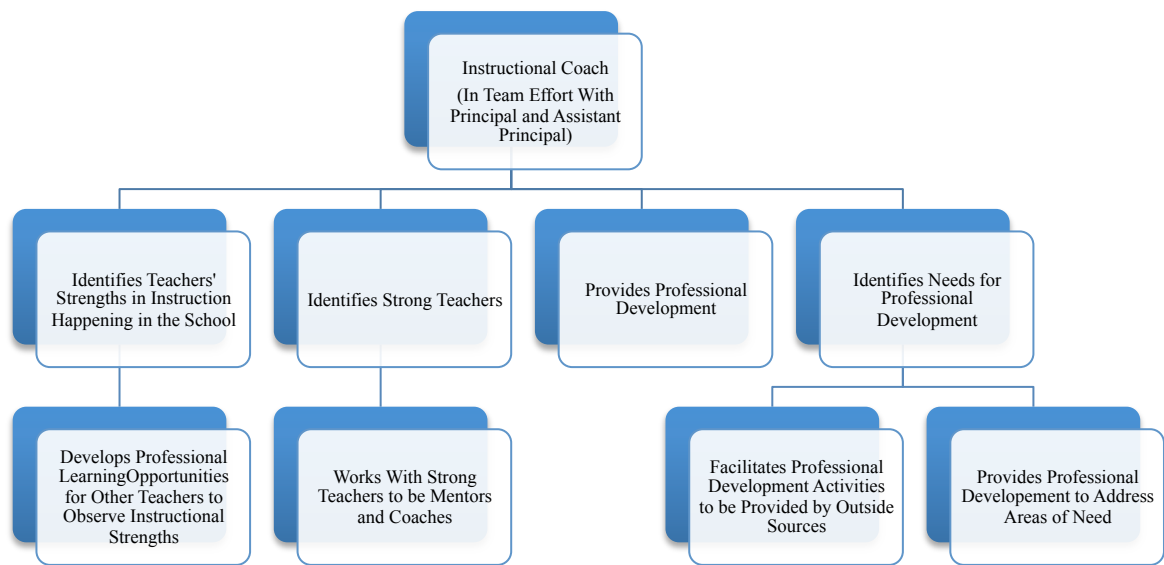
Instructional Coach (In Team Effort With Principal and Assistant Principal)

- **Identifies Teachers' Strengths in Instruction Happening in the School**
  - Develops Professional LearningOpportunities for Other Teachers to Observe Instructional Strengths
- **Identifies Strong Teachers**
  - Works With Strong Teachers to be Mentors and Coaches
- **Provides Professional Development**
- **Identifies Needs for Professional Development**
  - Facilitates Professional Development Activities to be Provided by Outside Sources
  - Provides Professional Developement to Address Areas of Need

Figure 5.2. Learning Community Model of Coaching

Theme 4: Instructional coaches maintain credibility of the instructional coach position by understanding the job of a classroom teacher and teaching students.

A survey used in a research review by Kowal and Steiner (2007) found that a characteristic of an effective coach mentioned most often was people skills, which included credibility. No other research has indicated instructional coaches perspectives of maintaining credibility. Knight (2007) notes that having credibility with teachers is imperative to successful coaching, and gaining trust is the key to credibility. The findings indicate that the instructional coach participants maintain credibility of the instructional coach position by teaching students and teachers being able to see that instructional coaches have complete understanding of the job of a classroom teacher. Heather stated, "If you're too far removed from the classroom, it's hard to have credibility with teachers and it's hard to connect with them." Additionally, she shared that an instructional coach has to understand all the moving parts within the duties of a

classroom teacher and take those into consideration when planning professional development. Marsha explained that instructional coaches must be involved with what teachers are being asked to do from all levels—district, state, and federal. Marsha shared that she also needs to know more about her teachers now than ever before so she can address any hurdles that get in the way to meeting goals that are set. Suzanne shares the view of Palmer (1998), "Unlike many professions, teaching is always done at the dangerous intersection of personal and public life...teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability" (p.17). Suzanne believes that if she is vulnerable and teachers can see her go through struggles as they do, her role as a coach becomes stronger.

