Creating Conceptual Clarity: Instructional Coaches’ Understanding of Instructional Coaching

Submitted by

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A Dissertation Submitted in

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctorate of Education

Concordia University-Chicago

River Forest, Illinois

May 2015
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May, 2015

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Abstract

Teachers have an integral role in education as they influence, among many things, student learning. They are provided with professional development and mentoring opportunities, reflective on-cycle formal and informal evaluations, and teacher coaching to increase the effectiveness of their craft. The focus of this study was to understand instructional coaching from the perspective of instructional coaches. Research on instructional coaching has shown that teachers may increase their effectiveness to create a more engaging classroom. This study used a descriptive case study approach of instructional coaches in three different high schools to uncover how coaches engage teachers in learning as they describe their coaching sessions. Engagement theory and learning theories were researched to more deeply understand how instructional coaching is more than just a mentor or professional development opportunity for teachers, but relies heavily on engaging teachers in the process of shifting their philosophical viewpoints, uncovering best practice instructional techniques, and critically examining their teaching. Additional parts of this study emphasized on determining if instructional coaching programs are successful, and how instructional coaches engage in learning to make them become better instructional coaches. The focus of this study was specifically on instructional coaches, as this study provides insight and experience into their role in teaching teachers.

Keywords: instructional coaching, engagement theory, adult learner, descriptive coaching case study, and coaching, mentoring, professional development
To Sarah, my coach in life.
Acknowledgements

I will never forget when I “played school,” ran a “library” in my house, and discovered the joy of “teaching” as a child. As I grew older and embraced that being an educator was the path I would take, my mother, Kim, shared how she knew she should have given me a stethoscope as a child instead of a book because then I would be a doctor. Thank you to my family and friends who have supported me on this journey, especially Kim (mom), Len (dad), Danielle and Taylor (sisters) for playing along with my passion in education as I grew up, understanding the value of education and spending countless amounts of money to give me the best education and then giving me the motivation to set-goals to receive the same highest honor in education. Mom, I am now a doctor! Similarly, my grandparents, especially my grandfather, Leo, stretched my thinking, shared his life stories, and from an early age inspired me to be the very best I can be. I took this to heart and knew I would do everything in my power to honor his name and make him proud of me to carry-on his name. I am so happy he made the promise to me to “stick around” to see this through. I only hope this can now be the inspiration to him to keep living to see all the future amazing accomplishments of my daughter, Campbell Jane. Right now, they are milestones of walking and talking, but soon she will be old enough to understand all the great stories of my grandfather’s life that he once shared with me.

The greatest educator in my life is my wife, Sarah: you and your mother, Suzanne, opened this path for me to show me that being an educator was successful and leads to a fulfilling life. From our first class in college to 13 years later, you have always stood by my side, supported me, and made me realize all the potential I have. Words will
never be able to express how much you and your support means to me. You taught me love, to be loved, and to open my heart. Your constant push through these last five years especially has been the inspiration I needed to continue. Thank you for always being there to support my goals and always standing beside and behind me to give me the push I need to pursue my passions. I am thrilled to be finished with this chapter of my life. Time that was once spent reading, writing, and studying can now be spent on raising the most beautiful, collective part of our life, our daughter, Campbell Jane.

To my daughter, Campbell Jane, a long time ago I set a goal to earn this doctorate by the time you were born. There were times when I felt that literally was never going to happen (both finishing the doctorate and you arriving). As I always say, everything happens for a reason, and your birth on my birthday, was the final motivation I needed. Thank you for being on a nap schedule to give me time to write. I only hope you can follow your dreams, set and reach all of your goals, and rely on all the amazing people around you (nana, papa, gammy, aunties, mommy, and me) to always be there to be your number one fans.

Finally, this dissertation has only been possible because of the incredible amount of talent, dedication, and time my dissertation chair, Dr. Pamela Konkol, and committee, Dr. Simeon Stumme and Dr. Chris Lilly, put into sharing their expertise, guiding me through the process, and countlessly reading my work to provide authentic feedback. I extend my deepest gratitude to my committee, my editor, Jerry Berardi, and all the other people in my life who have supported me through this process including Ann, Haley, and Steve for committing yourselves to this study; I am so appreciative of your honesty, timeliness, and passion for instructional coaching. Your mark on education and educators
is something that does not go unnoticed. This study has opened the door to me working with amazing educators who are or were instructional coaches. The network created, the inspiring team developed, and the future influence we can collectively make as coaches is something I am excited to pursue as the next chapter of my life begins.
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The focus of this inquiry was to develop an understanding of instructional coaching through the perspective of how instructional coaches perceive instructional coaching and engage teachers in the learning process. Most of the current research in instructional coaching provides illustrations of instructional coaching models, explanations of how instructional coaching can be considered a type of mentoring or professional development opportunity, or focuses on the effects of instructional coaching on improving teacher effectiveness. In many cases and in many districts, there is confusion of the instructional coaching role. Instructional coaching is a specific model (Knight, 2007) developed to support teachers; however, the inconsistency of the use of the model is in question. This investigation showed another side of instructional coaching in that it is conceptually different depending on the school or district in which one is an instructional coach. This inquiry focused on illustrating how instructional coaches engage teachers as they work with them and perceive instructional coaching.

Although engagement theory (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1999) is typically applied to understanding how students become engaged in the learning process, the theory has applicability to analyzing instructional coaches as learners or teacher-learning in this inquiry as well. Specifically, engagement theory “promotes student activities that involves cognitive processes such as creating, problem-solving, reasoning, decision-making, and evaluation in which students are motivated to learn due to the meaningful nature of the learning environment and activities” (p. 109). While the underlying basis of this theory connects to technology-based engagement, the components of the theory and
the conclusions drawn link to the instructional coaches’ role of engaging teachers in learning, understanding how to provide opportunities for teachers to learn, or even to understand what is necessary for instructional coaches to become better instructional coaches. This is important because currently research on how instructional coaches learn and get better at their position as an instructional coach is limited. The conclusions drawn from Kearsley and Shneiderman are the following: “the major premise is that students must be engaged in their course work in order for effective learning to occur. The theory posits three primary means to accomplish engagement: (1) an emphasis on collaborative efforts, (2) project-based assignments, and (3) non-academic focus. It is suggested that these three methods result in learning that is creative, meaningful, and authentic” (p. 166). For this inquiry, engagement theory provided a lens to research the phenomenon of instructional coaching. Using the lens of engagement, I developed a deeper understanding of the learning processes of instructional coaches and teachers from the perspective of instructional coaches as they shared understanding the role as an instructional coach and engaging teachers in the learning process.

This study was completed through case studies of three instructional coaches in different school settings through a series of interviews of the instructional coaches. All schools have different vision statements and instructional coaching programs with various levels of training. One school relies on the teacher’s masters degree in reading as training, one of the school allows the instructional coaches to work toward his or her strengths to determine a model that best fits the school, and one school trains its instructional coaches through an instructional coaching model. The object of this inquiry
was to understand instructional coaching through how instructional coaches perceive their role and engage teachers in learning.

Through this research, I sought to develop an in-depth understanding of instructional coaching through how instructional coaches understand their varying roles and engage teachers in learning. Instructional coaches provided perspectives on whether or not they view themselves as teachers of teachers. This study investigated how and if instructional coaching is more than just professional development for teachers and mentoring of teachers. Developing this understanding was particularly important because it shows what instructional coaching qualities are needed when choosing instructional coaches, and it additionally provides more information to teachers who want to become instructional coaches.

For this study, the term “instructional coach” and “instructional coaching” were defined to include any non-evaluative certified teacher who has the responsibility of teaching teachers or working in what the school defines the staff member as an instructional coach. This is important to know because the term “instructional coach” or “instructional coaching” is often times interpreted differently depending on the school, district, or researchers’ understanding of the concept. The instructional coaches experiences in this study varied from coach-to-coach, district-to-district, grade level-to-grade level, and their personal educational philosophies. While the experiences were different, the basis of this investigation understood their role through their perspective, and additionally understood how they engage the teachers they work with through the learning process.
**Background and Context**

**Teacher as student: My experiences with formal and informal coaching.**

My interest in instructional coaching developed in my first year of teaching, although at that point I had no idea that it was called instructional coaching. Working in an upper class western suburban district, I was a high school English teacher—part of a new teacher mentor program. During our initial induction period, we spent a week before the school year discussing philosophies of education and research on education. While this was essential to framing the school year and introducing new faculty members to the philosophy and priorities of the district, all I could think about during this experience was what I would say and do with my students the first day of school. Every night I went home with the thought that I just did not even know where to start when students entered my classroom. Like many other new teachers, I thought my pre-service student teaching prepared me well; however, like many other new teachers, it felt much different when it came to my very first day of teaching by myself; simply the fact that it was my own classroom raised the stakes to a whole new level. Looking back, that first year was more of a struggle than I ever imagined, or could allow myself to acknowledge at the time.

There was an established school support system for new teachers. I had an everyday departmental mentor, I had a school mentor who was one mentor for all new teachers, and once a week I met with the new teachers of my department with my department chair. As I recall, there really was not much of anything that helped me be a better teacher. The purpose of the mentors in this district were to just expose new teachers to what the school was like and how to do the basic day-to-day responsibilities—like make copies, figure out where the library and bookstore were, and have someone to
talk to if new teachers had questions. I was able to understand teaching, the philosophies of teaching, and I was given the opportunities to know and understand the school systems to basically survive. There was an element missing; something that I knew I needed as a reflective practitioner to improve my craft, but for me, I just did not know how to access that skill of improving my teaching by myself.

Importantly, this elusive sense of what was missing from my experience was presented in two specific experiences that were facilitated by the school mentor for all new teachers. Although these experiences were not framed as such at the time, contemporarily, these experiences would be called instances of “instructional coaching,” a concept that was first introduced by Robert Greenleaf in 1970.

The first experience was framed as a simple meeting time for new faculty to share “what works” in the classroom. New teachers were asked to be ready to talk about basic instructional strategies that could be done in any classroom, no matter the content. I will never forget the strategy I brought to the meeting: “tick-tock-tick-tock-ding.” Looking back, it was a version of think-pair-share that gave specific time limits for students to collect their thoughts, discuss with one another, stretch their thinking, and then report out. At this point in my teaching career, this was not a teaching strategy that I did not really learn about nor did I realize it was an essential element of collaborative instruction. What was interesting about the new teacher sharing meeting was that there were no other new teachers, out of 15 teachers, who did anything like that in their classroom. Based on this experience, I was also able to learn several teaching strategies that I could apply in my classroom. This was the first time in my teaching career that I was engaged as a teacher to do something that could help me in my teaching—this was significant.
The second experience manifested as an opportunity for my school-mentor to observe my teaching and provide me with non-evaluative feedback. I was more nervous than ever to have another teacher in my classroom, but she, as a non-evaluator, provided me authentic teaching feedback that ultimately acknowledged that what I was doing was on the right track in terms of being an effective teacher.

At the time, I felt like the overall experience did not necessarily help me, but what I realize now looking back was that these two experiences combined provided what could have been a more effective way to make me a better teacher and help me learn as a teacher. This experience was important because it was my first with instructional coaching. I had the opportunity to see first-hand how instructional coaching affected my instruction, my students, and me. This was the turning point in my educational career as it offered me insight into how every teacher needs an experience with an instructional coach so he or she can be engaged in the learning process and grow as a professional.

Within that academic year, I participated in no less than 10 full new teacher induction days, approximately 40 meetings with the rest of the new teachers in my department and my department chair, I had a course mentor, and the school provided a mentor for me. The amount of time, energy, and the monetary investment the district put into me really showed me that mentoring is important. However, at the end of the year and looking back and reflecting almost 10 years later on this experience, I recall only two significant experiences in which I was explicitly engaged in the process of cultivating my practice and could see the direct philosophical gain. The rest of the experiences definitely provided background information about teaching, but as a new teacher that information was not practical to me—I was not engaged in the process, and it did not support current
classroom practices like the two experiences of what would now be coined instructional coaching did during that year.

My next teaching appointment was in a district where a mentoring program of any sort did not exist. Teachers shared ideas about best practice teaching regularly, and disciplinary teams offered professional support. This was part of the culture of the school. Sharing was important, teams of teachers were smaller, and it was an expectation to work more closely with each other so each student could have a common experience. If I were to apply a conventional conceptualization to experience, it would parallel a “team-supported instructional coaching” method (Knight, 2007). Insofar as we had many opportunities to share effective teaching strategies, I was highly engaged in this process and could see the direct influence in my classroom. I grew significantly as a teacher in this context due in great part to the coaching atmosphere, despite the fact that instructional coaching or mentoring was not explicitly in place in this district.

When I started a master’s degree in a reading specialist program, I was introduced to “literacy coaching” (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012). Concurrently, my school implemented literacy coaching as the latest approach to try to assist teachers in improving their instruction. My graduate work, combined with my close relationship with the coaches in my building, provided me with an opportunity to gain both theoretical and practical insight into the influence coaching teachers can make on each teacher’s professional practice; particularly with respect to working directly with teachers. I started to understand how the coaching of teachers, or the application of the intervention to the practice of teaching, can have an extended effect on classrooms and students. Meaning, as instructional practices are positively influenced, more students are served because
more engaged classrooms are created. This is an important consideration because
effective, engaged teachers can have the power to increase student learning. My personal
philosophy is that as student learning increases students will be better prepared for life
after high school.

During this time, I also went through professional development training on
Project CRISS (Creating Independence through Student Owned Strategies) (Santa,
Havens, & Valdez, 2004). Project CRISS is devoted to creating effective classrooms
through increased engagement strategies and best practice teaching techniques. This year
added to my foundational knowledge in understanding how, with improved instructional
strategies through being engaged in the teacher-learning process, teachers can increase
learning in their classrooms.

A teacher of teachers: Becoming an instructional coach. It is important to
understand my own position with respect to this study. I was an instructional coach for
three years. Due to my experiences and connection to the topic of inquiry, I address my
own assumptions later in this chapter because they directly influence my position on this
concept. As an instructional coach, I had different opportunities to work with teachers: I
co-taught a science class, coached a team of English teachers, was responsible for
coaching new teachers, was assigned to work with elective teachers, and redeveloped our
special education co-teaching model to include opportunities for coaching. From these
coaching experiences, I discovered that teachers learn best through the context of their
content, teachers learn best from other teachers, and teachers really do want to improve as
teachers.
When I worked one-on-one with a science teacher to co-teach a biology class for low-level readers, the charge was to redesign the curriculum and coach the science teacher throughout the year on more effective ways to teach struggling learners. Implicit in this charge was engaging her in the learning process, which included shifting her philosophical educational views to increase her effectiveness as a teacher. This meant I had to help her understand that lecturing for an entire period and allowing students to fill-in notes based on a power point presentation did not allow them to fully engage in learning. While she was tentative at first, when she began to see the affect these strategies had on the learning that took place within her classroom, she really embraced the process. It took several coaching sessions and weeks into the course, but by the end of the semester, she truly changed her instructional practices. Additionally, I coached an entire team of English teachers on curriculum design. While the purpose was to create a more effective English curriculum, it gave me opportunities to discuss assignments and activities that could be enhanced to better meet the needs of students; teachers were engaged because it directly affected them.

During my experience as an instructional coach, I was assigned to coach a driver’s education team, health team, physical education team, applied tech team, and business team. This team-coaching approach allowed me to be part of teams of teachers and to coach them using the context of their content. When I had the responsibility of coaching about 10 new teachers, the range of new teachers I coached were parts of various encore courses like art, engineering, business, auto maintenance, and music. I also was able to get into teacher’s classrooms, plan with them, and provide more direct and contextual feedback through engaging them in the learning process, and see
instructional and student growth first-hand from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. The reason why it was so successful was that I engaged each teacher in philosophical changes. Success was measured through the teachers meeting the school’s initiatives of getting students talking, writing, thinking, and processing information in class.

I was also an instructional coach for our school’s co-teachers of special education students—a regular education teacher and a special education teacher. During that year, I was given the charge to look at the school’s current system and I established professional development opportunities for teachers to understand the affect their instructional practices and co-teaching relationships have on student engagement in learning. The instructional coaching influence I had was on 30 teachers, but it was more indirect, as it was whole-team coaching with opportunities for co-teachers to work together to coach each other.

Significantly, both personally and for this study, given the number of students in my school connected to the number of teachers I worked with and the classes they taught, my work as a coach had the potential to influence approximately 800 students in any given year. During each year, I coached approximately 20 teachers who had a direct effect on almost every student. The teams I coached were teachers who taught courses needed to graduate high school.

Instructional coaching allowed me to attempt to shift the thinking of teachers in a practical sense by using their curriculum in order to meet our school goal of creating a more student-centered learning environment. Teachers need someone to show them how building the literacy and engagement skills of students is a possibility in every given
content area. This is a school initiative. The one-on-one and team effort needed to establish change in practice took time, but once teachers realized the benefits to meet the school’s initiatives after they changed their instructional practices, the way they previously thought shifted to provide a student-centered teaching environment.

There were points in my coaching experience where all I thought about were the missed opportunities that were then relevant to me to give new teachers a stronger starting point as opposed to just a teacher mentor program or allowing teachers to sit through professional development presentations or workshops. Student teaching provides that coaching, but it is different because the student teacher is still the student. From my experience, it seems that when the student teacher becomes the teacher, the teacher is left to figure out how to teach during a critical point in their career. The teacher, as a student teacher, is still engaged in the learning process as that student; however, when that student teacher becomes a teacher, an instructional coach can provide the support needed to engage the teacher as a teacher-learner and provide the teacher contextualized opportunities to grow in his or her professional practices.

**A look from the administrator’s chair.** In my current position as Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction, our district is in its pilot year of instructional coaching. I was not part of the team that developed the peer-to-peer instructional coaching model, but am working with the instructional coaches in my school to help them in their roles. There are two part-time instructional coaches in the school. The purpose of instructional coaching in the district is for professional development of teachers. In its current state, teachers seek out instructional coaches for additional
support. There is not necessarily a target group of teachers; however, some coaches are taking this approach.

This coaching model is based from the framework described in *Coaching Matters* (Killion, Harrison, Bryon, & Clifton, 2012) and provides a more structured approach to instructional coaching based on the model in the text. Instructional coaches are data experts, instructional experts, and learning experts. The influence on students and teachers varies depending on the coach, but data is being collected more thoroughly in this system to determine the program’s effectiveness. My new school district does have a mentoring program; however, it is limited in its tie to instructional practices.

My experiences have caused me to draw my own conclusions regarding instructional coaching. From my perspective, because of my experience as an instructional coach, instructional coaching is the single most effective way to engage teachers in professional learning toward improvement of instructional practices that directly affect student engagement and learning. From personal experience, I have seen the direct success in improving teaching and learning through instructional coaching experiences. While I may understand the potential influence instructional coaching could have, my investigation of instructional coaching is important because I am not the only person who is an instructional coach. The experiences of others provide a clearer picture of instructional coaching, its potential success, and an understanding of how teachers learn through the perspective of an instructional coach. Working one-on-one with a teacher, coaching teams of teachers, and being a coach for new teachers were all ways that I experienced this success.
Knight (2006) focused on the professional learning that takes place because of instructional coaching. Jewett and MacPhee (2012) targeted how instructional coaching allows teachers to focus on what is really important: student learning. Gregson and Sturko (2007) determined that teachers need opportunities to learn within the context of their field. These studies combined with personal experiences show that instructional coaching is significant in the educational field today. Through this study, I illustrate the significance of instructional coaching beyond conventional assumptions that coaching is merely a component of mentoring or general professional development. This needs to be more clearly identified for districts that have instructional coaches because there is a lack of clarity around the concept of instructional coaching. While many instructional coaching models exist, based on my personal experiences working in four different high schools, districts still choose to take the concept of instructional coaching and determine how to use the coach based on the need of the school or district.

The purpose of this research was to focus specifically on the common element: understanding the components of instructional coaching from instructional coaches themselves. One important element of instructional coaching missing from the extant literature is a more direct connection to understanding why there is a lack of clarity in understanding instructional coaching as well as determining what is needed for instructional coaches to be more supported to allow for a common understanding of the position. Learning how an instructional coach engages teachers in the learning process was a common part of the research to determine if this provides clarity in the understanding of the role. As learning is a component of this research, both on the part of the instructional coaches and the teachers they coach, that is a defining difference
between instructional coaching, other coaching models, mentoring, and general professional development for teachers. I employed engagement theory (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1999) with additional learning theorists Malcolm Knowles (1980), K. Patricia Cross (1981), Allan Paivio (1991), and David Ausubel (2000) as the theoretical framework for this study.

**Problem Statement**

While there is an abundance of research that supports engaging students in the learning process, the literature on understanding learning through how instructional coaches learn or how instructional coaches engage teachers in learning is not identified as specifically. Student engagement is defined as active learning (Kidwell, 2010). In research reviews of student engagement, Shernoff (2003) focuses “particularly on the phenomenological aspect of high involvement in classrooms, which includes concentrated attention, interest, and enjoyment that indicates that students are more engaged in student-controlled versus teacher-controlled learning activities” (Shernoff, 2003, p. 159). Kidwell (2010) shows how if students are not engaged in the learning process, all of the testing, data analysis, teacher meetings and instructional minutes devoted to creating learning opportunities will not motivate students to learn. Motivation is a key aspect of student engagement. While this is a point of contention in various research, the literature studied in this research focused on student engagement determined that motivation is a significant factor. Additionally, the focus on cognitive engagement can lead to “achievement and learning” (Kidwell, 2010, p. 29). This is why there has been an increase in the awareness and importance of student engagement in relation to student achievement and learning; students need to be invested in their learning.
Similarly, it is just as important that instructional coaches and teachers need to be engaged in order to learn (Knowles, 1980). Currently, there is research connected to adult learning by Malcolm Knowles (1980) and K. Patricia Cross (1981); however, research is not specifically connected to how these learning theories are applied to instructional coaching or how to understand how teachers learn through the instructional coaches’ perspective. The point of this investigation is to uncover how engagement theory and other learning theories can be applied to instructional coaches to show how instructional coaches engage teachers in the learning process.

**What instructional coaching is and is not.** Another issue is that there is a lack of conceptual clarity both from research and from instructional coaches themselves about the understanding of what an instructional coach is. There is confusion over the types of programs schools and districts develop to support their teachers, especially if people identify themselves as an instructional coach. For example, mentoring programs are established in schools because with this added support, schools want their teachers to stay in the district and not leave to teach in a different school or leave the teaching career entirely. Nonetheless, in my personal experience, the mentoring programs that have been developed do not have an instructional focus and do not center on engaging teachers in the learning process. As a result, school districts have developed the role of instructional coaches because studies show that peer-teachers work to collaborate with other “teachers to deepen and enhance teaching practices with the ultimate goal of improving student learning. This perspective relies on a constructivist approach where growth and change are the goals” (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012, p. 12). As the profession evolves, mentoring programs are beginning to shift into coaching models or have taken on the role of
instructional coaching models because of the contextualized learning that takes theory to practice. This is a key understanding that this study investigated from instructional coaches’ perspective.

There is some evidence (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010) that suggests an instructional coach, as a mentor, can provide needed support for teachers’ professional learning, self-efficacy, and engagement in the process of improving instruction. Instructional coaches promote a culture of ongoing adult learning and inspire teachers to be reflective and make changes (Stover et al., 2011). However, even in this case, mentoring and instructional coaching are interchangeably used in the research. In this regard, a study by Collett (2012) showed success with mentoring programs throughout the year because the support that coaches provide changes in both quantity and quality as time progresses. This study adds to the current research by illustrating how to understand instructional coaching through how instructional coaches perceive themselves as both learners and teachers of teachers. This is different than just a mentoring relationship, even though some schools and districts define coaching as mentoring.

Current research shows how teacher mentoring systems with implemented coaching models can increase the effectiveness of teachers, increase student engagement in learning, and ultimately lead to higher levels of teacher retention and student achievement (Bell, 2000; Carruthers, 1993; Roberts, 2000). Some districts may use the instructional coaching model to mentor teachers or replace a formal mentoring program. This model is not necessarily designed for one type of teacher, but for all teachers in need of additional support. However, research, especially from Knight (2007), shows that instructional coaching is not about mentoring, but about engaging teachers in the learning
process. Therefore, instructional coaches can use engagement as their means to increasing their effectiveness as coaches.

When looking solely at mentoring programs, it is not known whether engaging teachers in learning is a necessary part because programs currently rely on a mentoring relationship that provides expertise, advice, and collaboration as opposed to determining how to engage the teacher to think differently to learn different approaches as adults. This study contributes to this topic because more research is needed to support and understand how teachers and instructional coaches learn through instructional coaching. Additionally, this study focused on having instructional coaches explain how they understand the nature of their position to determine why instructional coaching is different than other teacher support systems.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand instructional coaching through the perspective of instructional coaches and how they engage teachers in the learning process. Instructional coaches from three different high schools participated in the case study. The nature of instructional coaching is to work directly with teachers to engage them in the learning process to improve the effectiveness of their instructional practices. Due to the purpose of this role, instructional coaches must have the skills necessary to engage and teach teachers. Choosing coaches from three different settings provided a better understanding of the universality or site-dependence of the nature of this inquiry as it connects to the key component of learning. Since there are differing interpretations of instructional coaching and a lack of clarity and consistency
regarding the role, interviewing three coaches from different schools was essential in
determining consistent emerging themes.

This study contributes to the educational field because it used engagement theory
(Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1999) and learning theorists Malcolm Knowles (1980), K.
Patricia Cross (1981), Allan Paivio (1991), and David Ausubel (1978) to develop a
deeper understanding of how teachers experience the learning process, and if there is a
need for instructional coaches to engage in learning to become better instructional
coaches. Further, this study serves to illustrate how instructional coaching may be
different or similar to other teacher-support models that currently exist in the school
setting. By looking at coaching through this lens, practitioners will better understand
what is needed for instructional coaches and teachers to learn new concepts.
Additionally, it provides an understanding of the skills needed to be an instructional
couch.

Bickmore (2013) indicated the need for mentoring programs for teachers because
as prepared as they might be by coursework, pre-service teachers are still students in a
college setting. After years as students, teachers take jobs and have limited contact with
their previous teachers to help them, learn from them, and make their transition into
teaching more effective. This separation is less problematic if novice teachers are
engaged with experienced mentors, fellow teachers, and supportive administrators.

Putnam and Borko (2000) focused on the situated nature of knowing and learning,
which suggests that teachers’ own classrooms are powerful contexts for their learning.
Situated cognition posits, “the situation in which a person learns becomes a fundamental
part of what is learned” (p. 6). Furthermore, some of the most powerful teacher learning
experiences can occur in a teacher’s own classroom through self-or-observer examination of the teacher’s practice. Similarly, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) suggested the process of inquiry was defined as “critical and transformative, a stance that is linked not only to high standards for the learning of all students but also to social change and social justice and to the individual and collective professional growth of teachers” (p. 38).

“There has been a growing effort over the past decade to provide organizational structures that enable groups of teachers to come together to talk about their work, learn from one another, an address curricular and instructional issues” (p. 89).

