

The Impact of Instructional Coaching Programs on Teacher Effectiveness:

Perceptions from the Field

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Abstract

This qualitative study was conducted to examine instructional coaches' perceptions of their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Interviews were collected by the researcher to collect perceptual data. The results of this study can be used by educational leaders to understand the value of instructional coaching programs as an avenue to provide teachers with job-embedded professional learning. For the nine participants in this study, it was evident that instructional coaches perceive they improve teacher effectiveness. The eight findings from this study unveiled that instructional coaches felt that they improved teacher effectiveness. They accomplish this task by providing personalized professional learning. Effective listening and questioning skills, coupled with cultivating trusting relationships with teachers, are essential skills that instructional coaches utilize to improve teacher effectiveness. Further, effective instructional coaches have extensive teaching experience and are provided ongoing professional learning on best practices, instructional strategies, and instructional coaching practices. Instructional coaches believe they are better equipped to improve teacher effectiveness when they are provided opportunities to connect with and learn from other instructional coaches. Finally, findings from the current study included that the building principal is a factor in the instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. The significance of this study is that it could add to the understanding of instructional coaches' perceptions of their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. The results of this research led to several recommendations. District leaders provide professional learning on the effective listening and questioning skills to instructional coaches. Further, it is recommended that district leaders in charge of instructional coaches analyze candidates' inter-personal skills and teaching experience when hiring instructional coaches.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to my wife, Jennifer, my three children, Ella, Anderson, and Caroline, and all the students and families I have served as an educator.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Across the United States school districts have increasingly employed instructional coaches tasked with improving teacher effectiveness (Knight 2007; Kowal & Steiner, 2007). According to the Vermont Agency of Education (2016), it is believed that instructional coaches can provide teachers with real-time, job-embedded professional development to certified staff. Learning Forward (2010), which was formally known as the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), identified job-embedded professional learning as a vital component of effective professional learning for educators. Job-embedded professional learning is defined as “a shared, ongoing process that is locally rooted and makes a direct connection between learning and application in daily practice, thereby requiring active teacher involvement in cooperative, inquiry-based work” (Learning Forward, 2010, p. 2).

Instructional coaches go by a variety of titles with diverse job responsibilities. Titles and roles often differ among districts; they are largely defined as on-site professional developers tasked with supporting teachers to improve instruction through research-based instructional practices (Knight, 2009). For the purpose of the current study, the term instructional coach is used to represent the various titles prescribed to the position.

Responsibilities of instructional coaches include providing resources for teachers, analyzing student data, implementing curriculum, mentoring teachers, providing teacher feedback, and leading professional development (Knight, 2009). Instructional coaching programs are not as effective when the work of the instructional coach is unfocused.

Further, instructional coaches are not as effective when they are provided little direction and support. Wren and Vallejo (2009) reported instructional coaches' work is often squandered when they are not provided adequate support. This leads districts to question the effectiveness of the instructional coach program and has led to the withdrawal of instructional coaching programs by some school districts (Knight, 2009). Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, and Lamintina (2010) reported that the support instructional coaches received from building principals was influential to their effectiveness. Further, the professional development provided to instructional coaches served as a catalyst to their effectiveness (Martin, Kragler, Quatroche, & Bauserman, 2014). For these reasons, it is important for school leaders to have a clear understanding of how the professional development instructional coaches receive impacts their capacity to improve teacher effectiveness.

Background

In 2001 educational reform was at the forefront with the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). With the impending implementation of NCLB, legislators began generating reform efforts by increasing demands for improved student achievement (Guskey, 2000). Through NCLB the focus was placed on student achievement. Increases in student achievement were believed to be accomplished in part by improving the effectiveness of educators. One of these changes was providing research-based professional learning (Guskey, 2000). An increase in the use of instructional coaches evolved, due in part to the professional development requirements contained in NCLB (Kowal & Steiner, 2007). "NCLB required school districts to develop and implement a school improvement plan that includes professional

development programs for teachers at schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress “AYP” (Kowal & Stiener, 2007, p. 1). During the 2005-2006 school year nearly 10% of all schools had not achieved AYP thus requiring them to develop a school improvement plan. This requirement led to an increase in instructional coaching as a professional development strategy (Kowal & Stiener, 2007). Educational experts supported the emphasis on professional development programs noting that high-quality professional development could be the vehicle for ensuring highly effective educators in every classroom (NSDC, 2006). Job-embedded learning has continued to be part of federal education regulations that emphasized the importance of school-based learning for teachers as a component of best-practice professional development (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a, 2009b).

In 2015 President Barack Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which replaced NCLB. While shifting the focus from accountability to one of equity and excellence, ESSA maintained NCLB’s focus of improving student achievement through developing the skills of educators (Gendron, 2017). School districts were required to provide educators with job-embedded professional development (Killion, Harrison, Bryan, & Clifton, 2012).

As schools began to introduce instructional coaching, it was assumed that high-quality professional learning that improved teaching practices would increase student achievement (Knight, 2009). “Perhaps most importantly, coaching puts teachers’ needs at the heart of professional learning by individualizing their learning and positioning teachers as professionals” (Knight, 2011, p. 2). Through an analysis of hundreds of interviews, teachers were critical of “sit and get” professional learning (Knight 2007).

Bush (1984) reported that 10% of teachers implemented a new instructional strategy after attending a single training session on new instructional strategies. When coupled with attributes of instructional coaching such as theory, modeling, practice, feedback, and site-based support, 95% of teachers successfully implemented the new instructional strategy. The effectiveness of an instructional coach has been identified by research and linked to the coach's knowledge, experience, and expertise (Campbell & Malkus, 2009; Manno & Stoelinga, 2008; Taylor, 2008).

The setting for this study was an affluent county, named County X, in the state of Kansas. Table 1 provides County X demographics.

Table 1

County X and State of Kansas Demographics from the 2017 United States Census

Region	Population	% BA/BS	Median Income	Poverty
County X	544,179	54.6	\$81,121	5.3%
Kansas	2,911,505	32.3	\$55,477	11.9%

Note: % BA/BS = % of Population with a BA/BS or Higher. Adapted from *United States Census 2017*, by U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017.

Six school districts have boundaries within County X. Five of the six school districts employ instructional coaches and were included as part of the setting for this study. For the purpose of this study, districts were identified as District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E. Provided in Table 2 is demographic information for the five districts which were included in the study.

Table 2

District A, District B, District C, District D, District E, and State of Kansas Demographics from the 2017 United States Census

District	Enrollment	% Poverty	% SPED
A	22,532	8.07	10.46
B	3,987	30.75	16.49
C	29,405	27.58	12.96
D	27,138	34.65	9.19
E	7,294	11.86	8.09
Kansas	486,694	48.10	14.74

Note: % Poverty = % of Population Living in Poverty; % SPED = % of Students Receiving Special Education Services. Adapted from the *Kansas State Department of Education Report Card 2018*, by Kansas State Department of Education, 2018.

The table lists pertinent demographic data of the 5 districts in County X that were included in the study. Demographic data from all students in the state of Kansas are included as well. Specifically, the table reports the number of students enrolled, the percentage of students living in poverty, and the percentage of students who receive special education services.

Statement of the Problem

The most effective schools are those that demonstrate student academic growth, which only occurs with effective teachers (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Effective instruction is a prerequisite to high levels of student learning and achievement (Danielson, 2007). “The greatest effect on student learning occurs when the teachers become learners of their own teaching and when students become their own teachers” (Hattie, 2009, p. 22). Students assigned to effective teachers score higher on standardized assessments and demonstrate greater academic growth than their peers who are assigned to less effective teachers (Jordan, Mendro, & Wersinghe, 1997). Furthermore, ineffective instruction can

even impede student learning (Danielson, 2007; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Jordan et al. 1997; Marzano, 2003).

Teacher effectiveness is defined as the teacher's ability to identify the most important ways in which to represent the subject they teach, the ability to create an optimal classroom climate for teaching, the ability to monitor learning and provide feedback, the belief that all students can reach success criteria, and the ability to influence surface and deep student outcomes (Hattie, 2012). In a report compiled by the Vermont Agency of Education (2016), it was reported that school districts are investing high amounts of time and money to implement instructional coaching programs to improve teacher effectiveness. Additionally, the Vermont Agency of Education (2016) argued that the investment in instructional coaching places the responsibility on school districts to ensure instructional coaching programs improve teacher effectiveness and ultimately, student learning.

Research describing best practices for ongoing professional development for coaches was lacking (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). Because instructional coaching requires learning on the job, Gallucci, DeVoogt, Van Lare, Yoon and Boatright (2010) contended that districts would be wise to give special consideration to coaches' learning and organizational supports that promote learning. In their work, Martin et al., (2014) reported that instructional coaches who were provided extensive professional development such as curriculum training, training on reform initiatives, and on-going, on-site support reported higher quality and more frequent work with teachers. According to Knight (2009), additional research is needed to identify instructional coaches' perceptions of how their work improves teacher effectiveness. Specifically, additional

research is warranted to identify support systems that increase instructional coaching effectiveness, best practices for instructional coaches, and an analysis of factors which impact instructional coaching effectiveness, such as the building principal (Knight, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to determine instructional coaches' perceptions of their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. The current study sought to unveil how instructional coaches perceive they improve teacher effectiveness. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to identify the skills effective instructional coaches utilized and how their experiences impact their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. An additional purpose of the study was to understand the professional learning pertinent to instructional coaches and factors which impact their ability to improve teacher effectiveness.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study adds to the research base regarding how instructional coaches perceive they impact teacher effectiveness. Exploring the perceptions of instructional coaches may inform district leaders of the potential benefits and drawbacks when implementing an instructional coaching program. Further, the perceptions of instructional coaches could assist district leaders when hiring instructional coaches.

Delimitations

Delimitations are restrictions predetermined by the researcher and applied to limit the scope and purpose of the study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The delimitations for the current study were as follows:

1. The instructional coaches were employed by a district in County X as certified staff members in the participating districts during the 2019-2020 school year.
2. The instructional coaches selected for the sample were responsible for providing professional learning to certified teachers teaching at least one grade K through 5.

Assumptions

Assumptions help the researcher frame the study, interpret data, and provide significance for the conclusions (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). This study was based on the following assumptions: (a) the participants understood the interview questions being asked, (b) the interviewer was unbiased and did not influence the participants, and (c) the participants answered all questions honestly.

Research Question

Research questions are used to formulate and focus an investigation and should be created to evaluate the relationships among the variables (Creswell, 2009). The following research question guided this qualitative study.

RQ. How do instructional coaches perceive their ability to improve teacher effectiveness?

Definition of Terms

Terms specific to this research have been identified and defined to assist the reader in an accurate interpretation of the intent and findings of the current study. For these purposes the following definitions are provided.

College and career readiness. The College and Career Readiness and Success Center (2014) defined college and career readiness as a characteristic of students who

graduate from high school prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary opportunities, whether college or career, without need for remediation.

Effective teaching. Hattie (2012) defined effective teaching as teachers' ability to identify the most important ways in which to represent the subject they teach, to create an optimal classroom climate for teaching, to monitor learning and provide feedback, and to influence surface and deep student outcomes; and the teachers' belief that all students can reach the success criteria,

Instructional coach. Killion and Harrison (2006) defined an instructional coach as an individual employed by a school district with the purpose of providing job-embedded professional development intended to engage educators in collaborative work designed to contribute to the growth of teachers' instructional ability.