In addition to understanding the job of a classroom teacher, findings indicated that instructional coaches believe they maintain credibility with teachers by also teaching students. Heather stated, "Instructional coaches still work with students an awful lot so they don't lose sight of how hard the work is." Suzanne shared that instructional coaches need to teach students to be aware of how certain strategies will work. It is important for instructional coaches to know the "ins and outs" of teaching strategies.

Sonya feels that going into classrooms and teaching students additionally provides an opportunity for teachers to see her and recruit her support. When working with students of different ability levels, Betty is reminded that teachers have different ability levels of instruction and doing so helps her plan more appropriately professional development. With the focus of the role of a coach being the improvement of instruction (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Knight, 2007; Pomeranz & Pierce, 2013; Zepeda, 2015), being connected to students by providing instruction is an important element for an instructional coach to consider.

The themes presented are connected to the instructional coaches' perspectives and guided by each coach's personal belief about the job of an instructional coach. Instructional coaches' self-identified roles began with the personal belief of each coach. Confidence and maintaining credibility are affected by the self-identified role and also impact each other. Figure 5.3 demonstrates the connection of instructional coaches' personal beliefs, self-identified roles, confidence within the job, and maintaining credibility.
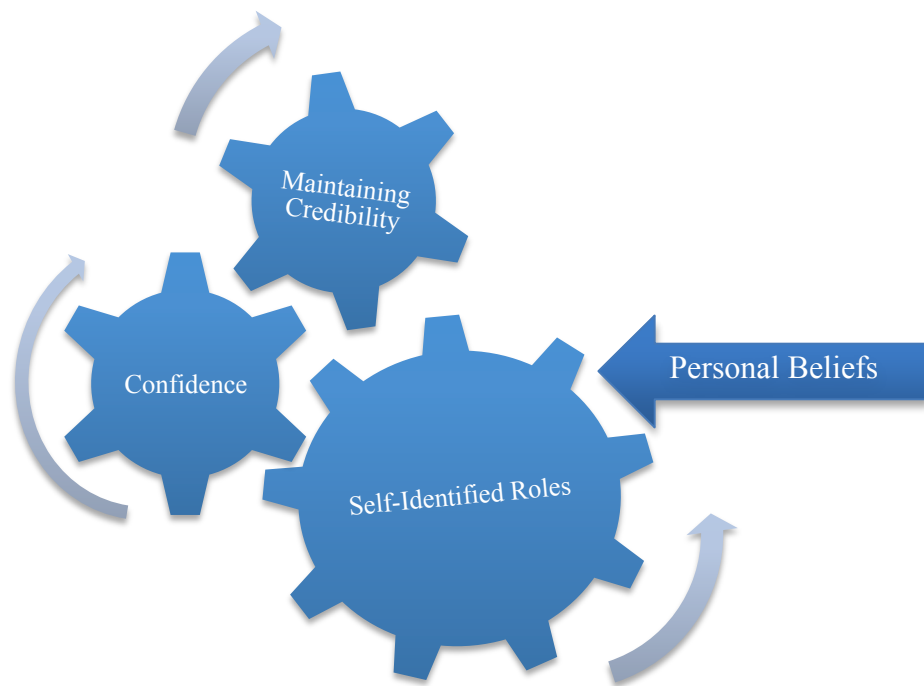

Figure 5.3. Connecting the Themes

Implications for Future Research

The research model in this study allowed for the examination of instructional coaches' perspectives about working with teachers. The findings noted that the instructional coaches had self-identified roles that were grounded in their personal belief about the role of an instructional coach. The self-identified roles impacted the coaching

structure that was framed within each school. Within the findings of the study, it was also noted that instructional coaches did not focus deeply on the process of coaching within the self-identified roles, which is indicative of research that shows people skills were highly important in building work relationships with teachers and the most mentioned characteristic of an effective coach (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Kinkead, 2007; Knight, 2009; Kowal & Steiner, 2007; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Future studies should explore how the self-identified roles impact the instructional coaching process. Additionally, future studies should also be conducted on the differing coaching structures, and the impact and effectiveness each has on school culture and professional learning, including gaps that may be present related to the self-identified roles.

