

COACHING AS A FEMINIST PRACTICE: A REIMAGINATION OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL
COACH AND DISRUPTION OF THE THEORY/PRACTICE DIVIDE

by

MORGAN ANA MENDIETA

(Under the Direction of Stephanie Jones)

ABSTRACT

Patriarchal ideologies and structures helped to shape the public school institution at the onset of compulsory education in the United States and continue to circulate within educational discourses today, causing harmful consequences for the workforce made up of mostly women¹ that is tasked with educating our nation's youth (Jones, 2020, Accepted – 2024). Additionally, the separation of theory and practice within educational contexts, also known as the “theory/practice divide,” at times contributes to the production of educational practice as atheoretical, although there are always theories informing practice (hooks, 1994; Lenz Taguchi, 2009; St. Pierre, 2016), and helps to disguise the patriarchy at work in the school institution. For the instructional coaching practitioner, the unique positioning between teacher and administrator within the school institution and the separation of theory and practice within educational contexts work together to produce the coach in isolating and confusing ways.

¹ In this dissertation I use the words woman and women to indicate that gender and gender expression are distinct from sex (i.e. “female”) as assigned at birth based on presumed biological determinants such as reproductive anatomy. Some of the quotes in this dissertation come from sources that use the sex-designation “female,” and I have included those quotes as they are written in the original sources. All of the participants in this study identified themselves as women.

This research study seeks to explore what happens when a group of practicing instructional coaches meet to share experiences, read and discuss feminist and poststructural concepts and theories, and collaborate to devise ways to coach differently. Using feminist and poststructural theories and the post-qualitative process of “thinking with theory,” this study aims to bridge a connection between theory and practice for instructional coaching practitioners, to cultivate community in both sense and space for coaches, and to investigate the intersection between instructional coaching and feminist practice.

This study names theory and theoretical concepts as a tool coaching practitioners can use to open up new possibilities in coaching. Further, the intersection of instructional coaching practice and feminist practice is framed as fruitful for coaching practitioners. A call for the creation of coaching communities where coaches can engage in the above practices is made throughout this dissertation.

INDEX WORDS: feminism, poststructuralism, post-qualitative, thinking with theory, instructional coach, educational coach, feminist practice, patriarchy

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DEDICATION

To the women of the Coach Group for your conversation, collaboration, and community, and without whom this dissertation would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: AN INVITATION TO THINKING THEORETICALLY

I sit at a stoplight on my Friday commute to work admiring the sun rising over the horizon straight ahead. I feel exhausted after a hectic final week of school with students and stifle a yawn – *briiiiing, briiiiing*. My attention snaps to the caller ID on my car’s dash where I see Bea’s name – *briiiiing* – I answer, “Hey you.”

Bea dives right into the conversation, excitedly sharing that she recently completed our school district’s Coach Endorsement Program, a two-year commitment for district coaches like Bea, before changing the topic to the fictional text our book club will be meeting to discuss later tonight. “Oh, and I forgot to tell you. I was with one of your teachers last night,” Bea adds.

“What! Who? Why?” I rapidly interrogate, curious who it could be. I usually know when teachers from my school are at the district office since one of my assigned assistant principal duties is organizing professional development for teachers.

Bea quickly brings me up to speed, explaining that she was with a second grade teacher from my school. As to why – Bea began a group this past semester where she meets with teachers across the district once a week to collectively create elementary social studies resources.

“How did I not know this? This is amazing, Bea!” I exclaim after hearing the details. “I know your group sounds totally different, but it reminds me some of the Coach Group...” I pause, thinking back to the group of instructional coaches I began over a year ago now as

part of my dissertation study. “But maybe not, I don’t know,” I add, beginning to doubt the connection.

“Oh, for sure they are similar,” Bea says. “I told the teachers something you said when we first met, ‘I don’t have all the answers, but I think it would be helpful for us to dig into some important texts to see if it would help us work together. Let’s read through some different things, have hard conversations, and discover something together.’ Or something like that. I can’t remember exactly what you said. Anyway, I would not have made my group the way I did, if it wasn’t for our Coach Group.”

A smile creeps across my face. “I love that for you and those teachers! It sounds powerful and important. Who else is in the group?”

“Just five teachers for now plus me, and they’re all women.”

Troubles in Coaching Discourse

I smile remembering Bea’s phone call that came just a week ago, in May 2024, as I currently put the finishing touches on this dissertation. In fall of 2022, I began my study alongside four amazing women, all of which were instructional coaches like me and Bea. In the months leading up to the study, feelings of confusion, doubt, and frustration clouded me as I coached, outweighing the times I felt successful and proud of my work and the times I genuinely smiled. I believe the anxiety-inducing feelings I felt, did not happen by chance.

Although the days of No Child Left Behind (2002) and Race to the Top (2013) are gone, residual effects of the legislation and the standards-based reform movement² remain, both within the educational landscape and within me. The obsession with teacher

² Ravitch (2016) provides a detailed account of the standards-based reform movement that was set in motion by No Child Left Behind (2002) and continued through Race to the Top (2013), two pieces of federal legislation that are no longer in effect.

effectiveness as it relates to student achievement continues to permeate many of the discourses circulating in education including the discourse of instructional coaching. Much of the literature available to and produced for practicing coaches include what are sometimes called “high-leverage” coaching moves (e.g., Cains & Moorer, 2024, January 6), or fundamental coaching techniques that are positioned within the literature to foster change and growth within the teachers coaches work with. Examples of common coaching moves include scripted conversation plans (e.g., Aguilar, 2013) and probing questions (e.g., Thompson-Grove, n.d.), checklists for the coach to follow (e.g., Knight, 2020), and protocol guides (e.g., Center for Leadership and Educational Equity, n.d.), to name a few. In alignment with the standards-based reform movement, the instructional coach does all of this in the name of “teacher effectiveness,” or to produce teachers that produce proficient students.

But what happens when the coaching move an instructional coach tries flops or the coaching conversation fizzles out before it even begins? What does a coach do when the checklist is complete, but it feels like no change has been made? Instructional coaches can facilitate protocol after protocol until the end of time, but does that mean they are serving their teachers and students in ways that promote learning, equity, and social-emotional and physical well-being? And given that instructional coaches serve their schools in a unique way - neither teacher or administrator, but something in-between - or what Jones and Rainville (2014a) describe as “never complete insider, never complete outsider,” who do coaches turn to when faced with the above puzzling realities (p. 183)? Over my tenure as an instructional coach, the above difficulties were my daily reality and served as my tipping point into this dissertation study.

You Can't Unthink Theory

Theory and practice have historically been positioned as separate in education, creating a tradition known as the theory/practice divide (hooks, 1994; Lenz Taguchi, 2009; St. Pierre, 2016). I understand the division of theory and practice within education to follow binary logic where the work of educational theorists and researchers is viewed as separate from those on the ground and practicing in education, the teachers. St. Pierre finds “privileging practice over thought” within the social sciences to be a consequence of such binary thinking (p. 111). I find much of the popularized coaching literature that is accessible to practicing coaches to appear atheoretical and/or unideological due to the absence of explicit theories and beliefs driving the perspectives and opinions presented within the writing, which I explain further in chapter two. Rather than explicitly stating the theories guiding the writing of literature intended for instructional coaches to use, authors tend to only include their personal accounts of coaching, reflections, and implications for other coaches’ practice. Scholars who theorize instructional coaching have also pointed out this presumed atheoretical stance in most literature written about and for coaches (e.g., Galey, 2016; Jones & Rainville, 2014a).

The absence of the language of theory within this practical coaching literature could potentially lead to a misunderstanding that these publications are atheoretical. However, *all coaching practice is guided by theory*, even if that theory is not articulated and even if a coach is not aware of the theory guiding their work. Educational researchers have long argued that theory and practice are inexplicably linked and call for a disruption of the theory/practice divide (hooks, 1994; Lenz Taguchi, 2009; St. Pierre, 2016). Lenz Taguchi, a feminist new materialist scholar of education explains, “theory and practice do not

represent a divide - an either/or binary; rather, 'practice is in fact continuously and already doing and enacting educational theories,'" (p. x). In the context of coaching, although often unnamed, there are theories and perspectives driving the practical advice and suggestions of coaching publications which then orients the work of the coach accordingly.

I came to learn firsthand during my time as a coach that assuming coaching practice to be atheoretical can produce challenging feelings such as frustration, confusion, and discouragement within the coach that over time could lead to a coach's unhappiness within the role. For example, when practitioners in the field take up practical coaching orientations that claim to be "effective" without considering or understanding the theoretical underpinnings that are driving the given practices, they can find themselves in situations where they are doing things that do not necessarily align with their own ways of thinking and being, just like I did in the beginning of my coaching career. Because our ways of thinking and being are always guided by and guiding our theories about education, learning, change, and/or others, when there is misalignment between the theories driving the practice and the theories of those enacting the practice, tension in practice can occur.

I was introduced to theory and using theory as a tool for thinking in my doctoral studies, just as I was beginning my work as a coach. At this time, I came to an epiphany of sorts, an idea that has come full circle to situate itself as the driving force behind this dissertation study: *You can't unthink theory*. This means that once a theory is read, deciphered, interpreted, taken on, read again, and so on, that theory becomes difficult to forget. In this way, theories begin to pop up in the world, insert themselves in our lives, and are seen in anything and everything. *You can't unthink theory* is a thought that drives this study.

Throughout this dissertation, I tell my story of attempting to spread this thought to others by bridging the historically divided traditions of educational theory and practice alongside four practicing instructional coaches – all women – and our time together as members of a coaching community we named the Coach Group. When I began this work, disrupting the theory/practice divide with the women of the Coach Group through providing them with an invitation to thinking theoretically was my primary objective. Through belonging to and with the group and being with all the ongoing data generated by the group, a related but new objective emerged that could not be ignored, and will be woven throughout this dissertation: *the promise of framing instructional coaching as a feminist practice.*

Theories and Practice that Guide Me

Since beginning my doctoral studies, I have been drawn to feminist and poststructural theories and in using these theories to open up my understanding and disrupt what seems commonsense or “natural,” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 478) in education, my life, and the world. The ways of being and thinking behind feminist and poststructural theories, the ontologies and epistemologies, that make them possible serve as a critique to positivism³ and its humanist ideals that scientize discourse, including education, and position the human subject as stable, growing in a linear fashion, and innately itself. In this dissertation, I understand the human subject as one that undergoes “continual

³ The theoretical framework of positivism posits that knowledge can be verified and proven true through observation, measurement, and other scientized processes. The work of logical positivists of the Vienna Circle in the early twentieth century largely influenced the social sciences of the mid-twentieth century and today where “a unified theory of science” held that all sciences, including the social sciences such as education, can produce knowledge through the scientific process (St. Pierre, 2012, p. 490). See St. Pierre, E. A. (2012). Another postmodern report on knowledge: Positivism and its others. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 15(4), 483-503. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2012.696710>

reconstruction and reconfiguration,” through relation, experience, conversation, and more in rethinking what the coach could be (St. Pierre, p. 502).

I am particularly drawn to the concept of power in my work as the position of the coach is blatantly power-laden, yet not heavily researched within the educational realm (see for exceptions: Aguilar, 2020; Bocala & Holman, 2021; Jones & Rainville, 2014b; Morrell, 2014; Rainville & Jones, 2008; Reilly, 2014; Rogers, 2014). Like many feminists before me, I believe the analysis of power is integral to any research that claims to be feminist and thus in this study I explore various theoretical orientations to the concept of power as I make sense of the data (Allen, 1999; hooks, 2015a; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). I intermingle the work of feminist theorists and writers such as Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and bell hooks and their theorizations around power and the related theoretical concepts of subjectivity, performativity, and situated knowledges. hooks (2015b) writes, “women, even the most oppressed among us, do exercise some power,” (p. 92). I keep this statement close to heart as I navigate the stories shared by the women of the Coach Group and our time spent together.

Additionally, I rely heavily on Michel Foucault’s theorizations of power as I navigate the complexities of coaching within the data and my own life and open up new understandings of what coaching could be. I emphasize Foucault’s (1978/1976; 1997/1984) understanding of power to exist in relation that challenges commonsense beliefs about power including who does and does not have power, how power operates, and what power produces, all of which I find useful for rethinking the position and practice of the instructional coach. In thinking with Foucault, Jackson and Mazzei (2023) remind me that a Foucauldian analysis of power does not ask “‘what is power?’ and ‘where does power

come from?” but investigates “the productive effects of power as it circulates through the practices of people in their daily lives,” (p. 50). In reading and being with this dissertation study, I continuously pose: *How does power work? What does power produce?*

I was intentional throughout the planning and duration of my study and in the writing of this dissertation to keep feminist practice central within my work. Taking a cue from Weedon (1997), I understand feminist theory and feminist practice to exist in an “integral relationship,” working together to form the complete whole that is the feminist movement (p. 5). The feminist practices of community, consciousness-raising, theorizing, education, and advocacy are most highlighted in pages to the follow, as I explore and recount the happenings of the Coach Group and form the argument that coaching can be feminist practice. As a feminist poststructural study, my theorizations attempt to deconstruct the discourse of coaching (Lather & St. Pierre, 2007).

Research Questions

In this study, I investigate what happens when a group of practicing instructional coaches are presented with the idea that a theory/practice divide often operates in education; engage in readings, learning, and discussion around theoretical concepts (namely power); and are encouraged to understand theory and practice as always constituting one another. In other words, coaches in this group were encouraged to disrupt the divide and use theoretical concepts as tools within their coaching practice as a part of the Coach Group. In this way, it is my hope that the instructional coaches participating in this study offer new understandings of how we can coach differently to both the field of instructional coaching as well as themselves. Further, an important contribution of this study is the isolating nature of the position of instructional coach and the belief that

belonging to a community, such as a community of coaches, offers a rich environment for learning that contributes to the well-being of the individual through a sense of shared experience.

As I designed this study, I sought to answer the following research questions:

- How can instructional coaches use theoretical concepts to make sense of their coaching environment, positioning, and experiences and to coach differently?
- How do coaches experience belonging to a coaching community?

A third and important research question emerged within this study and, I believe, will be a powerful contribution to the field of instructional coaching:

- What does conceiving of instructional coaching as feminist practice produce?

The Study At-A-Glance

The chapters to follow center the four months I spent alongside four other practicing instructional coaches that came to make up the Coach Group, as well as my experience as a member of that group before, during, and after. It was not by chance that the following four women came to become members of the group: Bea, Caitlin, Fran, and Heather⁴. I met Bea first, when we were both still teachers teaching on the same grade level at the school where I would eventually step into my first coaching role. Caitlin was my coaching partner. We coached together for three years and were coaching together when this study began, only to be interrupted by my transition into leadership as an assistant principal a few weeks after the conclusion of the four-month study. Over my years working with Bea and Caitlin, our working relationships morphed into friendships. With Fran and

⁴ All names of research participants and schools are pseudonyms.

Heather, I hold more of a formal relationship. I met both of them through district coaching meetings and professional learning workshops (see Table 1).

Table 1

Coach Group Member Information

Coach	Race and Ethnicity	Highest Degree Earned	Place of Employment	Years of Experience in Education	Years of Experience in Coaching
Bea	White (not Hispanic or Latino)	Master's	District Office	8	1
Caitlin	White (not Hispanic or Latino)	Master's	Bear Elementary	11	3
Fran	White (not Hispanic or Latino)	Specialist	Swan Elementary	26	9
Heather	White (not Hispanic or Latino)	Master's	Ant Elementary	8	3
Morgan (me)	White (Hispanic or Latino)	Master's	Bear Elementary	9	3

Note: Data listed in this table is reflective of the women's experience and places of employment during the time of the study.

Means of Data Generation

The Coach Group met formally four times in four months as a collective whole, which served as a primary means of data generation for this study. I crafted meeting guides similar to how one might plan a professional learning session that I followed throughout meetings⁵. My plans for these meetings included conversation and writing prompts,

⁵ The meeting guides can be found in Appendix A.

creative writing and thinking activities, reading time followed by text-based discussions, and more. Included also within the data are conversations, text threads, and phone calls that took place outside of the formal group meetings during the study and after the official meetings of the group had ended. I also include journal excerpts from individual coaches and other artifacts such as group constructed charts and plans generated through the various activities we did together. Following the fourth and final Coach Group meeting, I interviewed each of the coaches⁶.

In addition to this data generated during the four months of our formal meetings, I also consider other experiences – thoughts, feelings, reactions, memories, and more – that I had before and during this study and in the months since I have spent writing about it. St. Pierre (2011) writes extensively about this type of data, what she calls “transgressive data,” (p. 612). In explaining what transgressive data means to her, St. Pierre writes:

Much data – *what we think with when we think about a topic* – [is] identified *during* analysis and not before. Until one begins to think, one cannot know what one will think with. In that sense, data are collected during thinking and, for me, especially during writing. (p. 621)

As I dove into the data generated for the study and began writing, I made connections to experiences and memories outside of the Coach Group that I found informed my thinking, including experiences and memories both past and present. Sometimes as I wrote, memories resurfaced that I found helpful for thinking with, so I leaned into them. At other times, what I was writing became connected with my current experience, so I included that, too. The data used in this study is more than what was generated by the Coach Group. The

⁶ The interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

data is also any thought, feeling, reaction, or memory that bubbled up and connected to this dissertation as I wrote.

Analysis

In the chapters to follow, I lean on feminist and poststructural theorists and educational researchers to employ Jackson and Mazzei's (2023) process of "thinking with theory," as I tell stories of these coaches and myself in an attempt to produce something different and important. Jackson and Mazzei's approach for analyzing qualitative data decenters the theory/data binary that is often characteristic of traditional qualitative analytic approaches and instead finds theory and data to constitute one another throughout the analysis process. For me, thinking with theory and my data analysis process as I wrote this dissertation looked like this:

1. I read data generated from the formal group meetings, conversations, and interviews alongside various theoretical works, welcoming transgressive data to pop up in-between, as it came.
2. As I read back and forth between data and theory, I considered what questions emerged in the middle and what new knowledge and rich meanings could be made.
3. When I had a thought about the data or theory I was reading, I wrote.
4. When I could no longer write, I went back to reading.
5. Sometimes what I was experiencing outside of my dissertation study made its way into my thinking process such as a friendly conversation or a challenge I was facing as an administrator. I leaned into whatever surfaced as I navigated reading, writing, and revision.

6. At times, I became stuck and reached out to members of my writing group for their opinions, guidance, and texts they thought could help or to members of the Coach Group to see what they were up to now or to ask them to say more about something they previously said.
7. At other times I became *really* stuck and closed my computer for days and sometimes weeks, only to hop back in when others reached out to me like my advisor, always diligent in pushing me along and keeping me afloat, or a writing group member asking me to meet for work session. More times than I like to admit, it was my mom telling me how proud she was that somehow made the writing to flow.
8. And so on, and so on.

I consider my work to be post-qualitative and rely on Elizabeth St. Pierre's writings on post-qualitative research throughout my analysis process. At times when I question my process, when I begin to wonder if I'm doing *real* research, I remember St. Pierre's (2011) words: "writing is analysis," (p. 621). I read, I think, and I write. All at once. Taking a tenet from feminist analysis, I am *on the ground*, both researcher and subject. It is from here, I "see the lines of descent, the tangles, the sedimentations, and the fractures and breaks... [and] descend into the watery tangle to find the intersections with other lines," (Davies et al., 2002, p. 297). It is through this entanglement with my research that I am enabled to think differently and bring new understandings to the wider field of coaching.

Following the final Coach Group meeting, the writing/analysis/reading/thinking process consumed me. After transcribing and organizing the array of generated data from my time with the coaches, I dove into the analysis process. Read, think, write. As I flowed

through this process, I began to group and arrange my writing until it finally created something that I felt comfortable calling a chapter. I became obsessed with rereading my work again and again, rearranging, adding, and taking away. As I completed each chapter, I shared it with my advisor, other PhD candidates, and members of the Coach Group and upon receiving feedback, reworked some more. I am confident that I could have stayed in this world forever, if not for due dates encouraged by my major advisor (that I mostly ignored but were always looming). St. Pierre's (2011) notion that post-qualitative work "is not *is*; it is *becoming*," never felt more relatable (p. 613). This dissertation and the process I went through in writing it does not fit into the neat and predictable box of scientized qualitative tradition, but it is my hope that living and growing through this madness, my process, leaves me and my readers with a more open understanding of what the coach can be and think and do. In other words, an understanding of the coach as "*this and this and this...*" (St. Pierre, p. 613).

Overview

This dissertation is intended to be accessible for the practitioner while also serving as a contribution to the scholarly field of coaching. As mentioned earlier, I find the disconnect between popularized coaching literature, scholarly coaching research, and philosophical writings to attribute to the difficult nature of coach work. It was my intention in beginning the Coach Group to explicitly bridge the divide between the practical and scholarly worlds of coaching. Thus, in writing this dissertation, I intermingle the above texts and new understandings from my research in a way that is both academic yet accessible for those not in academia. This accessibility comes by way of language choice

alongside rich descriptions and explanations of theoretical concepts not commonly referenced within everyday life.

Further, I began this introduction by naming some of the anxieties I had as a practicing instructional coach as I designed this study. These doubts are nothing new to me. As a public school student during the No Child Left Behind/Race to the Top era turned public school educator, it has been engrained within me to do things *right*, which has also resulted in a crippling fear of failure. I have learned throughout my doctoral studies that there are other ways to be and think in the world than the ideology driving the legislation and schooling experiences of my childhood, undergraduate teacher preparation program, and career. As St. Pierre (2011) explains, these ideas “over time, have become so transparent, natural, and real that we’ve forgotten they’re fictions. We accept them as truth,” (p. 623). As I write the pages to follow, it is my aim to bring new understandings to what it means to coach and disrupt the pervasive idea that there is a right and a wrong way to do this work, and there is no best or “true” way to coach.

As I investigate the workings of power within the practice of coaching and community and frame coaching as a feminist practice, I hold on to hope. I hope this work helps – primarily myself, but perhaps others such as practicing coaches, administrators of coaches, contributors to the field of coaching, and more – to begin the process of reimagining the instructional coach into one that can learn, flourish, and grow with and alongside teachers as they work together to transform schools into safe, socially-just, and equity-oriented spaces for all students and educators. I understand schools to be a space where children cultivate knowledge, skills, and morals that they take with them into their adult lives and use as participating members of society and the coach as one that can help

foster this belief throughout a school building as opposed to only within the walls of a single classroom. Yet I also understand that the ways coaching is framed in coaching publications and the ways coaches are sometimes positioned within the school building, as was my case, do not always support this vision of schooling. It is my hope this dissertation can help to guide myself and others toward a reimagination of the coach where the above is possible.

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters followed by a reference list and appendices. The chapters are crafted to best showcase my research goals of bridging the educational theory/practice divide, investigating coaching community, and framing coaching as a feminist practice. Additionally, each chapter begins with an artifact from myself or one of the women of the Coach Group that was crafted during our time together or after and concludes with a connection back to the opening entry. I find the inclusion of multi-media artifacts to add an insightful perspective to the aims and theorizations of each chapter. Below is a brief description of the chapters to follow.

In chapter two, "The Coach in Education: A Focused Review of Literature," I survey literature in the field of instructional coaching to describe writers' approach to research, their conceptions of the human subject, and how these conceptions orient the work of instructional coaches differently. This chapter aims to construct a landscape of contemporary scholarship in the field and give context to the discourse of coaching I refer to in subsequent chapters, while also bringing awareness to the theories driving coaching literature and what putting this literature into practice absent-mindedly could mean for instructional coaches.

In chapter three, “In Tandem: Instructional Coaching and Feminist Practice,” I provide narrative accounts and transcriptions from Coach Group meetings and one-on-one interviews I held with each woman of the Coach Group to paint a picture of how feminist practice can inform coaching practice. Throughout the chapter, I make connections between the data provided, literature on instructional coaching, and feminist theory to form the central argument that coaching practice and feminist practice can work in tandem to help coaches coach in different ways and in ways aligned with the goals of the feminist movement. My aim is to position instructional coaching as feminist practice and offer what could be in instructional coaching.

In chapter four, “Thinking with Theory to Coach Differently,” I use Jackson and Mazzei’s (2023) process “thinking with theory” to reimagine aspects of instructional coaching discourse deemed harmful and challenging by the women of the Coach Group and myself during our time together. Throughout the chapter, I rely on feminist and poststructural theories and concepts such as Michael Foucault’s (1977/1975, 1978/1976, 1997/1984) theorizations of power, Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993, 1997) gender performativity, and Donna Haraway’s (1988) situated knowledges to argue that aspects of coaching discourse are driven by patriarchal structures and ideals and to open up new possibilities for coaching practice. The goals of this chapter are twofold: to position “thinking with theory” as a tool coaches can use to inform their coaching practice and to offer implications for the field of instructional coaching through the theorizations I provide throughout the chapter on coaching differently.

Last, in chapter five, “Conclusion: Toward Coaching Differently,” I close by drawing a connection between the aims of the study; the research questions; and chapters two, three,

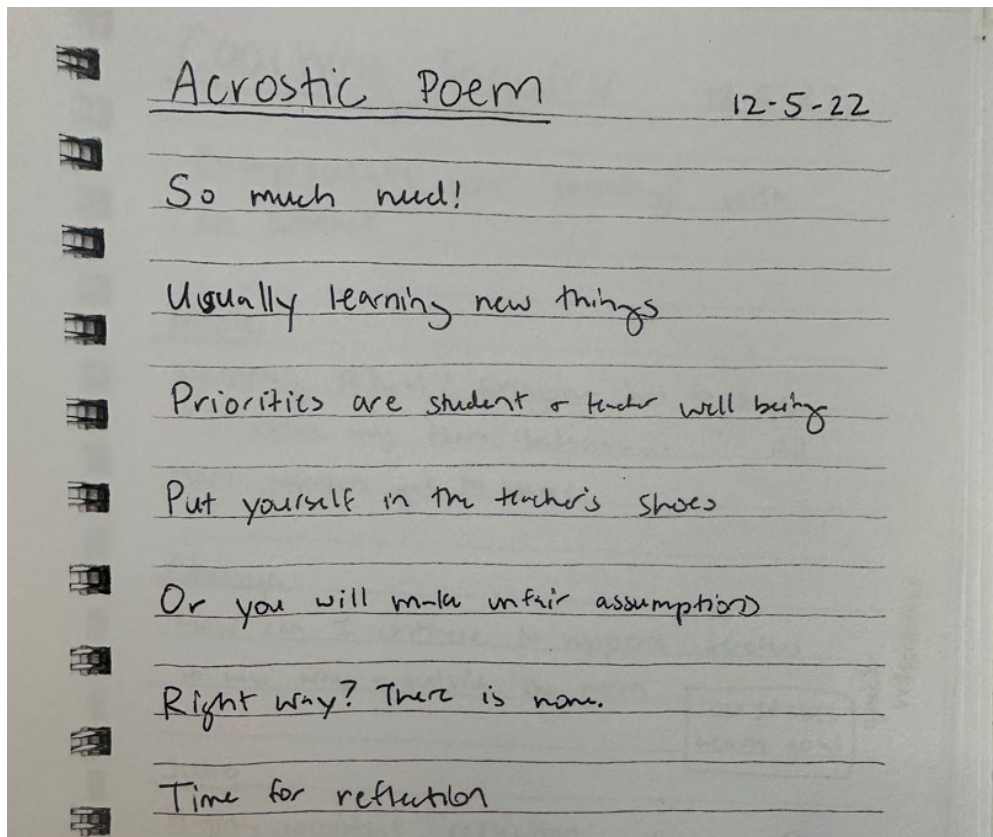
and four. I provide implications to drive my future work as an assistant principal that works with instructional coaches that I also believe can contribute to the greater field of instructional coaching. I additionally include an afterword that provides an update on where each of the women of the Coach Group are now.