According to the literature reviewed, the key (Reeves, 2007) is that teachers must be engaged with their mentors; however, there is limited research connecting how the mentors engage teachers to improve only through the mentoring process. Instructional coaching presents this option, but is limited in the research to determine why there is such a lack of understanding in determining an instructional coaches’ role or how coaches get teachers to learn. Additionally, there is confusion around the topic of instructional coaches primarily in part to schools and districts taking the concept and determining how it fits for that school or district only. Research interchangeably uses the terms mentoring and professional development as elements of instructional coaching.

Bowie (2005) discussed how mentors are used in education to support new professionals who must meet the demands of the position while managing the stresses of a new environment. The purpose of this study was not to further investigate mentoring, but rather show how its interchangeable concept with instructional coaching creates confusion when there are elements of mentoring programs that can be considered
coaching programs. I wanted to understand instructional coaching by how, through personal experiences, instructional coaches engage teachers in the learning process.

Since the work of the actual instructional coaches was a major focus of this study, literature was reviewed that shows how engagement, both on the part of the instructional coach and the teacher, leads to participation in active learning, which determines investment in education that leads to learning (Kidwell, 2010) while utilizing the understanding of engagement theory (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1999) to understand the role of instructional coaches as teachers of teachers. A review of the literature on this topic also indicated the need for understanding instructional coaching from the instructional coaches’ perspective.

**Research Question**

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of instructional coaching through how instructional coaches understand their role and utilize processes involved in instructional coaching—particularly with respect to how they engage teachers in learning. This inquiry employed a case study design and investigated instructional coaching from their perspective through how instructional coaches engage teachers in learning. Instructional coaching is significantly important to the profession because it is a position that could have the power to indirectly influence students. By teaching a teacher and engaging teachers in the learning process of increasing the effectiveness of their instructional strategies, instructional coaches have the role of being more than just a resource or mentor to teachers—but a teacher of teachers. This study may lead to a further understanding of what instructional coaches need regarding their own learning to
become better supported as instructional coaches. This study also may have uncovered what supports instructional coaches need to grow in their role.

This relates to the problem statement because currently, there is limited research on the perspective of how teachers learn as determined by instructional coaches, since the coaches are the ones who can and should be able to engage teachers in the learning process. Additionally, research supports instructional coaching as being effective, but currently focuses more on models of instructional coaching or outcomes of instructional coaching. The research also leads to confusion, as schools and districts have different views on what instructional coaching is and how it is used in their schools. Current research is not as substantial when determining if the role of an instructional coach is to teach the teacher or engage the teacher in the learning process. The research also interchangeably uses mentoring, professional development, and instructional coaching when there is or should be a clear difference. Mentoring may not have an instructional focus, and professional development may focus on many activities linked to the context of the courses teachers teach, whereas instructional coaching uses the context of teaching and learning based on what the teacher teaches. Certainly, all facets of teacher learning have elements of engagement, but specifically the role of an instructional coach can best benefit from research that supports engaging teachers or instructional coaches in the learning process. One element of this can include how to shift teachers’ philosophical views on instructional practices. This component of the coaching process is one that needs to be investigated further. This may be what distinguishes instructional coaching from other teacher support systems to determine if teachers are learning.
The purpose of this qualitative case study also was to understand instructional coaching from the perspective of instructional coaches, through how they engage teachers in the learning process. The theoretical framework of engagement theory and other learning theorists was employed. To that end, the following research question guided this qualitative study:

1. How do instructional coaches understand and describe the nature of their work with teachers?

Based on the key aspects of instructional coaching and the theoretical framework, I anticipated that the following would emerge while answering this research question:

a. How coaches perceive their role.

b. Why there is confusion regarding the concept of instructional coaching.

c. How coaches plan to engage teachers during their sessions.

d. What techniques coaches use to ensure learning is taking place.

e. What, if any, further professional development is needed to better support instructional coaches.

f. How coaches share that they involve cognitive processes during their coaching sessions.

**Advancing Scientific Knowledge**

There was a need for this research question to be investigated because of the potential in providing additional support for understanding the role of an instructional coach as a teacher of teachers. In this investigator’s experience, coaching did not work as well if philosophical viewpoints were not changed in the coaching process and the coach was not able to engage the teacher in the process. Understanding why this happens may
be a major factor in further research on why instructional coaching may not work. There also is confusion around the conceptual understanding of instructional coaching based on school districts’ philosophy of the instructional coaching program. Finally, this study may provide more support on the need for stronger coaching of instructional coaches to better understanding their purpose.

The literature review provided a greater understanding for the need to further study distinguishing teacher-mentoring programs and professional development opportunities from instructional coaching models because of the conceptual confusion that exists. The literature is based on several educational studies. This study focused exclusively on instructional coaching; however, it looked at different types of mentoring roles. This is relevant because the findings show what instructional coaching is and is not, and how it can be confusing to understand what instructional coaching actually is because of these different teacher support systems.

A primary focus of past studies is not developed on the actual teaching instruction, but has begun to phase in coaching models. In recent years, the coaching model has been used to mentor teachers; however, there is limited research on the importance of engaging teachers in the process through shifting philosophical viewpoints on instructional practices. More research is needed to support the intention of instructional coaching and what is required for instructional coaches to have a better understanding of their roles.

Current research is just beginning to look at connecting teacher-mentoring programs with instructional coaching practices. These two areas fit together because after understanding what a mentor program is and being exposed to several types of mentor
programs, there is a tie to “new teacher only mentor programs” with induction programs, coaching programs, and peer-coaching programs. The coaching part of this then expands its research to include elements of instructional coaching that link to strategies, student engagement, and even teacher retention because of this practice. Furthermore, the literature review for this study showed the theories connected to instructional coaching practices and how the theories are recently tied to practice. Research was drawn from over 75 different sources to provide a comprehensive and focused perspective on what instructional coaching is and is not, and how there needs to be additional support for research that includes an understanding of instructional coaching from the instructional coaches’ perspective based on how they engage teachers through the instructional coaching process.

**Significance of the Study**

The implications of the potential results of this study are that schools may have to define their mentoring roles, instructional coaching roles, and professional development opportunities to better reflect the desired outcome that the district sets of the school. Additionally, this study may potentially increase the focus of engagement in teacher-learners and how to better begin the process of coaching teachers or even coaching coaches to be better at their craft.

The research question explored the concept of the role of the instructional coach, and the interview questions established how instructional coaches perceive their position and engage teachers in learning. Although this area was not previously explored in instructional coaching, instructional coaches may not have been aware that this is an essential component of their position. During the interviews, some of the instructional
coaches’ coaching session references were directly tied to this concept, so the data was documented for future reference or future studies. Additionally, based on the explored phenomenon, engagement theory was further investigated and applied to learning about instructional coaches and teachers through instructional coaching.

This study contributes to the current literature because it shows the application of engagement theory to instructional coaches and teachers through instructional coaching. It investigated the role of an instructional coach and the coaches’ affect on teaching teachers. Particularly, elements of this study directly connect to the studies from Bickmore (2013), Bowie (2005), Carlisle and Berebitsky (2010), Jewett and MacPhee (2012), Kagan (2001), Kearsley and Shneiderman (1999), Bess (2006), Kidwell (2010), McCann (2011), Santa, Havens, and Valdes (2004), Smith and Ingersoll (2003), and Stover, Kissel, Haag, and Shoniker (2011).

Nature of Research Design for the Study

The type of research design chosen was a bounded case study approach with data collected from three instructional coaches in three different high schools. The data was analyzed to drive an emergent theory from the coaches. Data was collected from individual interviews with several follow-up interviews as well as a final whole group interview. This was selected because it was the most effective way to get a full picture of the role of an instructional coach and move beyond a cursory view of several instructional coaches with fewer follow-up interviews.

There is limited research that shows how instructional coaches can improve at their job. Professional development is limited for instructional coaches and based on the districts, schools, or instructional coach’s understanding of instructional coaching.
Instructional coaches have differing perspectives of their positions; therefore, depending on the workplace, instructional coaching programs have different results. Based on the data collected, additional components to the literature review were added to provide a comprehensive understanding of the lack of understanding of what instructional coaching actually is.

The data collected included three initial in-depth interviews of three different instructional coaches from three different high schools in two districts. The initial interview was 45 minutes to 1 hour in length and included a specified interview protocol. I have a professional relationship with all three participants. One of the participants works at the school where I am her secondary evaluator. I previously worked with the other two participants at other schools. As part of the interview protocol, follow-up questions were asked during the initial interview.

Based on the common emergent themes of the initial interviews, a series of e-mail interview questions were sent to allow participants to expand their thoughts or provide additional clarity. At least five different interview follow-up questions were asked per participant. Once I reached the saturation level of data collection, an emergent theory was discussed at the final interview with the three coaches. This was a way to engage the participants in understanding each other’s perspective of instructional coaching. This was an important step because it gave participants the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue that was significant in the data analysis. The final step in the data collection process was having a focus group interview with all three participants. It was during this point that I shared my decision-making processes about how the data was analyzed, and I asked for feedback to understand the emergent theories and conclusions that were drawn.
An analysis of data was used to study how instructional coaches perceive their position. This analysis was systematic and structured to include constant comparisons, open coding, then axial coding to center what was being explored as it related to specific categories, and finally selective coding in the development of the theory (Creswell, 2008). Triangulation methods included interviews, peer review, and member checking.

**Definition of Terms**

Some common terms used in this study are:

**Engaging teachers.** This term means contextualizing the teaching experience to directly influence instructional practices. Engaging teachers is more than just talking with them, showing them strategies, techniques, lessons, or even modeling instructional practices, but really determining the best ways to allow them to deeply understand their role as a teacher and shift their role to be a facilitator of learning.

**Instructional coaches.** These coaches are teachers who are put in the position of working with other teachers as part of their teaching assignment. Instructional coaches have to coach teachers by best understanding the needs of students and in some way shift the philosophies of teachers to determine the best ways to influence their students directly.

**Instructional coaching.** Instructional coaching is an opportunity for a non-evaluative instructional coach to work collaboratively with a teacher to set goals, lesson plans, and have reflective conversations around best instructional practices. Instructional coaching is the act of working in partnership as a job-embedded professional learning opportunity for teachers.
Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

The following assumptions were present in this study:

1. The instructional coaches follow a model of instructional coaching that they have no control over in regards to the school or district’s vision of the instructional coaching program.
2. The instructional coaches want to be viewed as a support system for their colleagues and do not want to cross the line of being their colleagues’ teacher.
3. The instructional coaches were honest in their evaluation of the instructional coaching program and answered the interview questions to the best of their abilities.
4. During the study, the names of the individuals participating were kept confidential.
5. I ensured each individual signed a consent form that allowed me to use the information they gave as well as their interview for data analysis.
6. All elements of this research were voluntary; these participants were involved based on their own free will.
7. Each participant was given an ID number, and this information was kept separate from his or her name to again maintain participant confidentiality.

The following limitations were present in this study:

1. I gathered data from both my home school and former district.
2. The limitation of this study was the smaller number of participants because of it being a descriptive case study, thus as the research developed, I was concerned that the study may need to be revised to allow for more participants.
3. Research was only supported from two different districts from the perspective of three different coaches in three different high schools.

The following delimitations were present in this study:

1. I had no control over the instructional coaches’ personal viewpoints on the instructional coaching process.
2. I had no control over the district or school’s role in determining the instructional coaching program.

**Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Chapter 1 provided an introduction of the topic of study. Through the personal role I play in this area of education, this descriptive case study was developed to determine the instructional coaches’ role in understanding the perceptions of instructional coaching through how coaches engage teachers in the learning process. This chapter focused on how the role of an instructional coach is different than that of a mentor and a professional development opportunity and described the problem statement, rationale for the study, and how the study will affect future research.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework for the study and develops the topic through the review of literature. It presents a review of current research on interchangeable coaching roles, like mentoring, to show that it is not instructional coaching. It also shows how instructional coaching programs have developed. Engagement theory is the central component of the review of literature. It can be transferred to instructional coach and teacher learning as well as student learning.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology, research design, and procedures for this study. This is a single case study with multiple participants bounded as one. The coaches
of this study are from three different high schools and data will be collected through a series of interviews.

Chapter 4 describes the investigation in further detail as well as the data that was collected through interviews. The participants shared their personal experiences with instructional coaching in context with the major emerging themes of the study. The data was analyzed in a systematic and structured way to include constant comparisons.

Chapter 5 interprets and discusses the results as it relates to the research question. There are five conclusions drawn based on emerging themes. The gaps in literature and recommendations for future studies and practice are addressed.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of instructional coaching and how to better understand the coaches’ role through how instructional coaches engage teachers in the learning process. This literature review addresses specific aspects of the instructional coaching model, learning theories, and studies focused on engagement. It primarily focuses on the conceptual confusion that exists because of shifts in teacher mentoring. Such a system may not have an instructional tie, professional development, and different activities that may help teachers grow in their profession, while another consists of one that coaches teachers specifically through an instructional coaching model that “provides intensive, differentiated support to teachers so that they are able to implement proven practices” (Knight, 2008, p. 30). Additionally, research on teacher-learning focuses on engagement, different types of learning methods offered through mentoring programs or professional development opportunities, and shifts to instructional coaching practices to take the place of mentoring programs as a means of professional development. Currently, experimental studies on instructional coaching are few (Cornett & Knight, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Nonetheless, I posit that uncovering common themes that emerge from instructional coaches themselves based on how they engage teachers as learning can be cohesively expressed in a single instructional coaching model. This model, while not generalizable, offers a thick description that may be helpful to schools, administrators, teachers, and other related stakeholders interested in the development of an embedded professional development model for their work or research.
Theoretical Framework

Engagement theory provided the theoretical lens in understanding this study. Kearsley and Shneiderman’s (1999) engagement theory and Ross’ (2008) research on engagement, as defined in Chapter 1, promotes the understanding that engagement means interacting with others, doing worthwhile tasks, and utilizing different cognitive processes all through a positive psychological environment. While other theories might provide application of the educational system, engagement theory focuses on the inquiry of the research first.

Engagement theory stems from Malcolm Knowles (1984) research on adult learning. Knowles focused on the following adult learner characteristics: self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn. Additionally, the author determined there are four principles applied to adult learning:

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life.
4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

Knowles (1980) influenced other learning theories and theorists including Cross (1981) and the characteristics of adults as learners (CAL) model, Paivio (1991) and the dual coding theory, and Ausubel’s (2000) focus on frontloading learning with organizers to allow processing of information.

Additionally, motivation (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009), flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and cooperative learning (Davidson & O’Leary, 1990) theories will be addressed
in this literature review as important aspects of instructional coaching that are either needed by instructional coaches to fulfill their professional growth or provided by instructional coaches based on the teachers they coach. Each provides a need for engagement. As I investigated the phenomenon of instructional coaching, understanding instructional coaching through the perspective of the instructional coach, and how coaches engage teachers in the learning process, engagement theory provided a better foundation for this study given its connection to the qualities instructional coaches elicit.

This study attempted to understand teacher learning through how coaches engage teachers through engagement theory as defined by Kearsley and Schniederman (1999). The focus was specifically on how instructional coaches are engaged in learning and engage teachers in learning.

**Review of Literature**

Literature primarily from Bickmore (2013), Bowie (2005), Carlisle and Berebitsky (2010), Knight (2006, 2009), Reeves (2007), Jewett and MacPhee (2012), Bess (2006), Kidwell (2010), McCann (2011), Smith and Ingersoll (2003), and Stover, Kissel, Haag, and Shoniker (2011) was reviewed around the concept of the instructional coaching model. These studies were investigated in relation to understanding instructional coaching from instructional coaches through how instructional coaches engage teachers in learning. This review includes literature surrounding several emerging concepts including variations to the model, lack of clarity in instructional coaching, coaching roles, engagement, and impact of instructional coaching.

The literature on various instructional coaching models is important to understand because it provides context for elements of instructional coaching that exist in current
school systems or structures. The foundation of coaching can be better understood when there is an understanding of how more well-known school models have aspects of an instructional coaching model already in place. Literature on coaching practices provides a big picture for understanding of the type of research-based coaching practices that are used during instructional coaching sessions. The research question of this study asked to describe the nature of the instructional coaching position, so the research on the coaching practices that exist provides additional context on what is important.

Another theme that emerges is the concept of engagement. Engagement was the basis of the theoretical framework for this study. There is a gap in research revolving around what professional development is needed for instructional coaches to become better at their position and how instructional coaches actually engage teachers in learning. There is, however, research to support different instructional coaching models, and both adult learning and student learning in general. What began as a way to keep teachers in the teaching profession has evolved into supporting teachers not only to continue to be teachers, but be the best teachers they possibly can be.

This literature review focused on variations of instructional coaching models, lack of clarity and inconsistency in instructional coaching, coaching practices, engagement, and impact of coaching frame the background and influence of instructional coaching as it is reviewed in current literature.

**Lack of Clarity and Inconsistency in Instructional Coaching**

A variety of instructional coaching models exist, including literacy coaching, coactive coaching, cognitive coaching, and instructional coaching (Knight, 2007). While there are differences among these coaching models, all of them involve coaches working
with teachers for purposes of instructional improvement. All of these different models are perhaps the reason no agreed upon or all-encompassing definition of this sort of educational intervention has emerged (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). Currently, there is a lack of clarity around the instructional coaching role; instructional coaching roles can be anything but clear. This can be problematic for the instructional coach. There is not a clearly defined set of roles that all instructional coaches share, and this is why the interchangeable coaching models, mentoring systems, and professional development opportunities that schools identify as coaching make this concept anything but clear.

Denton and Hasbrouck (2009) summarized the problem, stating “unfortunately, the rush to implement coaching before strong theoretical models, or even well-defined job descriptions, were in place has caused a good deal of confusion related to the role and the focus of coaching. Coaching is, in essence, different things to different people” (p. 155).

Lack of definition in instructional coaching roles has only further constrained the ability for instructional coaches to make decisions while working with teachers. There is much ambiguity around the topic. There are unclear expectations about how an organizational member should perform the role adequately based on role-set member expectations (Singh, 1998). In the instructional coaching role, role ambiguity is found in unclear or vague job descriptions, inconsistent application of instructional coaching roles, and teacher lack of understanding of the roles instructional coaches perform as part of their position. For instructional coaches, as teacher leaders, to develop quality instructional coaching programs, clarity of role expectations is necessary (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Knight (2009) defined an instructional coach as someone who “partners with teachers to help them incorporate research-based instructional practices into their
teaching… [which] help students learn more effectively” (p. 30), whereas professional
development is a term used to describe specific teaching and learning activities related to
education and planned for teachers to improve competency and technical levels (Knight,
2005).

To further understand the interchangeability of the concept and illustrate the
confusion and inconsistency of instructional coaching, the term coaching has been used
in a variety of ways, but in education, most authors describe the role as inherently
multifaceted and ambiguous (Coggins et al., 2003; Darling Hammond, 2009; Showers,
1985). Instructional coaching can either be content-based or generalized and intended to
support teachers in meeting the aims of school or district-based instructional reform
(Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). In several accounts, coaching has
been structured as a voluntary form of professional development, whereas in other
contexts it is mandatory for particular groups of teachers (Knight, 2004).

Knight (2005) defined an instructional coach as “an on-site professional developer
who teaches educators how to use proven teaching methods … and collaborates with
teachers, identifies practices that will effectively address teachers’ needs, and help
teachers implement those practices” (p. 17). Knight (2004) asserted that coaching should
be voluntary, and coaches should develop a collaborative mindset. However, not all
coaching has been voluntary; “some coaching programs have introduced what is known
as —directive coaching” (Bacon, 2003, p. 74). In voluntary coaching, coaches are often
expected to market themselves and their work with many teacher or use student data or
observation tools to demonstrate a need for change in instructional practices to teachers
who will then ask the coach for help (Deussen et al., 2007). In directive coaching, student
scores and both administrator and coach evaluations determine which teachers are assigned a coach.

Knight (2006) defined the roles of a coach as follows: to enroll teachers to be coached, to identify appropriate interventions for teacher learning, to model teaching, to gather data in classrooms, and to engage teachers in dialogue about classroom and other data. Reed-Wright (2009) found that coaches, in her case study, had similar roles to others in the literature. She listed 10 different roles that literacy coaches, another interchangeable coaching position, did on a weekly basis ranked in order of number of times mentioned by teachers:

1. Modeling
2. Questioning and probing
3. Dialoguing
4. Reflecting
5. Listening
6. Using concrete evidence
7. Making reading-writing connections
8. Videotaping [teachers] for playback
9. Side-by-side coaching
10. Thinking aloud (p. 104)

Deussen et al. (2007) listed five different activities for coaches:

- assisting teachers in implementing new curricular programs
- consulting with and mentoring teachers
• supporting teachers as they apply knowledge, develop skills, polish technique and deepen their understanding

• planning and conducting research and writing grants

• and leading discussion groups or study or book groups” (p. 6).

Though growing in popularity, the “coach” role is highly variable across individuals and settings. As Poglinco, et al., (2003), noted, “there does not appear to be one ‘official’ written job description for coaches that is shared by all schools” (p. 9). Indeed if the coach role lacks definition even within a defined model, it should not be surprising that it is variously interpreted and differently structured by other educators. Some coaches are “school coaches” who work to support whole-school improvement (Brown et al., 2005); others are “instructional coaches” who work to help teachers refine and enhance their classroom practice. All of this combined makes instructional coaching inconsistent across settings and in turn may make instructional coaches lack clarity in their role.

There is a lack of clarity in understanding the role of an instructional coach because instructional coaching means something different for instructional coaches, different schools, and districts. This is important to understand because the inconsistency in the model’s use can be confusing. Because of this, much of the research is interchangeable in that research on mentoring, professional development, and different coaching models, can be important to understanding the common element of instructional coaches—working with and engaging teachers in contextualized learning. Additionally, the lack of clarity in the instructional coaching role can lead to a better understanding that instructional coaches may need to be coached to better understand their roles.
Variations of Instructional Coaching Models

A variety of coaching models offer support, feedback, and intensive, individualized professional learning (Knight, 2006, 2009a), which promise to be a better way to improve instruction in schools (Reeves, 2007). Some of these models include literacy coaching, peer-to-peer coaching, data coaching, and technology coaching. The model chosen for this study was instructional coaching, although there are variations in the model depending on the research.

In the instructional coaching model, coaches are positioned both outside and inside the classroom, providing them with a powerful knowledge-sharing approach to professional development that has the potential to support teacher change across school contexts. Instructional coaches are professional educators who typically work with other classroom teachers to help improve their practice (Knight, 2007). Mentoring, however, is the process of providing help, advice, and guidance to people with less experience for the purpose of helping them with their personal and career development (Bell, 2000; Carruthers, 1993; Roberts, 2000). Instructional coaching is different from mentoring in that coaching often involves an instructional modeling and feedback loop that may or may not be present in a typical mentoring program (Knight, 2007). Although the main purpose of mentoring is to help the new and perhaps less experienced person, there are elements of instructional coaching that are involved in the process that leads to the education and engagement of adults in the learning process. This model is better suited than the others for research on adult engagement because it is focused on adults teaching adults in the context of their content area. In this section, program descriptions and
research findings will be shared based mentoring programs to show the key difference between mentoring and coaching.

Schools rely heavily on professional development of their teachers to help teachers grow professionally. Instructional coaching is a form of professional development for teachers; however, ultimately, professional development results in the transfer of new instructional practices, and the coaching aspect facilitates the transfer of the training (Joyce & Showers, 1988). As defined by Knight (2006), the important part of instructional coaching is the professional learning that takes place. While coaching programs do not focus necessarily on understanding teacher-learning from the perspective of what the coaches actually do to engage adults, the process of each model is influenced through teacher learning.

**Teacher support programs.** A common approach for teachers entering the profession is to be part of a new teacher-mentoring program to transition as an effective teacher during the first year of service. These programs look very differently in the educational system depending on where teachers work, what part of the country they are from, and based on the educational beliefs or financial considerations of the school district. Additionally, there may not be a mentoring program to support teachers. Bickmore (2013) showed the need for mentoring programs for teachers. Some teachers have limited contact with someone to support him or her in their early years of teaching to make their transition into teaching more effective. The author determined that this separation is less problematic if novice teachers are engaged with experienced mentors, fellow teachers, and supportive administrators. Unfortunately, the reality is disappointing, and novice teachers often find themselves isolated (Bowie, 2005); they are often assigned
students with the most difficult challenges, with no mentor. Because of this, there is a need for the professional learning of teachers to further develop their teaching skills.

Teacher mentoring programs are in school districts across the nation, but the actual systems created by schools are very different with the effectiveness of the programs not necessarily data-driven or a long-term focus. In most cases within teacher mentoring programs, newly hired teachers are paired up with more experienced teachers to help communicate effective means of education according to the standards set up by the specific district. “In particular, mentors are used in education to support new professionals who must meet the demands of the position while managing the stresses of a new environment” (Bowie, 2005, p. 43). A common focus of teacher mentoring programs are to make new teachers more comfortable in their new teaching environment, but depending on the program, there may be additional time commitments to the mentoring program that may take time away for new teachers to focus on their daily work and therefore hinder the success of the program. Since there are elements of adult learning in mentoring programs and mentoring programs have been the basis of the development of instructional coaching, it is important to understand mentoring models and the professional development opportunities that come with them.

**Mentor program.** There is not one clearly defined method for mentoring. Every school in every district has the opportunity to run a mentoring program in any way they desire; some schools may not even offer such a program. “Quality teaching becomes the responsibility of the entire school, new teachers are coached to become good teachers, and good teachers become great teachers” (Riley, 2006, p. 16), but to make this happen, districts have different types of mentoring.
For example, in El Paso, Texas, the El Paso Independent School District developed the “Making Every New Teacher Our Responsibility (MENTOR) Program.” This program offers a type of mentoring for new teachers, which allows them to receive professional guidance and support from a mentor teacher assigned during their first year (Ciriza, 2005). This is a type of mentoring that is solely focused on new teachers within the district only. The purpose of this program is to have “new teachers receive professional guidance and support from a mentor teacher assigned to them during their first year in the District. New teachers with less than three years of teaching experience also benefit from the many training sessions the Staff Development Department prepares for them” (Ciriza, 2005, p. 4). In addition to this, one of the other major focuses is to “determine the number of new teachers that leave the profession during their first three years with the District. The study also looked at the quality and quantity of the mentorship training” (p. 4). The major results indicated that “the majority of mentors (87%) felt the training had been effective in preparing them to become highly qualified mentors; furthermore, mentors felt the quality of them mentor training was ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good.’ Overall, mentor teachers seem to be satisfied with the mentor training. Even though mentors seemed to be pleased with the mentor training, some mentor teachers seem to be concerned about not having time to meet with their mentee, or not knowing how to schedule meeting and observation times” (p. 4). It is easy to conclude the study’s results indicated the necessity of having a teacher mentor program. Furthermore, the study did not investigate how mentors engaged new teachers in the process other than discussing the training sessions for staff.
**New teacher only program.** In New York City, a campaign was launched to focus on the mentoring of first year teachers only. This type of mentoring is different because it does not matter if a teacher is new to the district, the point is that if they are a first year teacher (meaning this was their first teaching job), then they must receive this type of mentoring. This actually became a New York City policy change applying to all New York state districts, mandating that teachers with less than a year’s teaching experience must receive mentoring (Keller, 2006).