Principals are the instructional leaders of schools and the relationship and work that occurs between the principal and instructional coach can affect the school culture and professional development. While support from principals was indicated in the findings, future studies may wish to consider principal's perspectives of working with the instructional coach and the impact they have within instructional coaching structures.

The small scale of the study site was a limitation of the study; hence, future researchers may wish to conduct studies with a larger school district or expand to use multiple school districts. Additionally, this study was conducted over a short period of six months' time. Future research may benefit from a longitudinal study covering an entire school year, capturing instructional coaches' preparation for and closing of the school year.

Implications for Practice

Professional learning is vital for teachers and findings from this study show that instructional coaches feel professional development is important for the effectiveness of their work with teachers. The evaluation system in Georgia, the Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES), allows the instructional coaches to set a professional goal; however, instructional coaches indicated a lack of professional development related to the area each coach feels is a deficiency. Professional development for instructional coaches should be linked to the goal each coach sets, and instructional coaches should take into consideration any areas of deficiency when creating their professional learning goals.

When principals and instructional coaches work together to set the professional development for their respective schools, instructional coaches perspectives about the coaching structure should be taken into consideration to address any concerns and gaps that may be created by self-identified roles. For example, a coach who spends a lot of time being a servant to teachers and fulfilling surface needs of finding resources, making copies of work, and taking over the class to allow a break for the teacher, may not be able to spend the necessary amount of time planning and conducting needed professional development.

Practitioners who are leaders of instructional coaches within a district must take steps to ensure that instructional coaching structures in schools are implemented in an effective fashion. Leaders must support the premise that the purpose of an instructional coach is to be among many other things, an onsite professional developer who teaches educators how to use evidence-based teaching practices and supports them in learning

and applying these practices in educational settings, and to have in place structures that support the individual learning of educators.

Concluding Thoughts

This study builds on the existing research base of effective instructional coaching strategies used for professional development and the characteristics of an instructional coach that prove to be effective for someone in an instructional coach position. Instructional coaches' perspectives about working with teachers were examined. On the surface, an instructional coach having effective coaching characteristics and implementing effecting coaching strategies leads to effective professional development; however, the self-identified roles of instructional coaches and the coaching structure set in a school also have an effect on professional development.

Instructional coaches self-identified roles are grounded in their personal beliefs about instructional coaching. It is important for the school principal to understand the coach's beliefs and strengths, and together, create a coaching structure based on the coach's strengths to meet the needs of teachers within the school. Understanding instructional coaches' perspectives helps principals and instructional coaches themselves create a deeper understanding in the framing of professional development and the creation of a school atmosphere that leads to teacher learning and more effective classroom instruction.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guide/Questions for Initial Meeting

1. Tell me about your professional background.

2. Tell me about your job as an instructional coach.

3. How would you describe your role?

4. What characteristics are important in being an instructional coach?

5. What knowledge is important in being an instructional coach?

Appendix B

Follow-Up Interview Guide/Questions

1. Describe a typical coaching session.

2. Talk about a particular time as instructional coach that you feel went particularly well.

3. Tell me about a particular time as an instructional coach that you feel did not go well.

4. Tell me about the expectations of your role from teachers.

5. Tell me about the expectations of your role from administration.

6. Think of a time that was difficult as an instructional coach due to barriers or a particular barrier and tell me about that experience.

7. Were you able to overcome the barrier? If so, how? Are there other barriers you notice within your role as instructional coach?

8. How competent do you feel in your role as an instructional coach?

9. What professional learning and/or resource materials are needed to support you in your growth and development as a coach?

10. What would you like to know more about in your coaching role?

11. What is your feeling about the effectiveness/benefits of instructional coaching in comparison to other types of support teachers may receive, such as workshops?

12. What are the kinds of structures necessary to optimize the role of instructional coaches in schools?

13. What suggestions do you have for improving the instructional coaching program? (training, relationships with teachers, administration, amount of time needed,

visitation schedule.etc)

14. What are your feelings about your job as instructional coach?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about being an instructional coach?