CHAPTER 2

THE COACH IN EDUCATION: A FOCUSED REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Figure 1

Bea's Poem



Note. This poem was written by Bea during the final Coach Group meeting in response to the following prompt: What does it mean to coach and be a coach? ⁷

⁷ See transcription of Bea's poem below. Bolding of the first letter of each line is added for emphasis.

So much need!
Usually learning new things
Priorities are student & teacher well being
Put yourself in the teacher's shoes
Or you will make unfair assumptions
Right way? There is none
Time for reflection

The research and writing on coaching offers a starting point for thinking through what a coach is or can be and what a coach does. While there is some overlap in the literature on definitions of the coach, there are also nuanced and at times contrasting claims, opinions, and ideas relating to the positioning and work of the coach. Aguilar (2016) compares the work of a coach to the work of an artist, both of which she describes as “messy,” entailing disorganized and haphazard processes, false starts, revisions, and unfinished work (p. xv). In survey of the research, I find that I agree with description. Not only is coaching not universally defined (Aguilar, 2013; Ivory, 2020), but to complicate matters more, there are various forms of coaching within the field of education. These forms include what is called the instructional coach, literacy coach, peer coach, transformational coach, and cognitive coach, to name a few. These coaching forms overlap yet also have distinct tenets and characteristics. Add to the mix a multitude of methods recommended for coaching (e.g., directive, facilitative, dialogical, technical, collegial, challenge, etc.) to be used or not used dependent on various factors of the coaching situation, and it becomes apparent that coaching is indeed messy and the field of coaching itself is difficult to navigate.

When I became a coach, I had trouble navigating the complexities of coaching, which prompted me to reside in a perpetual state of unease. I became engrossed in determining exactly what a coach is and does in an (unsuccessful) effort to uncomplicate the messiness of the work. Relying mostly on atheoretical writings related to coaching from my coach induction program (e.g., Knight, 2007, 2018), I became more confused and frustrated as I attempted to put what I read into practice. I employed strategies without considering the theories and beliefs driving that practice such as checklists and rubrics to assess teacher

practices and coaching cycle frameworks that aimed to foster teacher improvement. Then I was met with disinterest, tension, and at times, resistance from teachers and myself. A shift in my thinking occurred when I was introduced to theory-rich coaching literature (e.g., Jones & Rainville, 2014b; Rainville & Jones, 2008; Reilly, 2014) and particularly coaching research that takes a critical stance (e.g., Aguilar, 2020). Once I read this theoretically oriented research, I became disinterested in finding rigid answers and quick fixes to my coaching difficulties and began to embrace my confusions and curiosities. Instead of attempting to un-complicate the role, I began to understand that leaning into the complexities of coaching could help me attempt to foster a school experience that felt more welcoming, more invigorating, and more aligned with values of social justice for the teachers and students I served.

In this chapter, I synthesize the rationale for coaching to help historically situate coaching within education and to highlight coaching as a political practice. Understanding coaching as a political practice illuminates the intentions behind the federal funding of coaches and how those aims are reflected in the positioning and work of the coach according to scholars. Secondly, I provide a focused review of literature on coaching that describes various authors' approaches to research, their conceptions of the human subject, and how these conceptions orient the work of coaches differently. One approach to research includes writing that appears atheoretical and/or unideological due to the absence of explicitly theoretical language and beliefs driving the perspectives and opinions presented within the writing. Included instead within this approach to research are often authors' personal accounts of coaching, reflections, and implications for practice. Another, much smaller, pool of research includes work that is theoretically situated and at times

critical. These contrasting approaches to research within the broad field of coaching literature complicate the search for what it means to be a coach for those of us attempting to use coaching literature to navigate the complexities of the role.

Through this chapter, it is my hope some clarity can be gleaned in considering possibilities of what a coach is, can be, and does, while also eliminating potentially harmful conceptions of the coach such as the positioning of the coach as evaluator, surveiller, or manager. Included in the review is both atheoretical, or popular, literature and theoretically informed, scholarly literature. Both approaches to research are included as the popular literature is widely accessible and often read at the practitioner level, whereas the use of research traditions, theory, and the conclusions that are therefore drawn within scholarly literature offer new possibilities for the future of coaching that are possibly unknown by those serving in the coaching role.

I argue that literature that positions the coach as a humanist subject⁸, or an essential, rational, autonomous being operating independently of context, as incommensurable with the rationale and ideals of coaching as often advocated for in coaching publications where coaching is positioned as a relational, collegial, and localized approach to adult learning and development. Further, I find coaching publications aligned with a humanist understanding as potentially damaging for the coaches that take up their coaching practices and the teachers and students impacted by such coaching. Instead, I find

⁸ The humanist subject as produced by Enlightenment period philosophers such as Descartes and Locke is “an epistemological subject,” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 618), “all-knowing subject,” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 500) that is “a sovereign, lucid, transparent, free, agentive, self-sufficient, rational, knowing, meaning-giving, conscious, stable, coherent, unified, self-identical, reflective, autonomous, intentional, and ahistoric individual,” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 618). The humanist subject has an innate, inner-self and “a will, a freedom, an intentionality,” that can also be thought of as an essence that the subject chooses to “express,” (Butler, 1995, p. 136). Anything that is not a subject, or human, is an object and further, the subject is separate and above all else (St. Pierre, 2011). This subject of humanism prevails in the social sciences such as the field of education.

research that understands the coach to be a *posthuman subject*⁹ produced by an assemblage of and entanglement with others, experiences, and material-discursive¹⁰ elements to orient the work of the coach as reflective of and responsive to the contexts in which they coach. My hope is to encourage coaches and other educational stakeholders to embrace the posthuman, complicated-ness of coaching as we flow through times of knowing and not knowing, and to consider the theoretical assumptions driving coaching literature and how those assumptions translate into practice as we seek answers, take up what we read, and try out the kinds of coaches we want to be.

A Brief History of the Coach in Education

Established within the larger field of professional development, researchers introduced coaching to the educational context in response to traditional “one shot” professional development sessions (Aguilar, 2013; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Jones & Rainville, 2014a; Joyce & Showers, 1996; Skyes, 1996). Following an extensive literature review of professional development, Joyce and Showers (1980) were the first to write of coaching as a potentially powerful professional development practice that includes “theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and classroom application,” (p. 379) where the coach is positioned as a pedagogue whose primary role is to teach teachers. In contrast to the lecture-like professional development workshops permeating the professional development scene at the time, coaching was positioned as a form of intensive and

⁹ The posthuman subject of postmodernism disrupts the idea of the individual put forward by humanism. The posthuman subject is always becoming and produced relationally through an assemblage or entanglement with other “humans, time, space, physical objects, and everything else,” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 618).

¹⁰ Karen Barad’s (2007) term material-discursive sees the material (matter, what is concrete) and the discursive (language, thought, meaning) as inseparable co-constitutions that intra-act to produce one another. As Lenz Taguchi (2009) explains, “the material affects our discursive understandings just as much as our discursive understandings affect the material reality around us,” (p. 30).

sustained professional development that is relational and, at times, in-the-moment with teachers in their practice using the above coaching strategies. Joyce and Showers hypothesized guidance and learning fostered through coaching relationships to have more transfer into everyday teacher practice than training from one-shot professional development sessions¹¹ and confirmed this to be true in Showers' 1982 and 1984 follow-up studies. Following these initial publications, coaching secured its spot as a promising approach to professional development as the field slowly grew and evolved with the addition of new research studies.

That is not to say the scholarship remained unproblematic or that the idea of the coach was welcomed without question. In their widely cited article, Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) were some of the first to recognize and name the bureaucratic forces that can easily become wrapped up in the position of the coach. The authors evaluated the most pervasive method of coaching at the time, the technical coach. Growing from the work of Joyce and Showers, the focus of the technical coach was to ensure transfer of teacher training into classroom practice (Garmston, 1987; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). In their analysis, Hargreaves and Dawe explained how the practice of coaching claims to adhere to the ideal of a collaborative culture, and yet “under the aegis of professional collaboration and personal development, lurks an administrative apparatus of surveillance and control,” (p. 239). Hargreaves and Dawe called this aspect of coaching “contrived collegiality” and

¹¹ “One-shot” professional development is a term of instructional coaching and professional development discourse that refers to professional development sessions that only occur once such as professional development workshops teachers attend during in-service days or educational conferences. One-shot professional development is not ongoing or job-embedded like the professional development that occurs from instructional coaching. In other words, educators attending these professional development workshops only have “one-shot” to take up the learning, and likewise, the workshop facilitators have “one-shot” to leave an impression.

challenged the field to create more ethical and less demeaning forms of coaching and professional development that more so adhere to the principles of collaborative culture and collegiality (p. 239).

Unfortunately, the twenty-first century did not meet Hargreaves and Dawe's (1990) call. In 2002, the Reading First initiative, funded by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2002), delivered significant funding for assessment, curriculum, and professional learning related to the teaching of reading in schools (National Center for Reading First Technical Assistance, 2005). With new federal funding, the number of school-based coaches grew immensely from a previously near non-existent number (Galey, 2016; Walpole, 2021). Districts that received funding were required to use what the act called *scientifically based reading research* (SBRR) when meeting the assessment, curriculum, and professional development requirements of the legislation (Gamse et al., 2011). The overall intent of Reading First was to raise student reading outcomes, as measured by standardized tests, by the end of third grade (Gamse et al., 2011). The coach, often funded through this initiative, was often repositioned in managerial ways as an extension of the administrative officials of the school (Dozier, 2014; Jones & Rainville, 2014a). While people hired in coaching roles might have worked hard to create collegial relationships and support teachers in the ways that were most relevant to them, most of the official discourses around instructional coaching during the NCLB era of 2002-2015 can be understood as a means of control where the use of standardization, surveillance, and evaluation helped to ensure the demands of the legislation and other aspects of the school-based reform movement were met, just as Hargreaves and Dawe foreshadowed.

With the enactment of NCLB came a surge in attention on the coach, and likewise, coaching publications. Unlike the early research and writing in the field, a new type of coaching literature written for the practitioner audience emerged. This seemingly atheoretical, widely published and accessible literature included aspects of reform movement discourse with a central motivation to improve “teacher effectiveness,” or the “value-added measure” of “teachers’ contribution to their students’ learning,” (Goe, 2007, p. 40), which was reduced to an understanding of reading achievement as measured by standardized tests. Prescriptive coaching practices including checklists, sequenced steps for various coaching situations, question stems for coaching conversations, self-assessment coaching rubrics, and more made up this new, popular literature. Such coaching moves were regarded as strategies and tools for coaching practitioners. Here entered not only the standardization of the coach, but a new type of coach itself, the instructional coach. The pioneer of instructional coaching, Jim Knight (2007), described the instructional coach to be one who “collaborates with teachers so they can choose and implement research-based interventions to help students learn more effectively,” (p. 13). Focused on improving teacher effectiveness and carrying out instructional reform, the instructional coach was a chariot for the standards-based reform movement (Galey, 2016).

While NCLB is no longer in effect, the discourses and ideologies engendered by the legislation and the standards-based reform movement continue to linger such as the re-emergence of The Science of Reading (The Reading League, 2021)¹². Teacher effectiveness,

¹² The Science of Reading was named as such because of the Reading First Initiative mandated through NCLB where the national reading panel selected and analyzed “scientifically based reading research” as a way to determine which instructional practices were “scientifically proven” to teach children to read. Since 2013 and as of April 29, 2024, 38 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws and/or policies related to the use of evidence-based, or scientifically proven, reading instruction (Schwartz, 2024, April 29).

increasing student achievement, and standardization of nearly every aspect of schooling remain the center of focus within many public schools nationwide. This is reflected in newer coaching publications, as well, where improving teacher effectiveness through standardized frameworks remains the focus of coaching practice (e.g., Knight, 2018; Knight 2021a; Lang-Raad, 2018). However, coaching in its many forms continues to grow with new research and theories being used to make sense of coaching and with increased employment of coaches nationwide (Galey, 2016). One new facet of coaching literature responsive to the current sense of socio-political unrest in the United States is coaching for equity (e.g., (Aguilar, 2020; Bocala & Holman, 2021; Walpole, 2021). When coaching for equity, race, gender, oppression, and other critical concepts are understood as inseparable from teacher practice and as thus are explicitly discussed in coaching conversations.

Coaching as a Political Practice

Understanding the widespread emergence of the coach within education as associated with standards-based school reform efforts implies the work of the coach to be a political practice, or a practice that endorses certain political ideologies and discourses. However, this does not mean the work of the coach was not politicized prior to the early 2000s. Many researchers and writers across the historical landscape of coaching link coaching with change (Aguilar, 2013, 2020; Bocala & Holman; 2021; Dozier, 2014; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Jones & Rainville, 2014b; Joyce & Showers, 1980; Morrell, 2014; Rainville & Jones, 2008; Skyes, 1996; Stephens & Mills, 2014; Walpole, 2021). The idea of change has been taken up by the field in varying ways including changing teachers and students, change in instructional practice and educational outcomes, and actions for social

change. Change, as it relates to education, is inherently political and not neutral. Aguilar (2013) reminds us that any time we seek educational change, whether it be for the purposes of “reform,” to “save,” or to “transform,” we are taking a political stance (p. 5).

Recognizing the political nature of coaching is important for the analysis of how various authors in the field position and therefore, orient, the work of the coach. Inherent within the positioning of coaches, whether humanist or posthumanist, are political understandings of how the world works. For example, one who views the human subject as an essential, rational, self-determining being likely has a different outlook on how humans, such as teachers and students, learn new skills than a person who views the human subject to be a production of the material-discursive environment. For example, a coach employing a humanist perspective might assume that a teacher implementing a new instructional practice incorrectly can overcome their struggles on their own freewill and with time and practice. Whereas a coach that conceives of the teacher as posthuman may find the “incorrect” implementation of the new practice as having nothing to do with the teacher’s innate skill set or lack thereof. Perhaps the teacher adjusted the practice to be more responsive toward students’ needs or more relevant toward students’ background and culture. The political factors at play within various scholars’ understandings of and approaches to coaching translate to practice in differing ways. These differences warrant a closer look in analysis of various conceptions of the coach.

A Focused Review of Educational Coaching Literature

There are two distinct types of publications within contemporary coaching literature. Some publications follow the traditions of scholarly, theory informed research, while others provide implications and practical next steps for the field based on narrative

experiences of the author and what at times seems to be personal opinions and beliefs. I refer to these two types of publications as scholarly/research literature and popular literature, respectively. The presumed absence of theory within popular literature can lead to a misunderstanding that these types of publications are atheoretical. However, although unnamed, there are always theories and theoretical perspectives driving the practical suggestions embedded in these works including the authors' implicit assumptions or understandings of the role of coaches, the purpose of education, beliefs about the human subject, and how these understandings orient the work of the coach accordingly (St. Pierre, 2016). I believe recognizing and understanding how the human subject, specifically, is positioned and how coaching practice is therefore oriented within coaching publications is important for practitioners reading these texts. When we are able to identify how the coach is positioned in a text and what that means for the coaching practice shared, we can employ caution when taking up new coaching practices and only put into practice those coaching practices that are aligned with our own ways of being and thinking.

In this chapter, I provide a focused review of educational coaching literature to help navigate this peculiarity of the field. To do this, I analyze publications across the field by considering the approach authors take for research, how the human subject is conceived by authors, and how the work of the coach is oriented accordingly. I begin this review with literature that positions the coach as a humanist subject and follow with a review of literature that includes a posthumanist conception of the subject. In both sections, I discuss how these varied positionings translate into the work of the coach. I close with implications for researchers as well as practitioners attempting to understand the complexities of the role and field.

The Coach as a Humanist Subject

In this section I think with several scholars to make sense of the underlying theories guiding the published work of Jim Knight, who is a popular writer for and about instructional coaches, as well as the work of some researchers in instructional coaching including Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers; Robert Garmston; and Rebecca Miller, Elizabeth Wargo, and Ian Hoke. Specifically, I draw on poststructural theorist and philosopher Elizabeth St. Pierre, who often draws upon the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault, to make sense of the differences between a humanist and a posthumanist conception of the human subject¹³. I also use the work of feminist, poststructuralist, gender theorist Judith Butler and their theorizations on the human subject in this pursuit.

Jim Knight's Work

Knight's research on instructional coaching is large in scope, consisting of a dozen practitioner style book publications and even more journal articles. His initial approach to research consisted of "informal studies" that "may have lacked rigor," but nonetheless served as a foundation for his first major article introducing the instructional coach (Knight, 2021b). Knight expands on this attempt at research in reflection, "In the early years, our work was about finding our way, finding names for what we did, grabbing what data we could to support what we were doing, and trying to get better at coaching every day," (Instructional Coaching Group, 2021). This early attempt at research lacks theoretical analysis such as what called him to perform the random coaching actions, why he felt those

¹³ For overview of the humanist and posthuman subject see St. Pierre, E. A. (2000). Poststructural feminism in education: An overview. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(5), 477-515. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390050156422> and St. Pierre, E. A. (2011). Post qualitative research: The critique and coming after. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 611-625). SAGE.

actions to be effective in the moment, and how the data supported his practice. Further, embedded in this writing and Knight's future publications are assumptions about education, the role of the coach, power, and the human subject that work together to shape his work yet remain invisible to his readers.

Knight (2007) later engaged in "10 years of systematic study of professional development," including "ethnographic interviews" and "dozens of pretest-posttest and comparative studies on the impact of particular interventions," (p. 13). One study of particular interest is a quantitative, comparative study of traditional one-shot professional development and Knight's instructional coaching model that he claimed validated the theoretical foundation for instructional coaching (Knight, 1999). The theoretical foundation validated through the study was Knight's own, what he calls the partnership philosophy, or a melding of concepts (e.g., equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity) rooted in anthropology, social psychology, organizational theory, philosophy of science, and educational theory (Knight, 1999) that are also commonly referenced in other coaching publications (e.g., Aguilar, 2013, 2020). However, Knight's research does not use high-level theory, or "theory rich enough to address the complex and contradictory nature of... fieldwork and analysis," (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 614). Instead, he relies on philosophical principles as the foundation for claims he makes about what coaches should and should not be and do.

While Knight does not offer his conception of the human subject, his descriptions of the instructional coach point to a humanist understanding. Knight (2007) describes the coach and the teacher as able to "consider ideas before adopting them," and "free to make real meaningful choices," (p. 25). Here the human subject is understood to have a mind that

begins as “a blank slate,” and one who eventually constructs “a personal identity based on consciousness,” two of Locke’s tenets of humanism (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 618). Additionally, Knight (2018) considers individuals to be the “ultimate decision makers about what and how they learn,” (p. 4) and “free to reconstruct and use content the way he or she considers it most useful,” (Knight, 2007, p. 25). In these instances, Butler’s (1995) description of the humanist subject as one “endowed with a will, a freedom, an intentionality, which is then subsequently ‘expressed’ in language, in action,” aligns with Knight’s descriptions of the coach (p. 136). Knight assumes the coach and the teacher to be autonomous individuals who are productions of their own consciousnesses and operating independently of the material-discursive environment.

Much of Knight’s research and writing orients the coach as a knowledge holder and the teachers coaches work with as the opposite, which can also be related to his understanding of the human as a humanist subject. For example, Knight (2004) writes how the goal of the instructional coach is to “pass ownership of ideas to teachers,” (p. 36). He refers to the ideas as “research-validated practices [that] offer useful solutions to the problems teachers face,” (p. 33). With this orientation to coaching, the binary oppositions of coach/teacher, giver/receiver, knower/learner, and evaluator/evaluated are developed. St. Pierre (2011) explains how with the humanist belief that the human is separate from and above all else, binaries such as “self/other, subject/object, knower/known, man/nature,” and others take form (p. 618). While the binaries St. Pierre puts forward involve human and non-human entities, I find her thinking useful here as the coach is positioned as separate from and above the teacher. To use St. Pierre’s words, in positioning the coach as a “knower” and the teacher as “known” – as in studied by the coach, known by

the coach, known to not possess a certain type of knowledge and therefore in need of it – an opposition and power hierarchy between the coach and the teacher are formed. This orientation to coaching not only deprofessionalizes the teacher, but also alludes to the types of knowledge that tends to be valued in coaching and education, such as research-based, scientifically proven coaching and instructional strategies¹⁴, while marginalizing other ways of knowing.

Knight's conception of the coach goes beyond the transfer of knowledge and also considers how new learning is put into practice. Knight (2007) states, "Whenever ideas are shared by ICs [instructional coaches], they are shared to be implemented," (p. 27). He explains that coaches can ensure shared ideas are implemented by validating, reassuring, supporting, and encouraging teachers as they refine their practices to match the coach's ideas (p. 22). This aspect of coaching according to Knight, situates the coach as an agent of control who decides what and how teachers teach in the initial transfer of knowledge as well as one who surveilles and evaluates teachers until the predetermined standards of practice are met. In this way, the work of the coach becomes "to qualify, to classify and to punish," which Foucault (1977/1975) writes are an effect of the normalizing judgement of surveillance (p. 184). In other words, teachers who are not implementing their new knowledge in ways deemed appropriate by the coach may qualify for additional support

¹⁴ The terms "research-based" and "scientifically proven" are productions of positivist discourse where knowledge is produced through the scientific process. In the context of education, research-based, scientifically proven strategies are determined through research studies that hypothesize claims and collect, measure, and analyze data, or aspects of educational practice, to predict and name strategies that work best in garnering improvement results. For example, Knight et al.'s (2015) article, "3 Steps to Great Coaching: A Simple but Powerful Instructional Cycle Nets Results," serves an example of positivist language in the coaching context. Knight et al. writes, "instructional coaches who use a proven coaching cycle can partner with teachers to set and reach improvement goals that have an unmistakable, positive impact on students' lives. And that should be the measure of effectiveness of any coaching program," (p. 18).

from the coach, be classified as “ineffective,” or ultimately be punished for not falling in line. The political nature of coaching in this form is evident, as coaches are positioned within the school apparatus as administrative extensions of control and teachers as the ones to be watched, controlled, and eventually reformed according to imposed mandates. The binary of coach/teacher is further emphasized and controller/controlled can be added to the list of divisions inherent in coaching as according to Knight.

The transfer of knowledge from coach to teacher and ensuring implementation of that knowledge by teachers constitutes how Knight orients the work of the coach. But within his writing, he also shares strategies for how coaches can take on his approach to coaching. One way Knight does this is through uncomplicating coaching into a series of steps to be followed – by positioning coaching as a science. For example, Knight (2018) dedicates an entire book to what he calls the “The Impact Cycle,” a cycle coaches can follow with teachers to foster improvements in teaching. Through this cycle, coaches begin with *identifying* the “current reality” of the teacher they are working with, a goal, and a teaching strategy that can help the teacher meet the goal. In stage 2 of the cycle, the teacher *learns* through modeling from the coach and checklists. The final piece of the cycle is *improve* where teacher actions are monitored for improvement, progress is assessed, and if the goal is not met, the cycle begins over again (p. 1-9). In short, Knight sums the work of the coach up into three steps: identify, learn, and improve. Commensurate with his humanist understandings of the coach and the standards-based reform movement his conception of the coach was born from, in instances such as these Knight reduces the work of the coach into “systematic procedures and protocols, mechanistic technique, statistical manipulation, and casual structures,” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 623). St. Pierre warns that over time when we

latch onto descriptions like Knight's, they "become so transparent, natural, and real... We accept them as truth," (p. 623), which reminds us to view Knight's humanist orientation toward coaching as not the true or right way to understanding coaching or the coach herself, but only one way to do so.

Other Scholars and Their Humanist Assumptions

There are researchers within the field of coaching that view the human subject in humanist terms similar to Knight but publish their work outside of the popular realm and follow the traditions of scholarly research more closely. These authors' approaches to research vary. For example, Showers' (1982) research study operates under the positivist tradition with an "experimental pretest/posttest control group design" that quantitatively assessed teacher transfer of training from various professional development experiences and student outcomes (p. 9). According to Showers, it was confirmed through the study that peer coaching following professional development workshops does increase teachers' transfer of newly learned instructional strategies to practice but not necessarily student outcomes since "students of high transfer teachers scored better on recall tests but no differently on essay tests than students of low transfer teachers," (p. 4). Keeping true to the positivist tradition, Showers did not explicitly use a language of theory to situate her study, analyze data, or to provide implications to the field. Instead, she designed a quantitative study guided by positivist assumptions where she positioned the outcome measures as scientific fact in her claim of a positive, causal relationship between peer coaching and teacher transfer of newly learned instructional skills.

Another early and widely cited scholar within the field, Garmston (1987) and Garmston et al.'s (1993) work grew out of Joyce and Showers' (1983) idea of the peer coach

and provided detailed explanations of various types of coaches and corresponding implications for the field. However, while Garmston's writing was published for the scholarly field and is referenced often, much of his writing seems informed by his own ideas and beliefs that appear atheoretical due to the absence of a language of theory guiding his beliefs. For example, Garmston (1987) makes large claims such as, "coaching can enhance professional development and school culture when administrators select a model appropriate to school goals and take steps to show that they value and support it," but does not support such statements with data or use theory to support his thinking (p. 17).

A more contemporary but similar example, Miller et al. (2019) consider the conditions needed for fostering professional growth of teachers through coaching as well as the complexities of coaching in their narrative case study. In this article, the authors begin by providing the narrative portion of the case study that follows a newly hired coach over her first few months as a coach. Following the narrative, the authors briefly analyze the narrative scenario where they exclude the use of theoretical concepts in their discussion. For example, Miller et al. write, "coaches may be positioned within systems to develop common language and facilitate change," (p. 23) but do not elaborate further on how this positioning looks, what it could mean, how change could be facilitated, and so on. The use of a language of theory throughout Miller et al.'s discussion could help to inform and strengthen their claims around the complexities of coaching.

The above authors do not make explicit what they believe about the human subject, how power operates, how change happens, or what education is for, which are all issues that shape what is possible to think about, write about, advocate for, and so on. So, their

readers are left to take their recommendations at face value and not necessarily question if and whether there are fundamental theoretical differences between the authors and themselves. Even though they don't offer their conceptions of the human subject, threads of a humanist understanding can be gleaned in review of their work. For example, Garmston mentions in several instances the teacher's "self" and its relation to the decision-making, actions, and outcomes of the teacher. Garmston (1987) views the teacher's self-awareness as a factor of their success for it allows them to "monitor and evaluate their decisions, and to improve themselves professionally," (p. 26). Garmston et. al (1993) explain how this self-awareness includes "the ability to self-monitor, self-analyze, and self-evaluate," and change accordingly (p. 58). Garmston positions the human subject as an effect of the conscious, coherent, knowing self and not "of the outside, of the known, of social practice, of change, of time," which St. Pierre (2000) explains to be characteristic of humanist understanding (p. 500).