Similarly, a mentoring program developed at Arizona State University by Margaret Schmidt (2005), which focused a research study on one individual, Chris, who was a new teacher going through a mentoring program. In the final results, she said, “Chris took a serious and thorough approach to his role as mentor and developed his own job description as he went. Early in the year, he contributed readily to post-teaching discussions led by me, offering insights from his experiences in his own schools. By the end of the first month, Chris began making notes during class to use as a basis for his suggestions in our after-class discussions with the pre-service teachers” (p. 14). Based on these comments, it gives authentic data to show the effect of her study and how mentoring programs do help teachers.

In addition to answering research questions, Schmidt described in great detail parts of the case study that had a specific effect on her research. For example, she provided sections and examples for “giving responsibilities to students, classroom management, understandings of lesson planning and assessment, teaching strategies and classroom routines, pacing, relationships in advice received and given, and new views of self” (Schmidt, 2005, p. 15). These areas all influenced her research and others.
In addition, Schmidt highlighted experiences that give a glimpse of the importance of this topic: “Chris’s story reveals both his own struggles and successes in learning to teach and the failures and successes of our efforts as both formal and informal mentor. This study’s findings support others who urge caution in assuming that mentoring programs are unquestionable valuable. The findings also suggest the need for mentors, whether formally assigned or informally arranged, to invest time in listening very carefully to beginning teachers. The study’s findings encourage further exploration of and questions related to indicators of potential failures, as well as the concept of mentor as ‘expert’” (Schmidt, 2005, p. 25).

These major results are extremely helpful in determining how successful her study was, and show how important teacher mentor programs are. Additionally, there was qualitative data collected to show the significance of the mentor engaging the new teacher in the learning process.

**Induction program.** Other types of mentoring include specific programs called induction and BEST programs. These programs focus on mentoring through a series of training more than just the first year of teaching. Within induction programs, the mentor, and teacher work together for multiple years (Moir, 2003) at the very least. “In order to address concerns over new teacher development and attrition, many districts and states have implemented induction programs over the past decade. These programs match mentors with new teachers and often feature workshops and courses as well as opportunities for new teachers to visit other classrooms and schools” (Youngs, 2002, p. 4). Other schools have also developed similar induction programs as well that include a series of workshops throughout the year.
Additionally, “an important aspect of the BEST program is the ongoing efforts to involve expert classroom teacher in designing the content-specific seminars for first-and second-year teachers in the development and scoring of the portfolios” (Youngs, 2002, p. 19). There is clear adult learning in this process.

**Peer coaching program.** Another way to mentor teachers is through peer coaching. Studies show that peer teachers collaborate with other “teachers to deepen and enhance teaching practices with the ultimate goal of improving student learning. This perspective relies on a constructivist approach where growth and change are the goals” (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012, p. 15). This program is very similar to other teacher coaching models in that it allows teachers to focus on their primary goal: to be an effective teacher. While these models do not focus on transitional influences of beginning teachers or assimilation to a new environment, these models provide direct connections to theory and teaching.

Jewett and MacPhee’s (2012) mentor coaching model found three common results in a study. Coaching teachers use restraint when working with mentees, which means they consciously and intentionally choose not to share thoughts, ideas, or opinions with their partner teachers. Additionally, active listening is another way that teacher mentors show restraint, as they encourage their partner teachers to talk and share their ideas with minimal interruption, paying close attention to ensure their understanding. Restraint, in this sense, is challenging, but coaching teachers is a way to develop an understanding about opening spaces for inquiry and self-discovery. Coaching teachers realize that they need to support their partner teachers without imposing their own beliefs and ideas.
(Jewett & MacPhee, 2012). While this study focused more specifically on the intentions of the mentors, it found similar areas of mentee coaching that are effective.

Collett’s (2012) mentor program, similar to the coaching model, shows that coaching provides contextualized professional development creating opportunities for the construction of beliefs and practices to be grounded in teaching experiences. Individually, instructional improvements can occur as teachers practice, observe results, and evaluate the effects on student outcomes. Instructional coaches can support this process and encourage its ongoing use.

As program designs change and are implemented differently at each school, the significant growth in mentor models is moving to a coaching model that supports successful teaching within the classroom. Almost every study has this element as part of its model with each discussing its importance to the mentoring process.

**Other coaching programs.** Bickmore’s (2013) study focused on novice teachers through a professional development approach to new teacher mentoring. This practice, developed as GEM (Group of English Mentors), offers coaching for the mentors as well as the mentees. The focus is on when novice teachers engage in professional development and mentoring that promotes collective participation, focuses on content, and encourages coherence to and alignment with standards and assessments, they are more likely to develop and practice an effective classroom pedagogy.

Similarly, Stover, Kissel, Haag, and Shoniker (2011) described the influence of effective professional development, which includes ongoing modeling, practice, feedback, and reflection over time. In a typical coaching model, literacy coaches and teachers engage in a cycle of demonstration, observation, and reflection. Together, both
participants demonstrate, observe, reflect, and consider how such teaching decisions influence students. These latter studies show a potential shift in clearly developed and defined new teacher mentor programs that is now primarily focused on coaching teachers—in some cases in any year of service—to become better teachers. This shift places the emphasis more on the actual teaching of teachers rather than other areas of education that teachers may have difficulty in adapting.

In Bickmore’s (2013) study, the goals of GEM helped both novice and experienced teachers to:

- foster the habit of professional development that considers content area and educational theory
- identify appropriate instructional strategies including assessment, collaborative planning practices, differentiation, and technology
- develop strategies for reflection about one’s teaching
- discuss methods of building and sustaining a collaborative community
- develop mentoring relationships between experienced teachers and novice teachers that cross school boundaries

Similar to the goals of the GEM system, Stover et al. (2011) designed a system where mentors or coaches use (a) daybooks, which foster reflection via writing; (b) surveys, which foster reflection via individualized professional development; and (c) videotapes, which foster reflection via viewing. Jewett and MacPhee (2012) depended specifically on the work of experts in the field of literacy coaching, which is their version of mentoring, to construct and guide participants through the coaching component of the mentoring
Koballa, Bradbury, and Deaton (2008) derived a system focused on the conception of mentoring as:

- personal support highlights the mentor’s role in providing the teacher with both emotional and pedagogical support
- apprenticeship underscores the mentor’s experience-based knowledge and how it can be applied to help the new teacher
- co-learning supports a working partnership for the mentoring pair

Each take different mentoring approaches, but have an underlying focus on teacher support with similar results.

**Conclusion.** While there is not one single image of effective mentoring, there are several common trends in program designs. Mentors assume a variety of roles, including those they believe they should assume and those that mentees ask them to assume. Literature describes them as parent figures (protecting the mentee from serious difficulty, but at the same time allowing them to learn from mistakes), support systems (supporting and helping the mentee on a day-to-day basis and in moments of crisis), trouble shooters (helping the mentee head off trouble), colleagues (fellow learner), scaffolds (sharing experiences and knowledge of ways to work with students, design curriculum, and solve classroom problems), master teachers (providing role models), and coaches (providing training to new teachers) (Bickmore, 2013). Many studies show that at least one element, if not more, is embedded in teacher mentor programs.

This review of literature on mentoring and the different types of programs offered is significant because of the confusion between mentoring and coaching. Since mentoring programs have been around for a longer period of time and through them instructional
coaching models have developed, teacher mentoring serves as the base of an instructional coaching program. Program descriptions and research findings are shared based on different types of mentoring programs. In each case, there were elements of teacher learning that were not explored to a deeper level, although it was evident that teachers were learning. As the phenomenon of instructional coaching develops, the key difference between mentoring and coaching is that a learning process exists for teachers that can then be applied in their practice. What is even more significant is that research on instructional coaches or teachers as the learners needs to be applied as instructional coaches engage teachers in the learning process.

Coaching Roles

There is research on how instructional coaching practices are linked to mentoring models and professional development opportunities for teachers to engage in the learning process. While there is not one set instructional coaching model, the qualities and eventual outcomes of coaching programs are similar in their types of roles.

Carrera’s (2010) study concluded that different types of coaching practice, coaches’ qualities, and follow-up coaching support influence the effectiveness of coaching on language teachers’ professional development and learning. A coach takes on different roles including that of a data coach, resource provider, counselor, mentor, curriculum specialist, instructional specialist, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, school leader, and catalyst for change (Knight, 2009b; Marsh, McCombs, Lockwood, Martorell, Gerwhwin, & Naftel, 2008) depending on the type of program in place. While these coaching roles take on various forms, there are elements and coaching practices that are the same in every coaching model, which stems from supporting staff through being a
mentor and the types of coaching practices that support teacher learning through these roles.

**Being a support for teachers.** Supporting teachers through a coaching model stems from past practice mentoring models that influence teaching. Coaching for teachers has taken on an important role in school reform in recent years. Although the literature contains numerous and compelling descriptions of the perceived, positive effects of mentoring (Shulman, 2004), the literature on mentoring and coaching have consistently identified the need for the development of empirically-based knowledge of mentoring. There is a need to move discussions of mentoring and coaching teachers from the abstract to an experiential level (Colley, 2002).

McCann (2011) described mentoring as an intricate web of experiences that are woven and broken continually. Teachers are part of this web, as they frequently come into contact with people who may or may not influence their instruction for the better. A supportive teacher education program, thoughtful principal, and teacher-peer all can make a difference in a novice teacher’s career. Novice teachers need an environment where both their personal and professional needs can be addressed and subsequently met (Bickmore, 2013). The role of the mentor may vary in different districts and “the mentor’s world can take many different paths depending on the principal’s or mentor’s perceptions of good mentoring. For some, the mentor may simply address administrative routines and perhaps check in briefly to see how things are going” (Watkins, 2005, p. 85). In other cases, different expectations may be set up for the mentor. It can be a “renewing process for the mentor and an engaging process for the protégé” (p. 87). The responsibilities of a mentor are different depending on the school and the school’s
program. The role of being a mentor and the one being mentored is important because both support each other.

If one of the ultimate goals of teacher mentor programs is to allow professional growth for both the mentor and mentee Stover et al. (2011) shared how the core of professional development must be built on the trusting relationship between teacher and coach. In fact, trust between mentor and mentee needs to be a focus of the role of the mentor. “When this relationship is fostered, coaches [mentors] come to know, understand, and appreciate the teachers’ level of experience, expertise, and interests. Because of this knowledge, the coach [or mentor] can more effectively support them in their professional growth” (p. 501). In many studies, a common thread seems to be that “the relationship between mentor and mentee remains at the core of the program” (Flynn & Nolan, 2008, p. 80).

Additionally, studies have shown that “mentoring can be a vehicle to support and inspire new teachers’ professional development. Beginning teachers profit from instructional guidance as they establish their own set of teaching practices” (Hanuscin & Lee, 2011, p. 56). In the teaching profession in general, professional development is necessary and required. By involving teachers in professional development early on in their career, it remains embedded in their duties as a teacher. Similarly, mentors today teach and guide new members of a profession or organization as they transition from new inexperienced teachers to seasoned professionals. Studies suggest that strong mentoring relationships have positive effects on the career development of teachers (Hallam, Chou, Hite, & Hite, 2012).
Coaching as a mentor. Some adult learning takes place in the workplace via mentoring or coaching models grouped as a development options for teachers. Workplace learning via distance education, communities of practice, or e-learning also broadens the adult learning context taking place beyond the confines of the classroom. Placing the learning within or close to the workplace setting means the learning experience can be coupled with the learner’s work role; heightening the likelihood that the learning transfers into practice and increasing the motivation and meaning which attach to it (O’Toole & Essex, 2012).

To increase adult learning, districts have used the role of the mentor as a coach. In some districts, the role of the mentor or coach is defined as a person called upon to constantly maintain a sense of mutual support and confidentiality when working with teachers (Bowie, 2005). By assuming this role, teachers get to be a leader for the mentee and provide the support needed to maintain the positive atmosphere of the school environment. In addition, this role “can help new teachers expand the concept of collaboration by training them in community relations. Coaches as mentors should be available to observe, assess, and model parent/teacher conferences, showing new teachers the ropes in this important real-world aspect of teaching” (Moir, 2003, p. 9). This is relevant because the main idea is that mentors are there as a guide to support the teacher they are mentoring and provide authentic experiences to show the teacher their role as a teacher.

Similarly, other studies have described the necessary value of observing teaching. Jewett and MacPhee (2011) introduced a coaching cycle consisting of a pre-observation conversation, an observation, and a post-observation conversation. “Whether the
observations are a formal procedure as part of a teacher evaluation plan or not, having supervisors and mentors observe teachers on separate occasions and engage the beginner in professional conversations about the observations would support growth” (McCann, 2005, p. 53).

Other districts focus on quality mentoring and use a call for action approach among their mentors. They establish guidelines for their mentors and decide that “mentoring should take place during the school day, in-class, and one-on-one, with sanctioned time for both mentors and beginning teacher” (Moir, 2003, p. 11). Hands-on mentoring like this seems to be a common part of the mentor role because differentiated support, based on teachers’ individual needs and learning styles, is crucial for the work of a mentor, and this happens when mentors are in the classrooms of their mentees to coach them. “Learning happens within teachers, not to them” (Stover et al., 2011), which begins to shape what mentoring systems are like. As the profession evolves, mentoring programs are beginning to shift into coaching models because of the contextualized learning that takes theory to practice.

**Coaching as professional development.** Teachers, like other professionals, learn by participating in the activities that are socially and culturally situated within their profession (Jenlick & Kinnucan-Welsch, 1999). Professional development that provides teachers the opportunity to investigate, experiment, reflect, discuss, and collaborate with other teachers can help them change their practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995); however, the “one-size-fits-all” workshops that are usually offered try to disseminate new information.
Bickmore (2013) discussed a problem with professional development. In most educational settings, professional development depends on the actions of a department chair, a district or state administrator, or a curriculum specialist. This is not necessarily the most effective means for professional development for mentors or mentees. Training is needed and necessary for being a mentor because it is an important part of the mentoring process. Training and professional development should be part of the role of the mentor. “Many districts provide no training for mentors because they assume the mentors’ experience will suffice. However, even though mentors may be very experienced teachers, they need skills in many areas that may require training” (Bowie, 2005, p. 42).

Similarly, other studies showed “while teaching experience is often viewed as sufficient for serving as a mentor, researchers argue that training is essential to successful mentor programs” (Hanuscin & Lee, 2011, p. 57). In some districts, “mentor-training workshops are held to train newly hired mentors for an alternative licensure program. In this particular program, the mentors were unaffiliated with the school district and were all retired educators who had successful careers (teachers, principals, and superintendents)” (Bowie, 2005, p. 43). While this program specifically trains external mentors, others use this approach internally. These types of workshops train mentors on how to actually be a mentor. If the experience of teaching is going to keep new teachers committed to the profession, they will have to find ways to break away from the traditional isolation of teaching. Some useful examples of purposeful professional development activities suggest ways to connect new teachers to a group of teachers and find satisfaction in the collaboration (Bickmore, 2013).
From this perspective, professional development can support deep changes in teaching if it is situated in classroom practice, is on-going, and is collaborative with other teachers. Because this professional development experience is centered on the teacher as a professional, it also must consider the needs of the adult learner. Educators and researchers generally believe and promote the concept that one of the best ways to improve the teaching and learning process is by providing teachers with quality professional development experiences (Eun, 2006). Unlike traditional professional development, which takes place outside the classroom setting and requires teachers to transfer new knowledge to the classroom, coaching takes place in the instructional setting (Taylor, 2008). Professional development activities should take into account the stages of a teacher’s development so that the teacher is ready to learn concepts that will help him or her be a better practitioner.

Professional development experiences should provide content that is directly applicable to the teacher’s practice. Teachers often complain about professional development content that is too theoretical and not useable in the classroom. They want practical strategies and ideas that they can immediately apply in their practice. Consequently, the professional development experience should be a venue for teachers to collectively articulate and address issues, problems, innovations, and/or reforms as they relate to classroom practice (Gregson & Sturko, 2007). Teachers’ teaching their peers is a common form of professional development in the integration literature (Stasz, Kaganoff, & Eden, 1994), and “a powerful way of linking professional development with team building” (Finch, 1999, p. 11). In addition to participating in teamwork and collaboration, teachers’ teaching teachers can also be used informally to help peers learn skills and
knowledge associated with specific lessons. According to Rolheiser, Ross, and Hogaboam-Gray (1999), teachers’ teaching teachers can have positive outcomes, including increased opportunities for teacher leadership, increased communication and collaboration, and increased learning among teachers, and asking teachers to share teaching strategies with their peers also can reduce teachers’ isolation. Peers can share their experiences and prior knowledge with other teachers to construct new meanings and behaviors (Gregson & Sturko, 2007).

When examining the importance of evaluating professional development and its affect on pedagogy and student learning, Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) noted that while 90% of American teachers received some form of professional development or another, many are dissatisfied with the professional development they received. The complaints included: collaboration was rare, and when it occurred, it is weak; much of the professional development available was not useful; opportunities for training about teaching special needs students or limited English proficiency students are virtually nonexistent; teachers’ own priorities for further professional knowledge are not being addressed; and, teachers have limited influence in crucial areas of decision-making, particularly in the area of professional development. Guskey and Yoon (2009) echoed these findings by reporting a disconnect between the professional development that teachers desired and what they are receiving.

**Conclusion.** Research provides support that instructional coaching is part of a bigger school improvement practice to provide another set of supports for teachers in this high-stake era. There is research that shows how instructional coaching practices are linked to mentoring models and professional development opportunities for teachers to
engage in the learning process, but ultimately most research just relies on any practice as being a teaching support.

Engagement

Current research focuses more specifically on student engagement. There is research on adult engagement, but not as specific to understanding how adults learn through instructional coaching. According to Krause (2005), engagement “emerged as a cornerstone of the higher education lexicon over the last decade” (p. 3). The author defined engagement as “the time, energy and resources students devote to activities designed to enhance learning at university” (p. 3).

Engagement, as described in the literature, is often linked to particular behaviors or outcomes. For instance, Bowen (2005) claimed that “engaged learners are those who complement and interpret what they learn from others with direct knowledge based on personal experience, who develop appropriately complex understandings situated in relevant contexts, and who recognize learning’s moral implications and consequences” (p. 7). Brady (2004) noted that “when students are more active in their learning, they are more likely to be engaged. ‘Active learning’ involves increasing student autonomy, interaction and exploration” (p. 156), which is particularly important for pre-service teachers in coming to understand the complexity of teaching. In understanding this topic, it is important to know the components and research that identifies what student engagement is, how motivation influences engagement, the concept of flow, cooperative learning linked to engagement, and research on adult learning.

Student engagement. Student engagement is defined as active learning (Kidwell, 2010). In research reviews of student engagement, Shernoff (2003) focused “particularly
on the phenomenological aspect of high involvement in classrooms, which includes concentrated attention, interest, and enjoyment that indicates that students are more engaged in student-controlled versus teacher-controlled learning activities” (p. 159). Kidwell (2010) indicated that students who are not engaged in the learning process will not be motivated students to learn. “Cognitive and behavioral engagement leads to participation in active learning which determines student investment in education that leads to achievement and learning” (P. 29). This is why there has been an increase in the awareness and importance of student engagement in relation to student achievement and learning; students need to be invested in their learning. Theories support how learning happens when students actively process information through writing, talking, and transforming by using strategies (Santa et. al, 2004). This underlying principle leads to engagement, which can be sustained to lead to intrinsic motivation. Once this is achieved, students will increase their learning and achievement.

**Motivation.** Motivation has been discussed as an important aspect of student success in schools (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009). Motivation describes the basis of and the processes involved in protecting or enhancing one’s self-worth. Martin and Dowson (2009) described that part of this theory is that students’ self-worth is largely derived through their ability to perform academically and competitively with worth being conditional on achievement. In essence students’ self-protect, and this self-protection can have a negative affect on their engagement and achievement. This prescribes motivation in that students’ relationships affect their self-worth, which determines their motivation, engagement, and achievement. While motivation to learn may sometimes be external for adults, it is more often associated as being internal for adult learners. Internal motivation
may include improving an individual’s self-esteem, helping an individual gain self-confidence or a sense of accomplishment, garner recognition, or quite possibly lead to a better quality of life (Holyoke & Larson, 2009).

Other researchers propose that students are motivated and engaged because they usually want to understand and process information fully (Guthrie, 2004). Highly motivated students are internally motivated and strategic. They are less engaged students that do not do as well because they are not able to apply strategies (Wigfield, 2008). Because of this, it can be concluded that if students were successful in understanding strategies they would increase their engagement and motivation thus increasing achievement.

Sometimes motivation and engagement seem synonymous; however, it is important to understand that they are different. Students who are motivated are usually intrinsically motivated, ready to learn, and monitor how they are succeeding which leads researchers to believe that this connects to engagement. Teachers should strive for students to sustain engagement, not just temporary engagement. Once students reach sustained engagement, this leads to motivation (Asselin, 2004). Teachers use strategies to attain engagement (Alger, 2009). To sustain engagement and reach intrinsic motivation, teachers need not focus on one particular strategy, but provide 25 to 30 instructional practices, which this will lead to increases in motivation and engagement (Guthrie, 2004). In other words, as students begin to understand why they are learning and teachers incorporate strategies in their instructional practices, students will begin to sustain engagement and be motivated, thus leading to an improvement in their learning and achievement.
Flow. In addition to motivation as a quality of engagement, Csikszentmihalyi (as cited in Shernoff, 2003), identified flow as a state of deep absorption in an activity that is intrinsically enjoyable where the individual functions at his or her fullest capacity and is based on a symbiotic relationship between challenges and skills needed to meet those challenges. The flow experience is believed to occur when one’s skills are neither overmatched nor underutilized to meet a given challenge (Shernoff, 2003). Flow links to engagement as it focuses on three areas: concentration, interest, and enjoyment. The primary research of Shernoff and Csikszentmihalyi provide evidence that these three areas are necessary for student engagement and learning to take place.

Cooperative learning. Cooperation can be operationally defined as the presence of joint goals, mutual rewards, shared resources, and complementary roles. In cooperative situations, people strive to reach their goals through the support and joint focus of others in their group or class. Cooperative learning is more conducive in higher level thinking and problem solving situations that contribute to the advancement of achievement and motivation (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Cooperative learning is one of the most heavily researched topics that support giving students the opportunities to work together to increase their engagement in learning. In working together, students use a variety of social skills (Davidson & O’Leary, 1990). Cooperative learning and cooperative lessons are structured to assure positive interdependence, individual accountability, guide monitoring and processing, and provide a paradigm for success—thereby a means for developing student self-esteem (Avery, 1994). Cooperative learning breathes life into teaching by inviting students to become co-producers of ideas with their teachers, which is a strong proponent for increasing engagement. Students have strong needs to affiliate;
in cooperative groups, they may develop higher levels of trust, feel less vulnerable to taking risks, and feel more comfortable that in the class as a whole. Group work may even reassure the overly anxious student and energize the unconcerned one. Cooperative learning groups provide a variety of sources of motivation, active participation, and engagement (Davidson & O’Leary, 1990).

Kagan (2001) developed a cooperative learning model that describes how cooperative learning strategies increases competitiveness, which leads to student engagement and higher levels of achievement. The use of the Kagan’s structures through cooperative learning report positive outcomes for students including increased achievement, improved social skills and relations, and improved classroom climate. Ultimately, cooperative learning shows the power of divergent thinking and learning (Davidson & O’Leary, 1990), which leads to student engagement and increased achievement.

Daniels (2010) suggested that “students cannot make students motivated, but they can create environments that allow the students to feel motivated themselves” (p. 26). Using cooperative learning strategies is a way to create opportunities for students to be engaged with content. When students learn that they have control over their choices, thoughts, and actions as they work in positive learning environments with other students, they engage because they see value in the learning experience, which leads to intrinsic motivation that increases student engagement.

Rugutt and Chemosit (2009) described results of their study, which indicated that student-to-student relations, critical thinking skills, and student-faculty interaction are statistically significant predictors of student motivation. Student engagement in
educational experiences that can enhance the development of an environment that encourages students to express their own ideas, freely participate in discussions, freely compare and contrast ideas, be involved in discussion among themselves, and being able to learn from each other leads to elevated student-to-student relations and development of critical thinking skills and thus student motivation and academic success.

Throughout their lives, adults will experience different types of learning including experiential and cooperative learning, which probably are meaningful to them. Thus, learning styles, teaching strategies, and activities that involve groups, peers, and collaboration should be included in the adult learning process. Professional development should provide opportunities for teachers to learn experientially and cooperatively on an on-going basis in the context of their workplace (Gregson & Sturko, 2007).

**Adult learning.** Adults tend to want to learn in the moment, meaning they seek out learning that is relevant for them at that time, whereas children have compulsory attendance for the majority of their learning experiences. This paradigm is being challenged for children as a result of social media and the internet. Children must now learn how to find what they need to know, rather than learning what they might need to know, bringing them into the moment in a different way. This process has the ability to begin the journey of the lifelong learner in childhood. Attention spans between adults and children are not as wide as one might think. Good teachers, as defined by teachers who create student-centered classrooms, work hard to change the dynamics of the classroom regularly so that children remain engaged. They do this via regular activities, a variety in their delivery, and mixing talk with participation and action. Only the best adult teachers take this approach (O’Toole and Essex, 2012).
Merriam and Caffarella (1999) defined the adult learner in terms of who participates and who does not participate in adult education. They identify the profile of the typical adult learner as being remarkably consistent: White, middle class, employed, younger, and better educated than the non-participant. Other authors have attempted to define adult learning by distinguishing it from pre-adult schooling. In 1980, Knowles identified the following characteristics of adult learners:

- autonomous and self-directed
- need to be free to direct themselves
- have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities and previous education
- are relevancy-oriented
- must see a reason for learning something
- are more problem-centered than subject-centered in learning
- are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones (as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999)

Galbraith (1990) went one step further and admitted that adults are “different from children and youth as learners in many respects” (p. ix), and therefore “different methods from those of traditional pedagogy would be likely to be more effective with them” (p. ix). Apart from trying to help the adult learner feel safe, educators of adults must bear motivation factors in mind.

To keep their learners engaged and motivated, Cross (2004) suggested that educators should try to establish a friendly, open atmosphere that shows participants they will take part in a positive and meaningful educational experience, and adjust the level of
tension to meet the level of importance of the objective. If the material has a high level of
importance, a higher level of tension or stress should be established. Otherwise, a low to
moderate level is preferred; then set the degree of difficulty high enough to challenge
participants, but not so high that they become frustrated by information overload. In
addition, “feedback must be specific, not general.” Adults must also see a reward for
learning and must be interested in the subject. Interest is directly related to reward. Adults
must see the benefit of learning in order to motivate them to learn (Galbraith 1990).