Job-embedded professional development. Hirsh (2009) defined job-embedded professional development as teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning.

Professional development. Learning Forward (2015) defined professional development as learning opportunities that are sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data driven, and classroom focused. For the purpose of this study, the terms professional development and professional learning are used interchangeably.

Summary

This research study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 detailed the background, statement of the problem, purpose, and significance of the study. Further, Chapter 1 provided an overview of the delimitations, assumptions, research question, the

definition of terms, and an overview of the methodology. In Chapter 2 the review of literature is presented. Specifically, the literature review delineates the historical perspective of professional development, theories of adult learning, emergence of instructional coaching, characteristics of effective instructional coaches, and characteristics of effective instructional coaching programs. Chapter 3 provides the methodology, sampling procedures, and instrumentation. A detailed description of data collection procedures, data analysis and synthesis are additional components of Chapter 3. The chapter concludes with an explanation of reliability, a detailed account of the researcher's role and limitations to the study. Presented in Chapter 4 are the findings of the phenomenological qualitative study. Finally, Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, findings related to the research in the literature, implications for action, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this research was to study instructional coaches' perceptions of their effectiveness in improving instruction. Pertinent literature specific to the current study is reviewed in this chapter. This chapter provides a historical perspective of professional development, an analysis of adult learning theories, and a detailed overview of the emergence of instructional coaching. An overview of effective coaching programs with a specific investigation of clearly defined coaching roles, the relationship between the building principal and the coach, and professional development provided for instructional coaches is provided. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the characteristics of effective instructional coaches. Specifically, the importance of the instructional coaches' pedagogical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and content knowledge are analyzed.

Historical Perspective of Professional Learning

When professional development is designed well, it affords teachers the opportunity to master content, improve teaching skills, evaluate their performance, and most importantly, improve student achievement (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). The forms of professional development which include teacher participation in a workshop or conference led by an outside consultant, often referred to as sit and get, has been found to do little to improve teacher effectiveness and student learning (Guskey, 2000; Knight 2007; Neufeld & Roper, 2003).

In 1974, Lawrence reviewed 97 studies and evaluation reports of teacher in-service that were utilized to determine characteristics of a successful program. Research

results indicated in-service programs consisting of a single session were largely ineffective. Lawrence (1974) reported that the more successful in-service programs were those that provided educators the opportunity to collaborate, share ideas, receive feedback, and apply new learning. Joyce and Showers (1980) hypothesized that the integration of learning new skills and continuous learning through on-site coaching improved teacher effectiveness. To identify the effect of various training methods, Joyce and Showers (1980) conducted a nearly two-year research project which included a meta-analysis of 200 studies. The study identified the effectiveness of various training methods. Joyce and Showers (1980) concluded that almost all teachers could acquire new skills if certain elements were in place. The elements included presentation of theory or description of the skill or strategy, modeling or demonstration of skills or models of teaching, practice in simulated and classroom settings, structured and open-ended feedback, and coaching for application (Joyce & Showers, 1980).

In the late 1970s, the California Department of Education was receiving numerous complaints from teachers regarding workshops offered to them. This prompted the state department to enlist the help of Bush (1984), who conducted a five-year longitudinal study to examine the impact of professional development on a teacher's ability to adopt and implement a new strategy in classroom instruction. The study included 80 schools across seven counties in the state of California. Bush (1984) noted that 10% of teachers successfully implemented the new skill when only given a presentation of the new skill. When the new skill was also demonstrated to the teacher, 13% of teachers were able to successfully implement the skill. Additionally, when teachers were provided an opportunity to practice the skill in a controlled environment, 16% of teachers successfully

implemented the skill. Providing teachers with feedback increased the percentage to 19. Further, Bush (1984) reported that 95% of teachers successfully implemented the skill when provided instruction, which included theory, modeling, practice, feedback, and site-based support.

In examining emerging research on professional development, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) published their findings, which further examined essential characteristics of professional development. They suggested that effective professional development must allow teachers to integrate theory with practice. Further, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) identified effective professional development as, “sustained, ongoing, intensive, and supported by modeling, coaching, and the collective solving of specific problems of practice” (p. 598). While effective practices for professional development are often overlooked and underutilized (Lieberman, 1995), it is noted that effective practices for professional development should provide educators opportunities to think critically, collaborate, and solve problems with others, and the opportunity to use their own experiences.

Two years later, in a review of the literature on professional development, Sparks and Hirsh (1997) provided eleven changes which school districts should implement to move away from traditional forms of professional development. While external consultants and sit-and-get workshops have their place in a comprehensive professional development plan, Sparks and Hirsh (1997) noted that in order to effect change in schools the type of professional development teachers need must occur during the school day. Professional development could be provided through coaching and study groups that collaboratively review student data and plan instruction. Further, the changes provided

by Sparks and Hirsh (1997) placed an emphasis on focusing professional development on what students need to learn while being results-driven, standards-based, and focused on content.

In their work, *Student Achievement through Staff Development* (Joyce & Showers, 1988) the authors identified professional development to be more effective in the transfer of knowledge and skills into classroom practice when accompanied with in-school coaching. Fourteen years later, Joyce and Showers (2002) published the same book in its third edition which served as a continuation of their review of research on training design and their hypothesis related to the transfer of new learning into classroom practice. In their book Joyce and Showers (2002) examined six case studies of schools, districts, and programs that generated positive effects on student achievement. The cases varied in focus from curriculum to interventions for at-risk students to broad staff development renewal efforts. In the fourteen years that passed between the first edition of *Student Achievement through Staff Development* and the second edition (Joyce & Showers, 2002) noted, “the duration and intensity of many training events have greatly increased, including various forms of follow-up and continuing technical support” (p. 69). Further, Joyce and Showers (2002) identified four components of effective professional development. The four components are exploration of theory, demonstration or modeling of a skill, the practice of a skill under simulated conditions, and peer coaching.

The first component, exploration of theory, “is necessary for understanding concepts behind a skill or strategy. Study of theory facilitates skill acquisition by increasing one’s understanding” (Joyce & Showers, 2002, p. 74). This component alone results in minimal transfer of training with an effect size of around 0.5. The second

component, demonstration or modeling of the skill, is noted to greatly facilitate learning. This component can be included in settings which simulate the workplace such as during a training session or via film (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The third component, the practice of the skill, is most effective in settings which are modeled within the workplace. This component allows for teachers to learn from one another (Joyce & Showers, 2002). To achieve mastery of the skill “requires 20 or 25 trials in the classroom over 8-10 weeks” (Joyce & Showers, 2002, p. 74). Coupling exploration of theory with demonstration and practice of the skill nets an increase in transfer of training with an effect size of roughly 1.18.

The fourth component, peer coaching, is identified as “the collaborative work of teachers to solve problems or questions that arise during implementation” (Joyce & Showers, 2002, p. 74). When peer coaching is included with exploration of theory, the demonstration of the skill, and practice of the skill, the transfer of training is significant, netting an effective size of 1.42. Further, during hundreds of interviews conducted by Knight (2007), it was noted that teachers are unanimously critical of one-shot programs that fail to address practical concerns. Teachers criticized training that lacked follow-up and failed to provide the personalized experiences teachers needed.

In 2001 Learning Forward published the first edition of *Standards for Professional Learning* (NSDC, 2001). These standards were published to guide professional development efforts associated with NCLB. Learning Forward, along with 40 other professional associations and educational organizations, developed the standards for professional learning. The third edition of these standards of professional learning, which are listed below, were released by Learning Forward (2011):

- Learning Communities: professional learning occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment
- Leadership: professional learning requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning
- Resources: professional learning requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning
- Data: professional learning uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning
- Learning Designs: professional learning integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes
- Implementation: professional learning applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change
- Outcomes: professional learning aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards. (p. 2)

Through the implementation of these seven standards, districts can better support teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Implied within the seven standards are several prerequisites for effective professional learning to occur. These prerequisites are identified as the educators' commitment to all students, the learner being ready to learn, the learner's ability to participate in collaborative inquiry while learning, and realizing that all educators learn differently (Learning Forward, 2011).

To ensure all students are college and career ready Killion and Hirsh (2013) concluded that effective professional learning, leads to enhanced educator effectiveness and student learning when it is comprehensive and sustained.

The implementation of ESSA brought with it a shift from accountability to equity and excellence. Further, ESSA promotes professional development, which is job-embedded (Killion et al., 2014). It is vital that professional development transfers new knowledge into classroom practice, leading to changes in educator practice and student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Killion & Hirsh, 2013). Combining learning from one-time in-services with job-embedded professional learning is effective (Killion et al., 2014).

Theories of Adult Learning

An analysis of adult learning theories is necessary when discussing teacher professional development. Initially identified by Houle (1961), adult learning theory is self-directed learning. In the 1950's Houle conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of twenty-two adults who were identified as continuing learners. While the purpose of his research was to identify why adults engage in continuing education, the study also identified some insights into adult learning. Specifically, Houle (1961) concluded that adult learners in formal education possessed one of several orientations, (goal, activity, learning) which resulted in adult participation learning.

In another highly cited study, Tough (1971) examined adult learning in a non-formal setting and coined the term self-directed learning. He identified self-direction as primarily context specific and concluded that learner motivation was tied to a particular

problem or event. His identification of adult learning projects being created by the learner broadened the perceptions of the depth of learning that occurs in adulthood.

Knowles (1970) shared practical solutions to approach adult learning and held the belief that a separate way of viewing adult learners was needed. For the learning climate to be conducive to adult learning, the physical environment must be a setting in which adults feel at ease. Further, the psychological climate must allow adults to feel accepted, respected, and supported. Diagnosis of learner needs is essential; adult learners are much more motivated to learn concepts and skills when they are invested and have been a part of the planning process. In 1973 Knowles published *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*. Knowles (1973) identified the term andragogy which is the method and practice of teaching adult learners. Andragogy theory is based on four assumptions which vary from pedagogy: (a) changes in self-concept: as the person grows and matures his self-concept moves from one of total dependency to increasing self-directedness, (b) the role of experience: as a person grows and matures they accumulate experiences that cause them to become a resource for learning and are provided with a rich platform to relate new learning, (c) readiness to learn: as a person matures, their readiness to learn is decreasingly the product of their biological development and academics and is more so the product of developmental tasks required for the performance of evolving social roles, and (d) orientation to learn: children have been conditioned to have a subject-centered orientation to learning, whereas adults have a problem-centered solution to learning.

In his work *Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice*, Mezirow (1997), discussed transformative theory of adult learning which involves transforming frames of reference through critical reflection or assumptions, legitimizing moral values through

agreement via discourse, taking action on reflective insight, and critically assessing the learning. Mezirow's (1997) transformation theory is grounded in "transforming frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions and validating contested beliefs through discourse" (p. 11), which provides a framework for adult learning. This framework consists of two dimensions: habits of mind and points of view.

Habits of mind, are broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by a set of codes. These codes may be cultural, social, educational, economic, political, or psychological. Habits of mind become articulated in a specific point of view, the constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6).