On the other hand, Showers (1982) does not describe the human subjects of her study outside of their "characteristics" including their sex, level of education, and the grade and subjects they taught at the time (p. 5). Instead, she spends more time discussing the design of her research and the measurements taken of these teachers regarding their attainment of knowledge from coaching per the "Teacher Innovator System" and interviews and resulting student outcomes based on a battery of standardized assessments given to students such as the "V-3 Wide Range Vocabulary test" (p. 14). The measuring of human knowledge in Showers' work assumes the human subject to have the ability to take up or produce knowledge and therefore produce change, a tenet of humanism that St. Pierre (2000) reminds is taken-for-granted by many in and outside of research.

Finally, the positioning of human subjects in Miller et al.'s (2019) case study grows out of Knight's (2018) work and conceives of the human subject similarly in humanist terms. The centering of the individual as outside and separate of all else including time, space, material-discursive entanglements, memories, and more; and as knowing, conscious, and self-determining autonomous agents points to a humanist conception of the human subject within these authors' studies of coaching. This is important for readers of their work to understand because how an author perceives of the human subject orients the work of the coach accordingly.

The work of the coach is oriented similarly by the authors of these studies. The main commonality woven through their work is the overall goal of improvement to be attained through coaching, including improvement both of teacher performance and of student achievement in terms of evaluation tools such as teacher observation and standardized achievement assessments, and how improvement can be achieved by following a combination or series of steps. For example, Showers (1982) positions coach work as a blend of "companionship, the giving of technical feedback, and the analysis of application" that leads to improvement (p. 18). Garmston et al. (1993), on the other hand, claim teacher reflection can foster improvement. They explain how teacher reflection is prompted and remains the focus of coaching when the cycle of "preconference, observation, and postconference" is followed (p. 57). Similarly, Miller et al. (2019) offer Knight's (2018) Impact Cycle of identify, learn, and improve to guide the coach's work.

Although these authors do recognize coaching to be complex within their studies, it seems they also attempt to uncomplicate the work of the coach by partitioning coaching practices into defined actions and by sequencing these actions into series of steps or cycles

to be followed. A sense of linearity is also present in this orientation to coaching. In other words, with each step followed by a coach, the teacher will learn more and improve more, and knowledge and growth will accumulate. With a humanist understanding of the coach and teacher separate from all else, the orientation to coaching presented by these authors reflects the positivist tradition and all that comes with it, including the belief that replication and generalization are possible and that a standardized, cyclic orientation to coaching can be taken up and successfully followed by any coach in any educational setting to garner improvement. But St. Pierre (2011) attests that the adherence to exactness presented by those with positivist understandings is not possible as “everything is entangled and always already overlapping, dynamic, contested, multiple, antagonistic, becoming, in process,” (p. 619). It seems these authors’ charges for improvement via coaching cycles or specific coaching actions are unlikely to be as uncomplicated as they are positioned to be within their studies.

The Coach as a Posthumanist Subject

Contrary to the publications described above that are at times seemingly atheoretical and/or reliant on positivist research traditions, there is a much smaller pool of research within the field of coaching that centers the use of theory in research and discussions surrounding the work of the coach. The theoretical frameworks driving these studies fall within various realms including the emancipatory and deconstructive paradigms (Lather & St. Pierre, 2007). These authors’ approaches to research mostly include qualitative studies (e.g., Jones & Rainville, 2014b; Rainville & Jones, 2008; Rogers, 2014; Stephens & Mills, 2014), responses to studies that pose additional theory-driven considerations (e.g., Cahnmann-Taylor, 2014; Dozier, 2014; Morrell, 2014; Reilly, 2014;

Rodgers, 2014), and analyses of or reports on coaching initiatives (e.g., Bocala & Holman, 2021; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Skyes, 1996).

One scholar approaching research in a similar way, Elena Aguilar (2013, 2020), writes for the practitioner audience and her work includes widely published and read books. While her approach to research does include some empirical evidence from her time as a coach, similar to Knight and other authors described above, Aguilar also draws on various theories and ontology, or the nature of being, to inform the ideas she puts forward. These approaches to research open up possibilities for varied purposes of and approaches to coaching, while simultaneously avoiding the urge to uncomplicate and scientize the practice itself. For example, Aguilar (2020) uses Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality where it is understood that "identity makers intersect and create unique experiences of marginalization," in her work around coaching for equity (Aguilar, p. 8). According to Aguilar, the school institution is "polluted by white supremacy" (p. 8) and through exploring the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and more, coaches can begin to reveal racism at work in schools and coach in more equitable ways.

Scholars within this smaller pool of research are careful to position the coach and teacher as human subjects in poststructural and/or posthumanist terms by rejecting the autonomous, rational, self-determining individual put forward by humanists. Instead, the human subject is understood to be an assemblage of "humans, time, space, physical objects, and everything else," (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 618). For example, Cheryl Dozier (2014) makes note of this in her study about literacy coaches navigating teachers' intellectual unrest in explaining that coaches must understand that "each teacher is shaped by previous experiences and identities," (p. 235). Additionally, in her "coaching manifesto" which

outlines her vision for coaching, Aguilar (2013) writes, “everything is connected in space and time; every action has a reaction and influences other pieces of the whole now and in the future. We are bound to each other by invisible webs of interrelated actions,” (p. 40). For Aguilar, the human being is understood as an assemblage of their interactions and connections to all things over time.

Mary Ann Reilly (2014), a scholar who studies literacy education, imagines the coach to be a rhizome, a metaphor for knowledge making posed originally by Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1980) in contrast to the more well-known tree of knowledge metaphor. For example, as Reilly analyzes the positioning of the coach she argues that as a rhizomatic agent, the coach’s “ideas have neither beginnings nor ends but rather exist in infinite middles between infinite things,” (294). Reilly describes how all humans are entangled within a dynamic environment and exist “in the middle of things with the capacity to be connected in all dimensions to something else,” (p. 293). This entanglement of the posthuman subject rejects the humanist idea of linearity and progressive development. In this way, the posthuman subject is “not stable but always becoming,” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 618).

On a final note, Stephanie Jones and Kristin Rainville (2014b) studied literacy coaches’ interactions with teachers where they used three different theoretical orientations toward power (poststructuralism, Bourdieu’s sociology, and Eastern philosophies) to offer ways of coaching with compassion and humility. For example, in discussing misunderstandings between coaches and teachers, Jones and Rainville used Thich Nhat Hanh’s (2005) concept of *understanding* to theorize a practice of mindfulness coaches can use to avoid misunderstanding. Jones and Rainville explain that coaches can transform

their subjectivity produced through governmentality by “choosing to act differently,” (p. 275). In this case, Butler’s (1992) understanding of the socially constructed human subject and the subject’s potential for agency comes into play. Butler writes, “the subject is constructed through acts of differentiation that distinguish the subject from its constitutive outside,” (p. 12). In other words, although the human subject is constructed by and contingent of living in a social world, humans can also choose to repeat or not repeat aspects of their subjectivity and in doing so can subtly work against the ways they are subjugated.

In understanding the coach to be a posthuman subject, these scholars and others in the field orient the work of the coach much differently than those with a humanist understanding. To begin, these researchers tend to name and embrace the complexity of coach work and resist the recommendation of prescriptive coaching moves, because they fundamentally assume that there is not a “right” or “wrong” way to coach, but many nuanced ways of coaching contingent upon a variety of factors (e.g., local context, the past experiences of coaches and teachers involved, space, etc.). Further, the recognition of power within the position of “coach” itself, how power circulates within coaching relationships, and what implications power holds for the work of the coach are often discussed in the work of these scholars. This differs from the previous literature where discussions of power are not present. Above all, it seems that many researchers with a posthuman understanding of the coach find transformation of the school experience into one where all students, teachers, and coaches can learn, flourish, and find joy in their work to be a goal of coaching. The sections that follow will elaborate on these aspects of coaching.

Coaching is Complex and That's Okay

The complexity of coaching begins with the ambiguous positioning of the coach among and in relation to other professionals within the school setting. Walpole and McKenna (2008) compare the coach to a “middle manager” – not quite teacher, but also not entirely administrative. Jones and Rainville (2014a) similarly recognize an “in-between-ness” that is taken up by the coach where “never complete insider, never complete outsider” remains the coach’s reality (p. 183). Walpole and Blamey (2008) consider the many roles of the coach and describe the coach as “wearing many hats,” (p. 222). Despite the uncertain placement of the coach within the school environment, some researchers name their unique positioning as a channel for possibility within the job. For example, Jones and Rainville (2014a) propose the subject position of *intellectual* can be taken up by coaches to serve both teachers and students as a negotiator “between classrooms and administrative offices, between children and teachers, between teachers and administrators, between school and community, between theory and practice,” (p. 183). Coaches in this way embrace the complexity of their position as they fluidly adjust their day-to-day actions to best serve and justly advocate for both teachers and students.

These researchers are careful to avoid the rigid prescription of coaching moves as they think through the ways coaching can be framed and instead rely on theory as tool for understanding and navigating the complexities of the job. For example, returning to Reilly’s (2014) comparison of the coach to Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome, she names the horizontal, unestablished, dynamic path of the coach as a “potential conduit through which learners are connected or inspired to connect with one another,” (p. 294). Resisting the top-down, hierarchical transfer of knowledge from coach to teacher, Reilly emphasizes a

randomness yet purposefulness to coaching resulting from the unlimited connections that can occur when coaches place themselves in the middle of things and encourage teachers to connect with them and other learners on their own accord. Positioning the coach in this way simultaneously allows a multitude of possibilities for teacher learning while also positioning the teacher as a professional in control of their own learning and development.

Rainville and Jones (2008) utilize Gee's situated identities to consider the ways coaches can position themselves in the various contexts inherent to the job. The authors refer to situated identities as "shifts" in ways of being where "how we might talk, walk, dress, and so on are dependent upon social, cultural, and political demands of the particular context," where these shifts "change more than how we act in a situation; when we engage with people in different contexts we also often shift *how* we think and *what* we think about," (p. 441). Shifts can vary from inquiring about a teacher's family to assisting a teacher with a new instructional process. In this case, Rainville and Jones avoid naming a particular way of being for all coaches to adopt and emphasize a way of being contingent upon the situation. Intentionally embracing the various positions a coach can assume offers a way for coaches to build impactful relationships with teachers that allow ongoing support of teacher and student learning.

A final example of using theory to embrace the complexities of coaching, Cahnmann-Taylor (2014) names a theater technique, Rainbow of Desire, inspired by Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to help coaches navigate some of the complexities of coaching including considering teacher motivations and instructional choices as well as promoting critically reflective processes within themselves and teachers. Cahnmann-Taylor uses Rainbow of Desire as an inquiry-based coaching stance, where coaches and teachers give

voice to internal oppressions driving their motivations and actions and release those oppressions to move toward more socially just practices. Cahnmann-Taylor recognizes a fluidity to these exchanges and explains how such exchanges help illuminate the multiple hues of coaches and teachers and “the partiality of any one subject position and how contingent our words and actions are upon the coconstructed performance of social conflict,” (p. 213). Rainbow of Desire as a coaching stance recognizes and resists the movement to standardize everything from classroom instruction to coaching in exchange for more equitable practices for both teachers and students by promoting the complexity inherent within the job.

The theory informed research referenced above welcomes the complex nature of coaching. Instead of attempting to simplify the complexities of the position using one-size-fits-all prescribed processes and checklists of strategies, these researchers utilize theory to analyze and better understand complexities of coaching and to offer considerations for the field. In describing the coach, Aguilar (2013) states, “[coaching] is more than a set of tools... a coach must cultivate a particular way of being,” where their language, body, and emotions help to facilitate change for teachers, schools, and society (p. xv). Research suggests that theory can be used by coaches attempting to discover and assume a way of being in coaching most suitable for the challenges faced and goals of the position in each coach’s localized setting.

Power in Coaching

Some researchers holding a posthumanist understanding of the coach recognize power as a theoretical concept present within coaching. These researchers seek to analyze this complexity of coaching to offer a better understanding of how power is inherent within

the position of the coach, how it surfaces and circulates in coaching relationships, and what challenges and possibilities power poses. The ways coaches can purposefully exercise power dependent on their goals of coaching is an important aspect of this work.

The call for coaches to understand various theoretical orientations to power and to rely on those theories in reflection and, at times, in practice is made by Jones and Rainville (2014b), two scholars leading the field in researching coaching and power. In their article, the authors meld poststructural theories, Bourdieu's sociological analyses, and Eastern philosophies of power to analyze power in literacy coaching interactions. According to Jones and Rainville, the poststructural perspective assumes power to be wrapped up and circulating in all relationships where coaches and teachers can exercise power using verbal and nonverbal language to position themselves in a multitude of ways that can lead to "understanding, misunderstanding, or something in between," (p. 274). This understanding of power calls coaches to consider how their choice of language positions themselves in relation to teachers and what those positionings could potentially produce. For example, a coach wielding power to assume the position of expert above a teacher will likely have a different coaching relationship than a coach who is positioned as co-learner alongside a teacher. Jones and Rainville consider Bourdieu's constructs of *habitus* ("the self... one's body, speech, values, and habitual ways of interacting in the world"), *field* ("a sociopolitical space"), and *capital* ("the qualities or characteristics expressed through *habitus* that are perceived as valuable or not in a particular place"), on the other hand, to be tools coaches can use to analyze power in coaching relationships and make decisions about their future work (p. 273). Bourdieu's constructs illuminate that although coaches and teachers operate in the same school setting, each brings different capital to the relationship that when

recognized by the coach can potentially be leveraged in powerful ways. Finally, Jones and Rainville name Eastern philosophy's concept of *suffering* and the relief of teacher suffering by the coach as a key component of coaching. The authors explain that to relieve teacher suffering, coaches can examine how power is operating to recognize and understand suffering and respond with *compassion* and *humility*, two other concepts of Eastern philosophy. This call disrupts the standardized practices that promote the top-down transfer of knowledge from coach to teacher permeating the coaching scene and instead offers a way for coaches to attend to the physical and mental wellbeing of teachers as they work together to make schools places where both teachers and students can thrive. In all, Jones and Rainville are careful to recognize that different theories of power each have certain limitations, but also enable different possibilities for understanding and practice. This is a valuable insight for coaches who recognize and embrace the complexity of coaching and seek more than standardized practices.

Power as it relates to positioning is another aspect of the concept frequently discussed within the field. With a general movement away from the humanist and hierarchical positioning of coach above teacher that engenders the binaries of coach/teacher, expert/learner, and powerful/powerless, some researchers attest to a more lateral and dynamic relation between the positioning of the coach and teacher reflective of various theoretical orientations to power like those described above. Jones and Rainville (2014b) provide a rationale for this trend in stating the "active wielding of power by literacy coaches through controlling discourse or establishing status in the context of teacher learning works against the potential power of literacy coaches," (p. 285). In contrast to top-down positioning, Rainville and Jones (2008) posit coaches can "read"

situations to position themselves in purposeful ways and that the various positions taken up by coaches “open up spaces in which teachers feel they can take control of their professional development and experiment with ideas that could change their practices,” (p. 447). The positions coaches can assume include “friend, colleague, authority, expert, learner, and so forth,” (p. 441). Some researchers warn that while coaches certainly have areas of expertise, they should be careful not to position themselves as “the expert” (Aguilar, 2013; Dozier, 2008). Instead, coaches are encouraged to “be responsive to teachers’ strengths, interests, and needs,” (Dozier, p. 12) and to “[follow] the teacher’s lead,” (Rogers, 2014, p. 257) before offering their expertise. When a more lateral and fluid positioning of the coach in relation to the teacher is taken up in these ways, hooks’ (1994) notion of a “community of learners *together*” becomes possible (p. 153). In a community of learners together, coaches and teachers both learn, have power, and together go beyond the traditional limits of a top-down, coach/teacher relationship.

Foucault (1978/1976) writes, “where there is power, there is resistance,” (p. 95). And so, the inherent tie between power and resistance as it relates to coaching is noted at times within the research. For example, Jones and Rainville (2014b) reposition resistant teachers as “social beings who are interacting with coaches in relationships in which power is always operating,” (p. 272). Jones and Rainville acknowledge the link between power and resistance and therefore the inevitable possibility of resistance in coaching, yet do not offer any “quick fixes” for coaches to combat resistance. By choosing to resist fixing resistance, Jones and Rainville reframe teacher resistance as just another aspect of coaching relationships, which in turn opens up the possibility for coaches to notice and analyze teacher resistance and inform their coaching accordingly. Other scholars are aware of this

possibility, too. Bocala and Holman (2021) understand resistance to be a signal for teacher need, including the “need for additional information, more clarity, or a different approach,” (p. 68). Reilly (2014), on the other hand, views resistance as no more than interruption and explains that when resistance and interruption occur coaches should be “appreciative to the learning occasion that these forces give rise to” and understand that where there is tension “ideas beget ideas at potentially exponential rates,” (p. 294). The reframing of resistance in coaching as an opportunity for possibility rather than a problem for coaches to overcome is an important addition to the field’s understanding of how power operates in coaching relationships. In this way, coaches are encouraged to lean on their understandings of power as they navigate and investigate conflict while simultaneously keeping the learning space open to pivots as new ideas and wonderings emerge.

Coaching for Transformation

The field of coaching widely associates the work of the coach with *change*. In contrast to humanist researchers such as Jim Knight that claim the goal of coaching is teacher improvement, some researchers who view the coach and teacher as posthuman subjects see the coach as a catalyst for social transformation. Transformation as a coaching goal is equity-oriented and political in nature (Aguilar, 2013, 2020; Bocala & Holman, 2021) and seeks to dismantle oppressive systems such as racism, patriarchy, classism, ableism, and more that produce inequities in schools through coaching in ways that promote equity for all students. Aguilar (2013) defines transformational coaching as “a holistic approach to working with people that incorporates an understanding of how institutions and systems impact experience and learning and that fosters transformation at multiple levels,” (p. xiv). Coaching for transformation focuses less on changing teachers’

actions and behaviors (Aguilar, 2020) and providing *technical fixes*, and more on finding *adaptive solutions* to the challenges educators face by coaching teachers to “examine their beliefs, mindsets, and practices,” (Bocala & Holman, 2021, p. 67). This kind of coaching work aims to transform classrooms and schools – especially those from marginalized and minoritized positions – into more equitable spaces where teachers and students can prosper.

Scholars who advocate for coaching as a practice that can support transformation often utilizes inquiry-based practices to bring about change. For instance, Dozier (2014) prompts coaches to inquire into their own beliefs and practices when planning learning opportunities for teachers by asking questions such as “Am I open to learning from each teacher’s expertise, understandings, and questions?” and “How will the literacy practices we are exploring in the inquiry community support rather than marginalize learners?” (p. 235). Considering the first question posed by Dozier, a coach closed to learning from teachers may come to recognize they understand the work of teachers to be technical rather than intellectual, whereas the second question illuminates that schools are not neutral, but express what types of knowledge, morals, and histories should be taught to students (Giroux, 2011). Inquiries such as these prompt coaches to critically examine their beliefs and institutional practices that may be upholding oppressive structures and rethink other, more socially-just possibilities that can be attained through coaching.

Other researchers consider how coaches can lead inquiries with teachers to prompt teacher reflection and change in practice. For example, Diane Stephens and Heidi Mills (2014) study coaching as a collaborative practice that happens alongside teachers and provide engagement practices, such as Coaching Rounds and Reading the Room, that

coaches can use with teachers to help teachers inquire into their past experiences and theorize from practice. The authors explain, “we believe that the details of a teacher’s own classroom life can and should become a source for deep reflection on big ideas and that it is through reflection that change occurs,” (p. 197). Although not mentioned in their study, Freire’s (2011) concept of praxis, or “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” becomes possible through Stephen and Mill’s research (p. 122). Building off Stephens and Mills’ work, Ernest Morrell (2014) offers additional ways coaches can prompt teachers to reflect and inform their practice accordingly. For example, Morrell draws on Freire’s (1970) work on critical learning that uses “problem-posing pedagogy in which teachers and students learn from engaging in a mutually constitutive dialogue that emanates from real-world problems,” (Morell, p. 209) and tenets of Critical Race Theory such as encouraging teachers to challenge their belief systems to eliminate deficit perspectives that impact students in negative ways to develop a critical model for teacher learning coaches can help to cultivate. However, Morrell also warns that a change in teacher knowledge and practice may not be enough to provide equitable opportunities for *all* students, and that the concepts of funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth can be used by coaches and teachers to investigate the ways students and their families already “practice literacy in powerful ways,” and inform to inform teaching practice in equitable ways (p. 210). The use of inquiry-based practices such as these challenge coaches to promote their own as well as teacher questioning, reflection, and ultimately a change in practice through coaching experiences to help transform schools toward more equitable spaces. Dismantling oppressive structures such as racism, patriarchy, classism, ableism; practices; and beliefs rampant in schools and society is a lofty

goal for coaches seeking transformation, but one that becomes possible through the considerations given by the authors above.

Considerations for Educational Coaching Research and Practice

This chapter serves as a focused review of literature on coaching in education that considers the ways researchers approach research, conceive of the human subject, and how those conceptions orient the work of the coach in various ways. The literature surveyed includes widely disseminated, seemingly atheoretical popular literature, atheoretical research publications, and theory-laden research articles, for the most part. In all cases, coaching presents itself as an unneutral, political practice. Further, depending on the political context of any given work and other assumptions of the author such as how they conceive of the human subject, a certain goal of coaching is assumed which also relates to how the work of the coach is oriented. Through my above review of the literature and previous experience as an instructional coach, I close by providing three considerations for coaching researchers and practitioners relating to the politics of coaching, assumptions made about coaches (and humans) in literature, and complexities of coaching.

A Call to Explicitly Politicize Coaching

Much of the popular literature, including the work of Jim Knight, and atheoretical research publications are mostly affiliated with the political agenda that gave rise to and funded the position, namely the standards-based reform movement. In this case, the traditional view of schooling that considers “the best way to learn a *given* body of knowledge” is as an important part of the work of coaches (Giroux, 1988, p. 2). Coach work in this way prioritizes the transfer of knowledge from coach to teacher as well as ensuring teachers’ implementation of instructional “best practices,” all in the name of student

achievement that is to be measured by student proficiency scores. On the other hand, much of the theory-rich, research-based coaching literature and Aguilar's popularized writings assume a critical stance that rejects the scientized, prescriptive, "quick fix" coaching moves of popular literature and positivist studies. Instead, these researchers employ various theories to critically investigate the "'taken for granted' in school knowledge and practice" (Giroux, p. 7) that tends to privilege a particular kind of knowledge (epistemology) and way of being (ontology) that can reproduce systems of power in society along race, social class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, language, dis/ability, and additional markers that align with privilege and marginalization in various contexts in both school and society at large and provide considerations for how coaches can take part in transforming schools into spaces where all teachers and students can flourish, including those with marginalized and minoritized positionings. Calling attention to the political nature of coaching within all genres of the literature and in coaching preparation programs is an important consideration for the field. In this way, the tension, confusion, and sense of failure coaches may at times feel as result of mindlessly taking up coaching practices incommensurate with their personal, guiding ideals could be alleviated.

A Call to Consider Assumptions Made About the Coach

The way the human subject is conceived by coaching researchers and how such conceptions orient the work of the coach accordingly serves as a second aspect of the field that warrants attention. In survey of the literature, most popular literature and some research publications employ humanist understandings that view the coach and teacher as rational, autonomous, free beings that are separate from all else (St. Pierre, 2011). These researchers position the coach as knowledge holders whose purpose is to transfer

knowledge to teachers through a variety of prescriptive coaching moves based on researchers' empirical knowledge. Given that these practices are presented by researchers as fact, which is a characteristic of empirical research (St. Pierre, 2016), the possibility of failure with these coaching moves is not considered within the research. This is problematic for coaches who take up these practices thinking they are fail proof. What happens when they do fail? Confusion, helplessness, and anger come to mind.

Other researchers rely on a posthumanist understanding that sees teachers and coaches as an assemblage of humans, space, time, material, language – entangled with everything and “always becoming,” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 618). Given this posthuman understanding of the human being, researchers resist naming prescriptive coaching practices and instead use rich theory to navigate the complexities of coaching and to offer implications for the field. Again, coach preparation programs and the field could benefit from considering how coaches are positioned and how their work is therefore oriented within the research. This could help coaches take up coaching practices that align with their understandings of how humans are produced by and exist in the world.

A Call to Embrace the Complex and Unknown in Coaching

In the opening of this chapter, Bea's poem reads, “So much need!... Put yourself in the teacher's shoes... Time for reflection.” I connect deeply with her words that succinctly display some of her understanding of what it means to coach and be a coach. When I became a coach, I had a limited understanding of what a coach is and does, how they should act, what they should do, and the purpose of their work. What I did know was that my job was to support teachers and upon spending time in their classrooms and hearing their concerns, the need for support become apparent. Attempting to learn what a coach is and

does through accessing coaching literature brought little relief in my early coaching days. There were few simple answers, and the answers given that were simple often went sideways when put into practice and above all, felt wrong.

Through deeper review of the literature outlined above (and several years of experience and reflection, too), I have come to embrace the complexities, confusions, and times of not-knowing that come with coaching as a powerful aspect of the job. I have learned how to seek out literature in the field that aligns with my ways of being and translate what I read into practice in a way that works for me.

“Right way? There is none.” I agree with Bea.

I find it less important to define exactly what it means to coach and be a coach and more important to latch on to those moments of confusion and lean into the complex aspects of the job. In this way, a channel for inquiry and discovery opens and the meaningful work of transforming schools into something unthinkable and better than before through coaching can begin.

CHAPTER 3

IN TANDEM: INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING AND FEMINIST PRACTICE

Figure 2

We Know... We Believe... We Will... Chart

We Know...	We Believe...	We Will...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - power can be "unseen" - there can be rules of power - power is everywhere - power is not evil - Where there is power, there is resistance - power is relational - Recognizing/naming the system at work is a start to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's important to participate in resistance - relationships are important and powerful - We have impact, but it's limited - systematic change is possible, but not quick or easy. - Coaches should be intentional about not focusing on the individual, but the collective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - make the rules of power known - Resistance: offer a different perspective - not repeat a behavior - reframe walk-throughs to be supportive - emphasize community - promote teacher voice and diverse strengths/practices - prioritize authentic community among team

Note. The women of the Coach Group added to this chart following text-based discussions that occurred during each Coach Group meeting in response to the following prompt: How can *insert author of text discussed* inform what we know, believe, and practice as coaches?

Research Intentions: Before and Now

When I began this dissertation, framing coaching as a feminist practice was not a goal in the creation of the Coach Group, or as a part of my research. Instead, I was more

interested in determining ways we can coach *differently*, whatever that may mean, because it seemed the narrow way I was taught to coach was at times harming rather than helping teachers and their students. In designing my study, I chose to form the Coach Group because I felt alone in my role, and I needed a facet for connection, venting, and collaboration. I knew I wanted to bridge theory and practice within this group because I had found using theory that I learned in my doctoral studies was a tool that helped guide my personal coaching practice.

What I had unintentionally done in planning my study was form a group of coaches that engaged in feminist practice through our conversations with one another; our reading, writing and text-based discussions; and our actions that followed outside of the group. It is like something inside me knew coaching is feminist work. St. Pierre's (2011) notion "*theory produces people*," rings true in my case (p. 620). The feminist theories I had read throughout my graduate coursework had transformed me, seeped into my work as a coach and a graduate student, and through the Coach Group, I lived the theories and passed them on.