Malcolm Knowles (1980), an adult educator, developed the paradigm of
andragogy and is attributed with popularizing and operationalizing the concept, which is
defined as the “art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson,
1980, p. 43). The practice of andragogy, unlike pedagogy, puts the focus on the learner—the
adult—and not on the teacher. Andragogy tends to emphasize the process of teaching
over the content that is being taught. This concept has been the basis of several adult and
general learning theories that have developed including theories and concepts previously
discussed such as characteristics of adults as learners (CAL) (Cross, 1981), dual coding
theory (Paivio, 1991), and engagement theory (Kearsley & Schneiderman, 1999).

Another characteristic of adult learners is their orientation to learning. Adults are
life-, mission-, or problem-centered in their route to learning. They want to see how new
knowledge can be applied to their life or what it could look like through an understanding
or new knowledge lens, whether it is to improve job performance, come up with creative
ideas in the workplace, or handle family situations. Connections can be made to show
how information is presented to the adult learner. Flexibility in course requirements can
help encourage an adult learner to find ways of applying knowledge to a personalized
situation. When other adults share real life applications of content, it invites classmates to think of how the same knowledge could be applied in their situations (Holyoke & Larson, 2009).

Adults, unlike children, have their own unique learning needs (Knowles et al., 2005). Teachers are adult learners, and their professional development is a form of adult education, which shifts the focus of professional development to the needs of teachers and the different contexts in which they learn and teach (King & Lawler, 2003). It is essential that teachers understand the importance of reforms and innovations and how they affect students so that teachers can take ownership in them and focus their learning opportunities accordingly (Gregson & Sturko, 2007).

Self-directed learning is more aligned with an adult’s sense of autonomy (Knowles et al., 2005). Teachers should be active contributors to their own professional development experiences; they should be involved in the content and delivery of programs for them to be meaningful learning experiences. Thus, professional development should provide an environment for adults to have control over their own learning (Gregson & Sturko, 2007).

**Conclusion.** Engagement is highly researched, but not necessarily focused on how adults engage adults. This section provided research on student engagement practices and several topics of interest that show how to engage students or adults including motivation, flow and cooperative learning. The research on adult learning specifically highlighted differences in how students and adults learn, but ultimately showed that some of the practices are very much the same. Research on how instructional
coaches are engaged in learning to become better instructional coaches does not exist; however, the common engagement elements may be applied to them as well.

**Influence of Coaching**

This instructional coaching shift from a professional development or mentoring position into an area that provides contextual support affects teachers on many levels. Through the way instructional coaches engage adults in the process can influence direct teaching, which influences students. Bean (2004) identified three levels of activities associated with coaches that affect teachers they work with. Level 1 includes informal activities such as curriculum development or leading a study group. Level 2 activities are focused on area needs such as co-planning lessons, co-teaching lessons, or analyzing student work. Level 3 refers to visiting classrooms and providing teachers with feedback. If teachers are considered as professionals capable of making complex changes to their practice, they need opportunities to learn with other professionals within the context of their profession (Gregson & Sturko, 2007). Instructional coaching provides these opportunities. Additionally, the most positive influence coaches make is providing the support needed for the teacher so they are retained in the profession.

**Teacher retention through teacher support systems.** Since approximately half of all public teachers leave teaching in the first five years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), mentoring programs are used in schools as a teacher support system. Districts want to retain teachers because teachers are an investment. Mentoring programs specifically aim to retain young teachers who often leave the job after a few years. A University of Pennsylvania study found a third of new teachers quit within three years, and almost half quit within five. Teachers say this is because they did not get the support they needed in
their first year (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). This is why mentoring programs are important to develop. They give teachers the tools needed to make their teaching effective and provide them with the tools needed to want to stay in their district.

Bowie (2005) concluded that “when schools make so many demands of novice teachers without offering them the means to accomplish these tasks, the schools have set them up to fail. Teacher retention figures clearly reflect this failure. Nationally, about 12% of new teachers fail to make it through their first year of teaching” (p. 45). These numbers indicate a direct correlation to the fact that if schools do not have mentoring programs, the teacher retention rate will be extremely low. “Beginning teachers who have the support of mentors and well-planned induction programs experience increased job satisfaction and self-efficacy. In addition, when mentors and mentees have similar teaching assignments and common planning time, new teachers are more likely to remain in the profession” (Hanuscin & Lee, 2008, p. 56).

There is some evidence that suggests a literacy coach, as a mentor, can provide needed support for teachers’ professional learning, self-efficacy, and engagement in the process of improving instruction (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010). Literacy coaches promote a culture of ongoing adult learning, inspire teachers to be reflective, and make changes (Stover et al, 2011). In this regard, Collett’s (2012) study showed success with mentoring programs occurring throughout the year because the support that coaches provide changes in both quantity and quality as time progresses. There is a decrease for support provided as teachers increase in competence and confidence. As teachers begin to be more competent and confident in their first years of teaching, the likelihood they stay in the profession increases. “A teacher’s training and work experience plays a role in
predicting retention in the profession, as well as age, experience, and qualifications” (Hallam et al., 2012, p. 243). In the Hallam et al. study on effective mentoring systems, the combination of in-school mentors and collaborative PLC (professional learning community) teams in one mentoring model, which provided closer proximity and higher communication intensity, appeared to help retain beginning teachers during their first year. In contrast, the district coaches who had primary responsibility to mentor first year teachers in another mentoring model lacked proximity and communication intensity, and as a result, they did not appear to be as effective in supporting retention during the first year.

The participants of GEM argue that “teachers who experience multiple points of induction are retained at higher rates than those who do not” (Bickmore, 2013, p. 31). Bickmore also noted that the ideal solution is a multifaceted induction program and opportunities. Reflective educators including the novice and the veteran should create collaborative models that are sustained over time as they actively promote their own professional development. Hallem, et al. (2012) posited that school administrators play a significant role in providing the supportive environment needed for the development of new members of the organization. According to Ingersoll and Smith (2003), Most educators and teacher educators are aware of the astonishing 50% teacher dropout rate within the first five years of teaching, but it is important to remember that mentoring has proven to increase retention—particularly after the first year.

**Conclusion.** Research indicates many influences of coaching as it is linked to instructional practices and increases in student engagement and achievement. Ultimately,
however, most research looks to hard data that supports whether or not teacher supports lead to teacher retention.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate instructional coaching through instructional coaches and how instructional coaches engage teachers in the learning process. This literature review addressed specific aspects of the coaching model that links to engaging teachers in the learning process, the focus of this study. There is confusion regarding the implementation of an instructional coaching program. Research supports that implementation is inconsistent and confusing when instructional coaching is interchangeably used with mentoring and professional development. The shifts in teacher mentoring and professional development to that of coaching teachers was the basis of this study.

Studies identified mentoring programs, professional development, coaching models, engagement including adult learning, and the affect of instructional coaching. Currently, no studies connect all of these topics. Additionally, there are numerous studies on student engagement, but research on adult engagement by the means of an instructional coach is limited—especially when thought about outside of professional development. The gap in research indicates there is limited to no studies that support how instructional coaches become “better” instructional coaches.

This literature review provided a greater understanding for the need to further research instructional coaching, as it links understanding the role and how instructional coaches are teachers of teachers. A major focus of most studies is more geared toward mentoring programs and whether or not teachers are retained because of these programs.
In recent years, the “coaching model” has been used to mentor teachers; that model is designed for all teachers in need of additional support.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate instructional coaching through instructional coaches and how instructional coaches engage teachers in the learning process. This inquiry employed a case study design with the primary research question being how instructional coaches engage teachers as described in the nature of their position. This research study was experienced through the perspective of the instructional coach. While there is an abundance of research on instructional coaching, there is a lack of clarity in understanding the actual differences between instructional coaching and other teacher support systems. Additionally, the literature on how instructional coaches engage in professional development to become better coaches and how instructional coaches engage teachers in learning as it relates to an instructional coaching model is limited. The goal of this investigation was to uncover instructional coaching from the perspective of instructional coaches based on how coaches engage teachers in learning and how or if these understandings relate to the engagement theory and other adult learning theories. The research question explored was: How do instructional coaches understand and describe the nature of their work with teachers? This chapter provides information on this study’s research methodology, research design, my positionality, population and sample selection, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness, limitations, permissions and ethical considerations, and a chapter summary.
Research Methodology

My interest in instructional coaching stems from personal experience in the role of an instructional coach. Based on my experiences, I proposed and used a methodological approach that allowed me to understand the perspective of instructional coaching through instructional coaches themselves, and how they engage teachers in the learning process. Given the nature of the instructional coaching role in working with teachers, a qualitative inquiry was the most appropriate way to best understand the phenomenon of interest. Rossman and Rallis (2003) offered five general hallmarks of qualitative research that show how this study was best suited for a qualitative approach. “Qualitative research typically is enacted in naturalistic settings, draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the participants in the study, focuses on context, is emergent and evolving, and is fundamentally interpretive” (2003, p. 51).

Based on Rossman and Rallis’ five hallmarks, I used a qualitative approach in my investigation. This method of data collection was important because the nature of instructional coaching is based on the experiences of the coaches and how they describe their coaching sessions. Additionally, the investigation approached instructional coaching from the coaches’ perspective—how they engage teachers in the learning process. Data was collected through a qualitative approach. The data was analyzed based on the several interviews with the coaches to produce a theory. Creswell (2012) described qualitative research as a way to explore problems in depth to gain insight and understanding. My investigation into the of understanding instructional coaching and the engagement of the teacher-learner in the process was aligned with a qualitative research approach.
The data collected included three initial in-depth interviews of three different instructional coaches from three different high schools in two districts. The initial interviews were 45 minutes to 1 hour in length and included the proposed interview protocol. As part of the interview protocol, follow-up questions also were asked during the initial interview.

Based on the common emergent themes of the initial interviews, a series of e-mail interview questions were sent to allow participants to expand their thoughts or provide additional clarity. Five different interview follow-up questions were asked of each participant. These interviews were directly between each participant and me. The final step in the data collection involved a group interview with all three participants.

**Research Design**

The qualitative research design chosen was a case study with multiple participants that bounded as one. Three instructional coaches from three different high schools were used. “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Ultimately, case studies are tailor-made for exploring new processes or behaviors or ones that are little understood (Hartley, 1994). This investigation provided an explanation of the phenomenon of interest and answered the research question by providing the experiences and perspectives of different instructional coaches that work using differing instructional coaching models. It was important that the instructional coaching models were different because the variable did not matter in understanding how coaches work with teachers and understand their position is the focus of the inquiry. By utilizing the case study approach,
the instructional coaches’ experiences were analyzed to uncover the primary focus of the investigation: understanding instructional coaching from the perspective of instructional coaches.

In this research design, three instructional coaches were selected and interviewed about how they coach teachers. It was hoped that the interviews would answer the research question. The design included constant comparisons, open coding, then axial coding to center what was being explored as it related to specific categories. Selective coding was used in the development of the theory (Creswell, 2008). Triangulation methods included interviews, peer review, and member checking.

**My Positionality**

In addition to my positionality mentioned in chapter one, I have spent most of my educational career working as or with instructional coaches. When I was first introduced to the concept, the way I understood the position of an instructional coach was actually not what the experience ended up being. I first understood it as mentoring other teachers and providing professional development in way that would allow them to change their teaching practices. What I began to understand by working as an instructional coach was that I actually had to teach adults. This was a very different idea than I was used to.

Because of my experience with teaching and adult learning, I felt like instructional coaching blended these concepts, and showed that it is necessary to engage adults in the learning process as an instructional coach to enact change. I believe that instructional coaching is only successful if instructional coaches are able to do this. Arguably, I do not perceive every instructional coach as capable of doing this. I want to better understand instructional coaching and the success of instructional coaching through
the perspective of other instructional coaches. This will help me understand if engaging
teachers in the process is actually a significant part of the instructional coaching process.

Being a White, male assistant principal in my 30s, who was born and raised in a
blue collar household, but attended a white collar high school, has affected my view of
how I understand education. These views stem from how much parents are involved in
the education process. Additionally, I am product of a household in which I am the first
person to graduate from college and have degrees beyond that of a college education. I
have primarily worked in high achieving schools in districts with means to support
students and teachers in many ways other than just professional development
opportunities.

My hope was that this study would actually provide me with a better
understanding of this research because of the depth I would explore with three coaches. I
realized that my personal experience and investment in this concept could have resulted
researcher bias; however, I responded to the potential bias is by applying a multi-case
approach through interviewing more than one coach (Leonard-Barton, 1990). Multiple
cases augment external validity and help guard against biases. Moreover, multi-case
sampling adds confidence to findings. By looking at a range of similar and contrasting
cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how, where,
and if possible, why it behaves as it does (Miles and Huberman, 1994). While Yin’s
(1993) definition of a descriptive case study is “not looking for cause and effect, but
looking to see if case supports or rejects existing theory” (p. 22), I analyzed the data to
uncover a theory based on the data collection process.
Population and Sample Selection

Participants. “Case studies use a replication logic like experiments, not sampling logic” (Yin, 1993, p. 34); therefore, using a purposeful sampling strategy was necessary. The participants selected for the case study were intentionally chosen from three different high schools. The criterion for selection was that each participant had be an instructional coach. Selection was based on the willingness of the instructional coaches to volunteer for the study. I chose the three participants based on a previous working relationship. One instructional coach I know very well. We worked together for four years. One instructional coach was part of a curriculum team with me, and I worked with him for one summer. The third instructional coach was currently at my school. I am her secondary supervisor. I have worked closely with her for the past two years. After the participants agreed to be in this study, I provided them with consent and approval documents.

Demographic characteristics of participants. Table 1 contains demographic information of the coaches. Each participant was coded with pseudonyms.
Setting. Coaches chosen to participate were from one of three high schools in the southwestern suburbs of Chicago. The Illinois School Report Card provided the demographic information on all three high schools.

The population of each high school was approximately 4,000 students, 2,800 students, and 2,000 students. There are approximately three instructional coaches with varying levels of experience at each high school. The demographics of each school differ greatly. The first school, was 83% ready for college, had 9% low income students, 12% students with disabilities, and a racial breakdown of primarily White students (66%) and Asian students (18%). The second school was 71% ready for college, had 25% low income students, 15% students with disabilities, and a racial breakdown of primarily White students (54%), Asian students (16%), and Black students (14.9%). The third school was 74% ready for college, had 9% low income students, 12% students with disabilities, and a racial breakdown of primarily White students (84%) and Hispanic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Years as an instructional coach</th>
<th>Grade level Expertise</th>
<th>Previous Subject Area Taught</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>School Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach 1 (“Kate”)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>2,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coach 2 (“Lew”)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach 3 (“Jane”)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>English and Social Studies</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
students (9%). This information was relevant because it may have influenced how coaches responded to the questions. Additionally, the coaches experiences based on their working environment may have been a factor in the perspectives they provided.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Three instructional coaches were interviewed several times. The first interview consisted of a formal interview where I asked the following questions:

1. How would you describe your experience as an instructional coach?
2. How do you plan for your instructional coaching sessions?
3. How do you engage teachers as a teacher of teachers?
4. What do you see as the biggest factor that gets in the way of the teacher’s ability to learn?
5. How does your coaching style change in relation to the types of learners you coach?
6. How do you understand the learning process?
7. How do you know if adults are learning?
8. How has your understanding of instructional coaching changed from before you were a coach to now?

This interview was face-to-face that was recorded and then transcribed. Based on the direction the interviews took, follow-up questions and follow-up interviews with clarifying questions were asked through e-mails. The following questions were asked in the e-mails:

1. How can the role of an instructional coach be clearer to teachers? To administrators? To the community? To students?
2. What is the administrative perspective of you at your current school?

3. How does this perspective impact professional development you are offered?

4. Discuss further the idea that professional development for coaches might not be a priority. How do you know this?

5. How do you perceive your success to be measured from you? Other teachers? Administrators? Students? The community?

6. Discuss further and provide examples of teachers being more engaged in the instructional coaching process when they have a “need” to seek your assistance.

7. What have your experiences been like with teachers who do not perceive they “need” your support?

8. How important is your content expertise as an instructional coach?

9. From your perspective, what is the most important quality of being an instructional coach?

Answers to these questions were then analyzed through Dedoose, a data analysis program, and coded through the themes that emerged from the initial interview.

Once the data was analyzed, the three instructional coaches met with me for a group interview about the theory that developed. The following was discussed:

1. Share both a successful and unsuccessful coaching experience.

2. Describe one of your coaching relationships where there is trust.

3. Discuss a situation where there was a lack of trust.

4. Discuss in more detail the following: your role in coaching teachers who do not want the support, how the process of coaching takes time, how you get teachers to come back, and the benefits and difficulties with confidentiality.
5. Are there any advantages to your role being unclear?

6. Describe how a lack of clarity in your role can make it more difficult to coach.

7. What are some examples of when you felt a sense of guilt in your role?

This data collected was used to confirm or deny answers to the research question because an “important aspect of case study data collection is the use of multiple sources of evidence—converging on the same set of issues” (Yin, 1993, p. 32). The instructional coaches chosen shared the same title position and had the same role as a teacher of teachers.

The logic of sampling cases is fundamentally different from statistical sampling. The logic in case studies involves theoretical sampling in which the goal is to choose cases that are likely to replicate or extend the emergent theory or to fill theoretical categories and provide examples for polar types (Eisenhardt, 1989). In this study, through employing this analysis of data, a theory emerged based on the data collected from the interviews, follow-up interviews, and group discussion. Hence, whereas quantitative sampling concerns itself with representativeness, qualitative sampling seeks information richness where cases are selected purposefully rather than randomly (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Purposeful sampling was used based on the available instructional coaches in three different high schools. These participants were selected solely based on the fact that they are instructional coaches. While they do have a personal relationship with me, the nature of this design and intent of the interviews was built on trust. Having a previous relationship allowed the participants and me to potentially explore the phenomenon more deeply.
The names of the individuals participating in this study were kept confidential. Each was given an ID number with the information kept separate from their names.

The participants signed a consent form that allowed me to use the information they gave for data analysis. I also obtained permission from the coaches’ direct supervisor to use this research data. Participation in this study was voluntary, so the participants were involved based on their own free will. All the information gathered including scripts and audio recordings from the interviews were locked in a file cabinet located in my employment office. After two years, the data will be destroyed by means of using a paper shredder, erasing the recorded interviews, and destroying the audio files.

The research questions were given through face-to-face interviews with each participant. When I interviewed the participants, I used detailed coding cards and allowed the participants to read the transcripts of the session. Additionally, I employed informant checks during the follow-up questions. I determined that data collection was complete after a theory was uncovered during the final group interview. Some threats to validity included the variable based on coaching experiences, the teachers that coaches coach, and the school or school district. The focus of the interviews was on instructional coaching.

**Interviews.** Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated, “In-depth interviewing is the hallmark of qualitative research. ‘Talk’ is essential for understanding how participants view their worlds. Often, deeper understanding is developed through the dialogue of long, in-depth interviews, as interviewer and participant ‘construct’ meaning.” Patton (1990) classified interviews into three categories: informal conversational interviews, standardized open-ended interviews, and the interview-guide approach. The prime focus of guided interviews is to elicit the participants’ worldview, and though the researcher
develops categories or topics to explore, he or she remains open to pursuing topics that
the participant brings up during the conversations (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I analyzed
the data based on emerging themes involving the level of engagement, coaching
relationships, best teaching practices, success of coaching programs, knowledge of
instructional strategies, access to a coach, and role of the coach. “A key challenge in
conducting an acceptable case study research design is to ensure that the major questions
of the study are pertinent to the selected unit of analysis. If the questions do not coincide
with the unit of analysis, the data collected may not answer them either.” (Yin, 1993, p.
48). So while the interviews may have allowed me to collect valuable information about
the phenomenon of instructional coaching, it was important to use only the data collected
that connected to the inquiry.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data for the purpose of better understanding the role of the
instructional coach in engaging teachers in learning. I was able to ascertain the
instructional coaching experience of three coaches to highlight the instructional coaching
phenomenon.

Coding process. Dedoose, a data analysis program, was used in the coding
process. After transferring the interview from verbal recording to written recording, I
highlighted each of the three participants responses in a different color, and used the data
analysis program to create analytical categories. I then broke down each participant’s
response unit into the categorical units I developed based on the interviews. I wanted to
manipulate the different units and participants’ responses based on their interviews and
how they fit within the categories that emerged based from the interviews. By breaking
the transcript up into smaller units, I was able to do an analysis of emerging themes much more easily. This ensured that the data was coded more objectively. Through this process, I observed how the amount of similar data among multiple participants strengthened this research. This removed subjectivity from the process, which enabled me to analyze an emerging theory.

**Trustworthiness**

**Triangulation.** When I interviewed the participants, I developed detailed coding cards and used triangulation through member checking, rich description, and peer review. This helped to ensure that the data collected was accurate and consistent. Some threats to validity included the variable based on individual teacher experiences as well as each school where the participant was employed.

**Limitations**

In addition to the limitations outlined in Chapter 1, a major limitation of the study was the small number of participants. There were only three instructional coaches who were interviewed. This placed the research at risk for generalization.

**Ethical Considerations**

A major potential ethical concern was that one third of the information gathered for this study comes from my own school. Thus, a risk for personal bias exists.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the research methodology of multiple case studies chosen for this study. The research design employed was qualitative. Additionally, my positionality, the breakdown of the population and sample selection, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations were addressed.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter contains a detailed account of the participants of this study including an analysis of data gathered through the initial interviews, series of follow-up interviews, and a group interview. An analysis of the data identified emerging themes connected to answering the research question: *How do instructional coaches understand and describe the nature of their work with teachers?* Through an analysis of the data the following themes emerged:

1. To have an effective instructional coaching program, the roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach need to be clearly defined.

2. Trust is an essential component of an instructional coaching program; the types of relationships needed as an instructional coach are based on teachers and administrators trusting the instructional coach.

3. Instructional coaches perceive that instructional coaching works better when teachers seek out the instructional coach.

4. Instructional coaching programs should include criteria for the success of the program that is monitored based on established program goals.

5. To be a more effective coach, instructional coaches need learning experiences that teaches them how to be better at their position.

This chapter provides a description of each participant, which is significant because their personal story defines and limits the scope of this research. Pseudonyms are used to protect each participant’s identity. An analysis of the key findings of the study, including the final group interview where the emerging theory formed, also will be discussed.
Participants

**Introduction.** One of the most notable parts of the series of interviews was the rich, descriptive stories each coach shared about their instructional coaching practices. This established who the instructional coaches were and how they understood and lived the instructional coaching position. Through an analysis of their interviews, they commonly noted that instructional coaching is about relationship building, trust, bringing best-practice instructional practices to the forefront of the classroom, and getting students engaged in learning. These emerging categories will be discussed in further detail throughout this chapter.

Instructional coaching is in a sense a story in itself, and the conversations about the instructional coaches’ work with teachers is a significant data collection point to understanding the nature of their position. The following is a description of each coach with corresponding data that describes one of their coaching experiences. This format was chosen because it gives a first-hand account of what their coaching position is like at their respective school. The narrative describes their educational experience, what brought them to become instructional coaches, the coaching model they coach under, and what they use to chart their coaching activity. These points preview the key findings.

The coaches’ experience contributes to the type of coach they are. Their school, the teachers, and administrators who make up the culture and climate of their school, contribute to the type of coach they are. The specific story each chose to divulge identified how or if their coaching experience is successful. Based on the findings of this study, through an analysis of the data presented by the participants, the following section was chosen as a way to highlight the reliability of each coach, which directly connects to
answering the research question about how these coaches describe the nature of their work with teachers in their school.

Kate. Kate has been an instructional coach for three years. She works as both an instructional coach and English teacher. She teaches one block English class and then spends the rest of her day as an instructional coach. Kate has been working in the same school for eight years and developed the instructional coaching program at her school. The coaching model is based off of the framework described in *Coaching Matters* (Killion, Harrison, Bryon, and Clifton, 2012).

After becoming a reading specialist, part of her schooling gave Kate insight into what it meant to be an instructional coach. It was at this point in her career when she became interested in instructional coaching. From Kate’s perspective, she determined she could best help the school if she could teach teachers strategies to help support the most struggling of students in their classes. Kate said, “When the idea of instructional coaching came about here, that’s kind of when I saw that as an opportunity to take what I learn and help other people understand that and become better teachers for that piece of it.” While she described her instructional coaching experience thus far as an “uphill battle” because of its negative connotation and lack of a clear vision, she has seen many rewarding pieces to it when she works with teachers and sees the impact coaching has on students in classes. This previews much of Kate’s story through this study. Emerging components to her story constantly related back to the confusion she and other teachers in her school face about the concept of instructional coaching.

Through Kate’s interviews, she identified several examples of her instructional coaching experience. “When teachers have a need, they initiate an instructional coaching
meeting and come to the meeting ready to work together and learn. The teacher potentially has a ‘problem’ they need ‘solved’ or an idea they want to explore.” Kate recollected an experience where one teacher came to her with concerns about the diverse reading scores in his class. Another teacher came to Kate because she did not score where she wanted to on her evaluation. Several teachers have come to Kate looking for reading strategies. She describes these teachers as “tending to be the most satisfied teachers and then often return.” Kate does not have a way of monitoring or logging her coaching activity, but uses an electronic calendar to note her appointments. She noticed that when teachers experience success when working with her, “they are willing to come back and do it again when they have another need.” She thinks that “the awareness they have about their need creates a willingness to gain information.”

Lew. Lew has been an instructional coach for four years at a freshman only high school campus. This school has a split campus. While the population of the entire school is nearly 4,500, he primarily works with teachers of freshmen students where the population is about 1,200. Lew works as both an English teacher and instructional coach. He has spent 11 years in the U. S. public school system and three years overseas teaching English. Lew is in his late 30s, and his general educational philosophy is centered on the idea that “teachers can always improve, but teachers don’t always know how to; this is the angle [he] can take on improving life for students by working through teachers.” Lew self-described as a constructivist who believes that

if we set things up right and put the kids in a position to make meaning on their own, kids can be successful. Instructional coaching is the way that allows me to share ideas that I have, classroom practices, and research in a way that can get to
many students. That’s one thing that I like about instructional coaching; when my ideas are heard they sometimes affect one teacher’s 150 kids and sometimes they have the ability to affect 4,000 at the school.

He described his instructional coaching experience as primarily positive; however, there has been a big learning curve and challenges of getting teachers to support this role. Lew also expressed concerns over working two jobs at once, since he teaches three periods of the day and then spends the rest of his day coaching.

In Lew’s coaching experience, he noted that different things motivate different teachers, and he sees this on a daily basis. Lew keeps a discussion log that identifies his coaching activity. This will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter, but an example of his discussion log is:

9/3—Discussed approaches to differentiation. Teacher not comfortable with homogenous grouping. Discussed options for grouping and computer use in general. Talked about intro topics with teacher because she wasn’t here last week. End of next week will start on laptops. Google+ with questioning activity. Discussed breadth vs. depth with regard to upcoming short stories.