Mezirow (1997) provided ethnocentrism, the predisposition to regard those outside of one's group as inferior, as an example of a habit of mind. Further, the resulting points of view are comprised of the feelings, judgements, and beliefs one holds regarding specific individuals or groups of people. Points of view are susceptible to continuing change as one reflects on the process by which problems are solved and the need to modify assumptions are made. This typically occurs when one attempts to understand actions that do not occur as anticipated. Additionally, points of view are more accessible to feedback from others. Adult educators must be aware that to be autonomous thinkers, they must extend beyond the learning foundations of child learners (Mezirow, 1997).

Fitzgibbon (2002) conducted a study in which he facilitated a four-hour workshop for educators. The study was conducted at the University of Phoenix, Pittsburgh and included 18 prospective faculty members. The workshop was facilitated using learner

centered techniques within the framework of the seven factors of the Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS), which was created by Gary Conti in 1978 to evaluate whether an educator has a tendency toward learner-centered instruction or teacher-centered instruction. At the conclusion of the workshop, participants evaluated the impact of the workshop on their teaching style. During the workshop, Fitzgibbon reviewed teaching style, adult learning theory, and the implications of that theory on teacher-preferred teaching style with adult learners. He first presented an overview of adult learning theory and teaching style preference. He then sought to understand how that theory impacted teaching style preference. Fitzgibbon (2002) revealed that both learner-centered techniques and teacher-centered techniques utilized for adult learning influenced the participants' ability to learn and the quality of their learning. Fitzgibbon (2002) identified four areas of research related to adult learning. Each of the four areas has a set of ideas, strategies, and techniques appropriate for facilitating adult learning. They are self-directed learning, experimental learning, learning to learn, and critical reflection (Fitzgibbon, 2002). Having an understanding of how adults learn and creating professional learning opportunities with this in mind could improve the quality of teaching (Fitzgibbon, 2002).

Professional learning is essential to improving teacher quality and must be designed for teachers to gain knowledge and expertise and translate into daily practice (Holland, 2005). For teachers to change their practices in ways that lead to increased student achievement, teachers need time, opportunities to practice, feedback, and institutional support. The role of professional learning is vital and must not be taken lightly (Holland, 2005).

Emergence of Instructional Coaching

The shift to providing instructional coaching as a form of professional development occurred in the era of more accountability as dictated by NCLB. With the enactment of NCLB, school districts in the United States were required to develop and implement a school-wide improvement plan (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Specifically, this plan detailed how the school would make adequate yearly progress (AYP). As part of their improvement plan, schools were also required to detail how professional development would be provided to teachers. In 2005 and 2006 roughly 10% of the nation's schools were failing make adequate student achievement gains. Thus, school districts began utilizing instructional coaches to support gains in learning (Knight 2007; Kowal & Steiner, 2007). As school districts across the United States worked to improve teacher effectiveness, instructional coaching was becoming more prevalent. Instructional coaching typically focused on supporting long-term professional development for educators through data analysis, feedback on instruction, and cultivating a culture of collaboration (Hattie, 2009). The Center on Education Policy (2006) reported that 60% of school districts had implemented an instructional coaching model as a vehicle for teacher professional development

In an effort to ensure each child is college and career ready upon high school graduation, President Barack Obama introduced ESSA in 2015 which enforced more rigorous standards for students (Learning Forward, 2017). Improving teacher instruction and student achievement remained at the forefront with an emphasis on job-embedded professional development for educators (Gendron, 2017). Professional development

provided by instructional coaching programs was considered the most opportune method to improve teacher instruction and student achievement (Gendron, 2017).

Instructional coaches are effective in improving teacher instruction and helping to improve student achievement efforts. Truesdale (2003) found that after 15 weeks, teachers who worked with an instructional coach showed an increase in the transfer of training in their instruction, while those teachers who did not work with an instructional coach did not show evidence of transfer of training. A qualitative study was conducted by Kebaeste and Sims (2016) using semi-structured interviews to investigate the importance of instructional coaching. Interview questions were selected to elicit the participants' perceptions of instructional coaching, identify what coaching strategies were used, and understand how those strategies assisted teachers in improving their instruction. Eleven teachers and six educational developers were included in the study. Kebaeste and Sims (2016) identified instructional coaching as a viable approach to provide teachers with targeted, customized support. Additionally, Kebaeste and Sims (2016) identified that effective coaching is focused on the immediate needs of teachers. Flatt (2019) conducted quasi-experimental research to study teacher self-efficacy. Twenty-one teachers were interviewed and student achievement data from 670 students were utilized in the study. In addition, Flatt (2019) reported that when teachers were interviewed, their self-efficacy increased as a result of working with an instructional coach.

Characteristics of Effective Coaching Programs

The way instructional coaching programs are implemented matters (Killion et al., 2012). In a study comparing six schools in the Fairfax County public school district with high implementation of coaching and five schools rated as low implementation, high-

implementing schools demonstrated significantly higher pass rates on standardized assessments than low implementing schools. Findings also suggested that the coaches' level of impact varied with the way instructional coaches were used (Fairfax County Public Schools, 2008).

Hanover Research (2014) published a report which provided an overview of best practices for instructional coaching across various coaching models. The report was compiled from available literature as well as interviews from experts in the field (Hanover, 2014). The report included an identification of defining instructional coaching roles, the relationship between the building principal and the coach, and the professional development the coach receives as key aspects to an effective coaching program (Hanover, 2014).

Clearly defined roles. While coaching programs differ among districts, Killion and Harrison (2006) assert that the success of the program depends on making smart decisions regarding the coaches' role. To provide a framework for instructional coaching, the Vermont Agency of Education (2016) published a report which states, "it is important to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of coaches" (p. 2). In other schools where coaches' work is unfocused, coaches strive to be all things to all people. They have very little direction regarding their work; teachers question the investment in coaching programs, and, in some districts, coaching programs have ended (Killion & Harrison, 2006). In a review of the 2008 RAND Corporation study, Killion et al., (2012) asserted "When district and school leaders set the program's parameters and consider what work coaches are expected to do each day, coaches have the greatest leverage to improve teaching and student learning" (p. 54). To provide a framework for the role of

the coach (Killion & Harrison, 2006) identified 10 roles for coaches. They are resource provider, data coach, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, mentor, school leader, catalyst for change, and learner. The roles were developed after working with and observing coaches. The purpose for and an example of each role are provided below in Table 3.

Table 3

Coaching Roles

Role	Purpose	Example
Resource Provider	To expand teachers' use of a variety of resources to improve instruction	Gathers information and/or resources (articles, materials, etc.) for teachers
Data Coach	To ensure that student achievement data is used to drive decisions at the classroom and school level	Works with individuals or groups to facilitate conversations around data-driven instructional decisions
Curriculum Specialist	To ensure implementation of the adopted curriculum	Helps teachers unpack required curriculum
Instructional Specialist	To align instruction with curriculum to meet the needs of all students	Coaches teachers on methodologies and best practices that can be used to deliver content
Mentor	To increase the novice teachers' instructional skills and to support schoolwide induction activities	Works with the novice teachers and at the induction level
Classroom Supporter	To increase the quality and effectiveness of classroom instruction	Visits teacher's classroom to model, co-teach, or observe; conducts pre-and post-visit conferences with teacher to facilitate reflection
Learning Facilitator	To design collaborative, job-embedded, standards-based professional learning	Assists with coordinating and planning effective school-level professional development
School leader	To work collaboratively (with formal and informal leaders) to plan, implement and assess school change initiatives to ensure alignment with and focus on intended results, and to monitor transfer or practice from professional development into action	Participates as a learning walk team member to monitor transfer of knowledge into practice
Change Catalyst	To create disequilibrium with the current state as an impetus to explore alternatives to current practice	Challenges current practices and supports teachers as they make changes
Learner	To constantly seek to become better at what he/she does	Continually updates own professional repertoire

Note: Adapted from Coaching Matters, by J. Killion, C. Harrison, C. Bryan, and H. Clifton, 2012, pp. 54-55.

While the specific job expectations differ among school districts, the ten roles described were similar across coaching models and districts (Killion & Harrison, 2006).

Narrowing expectations to a few of these roles is vital to the coaches' success; roles should be identified and aligned to the goals of the program and the district (Killion et al., 2012). Additionally, by narrowing the range of roles, coaches focus their work more intensely on those roles that have the greatest potential for impact on teaching and student learning (Knight, 2009). A coach has many responsibilities and duties that need to be accomplished. "However, coaches need time for extended professional learning and support to gain the specific knowledge and skills associated with each role" (Killion et al., 2012, p. 57).

Coach administrator relationship. "The heart of a successful coaching program is the relationship between the principal and the coach" (Killion et al., 2012, p. 103). Further, Killion et al. (2012) asserted that while it is the principal who serves as the building's primary instructional leader, it is the role of the coach to support the principal's vision of the building. The partnership between the coach and the principal is noted by Wren and Vallejo (2009) as a crucial aspect of the success of the coaching program. Wren and Vallejo (2009) spent several years researching the relationship between the instructional coach and the building principal. They published key components of the relationship between the instructional coach, and the building principal.

The coach must not be viewed as one who only works with incompetent teachers. Rather, it is the coach's role to provide consistent opportunities for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other (Wren & Vallejo, 2009).

Maintaining a collaborative relationship between the coach and the principal is an illustrative model for all professional relationships at the school. The principal often

utilizes the coach as a sounding board and vice versa. As noted above, the principal is the instructional leader, sharing the responsibility for professional development in the building between the coach and the principal is important. The principal often determines the needs of the teachers, then works with the coach to plan and develop professional learning opportunities for teachers (Wren & Vallejo, 2009). It is essential that the principal supports the instructional coach in words and actions and that the instructional coach finds a balance between mentor, one who teaches, and director, one who directs or sets expectations (Wren & Vallejo, 2009). Specifically, Attebury and Bryk (2011) uncovered a correlation between principal support of professional development offered by the instructional coach and higher rates of utilization of the instructional coach.

In their work with schools across the country, Sweeny and Mausbach (2019) argued that the most important relationship a principal has is the relationship with their instructional coach; it is this relationship that directly impacts student learning outcomes as it cultivates collective teacher efficacy. Further, Sweeny & Mausbach (2019), through a review of the literature, shared three practices which will ensure the coach and principal support each other effectively: connect coaching to school improvement, set high expectations for high-quality instruction, and develop a coherent coaching model.

Professional development for instructional coaches. Given the limited research regarding professional development for instructional coaches, Neufeld and Roper (2003) conducted a two-year study which included observations and interviews of 39 teachers, principals, and instructional coaches. Their findings afforded them the ability to develop guidelines to support coaches through professional learning. According to Neufeld and

Roper (2003), coaches must receive a focused and coherent orientation of any new change initiative. Further coaches must hear the same message as the teachers they support. It is imperative that principals and coaches understand the goals of the reform in which they are engaged and the reasons that undergird the changes. Similar to teacher professional development, professional development for coaches should be differentiated. It was also recommended that expert coaches should have roles as coach leaders (Neufeld & Roper, 2003).

Understanding and supporting coaches' learning is noticeably under-researched (Gallucci et al., 2010). In a review of 250 documents related to instructional coaching, White, Howell-Smith, Kunz, & Nugent (2009) identified four major areas in the field of instructional coaching that require more research. One of the areas noted requiring further research was needed to understand the specific professional learning that coaches need and how frequently they need it. "As schools invest more heavily in training their educators in new instructional strategies, it becomes important to ensure that the instructional coaches themselves are provided the support and training they need to become successful" (Stock & Duncan, 2010, p. 57).