In this chapter, I give an account of how I came to understand coach work and feminist work to work together as one. I begin by providing a discussion of the publications and texts I selected for the Coach Group to read and discuss as well as some other pedagogical decision-making that went into the planning of the group. Next, I provide a brief overview feminism and its goals over time and discuss in more detail feminist practices engendered by the movement including the consciousness-raising group, feminist education, sisterhood, feminist critical practice, and feminist advocacy. I then offer narrative excerpts from various Coach Group meetings and transcriptions of one-on-one

interviews I held with each coach. Using the data provided, I draw connections between research on instructional coaching and traditions of feminist practice, specifically discussing the practices of the consciousness-raising group and feminist education. I build the argument that instructional coaches can lean into traditions of feminist practice to coach differently and that through coaching in these ways, coaches can also serve the feminist movement. My overall aim is to position instructional coaching as an avenue for feminist practice while simultaneously positioning feminist practice as an “*ethico-onto-epistem-ology*,” (Barad, 2007, p. 90) coaches can use to cultivate their craft.

The Coach Group: An Invitation to Thinking Theoretically

The various theoretical frameworks and concepts I was introduced to throughout my doctoral studies transformed nearly every aspect of my life such as how I understand, how I learn, how I think, how I speak, how I act including my interactions, and how I exist, and therefore, how I coach. Thus, one intention of this study was to duplicate, on a much smaller scale, an introduction of theoretical concepts and theoretically-informed research for other instructional coaches to see what happens or could happen with their coaching practice when they were invited to thinking theoretically during group meetings. In designing this research study and planning for Coach Group meetings, much thought went into how we would spend our time together, especially including what theoretical texts I would provide for the group to read and discuss. In this section, I will discuss the texts I chose for the group to read and why. I will also discuss some other pedagogical decisions I made as I prepared for Coach Group meetings.

The Texts

I encountered each of the texts selected for the Coach Group to read through my doctoral studies, some as a part of my course reading and others as I branched out into my own interests and research. The texts chosen for the Coach Group are ones that have “stuck” with me since my initial readings and in my many re-readings and are listed below in the order they were read and discussed throughout the group meetings¹⁵:

- Lisa Delpit’s (1988) article, “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children”
- Michel Foucault’s (1978/1976) chapter, “Method,” in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*
- Michel Foucault’s (1977/1975) chapter, “Panopticism,” in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*
- Bronwyn Davies’ (1991) article, “The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructural Analysis”
- bell hooks’ (2015) chapter, “Changing Perspectives on Power,” in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*

Each text chosen includes poststructural and/or feminist theorizations of the concept of power as I assume the discourse of coaching to be entrenched in workings of power and poststructural and feminist theories as one way to deconstruct and reimagine the instructional coach, as I have previously discussed in chapters one and two. I intended to provoke thought, conversation, and perhaps action in practice as the group members

¹⁵ For a full reference list of texts read and discussed by the Coach Group, see the Coach Group Text List in Appendix C.

discussed the texts and related the various conceptions of power to their practice and experiences. Although each reading chosen falls within the poststructural and/or feminist frameworks, I intentionally included nuanced orientations of power to additionally help illuminate for the group that the ethico-onto-epistem-ologies of individuals drive what they can think, write, and produce. In doing this, I hoped the readings would begin to explicitly bridge theory and practice for the Coach Group members and perhaps ignite a want within the women to search for and connect to other theories, scholars, and texts that could transform their practice in ways meaningful to them.

Additionally, I also attempted to choose texts that were accessible to the women of the Coach Group, who I presumed did not have much experience in reading texts that include explicit use of theoretical language such as Delpit's (1988) and hooks' (2015) pieces or could become accessible as I led the group through the text such as Foucault's (1977/1975, 1978/1976) and Davies' (1991) works. Later in this chapter, I will analyze and discuss how the women of the Coach Group took up these readings during our time together and how the readings helped to engage the women in feminist practice as they navigated their roles as coaches.

Pedagogical Choices

After determining the texts the Coach Group would read, there were also certain pedagogical decisions I made for how the group would engage with the selected readings when we met. For example, each text was assigned for group members to read as "homework" with the exclusion of the first text read, Delpit (1988), during the first Coach Group meeting. Much like the experiences I had as a graduate student, I thought prompting the women to read the texts outside of the group would give them time to sit with what

they read, reread as they wished, and begin thinking about and connecting to the theorizations of each author. I encouraged group members to mark up each text, make notes, jot questions, and include any other annotations that could enhance our discussions when we met to discuss. Prior to sending the women off to read, I planned an introduction for each text including the background of each author, the theoretical framework, and other information I thought pertinent. I also made pedagogical decisions surrounding how each text would collectively be discussed and analyzed during meeting times, which I discuss more thoroughly in the later parts of this chapter.

In addition to discussing the texts, there were also other activities I planned for the group to complete during our meetings such as various writing exercises, inquiry-based activities, and activities that prompted and required the women to discuss their past and current coaching experiences¹⁶. Group members were also asked to keep a “coach journal” throughout the four-months of the study where they were encouraged to write about their ongoing coaching experiences, what they are thinking, what they are feeling, and so on, and bring the journal to each meeting.

My intention behind planning these other activities was to foster an explicit connection between theory and practice for the women of the group. For example, while discussing each text, the women were asked to partner with one another to think about an entry from each of their coach journals alongside the orientation of power just read. I planned prompts for the women to think through this such as:

- How is *insert author*’s conception of power present in your writing?

¹⁶ See the Coach Group Meeting Guides in Appendix A for more details regarding the planning of each Coach Group meeting such as the sequence and pacing of each meeting and all writing prompts, discussions, and other activities for the group to complete.

- What would *insert author* say about your coaching moment?
- How can you use *insert author*'s conception of power to understand or interpret your coaching moment in a different way?

As the women completed this activity, I floated around the room to listen in and provide probing prompts like “Say more,” and “What do you mean?” While it was my intention to learn alongside the other women of the group as I facilitated the meetings and for all of us to having equal standing within the group, I understood that my role would be different as I inquired into the questions driving my research. For example, my role would require me at times to teach the women and at other times to be outside of the activities to observe and listen so I could decide where to take the group next. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss in more detail the planned activities of the Coach Group as I work to frame instructional coaching as a feminist practice following the brief overview of feminism provided next.

A Brief Overview of Feminism

The feminist movement has a long, complex, and diverse history that some understand in “waves,” or a sequenced categorization of the goals and work of feminists. While what follows is an overly simplistic synopsis of decades of work and research, I include it to provide a brief bit of context regarding the feminist movement for readers of this dissertation that may be unaware¹⁷. Beginning in the 1800s, the first-wave of feminists sought to attain women’s rights such as the right to vote and own property (e.g., Mott,

¹⁷ While providing a more detailed overview of the feminist movement is beyond of the scope of this dissertation, I recommend readers to see texts such as Estelle Freedman’s (2002) *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* and bell hooks’ (2015a) *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* to learn more about the large and diverse feminist movement.

1849; Stanton et al., 2018/1848-61), whereas second-wave feminists of the mid-twentieth century worked toward equality in the workplace and at home, gaining women's reproductive rights, and more (e.g., de Beauvoir, 1953/1949; Firestone, 1970; Rubin, 1975). Today, we sit somewhere between the third- and fourth-waves, navigating the nuances of women's identities, considering how feminism can best serve all women, publicly drawing attention to rape culture and other sexual assault issues, protesting and lobbying to ensure the women's reproductive rights attained decades before remain, and more (e.g., Burke, 2021; Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Spivak, 1988). It is important to note that feminism simultaneously entails a movement, theory, and practice, or in other words, feminism is a politics (hooks, 2015a, 2015b; Weedon, 1997). By politics, I mean an "activity, process, policy, *and* productive force" that seeks to change a system (Lloyd, 2005, p. 173). In the case of feminism, the overarching system is that of patriarchy¹⁸, which is upheld by the systemic practices of sexism and misogyny.

As the goals of the feminist movement have evolved, the literature, research, and theories composing the field have grown and multiplied. At times, different subgroups within the feminist movement have been at odds with one another (hooks, 2015a, 2015b; Weedon, 1997). Women of color and others outside of the white, middle- to upper-class,

¹⁸ Patriarchy is a system of domination that ensures the "social, political, and interpersonal power and superiority of men" through maintaining gendered binaries such as male/female and man/woman (Jones, Accepted - 2024, p. 2). Jones (Accepted - 2024) writes of "systemic expressions of patriarchal masculinity," or ways patriarchal logic manifests in systems (including the school) such as hierarchical thinking and competition (p. 2). The related concepts of sexism and misogyny work together to uphold the system of patriarchy. While sexism is the "*system of beliefs*" that perceives gendered differences between men and women that position men as the dominant sex, misogyny is the "*system of discipline*" that polices and punishes those that act outside of or against the patriarchy (Jones, 2020). Where sexism sets the stage for patriarchal thinking through positioning women as inferior, misogyny works to enforce the system. See Kate Manne's (2017) book, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, for more on sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy and Stephanie Jones' 2020 article, "Repeat After Me: Mi-sog-y-ny: Belittling and Controlling Women and Teachers," and accepted 2024 article, "Dismantling Patriarchy in Teacher Education," for a discussion of these terms in the contexts of teaching and teacher education.

academic realm have worked to mold the movement into one responsive to the lives and struggles of all women no matter their race, class, education, or any other marginalizing factor (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981, 2015a; Spivak, 1988).

Further, as feminist groups organized throughout the first- and second-wave, traditions of feminist practice solidified. For example, the consciousness-raising group became a site for women to gather in community, learn from and with one another, and take the first steps toward action. The central purpose of the consciousness-raising group was for women to learn about the patriarchy and sexist oppression and to identify and challenge their own sexist thinking (hooks, 2015a, 2015b; Weedon, 1997). As hooks (2015a) reflects on the consciousness-raising group, "Before women could change patriarchy we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness," (p. 7). Early consciousness-raising groups were therapeutic, healing, and allowed women to vent in ways that "uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds," (hooks, 2015a, p. 8). As consciousness-raising groups transformed, they became sites for women to convert to feminism via conversation (hooks, 2015a). According to hooks (2015a), feminist conversation within the consciousness-raising group included open dialogue and debate yet marshalled the principle of voice equity.

Feminism also made its entry into the academy through the development of women's studies departments and as a result, a plethora of feminist theorizations, research, and literature were published (e.g., Haraway, 1988; Hartsock, 1983; Mies, 1983). As hooks (2015a) explains, the goal of feminist education was to "[explain] to women and men how sexist thinking worked and how we could challenge and change it," (p. 19). Whether through the consciousness-raising group or women's study courses, educating

women through feminist education became a primary means for spreading word about the movement and a necessary first step in preparing feminists for advocacy (hooks, 2015a, 2015b; Weedon, 1997).

Additionally, sisterhood was positioned as a feminist practice that bonds and unifies women into an organized front. hooks (2015b) explains that historically women have been pitted against one another¹⁹, but that through learning to communicate and overcome hostility toward one another, sisterhood across difference can be attained. The practice of sisterhood supports and enriches the lives of women as they work together to attain the goals of the feminist movement (hooks, 2015a; 2015b). In this way, “Sisterhood is powerful,” became the slogan of the feminist movement during the second-wave and is one that hooks (2015a) argues is still relevant today.

Another feminist practice of note, critical practice, materialized from feminist poststructuralism. Weedon (1997) states that feminist critical practice can be applied to any discursive practice, or practice unique to and commensurable only within a particular setting or institution, such as dress, jargon, mannerisms, institutionalized processes and norms, and so on. According to Weedon, critical practice analyzes how a discursive practice is structured, names power relations the practice produces or reproduces including points of resistance, and illuminates cracks within the structure that could be challenged for transformation to occur. Given that feminism is the movement to end sexism and the oppression of those that are perceived or identify as women, investigating, navigating, and

¹⁹ This is an important claim in the context of education as teachers, most of whom are women, are often set against one another in terms of competition, and I argue against coaches, and one that is illuminated in feminist educational research (e.g., Gillespie & Thompson, 2021; Pittard, 2015; Thompson, 2023; Thompson & Jones, 2021).

negotiating power relations across various lines through critical practice seems fundamental in order to advocate for and attain the goals of the movement.

Finally, the practice of advocacy sought to spread the goals of the feminist movement beyond the consciousness-raising group and engender change at various levels. Feminist advocacy became both the public call for change through campaigning, lobbying, and other political acts, as well as the act of inspiring others to join the movement (Evans, 2005). Myers and Tronto (1998) discuss feminist advocacy in the classroom and claim that all professors (and I argue, teachers) are advocates. For example, whether educators take the stance of advocate or claim neutrality, the act of creating a course syllabus positions certain theories, research, and ideas as worth knowing. The authors claim feminist advocacy in the classroom to also include questioning techniques that foreground assumptions and demand “greater clarity for accepted truths,” (p. 808). No matter the foothold, advocacy remains central within feminist practice.

The feminist practices of consciousness-raising, feminist education, sisterhood, critical practice, and advocacy while discussed separately above, work together to serve the goals of the feminist movement. For example, the consciousness-raising group serves as a site for feminist education to occur and the bonds of sisterhood to grow. Within the consciousness-raising group, critical practice can also occur which as a result, can lead to the development of plans for advocacy, and so on. In summary of the above feminist practices, I am reminded of hooks’ (2015a) claim, “Feminists are made, not born,” (p. 7). In other words, being born or identifying as a woman does not make one a feminist. It is through engaging in feminist practices like those described above that women can become chariots for the feminist movement.

Defining Feminism

The work of feminists is vast, complex, and diverse. While various definitions of feminism exist within the literature, I understand feminism to be a movement to dismantle patriarchy as a system of power as well as the practices of sexism and misogyny that uphold the patriarchy. The thinking of feminist theorists and researchers helps to inform my understanding such as Jones' (Accepted – 2024) and Manne's (2017) discussions of the interrelated yet distinct systems of patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny. For example, Jones (Accepted – 2024) writes:

To understand how patriarchy operates is to also understand how patriarchy creates and perpetuates capitalism (and economic exploitation and classism), neoliberalism (and a hyper individualism), white supremacy (and racism), and colonialism (and erasure of indigeneity) as systems to reinforce patriarchal control (Taylor, 2021). (p. 2)

Jones helps me to understand the endeavor of feminism as linked with other movements seeking to end other systems of domination. Other feminists note this, too, such as hooks (2013) who uses the phrase "*imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*" when discussing the interlocking systems of domination that does not privilege one form of domination over another (p. 4).

I lean into hooks' writings on feminism to further guide my understanding. For example, hooks (2015a) does not point to men as the sole enemy of feminists, but notes that women and children can also embrace patriarchal logic and perpetuate sexism and misogyny. hooks explains, "we have all been socialized to embrace patriarchal thinking, to embrace an ethics of domination which says the powerful have the right to rule over the

powerless and can use any means to subordinate them,” (p. 74). This distinction by hooks calls to me as an educator given that the school is both a patriarchal institution (Davies & Hunt, 1994; Grumet, 1988; hooks, 1994; Jones, 2011, 2020, Accepted – 2024; Jones & Woglom, 2013; Walkerdine, 1989) and one primarily made up of women and children.

It is also important to note that as I think with feminist theory and research in the pages to follow, I do so from my privileged position as a white, cisgender, heterosexual, middleclass woman. Many feminists name and trouble the overgeneralizations made by white feminists and the call for universal goals to drive the movement (e.g., Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks 2015a, 2015b; Lorde, 1981; Love, 2019). For example, Lorde (1981), a black, queer feminist and theorist, writes:

Our personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action. The failure of academic feminist to recognize difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, define and conquer must become define and empower. (p. 2)

Thus, I will attempt to write from my nuanced viewpoint and position only where I “reach without overextending myself” in the pages to follow (Manne, 2017, p. 14). These are the understandings of feminism that guide me as I work to position coaching as feminist practice throughout this chapter and dissertation.

Instructional Coaching Meets Feminist Practice

In the second half of this chapter, I discuss two practices the Coach Group engaged in during each group meeting: the opening ritual and text-based discussions. I begin the discussion of each practice by first providing more insight into the pedagogical and methodological choices and decisions I made to prepare for each of these group practices.

After, I include a narrative account of the practice in action during one Coach Group meeting. I then use the narrative as well as other transcriptions from Coach Group meetings and the one-on-one interviews with each of the women to draw connections between the work of the instructional coach and feminist practice. Through this discussion, I build the argument that instructional coaches can use traditions of feminist practice to refine their coaching craft. The feminist practice I investigate in this chapter are the consciousness-raising group and feminist education as I felt they were most connected to the experiences with the Coach Group. In chapter four I will center the use of feminist and poststructural theories to coach differently. I will also weave principles of sisterhood and advocacy throughout my discussions of the consciousness-raising group and feminist education in the pages to come.

The Opening Ritual

Pedagogy and Methodology

Over the months I spent with the Coach Group, we began each meeting in a similar manner. What are our hopes for the meeting? What are our fears? After posting our hopes and fears to the t-chart²⁰, we voiced them out loud. We made connections between what we each had written, posed questions to one another, and offered opinions and perspectives on each other's and our own statements. Naming our hopes and fears during our time together became the Coach Group's opening ritual.

In planning for the Coach Group opening ritual prior to the first Coach Group meeting, I was largely inspired by the "Fears and Hopes Protocol" from the Center for

²⁰ See Appendix D for a photograph of the Fears and Hopes Chart the women of the Coach Group added their fears and hopes to each Coach Group meeting.

Leadership and Educational Equity (CLEE) (2021). CLEE states the purpose of the protocol is “to establish a norm of ownership by the group of every individual’s expectations and concerns: to get these into the open, and to begin addressing them together.” Like CLEE, I thought opening with a discussion of what we each hoped to get from the group and feared could come from the group would bond group members together and push us to make initial connections and begin to develop community.

I also leaned into my knowledge from coaching publications that provide protocols and activities like the “Fears and Hopes Protocol” for coaches to use when they begin work with individual teachers or teacher groups during my planning process. For example, Deacon and Harkness’s (2020) process “Developing Coach/Teacher Partnership Agreements,” provides prompts such as “Will we communicate any of our coaching work to the principal?” and “In our coaching partnership, what roles do we take on?” for coaches and teachers to use to develop a written norming agreement before coaching begins (p. 240)²¹. Similar to the “Fears and Hopes Protocol,” the “Developing Coach/Teacher Partnership Agreements” process addresses benefits teachers hope to gain when working with coaches and illuminates any concerns teachers may have before beginning work with a coach. Encouraging the women of the group to record their fears and hopes on a sticky note and placing those notes on a designated chart served as my interpretation of a written agreement that emphasized our hopes for the group and shifted each fear from an individual burden to being shouldered by the collective. Melding together the “Fears and

²¹ Coaches developing “Partnership Agreements” with teachers prior to beginning coach work is a practice currently endorsed by the school district that employs all Coach Group members including myself. This practice was first introduced to me during my time in my school district’s coach induction program in the 2020-2021 school year. I currently serve as an administrator sponsor for two teachers in the same program where developing “Partnership Agreements” remains part of the coursework.

Hopes Protocol” (2021), the “Developing Coach/Teacher Partnership Agreements” process (Deacon & Harkness, 2020), and other coaching publications’ processes for beginning work with teachers and groups I have been exposed to throughout my career (e.g., Aguilar, 2013, 2018), I planned a ritual to open each meeting that would “break the ice” and help forge community among the coaches.

The narrative to follow is my account of the opening moments of the first Coach Group meeting that took place in September. To write the narrative, and the other narrative included later in this chapter, I referred to various pieces of data generated from my time spent with the Coach Group including videos and transcriptions of Coach Group meetings, reflections from a journal I kept, voice notes I left myself when journaling wasn’t an option, screenshots of text messages sent and received in reference to this study, artifacts created by the Coach Group, my memories, and more. Following the narrative, I analyze the Coach Group moment and draw connections between the moment accounted, other data generated through this study, instructional coaching literature, and feminist theory to take my first steps toward fusing instructional coaching and feminist practice. I then repeat this process with a second moment from the Coach Group centering the group practice of text-based discussion before concluding the chapter.

Narrative: Fears and Hopes

The window of Bear Elementary’s Professional Development Room provides a bird’s eye view of the playground, its adjoining field, and the small plot of wooded land that encircles the grounds of the school, nestling the school within a suburb of a major southern U.S. city. I peer out the window taking in the serenity of the scene in the late afternoon. The calm in these after-school hours is much different than the playful chaos that ensued on

these same grounds only hours earlier during recess. I take a few calming breaths before turning away to take a seat at the tables I pushed together in the center of the room, forming a space large enough for all the women coming to sit together.

On this sunny September day, the Coach Group meets for the first time. I straighten the excerpts from two publications I copied and prepared for the members of the group to use during today's meeting, Lisa Delpit's (1988) "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children" and Michel Foucault's (1978/1976) chapter "Method" from *History of Sexuality*. We will read and discuss these later. I eye the snack table I prepared earlier displaying mini-sandwiches, chips, candy, diet cola, and sparkling water and decide I feel too uneasy to eat. I sit and wait.

Later, Bea, Caitlin, Fran, and I each have two sticky notes ready before us. Formal introductions, an ice breaker activity, and a visit to the food table have already transpired. I pause to take in the women before me. Seated across the table from myself is Fran. She is undoubtedly the most experienced coach of the bunch. Having taught for 26 years, Fran is now in her ninth year as the kindergarten through fifth grade literacy coach at Swan Elementary, a Title I school that feeds into the same high school as Bear Elementary, my home school. I always feel for Fran. After her school named a new principal two years ago and experienced substantial staff turnover, she lost her math coaching partner. Fran's been coaching solo ever since.

The coach from Bear Elementary and my coaching partner, Caitlin, sits next to Fran. Caitlin has two more years of teaching experience than me. While she taught for eight years before becoming a coach, I taught for six. This year begins our third year coaching together at Bear Elementary, another Title I school. Caitlin coaches all subjects in kindergarten

through second grade, and I do the same for grades three through five. Caitlin and I describe our coaching partnership turned friendship as a “yinyang” situation. Where I taught upper grades, she taught lower. Where I served as a model classroom and mentor for math, she served as one for literacy. Where I am extroverted and talkative, she is introverted and calm, and so on. I am grateful for Bear ES for bringing us together and for Caitlin for being all the things I am not.

Sitting next to me is Bea. Like Caitlin, Bear ES introduced me to Bea. We taught fourth grade together for three years before I became a coach. Bea taught for a total of seven years before she was promoted to being the sole social studies coach for the District Office this school year. As a district coach, Bea serves all 81 elementary schools in our school district in regard to social studies curriculum and instruction. I know Bea has been nervous about her new coaching role and hope she feels more at peace with her promotion soon.

Heather is not with us today because of a previous engagement, but she will join next time. I informed the other women during the introductions earlier that Heather is a math and science coach for all grade levels at Ant Elementary, another Title I school in our school district. Heather taught for four years and is now on her third year of coaching. I am excited for the other women to meet Heather next time. As far as I know, no one else in the group knows Heather outside of myself.

I have asked the women to record two things on each sticky note – a hope and a fear. “If this is the worst meeting you ever attend, what would happen? What is your fear? On the flip side, what is your hope for this meeting? What is the best possible thing that could happen during our time together today?” I pose these questions to the group.

We ponder and we write our thoughts. I am the first to finish and rise from seat. I place my two sticky notes on a t-chart posted to the front wall I had prepared beforehand labeled “Fears” and “Hopes.” I linger by the chart. One by one, each of the other women add their hopes and fears to the chart. Once all fears and hopes are posted, I begin a conversation around what each of us has written.

Morgan: I can start with my fear. [reads off chart] Everyone thinks this [group] is stupid and a waste of time. This is not a fear stemming from just today. You can ask, Caitlin. I have not shut up about this group being a waste of time. That’s my fear.

Caitlin: No, she hasn’t, and as I’ve told her, the group is going to be great and everyone wants to be here.

Bea: Mine is that in talking to you guys, I will find out I’ve made a horrible mistake I wasn’t aware of before and that it negatively impacts all 81 schools.

Caitlin: That is what mine is essentially. After talking with you guys, I realize I’ve done everything so wrong and ruined so many teachers.

Bea: It’s like looking back to your first year of teaching.

Caitlin: Exactly and you’re like, “Oh, how could I have done that?”

Fran: Mine’s about not fitting in. Like, “They [gesturing to the other group members] all have it going on,” and I’m over here going, “Oh my gosh, what have I been doing?”

Caitlin: You’re fitting in so far because all three of us have the same fears.

Morgan: Wow, great point. Let’s share our hopes.

Bea: I hope we can figure the special ingredient that makes coaching effective that isn't power. That we don't have to give ourselves more power to make it work.

Caitlin: [reads off chart] That we can build this community and have support and safe space to figure this stuff out together.

Morgan: [reads off chart] Everyone loves being here and is excited to come back next time. [pauses] I'm noticing my hope and fear both focus on what everyone else is thinking and feeling.

Bea: I think you keep thinking we're all doing you a really big favor, when I think we are all going to really benefit from it [the group]. So, you need to have a mental switch. This [group] is for all of us.

Fran: That's right. Mine is to leave energized and to learn new things for me. I know I have a lot of experience as a coach, but what changes can we make.

Caitlin: I just feel good. [pauses] My hope is to build a community of coaches to grow with and have for support. We're all coming with very similar hopes and fears, which makes me excited about where this is going to go. Even though they [the hopes and fears] are not worded exactly the same, they are in the same category, and I feel like this a good group to do this stuff.

Bea: I feel we are all nonjudgmental. I think it's the root of all our fears: judging each other.

Caitlin: And judging myself.

Analysis

In analysis of the above moment from the first Coach Group meeting, it seems the opening ritual served a purpose beyond connecting the coaches and putting in the open their wishes for and concerns about the group, that purpose being to allow time and space for the women of the group to voice, digest, and perhaps rethink troubling inner-monologues that perpetuate patriarchal logic. For example, a commonality within each Coach Group members' fear is that of judgement, both of oneself and by others. While Bea and Caitlin feared having to judge their own coaching ability, Fran considered the other women of the group and in judgement of herself worried she may not fit in. I, on the other hand, considered how the others would judge the Coach Group itself. Self-doubt lurked in the vulnerabilities we shared such as in Caitlin's voiced fear which as follows, "After talking with you guys, I realize I've done everything so wrong and ruined so many teachers."

Educational researchers have also long shared stories of the fearful, insecure, worried (and more) woman teacher (e.g., Gillespie, 2024; Grumet, 1988; Walkerdine, 2003). For example, Hughes-Decatur (2011) describes this phenomenon of women teachers as "*bodily-not-enoughness* – the idea of not being enough of *something*," (p. 73) and Pittard (2015) names the subject position of the "*good enough woman teacher*" where women teachers continually strive to attain the impossible standard of enough (p. 19). For the women of the Coach Group, the feeling of not being enough or being good enough was certainly woven throughout our discussion as we engaged the Fears and Hope protocol.

Furthermore, this moment with the Coach Group illuminates gender normativity at work that had conditioned Coach Group members, including myself, into a certain, ideal

representation of femininity²² as teachers and that continued to produce us as instructional coaches in ways that serve the patriarchal school setting. For example, discussions centering student proficiency and our effectiveness led by administrators during evaluation conferences as teachers, and now coaches, stand as one experience that could have helped to foster the inner-narrative of self-doubt we expressed through the opening ritual. Additionally, being that proficiency measures are never met by all students and teachers/coaches are thus always ineffective, we are produced again and again as not-enough. And as the insecure, fearful teacher/coach who is never good enough, we become silenced, even “infantilized,” (Jones & Woglom, 2013) and the act of speaking or acting against the consequences of patriarchy is not possible. The many gendered ways women educators are produced “is a ploy to keep us confined, powerless, and obedient,” (Friedan, 1963) and one that helps to maintain and sustain the patriarchy. Analysis of this early moment with the Coach Group helps me to recognize the gendered ways we had been produced as teachers and coaches throughout our career and begin to understand some of the practices the group engaged in as feminist.