The log showed the conversations that take place and the objectives that he tries to reach with the teachers he coaches. A part of the data collected on Lew showed that sometimes teachers just want someone to help them through the evaluation process. Other times, teachers really want to improve their teaching and enjoy the collaborative relationships between coach and teacher. When teachers have not exactly grasped students-centered constructivist approach to learning, for him, “that is a significant obstacle to overcome.” When teachers plan lessons with Lew as a teammate, or ask for revisions, or ask help
presenting something they are not comfortable with, the “experience is far greater and more satisfying for both the teacher and coach.” This is significantly different then when a teacher does not feel they need support. It would be easiest for him to say that he should not spend his time with teachers who do not want the help, but often times Lew struggles with really what is in the best interest of students. His school does not follow an actual instructional coaching model. Lew believes that the strategies and support can make it to the students despite the teacher’s "friction." His end goal is always helping students, so it is often worth the time and energy.

**Jane.** Jane has spent 18 years in education, both at the middle school and high school levels. She has been an instructional coach for the past 10 years in two different high schools and is in her late 40s. Jane teaches two periods a day; however, her teaching assignment is as an instructional coach in a social studies classroom and reading support classroom. The rest of Jane’s day is spent instructional coaching where she works one-on-one with teachers based on several components of researcher Jim Knight (2007), which include planning lessons, having reflective conversations, and creating more authentic assessments. Jane believes that “all students have the right and capacity to learn how to read and comprehend to their best ability.” She has always had an affinity toward the struggling students. In Jane’s current role as an instructional coach, she described it as “very positive because of the supportive school culture.” At a previous school in which Jane worked, she felt it was “very combative and negative because of a culture of fear.” Since the culture of Jane’s current school is that instructional coaching is a part of the culture, every new teacher coming into the school just knows that it is the expectation to use the instructional coaching program.
Jane shared that her teachers are “really engaged in the coaching process when they come prepared with an idea or lesson they would like to develop.” This was an emerging concept that will be further explored in this chapter. Often times teachers she works with, who have a solid grasp of previous assessment data, will guide the discussions and their future instruction. Jane went into greater depth about this concept in several cases that also will be discussed later in this chapter. Unfortunately for her, this does not always happen.

In some cases, Jane gets teachers referred to her by department chairs, so they are forced to work with her. In these situations, Jane tends to have defensive teachers that have been told they need support and they tend to be quiet and listen. There generally is not any two-way conversation or interaction. In addition, there is not a general openness to creating anything new for engagement. It was clear to her that these teachers do not feel they need support.

Jane usually gets a lot of attention after the first round of informal observations as well as formal observations. At this point, she shared that some of the newer teachers who were afraid to maybe have coaches in a class want her support because the teachers need the support for a better evaluation. Jane capitalizes on this so that she is able to ensure her teachers are creating activities authentic activities within the classroom to prepare students.

**Conclusion.** The purpose of this section was to provide background information about each participant in this case study. Each participant described at least one coaching experience and information about him or herself as a coach to understand the context of his or her position. This format was chosen because it gives a first-hand account of the
confines of each coaches’ coaching position at their school. These key points are used to understand the findings of this study.

Composite Case

**Data analysis procedures.** The three participants were interviewed in great detail during the initial round of interviews. Each one-on-one interview lasted approximately one hour. Based on the initial responses and follow-up conversations through e-mail and a group interview, all three coaches responded positively to the depth of questioning that was able to be afforded in a short amount of time. In fact the participants made statements like “you really got to the core of my position through your questioning” (Kate); “these are areas of my position I have never thought about” (Lew); and, “thanks for not holding back” (Jane). As a result of my previous relationship with all three coaches, this was helpful.

Kate initially responded that she was surprised at the amount of detail and reflection needed to answer the questions. Lew shared that the questions were part of his practice that he never really thought about, which has since then caused him to think further about his role as an instructional coach. Jane similarly was happy that the interview moved beyond a surface level approach to understanding her position. These responses preview one of my findings. Instructional coaches need more professional development or time to discuss their experiences with other instructional coaches. Because of these detailed interviews, I was able to gain a better understanding of the participants’ experiences.

After the initial interviews, I sent the participants a series of five detailed follow-up interview questions via email. This gave the participants an opportunity to reflect and
take their time in responding to the common emerging themes that were established during the original interview. This part of the data collection process took approximately five weeks. The data provided deeper insight. The final round interview was a group interview with all three participants. This experience was the capstone needed to allow participants to hear from one another, ask each other questions, and meet each other for the first time. This group interview was over an hour long and provided additional detail that confirmed the major components of the composite case study. The balance of this chapter will show how the following themes were uncovered.

All of the interviews were transcribed by an outside transcription service (Vanan Group). After listening to the interviews and reading and rereading the transcripts numerous times, the data was analyzed. During each part of the data collection process, the coaches shared examples of concrete work that was part of their role. Through an examination of their notes or logs on their coaching sessions, calendars, specific identified coaching experiences, and the sharing of strategies and visuals, it allowed me to triangulate the data collected from the interviews because of what was shown to me during the interviews. Their experiences were authentic as indicated through their experiences described in their spoken word.

For example, Kate shared calendar appointments and coaching note sheets that she uses with each teacher she coaches. These note sheets identifies their goals and what they need to do to meet these goals during their coaching relationship. Lew shared his discussion log that provides examples like “we discussed how to move away from power point that repeats information from reading. The teachers wants to redesign the course so there is less lecture.” Similarly, while Jane does not keep anything too formal, she
showed lessons from teachers and weekly outlines of what she does. An example she showed was a knowledge-based assessment where she worked with the teacher to add readings and higher-level questioning. These artifacts in conjunction with the interviews showed that what the participants were saying matched their practice.

The approach to this data collection process was lengthy; however, the group interview at the end was eye opening for all involved. Through a reflective conversation at the end of the interview, the participants shared that being able to discuss instructional coaching with other instructional coaches was one of the best professional development experiences they have had regarding instructional coaching and they wanted more of it.

Formal and informal member checks were done throughout the entire data collection process. This included clarifications, restatements of key ideas, transcript review, and a review of the chapter four analysis. I noted connections to all of the interviews for the instructional coaches to understand the emerging themes and why more data was needed. This provided an opportunity for all the participants to delve deeper into more specific experiences. The member checking was helpful because they were able to read what they stated and reflect further or clarify further what they intended. This allowed for more context to be added to the findings.

**Theme 1: To Have an Effective Instructional Coaching Program, The Roles and Responsibilities of an Instructional Coach Need to be Clearly Defined**

**Introduction.** The investigation allowed for a series of themes to be uncovered from the perspective of the three instructional coaches interviewed. Understanding the core research question, *How do instructional coaches understand and describe the nature of their work with teachers?* was the intent of the data collection process. The coaches in
this study do not use the same coaching model, in fact, all three had a difficult time identifying if they even followed a coaching model. This factor is discussed later in this chapter as the coaches answer the research question and show the significant finding that coaches and teachers do not understand the role of an instructional coach.

Through the coding process of the emerging themes, describing the role and responsibilities of each coach developed as one of the most important aspects. The findings for this section indicated that an instructional coaches’ job description needs to be clearly defined and understood for staff members.

Early in the interview process, all three instructional coaches shared that they have one component similarly defined job responsibility, which is that they use part of their day to work with other teachers. As stated previously in this study, the definition used as an instructional coach is that teachers need to have part of their day defined to coach other teachers. All three coaches meet this requirement and shared this as the single most relatable quality of their position. Other than this, it is clear in the case of these three coaches that there is not necessarily a common definition developed at their schools, which leads to role confusion. The coach’s primary role should be to meet with teachers to set goals, plan lessons, and help to improve instruction. This will be analyzed in greater extent later in the chapter. However, the participants mentioned that they have responsibilities that are assumed even though it might not be perceived as part of their position.

Similarly, it was evident through all parts of the different interviews that each participant had a difficult time understanding their position, explaining what their position is, and sharing the vision of the role at their respective schools. My analysis of
the data assisted with understanding this; therefore, the intent of this data analysis was to create clarity of the instructional coaching role because of the data they provided through their interviews. At all three schools, a job description has not been developed; however, one of the schools is beginning the process of better defining the roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach. This leads to an additional finding discussed later in this chapter, which focuses on administrator trust and discusses the implications that the school’s philosophy and structure affect the coaching role.

Discussion. Kate had a difficult time talking about her position to other colleagues because at first she “didn’t have a clue what it was.” Lew noted that “the reality is that the coaching part of [his] job is much less clearer to [him] than the classroom component.” Jane also shared a similar sentiment that she felt like her responsibilities increased substantially beyond what she ever could imagine. Since Kate was part of the team that developed her instructional coaching position, she was able to identify areas that made her position much more difficult at first. Kate said,

There wasn’t a clear vision at first because we spent the whole first year figuring out what our job actually was; three years later we now we have a much better picture of that. There is, however, the matter of educating staff on what our position is, so we are still figuring out that piece. I’m kind of set in the idea that it’s not a fixer position, but it is a position of being a collaborator.

The reality of their position may be difficult to explain from the instructional coaching perspective, but there is literature (Knight, 2006; Reeves, 2007; Bell, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 1988) that shows what instructional coaching is and how it should be defined in the school setting. Knight (2004) defined the role of an instructional coach more clearly
as being one who is an on-site professional developer who teaches educators how to use proven teaching methods. Instructional coaches use a repertoire of effective instructional practices to collaborate with teachers, identify practices that will effectively address teachers' needs, and help teachers implement those practices. All three coaches use these elements as what they perceive are part of their coaching sessions. When they meet with teachers, these are constant areas of focus. Additionally, Knight shared that instructional coaches use a variety of professional development procedures to encourage the widespread, high-quality implementation of effective teaching practices. They include holding one-to-one or small-group meetings during which instructional coaches can identify how to address their most pressing concerns; guiding teachers through instructional manuals, checklists, and other materials; collaboratively planning with teachers to identify when and how to implement effective instruction practices; preparing materials for teachers prior to instruction; modeling instructional practices in teachers’ classrooms; observing teachers when they use interventions; and providing feedback to teachers. Through the interviews, all of these points were referenced in some way as the instructional coaches described their position. Examples included “we actually have coaching meeting monthly where we can collaborate with other coaches in the district” (Kate); “I use CRISS strategies as a starting point for my meetings with teachers as a way to assist teachers in preparing materials for their classes” (Lew); and, “I often times go into teachers’ classrooms to model lessons. Just the other day I worked with an English teacher on an annotation technique. I modeled it to the class” (Jane). This will be described through specific examples throughout this chapter; however, there are many
additional roles that coaches take on and a variety of additional responsibilities that may confuse their role.

The three coaches shared the same initial understanding that they would be working with other teachers and supporting them in their classrooms. The day-to-day responsibilities of an instructional coach were not outlined to them nor was a job description shared with them. Because of this, they each have to self-initiate a schedule that works for what they perceive their instructional coaching role to be.

Kate shared that there were a couple of teachers that she has a strong working relationship with that “stop in on an as-needed basis” to share lesson plans or activities and get to Kate’s expertise on making them more engaging lessons where students are active in class through activities that require them to think critically, write, and have critical discussions with their peers. This is how she defined engagement. Additionally, Kate makes herself available by request and is working to push into classrooms to assist teachers or work with teams of teachers during their plan periods.

When working with teachers, Kate tries to get as much information from them at a time without being a burden. She gets an idea of what their objective is and their goal for their students and then does as much research as is needed before meeting with the teacher. Kate creates a list of questions and tends to be over prepared based on where the conversation takes them. Her day is very flexible, and she also works on providing professional development to the staff based on strategies she finds the most successful in her teaching.

Lew shared that while he does provide some one-on-one coaching with teachers who seek him out, the school asks him to do other tasks such as preparing literacy
lunches, which is a presentation format and group sharing of best practices and the school involves him in other school initiatives that are not one-on-one coaching. Jane usually has an initial conversation, whether it is face-to-face or email, that asks teachers to provide her with materials teachers are using in class before their initial coaching session. She tries to prep as much as possible and plan conversation notes. She works with new teachers and specific departments while also serving as an instructional coach as a co-teacher of a lower level social studies class.

All of this is information was relevant because it is based on the instructional coaches’ understanding of what they do as an instructional coach. While each approach coaching similarly in that they work to improve the instructional skills of teachers at their school, it was clear that without the formalized structure of the instructional coaching program, it causes role confusion. This led to the finding that teachers do not understand the role of an instructional coach and the responsibilities need to be more clearly defined.

Coaching as a form of mentoring. Throughout the data collection process, all three participants initiated conversations about their role being similar to that of a mentor or loosely identified qualities of a mentor or mentoring program that they exhibit. The literature (Denton & Hasbrouch, 2009; Singh, 1998; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Coggins et al., 2003; Darling Hammond, 2009; Showers, 1985) in chapter 2 identified how mentoring is similar to coaching. The intent of this section is not to mirror the literature review, but to identify that without any prompting, all of the instructional coaches identified their role as being connected to that of a mentor. Mentor and coach both share the same concept of teachers working with other teachers. However, there are two key differences that emerged from the interviews by the participants of this study: (1)
Instructional coaching is more directly tied to classroom practice, and (2) Mentoring is a process that is initiated by the school and imposed on the teacher, whereas instructional coaching is more of a choice. Another key finding that will be concluded at the end of this section is that because mentoring and instructional coaching are so similar, they need to be more clearly defined by each institution for the role of an instructional coach to be clearer. This was identified throughout the interview process.

Kate said, "With the mentor program, there’s a certain way that they [mentors] go through the program. There is a mentor cycle, and it is an obligation that we have to complete." During her coaching process, teachers come to her and express concerns, worries, or questions that they have, and they do not feel like it is such a rigid program they have to work through. Part of the mentoring program that she views as different from the instructional coaching program is that mentoring is not as reflective or allows for changing of any instructional practice. From Kate’s perspective, a coach asks questions that causes teachers to reflect and change their instructional practices. This is important because it confirms the finding of why a mentor is different than a coach, and even further proves the implication that a coach’s position is confusing and needs further clarification. Similarly, Lew described his experience when he works with newer teachers:

Sometimes I get paired with a newer teacher and it’s really just so that they kind of have a mentor because we don’t really have any type of mentor program. They just want somebody they can bounce ideas off of.”

He focused on how the mentor has to do the little details that are involved in managing the life working in a school. The instructional coach needs to be more targeted toward
effective classroom practices that are best for students. This identified that confusion that exists between mentoring and coaching. A discussion that could continue to be explored in future studies is that throughout the interview, Lew shared deeper details than the others as he reflected on this concept. What was interesting was when he said “Ideally, I wouldn’t want to coach somebody in the first year because they are so busy taking care of all that other stuff. For a younger teacher, I think coaching during the second year is a little better.”

As I further investigated the literature, based on his discussion and this prompting, I found that there is no supportive research that identifies the best years to coach a teacher. This issue may be ripe for study. What was common however, was the concept that both he and Kate identified the difference that instructional coaching has the classroom instruction component, which is different than mentoring. While this is definitely not debated in the literature, what is important to gain from this discussion is the confusion that exists because of their similar roles. Similarly, Jane described what her thoughts of the differences of the two were:

I think of mentoring in relation to instructional coaching because instructional coaches are part of that program as well here. A mentor is multifaceted in regards to daily schedule changes or logistical things that are needed as a first year teacher. I think instructional coaching is a much more focused approach that looks are more foundational instructional practices like reading and writing. It could be a crossover for sure and definitely is in our program but we do so much more with mentoring that has instructional ties.
An analysis of the three positions clarified the role of a mentor versus an instructional coach, but only among the three of them. It is not commonly identified where teachers or administrators share it in the schools. A large segment of the literature conflates mentoring with coaching, and depending on the institution or study, there is not much of a common or research-based concrete difference between coaching and mentoring other than what is noted in the literature review in this study, which is that research on these topics may be interchangeable depending on the context.

The literature focuses more on confusion of instructional coaches with roles that limit their success, like instructional coaches being supervisors; however, through instructional coaches defining the role of a mentor, they have been able to grasp the depth of their position that is needed for feeling a sense of fulfillment. The participants all knew that they were different from mentors, and it is clear that the more focused element of instruction versus being tied to daily routine activities seems to be the defining difference. Nonetheless, another key element that was echoed through each response was that mentoring and instructional coaching go hand-in-hand or are at least there are significant roles that need to be more clearly defined for the school to be clearer in identifying the role of an instructional coach.

**Creating clarity in instructional coaching.** Based on a deeper analysis of the participants, a similar emerging theme developed about how the instructional coaches wanted their role to be clearer to them and their school community. Kate would like her role to be clearer to teachers. “If coaches and coaches shared the work they were doing with others, it would help teachers see ‘options’ for work with coaches. Clearly defining the specific roles would also be helpful [data coach, learning facilitator, instructional
specialist]. Giving examples, menus, even showing a video of the work that happens together would help people understand what work a coach does. We have a ‘coach is/coach is not’ chart and I think this helps, but it is not standard practice.”

Lew took this a step further as many of his comments revolved around how unclear his role actually is. A synthesized version of Lew’s response was:

There are a few things that could better clarify my role as an instructional coach. For one, it is confusing to staff because many staff members view us as literacy coaches and other staff members view us as instructional coaches. Literacy coaching implies that I am only going to be able to help teachers in literacy initiatives or reading strategies in the classroom when in fact my major focus is on best instructional practices. I might be utilized more if my title captured what I actually did in the position. If my position was limited to more specific duties it would make it easier to articulate what I actually do. Right now, I am on several committees and am stretched very thin. That it makes it difficult to understand if all of these roles are actual roles of an instructional coach or not. I think the best way for students to get to know my role is if I were in classes where I can help them, or if I were to continue helping them through working with their teachers.

Jane shared:

Our teachers can have a clearer understanding of instructional coaches if instructional coaches have the opportunity (on a yearly basis) to present the goals (SIP, administrative, department, school initiative) to the teachers whether this is in whole group or departmental formats. In addition, their needs to be continual outreach through department or division chairs to discuss needs.
Her general concerns connect back to Knight’s (2007) definition and overview of an instructional coach. Having a common definition for the school and community is an important role of a school.

It is clear in the case of these three coaches that there is not necessarily a common definition developed at their schools. By developing an overview of what their role is, it will help alleviate the confusion that exists and may prevent them from taking on roles that are not or should be part of their role as an instructional coach. Jane was the only participant who actually seemed to like the nebulous nature of the position. In the final group interview, she shared a thought, which allowed the other two coaches to possibly think differently about how having flexibility or a lack of clarity in the position could actually be a positive thing. Jane brought up how “hugely beneficial” it was because it makes her more approachable by the staff. She reported that if she had a stringent role, it might dissuade teachers from using her as an instructional coach.

Because Jane identified this in the group interview, both Lew and Kate shared that because of that flexibility, they were probably able to grow more in their position and become a more effective coach because teachers do not have to see if they fit some guideline or checklist to be coached. The only frustrating part of this was that sometimes the participants then have a difficult time saying “no” to teachers if there is something that does not actually fit their role. Since teachers do not know what the coaching role is, they define it based on what they perceive it should be. Some of the examples provided by the participants were subbing for teachers, creating a worksheet for them, fixing an assessment, reviewing their evaluation paperwork, and making copies for them.
Throughout the data collection process and analysis in subsequent sections, it was clear that all three participants take on additional roles to prove their worth. The following was shared: “I want to be on every committee so people think I am doing something with my time” (Kate); “Administrators always ask me to be on certain committees or provide some professional development for staff. I feel like I can’t say no” (Lew); and, “I feel like I need to have my hand in many aspects of the school” (Jane). Each also described that by taking on additional responsibilities, they show that they are needed as an instructional coach. Kate shared that she does not want it to be perceived that she is just “hanging out.” Similarly, Lew asks for “more–and-more” to do from his administrators so he knows that “they will need me and therefore not get rid of my position.” And, Jane shared that she “wants to be involved in as much as possible so she can meet more teachers.”

Because of this common idea that coaches felt the need to take on additional responsibilities outside of coaching, I asked a question about whether or not they felt guilty as an instructional coach. Both Kate and Lew said that it is the perfect way to describe how they felt. They both feel like because they have extra time in their day, they have to fill it and over-schedule themselves. Jane, on the other hand, felt differently. While she understood this, she said that “this was something that I got over several years into the position. For me, it could be an issue of confidence.” Both Lew and Kate are generally new to the position, whereas Jane has been in the position for almost double the amount of years. The idea of guilt has not been researched, but is included as a possible future research topic in Chapter 5.
**Conclusion.** The data analyzed in this section indicated that the role and responsibilities of an instructional coach are misunderstood and need to be clearly defined. The participants focused on how they do not have consistent job descriptions, teachers are unaware of their responsibilities, and there is constant confusion between the role of a mentor and coach. Because of this, coaches have increased responsibilities. Based on the findings of this section, there is a need for creating clarity in the role of an instructional coach. These findings will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

**Theme 2: Trust is an Essential Component of an Instructional Coaching Program; The Types of Relationships Needed as an Instructional Coach are Based on Teachers and Administrators Trusting The Instructional Coach**

**Introduction.** This section focuses on relationships that are needed in the instructional coaching position. The emerging categories for analysis were how teachers and administrators trusting instructional coaches is needed. Additionally, the concepts of working as partners and confidentiality are discussed. This was an important part of this study because it adds layers to answering the research question. How the participants described their interactions and relationships with others is a significant part of the role that needs to continually be defined.

**Teachers trust as an essential part of the coaching relationship.** Trust is needed from teachers and coaches need to be trusted. It is an essential part of the coaching relationship (Knight, 2007). As suggested by the participants in one of the emerging themes about success, the relationships coaches have with teachers is determined based on whether or not the teacher trusts them. Kate shared that “trust is huge.” Lew stated “I have to be trusting of the people that I’m working with otherwise I
don’t see any good coming out of it.” And, Jane similarly said, “Trust is everything.” Discussion of the concept of trust will continue to be an on-going throughout the remainder of this study. Particularly, in subsequent sections examples of trusting relationships and relationships where there was not trust will be provided.

The participants’ reasons why they felt this way were all the same, and throughout many different parts of all the interviews, the underlying principle of many responses relied on trust being developed. If teachers do not trust them, then they will not want to be coached. All three participants meet with teachers and let them know that they are not going to tell anyone what they are working on or what happens in their classrooms unless the teacher is comfortable with it; they are all in a non-evaluative role. The hardest part identified was that the teachers actually have to believe them. There was almost a sense that instructional coaches have to be credible and capable of being trusted. Kate described this as how she “shares when parts of her teaching do not work so teachers realize she is not perfect.” Lew described this as “having to work with people who he knows best first and then hoping his credibility will spread.” Jane, similarly to Kate, shared how she “is vulnerable and takes risks, but since she has been a coach for so long, most teachers just trust her because of her reputation.” An implication to this is that this might be part of a coaches’ character that needs to be a quality in order to be a coach.

Another point developed was that the coach has to be trusted that they know what they are talking about in that they are going to lead teachers in a direction that is productive for their class. What is interesting about this point is that the only way to gain this credibility is by teachers talking about their experiences working with the coach. This meant that teachers have to have these discussions with their peers otherwise, since the
coaches will not talk about it because it may break their trust, teachers need to take the lead on building this quality in the coaches of their school.

Other components of trust in the relationship mentioned by the participants included the teachers trusting that the coaches are knowledgeable enough and will be a useful tool for them. There is trust that they think teachers and the administrators need from the instructional coaches as well. From the teacher’s perspective, they need to trust that what the coach says and whether or not the coaches’ intentions really are authentic. Kate described this best when she said,

I think people are nervous these days, and I do have to gain their trust; I am not there to catch them doing anything wrong, I’m there to help them in their teaching, help the students in the class, and help them with their planning.

Due to this, the coaches shared similar beliefs that teachers who come to them for help need to know that it is not going to be reported back directly to their administrators. The idea that Kate identified that some teachers might think that they are there to “catch them doing something wrong” goes back to the inherent finding that teachers do not understand the role of a coach. A key difference noted between instructional coaches and administrators is that coaches are there as their peer. This is something that again makes the role of the coach nebulous. Teachers may view coaches as pseudo-administrators and this makes the role of a coach confusing; however, Jane shared that to avoid this confusion, she makes it clear to her teachers. Her following statement was the foundation of many of her responses: “I’m not administrative, I’m not evaluating teachers, I’m here to help as a colleague … so trust is very important.” All three participants shared the common view that is confirmed in research (Stover et al., 2011; Flynn & Nolan, 2008;
Hanuscin & Lee, 2011; Hallam et al., 2012) that the key to a successful coaching relationship is trust between the coach and teacher.

All participants were able to talk quite freely about how trust was extremely important in their role, as was noted in the data analysis. Additionally, during the group interview, we were able to discuss this more in depth. The conversation led to examples of how teachers trusted them, and even how teachers did not trust them.

Kate discussed how a point of contention, both positively and negatively, is when she is placed in the teacher work room. In previous years, she coached people at her desk in the work room. It was difficult for teachers to work with her because they were out in the open and everyone could see her working with them. This connected back to the point that some teachers are unwilling to share their failures. This year (2014-2015), however, she has an instructional coaching office, and now teachers associate her as being an administrator because only administrators have offices. She also described how she applied to be on a leadership team as an instructional coach for English. She said,

In retrospect, this was very damaging for my relationship with my peers in the English department. I thought it would be great for an instructional coach to be a support for them and help them make decisions; however, almost half the department viewed it as another way for me to be closer to being an administrator. Because of this, I lost some trust because the leadership team had to make decisions, and since my job was to report back to my department, it made some people feel like I was making the decisions myself and caused them to not trust me.
It was evident that Kate works in an environment where teachers are very cautious of the role of administrators versus teachers. Her being in the position as an instructional coach is a non-traditional teaching role that is administrator-like. It also was clear that this and every other leadership role she assumes are scrutinized and affects her role as an instructional coach. She discussed reporting to her department as part of the structure of the leadership team. Her role is to design the curricular framework and then “report back” the decisions the district team made. This places her in an “uncomfortable position, because the department looks at [me] and thinks [I] have made the decision.” The department then connects her more to being administrator-like.

Lew focused on how teachers trust him the most when the teacher is secure enough in their own teaching. The teachers who seek him out and those who he seeks out and helps support beyond just being an instructional coach seem to be the best fit for him. For example, Lew shared he was having a difficult time coaching one teacher, but the teacher asked for his assistance to write a grant for a fish tank. After he did that, the teacher is now more willing to work with him and actually takes pride in some of the different strategies he is trying in his classroom. Lew also noted that he has had some issues with trust. They are as follows:

I have had situations where I went to a PLC of a group that I work with all the time outside of school in the theater. However, when I went to their PLC in my official capacity as an instructional coach, they completely shut down. In fact, they said that they thought I was a little too close to administration. One guy actually said, “I saw you in the hall the other day talking to ‘them’.” Since this team doesn’t openly trust administration and they view me as that, they really
have a difficult time trusting that I am not going to tell the administrators what we are working on.

This situation identifies the lack of trust in administration from teachers; therefore, if instructional coaches are viewed as administrators, then they have a difficult time being trusted. This connects back to having clarity in the position.