A study which included 398 instructional coaches in the state of Wyoming (Stock & Duncan, 2010) reported that 56% of instructional coaches reported they did not have a mentor. However, 90% of respondents thought mentoring was important for beginning instructional coaches. Further, Stock & Duncan (2010) found that 58% of participants thought mentoring was important for experienced instructional coaches as well. The five areas of professional learning that have the greatest need for instructional coaches who work with teachers in grades K-9 are instructional leadership, using data, sustaining

personal motivation, creating a collegial faculty, and dealing with difficult staff (Stock & Duncan, 2010). Barriers to providing effective mentoring for instructional coaches were a lack of time for mentoring and limited state guidance (Stock & Duncan, 2010). While the literature supports the need for professional development for instructional coaches, many instructional coaches receive little or no preparation (Killion et al., 2012). In their work, Killion et al., (2012) reported that in order to ensure coaches have up-to-date skills and knowledge to lead teachers in professional learning, effective coaching programs provide coaches with ongoing professional learning.

In 2018 the New Teacher Center (NTC), a national nonprofit focused on improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of teacher and school leaders, released instructional coaching program standards. The instructional coaching program standards provided essential components for offering an effective coaching program (New Teacher Center, 2018). The standards afford districts who are implementing coaching to integrate a program that supports coaches who can then improve the instructional practices of teachers, thus increase student learning and equitable outcomes for students. The standards are organized into three categories: foundational, structural, and instructional. The foundational structures identify important areas of consideration that form that basis for program design, implementation, administration, and growth. The structural standards outline essential program components: selection of roles and responsibilities of coaches who provide focused instructional assistance to teachers; preparation, development, and ongoing support for those coaches; and targeted, differentiated professional learning opportunities for teachers. The instructional standards examine the knowledge, capabilities, and

dispositions that are critical for coaches to support teacher development. A listing of the eight instructional coaching program standards developed by (The New Teacher Center, 2018) includes:

- Instructional coaching for optimal learning environments
- Instructional coaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Instructional coach roles and responsibilities, selection, assignment, and assessment
- Instructional coach professional learning, learning communities, and onboarding
- Instructionally focused formative assessments of teaching practice
- Program vision, goals, and institutional commitment
- Program leadership and communication
- School leader engagement (New Teacher Center, 2018, p. 2)

Characteristics of an Effective Coach

The vast majority of the literature on characteristics of effective coaching identified three categories of skills that an effective instructional coach must possess. According to Kowal and Steiner (2007) and White et al. (2015), pedagogical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and content-expertise are those three categories of characteristics. This section includes an explanation of each of the three categories.

Pedagogical knowledge. In an analysis of interview data of a small group of literacy coaches, Dole (2004) noted the coach's ability to develop and implement effective instructional strategies aides in the coach's development of teachers. Additionally, Dole (2004) identified the coaches' ability to understand classroom structures that best promote student learning essential to developing teachers. The ability

to identify resources and assist teachers in understanding them and implementing them is identified as a key coaching skill (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). White et al. (2015) completed a modified grounded theory, an approach for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Their work was based on a review of literature and on focus group data from both teachers and instructional coaches. It was reported that teachers found coaches' credibility in providing feedback that was directly related to the coaches' classroom experience. Analysis of the interviews (White et al, 2015) conducted with instructional coaches noted that their experience in the classroom was beneficial in not only their understanding of how to instruct students but also in how to work with teachers.

Interpersonal Skills. According to White et al. (2015), "coaches need to view their role in partnership with teachers and have strong interpersonal skills in order to develop positive relationships" (p. 8). Interpersonal skills specific to coach effectiveness are identified as the coach's ability to collaborate, the need to have the team recognized for their work instead of their own personal recognition, and the ability to establish trust with colleagues and administrators (Killion et al., 2012). The importance of the instructional coach possessing interpersonal skills is an important quality (Ertmer, Richardson, Cramer, & Joon, 2005; Knight, 2004, 2007). Further, strong interpersonal skills allow for instructional coaches to work with a diverse set of teacher personalities, especially those teachers who may resist coaching altogether (Stock & Duncan, 2010). Through surveying 107 teachers, Knight (2004) found that teachers reported feeling encouraged and inspired to improve their instruction when the instructional coach was able to cultivate strong relationships, communicate well, and establish credibility and

trust with teachers. In a similar study, Ertmer et al. (2005) reviewed interview data from 31 instructional coaches to examine their perceptions of the knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics needed to be successful. All 31 participants noted interpersonal skills as being essential to their work. Specifically, 24 of the participants emphasized the coaches' ability to build relationships, establish trust, and have respect for others as essential.

Content knowledge. The content knowledge of the instructional coach is directly related to their effectiveness. In their work Kowal and Steiner (2007) noted that content knowledge is most important for instructional coaches who work in a specific area. It is essential that all instructional coaches have a deep understanding of the content.

In 2015, White et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study which was embedded within a large-scale experimental study of instructional coaching for science teachers in rural school districts. The study included an in-depth analysis of the research coupled with focus group interviews of teachers and instructional coaches. The findings from White et al. (2015) aligned with the investigations conducted by Kowal and Steiner (2007). In the research conducted by White et al. (2015), instructional coaches agreed that content expertise was critical, especially when coaching a specific subject area. Further, the instructional coaches in the study noted they often conducted their own research of content to provide support to teachers on topics outside of their expertise (White et al., 2015).

The second set of standards released by NTC in 2019 are instructional coaching practice standards. These standards serve as a model of an effective coach and could be used to develop an evaluation tool to be used when evaluating the work of the coach.

The foundational structures highlight critical knowledge, skills, and professional goals necessary for instructional coaching. The structural standards outline partnerships that characterize and support quality coaching. The instructional standards provide a strategic focus on optimal and equitable classroom practice and student learning (New Teacher Center, 2018). A listing of the eight instructional coaching practice standards developed by (The New Teacher Center, 2018) includes:

- Engages teachers in instructionally focused inquiry cycles
- Builds teacher capacity to provide optimal learning environments
- Creates collaborative, respectful, instructionally focused partnerships
- Engages school leaders and instructional leadership team in partnerships to advance teaching and learning
- Develops as an instructional leader
- Deepens knowledge of rigorous content standards, social and emotional learning, and culturally responsive pedagogy (New Teacher Center, 2018, p. 2)

Summary

The pertinent literature specific to the study in the area of the instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness was reviewed in this chapter. The literature review provided a historical perspective of professional development, discussed theories of adult learning, and detailed the emergence of instructional coaching. An overview of effective coaching programs with a specific investigation of clearly defined coaching roles, the relationship between the building principal and the coach, and professional development for instruction coaches was provided. The chapter concluded with a synthesis of the characteristics of effective instructional coaches. Specifically, the

importance of the instructional coaches' pedagogical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and content knowledge were analyzed.

Chapter 3 provides the methodology, sampling procedures, and instrumentation. Other areas of focus in Chapter 3 are an account of data collection procedures, data analysis and synthesis. Further, provided in the chapter is an explanation of reliability, a detailed account of the researcher's role, and limitations to the study.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate instructional coaches' perceptions of their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. To address the purpose, interviews were conducted with 10 subjects. In addition to identifying instructional coaches' perceptions of how they improve teacher effectiveness, the study was conducted to determine if instructional coaches were provided with professional learning specific to their job responsibilities. Included in this chapter is a detailed explanation of the research design, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis and synthesis. Further included are the reliability and trustworthiness of the study, the researcher's role, and study limitations. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to complete this study. Specifically, the study utilized a phenomenological interviewing methodology (Creswell, 2009). Phenomenological research involves examining a small number of subjects through extensive engagement. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), qualitative research encourages the researcher to adapt and change directions as necessary to achieve in-depth and unanticipated insights. This study involved asking instructional coaches to share perceptions regarding their impact on teacher effectiveness. Of the two instructional coaches from each of the five districts, one was experienced having served as an instructional coach for five or more years, and the second instructional coach was a novice having served in their role for one or two school years.

Sampling Procedures

Nonrandom purposive sampling was utilized for this study. Purposive sampling “involves selecting a sample based on the researcher’s experience or knowledge of the group to be sampled” (Lunenberg & Irby, 2008, p. 175). Two instructional coaches from each of the five school districts in County X were sought out to participate in an interview. The following criteria were required for participation in this study: (a) the instructional coach provided professional development to teachers who taught one or more of the elementary school grade levels, K through 5, and (b) the instructional coach was a certified employee in one of the five school districts in County X during the 2019-2020 school year.

Instruments

In this section the instrumentation utilized for the current study is examined. Effective methods for conducting in-depth qualitative research using an interview must be structured around three types of linked questions: main interview questions, probes, and follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview script was designed by the researcher to address the research question. The following five main questions and nine follow-up questions were posed to each of the participants:

Question 1. How does instructional coaching improve teacher effectiveness?

Follow-up 1a. What are some examples of how you perceive you have improved teacher effectiveness?

Question 2. Please describe the skills an effective instructional coach utilizes.

Follow-up 2a. How do you utilize these skills in your work in improving teacher effectiveness?

Question 3. How do instructional coaches' experiences as an educator support their work as a coach?

Follow-up 3a. How has your past experience as an educator supported your work as a coach in improving teacher effectiveness?

Question 4. How important is professional learning for coaches?

Follow-up 4a. What type of professional learning should be offered to coaches?

Follow-up 4b. Has professional learning been offered to you?

Follow-up 4c. If professional learning has not been provided to the interviewee the researcher will ask, how do you improve your skills?

Follow-up 4d. If professional learning has been provided to the interviewee the researcher will ask, what type of professional learning have you participated in specifically for instructional coaching?

Follow-up 4e. Do you have a voice in what is provided?

Follow-up 4f. How has your professional learning as an instructional coach supported your work in improving teacher effectiveness?

Question 5. What other factors impact your ability as an instructional coach to improve teacher effectiveness?

The main questions and follow-up questions used in the interviews were directly related to the research question that guided the study. The interview questions were designed to allow the interviewee the ability to both be honest and conversational in their answers. Interview questions were developed so the study participants would be encouraged to share their experiences and provide additional details as needed.

Data Collection Procedures

A proposal to conduct the current study was submitted to Baker University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) on December 15, 2019. The IRB approval letter was sent to the researcher on December 18, 2019. A copy of the IRB approval letter is included in Appendix B. Upon approval from the IRB committee, the researcher conducted a practice interview. The interviewee was a building principal in a rural school district in south-central Kansas with no connection to study participants. After reviewing feedback from the mock interview, adjustments were made to the questions.

The researcher used his own professional learning network to identify instructional coaches in each of the five participating districts. An email was sent to prospective participants inviting them to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Once participation was solidified, each participant was sent via email a Participant Consent Form to acknowledge the participant agreed to be part of the study (see Appendix D). The consent form outlined the time commitment and purpose for the study. Furthermore, details were described about how the collection of data would be recorded and stored in a secure digital file and retained for a period of three years after the defense of the dissertation. Participants were told they could withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer any question at any point during the interview session. Participants acknowledged their understanding of the participant and researcher's role in the interview which indicated they understood all the procedures and consented to participate. Participants were also assured anonymity and confidentiality of their participation and

responses. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, interviews were scheduled, and participants were sent via email a script of the interview questions.