For example, making space for the women of the Coach Group to share their vulnerabilities is reminiscent of aspects of the feminist movement’s consciousness-raising group. During the onset of second-wave feminism in the 1960s, the consciousness-raising group served as a site for women to gather, converse, form community, and determine actionable strategies for the movement. hooks (2015a) explains that consciousness-raising

²² Feminist literature includes abundant descriptions of traditional ideals of femininity (e.g., de Beauvoir, 1952/1949; Friedan, 1963) such as rendering the woman as one who is passive, docile, caring, nurturing, doubtful, shameful, weak, understood only as what is not masculine. “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential... she is the Other,” (de Beauvoir, 1952/1949, p. xix).

groups provided women with an avenue to vent, reveal their wounds, and heal in relation to the trauma they had suffered from sexist oppression. According to hooks, before women can participate in action strategies, women must first “transform the enemy within,” with that enemy being the patriarchy (p. 12). To transform the enemy within, women recognize their sexist beliefs such as understanding women as inferior and weak compared to men yet pure, innocent, nurturing, and so on, and confront how their own sexist thinking and embodied ways of feeling manifest against other women and their own self²³.

The women of the Coach Group began this consciousness-raising work through the opening ritual. In putting our fears in the open, we admitted to feelings of not being enough and shared our worry of being judged by one another. According to hooks (2015a), this “confessional aspect” of consciousness-raising groups helps women to heal and begin the process of garnering strength to confront the patriarchy in the workplace and at home (p. 8). For hooks (2015c), healing is “about ways to make the hurt go away,” (p. 7) and “occurs through testimony, through gathering together everything available to you and reconciling,” (p. 17). In review of the transcripts from the one-on-one interviews I held with each of the women following the final Coach Group meeting, venting-type conversations like those that stemmed from the opening ritual may have provided the women with emotional relief and possible healing moments as they garnered the courage to do something differently in their coach work. For example, when asked how she

²³ The consciousness-raising group has largely been criticized for a variety of reasons such as the universalizing generalizations about women everywhere groups have been said to produce and the trickiness that comes from groups when raising consciousness can become replacing consciousness. See Leggett (2020) for more on the history of the consciousness-raising group and some of its critiques. However, as I explain throughout the remainder of this section, I find a reclaiming of some of the practices of the consciousness-raising group as a potentially fruitful implication for meeting groups of coaches. For the Coach Group, consciousness-raising was more an invitation to thinking theoretically rather than an imposing of a new or “correct” consciousness upon the group members’ existing consciousness.

experienced belonging to the Coach Group and the conversations we had together, Fran stated:

I think there's that feeling of, I would say this on the little sticky notes and stuff [referring to the "Fears and Hopes" opening ritual], feeling empowered. That's just a big word for me because I love the word empowered. The group challenged [my] belief system, but I felt supported and included. There was a feeling of inclusivity. I felt that I was part of something... I left there feeling a little lighter [pause]. After, our groups, I felt lighter.

For Fran, the "non-hierarchical model for discussion," common within consciousness-raising groups (hooks, 2015a, p. 8) and the Coach Group, fostered feelings of support and inclusion among group members. Further, Fran's leaving from the group feeling "lighter" possibly reflects personal healing that occurred for her from group activities. hooks (2003) explains that before one can go forward, one must first heal, which also seemed to be the case for Fran. As Fran went on to explain in her response:

I felt they're people I could call on if I need to. And that's a big thing, because I do feel like an island sometimes. It was nice to be positive [in the group], but also to be able to talk about the struggles. That helps me reset and think about where I want to go. What kind of coach to I want to be?

It seems the perceived sense of support, connection, and healing garnered by the group nudged Fran to reflect on her coaching practice and consider ways to take on the role differently. In discussing the consciousness-raising group, Leggett (2020) notes, "the idea behind going through this process as a collective is that there's power in numbers," (p.

239). For Fran, the sense she was not alone but a part of the group with shared struggles encouraged her toward a different way of coaching.

A subsequent practice of the consciousness-raising group following the healing conversations described above is to turn group conversation toward identifying patriarchal logic within group members and, later, replacing sexist thought with feminist thought and strategies through feminist education, which includes the reading of feminist theory (hooks, 2015a). While the opening ritual of the Coach Group did not serve this end, other practices performed by the Coach Group did such as text-based discussions we engaged in during each meeting. In the section to follow, I will next discuss the text-based discussions of the Coach Group.

Text-based Discussions

Pedagogy and Methodology

During each Coach Group meeting, thirty to fifty minutes were reserved for analyzing and discussing excerpts by various feminist and post-structural theorists and writers and considering how the theories read could inform or be applied to our coaching practice. Each of the excerpts were read by group members as “homework” between meeting dates, with the exclusion of the reading for the first Coach Group meeting where time was allotted to read the text during the meeting²⁴. Most often, Coach Group members broke into partnerships or triads to analyze the text where their discussions were centered around the recurring prompt, “How does *insert author name* conceive of power? How do

²⁴ See the Coach Group Text List in Appendix C for more information regarding the texts read by Coach Group members and the Coach Group Meeting Guides in Appendix A for specific time allotted to engage in analysis and discussion of texts during each meeting and the analysis prompts and protocols provided to guide the Coach Group in this practice.

you know?” After, I would lead the women in a whole group discussion. Conversations remained text-based but at times also connected to the women’s personal lives, the school setting, and the instructional coaching context. At the end of each text-based discussion, we collectively added to a three-column t-chart titled “We Know...,” “We Believe...,” and “We Will...”²⁵.

Prior to the first Coach Group meeting, I combined research from instructional coaching publications and my personal experience from my doctoral coursework to plan for our first text-based discussion. For example, the We Know, We Believe, We Will Chart was inspired by Elena Aguilar’s (2013) work on transformational coaching. Aguilar describes transformational coaches to go beyond planning the *doing* of coaching to also consider what they *think* and *believe* about coaching and how their ways of *being* as a coach can inform their coaching practice (p. 20). The “We Know” column of the Coach Group chart captured our thinking related to the texts we read and “We Believe” included connections we made to the text at the belief level. The “We Will” column pushed us to consider how our thinking and beliefs inform our ways of being as coaches and the things we do when we coach. I also kept Aguilar’s (2020) Six Conditions in Which Beliefs Change forefront throughout my planning process. For instance, I attempted to create a sense of safety within the group environment by encouraging the women to analyze the texts intimately as partners before discussing as a whole group to evoke Aguilar’s first condition for belief change, “We feel safe enough,” (p. 148). Considering the above context, the partnerships served as a safe space for the women to flesh out their thinking before bringing their

²⁵ See Appendix E for a photograph of the We Know, We Believe, We Will Chart the women of the Coach Group added to each Coach Group meeting.

thoughts to the whole group. For example, Bea posed her idea of simultaneous tearing and rebuilding of systems to Fran prior to expanding upon it with the whole group.

I also reflected on my time previously spent in doctoral classes having text-based discussions alongside professors and classmates. As aforementioned, my experience reading and discussing theory as a PhD student largely inspired the first research question of this dissertation: How can instructional coaches use theoretical concepts to make sense of their surroundings/experience and to coach differently? Thus, I chose text excerpts for the Coach Group to read that I read during my coursework that continue to pop up in my life and work as a coach and haunt me today such as Delpit 's (1988) article, "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children," and Foucault's (1977/1975) chapter, "Panopticism," from his book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. I modeled the Coach Group's analysis prompt after prompts Hilary Hughes, a professor of mine, repeatedly posed to me and my classmates during text-based discussions within an introductory Doctoral Orientation Seminar like "What argument is Foucault making in this section, specifically?"²⁶ Like Dr. Hughes, I crafted a prompt to support and guide the women of the group in their analysis of various texts. In planning for the text-based conversations to come with the Coach Group, I attempted to mirror pieces of my doctoral coursework experience that have remained impactful to me.

In merging Aguilar's (2013) research on transformational coaching, Aguilar's (2020) Six Conditions in Which Beliefs Change, and impactful experiences from my doctoral coursework, I attempted to plan an experience for the women of the group that could

²⁶ This prompt comes from the class presentation slides used by my professor, Hilary Hughes, in her Doctoral Orientation Seminar on October 14, 2019.

perhaps open new avenues for their coaching practice. Like Aguilar (2013), I thought to get to a different way of “doing” coaching, the group must also address (and possibly adjust) the thinking, beliefs, and ways of being guiding their practice. I implemented Aguilar’s (2020) Six Conditions in Which Beliefs Change to help aide in this process should any of the women be open to change regarding any of the above. I hoped that recreating an experience like my own from my doctoral classes by borrowing readings and prompts from my professors would furthermore open up the possibility for the women of the group to coach differently. The following narrative piece includes my account of one text-based discussion performed by the women of the group during the final Coach Group meeting.

Narrative: We Know... We Believe... We Will...

After four months of convening as a group monthly, I take in the four women sitting before me. No longer does an awkward silence fill the air, nor do I see darting eyes or fidgeting hands like I did during our first meeting back in September. On this December day, a light chatter fills the room as the women catch up with one another while I collect myself before the next segment of the meeting. We have just finished our opening ritual where Heather shared she hoped to “continue to learn from those in this group” and Bea mentioned she wished to “leave with a plan and a positive mindset.”

Scattered across the table we sit around are excerpts from book chapters and article journals we have read and discussed together, heavily highlighted and scribbled with our annotations. I spot notebooks for each group member, including myself, containing the notes we have jotted during meetings, responses to various writing exercises I prompted us to complete in previous meetings, and journaling we each have each done outside of the group. I pull the two “homework” readings from my folder the group will analyze and

discuss today. Both authored by feminist educational researchers, I set Bronwyn Davies's (1991) journal article "The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructural Analysis" and bell hooks' (2015b) chapter "Changing Perspectives on Power" from her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* before me. I clear my throat and begin.

Morgan: We'll dive into Davies first with partners, talk about it as a group, then fill out the [We Know, We Believe, We Will] chart and repeat with hooks... To give you a little background, Davies is definitely the harder read out of the two. She is an example of high theory. She is writing for academics similar to when we read Foucault... Whereas hooks, while she is an academic and well-known professor and researcher within the educational research community, she writes more accessibly for the [educational] practitioner and the feminist movement in general.

Caitlin: There's a lot of bell hooks out there. I didn't know who bell hooks was prior to meeting Morgan and then as I was reading [gestures to the hooks' excerpt], I was like "huh, bell hooks? I know her." And then as I keep reading new stuff later, I saw bell hooks again and was like "bell hooks? I'm currently reading her!" I never would have made that connection otherwise.

Bea: That's cool!

Later, the women break off into two groups, each gathered around opposing ends of the table. Bea is partnered with Fran and Caitlin with Heather. I spend my time bouncing between the two groups as they respond to the following prompt I had given them to discuss: How does Davies conceive of power? How do you know? I listen in as Bea and Fran discuss the text.

Bea: This is about the experience of women and why we feel like we can't get to the place we want to be. What's keeping us from things. I was trying to think about that alongside the experience of teachers and the parallels there... It's systematically set up for us to not be in power. Whether it's the language or something else. We can't fit into the power structures they've set up. We're trying to tear and build at the same time. It's so hard. I think teachers feel that way, too. The way we are trying to teach right now, the system set up is not conducive to student learning. We're tearing and building at the same time. It's exhausting.

Fran: Exhausting, yes, especially right now with all the new. I had a similar thought. Also, the whole idea around being worthy of recognition. It is something we all want and need, but we don't always feel worthy for it.

I continue to listen to both partnerships and contribute my own thoughts and wonderings when appropriate. After 10 minutes have passed, I bring the group back together.

Morgan: What are things we want to talk about as a whole group, questions, or things you want to point out?

Bea: We started with, "Yes, we're reading about women trying to get into a better place but also thinking about it as teachers trying to get into a better place with their teaching." I don't know if you guys thought of the same thing?

Morgan: I should add that I've chosen feminist theories because this is a group of just women and also because the elementary school has historically been compromised of mostly women, which makes our work feminist work. When

you think about elementary school, the ethic of care teachers give, the mothering that we do, our schools are set up that way because it's mostly always been women.

Bea: On page 51, the top paragraph towards the bottom, there's the line about... [reads from text] "inverting, inventing, and breaking old patterns." The metaphor I was talking to Fran about was with women trying to get to a place of equal voice with men, we have to tear down the building and also build it underneath us as we go to try to get to where they are. How impossible that is. I feel like it's the same with teaching. The way that the system is set up for kids and schools, if teachers are trying to do something different or help the kids a different way, it's almost impossible to do so because the structure in place is so tough.

Heather: [nods] And sometimes teachers will ask us things we don't necessarily have the authority to approve, but I think we do have power in instruction.

Caitlin: Yes, starting with that first idea thinking about teachers [reads from text] "An agent could well be defined as someone who was able to speak with authority." I feel like teachers have lost any sense of the idea that they are able to speak with authority. That's just been depleted. So, then they look to that next person, who is us [coaches], saying, "Okay, I don't have any agency to speak on this or make my own decisions. You must be the one who has it. Tell me." And then we're [coaches] here in the same situation saying, "Okay great, but we want you to have the authority to make those decisions. We're here to guide you to figure that out." At the same time, there are things we

[coaches] feel like we need to reach out for to people that are above us. It goes on and on. The authority to run things as you see fit is nonexistent in schools.

Morgan: I feel like a lot of what you guys are saying is related to something she [Davies] is talking about here which are discursive practices. A little background on that, we are in the school discourse. Within the school discourse, there is language that we use that people outside of school don't use. The way we dress, the ways we carry ourselves, the bodily practices in a school, the things that we talk about. Everything that goes into a being a person that exists in a school, that's the discourse, the discursive practices. The thinking behind it in post-structural theory is that there are things that are possible in a discourse and there are things that aren't possible. What she's [Davies] talking about here is the things we are able to do in our discourses to build something new. Going back to that thing about agency and how teachers aren't set up to make their own decisions right now and we [coaches] don't even feel like we can. On the bottom of 50 and 51, she's [Davies] rewriting the person to be [reads text] "an embodied speaker who at the same time constitutes and is constituted by discursive practices of the collectives of which they are a member." We are constituted by discourse and constitute discourse. I like how we can mobilize, invert, invent, and break old patterns. Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution, but the capacity to recognize or see what is going on.

Bea: And in the line with the third bullet point on page 51 [reads], “One would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an ‘other meaning.’” It made me think about when you’re talking with someone about something, they are never going to understand you unless they’re specifically listening to hear something new. So, if we’re trying to make change through conversations or relationships, it’s so dependent on the person you’re talking to.

We continue the discussion for three additional minutes. Then I grab a marker and prompt the group to consider what we could add to our We Know, We Believe, We Will Chart. Bea begins.

Bea: Something for the “We Believe,” something about systematic change is possible. I do believe that. I just don’t think it will be easy or quick. [Morgan writes: Systematic change is possible but won’t be quick or easy.]

Caitlin: For “We Know,” a first step is recognizing whatever it is that’s happening to then have the power to change. Or first we recognize and name whatever the behavior is to be able to enact change... [trails off]

Fran: I know what you’re saying.

Caitlin: Sometimes we are numb to it [the system] here [at school]. We don’t even pay attention. For example, why do we do what we do in CLT [Collaborative Learning Team, or a team that meets to collaborate around various instructional practices such as lesson planning]? It starts with noticing what’s happening.

Morgan: Recognizing and naming the system at work is a start to change?

Caitlin: Yes. [Morgan adds the above statement to the chart.]

Analysis

The above discussion centering Davies's (1991) journal article is reminiscent of other text-based conversations the Coach Group engaged in during our time together. By the fourth and final Coach Group meeting, the way we tackled text analysis and group discussion became ritualized, much like the "Fears and Hopes" opening. In analysis of the description provided above from the December meeting, I believe the text-based discussion process of the Coach Group may have served as a form of feminist education that prompted the women of the group to adjust their coaching beliefs, ways of being, and practice. More specifically, it seems that in having text-based conversations, the women of the group began the process of replacing their own sexist thinking and use of patriarchal logic with feminist thought and strategies and considering how to use their new feminist thinking and strategies to coach differently.

For example, the women discussed the authority coaches and teachers have in schools. Heather began the conversation by stating, "Sometimes teachers will ask us things we don't necessarily have the authority to approve," to which Caitlin explained her want to build agency within teachers to make their own decisions and not rely solely on her as a coach to be the decision-maker. In her response to Heather, Caitlin referenced Davies's (1991) definition of an agent "as someone who was able to speak with *authority*," (p. 51). Yet Caitlin also admitted, "At the same time, there are things we [coaches] feel like we need to reach out for to people that are above us. It goes on and on." Heather and Caitlin's perceived lack of agency of both teachers and coaches in this moment can be thought of as a production of patriarchal thinking and the hierarchies and binaries presumed in patriarchal logics and institutions such as the school.

Davies and Hunt (1994) describe binary logic to “[constitute] the world in hierarchical ways through its privileging of one term or category within the binary, and depriving the opposite term of sense in its own right,” (p. 389). In Caitlin’s case, the binary referenced is coach/teacher, where the coach is positioned above the teacher as both the knower and decision-maker. For Heather, the same followed for the binary of administrator/coach. In this way, the hierarchy of administrator > coach > teacher was formed. Caitlin and Heather’s inclination to consider who has authority and agency within schools in terms of binaries is no surprise. As Freedman (2002) reminds me, binary logic permeates history and present society, dating back to the folk stories and sacred texts of our ancestors.

Binary logic is engrained within us, but as St. Pierre (2000) points out, “since women are usually on the wrong side of binaries and at the bottom of hierarchies, feminists have troubled these structures that often brutalize women,” (p. 481). Although Heather and Caitlin demonstrated a recognition of patriarchal thinking in considering the authority teachers and coaches have in schools, the reading and discussion of Davies (1991) by the Coach Group offered the two women a feminist perspective of authority. According to Davies, “feminist, poststructuralist *authority* would not be coercive and would not be located within dominant discourses except insofar as it persuaded them to change themselves, to become more multiple, flexible and inclusive of different points of view,” (p. 51). Davies engenders the possibility for authority to be held by and shift between administrators, coaches, and teachers and for the school discourse to be accepting of varied thinking. In discussing coaching practice, Caitlin took hold of Davies’s feminist perspective

in stating, “we want you [teachers] to have the authority to make those decisions. We’re here to guide you to figure that out.”

In this text-based discussion moment, patriarchal logic appeared to lurk in Heather and Caitlin’s perspective of their coaching authority. But for Caitlin, it also seems feminist thought and strategy began to emerge in her thinking as the group considered ways to coach differently later on. For example, as the group added ideas to the We Know, We Believe, We Will Chart, Caitlin reflected, “Sometimes we are numb to it [the system] here [at school]. We don’t even pay attention... why do we do what we do...? It starts with noticing what’s happening.” Caitlin’s statement can be read as a cue from her reading of Davies (1991) for in the text, Davies writes, “Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognise that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted,” (p. 51). In this instance, Caitlin shifted from using binary logic that promotes a systematic, top-down structure where the coach is positioned as a cog in the machine to considering a feminist strategy that encourages the coach to recognize how the school positions the coach and consider ways to resist, not repeat, or change that positioning.

Additionally, Caitlin explained later in her one-on-one interview how she coached differently following the above text-based discussion with the Coach Group. Caitlin reflected:

I feel like I am more intentional with planning [my coach work] now... I’m finding that my plans are much more reflective and guide the teachers to be much more reflective than like product-based. There’s a shift in my intended outcomes as

opposed to when we started. Perfect example, when I last met with Tamara²⁷ about small group instruction, her biggest thing was her time. Because of this group... it gave me the idea to schedule an hour [for a substitute to cover her class] and do some of this work together to where we can figure out “What actually do I do [in small group instruction] when the data shows me this?” She walked away today with one group made and idea for one and then like half a plan for another one... Prior to [the Coach Group] the coaching may have been more of, “Let me come and see you doing a small group. Let me come model a small group for you. This is what a small group should look like and sound like. Go...” I never would have thought to block off time [with a substitute] to give her that time and not meet before school or after school... I don’t know if we were allowed to do it or not, but I went for it. Agency over my own. Not looking for any type of authority telling me I can or can't. And look, was it the most beautiful coaching in the world? Absolutely not, but she took away more from that than I think she has from any of the other times we’ve met.

In shifting her practice from “product-based” coaching to “reflective” coaching, Caitlin inverted the binary of concrete/abstract to “forge something new” in her coaching practice (Davies, 1991, p. 51).

For Caitlin, it seems recognizing her tendency to center coaching outcomes around products, as she was trained to do by her school district, allowed her to imagine a new way to coach where reflection and meeting the needs of the teacher are a part of the work. Or as Davies explains, “In understanding the discursive construction of self one [Caitlin was]

²⁷ All names of teachers mentioned by research participants are pseudonyms.

liberated from the burden of rationality which controls, dominates, and negates feeling, the concrete and the real in favour of the abstract,” (Davies, 1991, p. 51). Additionally, by “crossing traditional boundaries” and “breaking old patterns” of her school through securing a substitute for Tamara, Caitlin took feminist action toward “not what *is*, but what *might be*,” for coaching practice at her school (Davies, p. 51). As Caitlin also mentioned in her interview, “There is a lack of [teacher] agency and I don’t want to be part of that professional problem.” It seems in providing Tamara the opportunity to be coached in a way that respected her concern of time, Caitlin helped Tamara “to speak and to be heard,” (Davies, p. 51).

Through engaging in text-based discussions during our time together like the moment described above, the women of the Coach Group practiced feminist education. In discussing the thinking driving their coaching practice alongside new thinking emerging from feminist readings and other texts read, we were able to consider ways to coach differently informed by feminist thought and other theories. In reflection of the analyses above, these ways of coaching differently coupled with the healing evoked through the practice of consciousness-raising in other group rituals seems to have repositioned the women’s coaching practice as more responsive to the needs of teachers and students within their schools.

Conclusions

While perhaps seemingly dissimilar, both instructional coaches and feminists are in the business of change. While instructional coaches seek to improve teaching practice (Aguilar, 2013, 2020; Bocala & Holman; 2021; Dozier, 2014; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Jones & Rainville, 2014b; Joyce & Showers, 1980; Morrell, 2014; Rainville & Jones, 2008;

Skyes, 1996; Stephens & Mills, 2014; Walpole, 2021), feminists seek to improve the lives of women and eliminate domination of all forms (Freedman, 2002; hooks, 2015a, 2015b; Weedon, 1997). In attempting to determine ways to coach differently as a group, the women of the Coach Group help to illuminate that the practices of instructional coaches and feminists can perhaps work in tandem to inch closer to the goals of both parties.

More specifically, the coaches demonstrate that employing feminist practice in the context of coaching can engender new ways of coaching that potentially help themselves and the teachers they work with flourish as both women and educators. For example, a common practice within coaching literature is to prioritize creating a “culture of trust” (Aguilar, 2016, p. 39; Knight, 2018, p. 32) and building relationships (Aguilar, 2020; Knight, 2007) when beginning work with teachers. For some feminists, relational work is also central to the movement. The feminist concepts of sisterhood and solidarity call for “female bonding” and a “shared commitment” among feminists to help garner progress in their political efforts (hooks, 2015a, p. 15). But as feminists also point out, the work of raising consciousness and identifying “the enemy within,” or internalized sexism, within the individual woman must first be done before one can take feminist action (hooks, p. 14). As the women of the coach group began to do during our time together, naming their fears and venting about their problems and more alongside other women helped them to collectively begin to recognize their concerns and struggles as not “personal failings” but “socially produced conflicts and contradictions shared by many women,” (Weedon, 1997, p. 33). In the context of coaching, participating in consciousness-raising work both as coaches and alongside teachers during coaching may prove a fruitful practice for coaches prior to jumping into the instructional part of instructional coaching.

Another practice common in instructional coaching is to employ a coaching framework. For example, Knight's (2018) cycle of "identify, learn, improve" guides coaches to identify problems, learn solutions, and improve by making changes (p. 9). While not explicitly named as a framework, hooks' (2015a) descriptions of the feminist education that occurs in consciousness-raising groups where women identify sexist thinking, replace sexist thinking with feminist thought, and identify feminist strategies for women to use in their lives perhaps offers a different pathway for coaches. As modeled by the women of the Coach Group, reading and discussing feminist theories can serve as a catalyst for coaches to reflect on their coaching practice and try out things within their coaching they never have before.

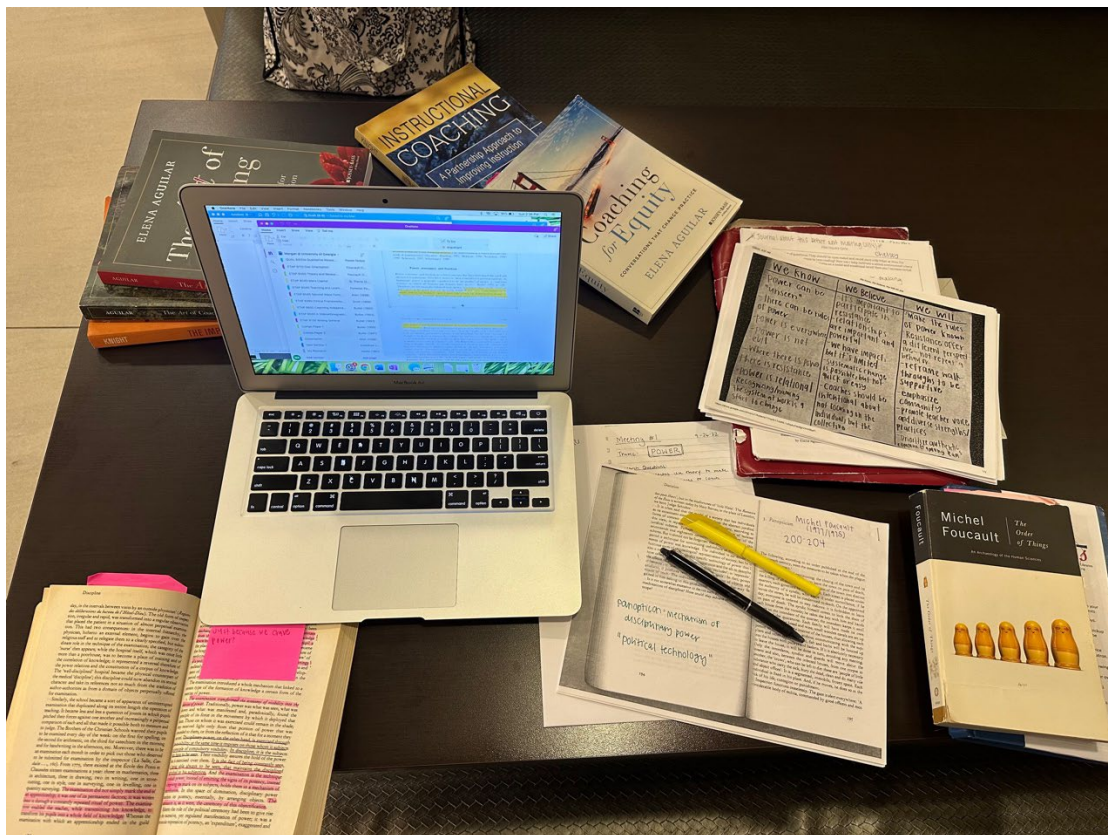
"We will emphasize community... be supportive... promote teacher voice and diverse strengths..." were some of the strategies written by Bea, Caitlin, Fran, Heather, and myself in reflection of the theories we read aligned with feminist thought. Outlining intentions for our future coaching endeavors, these statements served as ways to try out coaching differently moving forward and showcased how we envisioned coaching practice and feminist practice could work in tandem. In her book, *Feminism is for Everybody*, hooks (2015a) calls for all people everywhere to engage in feminist thinking. While hooks also notes modern society still has much to do before her claim "feminism is for everybody" is accepted (p. xiv), as the women of the Coach Group demonstrate, it seems feminism is for the instructional coach.