Jane’s examples stemmed from her personal relationship with her department chair. Since her department chair is one of her close, personal friends, she feels like this is one of the major ways trust gets in the way. Jane said, “I don’t tell my department chair anything about what I do as an instructional coach, but because of my personal relationship with her, people think I do.” She said that being an instructional coach is part of the school expectations, so this actually helps with the trust issue. Since instructional coaching is such a positive part of the culture and climate of the school, Jane insisted that it really is a non-issue. It becomes a very positive thing to be collaborating with an instructional coach, so because of this, she feels like everyone actually wants to talk about all the work they do with instructional coaches.

The concept of trust goes back to the role of an instructional coach. Through answering the research question, the argument presented by the participants was that trust is a significant part of the role. In fact, it is most essential for coaching to be effective, as noted in the research finding about the success of the coaching program.

**Administrator’s trust as an essential part of instructional coaching.** Jane brought up an additional point that all three participants shared regarding why having these positive relationships are so important: that instructional coaches are not administrators. Trust is so essential because often times, teachers view instructional
coaches as administrators, which is not the case. This is in-line with research focused on how instructional coaching is not an administrative role. Toll (2005) provided several strategies for coaches because “coaching duties sometimes look similar to duties performed by supervisors; coaches need to maintain teachers’ trust while having good communication with the supervisor” (p. 1). The ways coaches can do this is by separating themselves from the assessment of teachers; if the coach sees a supervisory matter, understand that the supervisor will see it to and therefore leave it up to the supervisor; and, communicate with the supervisor in a neutral manner.

There are parts of the administrator viewpoint in instructional coaching that is not at the forefront of current research. Understanding the administrator’s role or perspective is just as important. Kate shared that “administrators need to be clearer about my role too. I can attend leadership team meetings for question and answer sessions or I would even be willing to coach the administrators. Administrators should read some of the same works that coaches used to create the program.” In this part of the interview, there was an underlying suggestion that administrators are even unclear about her role. At times, Kate was visually frustrated hinting, through some of her answers, that this leads to a lack of clarity in her position. Kate literally stated “some administrators have no idea what I do and think they can just add me to every school team because they think that is my job.” Lew said “an explanation of the role and duties from the administrators to the teachers every year would be helpful; this way we all would be on the same page.” Jane, reported that she would like to see that “administrators could be clearer of our role if there was a quarterly check in with administrators. Depending on the school and the data accountability time of monitoring system would need to be in place.”
Trust was a quality that was expressed through several different components of the data collection process, and it carried over into several components of the role of an instructional coach. It was shared by all participants that trust is needed from administrators in that administrators need to trust that instructional coaches are doing their job. Particularly, Lew stated,

Thinking about this from an administrative perspective, there’s a fair amount of trust that they have in me also, and that my schedule is a little bit more flexible than other people. I’ve got a bit more freedom in some way because I don’t teach five periods of the day. So I think that administrators need to be trusting of coaches who have a looser schedule to use that time appropriately.

This is a point that has not been further developed or studied in recent research. Most of the literature (Knight, 2007) focuses on how teachers must trust instructional coaches, and that was definitely echoed by the participants, but identifying that administrators must trust coaches because of the time that is given to them during their day to do their job is something that should be further investigated. Additionally, this also tied into why the instructional coaches take on more responsibilities in the school that may not be part of their role.

Perceptions of confidentiality between coach and teacher. One standard component of the instructional coaching model is to maintain levels of confidentiality. Based on the experiences of the instructional coaches, this is a point of contention that is not necessarily as valued as the idea of trust in a relationship. In fact, this is one major part of this study that was interpreted differently by all participants. Each noted that trust is more important and that there are actual differences in confidentiality versus trust. Kate
shared that while starting the instructional coaching program, she felt that confidentiality had to be a big factor because she did not want teachers thinking that the information between a coach and teacher would collected or documented. Kate noted that she felt at times this may have caused less sharing among staff, which could be the reason why the instructional coaching program has not grown as much; however, because of the focus on confidentiality, there is a foundational trust in that teachers know what she will talk about with others.

Lew appeared to understand confidentiality more in line with what he hears from other teachers or administrators about teachers. There is a sense of confidentiality in his role where he is privy to more information than other teachers may have. Additionally, Jane viewed confidentiality as more of her right to protect students in a class. So, if she feels like students are at a disservice because a teacher displays gross misconduct, inappropriate behavior, or is deficient, she feels obligated to tell her department chair. This, however, goes beyond instructional coaching and is more centered, as she put it, on her “moral obligation to protect students.” Lew reported a key defining difference:

Trust is not about saying something to somebody that could get that person in trouble, but it is more of an issue of what the “true” intention of coaching is, when the coach says he will help both the teacher and the students in the teacher’s class and how the coach follows through with doing just that. This becomes the difference between trust and confidentiality.

Killion (2012) argued that the coaching relationship should be confidential. This is actually one of Knight’s (2007) major coaching principles. This, however, seems to be a point that is misunderstood from the perspective of the participants of this study.
Additionally, the context provided in some of the examples they shared showed how confidential relationships may hinder the progress of the instructional coaching program.

For example, coaches are put into difficult positions because they have to focus on building trust with the teachers and administrators, but yet they want to make it known what they do as a coach, how they are meeting their goals, and whom they are working with to show that their instructional coaching is working. Specifically, Kate said, “Whenever I work with a teacher and that teacher does something great in class, I just want to let everyone around me know, but I can’t because of confidentiality.” Additionally, Lew and Jane shared a similar message that they want to really celebrate when a coaching relationship is successful and when teachers do good things in their classes. Because of this, administrators need to trust that their coaches are doing their job. Since much of their position might be confidential, there needs to be administrative trust in the coach.

**Partnership as an integral part of the coaching relationship.** The concept of being a partner surfaced as being an integral part of the role of an instructional coach. Kate shared that she does not want to tell people what to do in their classroom. She wants them to feel ownership over what they come up with and partner with them until they are happy with what they come up with what they perceive will influence their classroom. Lew also felt just like a partner with them, and he likes the dynamic of partnership in the role. In Jane’s experience as an instructional coach, she knows that her success is because of the relationships she has with the teachers she coaches. She discussed the intensity of partnering with one teacher in particular because of her role as a co-teacher as an instructional coach. In this role, she plans and co-teaches specifically with one teacher for
the entire year. Due to this foundational partnership, the instructional coaching program has grown because of the respect that is exhibited between them. Kate describes one coaching situation as follows:

The first time we met, he brought his reading data. We looked at this, listed concerns, and began to brainstorm ideas to address this issue. From there, we prioritized and made a plan of action. Because this teacher had this concern, he was willing to implement right away and then follow up the next day. As we focused on the diverse readers, the conversation branched out into so many other areas of the classroom. We looked at the way he was giving notes, the skills that the activities were aligned to, the discussion seminar format he was using, the differentiating process and product, and how to grade these, as well as using formative and summative assessment data to make classroom decisions. This coaching cycle lasted the entire semester with a combination of co-planning, co-teaching, observation, and reflection. The teacher felt ownership of the work we did and was pleased with the outcome.

This was an example of a partnership approach. In turn, both the experience for the teacher and coach was positive. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) posited that instructional coaches should position themselves as equal partners, collaborating with fellow teachers based on their professional actions on partnership principles. In a 1997 research study, teachers reported that they were four times more likely to implement teaching practices they learned during partnership sessions than those they learned in traditional sessions (Knight, 1998). Similarly, instructional coaches also have the greatest affect in schools where the principal and the instructional coach work together in partnership. The
participants seemed to confirm that partnering with teachers and administrators in their role is what is needed.

**Conclusion.** This section focused on the concept of trust and how trust is needed from two perspectives as an instructional coach: trust is needed from teachers, and trust is needed from administrators. This was another aspect of understanding the instructional coaching position. Additionally, the concepts of partnership and confidentiality were discussed as aspects of the instructional coaching role that link to how trust is gained.

**Theme 3: Instructional Coaches Perceive That Instructional Coaching Works Better When Teachers Seek Out The Instructional Coach**

**Introduction.** This section connected to the research question because an important aspect of the nature of the role of an instructional coach is to work with teachers and engage them in the process of learning. There are examples that show what the participants do to engage teachers as well as examples of what they have done that has not worked. Additionally, data was collected on the perceived qualities of an instructional coach that are needed to be an instructional coach. All of this led to the understanding of what an instructional coach is and answered the research question of this study.

**Coaching used to engage teachers.** When it comes to engaging teachers in learning, all the instructional coaches brought up several examples of the very first thing they try to do to create the best first impression for teachers in order for them to continue to work with them. As Kate put it, “you don’t want to be a burden on teachers, and you want them coming back for more coaching.” It appeared that the first meeting, initial conversation, or first coaching session was one of the most important parts of
instructional coaches coaching cycle, because it determines if the teacher will continue to work with them. Kate said, “The first thing I try to figure out is if the teacher wants me to have them figure out ideas to use in their classroom, or if I need to provide them with several ideas and then they can choose based on what fits their teaching style best.”

Lew said,

Teachers process information according to their own filter. There is no question that I have to shift my coaching style based on the teacher I am coaching. Science teachers instruct very differently than a foods teacher and I have to know that going into a session so they are engaged in the process.

Jane then shared her technique:

I think you have to start by working with teachers who have a knack for working with challenging students. Once other teachers in the school see this, then it starts spreading because other teachers can see the direct success. I know teachers are engaged when they are actually using the instructional strategies I provide them and they can transfer it to their own content.

The underlying conclusion is that to engage teachers in coaching it really becomes teacher-dependent. Each of the participants have to shift their techniques based on the teacher they are working with and coaching. From their perspective, it is not a “one size fits all” program.

During the interviewing process, all three participants identified specifically what they do to attain that level of engagement in their coaching sessions. Kate said,

I question those teachers I coach and keep questioning them, and that engages them in the process. I use some of the same teaching strategies as I do with
students. I question, wait, listen, paraphrase, and I am constantly putting it back on them so they are doing the learning. Writing is a way that I get teachers engaged. If they are not writing things down, then I know they are not processing the information. I also use visuals, and am beginning to use videos. Graphic organizers, humor, and field trips (in the sense that teachers need to visit each other’s rooms) are beneficial strategies I use as well as technology.

Kate also identified qualities that make teachers think as a way to engage them. She shared how she constantly questions them and always goes back to their primary goal or objective of the lesson. She will use questions like: “how does this activity connect back to your objective?”; “how do you know your students are able to do this?”; and, “what are additional ways you can meet the goals of the lesson?” Additionally, she has them write down aspects of the coaching session in order for the teacher to have something concrete to reference. Similarly, Lew focused on visuals as well:

I use the following strategies in my coaching sessions: visuals, cooperative learning, graphic organizers, and discussions. Using visuals like graphic organizers seems to help the most. If they invite me into their class, I am much more effective because I can see what they did. Some people want me to be way more direct than others; I have to read those cues and make sure I am addressing what they seem to be engaged in and then follow-up while it is still important to them.

The examples Lew provided were experiences where teachers needed to see something to then put it into place. He shared that some of the discussions he has can primarily be about the teacher’s philosophy of education. He said that sometimes he must have one or
two coaching sessions where they just talk philosophy in order to better understand where they are coming from. So while having a face-to-face discussion about best practices in teaching or asking guiding questions to elicit if some sort of instructional reflection was necessary, when he directly shows teachers a concept or provides graphic organizers for teachers or actually sees the teachers’ classes, this makes both he and the teacher more engaged in the process. Jane similarly identified with using visuals in order to engage teachers. She said,

The major strategies I use in my coaching sessions include: using visuals, cooperative learning, humor, discussion, and technology. Most of the teachers I work with are very visual, and need to see something very concrete from me. I use this to engage the teachers I work with so they can see the connection their students can make during their class period. Teachers need to see the benefit of it. I also teach the teachers I work with through modeling. Teachers learn by seeing professionals that are able to actively engage in an activity, but this has to be balanced so teachers are comfortable, especially if they are on a different page instructionally than me.

Recent studies (Killion, Harrison, Bryon, and Clifton, 2012) identified similar strategies that the coaches shared about what they use in their sessions. To have a successful coaching program, coaches should share teaching practices that are powerful and easy to use. Their first encounters with teachers need to be highly effective. Teacher leaders within the school must have opportunities to be early adopters, and, coaches must use a variety of communication strategies (newsletters, emails, bulletin boards, word of mouth)
to ensure that teachers know about successes when they occur. The common identified way to engage teachers was noted as using visuals to attain engagement.

In the best case scenario, the teacher seeks the instructional coach for support, the instructional coach provides the initial technique used to build their relationship and provide context for a coaching session that will hopefully build to a long lasting interest between the teacher and coach, and then the coach engages the teacher in a series of strategies. The most common strategies uses are working cooperatively together through deep discussions and providing some sort of visual to the teacher. Similarly, Neufeld and Roper (2003) identified coaching, like teaching, is not a routine activity. It must be focused on instructional goals and planned, but it also must be responsive to the needs of the learners and the exigencies of specific classroom situations. Coaches not only develop principals’ and teachers' knowledge and skill; if they are successful, they also help develop schools' professional cultures as learning organizations.

Knight (2004) noted that instructional coaches help ensure that teachers are teaching the right content and that they have a deep, correct understanding of the content standards. This was identified as a priority with the participants. Instructional coaches then proceed to collaborate with teachers to develop a rich repertoire of teaching tactics to ensure that students master the content. These tactics include such practices as advance organizers, effective modeling, constructive feedback, effective questioning, and scaffolding instruction. This also was a significant part of the coaching examples the participants described. Teachers need to collaborate with instructional coaches to enhance their instructional proficiency.
**Teachers are only engaged when it is convenient for them.** The most notable common theme derived from the three participants was that teachers really do not engage in the coaching process if it is not the perfect time where they really need support. Their perception is that because teachers have so much to do, they do not want to “waste time” collaborating with a coach if it is not absolutely necessary. The most common statement they shared was that there is a perception that coaching takes too much time.

Kate said, “Teachers don’t feel like they have time for you. Then, it’s so hard to work with people if they don’t feel like they have time for you.” Lew said, “The number one thing that gets in the way of me being more successful is time. I don’t have enough of it and teachers don’t have time to work with me.” Jane also said “I believe people become so busy and overwhelmed that they can’t consider adding one more thing to their plate.” In these cases, and in all perceived successful coaching sessions, the participants identified that teachers really need to seek them out with a perceived problem or issue in their class before the teacher will be truly engaged in the coaching process. Additionally, time was mentioned as one of the key elements that get in the way of the coaches having deeper relationships and more coaching sessions with teachers.

In some cases, teachers do not resist change as much as they resist poorly designed change programs. This is an additional reason why the instructional coaching program needs to be clearly designed and instructional coaches need to have clearly defined roles. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) described that if something is easier, if it does more, then more people embrace it. Instructional coaches believe that the same notion holds true for educational interventions and share interventions that are proven to work and that address the real challenges a teacher faces. The fact that these interventions help
teachers help students increases the likelihood that teachers will adopt them (Knight, 2004).

Throughout the data collection process, the participants were able to identify the key factors that make, from their perspective, coaching success, and their identification of when it is not successful. Kate said,

Teachers are just like students, you can tell them something 700 times, but if it doesn’t impact them, then it isn’t going to stick. However, the minute there is a need for it suddenly something must happen and they reach out for support.

Lew argued:

The topics have to come from the teachers or they won’t be interested in hearing what I have to say. They bring me what is pressing on their minds and usually, because they bring it to me willingly, they want instant feedback. Much of the time they are directing the conversation because it is that important to them.

Jane said,

The majority of teachers are very intelligent and know their content very well; however, because it was easy for them to learn in school and traditional methods worked for them, they don’t understand that students may not learn the same way they did. There’s actually a fairly large percentage of teachers who fall in this category, and since they are so entrenched in their content, changing their instructional practices is not at the top of their list. Once they begin to notice their traditional ways are not working, then they seek me out because it is more meaningful for them.
Throughout the interviews, the consistent theme was that coaching becomes more effective when it is a necessity for a teacher. In addition to this, the participants shared experiences where coaching did not work for the teacher because the teacher was not engaged or forced into the coach. The best way to identify the commonalities of this idea is through the different examples they provided. Kate shared:

The teacher came to me because she was unhappy with her evaluation. She knew that she wanted to get rid of her note-taking packet, but did not know what she wanted to replace it with. We started in the same format that I start with all of the teachers I coach. I asked her about her objectives, and we began brainstorming new ideas. I had to provide idea options, but she was still engaged in this because she knew she needed to make improvements and therefore she was willing to take suggestions, and because these were things she would be doing in her classroom, she was invested in learning more about the ideas and then planning what would work for her. With this teacher, we co-planned and co-reflected. After the note-taking portion of the unit was done, she continued with her class until she got to the next unit and the next note-taking portion. She then came back to work together. This teacher knew that she wanted to improve one aspect of her class because it was pointed out to her that she needed to do that, but I was not able to continue my work with her in other areas because she did not feel she had a "need" for that. She was very receptive to the ideas about note-taking and completely transformed the way she did this—she was very much engaged in the coaching process for this; however, when the ideas started to branch into other aspects of class, she became disengaged (simple nods, smiles, no follow up
questions). She had a focus and a need, and that was when she was engaged in the coaching process. Unfortunately, when I followed up with her the next year (the year she was not being evaluated) her note packets were back out and that is how she was teaching the class.

In Kate’s case, she identified similar qualities as those described with successful coaching experiences. In this case, the teacher was very much engaged when it was only focused on the note-taking packet. She became disengaged when Kate began to focus on other aspects of her instruction that may have needed more support. Since the teacher did not feel like this was a need, she became disengaged. This primarily becomes a negative, unsuccessful coaching experience because the teacher was getting support because it was a mandated part of her evaluation. While there was success and Kate provided a different way to note-taking, it was deemed unsuccessful because the next year when she was not being evaluated she returned to teaching the same way using note-packets.

Lew actually had a different take on when his coaching did not work. He shared the following:

I feel like most of my failures are when somebody else is telling me what to do. This primarily happens when I go into classes and use pre-made presentations or just take materials other instructional coaches have created and try to use them when I am coaching. This happens when there isn’t necessarily a partnership approach with the teacher. This also happens when the department chair recommends teachers to work with me. They don’t necessarily tell me the approach to take with the teacher, but they do tell me to work with the teacher. For example, I spent an entire year working with a social studies teacher on
making a more student-centered classroom. His department chair basically made him work with me. He got to the point where we worked together and it became a really engaging, student-centered classroom; however, the other day, I was walking by his classroom and he was back to his old way of teaching. The kids were sitting in his class and he was lecturing the entire period. I figured out that he was only changing his practice when I was around. Other than that, when nobody was watching, he was back to the same way of teaching.

In Lew’s case, the teacher became very engaged in the process while working with Lew, but similarly to Kate, since the teacher was forced to work with Lew, he was not invested in the type of change necessary to be sustained. Like both Kate and Lew, Jane shared a similar experience:

I actually worked with a young gentlemen about two weeks ago, and he did not want to be coached at all. In fact, his department chair told him that he needed to meet with me, and he was very stone-faced and everything was very negative. When I provided him with suggestions on how to work with students struggling with the content and getting students engaged with reading the textbooks, he just said “no that won't work, that won't work.” So, I had to basically back off to what I had planned to work with him because he clearly was not open to any suggestion. At that point, I had to throw it back to him, I had to get some feedback from him, and I actually planned another session and at that point because we couldn’t move on during that initial session. He was a tough one. It is very difficult to work with someone who does not perceive they need to change or
want to change. It is also difficult when teachers are referred to instructional coaches by their supervisors because they just don’t want to be there.

In this example, the teacher had an internal struggle; he did not feel like change was necessary. There was no engagement at all. Although he was forced to work with Jane, nothing could actually convince him to try anything different.

All three examples have the common theme that when teachers are forced to work with instructional coaches, there is no affect. In understanding this theme, Kate connected the idea of adult engagement to students. She stated:

In the classroom, you have a captive audience and they are there. It doesn’t matter if they don’t want to be or if they do want to be there, the teacher’s job is to really engage them and then educate them. But, at the end of the day, they’re going to be there no matter what. Students feel like they have nothing to do but learn from you, so there’s a willingness there that I don’t think adults necessarily have all the time. I know this is a big generalization, but I feel like with teaching adults you have to get them first, like you have to captivate them and get an audience first, which is maybe the toughest part. Once you have a captive audience, then I feel like you can work together and get something done, but that’s one of the toughest parts is just getting them as a captive audience. I feel like you have to tip toe around more with adults. You don’t want to offend them, and not that I want to offend my students or anything like that, but you know just that … be careful the way that you word things and like the way that you question. There’s just a lot more thought that has to go into it and you have to be a lot more meticulous when you are working with adults than you necessarily do with students.
This connects back to the overarching theme of engaging teachers in the coaching process. Teachers must have a need for instructional coaching for them to want it. If there is no need or if the teacher does not perceive it is needed or it is forced, then instructional coaching does not work.

**Important qualities of a coach.** Since all three participants were former or current English teachers as well, there became the question of if they thought content or knowing content was an important way to engage teachers. Kate shared:

I think that having content knowledge can help make you a stronger coach in certain situations. If the teacher is looking for suggestions and doesn't have any ideas for the brainstorming phase of planning, it is helpful to have content knowledge so that you, as a coach, can throw out some ideas to get the ball rolling. I think it also makes me as a coach more comfortable in the coaching relationship; I feel stronger in my role. However, I think that a coach can coach in any content area. I have coached teachers through lessons about stocks and bonds, building walls, cuts of meat, algebraic equations, and several other areas that I do not have a strong knowledge base. The most important quality of being an instructional coach is patience. Working with others is difficult; working with professionals who feel ownership over their craft and who have devoted large portions of their lives to becoming experts in specific content areas is even more difficult.

Lew said,

Because of the varied duties of me as an instructional coach, I think it has been enormously helpful that I have taught so many levels of English; however, it is
probably just as important that I have had well-rounded interests throughout my education. All of the "intense dabbling" I did in history, art, physics, business, and Spanish is extremely beneficial to this position. Now that I think about it, my ability to speak several "academic languages" might be more helpful at the high school level of instructional coaching than my content knowledge in English. Content knowledge is very important in gaining the academic trust of the teachers—they often measure my academic integrity by ability to understand their greatest goals for their students, but knowledge of classroom dynamics, learning strategies, and assessment is the brunt of this job. In this regard, I feel the most important quality to being an instructional coach is being flexible and being able to be trusted.

Jane also said,

I believe content expertise is incredibly important as an instructional coach. To be successful in my current position, I need to have a solid repertoire of reading and writing strategies to successfully support my teachers. The most important quality is two-fold for me—personality and content expertise. Personality, in some cases, is actually way more important. Not everybody can be an instructional coach. Additionally, sometimes the best teachers do not make the best instructional coaches because even though teachers might be good at teaching students, it is entirely different when working with adults.

Research on the idea of content-specific coaches, as well as the number of coaches needed per number of teachers, and the idea of part-time coaching versus full-time coaching needs to further be investigated. The participants shared their viewpoints
ultimately concluding that content is not as important as having the ability to work with other teachers. Similar to this point was Knight’s (2004) research, which showed that instructional coaches “must be master teachers who are comfortable going into any classroom and love having the chance to work with other teachers” (p. 19). Simply put, no matter how much instructional coaches know, they will not win over teachers unless they can be successful in the classroom.

Successful coaches embody a paradoxical mixture of ambition and humility, a mix of attributes similar to those described by Collins (2001) for Level 5 leaders. Level 5 leaders “are incredibly ambitious—but their ambition is for the institution, not themselves” (p. 21). Effective coaches, like Collin’s Level 5 leaders, should be “a study in duality: modest and willful, humble, and fearless” (p. 22). The three participants did not identify these qualities as being needed, but through the interviews, it was evident that they embodied these qualities from my perspective based on their responses and an analysis of the data.

**Conclusion.** This section provided a detailed account of how and when teachers seek out instructional coaches. A key finding was that teachers will seek them out when they need immediate support. This makes defining the role of a coach more difficult because the intent is not for coaches to be “pop in” service, but to provide detailed teacher support through goal setting, lesson development, and modeling of best practices for a lengthy period of time. Additionally, qualities of a coach were identified by the coaches, which are essential to understanding what characteristics are needed when choosing or hiring an instructional coach.
Theme 4: Instructional Coaching Programs Should Include Criteria for The Success of The Program that is Monitored Based on Established Program Goals

**Introduction.** The following section focuses on measures of success for instructional coaches, which have not been developed. The participants shared how they think they are successful and how others define success in their school. Additionally, they discussed experiences where they felt their instructional coaching program was successful.

**Measuring success.** The intense pressure to foster significant improvements in student achievement can lead some leaders to promote many school improvement efforts within a single year. However, promoting too many interventions can actually be counterproductive. According to Conner (1992), most people embrace some change in their life, but as the number of changes multiplies and as the time demands increase, people approach a dysfunction threshold, a point where they lose the capacity to implement changes. Knight (2005) showed that for this reason, principals and coaches must carefully choose what changes they initiate and focus on high-leverage interventions that are likely to have a significantly positive effect on students' and teachers' lives. The major success and research-based measurement is that instructional coaching can increase teachers' fidelity to scientifically proven instructional practices. The discussion of improving instructional practices in this study was an emerging theme, but the actual way to determine if the participants’ coaching was working was unable to be identified.

One of the elements that made all three participants uneasy was the concept of whether or not they were successful. There are only soft measures of success in place,
and ultimately, success is based on how the participants viewed their position as being successful. This was one area that all three coaches echoed. There is a need for a system to determine if they are being successful as coaches. Each briefly outlined their perceptions of how they understand their success from their point of view, from other teachers, administrators, students, and the community. Kate shared,

I view my coaching work as a success if teachers come back again to work together, if they tell each other about the work we've done together, if they follow up on their own, if they tell their evaluator or admin about the work we've done, or provide positive feedback on a survey that I send out. I believe other teachers determine my success if they think what they worked on with me goes how they hoped it would go. Ideally, teachers would measure this by student achievement. Administrators determine if I am successful through my evaluation. I do not think that students have any idea about what I do or how I impact them, and the only way the community can connect me to success is if their student is successful, then they believe all aspects of the school are successful, which would include me.

It is significant to understand that instructional coaches are in the eye of the public. Ultimately, arguments are raised as to whether instructional coaching positions should exist or if they should just be another teacher in the classroom to lower class sizes. In Kate’s case, success is built on soft measures such as what teachers say and reflect about her and perceive based on whether or not teachers come back to work with her, whether or not their work was deemed successful by the teacher, and based on evaluative feedback from her administrator. Since she does not think students or the community
really know about her position or what she does, there is no measurement of success for those stakeholders. Lew had similar ideas:

Measuring success for topics that come from administration, or are perceived as coming from administration are more difficult to gauge. I'm talking about topics such as teacher reviews, school improvement plan topics, curriculum work, and sometimes literacy. When the initial ideas do not come directly from the teachers, it is more difficult to get their input on the success of the project. Gauging my role in the success of much bigger initiatives can be difficult, and I often have to wait much longer for the feedback/data (test scores, learning trends, etc.). Student feedback is useful to me. Since I am not the classroom teacher giving the grade (in a coaching situation), students will often speak more openly with me about the success or failure of a strategy that has been taught to them. I find that student input very helpful. The community's assessment of me as an instructional coach is very difficult to gauge, as I don’t know if they have a true understanding of the role or even know it exists. I do often rely on administration's perception of my success because the administrators often have a clearer picture than the teachers of the number of tasks I have my hand in.