Seven of the interviews were conducted via Zoom. Two of the interviews were conducted in person. All interviews were recorded using the REV app on the researcher's iPhone. The participants were encouraged to select spaces that would be quiet, comfortable, and spaces where they would not be interrupted in during the interviews. The study included nine participants, one experienced instructional coach and, one novice instructional coach from each of the five districts in County X who employ instructional coaches. The interview took no longer than an hour.

Scripted questions (see Appendix A) were used to interview all 10 participants. The scripted protocol was prepared in a manner which allowed participants to expand on their answers and provide robust explanations. During each interview, all questions and follow-up questions were asked of each participant. Participants were also probed by the researcher to provide specific examples. Gaining an understanding of experiences through the participant's rich and complex descriptions is one of the central premises of phenomenological research (Finlay, 2009). A recording of each interview was utilized to ensure everything the participant shared was captured verbatim. The REV app was downloaded on the researcher's iPhone and used to transcribe each of the interviews. REV takes the audio recordings that creates computer-generated transcripts that are perfectly synchronized. Finally, member checking was completed. Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a technique for ensuring the credibility of results. During member checking, transcriptions are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). All of the participants returned their transcriptions with out any changes.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Qualitative methods include display matrices, coding processes, and text analysis (Roberts, 2004). This phenomenological qualitative study centered on the use of one question to guide the research: How do instructional coaches perceive their ability to improve teacher effectiveness? After each transcript was returned without any changes from the member check, responses were copied into a Microsoft Word document. The researcher created a table in the document and organized the responses by interview questions in the table. The table was then printed, and the researcher read through the responses and highlighted similarities and differences in responses. By identifying similarities and differences in the responses, the researcher was able to identify themes and concepts. Those themes and concepts were then summarized by the researcher. The identified themes and concepts were analyzed by the researcher for the purpose of identifying commonalities. By closely analyzing the themes and concepts, the researcher combined them into categories to identify key findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Reliability and Trustworthiness

The bedrock of qualitative research is the trustworthiness of the results. Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a technique for ensuring the credibility of results. During member checking, transcriptions are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). After each interview was transcribed, a copy of the transcript was emailed to the participant for review. Each participant was afforded the opportunity to provide additions or modifications they deemed necessary. All nine participants returned their transcript without changes needed.

Researcher's Role

The researcher is currently an elementary classroom teacher in the Midwest. The researcher's career in education spans 13 school years, including 8 years as an elementary teacher, 3 years as an instructional mathematics coach, and 2 years as an elementary principal. The goals for conducting this phenomenological qualitative study were professional. The researcher wanted to better understand how instructional coaches perceive their effectiveness in improving teacher quality with the goal that findings will benefit instructional coaches, teachers, and most importantly, students. The researcher's history and attitudes could affect his ability to be objective and potentially could influence the results. The researcher maintained an objective and professional manner throughout the interview. Likewise the researcher maintained an objective and professional manner during the analysis of the transcripts. Further, the researcher considered his bias and ensured all judgements or actions were as objective as possible.

Limitations

The limitations of a study are the "factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings or on the generalizability of the results" (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 133). Three limitations were beyond the control of the researcher. First, the variability of the quality of professional learning the participants received is difficult to generalize. Second, the role of the instructional coach varies by school district and can influence how participants interpret their role. Finally, the size of the school district that participants are employed in can impact the scope of participants' work and the professional learning that is provided to them.

Summary

This chapter revisited the purpose of the research study and offered a detailed explanation of the process used to address the research question. A purposive sample of one experienced instructional coach and one novice instructional coach from five counties in District X is explained. Conditions for inclusion were also discussed. Careful examination of the instrument was also presented. An in-depth explanation of the data collection procedures and methods of data analysis were discussed in the chapter. Chapter 4 presents the results of the qualitative data analysis.

Chapter 4

Results

The results of the current study are presented in this chapter. The purpose of this research was to study instructional coaches' perceptions of their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. This chapter begins with an overview of the characteristics of the ten participants, followed by the results of the qualitative data analysis. The descriptions of participants' responses as well as direct quotes are a result of the researcher's analysis of the interview transcripts.

The participants selected for this study met certain criteria as outlined in Chapter 3. Although initially two instructional coaches were to be interviewed from each of the five districts, in one district only one instructional met the requirements for participation. While selecting participants, the researcher found that District E employed two instructional coaches. Only one of the two instructional coaches served in an elementary school, therefore nine instructional coaches were interviewed instead of 10.

Characteristics of Participants

At the time of the study, Participant 1 was in her second year as an instructional coach in District A. Prior to acting as an instructional coach, she had taught third grade for six years in the same building in District A. As an instructional coach she served two elementary schools. At the time of the study, Participant 2 was an instructional coach in District A where she had been in an instructional coaching role for four years. Her career as a teacher had spanned 19 years in kindergarten, first grade, and third grade. All 19 years of her career had been in District A. Participants 3 and 4 both served as instructional coaches in one elementary school building in District B at the time of the

study. Participant 3 had taught special education for one year outside of District B and had taught special education and fifth grade in District B for 10 years. At the time of the study, she was in her first year as an instructional coach. Participant 4 had taught third, fourth, and fifth grades in District B. At the time of the study she was in her third year as an instructional coach in District B. Prior to teaching in District B, she had taught fourth grade and fifth grade outside of District B. At the time of the study, Participant 5 was in her first year as an instructional coach in District E. Her experience had included administrative, teaching, and instructional coaching experience in district outside of District E. At the time of the study, participant 6 had worked as an educator for 23 years, all of which were served in District C. She taught fifth grade for 9 years and had been an instructional coach for 14 years. Participant 7 had 13 years of classroom teaching experience in first grade and third grade. She was in her second year as an instructional coach at the time of the interview. All of her years of experience have been in District C. Participant 8 had been a special education teacher at the elementary and middle school levels. At the time of the study, he was in his third year as an instructional coach in District D. Participant 9 had taught at the elementary level. At the time of the study she was in her second year as an instructional coach in District D.

All interviews were conducted between January 13, 2020, and January 31, 2020. Interviews with Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9 were conducted via video conference. Interviews with Participants 7 and 8 were conducted in person. The next section of the chapter contains the discussion of the findings of the interviews.

Key Findings

Through inspection of the interviews, the researcher identified eight key findings. An in-depth interpretation of each of the findings is provided. Vignettes provided by the participants as well as paraphrased responses from the participants are included.

Finding 1. Instructional coaches improve teacher effectiveness by providing personalized professional learning. When asked how instructional coaching improves teacher effectiveness, participants responded with generalizations and with personal experiences. When participants answered the more general question about how instructional coaching improves teacher effectiveness, participants also answered the follow up question regarding how they improve teacher effectiveness. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9 discussed providing personalized professional learning and support to teachers. The response from Participant 5 did not align with how instructional coaches improve teacher effectiveness. Participant 1 shared that an instructional coach is essentially personalized professional learning for teachers. Participants 2 and 3 both mentioned helping teachers with whatever they needed so they could make a larger impact on student learning. Participant 4 shared, “Ideally the coach helps teachers gain clarity of their current reality on their practice.” Likewise, Participant 7 reported that instructional coaches provide on the job training to fill in gaps in instruction and enhance teachers’ skill level. Participant 9 stated, “I’ve noticed that the longer I do this job you become a huge thought partner with the teacher and really give them an opportunity to reflect.” In reference to helping and supporting teachers, Participant 3 shared the following:

Ideally, the coach helps teachers gain clarity of the reality of their classroom.

Once we have a clear picture of what's happening in the classroom, I can lead the teacher to understand their strengths and weaknesses. I'm the liaison to helping them get to that reality.

Participant 6 mentioned that she feels as though she is a support person to help teachers grow in the profession. When asked for specific examples of how she improves teacher effectiveness, Participant 6 had the following to say:

Prior to my consultations with teachers, I plan reflective questions to ask the teacher. My hope is that when I pose these questions, they are coming up with some ahas. From there I set goals with teachers and collect data. Sometimes it is numerical data. For instance, 15 out of 20 students appear to be engaged when given the direction. Other data might be anecdotal. I will take notes regarding what students are doing. Or I may track the number of minutes transitions take. I can then use that data to talk about how long transitions take and set goals to shorten them.

Participant 8 shared a similar example:

I recently had a teacher reach out to me and ask for some ideas with classroom management. I visited her classroom and collected some data identifying students who I thought were the biggest instigators. I went over that data with her after several observations and talked about my general input on what I saw that could be improved and then I provided three or four follow-up observations where I collected more data to see if the changes she implemented were helping.

Instructional coaches perceive that they improve teacher effectiveness by providing teachers with job-embedded professional learning.

Instructional coaches perceive that they do improve teacher effectiveness. This is accomplished by providing on-going support and job-embedded professional learning to teachers. The on-going support and job-embedded professional learning that instructional coaches provide takes on multiple forms. Instructional coaches provide teachers with resources, observe instruction, set goals with teachers, collect data, and provide teachers with feedback.

Finding 2. Effective listening and asking good questions are skills

instructional coaches use to improve teacher effectiveness. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 reported that being an effective listener has played a significant role in their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Participants placed a tremendous value on their ability to identify teacher needs by listening to teachers and not presenting themselves as having all the answers. Each of the nine participants mentioned how their ability to listen and ask effective questions allows them to understand and identify the needs of teachers. Participant 2 did not provide specific examples but did mention being a good listener is an important skill in her efforts to improve teacher effectiveness. Likewise, Participant 5 mentioned listening as well as the ability to sit back and observe as paramount skills to her ability to improve teacher effectiveness.

The reflection offered by Participant 6 encapsulated the views held by other participants in this study in how her ability to listen and ask effective questions improved teacher effectiveness. In the following passage Participant 6 described how these skills are utilized in her work:

If I simply tell a teacher how to change, they may buy into my idea a little. When I take the time to listen and ask good reflective questions, they are able to come up with the idea for themselves. It is more likely to stick, and they won't just implement the idea for a week or two. It is going to stick because they came to the realization.

As Participant 6 stated, taking the time to listen and ask good reflective questions allows for the teacher to come up with solutions. Taking time to listen and asking reflective questions was not uncommon to other participants as well. Participant 4 further echoed the importance of listening and asking good questions in order to improve teacher effectiveness:

Questioning and listening skills are very important when working with a teacher. I'm not going to simply tell them exactly what they need to change to achieve a goal. This could be difficult because when I observe a teacher teaching, I could tell them if you just did XYZ. It would help but it can't be my idea. I must help them come up with it on their own and I do that by listening and asking questions.

Participant 1 alluded to this same finding when asked to describe the skills an effective instructional coach utilizes to improve teacher effectiveness. She further connected to the response from Participant 4 when asked how she utilizes these skills in her work to improve teacher effectiveness.

By being a good listener and asking good questions, I am able to get to the root of a teacher's need. I have to listen to what they want to work on, so it is relevant to

them. If I just set the goals for them, they wouldn't care about them and probably wouldn't work on them.

When asked to describe the skills an effective instructional coach utilizes to improve teacher effectiveness, Participant 3 mentioned listening. When asked to expand on how she utilizes the skill of listening, she shared the following.

Listening is so important. That's where I find out what teachers need. The more I listen, the more I'm going to learn. I've learned that instead of just jumping in and sharing my opinion I have to just listen, sit back and listen.