CHAPTER 4

THINKING WITH THEORY AS A COACHING TOOL

Figure 3

Thinking with Theory in Process



Note. This photograph was taken as I was in the throes of this chapter, enacting Jackson and Mazzei’s (2023) process “thinking with theory.” As I read various theoretical works alongside coaching practitioner texts and artifacts from the Coach Group, I wrote. When I became stuck, I read again. The result is what follows.

Instructional coaching publications offer a variety of coaching tools for the coaching practitioner. As outlined in greater detail in chapter two, much of the popularized coaching

literature includes frameworks for coaching (e.g., Knight, 2018), checklists for coaches to follow (e.g., Carver & Orth, 2017), question prompts and stems to guide coaching conversations (e.g., Knight, 2007), rubrics to evaluate coaching practice and classroom instruction (e.g., Aguilar, 2020), and other scientized coaching practices. Following the research traditions of science, such coaching practices assume a humanist perspective where the concepts of stability, linearity, rationality, binary and hierarchical logic, objectivity, and universal truths help to position the coach and teacher (Davies, 1991; St. Pierre, 2000, 2011) and inform the coaching practice.

Further, many of such coaching practices utilize observation, evaluation, and prescription of teaching strategies in an effort to improve teacher *effectiveness*, which are additionally practices borrowed from the scientific community, or ones that we can call positivist (Foucault 1988/1971; St. Pierre, 2000, 2012). For example, one of Knight's (2007) many frameworks for coaching follows the cycle of model, observe, and explore the data. During the model phase, the instructional coach teaches a lesson to students while the teacher watches. As the teacher watches the lesson, they complete an "Observation Form" where they make notes on teaching practices pre-identified by coach for the teacher to notice. Knight notes the form helps coaches ensure teachers "get the most out of the model lesson" and "know what to watch for," (p. 111). In the observe phase, the coach and teacher switch spots. As the teacher teaches the lesson and attempts to employ the "critical teaching behaviors" identified in the model lesson, the coach observes and evaluates the teaching practices using the same "Observation Form" (p. 120). During the final phase of the framework, the teacher and coach meet to debrief the teacher's lesson and explore the data collected by the coach. As the teacher and coach reflect on the observation data from

the teacher's lesson, they together complete an "After-Action Report" which helps prescribe next steps for the teacher's instruction through answering prompts such as "What was supposed to happen?" and "What should be done differently next time?" (p. 131). Knight's standardized framework for coaching is reflective of positivist thinking where the "age-old desire to get below the messy, contingent surface of human existence to a pristine, originary foundation, the bedrock of certitude" helps to simplify coaching practice into a series of easy-to-follow steps (St. Pierre, 2012, p. 493).

However, as I also argue in chapters one and two, these narrow, rigid ways of coaching do not even necessarily result in the intended outcome and can lead to a sense of frustration or failure within coaches when coaching goals are not met again and again. Using Knight's (2007) framework as an example again, it is imaginable that a coach could follow the model, observe, and explore the data cycle prescribed and see no change in teacher practice, even when repeating the cycle over. For Caitlin, this has happened before. For example, an excerpt from her journal written in mid-November reflects on a variety of coaching moves she had tried out. The excerpt reads, "First Grade has not responded to anything that I've tried... I need to find a balance of guidance and support, but not doing it for [them]. They really struggle to implement the work/thinking we have [done]." Caitlin's journal entry demonstrates a sense of perceived coaching failure as her teachers remain unresponsive of her varied coaching efforts.

During the time I spent with the women of the Coach Group and in my initial analyses of the data generated from the group, it became apparent that the ways the women were taught to coach did not always work for them in practice. At times, the women expressed feeling confused, frustrated, and lost in their work. For example, as Bea

summarized during her one-on-one interview with me at the conclusion of the study in reflection of her coaching practice, “I know things are wrong and things need to be fixed. And I don’t know how to help [teachers]. It was nice to meet with the Group and know that everyone is having the same experience. We are all drowning.” As a group, we attempted to navigate the coaching situations that bothered us and rethink our practice. Yet as Bea points out, the members of the Coach Group were not able to “fix” all their coaching struggles. Thus, the idea for this chapter was sparked.

Guiding Assumptions and Intentions

In this chapter, I position “thinking with theory” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2023) as an alternative to the checklists, rubrics, and other standardized coaching practices available to the coach through popularized coaching publications. Relying on my understanding of the human subject as one entangled with the material-discursive environment that includes human, nonhuman, social, cultural, scientific, natural factors, and more (Barad, 2003), I frame feminist poststructural theory as a tool for coaching that is commensurable with my understanding of coaches and teachers as “not stable but always becoming” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 618). Additionally, I lean into my understandings of the nature of knowledge where “truths” are contextualized and multiple and “knowledge and truth are not ‘pure’ but unstable and contingent,” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 499) in the analyses and theorizations to follow. An assumption I hold is that my understandings of the human subject and the way knowledge is produced, or my “*ethico-onto-epistem-ology*,” (Barad, 2007, p. 90), work together to guide me in this process. It is my hope that thinking with theory, particularly feminist and poststructural theory, serves as a tool in the endeavor to coach differently for coaching practitioners with similar onto-epistemological understandings to my own that

may also find themselves frustrated with scientized coaching practices like those described above.

In the pages to follow, I first provide a brief overview of feminism and poststructuralism and the related theoretical concept of discourse. Next, I use principles of feminism and poststructuralism to rethink one aspect of coaching that weighed heavy on the women of the coach group during our discussions to engender new possibilities for coaching practice. This aspect of coaching is the managerial positioning of the coach. To rethink the managerial-like characteristic of coaching, I provide a fabricated coaching artifact to provide context for this aspect of coaching, a theoretical analysis, and implications for coaching practice. Overall, this chapter has two overarching goals:

1. to provide implications for coaching practice that adds to the current scholarship on instructional coaching and is useful for the coaching practitioner, and
2. to serve as a model for how coach practitioners can use theoretical analysis to make sense of their own coaching situations and determine ways to coach differently.

An Overview of Poststructuralism and Feminism

To start, poststructuralism provides a “framework for understanding” that helps to draw connections between people and their social context in the pursuit of theorizing social change (Davies, 1989, p. xii). St. Pierre (2000) explains poststructuralism can “examine any commonplace situation, any ordinary event or process, in order to think differently about that occurrence – to open up what seems 'natural' to other possibilities,” (p. 479.) Weedon (1997) notes that at the level of the individual, poststructuralism offers “an explanation of where our experience comes from, why it is contradictory or incoherent and why and how it can change,” (p. 40). In these ways poststructural theory serves as a

tool for unpacking all that surrounds us and helps to identify possibilities for societal, institutionalized, and personal change.

Within poststructural analyses there is no objective knowledge or absolute truth, but contextualized meaning (Bove, 1995; MacLure, 2013; St. Pierre, 2000, 2011). According to MacLure, truth is “always partial, and knowledge always ‘situated’ – in other words, produced by and for particular interests, in particular circumstances, at particular times,” (p. 167). For poststructuralists, knowledge is contingent upon context and what is true in one context may not hold in another. Further, based on the work of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1977/1975), many poststructuralists assume knowledge and power to be linked where knowledge produces power and power produces knowledge (e.g., Butler, 2013; Haraway, 1988; Spivak, 1988; Weedon, 1997). Investigating the ways power operates remains central within poststructural analyses and particularly to feminist theorizations (e. g., Butler, 1990, 1992, 1993; Davies, 1989; Davies et al., 2002; Scott, 1988; Spivak, 1988) as the discourse of gender is fraught with power (Scott, 1986).

Foucault’s (1971/1970, 1972/1969) theorizations on discourse are central within the poststructural framework, serving as the context through which poststructural analyses occur. Butler (2013) defines discourse as “bodies of knowledge that define, limit, and produce what can and cannot be said in a particular socio-historical moment,” (p. 45). Discourse is not what is literally spoken, but the structuring principles that make what is said and not said possible and impossible within that given discourse (Barad, 2008; Jackson & Mazzei, 2023). According to Foucault (1978/1976) discourse produces, transmits, and reinforces power, but also “undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it

possible to thwart it," (p. 101). As such, Foucault's understanding positions resistance as possible within discourse.

The knowledge produced by discourse includes specific "statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (Scott, 1988, p. 35) that constitute ways of being in society and institutions such as the school, ways of thinking, and subjectivity at the individual level (Weedon, 1997). These ways of being and thinking and the positioning that occurs are circulated and maintained through discursive practices. Discursive practices include technical processes, behavioral expectations, cultural practices, embodied stylizations, and more (Foucault, 1977/1975). For example, in the school discourse teacher evaluation is a discursive practice. Teacher evaluation is a standardized process followed by school administrators and an expected part of school culture that defines expectations for teacher behavior. The discursive practice of teacher evaluation works to mold the teacher into the standard set by the school discourse as observation and evaluation feedback cycles occur.

Some feminists have taken up principles of poststructuralism (e.g., Butler, 1990, 1993; Cherryholmes, 1988; Davies, 1991; Davies et al., 2002; Gore, 1992; Haraway, 1988; Weedon, 1997), over time forging what St. Pierre (2000) calls an "invigorating and fruitful" relationship between the two bodies of thought and practice (p. 477). The use of poststructural theory and concepts provides feminists with a framework to understand oppressive characteristics of various discourses and theorize opportunities to resist, challenge, and transform them (McClure, 1992; Weedon, 1997). For example, Weedon's framework for feminist poststructural analysis challenges taken for granted social and political values, meaning, and power relations by asking "where they come from, whose interests they support, how they maintain sovereignty and where they are susceptible to

specific pressures for change,” (p. 169). Like Weedon, I pose the similar questions and more as in the pages to come as I analyze and unpack the managerial positioning of the coach within school discourse and attempt to decipher new ways of thinking and being as a coach.

“We are Sales[wo]men”: An Analysis and Rethinking of Coach as Manager

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss one aspect of school discourse that surfaced from the Coach Group and weighed heavy on the women during our time together, the managerial positioning of the instructional coach. To illustrate the managerial quality of coaching within school discourse, I begin by providing a coaching artifact I created specifically for this dissertation to model an example of how coaches can be positioned in managerial ways. The invented artifact is an email from a principal to a coach.

I was inspired to create the email artifact from the time I spent with the women of the Coach Group and the data that was generated through our being together during the group and after. During our meetings, we engaged in a variety of practices such as text-based group discussions, journaling and other creative writing activities, and a mini-inquiry project.²⁸ To create the email, I lean into the multiple artifacts generated through the practices from the Coach Group as well as the videos and transcriptions from meetings, transcriptions from the one-on-one coach interviews, conversations I’ve had with the women since, my memories, and everything else in-between. I choose to illustrate the managerial positioning of the coach through a fabricated coaching artifact that while not

²⁸ See the Coach Group Meeting Guides in Appendix A for a comprehensive list of practices engaged in by the Coach Group.

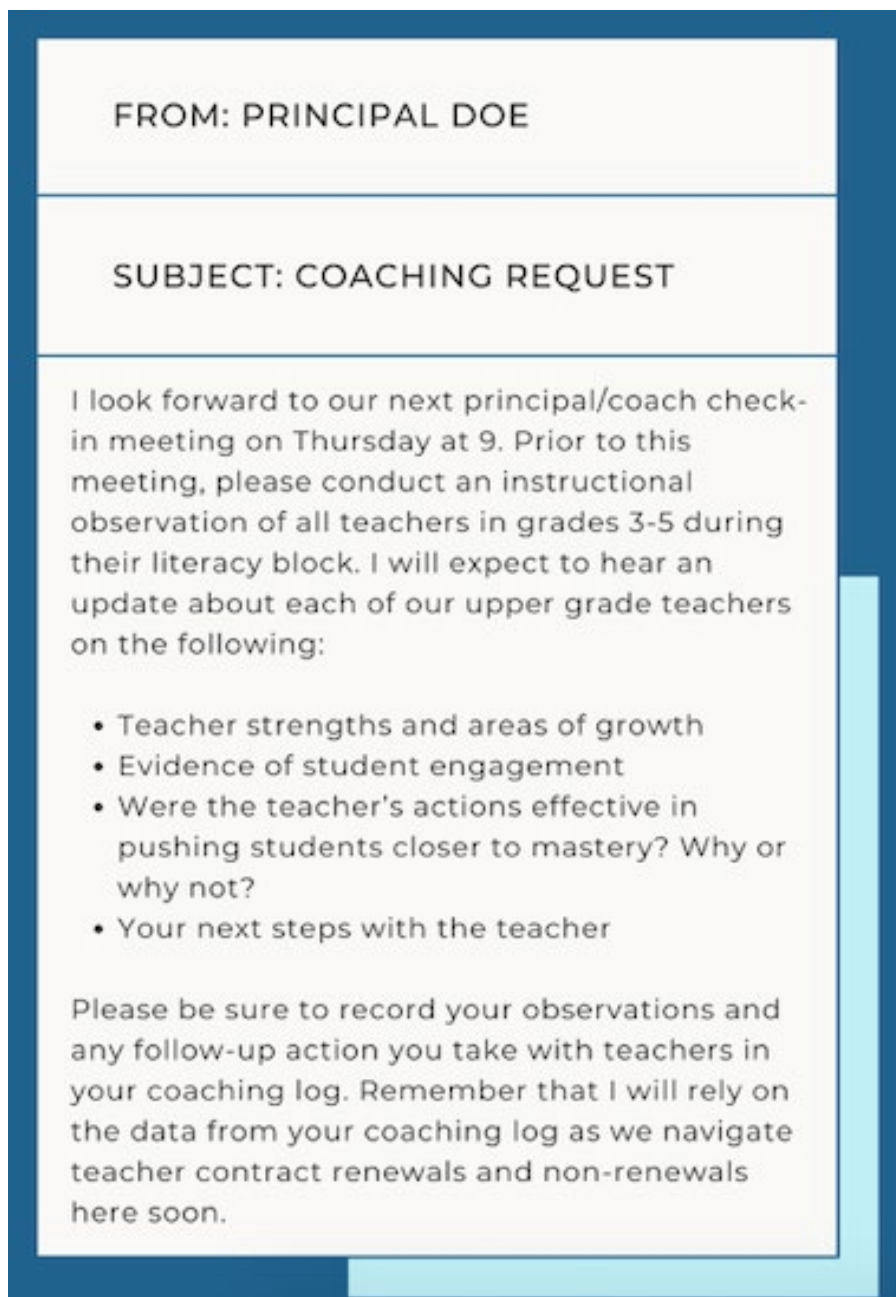
“real” provides practical insight into how the aspects of discourse discussed can manifest tangibly in practice.

Following the presentation of the email artifact, I briefly discuss how the artifact is produced through a managerial aspect of coaching discourse to set the context for analysis to come. To do this, I reflect on my time spent with the Coach Group. I then use feminist poststructural analysis to investigate and make sense of the ways power navigates through the email and the larger context that surrounds the coach as a manager aspect of discourse and identify strategies for change. I close this chapter by considering what implications my analysis poses for coaching practice.

Setting the Context

Figure 4

A Coaching Email



Note. I composed this email to illustrate an example of the managerial positioning of the instructional coach.

The women of the Coach Group were no stranger to directives like the one given in the fictional email above. Whether through email, a meeting, or in passing, group members expressed uneasiness and, at times, frustration toward the coaching requests made by their administrators and the effect of those requests on their positioning within the school setting. For example, during the first Coach Meeting in September and within a discussion about the disconnect between some practical coaching texts the women had read and what they were expected to do in practice per their administrators, the following exchange occurred:

Caitlin: There's no framework for this [coaching]. I'm going to read a book and approach coaching with a "blank" view, but then admin wants you to do "this," and district people want you to do "this." It's [coaching's] fighting "I'm going to be here and support you [teacher] in the way you want to be supported," and "Admin wants x, y, and z, and I have to somehow get you to do these things."

Bea: Yes, we are salesmen. And I did not realize that until the past few weeks. I am a salesman of whatever agenda. I am selling my department's district agenda more than anything else I'm doing. All that work I do is to pull people into that. I didn't realize that before and I should of.

Caitlin: I feel like it's because we're the middleman. There's people telling us what to do with other people that don't have an understanding of what to do.

The positioning of the coach as a manager is not a new idea within scholarly research on instructional coaching (e.g., Galey, 2016; Jones & Rainville, 2014a; Walpole & McKenna, 2008), as previously discussed in chapter two. Yet I find it to be one that

continues to be worthy of discussion in the endeavor of rethinking the instructional coach. For if coaching is to be a collaborative partnership between teachers and coaches (Aguilar, 2013, 2020; Knight, 2007, 2018) that is non-evaluative (Aguilar, 2013, 2020) to make “it easier for teachers to meet the needs of their students” (Instructional Coaching Group, n.d.) as popularized publications on coaching posit, then the managerial positioning of the coach is incommensurable with the ideals of the job. The uneasiness and frustration demonstrated by the women of the Coach Group certainly seems warranted. Through my analysis of the managerial positioning of the coach within school discourse below, I hope to offer ways coaches like the women of the Coach Group can navigate around their managerial positioning.

Analysis

In the email written by the fictional Principal Doe, several “truths,” or taken for granted meanings, within school discourse are identifiable when performing a post-structural reading of the artifact. These truths include the hierarchical organization of school personnel (e.g., DeWitt, 2012), the use of observation by those above upon those below (e.g., Ferlazzo, 2022), and the quantification of coaching support in determining teacher effectiveness and terms of teacher employment (e.g., von Briesen, 2019), to name a few. In the case of the coach, I find these aspects of school discourse to be entrenched with power and to work together to position the coach in managerial ways.

In the sections below, I analyze two managerial aspects of coaching within school discourse that the women of the Coach Group deemed most troubling: the school hierarchy and teacher observation. In my analysis of these two aspects of coach as manager discourse, I consider how power navigates through each aspect and what opportunities for

change could be possible. To do this, I begin by first providing historical context on each respective aspect and discuss how each are a production of patriarchy and other oppressive systems such as neoliberalism. After, I then discuss how each aspect can manifest in practice using Principal Doe's email and moments from the Coach Group as examples. Last, I employ thinking with theory using various feminist and poststructural concepts as well as the experiences, thoughts, and ideas the women of the Coach Group shared during our time together to reimagine the school hierarchy and the practice of teacher observation for the instructional coach.

The School Hierarchy

The hierarchical positioning of school personnel within the school organization dates to the mid-1800s when schooling in the United States began its transition toward a bureaucratic model, or one where the formal school organization operates via standardized positioning, rules, and procedures (Bidwell, 1965; Cremin, 1964; Duke, 2019; Katz, 1971). The school hierarchy begins with the principal on top and follows in a top-down, mostly linear fashion to the teacher with assistant principals, instructional coaches, and other school personnel such as behavior specialists and counselors falling somewhere in-between. Above the principal sits superintendents and assistant superintendents, other school district officials, and the school board. Each position within the school hierarchy comes with its own roles and responsibilities to ensure the smooth operation of the school (Bidwell; Labaree, 2020). Moeller and Charters (1966) hypothesize that within highly bureaucratized schools teachers' "sense of power" is lessened to where teachers have "small voice" and the "distinct feeling of impotence to control events" that play into their own interests (p. 448).

It is important to note that within school hierarchies, men typically reside in positions on top and women in positions below, perpetuating patriarchal structures and ideals. According to recent U.S. national studies, while women comprise 77% of the K-12 public school teaching positions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023), only 56% of K-12 public school principals (Taie & Lewis, 2022) and 20.5% of district superintendents are women (Finnan et al., 2015). Women comprising most of the lowest rung, teacher, is not a new phenomenon. Dating back to the 1800s, the shift toward employing many more women as teachers and *feminizing* the teaching workforce in the United States began (Clifford, 2014; Grumet, 1988; Montgomery, 2009). Additionally, in instances where women are found in positions higher up within the hierarchy, patriarchy as a system of power continues to operate as women often internalize and reproduce sexism and misogyny which work together to uphold patriarchy (Jones, 2020, Accepted – 2024). Further, some feminist educational researchers such as Pittard (2015) and Thompson (2023) have also noted the school hierarchy to be a production of neoliberal ideology²⁹ at work where the categorization of school personnel within the hierarchy helps to maintain a constant “fear of not being *good enough*” within women teachers and provokes competition among teachers (Pittard, p. 21). However, since women have often

²⁹ Neoliberalism is a political and economic ideology that promotes capitalist policies, practices, and procedures. Neoliberalism is difficult to define, a “notoriously slippery term,” (Gillespie & Thompson, 2021, p. 262), but can be “understood variously as a bundle of (favoured) policies, as a tendential process of institutional transformation, as an emergent form of subjectivity, as a reflection of realigned hegemonic interests, or as some combination of the latter,” (Brenner et al., 2010, p. 2). Neoliberalism produces consumerism, individualism, competition, efficiency, productivity, and more within its subjects and often converges with other systems of oppression such as patriarchy, racism, and imperialism (Gillespie & Thompson, 2021; hooks, 2013; Jones, Accepted – 2024). For more on neoliberalism see Brenner et al. (2010), Brown (2015), Harvey (2005), and Larner (2000). For examples of feminist educational research that investigates neoliberalism see Gillespie (2024), Gillespie & Thompson (2021), Pittard (2015), Thompson (2023), and Thompson & Jones (2021).

found themselves at the bottom of hierarchical structures and on the “wrong side of binaries,” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 481), disrupting patriarchal hierarchies and binaries has historically been and remains a central focus for the feminist movement (e.g., Butler, 1997; Davies et al., 2002; Haraway, 1988; Scott, 1986).

The school bureaucracy through which the patriarchal hierarchy is maintained is positioned as a “neutral structure that carries the aims of its designers at the top down to the ground level where the action takes place,” (Labaree, 2020, p. 54). However, the bureaucratic model is anything but neutral (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Labaree explains:

Because the bureaucracy was built within a system that perpetuated inequalities of class, race, and gender, it tended to operate in a way that made sure White males from the upper classes maintained their position and that stifled grassroots efforts to bring about change from below. (p. 54)

For example, Georgia State Board of Education Rule 160-7-1.01: Single Statewide Accountability System mandates a yearly “Accountability Profile” be publicly published for all public school districts or schools that includes various components such as “Adequate Yearly Progress [AYP], Performance Index, and Performance Highlights,” (Single Statewide Accountability System, 2011, p. 1-2). Should a school or district not meet “Adequate Yearly Progress” goals, a “Needs Improvement” status is given by the state with various potential consequences such as “intensive school-level support and guidance from GaDOE” or “replacing school staff who are relevant to the school not making AYP,” (Single Statewide Accountability System, p. 5). AYP is concerned with a slew of performance goals including student achievement, per Rule 160-7-1.01. State guidance from this mandate makes its way to the district level where district officials pass it on to the principals of local schools.

Somewhere along the way, it is determined how performance goals will be attained within the local school building. Perhaps a new curriculum is adopted or a professional development series becomes required of all teachers. The practical implications of the mandate trickle from the principal to coach and down to the teacher. Should any stakeholder along the way resist initiatives put forward, job termination can occur as the mandate states (Single Statewide Accountability System). Those at the top of the school hierarchy remain untouched and able to partake in the continual process of designing how school life is carried out by those below, and teachers are subordinated to teaching in ways that reproduce the ideals of the men at the top (Grumet, 1988; Stutelberg, 2016).

The School Hierarchy in Practice.

In the case of Principal Doe's school, as demonstrated in the email, hierarchical positioning is apparent as well as effects of that positioning. Principal Doe provides the directive of conducting an instructional walkthrough to the coach. In evaluating teachers per Principal Doe's guidelines (e.g., teacher strengths and areas of growth) through the process of teacher observation, the coach is positioned above the teacher as one who knows more about the teachers' practice than the teachers themselves and one who is able to determine next steps for those teachers' practice. Yet, the coach remains below Principal Doe. The coach reports back what is found in teachers' classrooms to Principal Doe where he will ultimately use knowledge gleaned from this report to inform his decision-making as it relates to the livelihood of teachers within his school building.

For the women of the Coach Group, a similar positioning was described. For example, Caitlin vented during one Coach Group meeting, "I'm stuck in the middle as powerless. Below admin and county but seen as having power above teacher and students.

It's very odd... This weird power dynamic of being in the middle," as she described the effect of carrying out directives given by her administrators. As group meetings went on, the women continued to discuss the tension created by their positioning. Fran questioned, "What am I in control of and what am I not?" and reflecting on her ability to engender change as a coach, Bea remarked, "Sometimes it feels like water lapping at the rocks... It feels like our actions don't mean that much. The power is, we only have so much... What we do has an impact. Our impact is just extremely limited. I used to think I would be a lot more powerful." The women viewed themselves as powerless extensions of their administrators yet regarded as a source of power by their teachers. As time went on with the Coach Group, the women hypothesized ways to navigate their positioning with the school hierarchy and leverage the power they felt they did have to coach in ways more relational, collaborative, and affirming toward their teachers.

Thinking with Michel Foucault's Power.

Poststructural understandings of power are useful for rethinking the school hierarchy and what that could mean for coaches. Where a traditional understanding of power views those at the top of the school hierarchy with ultimate power, the teachers (and students) at the bottom as powerless, and the coaches in the middle as having power somewhere in-between, poststructural theorizations of power posit a different reading than this dominating orientation to power. For example, Foucault (1978/1976) understands power to come from "below" where:

there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations... no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body. (p. 94)

Hierarchies where power is exerted from the most powerful unto those below who then exert power on those below them, and so on, do not exist for Foucault. In fact, power is not evil, but productive according to Foucault (1977/1975, 1997/1984). With this understanding, all people existing within the school hierarchy can exercise power in any direction and toward any end within a given power relation. Further, relations of power are capable of change as “power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all,” (Foucault, 1997/1984, p. 292). With Foucault’s notion of power, the coach is no longer stuck between the principal and teachers as an extension of the principal enacting powered moves on the teacher below per the principal’s directives from above. This does not mean the school hierarchy is eradicated. Instead, in viewing power relations as unstable and capable of change, Foucault makes working around or against the school hierarchy possible for the coach.

Thinking with Judith Butler’s Gender Performativity.

Feminist renderings of Foucault’s theorizations have paid careful attention to the way power circulates through structures and binary pairings to produce gender, the consequences of such, and how women can resist and reimagine gendered positionings. One concept of particular interest is Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993, 1997) gender performativity. Butler, a scholar in the field of gender and sexuality, sees gender as not something one is but as something one does. Gender is not an essence or expression of “an inner gender core,” but a performance (Butler, 1997, p. 144). Butler’s theorizations provide a useful reading of the gendered positions coaches take up and offers implications for how gendered categories can be undone by coaches to work against their positioning within the school hierarchy.