Similar to Kate, Lew had difficulty defining success in terms of how teachers and the community determine if he is successful. His experience also showed how defining the instructional coaching position makes it difficult based on all he does. What was interesting was that Lew does have a stronger connection to students in his role. Since he seeks input from the students in the class, he is able to determine if his work with the teacher is successful based on student response to the strategy. He was the only
participant who focused more closely on students in his responses. This may be in part due to how he has established his instructional coaching role.

Jane reported that everyone determines success. She said success is based on the “continual feedback she receives, teachers and administrators that keep having discussions and are open to class visits and constructive conversation to improving engagement and instruction, as well as repeat interactions with her and other teachers.” There was an understanding from the three participants that they overwhelmingly felt as if they needed to prove themselves in their coaching role.

**Specific examples of success.** Since the idea of measuring success was overwhelmingly similar for all three participants, I asked them further questions that elicited more specific examples of actual measurements of success that they use. A common theme that emerged was that each shared the anecdotal data that they perceive as determining their success. This was an essential determination of how the instructional coaches and their schools know that the instructional coaching program is successful.

Kate stated:

I think that the traffic through the coaching office has increased, and I think the awareness of it has increased. I know whether I am successful or not based on a lot of just feedback from the teachers. This is really hard to document, but just talking with them and asking them to share about their experiences before working with me shows me if they have grown as teachers, or if what I shared actually worked in their classroom. When the teacher reflects, I also get feedback on me. We do have a formal survey that we send out. I would say maybe a third of the people actually fill out the survey. Most of the time the surveys are
positive, but this can be because it is personal and colleagues don’t necessarily want to say anything negative. So it’s just a lot of “good job” and pat on the back a lot of the time instead of quality feedback that I can use to improve. If I ever overhear teachers say, “When I worked with Kate this happened …” I take all of those things as positive feedback. If I never see a person again or they avoid me in the hallway, I know that that didn’t go well, and I need to reflect and figure out why. Some teachers are told by their evaluator to work with me. I take that as positive feedback since administrators believe that I can help. They don’t have to do it, but it’s just made as a suggestion and if the teacher follows through it makes me feel like I am successful.

Kate has a direct role in understanding if she is successful. She is either the one who has to seek out the teachers she works with to get feedback, or rely on the teachers to share their successes and then hope that it gets back to her. From Kate’s perspective, the feedback of her success is random, and there is no system in place other than an optional survey where she can gain an understanding of whether or not she was successful. Lew stated:

I know I am being successful if a teacher comes back and says “I tried this, I did this assessment, and things are way better in my classroom now.” Sometimes teachers will give me anecdotal evidence that I need to hear to determine my success. For example, something like, “I shifted my practice and this or that and everything feels better in the classroom. I’ve got greater engagement because of some of my work with you, and I see it in some of those measures that are not often assessed in my grade book.” So, I really rely on teacher feedback like this. I
think that it’s also a sign of success when people are asking for more. When I help somebody with something, they want more help or share what I did with another teacher, and then that teacher seeks me out, that makes me feel successful. Since instructional coaching is part of the school improvement plan, I feel like if our SIP is successful, then we are successful. I do rely on the feedback of my evaluators also.

Lew relies on teachers to provide feedback to him. There is no system in place for him to collect this feedback, but his perception is that when teachers ask for more or come back to get his support, then he was successful. Jane shared the following:

I think a big gauge to my success is not only verbal feedback, but also people continuing to access me or spread the word. I encourage people to do this all the time. I will say something like “if you think this worked well or you want to invite me back, you know you are welcome to come see me or tell other teachers about our experience.” I think if people continue to reach out all throughout the year, I view that as a success. I’ve gotten feedback from administrators, and I’ve gotten feedback from department chairs, but as far as actual data, there just isn’t any. For me, there is not a quantitative way to view my success, but what keeps me going is working with the teachers and seeing what I perceive as success in what we are able to accomplish together. I also think, I will have weeks that are slow and I feel like, okay maybe I'm not reaching out enough, maybe I'm not having enough conversations, maybe I need to do some more outreach to people, and I definitely think as you know there are cycles where people reach out more, but generally speaking, if I am not “busy” working with teachers, I am doing
other projects or working on other items for the school that have better measures of success. This helps in my position because I don’t have to solely rely on just one aspect of my position to determine success.

Jane had a very similar response to both Kate and Lew. In fact, all three examples provided by the participants were based on whether or not teachers come back for further coaching (that is deemed successful) or primarily whether or not teachers share with others about their experience.

In all cases, there is no systematic way in their schools to establish if their program or they are successful. These examples show, from the participants’ perspective, how they determine if they are successful. The consistent understanding is that there really is not one way to determine if they are being successful, and the school has not identified an actual way to collect data that connects their position to having an influence in the school. While they certainly shared examples of their pockets of success, it was not universal. There is very limited research that has measurements to show if instructional coaching is successful. There are some dated sources noted in this section on the subject matter. Munro and Elliot (1987) purported that there are only about three types of outcomes to evaluate the effects of coaching programs, and each of these ways were alluded to in the participant’s responses, but there is nothing concrete that these coaches are using at their schools.

The first way for coaches to determine their success is by their influence in changes or improvements in teachers’ pedagogical strategies or activities. Munro and Elliot (1987) had 41 high school teachers collaborate and they found that the majority of the participants reported that coaching enables them to meet more instructional
objectives. Similarly, Sparks and Bruder (1987) found that teachers who were coached were better able to experiment with new methods of teaching. Other researchers have examined the effects of coaching on teachers’ use of new pedagogical skills or techniques (Valencia & Killion, 1988; Williamson & Russell, 1990). This accomplishment is essential because it represents the most immediate outcome (Joyce & Showers, 1982).

A second way to determine success in coaching is investigating the effects on student outcomes. Valencia and Killion (1988) looked at classes where the teacher was coached and noted significant gains in student writing. Sparks and Bruder (1987) found that 70% of teachers who were coached feel like their students made significant improvements in academic skills and competencies. There also has been research to recommend that coaching be linked to student success (Ackland, 1991), but few studies have examined both teacher and student change.

A third way success has been measured is based on teacher satisfaction with coaching. Kohler, McCulough, and Buchan (1995) determined that teachers feel like coaching is beneficial and alleviates burnout, isolation, fosters communication, trust, and support. Nonetheless, Little (1990) posited that it could generate conflict because it could violate autonomy, privacy, and equality in schools (Little, 1990).

**Conclusion.** This section provided evidence to conclude that a formal way of measuring the success of an instructional coaching program does not exist. The participants shared experiences about how they measure or others perceive the success of their program, but nothing was significantly noted as a concrete way to determine if the program was successful. The three participants also reported wanting something like this to exist, but they could not figure out how it would work. This goes back to how essential
it is define the role of an instructional coach. If it is defined, targeted measurements of success can be used to determine if the program and coaches are successful. In the case of these participants, they are only evaluated based on the teacher evaluation system in their schools and currently, their instructional coaching program is not assessed.

**Theme 5: To Be a More Effective Coach, Instructional Coaches Need Learning Experiences that Teaches Them How to Be Better at Their Position**

**Introduction.** This section provides a detailed account of how instructional coaches learn and what professional development they need to be better instructional coaches. In education, professional development is a way that educators gain new insights and improve in their role. The enhancement of teachers’ professional development and expertise has been a predominant area of educational reform (The Carnegie Forum, 1986; Emore, 1990). In contrast to the traditional methods of staff development, educators have noted that schools must be organized to promote teachers’ continual learning (Barth, 1990; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988). This is why schools have moved to coaching models. The instructional coaches in this study outlined various professional development experiences that have helped them in their role.

**Professional development for coaches.** Kate shared that she felt like instructional coaches were supported, and they can go to any professional development they wanted to, but it would be up to the coaches to determine where to go. She thinks that in other districts, they probably have a clearer vision about coaching and provide professional development on what coaching should look like. When asked for further examples of professional development that had the biggest affect on her she shared:
The biggest professional development we attended was a district run training based on Harrison’s coaching model that we follow. It was a full five days. I thought the last three were really beneficial because they were focused on strategies to use in coaching like questioning, learning about the different types of teachers I would coach, paraphrasing, and not always just jumping in with an answer. I feel like those were really beneficial. I self-identify more as a cognitive coach. I just constantly read and read books about coaching and watch the teaching channel videos where Jim Knight is coaching people. I mean, that’s really informal and whatnot, but those kind of things … like just constantly watching, looking at, that is helpful. I feel like any professional development that I can gain is valuable; it is just not always available. I feel it’s the big professional development that we are missing, and I am just not sure how to gain that experience.

For Kate, she reported creating more of her own professional development. It is clear that she wants to learn more, but does not seem to have the opportunities to be part of professional development for instructional coaches. For Lew, he shared that he is not sure that the topic of instructional coaching has exactly blossomed into its full potential yet. In fact, he and the other coaches he works with do not talk about any professional development opportunities for instructional coaches at all. I asked him for more specific examples of how he knew what to do as a coach or how he grows as a coach and he responded with:

So at first I was just doing anything I could to figure coaching out. One of the biggest challenges was to figure out how to teach teachers in a way that teach
them things that they can do rather than teach them things that I was successful at myself. I have figured out that learning my own teaching style is somewhat unique and personal, and learning to share ideas that are flexible for many different teaching styles in more important in the coaching role. I’d often have to not share things that were good ideas because of somebody’s personality. There’s so many components that go into a teacher’s classroom, personality and sometimes success that are lessons and not rely on that. I learned a lot about myself as a teacher, and in hindsight, that changed my approach to teach the teachers. I had to find practices that relied pretty strictly on planning preparation and not as much on some of the things that are harder to teach by a teacher, like personality in the classroom, but how they draw students out. This is professional development for me that I had to figure out myself. I don’t think that anybody is thinking how we can make me a better coach, so, there’s really nobody that’s pushing this besides ourselves.

Just like Kate, Lew has to provide his own professional development. One of the strongest statements he made was that he did not feel like anybody is asking how to make him a better coach. While Kate and Jane did not directly state this, all three of their experiences are very similar.

Jane shared that she had to help herself grow as a coach by becoming a Project CRISS (creating independence through student-owned strategies) trainer. This has helped her know and understand more research-based strategies to share with teachers while she is coaching them. She said,
I have attended some conferences over the years, met with other instructional coaches within the district as well as outside the district, and really just brainstormed with coaches about what has worked for them. I haven't gone to any formal professional development. To be honest, I just haven't gotten very much out of it. I think it's much more beneficial talking to someone like me in a different district. I think any opportunity for professional development I've sought of myself. It's definitely been supported, but was never suggested. In 10 years, I can't think of a single time that doing something to be a better coach was suggested to me. I sought everything out, so I don't think professional development for me is a priority. I'm always reading current journals. I don't necessarily focus on a single researcher, but just try to gather ideas from as many sources as possible.

Just like both Kate and Lew, Jane felt supported as a coach, but has never been shown that professional development is a priority for coaches. She has had to take it upon herself to grow professionally as a coach. Through the literature review, it is clear there is a gap in literature in professional development for coaches.

Neufeld and Roper (2003) noted that since few people have the knowledge and skills necessary to lead high-quality professional development programs for coaches, districts face considerable challenges in creating and staffing programs that provide their coaches with the depth and breadth of knowledge they need. In addition, the task of providing coaching professional development can become more difficult over time as teachers and principals increase their knowledge and skill. Simply put, as coaches succeed in increasing teachers' and principals' instructional capacity, they must increase
their own instructional capacity as well. Coaches need to be more than just "one step ahead" of the people they are coaching. In the case of the three participants in this study, they seek out their own professional development, and it is very limited.

**What is needed to support coaches.** One of the most prominent emerging themes was how instructional coaches get better or improve at their position. Collectively, all three participants shared that getting better at their position did not seem like a priority. In fact, all of them shared that they have never been asked to go to any professional development workshop or any training that would help them be a better coach. While they all felt supported at their school and they knew that they could ask to have any resource or go to any workshop and it would be approved by their district or administration, their perspective was that there is not a focus on them to become better at their position. Additionally, they are the ones that engage in the process to improve. They self-initiate and work to improve their craft, but it is not directed by anyone but themselves in their school. This was a very identifiably strong theme that has not yet been researched. Due to this, I asked several follow-up questions to better understand their perspective. Kate shared:

> I think my administration knows that I am hardworking, driven to learn, and motivated to do well, so they mostly let me do my the job and let me come up with ideas, and I have a lot of choice in how I handle the position and the work that I do. I know that I can ask for almost anything and I will be supported as long as I have a logical rationale behind it (e.g., books, workshops, supplies, support for trials or programs). This has been great for the program because I have really been able to do the job in a way that works for me. The flip side of this is that the
administration overall doesn't offer as much insight. There are definitely administrators that share ideas or resources that they think would be useful, but there are others that haven't communicated with me about the coaching position. Maybe it isn't needed to have communication with all administrators in the building, but this just further clarifies the lack of clarity in my role. I worry about professional development not being a priority for coaches. A majority of the information I know now and use is because I recently went through a master’s program and one of my classes was on instructional coaching. However, as time passes and things continue to change, I feel like I will be “out of the loop.” I think it is hard to say that professional development for coaches is not a priority, I think our administrators know we need it, but they trust in us to seek it out and further our learning ourselves. I think they will support anything we need, but they aren't necessarily putting ideas out there for us.

Although Kate has to seek out her own professional development, it connects with previous understandings of her position about trust. Since administrators trust her in her position, they rely on her to determine her own professional development needs. Lew’s approach to understanding this was like Kate’s; however, he delved into just how broad his role actually is. Lew said,

I do feel valued by the administrators at my school. I feel like my perspective is frequently requested and considered when it comes to school initiatives. Regarding the professional development for instructional coaching, I think that my responsibilities are so widespread, and because I'm seen as a jack-of-all-trades (from teaching, one-on-one coaching, PLC visits, students support, attending
meetings with administration, meetings for IEPs, meetings with counselors, transition planning for 8th to 9th, testing new students, organizing the Reading Committee, curriculum work, etc.) —because of all this, I don't think my role as an instructional coach, in the pure sense of the title, is always how I am primarily perceived by administration or else; I think they would say that all those responsibilities are exactly what an instructional coach is. Therefore, I don't think professional development directly for instructional coaching has been such a priority; however, professional development for the components that feed into instructional coaching have been well supported. Perhaps I have not pursued professional development specifically for instructional coaching as directly as I could. Administration has been very supportive of the many conferences and training sessions I have pursued, and some of them have been related to coaching; however, I have never attended an actual instructional coaching conference.

This statement connects primarily to the understanding that the role of instructional coaches are very unclear. In Lew’s case, his responsibilities are widespread, and because of this, the coaching piece of his job is only a part of his position. From his perspective, he definitely gets professional development opportunities; however, they are not directly tied to coaching. While Jane echoed a similar response, she also brought up an additional component. She said,

I have a positive and trusting relationship with my department chair as well as school administration. I meet with them on a regular basis to set goals and revisit needs assessments. I don't believe their perspective of me impacts professional development at all. If I seek out professional development, I have always been
supported. I agree that our professional development is not a priority; as with everything else, funding is an issue. If professional development needs can be met in-house, that is the priority.

Jane felt like funding may have a negative impact on her ability to attend professional development for coaches. This may be an issue. Another issue is that it may just not exist or be as widely present due to the smaller number of instructional coaches compared to professional development opportunities for teachers or administrators. All the participants in this study made it clear that their administrators trust them, but they also need to rely on themselves to seek out their own professional development.

To accomplish the work of being a coach, coaches require professional development of their own so that they can improve their knowledge and skill to tailor their coaching to the needs of the teachers and schools where they work. Although research on this topic is limited, Neufeld and Roper (2003) developed guidelines to support coaches through professional development:

1. Ensure that principals and coaches understand the "big picture" of the reform in which they are engaged and the reasons that undergird the changes.
2. Develop a strong, focused, coherent orientation program for new content and change coaches.
3. Develop differentiated professional development for experienced coaches.
4. Ensure that coaches are knowledgeable about the learning needs of special populations of students.
5. Ensure that the coaches hear the same messages that teachers do.
6. Enable some coaches to become "coach leaders."
While these guidelines can help schools and districts understand the needs of providing professional development for their instructional coaches, the concept of professional development for coaches needs to be further developed.

**Conclusion.** This section determined that the participants of this study have not been explicitly provided professional development opportunities to become better instructional coaches. All three participants shared that they had to seek out professional learning in order to become better at their position. A key finding was that there are resources and research to support that instructional coaches are needed to help teachers become better teachers, but there is nothing that supports how instructional coaches become better instructional coaches.

**Emerging Themes: Final Group Interview**

The final part of the data collection process included an opportunity for all the instructional coaches and I to meet together to have a final group interview about the themes based on the data collected. Through an analysis of the data, I concluded that there are little to no quantifiable measures to determine if instructional coaching is successful. As a result of this, instructional coaches feel a sense of guilt and therefore partake in various other roles to ensure that they are worthy enough to their administration and other teachers. There needs to be a clearer vision of the role of an instructional coach per school with indicated levels of supports to better the instructional coach and an agreed upon way to determine the success level of the program that administrators, teachers, and coaches are comfortable with. Additionally, teachers only want to be coached if it is a perceived self-initiated need from that teacher, otherwise, success is limited if it is forced. The final group interview was an opportunity to gather
more specific examples that were been embedded throughout the study to help explain the emerging themes. Additionally, the group interview provided additional support for implications of this study as described in chapter five.

Summary

Three instructional coaches from three different high schools participated in this qualitative study. This study was designed to gain insight of how instructional coaches understand and describe the nature of their position. Through the data collection process involving in-depth interviews, follow-up questions, and a focus group discussion, several themes emerged based on the following topics: the role and responsibilities of an instructional coach; relationships needed in instructional coaching; what strategies are used to engage teachers; how success is determined in instructional coaching; and what is needed for instructional coaches to learn more and become better at their position as an instructional coach. Data was described in a narrative format through a cross-case synthesis based on the emerging themes. The composite case analysis described similarities and differences among the participants in connection to the research question. Lastly, the group interview was described to uncover the emergent themes.

Chapter 5 will present the implication for practice through a summary of findings, discussion of findings, results as they related to the literature, the decision-making framework, and recommendations for further research.
Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This study was a qualitative bounded case study of three instructional coaches who work in three different high schools in the western Chicago, Illinois suburbs. All three instructional coaching models at their schools vary, but a common responsibility they all shared was that they have release periods during their day to work with teachers to be an instructional coach. The participants went through a series of in-depth interviews with a final group interview where they met each other for the first time and were able to clarify parts of the investigation and add more depth to points that they shared during their initial interview rounds. The purpose of the investigation was to answer the research question: *How do instructional coaches understand and describe the nature of their work with teachers?* This question allowed for the opportunity to understand the nature of instructional coaching from the instructional coaches’ perspective.

With recent mandates and demands on schools, instructional coaching, while not a new concept, is beginning to emerge more in some fashion as a way to provide job embedded professional development. Additionally, instructional coaching provides a support for teachers to improve instruction without it being evaluative. It was my purpose to move beyond a cursory view of understanding instructional coaching and to provide insight into components of instructional coaching that should be investigated further.

Throughout my study, I found gaps in literature, specifically around the concepts of how instructional coaches can become better instructional coaches and how important it is to shift philosophical views of teachers during the instructional coaching process. I also discovered measurements to show that instructional coaching is effective. The data
collection process from the participants in this study allowed me to investigate these concepts further. Additionally, several conclusions and implications of this study were determined. These will be discussed at length during this chapter.

The in-depth interviewing process with the final group interview enabled me to draw conclusions about the nature of instructional coaching, how it connects to literature on instructional coaching, and the experience of understanding how different instructional coaching is depending on district, school, and coach. These differences provided a path to find commonalities among all the coaches to better understand how the coaches were actually much more alike, even though they were coaching in three different coaching models.

The conclusions, recommendations, and implications noted in this chapter are based on a qualitative case study approach that will reveal the answer to the research question “How do instructional coaches understand and describe the nature of their work with teachers?”

**Summary of the Findings**

The central research question, “How do instructional coaches understand and describe the nature of their work with teachers?” was the basis of this investigation. This question guided the data collection process, which led to an initial in-depth interview with each of the three participants, which was then followed-up with a series of interview questions that were sent to the participants over five weeks, and concluded with a final group interview. Based on the data collected, the following themes emerged:

1. To have an effective instructional coaching program, the roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach need to be clearly defined.
2. Trust is an essential component of an instructional coaching program; the types of relationships needed as an instructional coach are based on teachers and administrators trusting the instructional coach.

3. Instructional coaches perceive that instructional coaching works better when teachers seek out the instructional coach.

4. Instructional coaching programs should include criteria for the success of the program that is monitored based on established program goals.

5. To be a more effective coach, instructional coaches need learning experiences that teaches them how to be better at their position.

Within these themes were sub-themes that allowed me to more closely examine the data, connect with research when it existed, and analyze the three participants’ responses. The sub-themes that emerged were based on a cross-case synthesis.

When investigating the roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach, the participants cited examples of their role being similar to that of a mentor. This, in addition to many of the other responsibilities they face in their role that may or may not be connected to instructional coaching, led to the understanding that their role as a coach is anything but clear. Clarity was analyzed further to include how the participants perceived their role and their lack of clarity from administrators, teachers, students, and the community in which they serve. As the data collection process continued, their stories and specific examples were the center of each response. Due to this, the topic of relationships was significant. Further exploration determined that trust, both teacher’s trust and administrator’s, was needed to be successful in this role. Additional analysis showed the need for clarifying the concept of confidentiality in the role of a coach. The
theme of how to be engaged in the instructional coaching process provided data into stories of how the coaches engaged teachers in the coaching process, when teachers were not engaged, which led into why and how coaching does not work, in addition to the qualities needed to make a successful coach. In each of the emerging themes, there was an essential element of instructional coaching linked to success. However, through the in-depth interviews, there was no way to determine if the instructional coaching programs at their schools were successful. This led into the discussion of how the coaches themselves learn and are supported.

The framework of engagement theory (Kearsley and Shneiderman, 1999) and other learning theories (Knowles, 1980; Cross, 1981; Paivio, 1991; Ausubel, 1978) provided the lens in which to frame the study and examine the data. The theories have natural connections to the analysis of this data, including the instructional coaches citing experiences of problem-solving, reasoning, and decision-making with further identification of creating a collaborative partnership with respective interactions and using extensive adult learning strategies particularly noting the use of visuals. This study was inundated with data to support these theories as was described in the discussion of findings in chapter 4. The case study approach was most effective because it allowed for a further, deeper exploration of the emerging themes.

Extensive interviews of the three participants comprised most of the data for this study. Each participant was initially interviewed, asked a series of at least five follow-up questions over five weeks, and then was part of a final focus group interview with all participants of the study. During the initial interviews, the instructional coaches shared data logs or coaching entries with me in addition to handouts or examples of work they
created with teachers. These materials confirmed the interviewing data collected. The data was analyzed and coded to allow for the emerging themes that led to the following findings and conclusions.

**Discussion of Findings and Conclusions**

To have an effective instructional coaching program, the roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach need to be clearly defined. Understanding the role and responsibilities of an instructional coach may be one of the most difficult tasks. It appears that coaches are given more responsibilities that do not have anything to do with coaching teachers. All three participants identified this. Specifically, Lew mentioned that he is in charge of literacy lunches. In our final group interview, Kate shared that she provided professional development in the form of “chats” in the workroom, while Jane has been involved in designing a peer-to-peer mentoring model that is different than her role as an instructional coach. Additionally, she sits on several school committees and takes over department chair responsibilities when the department chair is absent. Similar to existing research, Deussen et al. (2007) found that often times, coaches are asked to attend meetings and provide in-services. Findings in that same research support that one of the major complaints of teachers and coaches were that they were taken away from their coaching responsibilities to do other non-coaching related tasks. On the surface, all three participants agreed that their job is to work with teachers to make them more effective; however, in a deeper analysis of their position, it is unclear what their exact role is. Morgan (2010) suggested that districts involve a committee of stakeholders to determine a vision statement for coaches. In all three cases, there has not been a job description developed for the instructional coaches.
As the roles and responsibilities of the coaches were investigated further, all three participants made reference to their role being similar to that of a mentor. There is overwhelming research on both mentoring and instructional coach as described in chapter 2; however, there is limited research about them collectively because they serve different purposes. All three participants agreed that instructional coaching has an instructional tie that promotes enhancing teacher practice. Mentoring, while it may have an instructional purpose, has other day-to-day responsibilities that may not have a direct tie to student learning. Fulton et al. (2005) noted that instructional coaching has a more positive effect because it has the power to improve student learning. This is a point that needs further investigation, as there is little to no research that discusses how instructional coaching is measured. What was significant about the findings of this study is that it is not about mentoring versus instructional coaching, but rather about the inconsistency in practice of instructional coaching and role confusion. Kate, Lew, and Jane all reported wanting their role to be clearer to teachers and administrators. Knight’s (2007) research is centered on the importance of having clarity in the role.

**Trust is an essential component of an instructional coaching program; the types of relationships needed as an instructional coach are based on teachers and administrators trusting the instructional coach.** The most direct response given from Kate, Lew, and Jane was that trust is the basis of all their relationships as instructional coaches. Morgan (2010) and Reed-Wright (2009) found that trust was essential in the coaching relationships; teachers need to trust that coaches will not share information about their coaching sessions with administrators. The data analyzed in this study concluded similar sentiments. All three participants discussed how they need teachers to
trust them, and it takes time to build that coaching-teacher relationship. This is consistent with research that indicates that building relationships is a more important aspect of instructional coaching that content knowledge (Ertmer et al., 2003). Reed-Wright (2009) found that it took over six months for coaches to establish a relationship the teachers they were coaching. All three participants echoed similar responses that they were looking for long-lasting coaching relationships, and they viewed themselves as successful if teachers came back for more coaching sessions.