Participant 7 echoed the previous passage shared by Participant 3 by stating, "Listening during my consult with teachers to understand their current reality is huge. A lot of my job is taking them from where they are to where they want to be." Participant 9 shared a similar experience when asked to describe the skills an effective instructional coach utilizes to improve teacher effectiveness and asked how she personally uses the skills to improve teacher effectiveness. She stated, "I always remind teachers that I am a safe place, and I've realized that they don't want my advice and don't want me to compare it to my experience; they just want me to listen." Participant 8 identified the skill of providing feedback and the ability to ask good questions as pertinent to his ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Participant 9 stated, "The most important skill that I can bring to a teacher is being open-minded."

Strong listening skills are essential skills that instructional coaches must utilize to improve teacher effectiveness. Likewise, the ability to ask reflective questions of teachers is equally vital. Instructional coaches' ability to listen and ask questions trumps their knowledge base of instructional practices.

Finding 3. Cultivating trusting relationships with teachers increases instructional coaches' effectiveness in improving teacher effectiveness. For participants of this study, developing trusting relationships with teachers was an essential skill utilized to improve teacher effectiveness. All participants alluded to the importance of developing trusting relationships with teachers. Participant 7 mentioned that her ability to listen allows her to foster trusting relationships with teachers. Participant 3 and Participant 5 alluded to utilizing the skill of listening to cultivating trusting relationships with teachers to improving teacher effectiveness. Participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9 provided specific examples of how trusting relationships with teachers increased teacher effectiveness. In reference to cultivating trusting relationships, Participant 1 shared the following vignette.

That's all I did my first year. I feel like my mindset in my second year is so different because in my first year all I did was focus on being trustworthy, doing what I said I would do, and showing that I was not there to judge. Now that relationships are established, this year I feel like I'm actually helping teachers grow whereas last year I didn't feel like I was really doing that because there's so much important work that needs to happen with relationships first.

Participant 2 noted a similar finding.

Instructional coaches must be friendly. The most important thing is being a relationship builder. It's as simple as asking people how they're doing, what's going on with her family, and building personal connections. I feel like when

teachers have a relationship with me, they're more likely to allow me into their world and let me help them.

When it comes to the skills an instructional coach must utilize to improve teacher effectiveness, Participant 4 stated, "First and foremost is the skill of building relationships, specifically a trusting relationship." When asked to elaborate on what that means, Participant 4 shared the following, "When you are wanting to go to someone and say 'I am really bad at this and I need help', you're not going to do that with someone you don't trust or have a relationship with. Participant 4 further shared that trust is essential to improving teacher effectiveness. She discussed that it is important for teachers to trust that she will not gossip about the things we that have been discussed. When probed further about how to develop a trusting relationship Participant 4 shared the following example.

I try to interact with teachers as much as I can, whether it's sitting and having lunch with them, giving positive feedback or just helping them. When I see something great that a teacher is doing, I will constantly praise them and share the great things they're doing with other people. It is like how a teacher develops a trusting relationship with students.

Participant 6 shared that at the beginning of the year she leaves teachers gifts or treats. She pops into classrooms and leaves specific, yet positive feedback. She noted she likes to make deposits before having to start talking about some of the tough stuff as the year progresses. Like Participant 6, Participant 8 shared that during the first few months of school he is constantly providing teachers with positive feedback; further he mentioned being approachable as a skill he uses to improve teacher effectiveness. Additionally, he

noted that once trust is in place, teachers are more likely to let their guard down. Participant 9 shared that taking a partnership approach with teachers coupled with empathizing with them allows for her to better understand the needs of teachers and form trusting relationships with them.

Without trusting relationships in place, instructional coaches will not improve teacher effectiveness. Ensuring that trusting relationships are in place is accomplished through multiple avenues. Instructional coaches must get to know teachers on both a professional and personal level. Further, coaches must be a positive presence in the building, be approachable, and be able to provide positive affirmations to teachers.

Finding 4. Having extensive teaching experience contributes to instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. When asked how instructional coaches' experiences as an educator supports their ability to improve teacher effectiveness, participants responded with generalizations and with personal experiences. To some extent, when they answered the more general question about instructional coaches' experiences supporting teacher effectiveness, they also answered a follow up question regarding how their past experiences support teacher effectiveness. All participants except Participant 5 reported that their past experiences as a teacher had a positive impact on their ability as an instructional coach to improve teacher effectiveness. The response provided by Participant 4 did not align with the question. Participant 5 shared that her previous experience as a teacher has provided her with a wealth of instructional strategies which she is able to utilize when working with teachers to improve teacher effectiveness. Participant 1 and Participant 8 both shared that their teaching experience allowed them to have a sense of empathy while working with

teachers as an instructional coach. Participant 2, in reference to her past teaching experience stated, “It is very important because that is how I earn the respect of teachers.” Participant 2 shared that having past teaching experience provided her with the ability to relate to teachers and provide an instant connection to teachers during her first year as an instructional coach. Participant 8 shared the following, “My experience definitely helped me have empathy for teachers and be able to understand where they are coming from.” Additionally, Participant 8 noted a recent situation in which he was asked by the building principal to work with teachers to write a common assessment. The teachers expressed some frustration and did not recognize the value in completing the task. Participant 8 noted he was able to use his teaching experience to empathize with the teachers which led them to complete the task with minimal frustration.

Participant 1 shared that her experience as a classroom teacher has brought her an amazing amount of empathy in her role as an instructional coach. In her response to how her prior experience as an educator supports her work in improving teacher effectiveness, she shared the following. “I get what it is like to juggle a billion things in your mind at one time. I understand that when I'm meeting with them. For instance, it may be the first time they have gotten to go to the bathroom all day.”

In reference to how her experience as a classroom teacher and an instructional coach supports her role in improving teacher effectiveness Participant 6 provided the following.

I think every experience that you have provides another tool in your toolbox, and you are constantly utilizing those tools so that when teachers are speaking about

things that are happening then you are able to reach into that toolbox and grab those things because of the experiences you've had.

Participant 7 provided a similar response to Participant 6:

When listening to teachers share situations they have with kids or parents, I can relate to them and help them navigate the situation if I have had a similar experience. I think teachers always value that I have teaching experience too, and it gives me a little bit of credibility.

Both Participant 3 and Participant 9 shared that their experience as a non-grade level teacher has impacted their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Participant 9 shared, “When I was a math interventionist, I had the opportunity to work with kindergarten through fifth grade which was extremely beneficial before I went into coaching because I had only taught grades 4 and 5.” Participant 3 echoed what Participant 9 shared by saying, “My experience as a special education teacher has really helped. I had only taught fifth grade, but as a sped teacher I was able to see more grade levels and work with K-5 students.” Participant 3 also noted that as a special education teacher she spent a lot of time analyzing data and interacting and working with adults.

Extensive teaching experience prior to becoming an instructional coach propels their work of improving teacher effectiveness. Instructional coaches who have held positions outside of only grade level teaching are able to apply those experiences to improve teacher effectiveness. Further, the teaching experiences that instructional coaches have had allows them to empathize with teachers and better relate to what the teachers they are working with are facing.

Finding 5. Instructional coaches need ongoing professional learning on best practices and instructional strategies. When asked if professional learning for coaches is important, all nine participants answered yes and responded with generalizations and personal experiences. When asked what type of professional learning should be offered to instructional coaches, Participants 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9 specifically noted that ongoing professional learning on effective teaching strategies and content is vital in their roles as instructional coaches. Participants 2, 3, and 5 all mentioned needing to stay up to date with best practices and instructional strategies; however, they did not place an emphasis on needing consistent professional development on best practices and instructional strategies.

Participant 1 shared that her knowledge of current research and best practices is helpful when working with teachers. She mentioned that staying current by reading about best practices is not something teachers have a lot of time for. However, through her reading of best practices and instructional strategies, she has helped teachers stay current. Participants 2 and 5 echoed Participant 1's response. Participant 2 mentioned that through her learning of best practices and instructional strategies, she is able to assist teachers in implanting them. Participant 5 mentioned being an avid reader of educational research on best practices and instructional strategies. She shared that her own reading assists her in improving teacher effectiveness. Participant 3 reported that in her building teachers are working on implementing new strategies for writing instruction. She shared that by attending the conference along with teachers, she was not only able to expand her knowledge of the writing process but glean information regarding the needs of the teachers she attended the conference with.

Participant 7 shared that “basic knowledge of the content areas that you are coaching is important. You don't want to just be completely blind in what instruction should look like in a particular grade level.” Participant 9 provided a similar sentiment when she shared that “More professional learning on some of the basic foundational effective teaching strategies would be helpful.” Participant 6 discussed the importance of being provided professional learning on district initiatives. She also shared that professional learning for instructional coaches to learn strategies and content they may have not been exposed to as a classroom teacher is important. Similarly, Participant 4 discussed the importance of being well-versed in effective instructional strategies and content and stated that conferences focused on reading, math, science, and social studies instruction are important. In his first year as an instructional coach, Participant 8 felt that he had a learning gap with mathematical content. When teachers would ask him questions pertaining to mathematics, he had difficulty answering them and supporting them. After attending a conference on mathematical practices, Participant 8 reported that he felt much more prepared to assist teachers with mathematics instruction.

Staying current in the field is vital to the success of an instructional coach. This is achieved when instructional coaches are provided extensive professional learning on the topics of content and instructional strategies. Staying current in the field can be accomplished via attending conferences, professional learning offered by district leaders, and professional reading.

Finding 6. Instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness improves when instructional coaches are provided opportunities to connect with and learn from other instructional coaches. When asked how professional learning as an

instructional coach has supported their work in improving teacher effectiveness, all participants identified that connecting with and learning from instructional coaches improves their effectiveness. Participant 1 shared that some of the best professional learning she had been a part of as an instructional coach was learning from other instructional coaches in her district and elsewhere. Participant 2 shared that in her district the instructional coaches get together every Friday specifically for professional learning for instructional coaches. Further, she mentioned that district leaders in charge of providing professional learning to instructional coaches provide a voice to instructional coaches when planning their professional learning.

Participant 6 discussed the value of collaborating and learning from other instructional coaches when she shared the following:

When I am in a new situation with a teacher and unsure of how to proceed, I reach out to my fellow instructional coaches for help. Through conversations with them, I can better navigate my work with teachers.

The theme of learning from and getting ideas from other coaches was also apparent when Participant 5 expressed the following:

Being surrounded by other instructional coaches and being able to learn from them is so incredibly helpful. Recently I was asked to provide professional learning on math talks. I reached out to other instructional coaches who have had experience presenting on the topic, which was helpful for me.

Both Participant 3 and Participant 4 mentioned that at the time of the study, they have not been provided time by their district to collaborate and learn from other instructional coaches. However, they both mentioned that having designated time to learn from other

instructional coaches is something that is in the process of being implemented. Further, they both agreed that having time to collaborate with and learn from other instructional coaches would increase their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Participant 7 agreed that having time to connect with and learn from other instructional coaches improves her ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Moreover, she mentioned that being afforded the opportunity to attend instructional coaching conferences has had a greater impact on her ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Like Participant 7, Participant 8 is offered time to connect with and learn from other instructional coaches in his district. While he appreciates the opportunity, he reported that it is not as beneficial as attending conferences to learn new instructional strategies and content specific conferences.