According to Butler (1990), gender is the product of disciplinary power, or power that regulates individuals through “instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets,” (Foucault, 1977/1975, p. 215) that constitute positionings aligned with gender hierarchies and heterosexual ideals. The school institution is an example of a structure that dispels disciplinary power upon its inhabitants – staff at all levels and students. When thinking with Butler, it can be assumed that effects of disciplinary power in the schoolhouse have gendered implications for the women teachers and coaches positioned at the bottom of the school hierarchy. Butler (1993) characterizes, “this constituting effect of regulatory power as reiterated and reiterable,” (p. 22), where “gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*,” (Butler, 1990, p. 179). In other words, for Butler, gender occurs outside of the body as performances that include gestures, bodily movement, and other acts that give a false impression of gendered core, yet produce what Butler calls a materiality. It is not that one chooses to perform gender, but as an effect of power that one is called to participate in gendered acts that over time constitute the impression of gender. This impression of gender includes an essence of gender inside oneself as well as tangible productions of gender on the outside.

For example, women teachers have historically been positioned as motherly caregivers that are thoughtful, warm, and approachable (Goldstein, 2014; Grumet, 1988). They perform this gendered position through repetitive actions such as greeting students at the door with a hug each day, smiling at students and using a gentle, singsong tone of voice when speaking, wiping away the occasional student tear, holding students’ hands as

the walk through the halls, and more. The position of teacher as caregiver also materializes in teacher dress and style. When thinking of an elementary school teacher, fun yet modest dresses, bright colors, loose and comfortable clothing, clean makeup, and hair that is secured away from the face come to mind³⁰. This type of style is practical for care work and feminine in nature. The regulatory structures of the school produce and reinforce this gendered positioning of the teacher through staff handbooks (e.g., teacher dress code rules), teacher performance standards (e.g., Georgia Department of Education, 2016, July 1), observation, and feedback.

Coaches also are positioned in gendered ways. For example, in summary of coaching research, Fujiwara (2022, November 9) describes the disposition of the “effective” coach as “authentic,” which includes having a high level of social and emotional intelligence, communication and listening skills, and being empathetic, traits typically regarded as womanly (e.g., Rachels, 2019). Coaching actions that generate an authentic persona over time could include building and maintaining relationships with teachers, offering comfort and support in coaching conversations, and adapting coaching as needed per the emotional reading of the teacher. However, given that the coach is positioned above teachers and in managerial ways, the positioning of the coach is not entirely feminine. For example, Fujiwara also explains that coaches “cannot be passive providers of information,” but must “walk the walk” for “no one should become a general if they have not been a soldier first.” Fujiwara’s descriptions paint a picture of the coach as a commanding authority figure, a position typically reserved for men (Allen, 1998). However, much like the positioning of the

³⁰ Examples can be found from TikTok and Instagram searches such as “teacher OOTD,” “teacher style,” “teacher makeup,” and more.

teacher described above, the disciplinary powers of the school undergirded by neoliberal logic regulate this two-fold positioning through coaching performance standards, coach induction programs, and professional learning experiences.

For the women of the Coach Group, the middle-ness of their role complicated matters regarding their positioning. For example, Heather expressed the importance of being viewed as kind and not an authority figure. To garner this positioning, she performed weekly “random acts of kindness” such as providing each of her teachers with a “positive pin” as a gift or leaving notes of gratitude on their classroom doors. For Heather, the continued performance of acts of kindness toward her teachers could engender a positioning much like how she was viewed when she was a teacher. The regulatory powers that constituted Heather in gendered ways as a teacher continued to operate upon her in her work as a coach. Yet, Bea mentioned she at times found herself in situations where she was expected to mirror the language and acts of the district officials above her that she worked with at the district office (most of whom she noted were men). For example, Bea described conversations where she was asked to make claims about schools and teachers she had previously worked with on-site such as whether said schools and teachers were “good” or “bad.” While Bea was uncomfortable with making grand, evaluative statements that rank schools and teachers and reflect neoliberal ideology, she was unsure how to navigate away from these types of conversations. Bea’s conflict with her positionality illuminates neoliberalism’s “conduct of conduct,” (Brown, 2015, p. 21), where Bea as a neoliberal subject is expected to take on the goals, language, and practices of the neoliberal (and patriarchal) school institution and pushes us to wonder in what ways these positionings put forward by neoliberalism and patriarchy can be transcended.

In considering how to disrupt the positioning put forth by the school institution and reimagine the coach in ways outside of middle manager, we turn back to Butler's theory of gender performativity. For Butler (1990), there is some agency in gender performativity and the constitution of gender. They write:

The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act*... all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; 'agency,' then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. (p. 185)

Butler calls these agentic refusals to act *subversive repetitions*. By choosing to not repeat oneself, we can reject gender binaries and hierarchies and open up possibilities for other ways of being in the world.

For the instructional coach, Butler's (1990) subversive repetitions offers a way to act against the positioning of the coach. Take, for example, the managerial positioning of the coach where the coach is seen as an extension of administrators. The managerial-like quality of the coach is constituted over time through the performance of middle-manager tasks such as surveilling teachers per administrator's directives, coaching as a consequence of observed practice, and reporting back to the administrator. While the coach is not necessarily able to refuse directives given by their principal in entirety, there is opportunity to subvert managerial positioning in subtle ways. For example, Principal Doe's coach was asked to track data from her teacher observations and coaching that followed in a coaching log that Principal Doe would refer to later when issuing teacher contracts for the next school year. Principal Doe's coach could subvert this positioning through what she chooses to record in the coaching log for Principal Doe. Perhaps one of Principal Doe's

teachers struggled to model the division of fractions accurately for students during the coach's observation and later met with the coach to learn how to use fraction tiles to support with the division of fractions. To refuse the position of coach as manager, the coach could simply not record the teacher's difficulty with dividing fractions in the coaching log. In this way, Principal Doe's coach can work toward a more supportive and non-evaluative model of coaching where the coach is not viewed as an extension of the principal, but as a support for teachers. Butler's concept of subversive repetitions can be taken up by any coach wishing to disrupt their positioning constituted by the school institution.

The School Hierarchy Reimagined.

The positioning of the coach beneath administrators and above teachers remained a topic of conversation for the women of the Coach Group during our time together. For the women, their involvement in managerial-like practices positioned them as an extension of their respective administrative teams and with the ability to harness power over their teachers, which they felt had damaging consequences for the coach-teacher relation. Poststructural and feminist theories offer an understanding of power that rejects the school hierarchy and its patriarchal and neoliberal ties. The use of poststructural and feminist theories helps to reimagine the positioning of the coach to be lateral alongside the teacher, where a vision of collaborative, supportive, and non-evaluative coaching is possible.

In particular, Butler's (1990, 1993, 1997) theory of gender performativity calls us to understand gender as performance that is constituted over time and through regulatory powers. Butler's theorizations help to frame the positioning of the coach as both gendered and an effect of the regulatory powers of the school. Further, Butler's concept of subversive

repetitions offers insight into how coaches can refuse and “resignify,” (Butler, 1992, p. 9) their positioning in ways outside of school hierarchy more aligned with feminist ways of being and thinking. As Bea noted during one Coach Group meeting, there is “a slippery-ness of women coming into power and men opening the door and inviting and choosing the certain women that will let the structures stay in place that we must be careful of.” Leaning into poststructural and feminist theories serves as a beginning toward disrupting one harmful structure of the school institution, the school hierarchy.

Teacher Observation

Since the conception of compulsory education in the United States, teacher observation has been used by administrative officials outside of the classroom to inform their knowledge of what goes on inside the classroom (Cremin, 1964; Jewell, 2017). Teacher observation has patriarchal ties in how it is structured, its purposes, and its effects. Structurally, the majority of teachers observed in the United States identify as women, while those primarily doing the observing are men (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). The patriarchy “elevates some men over other men and all men over women,” (Gilligan & Snider, 2018, p. 6), which is the case, too, for teacher observation. Men observe women and other men, and at times, women outside of the classroom observe other women, as was the case for the women the Coach Group. Nonetheless, the practice of teacher observation follows a hierarchical structure much like that of the patriarchy that does not necessarily need a man to be reproduced as women also “acquire and embody the damaging and violent language, ideals, social practices, and political ideologies governing patriarchy,” (Jones, Accepted – 2024, p. 2), which in this case is the practice of teacher observation.

While the purposes of teacher observation are many and have shifted over time, teacher observation is primarily used today by school administrators as a piece of teacher evaluation data that is thought to lead to greater teacher and student outcomes (Giffin, 2020; Jewell, 2017; Johnson et al., 2021; Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Similarly, instructional coaching literature positions teacher observation as a tool for coaches to improve teacher practice through the collection of teacher data through observation followed by the giving of feedback (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2007, 2018). According to Knight (2018), the purposes of teacher observation implemented by instructional coaches are to “(a) get a clear picture of reality, (b) establish a baseline for setting a goal, (c) monitor progress toward a goal,” (p. 54). Through the identification of perceived teacher strengths and weaknesses, instructional coaches use data from observations to inform the trajectory of coaching.

Fostering improved teacher practice and greater student achievement outcomes, the binary of right/wrong, and the scientific process are a few themes present within the above descriptions of teacher observation. These descriptions of teacher observation are aligned with patriarchal thinking. Within patriarchy, men’s knowledge, norms, and values and everything patriarchal epistemology has produced including “scientific” and “rational” thought, capitalism, neoliberalism, disciplinary systems, white supremacy, colonialism, and more are privileged over other ways of being and knowing. These things are also historically humanist in nature (St. Pierre, 2000). St. Pierre in her discussion of humanism, writes of positivist observation. She explains, “Observation provides unmediated access to the world and its features... true scientific knowledge is based on facts garnered from the observation... truth can be discovered through careful, rigorous observation,” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 495). Within patriarchal teacher observation, positivist thinking manifests and the

prioritizing of finding “truth” through observation in the pursuit of improving teacher practice and student achievement outcomes prevails.

Teacher Observation in Practice.

Teacher observation as positioned within Principal Doe’s email mirrors the descriptions of teacher observation above. It is an action taken by the instructional coach to collect information about teachers and their classrooms that is used to inform and drive coaching cycles with teachers. It is a data collection practice, deterministic practice, and monitoring practice. The act of teacher observation requires the coach to be a silent observer, taking in all aspects of classroom life to then filter the happenings of the classroom during the time observed down to an informational, factual synopsis. Within the subject/object binary that allows “certain people to be the subjects of statements and others to be the objects,” coaches are the speakers while teachers are spoken about (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). As Knight (2007) explains:

As the observer, the IC [instructional coach] should try to remove his personal judgements from the activity of observing... the coach should see himself as a second set of eyes in the room, using the observation form or other data-gathering methods as tools for recording relevant data about how the lesson proceeds. (p.

121)

Often, coaches observe through a specific lens or with a certain goal in mind. For Principal Doe’s coach, this lens included the identification of teacher strengths and weaknesses, determining the sense of students’ engagement with the learning, and considering the effectiveness of teacher actions as they relate to student achievement.

Largely driven by what we had learned from coaching texts like Knight (2018) throughout our coach endorsement program and after, the women of the Coach Group including myself were no stranger to performing teacher observations like those called for by Principal Doe. During our time together, the women contrasted “admin walkthroughs,” or observations they were directed to perform and/or discuss with administrators, with observations the coaches performed on their own accord and confidentially. In discussing the consequences of her “admin walkthroughs” during one group meeting, Caitlin expressed frustration stating, “When admin has chosen to do a walkthrough a certain way and communicate [with teachers] after certain a way, it puts obstacles up for coaches in our later work with how we are perceived.” For the women of the Group, teacher observations conducted by coaches in association with administrators had damaging consequences for the coach-teacher relation. Additionally, the women of the group yearned for a way to coach and be present in classrooms, that did not contribute to the suffering of the teacher. Questions we posed toward one another in reflection of our coaching observations included: *Am I helping or making it worse? How can I make teachers feel less overwhelmed?* and *How can I know my teachers better?*

Thinking with Donna Haraway’s Situated Knowledges.

Feminist concepts and poststructural theories open up other ways of thinking in contrast to the humanist perspectives outlined above. When thought about alongside teacher observation, these concepts can transform the practice into something more meaningful and applicable for the women teachers that are objects of observation and the women coaches, like those from the Coach Group, conducting observations. Donna Haraway’s (1988), a feminist scholar specializing in the intersection of feminism and

science and technology, concept of situated knowledges is particularly useful for disrupting the “see/being seen dyad” (Foucault, 1977/1975, p. 202) and offers new possibilities for how coaches can conduct teacher observations.

According to Haraway (1988), “The eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity... to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power,” (p. 581). Vision, in this case, is all-seeing with the ability to discern “truth” and fact from sight alone. The seeing subject, the observer, does this in isolation of their own thoughts, feelings, experiences, and history, and from an unmarked position (e.g., male, white, heterosexual, cis, ruling class, etc.) of power. In the context of teacher observation, this understanding guides the coach to make judgements and claims about teacher practice and classroom life from their observation alone, unaffected by factors outside of their sight such as their background knowledge of the teacher and students, previous time spent in the classroom, personal opinions, and more. However, Haraway finds this idea of vision to be “an illusion, a god trick,” (p. 582) or what Davies and Hunt (1994) refer to as the “illusion of positionless speaking,” (p. 391).

For Haraway (1988), “only partial perspective promises objective vision,” (p. 583). Situated knowledges are partial, local, collective, and include “subjugated” standpoints, or the perspectives of those from below – the powerless or dominated (Haraway, p. 584). The concept of situated knowledges positions seeing and observing as something that cannot be accomplished with precise scientific objectivity. To be objective in a partial sense is to understand that what we see and the judgements we make are contingent upon our positionings, perspectives, and experiences, and more. These things are lenses we cannot

take off³¹. Additionally, situated knowledges are generated collectively and from all positionings. The inclusion of subjugated standpoints positions the perspective of marked others, the marginalized (e.g., women, those of color, the working class) as preferred because “they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world,” (Haraway, p. 584). The knowledge of those on the ground, living and positioned within contexts feminists and other social groups seek to transcend offer rich insight into the knowledge base. For the coach, this means attaining “a clear picture of reality” (Knight, 2018, p. 54) through observation alone is impossible. Understanding observations to be informed by our positionings and as partially objective repositions teacher observation as more than a solo, truth finding process for the coach. Additionally, Haraway’s inclusion of subjugated standpoints illuminates the need for teacher voice and point of view within conclusions drawn from observation.

Haraway (1988) offers “contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, [and] webbed connections” as practical implications for implementing partial objectivity and growing situated knowledgebases (p. 585). No longer must teacher observation be a totalizing, fact finding mission performed by the coach from the outside and above that results in consequences, be them positive or negative, upon the teacher below. For the coach, Haraway’s practices for garnering partial objectivity work together to transform teacher observation into a collaborative, generative, and fruitful experience. In the remainder of this section, I discuss how each of Haraway’s four implications could be

³¹ A phrase borrowed from Bettie St. Pierre who in her lectures and conversations always cautioned me and my classmates against attempting to do work from a named theoretical lens. According to Bettie, once theories are read and taken up, they become lenses we cannot take off. They are always there.

utilized within teacher observation to transform the practice in ways that disrupt its current humanist and patriarchal ties.

Contestation.

To begin, contestation adds the teacher's voice to interpretations of observed practice. A tenet of feminist practice, voice is understood "in terms of self-definitions that are oppositional to those definitions of women constructed by others," (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 309). The teacher's voice is regarded as of value and is heard alongside the coach's in discussions concerning observed practice. Through contestation, "sustained dialectal critique and exchange," (hooks, 2015b, p. xiv) becomes commonplace where a back-and-forth between teacher and coach unfolds within debriefing conversations. This could occur during an observation or after and could be generated by the coach prompting for teacher rebuttal when interpretations of observed practice are shared by the coach. Instead of the coach providing factual statements about observed teacher practice, summaries of teacher practice and implications for the teacher moving forward could be generated through the practice of contestation between the coach and teacher. When encouraging contestation, a leveling between teacher voice and coach voice occurs and a move toward collective understanding is made possible.

For the women of the Coach Group, contestation occurred within group meetings and challenged the women to reflect on how the practice could be replicated with teachers.

For Fran, although unnamed, the concept of contestation came up as she reflected on her coaching practice before joining the Coach Group and considered her practice moving forward. She said:

I was stagnant. I started thinking, “Don’t question. Do what is being said...” I was afraid to voice too much... [and] be a part of the conversation. Through meeting with the group, I discovered growth is possible when you feel like you have the freedom to voice things and question and have conversations and are able to bring up ideas. Even to people in power, people who have authority over you. Bringing that to the teachers and naming that you know you have the authority, but it is still okay to bring up things and talk about things is important for our work.

Fran’s reflection illuminates the importance of encouraging contestation in the coach-teacher relation and is particularly applicable for considering how contestation can occur context of teacher observation. Through cultivating a conversational space where contestation is not only possible, but encouraged, the coach can work toward positioning teacher observation as a transformational practice for the teacher. Conclusions drawn from the observation become more situated and next steps for the coach and teacher become more meaningfully aligned with the teacher’s identified need(s).

Deconstruction and Passionate Construction.

Deconstruction comes into play when the coach is challenged to rethink what was once thought (Barad, 1999; Butler, 1992; Foucault, 1970/1966; St. Pierre, 2000, 2011, 2017). In the words of Butler, to deconstruct is “to call into question and, perhaps most

importantly, to open up a term... to a reusage or redeployment that previously has not been authorized," (p. 15). It is a "destabilizing of that which we have unproblematically come to accept," (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 19). For the coach, deconstruction could occur independently throughout teacher observations and after, or in conjunction with the teacher. While certainly an oversimplification, the coach could deconstruct any aspect observed of classroom life such as the spoken, positional, or material, to then "passionately construct" something new, as Haraway (1988) encourages. No longer must teaching practices occur for the sake of doing what has always been done. No longer must the coach use observation to monitor and enforce implementation of those practices. With deconstruction and construction, the coach can begin to rethink and imagine categories of school life in ways more situated to those doing the teaching and coaching and lean into those understandings as they observe classroom practices and their follow up actions with observed teachers.

For example, Principal Doe's email directs his coach to identify the level of student engagement during the time of observation. For Principal Doe's coach, commonsense understandings of student engagement are available in popularized coaching literature such as Knight (2007, 2018) to guide interpretations of observed student engagement. Knight encourages the coach to capture the level of student engagement throughout observations by assessing time on task. In other words, student engagement is time on task. According to Knight (2018), time on task for students looks like, "Doing the assigned task... Making eye contact with the teacher or other students... Responding verbally or nonverbally to teacher prompts," (p. 171). Using deconstruction, Principal Doe's coach can confront the provided understanding of student engagement and reinscribe the term to

mean something new. To do this, the coach may ask herself how the commonsense conception of student engagement came to be structured and use those understandings gleaned as she constructs new understandings. For example, what ways of teaching and learning are promoted from this understanding of student engagement? Who does and does not benefit in this case? What is produced through this conception of student engagement? However, it is important to note that deconstruction is not something one intentionally chooses to employ (Foucault, 1970/1966; St. Pierre, 2017) but something that happens when “something in the world forces us to think,” (Deleuze, 1994/1968, p. 139).

For the coach, being aware of personal tension encountered when conducting teacher observations and within the thought process that occurs before, during, and after is a powerful implication. For when this friction occurs, deconstruction happens and an opening up of new and more situated possibilities in coach, teacher, and/or student thought and practice unfolds. Deconstruction and passionate construction allow the coach to break away from what has commonly been known and practiced within the school institution, including its patriarchal underpinnings, that which coaches have historically monitored and enforced through teacher observation. When aspects of school life are broken down and troubled, the coach can use what is learned to create new, more meaningful and contextualized ways of knowing and being in the school for teachers and students.

Webbed Connections.

Webbed connections promotes the idea of collective entanglement within teacher observation. Rather than the coach observing as an outsider within the classroom, they view themselves as part of classroom life, entangled with the teacher and students present,

memories of teachers and students of the past, the material elements of the classroom, the future to come, and more. Entanglement assumes individuals, like coaches and teachers, “to lack independent, self-contained existence,” and to “emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating,” (Barad, 2007, p. 3). In this way, observed teacher practice is understood to be produced by more than a teacher’s freewill. It is the product of everything that has joined together to create the teacher and their practice up until that time and continues to produce the teacher as moments pass.

On the other hand, the coach can understand their role as observer as not outside of, but very much connected to the happenings of classroom life during observation. The coach, too, connects what is taken in from the observation to everything that has produced the coach, positioning the coach as anything but a neutral observer. Additionally, even the very presence of the coach in the classroom during the time of observation converges with the teacher’s and students’ positionings to produce classroom experience. For example, as Caitlin commented during a Coach Group conversation on classroom observation, “Students learn from your judgements. They perceive what is right or what is good... If you are constantly giving praise for certain things, they learn ‘She likes these things.’” For Caitlin, her presence as an observing coach in the classroom prompted students to behave and act in ways differently than were she not there.

The coach can gain a more situated understanding of the why and how behind teacher practice when considering the webbed connections within the classroom space. Using Haraway’s (1988) notion, the coach also garners greater understanding of the why and how behind their own interpretations of what is observed. Most importantly, webbed connections help to illuminate the practice of teacher observation to not occur isolation of

everything else. When understanding the connection among people and things, the coach can perceive classroom happenings observed as the convergence of a multitude of various factors and use that understanding to make more contingent and contextualized judgements of teacher practice and in determining coaching actions with the teacher moving forward.

Teacher Observation Reimagined.

As the women of the Coach Group attested throughout our time together, ““refram[ing] walkthroughs to be supportive” was of great importance in considering their coaching practice moving forward (see Figure 2). Understanding teacher observation as not objective, but partial and situated, and leaning into Haraway’s (1988) considerations for obtaining partial objectivity as outlined above is a beginning for the reframing of teacher observations, or walkthroughs. Contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, and webbed connections are each grounded in feminist and poststructural theories. These concepts open up ways of thinking and being outside of those upholding the commonsense and current practice of teacher observation, which mirrors a hierarchical structure and serves patriarchal ideals. Further, it is a hope of this reimagining that women coaches, like those from the Coach Group, find greater insight and joy from engaging in observation practice that is grounded within feminist ways of thinking and being.

Haraway’s (1988) notion that “situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals,” (p. 590) reminds us of the importance of positioning teacher observation as a collaborative, relational, and integrated practice. Conducting observations *with* and *alongside* teachers, rather than *of* teachers fosters a transformative space for

coaches and teachers to learn together. Haraway also writes, “The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular,” (p. 590). For the coach, that somewhere can be the classroom. The reimagining of teacher observation outlined above offers one way to begin.

Implications

In the pages above, I rely on Jackson and Mazzei’s (2023) concept of thinking with theory to open up new possibilities for the instructional coaching practitioner. Guided by the assumption that the discourse of coach as manager can perpetuate frustration, and at times harm, for coaches that find themselves positioned between school administrators and the teachers they serve and with poststructural and feminist theories at hand, I disrupt two related aspects of coach as manager discourse – the school hierarchy and teacher observation – to open ways to coach differently. Throughout the pages of this chapter, I additionally weave in words expressed by the women of the Coach Group, my memories of their experience and my own, and other artifacts created during the time we spent to together discussing our experiences as coaches, reading and discussing theory, and conceiving of ways to transform our practice. In my concluding remarks below, I offer implications for coaching practice as it relates to both practitioners and researchers within the field.

As I sought to rethink the school hierarchy and the practice of teacher observation, the ties to patriarchal and neoliberal ideals underpinning these aspects of coach as manager discourse could be not ignored. While the school hierarchy mirrors the patriarchy itself with a predominant number of men seated atop and women below and perpetuates neoliberal goals, the commonsense practice of teacher observation is founded on traditionally masculine thought systems including patriarchy, neoliberalism, humanism,

positivism, and perhaps more. With a predominant amount of today's coaching practitioners identifying as women³² as well as the teachers they serve (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023), disrupting the patriarchy at work within coach discourse warrants priority for coaching researchers and practitioners. It is my hope that the reimaginings of the school hierarchy and teacher observation above that are informed by poststructural and feminist ways of thinking and being illuminate possibilities for coaches that are more practical, transformative, and meaningful for the coaches and teachers involved. hooks (2015a) reminds us that "to be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality," (p. 110). For coaching researchers and practitioners, connecting the reimaginings outlined above (and those yet to come) with our contextual and tangible realities becomes a starting point for transformation.

Employing Jackson and Mazzei's (2023) process thinking with theory as a tool within coaching practice stands as a second implication for the field of coaching. As modeled above, the pairing of theories aligned with one's ways of thinking and being alongside other texts, memories, experiences, or aspects of coaching discourse provides a conduit for rethinking coaching. The women of the Coach Group seconded the need for the explicit use of theory in coaching to rethink their practice. For example, Bea noted she used theory to navigate the uncomfortable feeling "Why am I doing it like this?" as she was coaching. Bea added that the use of theory to unpack coaching practices helps to resolve the "problem with education" of "doing things over and over without knowing the reason

³² Currently there are no instructional coaching statistics disaggregated by gender, to my knowledge. However, Knight (2015) estimates the coaches he has seen attend coaching conferences to be somewhere near 80% women.

behind it.” Like Foucault (1977/1972) who states, “Theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice,” (p. 208) Bea helps to illuminate that coaches are already employing theories within practice. Theory is practice and practice is theory. The introduction of thinking with theory as a tool for coaches is a step toward alleviating that “uncomfortable” feeling within coaches that are employing practices driven by theories unaligned with their ways of being thinking, such as the humanist orientations of coaching I have described previously.

Finally, it is important to note that the use of thinking with theory will not simply transform coaching discourse for poststructural theorists frame the agency to make choices within any discourse to be not as simple as it seems (Butler, 1992; Davies; 1991; St. Pierre, 2000). Davies refers to choices within any discourse as “forced choices” where each action taken by each member of that discourse is the “only possible action,” (p. 46). According to Davies, this is “not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively constituted through one’s placement with that discourse to *want* that line of action,” (p. 46). For poststructuralists, discourse not only signifies the actions of the people within but does so invisibly and in a way often unrecognized by those carrying out the actions. But not all hope need be lost for poststructural theory does offer the ability to use its terms, and the terms of other discourses, “to counteract, modify, refuse or go beyond” the discourse one is in (p. 46). For coaching practitioners then, choosing to react differently toward harmful aspects of the job produced by the coach as manager discourse becomes possible when theoretical concepts become accessible, known, and can begin to be tried out in practice, a final and powerful implication for the field of coaching.