In the final group interview, Kate shared that a few minutes before her coaching session ends, she asks the teachers when they will meet again. She reported that this puts them in a position to continue their coaching relationship. Lew and Jane both revealed they have standing appointments with teachers and this to build a more positive relationship the more they work with the same teachers. Barr (2003), Brady (2007), and Ingersoll (2007) concluded that relationship building, whether with teachers or administrators, is best practice for coaches. According to Feger, Wolect, and Hickman (2004) a coach needs to “establish a collaborative, reflective relationship with a teacher, not to tell the teacher what to do, but serve instead as a knowledge resource and a mediator to help the teacher reflect” (p. 16). However, there was something in the findings of this study that are not as thoroughly researched. Lew and Jane in particular shared that part of their role was to help shape the philosophical viewpoints of teachers to elicit a change. The Feger, Wolect, and Hickman (2004) study of helping the teacher to reflect is part of the limited findings that has a connection to philosophical change. This is an area that needs to be developed further, as it lays down the foundation of the instructional coaching relationship.
All of the participants brought up the fact that they are not administrators and shared stories about being too close with administration resulting in negative issues. This was consistent with other research that shows that teachers’ perceptions of coaches serving in an administrative role is negative for the coach. Costa and Carmston (2002) found that the instructional coaching process was more successful if instructional coaches were not in a supervisory role over teachers. The examples the participants gave ranged from Kate’s direct experience with telling teachers that she is not an administrator to Lew’s experience of teachers actually saying that they were not going to work with him because they saw him talking to administration, to Jane’s reflection that she felt like her relationship with her department chair may hinder coaching relationships. This is on the forefront of teachers’ and coaches’ minds and needs to be clearly defined.

One point that the participants brought up was that is not referenced in any studies is trust on behalf of the administrators. Kate, Lew, and Jane all shared that their administrations’ need to trust them because the administrators give the coaches additional release periods throughout their day and are unable to follow-up with how they use this time because that may directly affect trust between the coach and the teacher they are coaching. During this part of the study, there were implications that administrators do not understand the role of the coach and therefore are not able to assist them as needed.

**Instructional coaches perceive that instructional coaching works better when teachers seek out the instructional coach.** As the instructional coaches were describing the instructional coaching position, all three participants provided examples of how they try to engage teachers. The primary conclusions drawn were two-fold: (1) some sort of visual connection was needed for the teacher to be engaged; and (2) teachers who were
not invested in the process or did not seek out the instructional coach were not affected. This was consistent with research.

Deussen et al. (2007) found that instructional coaches had to spend large amounts of time working directly with teachers, providing follow-up sessions, and modeling best instruction with opportunities for teachers to discuss their instruction throughout the coaching process. Bush (1984), Joyce and Showers (1988), combined with Knight’s (2007) instructional coaching implementation suggested that instructional coaching increases skill transference. The direct work that is needed on behalf of the instructional coach with the teacher provides opportunities for the coach to show teachers elements of successful lessons that in turn engage students. Similar to Knight’s (2007) discoveries, there is a necessity that the teacher chooses coaching. In that, teachers should not be forced to be coached. Kate, Lew, and Jane provided several examples of the ways that instructional coaching did not work. All had the underlying connection that the teachers were somehow forced by administration or highly recommended. Additionally, in the cases of Lew and Jane, administrators sought them out to tell them to work specifically with teachers who needed additional support.

During this part of the data collection process, there were common points that were not identified in other research studies and therefore should be investigated further. Based on an analysis of the coaching experiences, the question was raised about how important content knowledge is in instructional coaching. All three participants agreed that there were other qualities that were needed which are more important than content knowledge. These qualities include having a strong personality, understanding best practice instruction, and being able to work with all types of teachers.
A limitation to the study was that all participants were former English teachers. This was inconsistent with other research findings. Several studies focused more on math. Richards (1998) found that “programs whose content focused mainly on teachers’ behaviors demonstrated smaller influences on student learning than did programs whose content focused on teachers’ knowledge of the subject, on the curriculum, or on how students learn the subject” (p. 17) Teachers are most satisfied with instructional coaches who possess a level of mathematics expertise that contributes to an increase in their mathematics knowledge (Franke et al., 2001; Penuel et al., 2007; Bruce & Ross, 2008). Similarly, Kennedy (1998) found that programs whose content focused mainly on general pedagogy demonstrated smaller influences on student learning than did programs whose content focused on teachers’ knowledge of the subject, the curriculum, or how students learn the subject. Since the participants of this study had different perspectives, it may be based on their content specific background.

**Instructional coaching programs should include criteria for the success of the program that is monitored based on established program goals.** All three participants viewed themselves as successful; however, they did not have a defined system to determine their success. This was consistent with research. According to Kowal & Steiner (2007), well-defined research based performance markers for evaluating instructional coach effectiveness is practically nonexistent. One possible connection that can determine success is their performance is based on the success of teachers based on student learning. Sanders and Rivers (1996) found that the way teachers perform has a direct influence on student learning. Thus, if instructional coaching programs are
designed to increase teacher effectiveness, then this would have a direct effect on student performance.

Due to the lack of measurements of success in instructional coaching and most of the measurements being based on anecdotal evidence, as part of this study, the participants were asked what other ways they would like to be able to measure their success. It appeared difficult for them to really determine what would be the most effective way to show their impact. The conclusions they drew may provide support for how success should be determined in their role. Kate does want success based on the students that she impacts through the teacher; however, this is difficult because she shared that there are only some teachers who are at the point where they can collect data and show results in their classroom; the majority of teachers are not to this point yet. Kate noted that it would be great to have other methods or indicators of success, but she was unaware of how this can be a reality considering all teachers are in different places. Lew, on the other hand, revealed never being questioned about whether or not he is successful or if the instructional coaching program is successful. At the time of this study, his coaching program is based on soft measures, but he thinks someone needs to come up with a better system to determine if he is successful; he is just not sure what this would look like or how this could be accomplished. Jane had the most experience with instructional coaching, and her responses throughout the data collection process drew the best conclusion from this study. She said,

Instruction coaching success is all based in a total a conversations or emails. I think this is a flaw. I know I'm doing my job, but I can’t always show that I'm doing my job. There is just no data. Some coaches qualitatively measure it and
survey the staff or figure out a way to gain feedback or evaluations from teachers, but I don’t think this would be an ideal situation because that just puts one more burdensome piece on teachers and therefore they might not want to be part of the coaching process. I have been coaching for a long time and I still don't know what the answer is. I know our school values it, but I don’t think we can measure it. One thing that is needed is accountability, not in the way that we would be reporting back to an administrator, but just as a way to show that there is evidence that we meeting with a variety of staff for a variety of purposes in utilizing our time. I think if there is some magic way to provide data to show that this does work, we need to figure it out. I can tell you it works because I know the teachers I support and I know what's going on the building, but there's no way to prove that. I firmly believe in instructional coaching that I never wanted it to be taken away not just because it’s my job, but I do believe what’s best for students is what’s best for staff. Because of this, to be able to ensure that we can provide data and to be able to show the validity of what I do, to me, probably would be the number one thing that is needed in this role. I mean it would devastating to school districts that are appropriately using instructional coaches to take that away because of the lack of data to support it. I really believe staff needs this support.

Based on this and an analysis of the three participants, the ultimate conclusion drawn is that a way to determine if instructional coaching is successful is needed. As Jane stated, “This is a flaw in the system.”

Professional wisdom is used to determine that this is an important support, but there is not a way to collect data due to the intricacies defined in this role throughout this
study, to show that instructional coaching is successful or has any effect on student learning. Additionally, determining success levels is not a consistent practice.

**To be a more effective coach, instructional coaches need learning experiences that teaches them how to be better at their position.** During the extensive interviewing process, elements of professional development for coaches were discussed. This became a common emerging theme because it was evident that coaches were limited in the amount of professional development opportunities. The drawn conclusion is that there are limited opportunities for instructional coaches to learn how to be more effective instructional coaches. This could be because of the lack of data on the success of instructional coaching programs. This is consistent with current research in that there is a gap in literature about what professional development supports are needed to create a better coach. While there are limited studies on this, conclusions drawn from Gottman (2001) and Ekman (2003) provide strategies that coaches can use to communicate better. This, however, is not consistent with the identified need that coaches need more significant professional development for coaching. Additional findings suggest that instructional coaches are widely supported by their administration. All three participants believed that their administration supports them with whatever professional development they need and ask for, but the key finding that must be investigated further is how administration can better support coaches. This is viewed through the lens of who exactly is coaching the coaches to get better at their craft. Currently, this is not happening and this practice is not supported in any recent studies.

**The group interview.** The most significant part of this study was when all three participants were able to be interviewed at once. Due to the nature of questioning during
the first two rounds of interviews, the participants were able to have a focused discussion around the common themes. During this part of the data collection process, common discussion ensued around successful and unsuccessful coaching relationships, trust, the concept of coaching taking time, and advantages and disadvantages of the instructional coaching role being unclear. The conclusions drawn were a significant part of the findings and conclusions based on the common themes. There were, however, several discussions and conclusions drawn from this part of the data collection process that were not as connected to the emerging themes.

One such example revolved around the concept of the culture and climate of a school and how that affects instructional coaches. This was consistent with literature from Knight (2007) who suggested that understanding school culture is vital for coaches to be in a position to be change agents. Similarly, there is research that supports that effective embedded professional learning promotes positive cultural change. The influence of coaching often goes beyond improving content instruction. The conditions, behaviors and practices required by an effective coaching program can affect the culture of a school or system, thus embedding instructional change within broader efforts to improve school-based culture and conditions (Neufeld and Roper, 2003).

All three participants described the culture and climate of their school. At one point, Kate shared that she had a discussion with her supervisor about how she felt at times the school’s culture was not built for instructional coaching. In that, they should dissolve the program because of some of the negative viewpoints of some of the teachers. However, she began to focus on putting herself in the teacher’s role and then understood that not everyone is comfortable with having his/her teaching scrutinized. She said, “It’s
a very personal experience for everyone. Everyone is nervous with a second set of eyes in their classroom and since students act differently every different day that makes teachers nervous.” Lew described his experience more on individual departments’ culture. He said he had to approach each subject differently based on the department’s perspective of the instructional coach. Jane said that it all comes back to the trust in the coach and that becomes the “direct pipeline to understanding the school’s culture.”

As their interviews were analyzed, the direct result of the culture and climate of the school appeared to be based on the quality of trust. This ties back to the discussion of the findings and conclusions drawn in understanding the instructional coaches’ relationship with others. One additional conclusion drawn was based on a back and forth discussion about the concept of guilt and the role guilt plays as an instructional coach. This discussion was necessary because it was a targeted implication that emerged as the data was analyzed. Although this is not something that was found in the literature, the participants’ all mentioned about how the concept of guilt is a regular feeling in their role. Kate noted that she wants to feel like she is “worth it.” Lew shared that he was given “release periods” which means that he is released from teaching courses to have time “off” to coach teachers. Jane stated that she “writes down everything she does every day just in case someone asks her how she was using her time.” When this point was brought up, both Kate and Lew said they did the same thing. In fact, Lew said that he did this for three years straight and then starting this year, since nobody ever asked him for his time logs, he ended up stopping it because it took so much time.

Jane was the only coach who felt like teachers in instructional coaching roles are natural leaders, so she felt like they would likely be taking on the role of being a coach
more informally if it was not an actual position in the school. While the conversation was deep, rich, and filled with questions, Kate described her sense of guilt best when she stated:

I think I’m guilty of being guilty. I worry about how teachers and administrators perceive me. I don’t want them to think that I am just hanging out all day and not doing my job, so I am sure to make sure I am always working on something and talking to administrators and teachers about all that I am doing in my role. The release periods that I have account for a lot of time that translates to a lot of money. I think Jane said it best because teachers do look at me and think that their class size could go down if I was teaching another class or two. I get really frustrated when my coaching responsibilities lighten up based on certain times of the semester; however, when I am not busy working one-on-one with teachers, I have other teaching and learning responsibilities. Sometimes I need to just learn more about how to be a better coach, but I almost feel guilty doing that because then I am not directly working with teachers.

In response to this, Jane shared some insight about how more experience in instructional coaching really helps with this feeling. She said,

I think this takes time. It’s a multiyear process. I mean I felt all those things too, but then I got more confident the more years I was an instructional coach. I’ve been doing this for seven years and it took until years four or five for some of those guilty feelings to subside a bit.

This would be an area that needs to be investigated further.
Personal Context Reflection

This study began with my personal story where I made reference to my own experiences as an instructional coach. The purpose of this section is to describe how this inquiry connects back to my personal context and showcases how my instructional coaching story has developed as a result of this study. This by no means has any implications about the drawn conclusions based on the connection to other studies, but rather an opportunity to describe the nature of inquiry that led to my further profound understanding of the effect of instructional coaching.

As an educator who has experienced so many different sides of education, from student, to teacher, to teacher of teachers, to administrator, I thought I had perspective, I thought I really understood what this investigation was all about, and what I wanted to gain from it. What happened, however, was I was able to learn about others’ perspectives, and this both affirmed some of my feelings and allowed me to reflect further on missing elements. Before this study I never thought of what measurements were available to show that instructional coaching was truly successful and I never thought of professional development that was needed to be a better coach. Now, that the study has concluded, these are the major elements of my investigation that have purpose moving forward. What excites me now is that I have a focus on how I can continue to give back to this part of the profession and determine next steps to make this happen. Currently, because of my research, I was able to put together a roundtable discussion of approximately 30 coaches from neighboring schools, and we are currently in the process of designing a full-day instructional coaching workshop in the fall of 2015 for approximately 150 coaches.
Elements of this study will be the primary focus, and I am happy that I can take some of my recommendations and actually make them a reality.

Instructional coaching, to me, still is one of the most important positions in the school. Through this data collection process, I was able to hear the passion that exists for best instructional practices; more of this is needed in school districts. I know these coaches work with teachers and that same passion is invoked and it spirals from teacher to student. As the students are the heart of the school, instructional coaches can impact them, much more of them, by supporting teachers. I still believe this even though my investigation uncovered that there really is no way to determine the success-level of instructional coaches. What bothers me though is that coaches, whether they realize it or not, sense this, and want to protect their position, and in-turn take on so many additional responsibilities that it makes it impossible to do everything the best they can. I am the first to admit that I did this as an instructional coach. I was on every committee possible, went to every professional development opportunity available, volunteered for everything and looking back at it, I wanted to show others that I was worthy. Now I see that by doing that it really causes other teachers to not have an understanding of instructional coaching at all. I saw this through the stories of Kate, Lew, and Jane. I see this more in me now because of this research. This is partially what leads to so much confusion about what an instructional coach is and is not and hence became a major focus of this study.

What was interesting to me was that it took me about a year of writing and rewriting to try to be conceptually clear about what I was writing about only to determine that the purpose of my writing was to show that nothing about instructional coaching is actually clear. This makes it very complicated for someone who is not familiar with
instructional coaching to understand. In fact, it becomes so difficult to clarify the position that it is just easier to blend roles and allow the coach to determine the essential parts of their position. This was uncovered in Kate, Lew, and Jane’s stories. They basically have the ability to define their own job and this leads to role confusion. While I knew that this was going to be a big part of this research, as I have finished, and I am beginning to create a network of coaches for future professional development opportunities, I am finding that the “confusion” is so much more prominent than I have ever imagined. I have now had the opportunities to meet so many different types of coaches: instructional coaches, literacy coaches, technology coaches, learning support coaches, numeracy coaches, data coaches, PLC coaches, and STEM coaches to name a few. They all identified with working with teachers throughout their day; additionally, they all followed a different coaching system or model with most of them not being able to identify any system or model they fall under. I do not think the issue is that coaches need to identify with one model, but more so that they need to be crystal clear about their purpose in a school in order to then be able to determine the best way to show they are successful in their position. This could be why it is so difficult to have measurements of success for coaches; there is no universal coaching model and therefore no universal measurement of success.

There were additional components of the data collection process that surprised me. I was really astonished that the participants did not realize how much information and research on coaching is available. It seemed like they really focused on how to be better teachers and therefore this would then translate into helping other teachers become better teachers. There did not seem to be as much of a focus on being a better coach. This
is interesting to me, but as I reflect on my experiences as an instructional coach, it makes perfect sense. I always figured that if I wanted to help teachers be better teachers, I should know and study what it means to be an excellent teacher. I never actually thought that I should try to become a better coach and then maybe that would lead to me coaching teachers better, which would then lead to them becoming better teachers.

I was also surprised at the focus of relationships and trust. Before this study, I did not really buy into this concept to the extent that the participants discussed this. I knew it was important, but I think maybe I just took it for granted. I guess I worked more in an environment where teachers were proud of the new things that they tried, and we would collectively share how teachers were better teachers because of working with me as an instructional coach. What I realized is the idea of building trust with teachers complicates the role of the instructional coach even more. Since coaches are not able to share much of the specific work they do with teachers, other teachers have a difficult time understanding what they do and if what they do really works. This adds to the complexity of their position.

What once began as a study that was intended to focus specifically on engagement, turned into a study that moved far beyond the intricacies of engagement in instructional coaching. I still believe that engagement is a big piece of this. In fact, conclusions were overwhelmingly drawn that teachers are only engaged in the process when they need something immediate and when they are not forced into the coaching process. Engagement then means different things to different people. This adds to the difficulty of understanding this concept. It is just too difficult to determine what engagement means, how to engage someone, and then how to judge it. In this study, I
believe I was given rich, authentic examples of what an engaged and unengaged teacher looks like, but it really is teacher-dependent and is not necessarily controlled by the instructional coach. My original intent was to understand what coaches really do to engage teachers they are working with, but it seems as if this is pre-determined by the teacher before the coaching session even begins. That was interesting to me.

Originally, I had intended on being an actual participant in the final group interview. I felt like I had the experience to share, and I wanted to engage in the conversation. What I did not expect was that as I started the interview, the participants, who really did not know each other, began to ask each other questions and provide more depth in their responses. It was at this point that I decided that I did not need to be part of this part of the research; I really wanted to listen and allow them to guide the final part. I am happy with this decision. I have been able to use parts of chapter 1 and parts of chapter 5 to tell my story. Since instructional coaching is so personal and the conclusions drawn are based on deep relationships, I know that this study tells the story of me, other coaches who were drawn from research and other studies, and Kate, Lew, and Jane.

One of the last reflections I have is based on the willingness of my participants to be part of this study. Based on the data collection process, it was so very clear that their time was limited as an instructional coach, that they were spread too thin, and that they were constantly taking on additional responsibilities. The irony is that they then took on this task of being part of this study. Throughout the process, they all commented on what a rigorous and time-consuming process it was. As the researcher, I really felt badly at times because I was asking them to provide so many details about concepts that they really never thought of before in connection to their position. I will never forget when
both Kate and Lew mentioned that the amount of thinking that went into this was exhausting. For me, I knew I was digging deeper in order to understand a very complex position, but for them, I was really making them re-examine their role. I struggled at times with the fact that I had to push them so much; I really felt like they were asked to go above and beyond my original intentions, but it ended up being such a wonderful experience. It all was worth it at the end when the four of us met for our final group interview and at the end they all shared how the experience helped them learn and grow beyond what they could ever imagine. In fact, they shared that it was probably the best professional development they experienced. This was rewarding for me because the conclusions drawn about needing more professional development for coaches actually happened because of this study.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to understand instructional coaches’ perspectives of their role as an instructional coach in relation to how they work with an engage teachers in the process. The study answered the research question: *How do instructional coaches understand and describe the nature of their work with teachers?* Based on the data collection process a series of themes emerged that led to recommendations to further research.

A recommendation is to examine more closely the best years for a teacher to be instructionally coached. Through this study, there were many references to the instructional coaches working with new teachers (in various stages of their tenure), teachers who were in need of remediation, and teachers who opted for their support. It would be significant if a profile of the best years to coach a teacher was created to assist
coaches on teachers to target. This would then lead into further investigation of the implications of coaching being mandatory or not. While this research looked at literature that determined it is more effective when it is voluntary (Knight, 2007), more research can be focused on coaching programs that are mandatory or contractual.

Similar to this was overwhelming conversation about whether or not subject expertise was more valuable than instructional expertise. The findings of other studies focused primarily on math in that teachers are most satisfied with instructional coaches who possess a level of mathematics expertise that contributes to an increase in their mathematics knowledge (Franke et al., 2001; Penuel et al., 2007; Bruce & Ross, 2008). More research should be focused on content-specific coaching. This would then lead into research that supports if a part-time coach is more successful that a full-time coach. The participants in my study were all part-time coaches. They felt that by them still being in the classroom they became more “reliable” since they were able teaching; however, there are schools that just have full-time coaches. A study that compares these two experiences would be significant.

The final two recommendations for further research were the basis of this entire study. Further research needs to be developed on how to measure success and instructional coaching influence. Currently, school districts are investing time and money into instructional coaches, yet they do not have a measurement to determine if they are successful or having an effect in the school. Additionally, more research needs to be completed on what is needed for instructional coaches to become better instructional coaches. Since it was concluded that professional development is limited regarding
coaching, the elements of coaching professional development should be examined to
determine the best ways for instructional coaches to learn and grow in the profession.

**Recommendations for Practice**

There is one major recommendation that is overwhelmingly evident as a result of
this study; the recommendation is focused on the entire purpose of this research.
Instructional coaches and administration need to determine what the instructional
coaching role is and how to make it clearer to teachers, administrators, and possibly even
students and the community. Without a clear role there is confusion. Currently, this is a
reality for instructional coaches. Due to this, instructional coaches are taking on roles that
are actually not part of their position. This limits their ability to be effective coaches since
they have to take on so many additional responsibilities. If there is clarity in their role and
all teachers and administrators understand it, instructional coaches have a better
opportunity to be successful. Once this happens, then a system to determine what their
needs are to be better supported in regards to professional development can be
implemented along with a system to measure their success and the affect they have as
coaches. The findings of this study in connection with the literature suggest that clarity in
the role of an instructional coach has the ability to lead to a much more successful
coaching program. Program developers considering the following questions at the
community, district, and school levels before implementing an instructional coaching
program can achieve clarity in the instructional coaching position:

1) What data do we have to determine a need for an instructional coaching
   program?
   a. What are our goals for this program?
b. How can our goals be used to determine how to measure the success of the instructional coaching program?

2) What are the teacher support systems already in place in the district?
   a. How are teachers accessing these supports?
   b. How would an instructional coaching program enrich or replace these supports?

3) What is the purpose of the coaching program?
   a. Define the process to access the coach.
   b. Define the responsibilities of teachers in this process.

4) What selection criteria will be used for coaches?
   a. What core competencies does an instructional coach embody?
   b. How will the coach be assessed to determine if he or she is meeting the expectations of the district?

5) Describe the instructional coaching framework of the district.
   a. What is the defined instructional coaching model?
   b. What is the defined purpose and non-purpose of the instructional coach?

6) What supports will be in place for coaches to learn how to be coaches?
   a. Who is the coaches’ coach?
   b. How will we ensure coaches receive ongoing training and support?

7) What is the administrative role in the instructional coaching program?
   a. What protocols been developed to determine how instructional coaches access their leaders for support?
b. How can leaders have the opportunity to be coached?

8) How do we know the program is implemented with fidelity? How will it be assessed at the community level? District level? School level?

These questions serve as the first step in understanding an instructional coaching program at a school. Program developers should ask these questions at the district, school, and community level to create clarity around the instructional coaching position. The results of the study determine that the role of the instructional coach needs to be processed before implementation; however, if a program is already in place, these questions serve as a possible starting point for program evaluation or refinement. The purpose of this study was to create conceptual clarity in instructional coaching and these questions serve as a guide to achieve this result.
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Appendix A

Informed Consent

- I have been asked to participate in a research study entitled “Creating Conceptual Clarity: Instructional Coaches’ Understanding of Instructional Coaching.”

- Approximately 3 instructional coaches have been asked to participate in this study. The procedures included in this study will be a series of interviews. No procedures are experimental.

- The purpose of this study is to investigate how instructional coaches understand their role and engage teacher in learning through their coaching sessions.

- I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and I understand that if I feel uncomfortable with any questions asked I may refuse to answer.

- If I agree to be in this study, I will be asked to be interviewed as well. If I agree to be interviewed, my responses will be audio taped. I understand that the interview may take up to 45 minutes with an additional interview follow-up session.

- I understand that there are no foreseeable risks or benefits from my participation in this study.

- I understand that my name aligned to my responses will be confidential and my name will not be mentioned in the report. The records of the study will be kept private and my name will not be published. The audio tapes will be secured by the researcher only and will be erased after one year.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw my participation in this study at any point in time and there will be no penalty to my employment or involvement where I work.

- This research study has been submitted to the Institutional Review Board. I can contact the principal investigator, Lenny DePasquale, at 773-617-1805 or crf_depasqlm@cuchicago.edu if I have any pertinent questions regarding this study. Dr. Pamela Konkol serves as the dissertation chair and can be reached at Pamela.konkol@cuchicago.edu.

- For questions about the rights of research participants, please contact the Concordia University Chicago Institutional Review Board at: IRB@cuchicago.edu

I have read the above information and have asked questions and received answers to my questions to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this consent form for my records and by signing this consent form I agree to participate in this study.
Signature:______________________________ Date:________

Signature of Investigator:____________________ Date:________
Appendix B

Conversational Interview Protocol

Instructional Coaches

1) How would you describe your experience as an instructional coach?

2) How do you plan for your instructional coaching sessions?

3) How do you engage teachers as a teacher of teachers?

4) What do you see as the biggest factor that gets in the way of the teacher’s ability to learn?

5) How does your coaching style change in relation to the types of learners you coach?

6) How do you understand the learning process? How do you know if adults are learning?

7) How has your understanding of instructional coaching changed from before you were a coach to now?
Appendix C

Follow-Up Interview Protocol
Instructional Coaches

The following questions emerged based on the initial interview. Please provide specific examples or stories if possible to illustrate your responses.

1. How can the role of an instructional coach be clearer to teachers? to administrators? to the community? to students?

2. What is the administrative perspective of you at your current school? How does this perspective impact professional development you are offered? Discuss further the idea that professional development for coaches might not be a priority. How do you know this?

3. How do you perceive your success to be measured from you? other teachers? administrators? students? the community?

4. Discuss further and provide examples of teachers being more engaged in the instructional coaching process when they have a “need” to seek your assistance. What have your experiences been like with teachers who do not perceive they “need” your support?

5. How important is your content expertise as an instructional coach? From your perspective, what is the most important quality of being an instructional coach?
Appendix D

Focus Group Interview Protocol
Instructional Coaches

A final focus group interview will take place based on the emerging theory that develops from the initial interviews and follow-up interview questions.

Through an analysis of the data collected based on the instructional coaches’ responses to answer the research question *How do instructional coaches understand and describe the nature of their work with teachers?* the following key aspects emerged: 1) The role and responsibilities of an instructional coach; 2) types of relationships needed in the role; 3) Strategies to engage and be engaged in the instructional coaching process; 4) Defining success in the role of an instructional coach; and, 5) How instructional coaches learn. The focus group will explore the following concepts and provide clarification on the data collected.

1) Share both a successful and unsuccessful coaching experience.

2) Describe one of your coaching relationships where there is trust. Discuss a situation where there was a lack of trust.

3) Discuss in more detail the following: your role in coaching teachers who do not want the support, how the process of coaching takes time, how you get teachers to come back, and the benefits and difficulties with confidentiality.

4) Are there any advantages to your role being unclear? Describe how a lack of clarity in your role can make it more difficult to coach.

5) What are some examples of when you felt a sense of guilt in your role?
Appendix E

Institutional Review Board Application (see submission)