To improve teacher effectiveness instructional coaches must be provided opportunities to learn and collaborate with one another. This can be accomplished in several ways. District leaders can organize opportunities for instructional coaches to meet. Likewise, instructional coaches can engage in on-line platforms to connect with and share experiences with other instructional coaches. Further, instructional coaches can be provided mentors and hands-on learning from other instructional coaches.

Finding 7. Providing instructional coaches professional learning on the topic of instructional coaching enhances their ability to improve teacher effectiveness.

When asked what type of professional learning they had participated in specifically for instructional coaching, all nine participants shared that they have had the opportunity to attend professional development on instructional coaching from experts in the field, such as Jim Knight and Diane Sweeney. Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 reported that they

have attended conferences held by Sweeny. Participant 2 and Participant 3 shared that they have attended conferences held by both Jim Knight, and Diane Sweeny. Participant 4 had the opportunity to attend a Jim Knight Conference. All nine participants reported that attending these conferences to learn about instructional coaching practices has played an integral role in their ability to improve teacher effectiveness.

Participant 1, who attended a Jim Knight conference towards the conclusion of her first year as an instructional coach, shared that the conference gave her clarity of her role. Further, she shared that she wished she had been able to attend the conference at the start of her first year as an instructional coach. Participant 3 attended a Jim Knight conference at the beginning of her first year as an instructional coach. She reported that the experience was “amazing” and provided her strategies to utilize when working with teachers to improve their effectiveness. Participant 4 shared that after attending a Jim Knight conference, she was better equipped to ask effective questions of teachers, assist them in setting goals, and improve their instruction. Participant 8 shared the following example regarding her learning from attending a conference hosted by Diane Sweeney on the topic of student-centered coaching:

My district is focused more on Diane Sweeney's model of student-centered coaching. We attended a full day conference of hers. After the conference I began designing coaching cycles with teachers. I feel like my learning from her conference made me more focused and I feel like I've been more effective when working with teachers because of it.

After attending a conference held by Diane Sweeney on student-centered coaching, Participant 6 implemented a new data collection tool she learned about at the

conference. She mentioned that she feels this tool has improved her ability to impact teacher effectiveness. Participant 5 also found value in attending a Diane Sweeny conference. She mentioned it helped her understand the research behind adult learning and coaching teachers. Further, she shared that after attending the Diane Sweeny conference she felt like she had a structure with which to coach teachers. Participant 9 reported that after attending a Diane Sweeny conference, she had a better understanding of the coaching cycle process and has been able to utilize it to improve the professional learning she provides to teachers. Participant 7 shared that her knowledge of coaching cycles which she learned from attending a Diane Sweeny conference has improved her ability to improve teacher effectiveness. She shared that through coaching cycles she is equipped to set goals with the teachers and identify growth at the conclusion of a coaching cycle. Participant 2 reported that attending workshops held by Jim Knight and Diane Sweeny was beneficial. She did not elaborate any more on her response.

Instructional coaches must be trained in instructional coaching best practices. Providing this training focuses their work with teachers and improves their effectiveness. Instructional coaches attain new skills from attending instructional coach workshops and conferences. Further, they garner new skills and tools when offered opportunities to learn from one another.

Finding 8. Building principals are a factor that impact instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. When asked about their ability as an instructional coach to improve teacher effectiveness, all nine participants mentioned the building principal. Participant 5 shared the following regarding the impact of building principals on her ability to improve teacher effectiveness:

The principal sets the tone for the building. It is so interesting to me. I serve seven different buildings and almost instantly from the time you walk in the office you can feel a difference of the culture and you can see the effect of the building leader. In the building I feel most effective in, at the beginning of the year the principal introduced me to the staff and said whatever you tell her stays with her. She is a safe place. She is a place to go to when you feel like you really need some help. You don't have to be perfect around her and whatever you say to her, she is not going to come back and tell me. When I was introduced to another building, the principal told his staff that the district was making him have me in the building. This is the school that I feel least effective.

Participant 8 mentioned the administrator's understanding of the role of the coach as a factor in his effectiveness. He noted that when administrators ask instructional coaches to perform administrative duties or deal with discipline, the effectiveness of the instructional coach decreases. Similarly, Participant 3 mentioned that being asked by the building principal to serve as a substitute teacher in classrooms takes away from the time she could be spending working with teachers. However, she did share that subbing allows her to get a sense of classroom cultures and provides her time with kids.

Participant 1 shared, "Principal partnership is hugely important." She added that partnering with building leaders and the building leadership team has assisted her in building connections throughout the building.

Participant 2 shared that meeting regularly with the building principal is vital in her work to improve teacher effectiveness.

I think the principal plays a huge factor in the effectiveness of the instructional coach. I have a weekly meeting with my principal. We meet for about an hour and a half to two hours every week. He knows what I'm doing, and I know what he's doing. Without that weekly meeting I would not be as effective as I am.

Participant 4 described the importance of a trusting relationship with the principal as a factor in her ability to improve teacher effectiveness.

I think the relationship with the principal is huge. They must be able to trust you. Then you have the confidentiality piece with the teachers to where I won't go to her and tell them what I'm working on and tell them the discussions that we've had. She has to be able to trust me to be able to get in those classrooms and work with teachers and not expect me to go to her with everything. Then there is the trust aspect. We have to be able to collaborate and communicate about teachers. I must know her expectations, but then I have to relay those expectations to teachers. I have to really understand what the principals' expectations are and be able to effectively tell the teachers what they are without overstepping my bounds.

In a discussion regarding factors that impact an instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness, Participant 9 brought up collaboration with the building principal. She noted that the collaboration with the building principal is a key factor in her ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Specifically, she mentioned discussing goals with her principal and having open and honest conversations about data. Participant 7 shared that the way the principal views the instructional coach and their relationship impacts how the teachers view the instructional coach. In turn, this impacts the work that

the instructional coach can engage in with teachers. Participant 6 mentioned that by observing the principal, she can gain clarity on what is important to them.

The relationship between the building principal and the instructional coach is not one to not be taken lightly. The success of the instructional coach is determined in large part by this relationship. Principals set the stage for the instructional coach to engage in their work to improve teacher effectiveness. Collaboration with principals and effective two-way communication between the instructional coach and building principal is imperative for instructional coaches to improve teacher effectiveness.

Summary

Findings of this study indicate that instructional coaches perceive they increase teacher effectiveness. To achieve this, instructional coaches provide teachers with ongoing job-embedded professional learning. Effective instructional coaches perceive they are good listeners and skilled at asking reflective questions. Cultivating trusting relationships with teachers is paramount in improving teacher effectiveness. Extensive experience in the field prior to becoming an instructional coach is a clear qualification for instructional coaches. Further, instructional coaches must be provided professional learning opportunities to connect and learn from other instructional coaches. This opportunity coupled with professional learning in content, effective instructional strategies, and instructional coaching is vital to their success. Lastly, building principals play a significant factor in either propelling or diminishing the effectiveness of instructional coaches. In Chapter 5 a study summary, the findings related to literature, and conclusions are outlined.

Chapter 5

Interpretation and Recommendations

This qualitative study was conducted to examine instructional coaches' perceptions of their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Chapter 5 is presented in multiple sections. The first section is a summary of the study that includes these four subsections: an overview of the problem, purpose statement and research question, methodology, and major findings. The chapter is concluded with findings related to the literature followed by concluding remarks.

Study Summary

This section presents an overview of the current study on the perceptions of instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Also, the purpose statement and research question describe why the study was conducted. Nine participants from five districts in County X were interviewed for this study. The review of methodology includes the description of the sample, interview protocol, data collection, and data analysis. Major findings provide a summary of the results of the analysis of the transcripts.

Overview of the problem. Hattie (2012) defined teacher effectiveness as the teacher's ability to identify the most important ways in which to represent the subject they teach, the ability to create an optimal classroom climate for teaching, the ability to monitor learning and provide feedback, the belief that all students can reach success, and the ability to influence surface and deep student outcomes. According to the Vermont Agency of Education (2015), to improve teacher effectiveness school districts are investing time and money in instructional coaching. With these investments comes a

responsibility to create instructional coaching programs that have the greatest potential for improving teacher effectiveness (Vermont Agency of Education, 2015). Instructional coaching requires learning on the job; thus, school districts must give ample consideration to the instructional coaches' learning and organizational supports that promote learning (Gallucci et al., 2010). Further, research describing best practices for ongoing professional development for instructional coaches is limited (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). Specifically, additional research is needed to identify support systems that increase instructional coaching effectiveness, best practices for instructional coaches, and analysis of factors that impact instructional coaching effectiveness, such as the building principal (Knight, 2009).

Purpose statement and research question. The purpose of this research was to study instructional coaches' perceptions of their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Specifically, the current study sought to analyze the pertinent skills effective instructional coaches utilize and how instructional coaches' experiences govern their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Further, the study was designed to understand the professional learning needs of instructional coaches and how their professional learning impacts their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. The study was also designed to identify factors which impact instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. The following research question guided the study: How do instructional coaches perceive their ability to improve teacher effectiveness?

Review of the methodology. The researcher used a phenomenological qualitative approach to examine the perceptions of instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. The qualitative research approach provided an opportunity to explore the

perceptions of instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Interviews were conducted either via Zoom or in person. Interview questions were designed to gather participants' perceptions in their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. After the interviews had been conducted they were transcribed through the REV app and organized to identify the themes that emerged from the interviews.

Major findings. There were eight major findings as the interview transcripts were analyzed. All were related to the research question. Noted in the first major finding was that instructional coaches perceived that they improve teacher effectiveness by providing personalized professional development. The results of the interview analysis indicated that all participants believed their primary mode of improving teacher effectiveness was by providing personalized professional learning and support to teachers. The story that Participant 8 shared regarding the teacher with tools to collect data to review, illustrates how instructional coaches improve teacher effectiveness.

The second major finding of the study was related to the skills instructional coaches utilize to improve teacher effectiveness. All participants of this study shared that their ability to listen and pose reflective questions to teachers impacted their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Participant 6's reflection of simply telling a teacher how to change may result in short term gains, but her ability to listen and ask reflective questions allowed the teacher to come up with ideas on how to change illustrated the importance of this finding. Further, the anecdote shared by Participant 1 regarding being a good listener and getting to the root of the needs of teachers and making the work relevant to them is an additional example of how instructional coaches used the skill of listening and asking reflective questions to improve teacher effectiveness.

How cultivating trusting relationships with teachers increased the instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness was noted in finding 3. Participant 1 shared that during her first year of teaching, she primarily spent her time developing trust and positive relationships with teachers. At the time of the study, Participant 1, in her second year as an instructional coach, felt like she is impacting the growth of teachers at a higher rate than during her first year as an instructional coach. This is a perfect example of how trusting relationships increase instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. All nine participants shared the importance of cultivating trusting relationships with teachers.

Discussed in finding 4 was the contribution of extensive teaching experience on the instructional coach's ability to improve teacher effectiveness. All nine participants shared that teaching experience is vital to their effectiveness and has had a positive impact on their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Empathy was a theme that emerged as a result of extensive teaching experience prior to becoming an instructional coach. Participants also noted that their ability to relate to teachers is in direct correlation to having been a classroom teacher prior to being an instructional coach. Participants 3, 5, and 9 all had experience as both a classroom teacher and other roles in education outside of the general classroom. Their stories shed further light on how experience in education beyond the general education classroom improved their abilities to increase teacher effectiveness.