As shown in the photograph at the beginning of this chapter, thinking with theory is messy and difficult work, yet a process that can serve as a catalyst for transformation. As Jackson and Mazzei (2023) explain:

Theory is responsive, not an application or a reflection. As responsive, then, theory is a chance encounter that incites the unthought. This disorderly circuitry of theory, encounters, and performative accounts is a way of reading intensively to enact a thinking with. (p. 5)

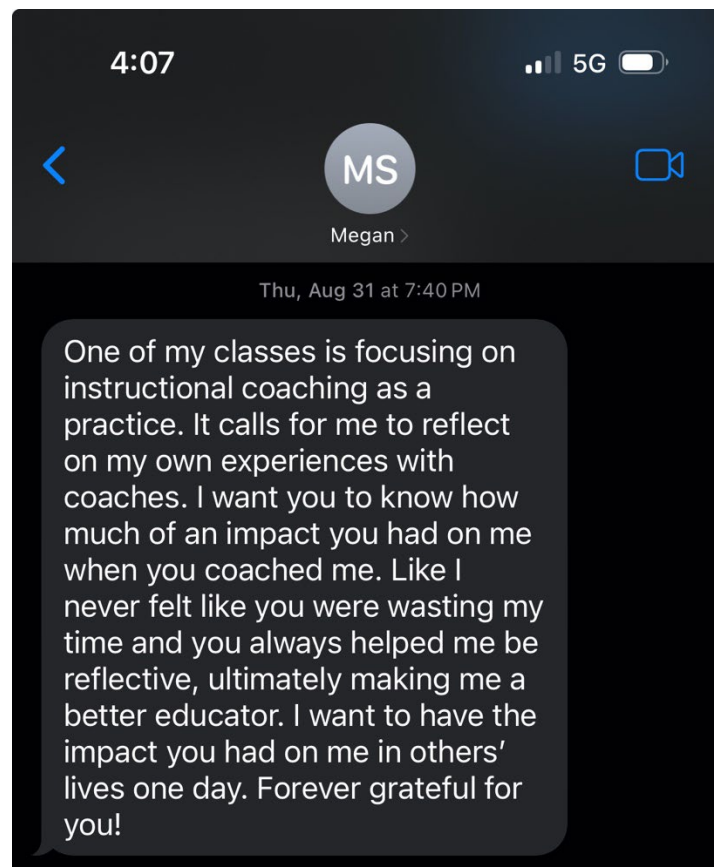
For the coaching practitioner recognizing those moments that signal something outside of the ordinary – experiences that produce confusion, unease, anger, joy, or whatever else – the moments that warrant response, can lead toward the previously unthought. Through thinking with theory, coaches can begin the endeavor toward coaching differently.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: TOWARD COACHING DIFFERENTLY

Figure 5

Text Screenshot



Note. A text I received from a teacher I worked alongside at Bear Elementary. I received this text after being gone from Bear for several months and was instantly reminded of why I do what I do.

Throughout this dissertation, the call to coach differently centered my work. Frustrated by the ways I was instructed to coach, isolated by the nature of the role, and worried of the harm I could be causing to teachers and students, I turned to feminist and

poststructural theories to bring new possibilities to the role as I designed and carried out my study and crafted this dissertation. The aims of my work were to disrupt the notion of the educational theory/practice divide, to center coaching practice (and all practice) as inexplicably linked with various theoretical frameworks, and to position theory as a tool instructional coaching practitioners can use to inform coaching practice when relying on theories aligned onto-epistemologically (Barad, 2003) with oneself. A guiding assumption of my study is the power of feminist community, or a sense of community, and the lack thereof within typical coaching contexts, which sparked the idea for the Coach Group. A second assumption I held is the inaccessible nature of much theoretical writing and scholarly research for the everyday coaching practitioner, which troubles the goals of my study but urges me to write, create, and engage in accessible ways. As I began meeting with the Coach Group and in reviewing the multitude of data generated through our time together, it became glaringly obvious to me that the work we were doing as coaches within and outside of the Group was feminist practice. With these aims and assumptions in mind, the following research questions steered my work:

1. How can instructional coaches use theoretical concepts to make sense of their coaching environment, positioning, and experiences and to coach differently?
2. How do coaches experience belonging to a coaching community?
3. What does conceiving of instructional coaching as feminist practice produce?

Each of the chapters included above considers one or more of these research questions, my intentions, and my assumptions. Through chapter two, I began the work of troubling the theory/practice divide in the context of instructional coaching. In my review

of instructional coaching literature, both scholarly and popular, I sought to determine the ontological and epistemological understandings of each author I read and considered how their orientations toward coaching were generated accordingly. Through engaging in this focused literature review, I became troubled by the overwhelming amount of humanist-oriented coaching practitioner texts and how my taking up coaching practices from these texts and humanist perspectives could perpetuate harm for the teachers and students coaches work with. Through writing chapter two, I familiarized myself with the field of coaching research and literature, came to understand coaching as politically-charged and more often than not humanist-ly oriented, and felt more sure that the use of poststructural and feminist theories in coaching could channel coaching in less harmful ways.

In chapter three, I centered my third research question as I attempted to frame coaching as a feminist practice. As I discussed traditions of feminist practice and positioned them alongside my experiences with the women of the Coach Group, I began to understand the intersection of instructional coaching and the feminist movement as fruitful. Through relying on traditions of feminism, coaching practice could be informed and through coaching, steps toward the goals of the feminist movement could be taken. Additionally, the discussions in chapter three add to the call for establishing coaching communities. As I recalled the moments of consciousness-raising and feminist education that took place throughout Coach Group meetings, I strengthened my belief that coaches cannot do this work alone. Much like feminist groups, the creation of coaching groups could prove to be invigorating sites for challenging ourselves and current practice and identifying strategies for change. I have taken this belief into my current work as an assistant principal where I meet with the four instructional coaches at my school each Friday for what we call

“Coaches Collab.” The highlight of my work week, it is my hope to carry on these feminist practices in my new setting and see what unfolds.

Last, in chapter four, I explicitly put theory to work to model how coaches can use theory to transform coaching practice and to partake in my overall goal of determining ways to coach differently. As I worked to disrupt the discourse of coach as manager through rethinking the school hierarchy and teacher observation, I could not ignore the patriarchal connection with nearly everything that troubles me about coaching and education, including what was discussed within my analyses and what didn't make the cut of this dissertation. While the analysis that occurred within the chapter provides implications for the greater coaching community and direction toward coaching differently for myself that I find important and am already carrying out, I am left wondering if seismic change will ever be possible and disheartened knowing there is a long way to go.

Moving Forward

From the four months I spent with the Coach Group to the last year and a half of writing this dissertation, I am forever changed. While the women of the Coach Group consistently illuminated harmful aspects of coaching discourse that presented challenges for their work during our meetings, the dissertation writing process allowed me to deconstruct their experiences and begin to reimagine a different way of coaching. As my journey as a doctoral student nears its end and serving as an assistant principal supervising instructional coaches and teachers becomes my professional focus, I intend to bring the conclusions I have drawn throughout this dissertation into my practice. Below I share my first and, what I believe to be, most critical steps toward cultivating new possibility for the instructional coaches and teachers I serve. Additionally, I offer these implications to the

larger field of instructional coaching where it is my hope that my next steps help others to coach, or support coaches, in transformational ways.

Implications

First, we must bridge a connection between coaching practice (and all practice) and the theories that drive the work. Operating under the assumption of “that’s just the way it is,” or that there are true, correct, and right ways to coach presents a slew of challenges for coaches, especially when the coaching moves employed do not go as planned. To build this bridge, I intend to coach my coaches. As I work with my coaching team to develop our vision of coaching for next school year and in our work together throughout the year, I will call attention to theories at work within coaching practices and challenge my coaches to consider how other theories and way of thinking can inform their practice. As my coaches come to me for help with coaching challenges, I will guide them toward thinking theoretically through providing prompts, resources, and more. Over time, I hope to find the use of theory as a tool for coaching to become a routine part of their practice.

Cultivating a feminist community space for my coaches stands as a second implication moving forward. While I have already began work in this area through the weekly “Coaches Collab” sessions I hold with my coaching team, assisting my coaches in establishing a larger community with other coaches outside of our school building seems important. As the women of the Coach Group demonstrated, when coaches with a variety of experience and from various locations come together, rich and dynamic conversation and collaboration can occur. I recently pitched the idea to my principal of starting a “Cluster Coaches Collab” group where coaches from neighboring schools meet quarterly for this work, to which she agreed. Through creating and sustaining coaching communities, we can

alleviate the feeling of isolation within coaches while also providing a site for coaches to affirm, challenge, and/or refine their coaching practice.

Finally, understanding the goals and practices of instructional coaching and the feminist movement to be mutually beneficial toward one another is an aim to put in practice. Throughout my career, I have almost exclusively worked alongside women and my encounters with men in a professional context have been limited to my experiences engaging with officials from the district office. Despite the overwhelming majority of those carrying out teaching, learning, and coaching daily within my school and district to be women, men (and patriarchal ethic-onto-epistemologies) continue to determine expectations and set parameters for our work from above. When working with my coaches, leaning into principles of feminist practice with the hope that these feminist principles transfer into their practice with teachers could transform our coaching support into something more meaningful and aligned with women's ways of thinking while also contributing to the larger goals of the feminist movement.

I began this dissertation in a state of unease and end in much the same way. While the implications I have laid out above provide me with hope and small, practical steps toward transforming instructional coaching into what I believe to be more meaningful and important practice, I remain burdened by the impossibility of it all. The dominating structures that have regulated our schools since the conception of schooling remain and aren't going anywhere. For now, I remember the teachers and students I have supported over the years, hold tight to small wins like the text message from the opening of this chapter, and carry on in the endeavor of coaching differently.

AFTERWORD

THE WOMEN OF THE COACH GROUP

The four months I spent alongside the women of the Coach Group were some of the most enjoyable of my professional career. Our group meetings provided a site for meaningful conversation, collaboration, and creation where we could voice our vulnerabilities, frustrations, and wondering as well as collectively celebrate our successes. It has been over a year since our final Coach Group meeting, yet I remain in contact with each of the women. Below is a brief update on each of the Group participants and where they are now.

Heather remains at Ant Elementary as the K-5 math and science instructional coach. Next school year she will begin her fifth year of coaching and does not intend to make any career changes soon. I remain in touch with Heather in a friendly capacity and occasionally run into her at professional development sessions and other district meetings. Heather continues to radiate positivity and hopes this outward projection transfers into her coaching relationships.

After three years of being the only coach at Swan Elementary, Fran finally got a coaching partner – Caitlin! Now able to focus on serving as the K-5 literacy coach, Fran feels more at peace in her position and as though she can create and sustain change in her role. As Fran recently remarked to me, “Coaching can feel like the overlooked position at times since our whole job is to pour into others, sometimes leaving little attention for our own self-care. It has made so much difference to have a partner to think, plan, and share with!”

One of Fran's largest takeaways from the Coach Group is to ask, "Why?" No longer a passive bystander, Fran gained the courage from the Group to question aspects of her coaching role that troubled her. Like Heather, I remain in touch with Fran through district gatherings and our mutual connection with Caitlin. Fran plans to retire from Swan Elementary in a couple years' time as an instructional coach.

Upon my departure from Bear Elementary due to my assistant principal appointment, Caitlin, too, thought it was time for a change. Due to the connection she made with Fran through the Coach Group meetings, Fran set her up with an interview at Swan Elementary and the rest is history. In her new role, Caitlin transitioned from serving as a K-2 coach for all subject areas to supporting K-5 math. She is still adjusting to the new school, the new coaching assignment, and forming coaching relationships with teachers she did not have a previous teaching experience with. However, Caitlin has shared with me on numerous occasions her happiness with her new principal and assistant principal that both better understand the complexities of coaching and do not provide her with as many managerial-like directives. Although she is content at her new school, Caitlin is considering looking into jobs at the district office. Her school recently participated in a case study for a new district program supporting teacher retention that sparked Caitlin's interest.

Bea is currently wrapping up her second year as the K-5 district social studies coach. No longer new to the position, Bea described herself as "much more informed and confident." Recently her department hired counterparts for Bea, two 6-12 social studies coaches for the district. No longer the newbie, Bea has enjoyed showing her new partners the ropes and passing along some of the coaching practices she refined during the Coach Group. Bea also founded a group this semester where she teachers meet once a week after

school to create social studies resources, where she is able to lean into practices the Coach Group also engaged in such as reading and discussing texts. Additionally, Bea is considering enrolling in a PhD program in the next few years.

Caitlin, Bea, and I remain close friends and get together at least once monthly. At times our conversations mirror those that occurred during Coach Group meetings, and it is not uncommon for our group text to take a theoretical turn whether we're discussing what's going on at school or Taylor Swift. Although we were friends before, I am thankful for our time in the Coach Group and see our friendship as forever changed.

As for me, a few weeks after our final Coach Group meeting, I began work as an assistant principal at a neighboring elementary school in our school district. My favorite part of my new job is serving as the instructional coaching assistant principal. I continuously seek ways to put what I've learned from this dissertation experience into practice, whether it is through my work with the instructional coaching team or in supporting my grade level teachers. I plan to remain in the local school setting where I feel I can create and sustain change on the ground, even if it is one student or one teacher at a time.

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Appendix A

Coach Group Meeting Guides

Date	Plan	Time
9/26	<u>Introductions & ice breaker</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share name and school • Ice breaker: “Line Up” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Years as an educator • Years as a coach • Favorite grade to teach • What time you woke up today • Number of countries you’ve been to • How many pets you have • Share brief history as an educator and current position • Share personal information, if comfortable (family, hobbies, etc.) 	10 min
	<u>Present group info and logistics</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How this study came to be <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lost as a new coach ○ Coaching independent study ○ Turning from popular literature to theory and isolation to talking about my thoughts/ideas/experiences with others • State my ontological and epistemological beliefs that inform decisions I make for this group • Share research questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How can instructional coaches use theoretical concepts to make sense of their surroundings/experience and to coach differently? ○ How do coaches experience belonging to a coaching community? • Share participant requirements and discuss confidentiality as a group 	10 min
	<u>Fears and Hopes Protocol</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protocol modification: Provide each group member with 2 sticky notes to record their fear and hope and use these stickies for step 3 	10 min

	<u>Break</u>	10 min
	<u>Writing exercise</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think of a recent coaching moment/interaction that prompted an uncomfortable feeling within you (anger, annoyance, anxiety, etc) • Write about this moment. What happened? • Group members share in partners the gist of their chosen experience 	5 min
	<u>Intro to theory</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present theoretical paradigms and identify the theories chosen for this group as critical and/or poststructural • Name popular coaching literature (e.g. Knight) as positivist • Introduce reading/theory as a tool 	10 min
	<u>Reading of Delpit (1988)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Delpit (1988) “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children” p. 283-284 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a sticky note: How does Delpit conceive of power? How do you know? 	10 min
	<u>Putting Delpit (1988) to work</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members share in partners their thoughts on how Delpit conceives of power • Partners then use Delpit’s understanding of power to analyze the coaching moment they previously wrote about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How is Delpit’s conception of power present in your writing? ○ What would Delpit say about your coaching moment? ○ How can you use Delpit’s conception of power to understand or interpret your coaching moment in a different way? • Whole group shares and discusses thoughts, new understandings, and questions from the partner work • Closing discussion question: How can Delpit’s conception of power inform what we know, believe, and practice as coaches? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Group members can add thoughts to the ongoing “We Know, We Believe, We Will” chart 	30 min
	<u>Introduce coach journal</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage group members to journal, take notes, send texts, record audio notes, etc. about their coaching experiences, what they are thinking, what they are feeling, document coaching moments that “stick out,” etc. as much as they can 	5 min

	<u>Looking ahead</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework: Read Foucault (1978/1976) “Method” p. 92-97 • Next meeting: 10/17 	5 min
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Date	Plan	Time
10/17	<u>Introductions and Wellness Check-in</u>	5 min
	<u>Review “Fears and Hopes” chart</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Fears and Hopes charts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Are there any fears or hopes to add? 	5 min
	<u>Writing Exercise</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write about a recent coaching moment 	5 min
	<u>Analyzing Foucault (1978/1976)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members individually review Foucault (1978/1976) “Method” p. 92-97 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a sticky note: How does Foucault conceive of power? How do you know? • Group members share in partners their sticky notes and discuss the reading • Whole group shares and discusses thoughts, new understandings, and questions from the partner work 	25 min
	<u>Putting Foucault (1978/1976) to work</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a journal entry from one group member to analyze using Foucault’s conception of power (I will have a journal entry of my own for analysis, if needed) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ How is Foucault’s conception of power present in the writing? ◦ What would Foucault say about this situation? ◦ How can you use Foucault’s conception of power to understand or interpret this experience in a different way? • Closing discussion question: How can Foucault’s conception of power inform what we know, believe, and practice as coaches? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Group members can add thoughts to the ongoing “We Know, We Believe, We Will” chart 	20 min
<u>Break</u>	10 min	

	<p><u>Writing exercise</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: What keeps you up at night related to education/coaching? What excites you? What would you change if you could? Why? How? • Allow volunteers to share their writing, if they would like 	20 min
	<p><u>Inquiry launch: How can we coach differently?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Aguilar (2018) “Mini Inquiry Cycle” p. 476 as a resource • Independently group members will create an inquiry plan to consider how they can use what happens in this group (readings, writings, discussions, etc.) to coach differently by brainstorming a list of questions (e.g., How can I cultivate relationships with “resistant” teachers?) and creating a plan for how they can inquire into a chosen question • Encourage group members to implement their plan and document how it goes in their journal • Group members can get feedback on their plan via partners or by sharing with the whole group 	25 min
	<p><u>Looking ahead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework: Read Foucault (1977/1975) “Panopticism” p. 200-204 • Remind group members to launch their inquiry plan and journal about the process • Next meeting: 11/14 	5 min

Date	Plan	Time
11/14	<p><u>Ice breaker</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Which one are you?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Group members choose which photo will be them on the upcoming break and share why 	5 min
	<p><u>Review group norms and “Fears and Hopes” chart</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose one norm to hold yourself accountable to today • Review Fears and Hopes charts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Are there any fears or hopes to add? 	5 min
	<p><u>Analyzing Foucault (1977/1975)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members individually review Foucault (1977/1975) “Panopticism” p. 200-204 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a sticky note: How does Foucault conceive of power? How do you know? 	25 min

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members share in partners their sticky notes and discuss the reading • Whole group shares and discusses thoughts, new understandings, and questions from the partner work 	
	<p><u>Putting Foucault (1977/1975) to work</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members will form two groups to create two charts: The Classroom and The School <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ How are classrooms or schools traditionally set up to ensure students or teachers are meeting expectations? ◦ How is observation used by teachers or coaches/administrators to ensure students or teachers are meeting expectations? • Groups will switch charts and add any further thoughts they have • As a whole group, review the charts and discuss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ How is Foucault’s conception of power/the panopticon present in the traditional set up/structure of the classroom/school? ◦ How is Foucault’s conception of power/the panopticon present in teacher-student or coach/admin-teacher observation? ◦ What would Foucault say about these situations? ◦ How can you use Foucault’s conception of power to understand or interpret classroom set up and observation a different way? • Closing discussion question: How can Foucault’s conception of power and the panopticon inform what we know, believe, and practice as coaches? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Group members can add thoughts to the ongoing “We Know, We Believe, We Will” chart 	25 min
	<u>Break</u>	10 min
	<p><u>Writing exercise</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members will complete Aguilar (2018) “Take Apart a Thought” p. 182 with a partner • Prompt: How can theory help you interpret your thoughts and think differently? • Allow volunteers to share their writing, if they would like 	20 min
	<p><u>Inquiry update: How can we coach differently?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members will each share an update of their inquiry plan/read aloud journal entries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ How’s it going? 	25 min

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are you now thinking? Wondering? • Independently group members will update their inquiry plan to reflect new learning/thoughts for implementation • Group members can get feedback on their plan via partners or by sharing with the whole group 	
	<p><u>Looking ahead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework: Read Davies (1991) “The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructural Analysis” p. 50-51 and hooks (2015) “Changing Perspectives on Power” p. 91-95 • Remind group members to continue their inquiry plan and journal about the process • Schedule interviews for 12/13-12/16 • Next meeting: 12/12 	5 min

Date	Plan	Time
12/5	<p><u>Ice breaker</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Coach Acrostic Poem” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Group members will independently write acrostic poems about what it means to coach and be a coach and share with the group 	5 min
	<p><u>Review group norms and “Fears and Hopes” chart</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose one norm to hold yourself accountable to today • Review Fears and Hopes charts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are there any fears or hopes to add? 	5 min
	<p><u>Analyzing Davies (1991)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members individually review Davies (1991) “The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructural Analysis” p. 50-51 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a sticky note: How does Davies conceive of power? How do you know? • Group members share in partners their sticky notes and discuss the reading • Whole group shares and discusses thoughts, new understandings, and questions from the partner work • Closing discussion question: How can Davies’s conception of power inform what we know, believe, and practice as coaches? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Group members can add thoughts to the ongoing “We Know, We Believe, We Will” chart 	20 min

	<p><u>Analyzing hooks (2015)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members individually review hooks (2015) “Changing Perspectives on Power” p. 91-95 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a sticky note: How does hooks conceive of power? How do you know? • Group members share in partners their sticky notes and discuss the reading • Whole group shares and discusses thoughts, new understandings, and questions from the partner work • Closing discussion question: How can hooks’ conception of power inform what we know, believe, and practice as coaches? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Group members can add thoughts to the ongoing “We Know, We Believe, We Will” chart 	20 min
	<p><u>Break</u></p>	10 min
	<p><u>Inquiry presentations: How can we coach differently?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members will each share an update of their inquiry plan/read aloud journal entries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How’s it going? ○ What are you now thinking? Wondering? • Independently group members will create an artifact to share with the group that encapsulates their learning from their inquiry and this experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How <i>can</i> you coach or be a coach differently? ○ Ideas: traditional writing, creative writing (found poetry, graphic novel), music, drawing, video/multimedia, etc. • Group members will share their culminating artifact 	55 min
	<p><u>Goodbyes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm interviews for 12/13-12/16 • Can I copy their journals, different artifacts, etc? • Consider how the group can stay in touch or reach out, if needed 	5 min

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Introduction

- The purpose of this interview is to dive deeper into your thoughts about and experience with the coach group.
- If you are uncomfortable with any of the forthcoming questions, feel free to pass. Let me know if you need a break. This should take around 30 minutes.

Brief personal/work experience

- Tell me a little about yourself and your background.

Theory

- Tell me about your experience with the readings and discussing the theoretical concepts.
- Can you tell me about a time outside of coach group meetings when you used a theoretical concept as a “tool”?
- Do you think reading theory can impact your work as a coach? In what ways?

Community

- Tell me about your experience belonging to the coach group.
- In what ways did belonging to this group impact you on a personal level (mental and physical wellbeing), if any?
- In what ways did belonging to this group impact your commitment to sustained employment as an instructional coach, if any?

Coaching differently

- In what ways do you coach differently now than before you joined the coach group?
- What does being a coach and coaching others mean to you?
- In what ways does your work setting promote and/or limit these ideals?

Closure

- Is there anything else you would like to share?

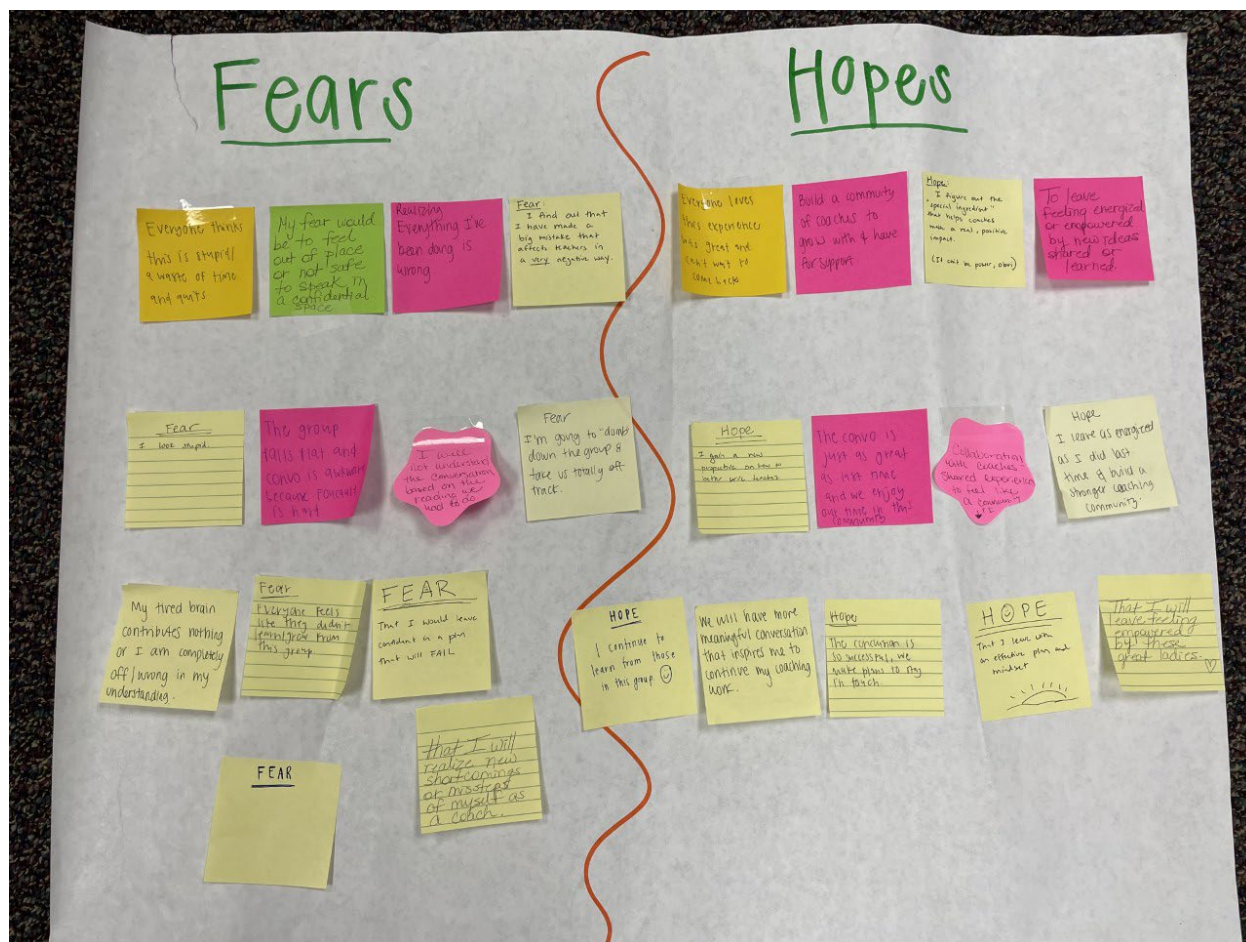
Appendix C

Coach Group Text List

- Davies, B. (1991). The concept of agency: A feminist poststructural analysis. *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology*, 30, 42-53.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23164525> (pp. 50-51)
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(3), 280-299.
<https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.58.3.c43481778r528qw4> (pp. 283-284)
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, volume 1: An introduction* (Robert Hurley, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1976) ("Method" pp. 92-97)
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (Alan Sheridan, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1975) ("Panopticism" pp. 200-204)
- hooks, b. (2015). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743172> ("Changing Perspectives on Power" pp. 91-95)

Appendix D

Fears and Hopes Chart



Appendix E

We Know... We Believe... We Will... Chart

We Know...	We Believe...	We Will...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - power can be "unseen" - there can be rules of power - power is everywhere - power is not evil - Where there is power, there is resistance - power is relational - Recognizing/naming the system at work is a start to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's important to participate in resistance - relationships are important and powerful - we have impact, but it's limited - systematic change is possible, but not quick or easy. - Coaches should be intentional about not focusing on the individual, but the collective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - make the rules of power known - Resistance: offer a different perspective - not repeat a behavior - reframe walk-throughs to be supportive - emphasize community - promote teacher voice and diverse strengths/practices - prioritize authentic community among team