Finding 5 related to the need for instructional coaches being provided professional learning on best practices and instructional strategies. All nine participants shared that professional learning for instructional coaches is essential while five participants

discussed the importance of professional learning related to best practices and instructional strategies. Participant 7 discussed the importance of not walking into a classroom blind in terms of what instruction should look like. She shared that a basic understanding of the content that the teachers she was working with were teaching was important.

Discussed in finding 6 was the need for instructional coaches to be provided opportunities to connect with and learn from other instructional coaches. All nine participants shared that connecting with and learning from other instructional coaches enhanced their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Further, all nine participants shared that in their district there was time allotted for instructional coaches to collaborate and learn from one another. Participant 2 shared that her district was diligent in seeking out the learning needs of instructional coaches.

Highlighted in finding 7 was that providing instructional coaches professional learning on the topic of instructional coaching enhances their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. All nine participants indicated that they had the opportunity to participate in professional learning specifically for instructional coaching and that it had a positive impact in their efforts to improve teacher effectiveness. Participant 2 noted that professional learning on instructional coaching focused on the scope of her work and made her more effective. Participant 9 echoed this sentiment by sharing his experience during and after attending an instructional coaching conference.

Finding 8 related to the building principal. An analysis of the interviews revealed that building principals impact instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. The story of Participant 5 encapsulated this finding. She shared how she

was introduced in two buildings at the beginning of the year. In the first building the principal's attitude toward the staff regarding her was enthusiastic, while in the second building the principal did not exhibit the same enthusiasm. Further, she shared that she has had much greater success in the first building than the second building. Participant 2, who expressed much success in her role, mentioned that the principal played a huge factor in her effectiveness. She also mentioned the importance of trust between the coach and the principal. This sentiment was also echoed by several other participants.

Findings Related to the Literature

In this section, the results of the research were compared to previous research. The literature that was pertinent to the current study was presented in Chapter 2. One research question was used for this study.

Upon analysis of survey data of 107 teachers, Knight (2004) identified the instructional coaches' ability to cultivate strong relationships, communicate well, and establish credibility and trust with teachers had a significant impact on teachers feeling encouraged and inspired to improve their instruction. Similarly, Ertmer et al. (2005) analyzed interview data from 31 instructional coaches and identified interpersonal skills as being essential to the effectiveness of the instructional coach. Of the 31 instructional coaches interviewed by Ertmer et al. (2005), 24 of them emphasized that the ability to form relationships and establish trust was vital to their work with teachers. The theme of trusting relationships aligns with the findings from the current study. All participants in the current study stressed the importance of developing trusting relationships with teachers. In the current study, seven participants shared stories of how the time spent

developing trusting relationships with teachers had a positive impact on their ability to improve teacher effectiveness.

According to Kowal & Stiener (2007) the content knowledge of the instructional coach is directly related to their effectiveness. Further, they note that it is most important for instructional coaches who work in a specific content area. In a qualitative study White et al. (2015) found that instructional coaches agreed that their content expertise was critical to their success. Further, White et al. (2015) noted that instructional coaches often conducted their own research and learning of content outside of their expertise. The current study found that content knowledge was imperative to the instructional coach's ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Further, the current study revealed the importance of ongoing professional learning of content and instructional strategies. Five of the participants in the current study noted that their knowledge of content and instructional strategies enhanced their ability to improve teacher effectiveness.

The current study revealed that instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness increased when instructional coaches were provided opportunities to connect with and learn from other instructional coaches. All nine participants in the current study reported that connecting with and learning from other instructional coaches improves their effectiveness. This finding connects to the research regarding the need for instructional coaches to have mentors. Stock & Duncan (2010) completed a study which included 358 instructional coaches in the state of Wyoming. They found that while 56% of instructional coaches reported not having a mentor, 90% of their respondents reported that mentoring was important for beginning instructional coaches. Stock & Duncan (2010) reported that 58% of participants felt that mentoring was important not only for

beginning instructional coaches, but also for experienced instructional coaches. Further, Stock & Duncan (2010) reported that a barrier for mentoring was a lack of time. The participants in the current study shared that their districts build in time for them to learn from and collaborate with other instructional coaches.

Noted by Wren & Vallejo (2009), the partnership between the instructional coach and building principal is crucial to the success of the instructional coach. After working with instructional coaches and building principals in more than 40 countries, Foltes (2015) identified that the principal and instructional coach's ability to work together and establish strong communication is paramount to the success of the instructional coach. This research is aligned with findings from the current study. Findings from the current study report that building principals are a factor that impacts instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Out of nine participants, seven of them mentioned the building principal when asked to share what factors impact their ability as an instructional coach to improve teacher effectiveness.

Conclusions

The qualitative study was designed and conducted to examine the perceptions and experiences of instructional coaches and their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. This section begins with implications for action and recommendations for future research. It is then followed by concluding remarks.

Implications for action. The findings of this study provided evidence regarding instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness. In analysis of the eight major findings from this study, the researcher recommends the following five implications for action.

Finding 2 pointed to the importance of instructional coaches being effective listeners and savvy at asking reflective questions to teachers. All participants reported that being an effective listener and skilled at asking reflective questions played a significant role in their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. This finding leads the researcher to recommend that district personnel provide professional learning on the topics of effective listening and asking reflective questions to instructional coaches, especially those new to the position.

Cultivating trusting relationships with teachers is a key finding from the current research. All of the current study's participants identified developing trusting relationships with teachers as an essential skill needed to improve teacher effectiveness. This finding has led the researcher to recommend that district personnel in charge of hiring instructional coaches place a significant emphasis on a candidate's ability to cultivate such relationships with adults. Additionally, the researcher recommends that the supervisors of instructional coaches pay close attention to this skill when evaluating instructional coaches' effectiveness.

Extensive teaching experience must be a prerequisite for those seeking instructional coaching experience. Analysis of the current study's interview transcripts highlighted that all nine participants indicated extensive teaching experience as having a sizable impact on their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Given this finding the researcher recommends that school district personnel tasked with hiring instructional coaches ensure that potential candidates have extensive and diverse teaching experience. Further, candidates that have classroom teaching experience, coupled with experience in

roles outside of the general education classroom, must be highly considered for instructional coaching roles.

Upon in-depth analysis of the interview transcripts, instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness increases substantially when provided with opportunities to connect with and learn from other instructional coaches in the field. Given this finding the researcher proposes that when developing instructional coaching programs, district leaders ensure substantial time is provided to instructional coaches to collaborate. It is equally recommended that district leaders identify the learning needs of instructional coaches when developing professional learning opportunities for them.

Within the current study all nine participants noted that professional learning on the topic of instructional coaching propels their ability to improve teacher effectiveness. Multiple participants stated that professional learning opportunities such as this provided a focus for their work with teachers. It is recommended by the researcher that as part of the district's onboarding process, they provide new instructional coaches with professional learning opportunities related to instructional coaching best practices. Further, on-going professional learning for coaches must be provided to continue to hone their skills.

Study findings indicated the building principal is a key factor in the ability of the instructional coach to improve teacher effectiveness. In the current study seven out of nine participants indicated the building principal has a significant impact on their work. Given this finding it is recommended by the researcher that training be provided to building principals regarding the role of the instructional coach. It is imperative that

district personnel hold building principals accountable for utilizing instructional coaches for the purposes of improving teacher effectiveness.

Recommendations for future research. The following recommendations represent areas which are warranted through additional research. Researchers could build upon the results of the current study to determine whether the experiences of these instructional coaches are the same for educators in other regions across the country. Since the sample size was small and only included one county in the Midwest, it would be beneficial to increase the sample size by interviewing instructional coaches across the Midwest to determine if the same findings would take place.

A mixed methods study could be conducted by adding a pre-interview survey to secure quantitative data. Question in the survey would ask similar questions as the interview. The data could be analyzed and compared to the qualitative data to determine if results are similar. The quantitative data could also provide information for further questions in the interview process of the study.

One of the themes that emerged from this study was the role the building principal plays in the effectiveness of the instructional coach. A study could be conducted on how building principals view the role of the instructional coach. Conducting such research could provide information on how to support building principals as they work with instructional coaches to improve teacher effectiveness.

Concluding remarks. Students achieve success because of excellent instruction provided by teachers (Hattie, 2009). When teachers are provided opportunities to learn effectively, student achievement soars (Hattie, 2009). Across the country instructional coaches are tasked with the enormous role of providing job-embedded professional

learning for teachers with the intent to improve teacher effectiveness. Districts must ensure that instructional coaches' purpose is to provide personalized professional learning to teachers. Further, district leaders must ensure that instructional coaches have extensive teaching experience, are well versed at asking questions and listening, and have the interpersonal skills needed to cultivate trusting relationships with teachers. Equally important, instructional coaches must be provided opportunities to stay current on instructional coaching and instructional best practices, instructional strategies, and given opportunities to collaborate. Finally, district leaders must pay close attention to factors that impact the instructional coaches' ability to improve teacher effectiveness with an emphasis on the principal's interactions with the instructional coach.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Script

Interview Script

Question 1. How does instructional coaching support teacher effectiveness?

Follow-up 1.a. What are some examples of how you have improved teacher effectiveness?

Question 2: Please describe the skills an effective instructional coach utilizes.

Follow-up 2.a. How do you utilize these skills in your work in improving teacher effectiveness?

Question 3: How do instructional coaches' experiences as an educator support their work as a coach?

Follow-up 3.a. How as your past experience as an educator supported your work as a coach in improving teacher effectiveness?

Question 4: Do you think professional learning for coaches is important?

Follow-up 4.a. What type of professional learning should be offered to coaches?

Follow-up 4.b. Has professional learning been offered to you?

Follow-up 4.c. If professional learning has not been provided to the interviewee the researcher will ask, how do you improve your skills?

Follow-up 4.d. If professional learning has been provided to the interviewee the researcher will ask, what type of professional learning have you participated in specifically for instructional coaching?

Follow-up 4.e. Do you have a voice in what is provided?

Follow-up 4.f. How has your professional learning as an instructional coach supported your work in improving teacher effectiveness?

Question 5: What other factors impact your ability as an instructional coach to improve teacher effectiveness?

Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter



Baker University Institutional Review Board

December 18th, 2019

Dear John Schulte and Verneda Edwards,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

- Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
1. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
 2. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
 3. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
 4. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.
 5. If this project is not completed within a year, you must renew IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

Nathan Poell, MLS
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee
Scott Crenshaw
Sara Crump, PhD
Jamin Perry, PhD
Susan Rogers, PhD

Appendix C: Study Invitation Email

To Whom it May Concern:

As an instructional coach, you play a vital role in improving teacher effectiveness. In an effort to identify how instructional coaches perceive their role in improving teacher effectiveness you have been invited to partake in a qualitative research study through Baker University. Interviews will include 5 questions and follow-up questions centered around how you perceive instructional coaches improve teacher effectiveness. Interviews will last approximately 30 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom or in person during the week in January 2020. If you would like to partake in this research study please respond by January 10, 2020.

Sincerely,

John S. Schulte

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

I, _____ give my consent to participate in the study and will answer questions in a truthful, non-biased manner. Further, I understand the following.

- My name and place of employment will not be linked to my responses or the study.
- I can leave or cancel the interview at any point.
- I will have the opportunity to review responses prior to them being included in the study.

Signature of Participant

Date