

LEARNING WITHIN THE CLASSROOM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
INSTRUCTIONAL LITERACY COACHES

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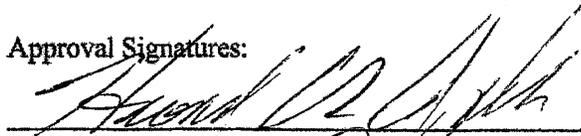
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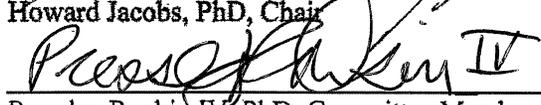
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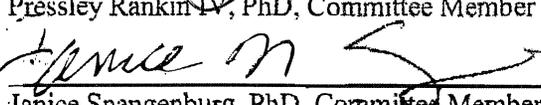
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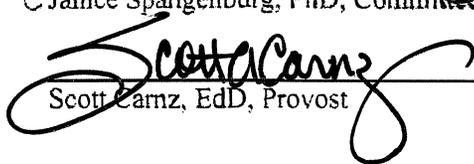
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ABSTRACT

Increasing student achievement is a primary focus for teachers and administrators in school systems and federal agencies. Many mandates require these organizations to implement professional development sessions with teachers. This is often done through a single workshop with little to no follow up, which has proven to have minimal results in changing teachers' instructional practices. One professional development model that is gaining interest is instructional coaching. However, additional information is needed to understand the relational nuances that occur between coaches and teachers. The purpose of this study was to identify the activities and actions in a coach-teacher partnership found in the instructional coaching model. In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher explored the instructional coaches' perceptions of the activities and actions that are important when building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships and understanding which activities and actions impacted changes to teachers' literacy practices. The participants in this study were purposefully selected and consisted of reading specialists/coaches who had at least 3 years of experience in elementary schools. The data collected from the individual interviews were transcribed and coded, which led to themes revealing the activities and actions within a coach-teacher partnership and the essence of supporting teachers' learning. Identifying the activities and actions that support coach-teacher partnerships and facilitate shifts in teachers' instructional practices may help school systems implement instructional coaching as one method of supporting teachers' professional learning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
Study Background and Foundation.....	4
Historical Background.....	9
Deficiencies in the Evidence	10
Problem Statement.....	11
Audience.....	13
Specific Leadership Problem.....	14
Purpose of the Study.....	17
Methodology Overview	18
Research Questions.....	20
Study Limitations.....	21
Study Delimitations	22
Definitions of Key Terms	22
Significance of the Study	23
Summary.....	24
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	26
Evolution of Professional Development.....	27
Instructional Coaching and Andragogy	33

Coaching Variations and Models.....	37
Coaching and Relationships.....	42
Coach as Instructional Leader.....	48
Transformational Leadership.....	52
Summary.....	56
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	59
Research Method	60
Research Design.....	62
Data Collection Procedures	65
Instruments.....	67
Researcher as Instrument.....	68
Epoche and Bracketing.....	69
Participants.....	70
Data Analysis Methods	72
Limitations	73
Study Delimitations	74
Summary.....	75
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	77
Presentation of Findings	78
Experiential Learning.....	82
Mindset.....	83
Reflection	85
Collaboration.....	86

Inspiration.....	90
Leadership	93
Responsibility	95
Courage	98
Summary	101
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION.....	102
Discussion of Findings and Conclusions	103
Research Question 1	104
Experiential Learning: Teacher Choice.....	104
Collaboration: Listening.....	105
Inspiration: Celebrating Teacher Successes	107
Responsibility: Modeling Lessons	108
Research Question 2	109
Experiential Learning: Reflective Practices	109
Collaboration: Studying Student Work.....	110
Inspiration: Leadership.....	111
Responsibility: Sustainable Learning.....	112
Research Question 3	113
Experiential Learning: Theory	113
Collaboration: Peer Influence.....	114
Inspiration: Student Learning.....	116
Responsibility: Student Achievement	117
Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement	118

Application to Leadership.....	119
Recommendations for Action	123
Recommendations for Further Research.....	125
Concluding Statement.....	127
References.....	129
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	143
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT	146
APPENDIX C: INVITATION FOR STUDY PARTICIPATION	147
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM	149

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 4.1 Participant Demographics.....	79
Table 4.2 Meaning Statement Samples and Conceptual Categories.....	81
Table 4.3 Themes and Conceptual Categories.....	83

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Classroom environments look different than they did years ago. Leaders in the federal government, state education agencies, and local school districts seek ways to enhance schools due to changes that include rigorous standards and advanced technology. According to a recent report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Bandeira de Mello, Rahman, and Park (2018) documented the results of a recent mapping study illustrating that many states have introduced more rigorous standards in schools. These standards align more closely with the standardized assessments given to students. Administrators at the state and local levels have adopted these changes in hopes of preparing all students for college and careers and to reduce the current achievement gap that affects many students.

Despite the efforts made by the people in these agencies to enhance education through the adoption of new curricula or school reform initiatives, student achievement data continue to exhibit challenges within the educational process. The 2017 NAEP report illustrated that only 35% of the students assessed across the United States are at or above basic proficiency in reading (Bandeira de Mello et al., 2018). These results show implementing rigorous standards in school curriculum does not result in increasing student achievement. Therefore, additional changes may need to occur to ensure student success.

Facing challenges to increase student achievement, educational leaders often feel more successful at making changes when placing the focus on the things that occur

within the four walls of the classroom. Slegers, Thoonen, Oort, and Peetsma (2014) found in their research on organizational-level conditions that shift teachers' practices, it is both the organizational and teacher-level conditions that have the greatest impact on stimulating instructional changes. However, school leaders and policymakers continue to attempt comprehensive school reform models to make these changes within the classroom. Attempting school reform models is especially true in today's age of federal reforms, high-stakes testing, and accountability (Slegers et al., 2014).

In the foreword of a report evaluating teachers' professional development across the globe, Governor J. B. Hunt, Jr. (2009), the founder of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, suggested that mandates or school reforms often require teachers to attend professional development that may or may not relate to their day-to-day teaching and often do not consider teachers' existing levels of knowledge. Similarly, Czajka and McConnell (2016), in a case study on situated instructional coaching, found the least effective method of professional development occurs when the goal is to inform and expect immediate adoption. Likewise, this time spent in training does not always result in the intended gains, as illustrated in Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos' (2009) report on elements of effective teacher professional development. These elements include opportunities for teachers to have extended periods of time for learning, actively engaging with the new content, and collaborating with peers, which is in stark contrast to "sit-and-get" professional development.

Researchers have remained interested in studying the elements of effective professional development for teachers, as illustrated in a recent report by Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017). After assessing 35 studies to define and study professional development, the authors suggested innovative professional development models can help teachers advance their pedagogical skills to include sophisticated skills. They reported that these skills can address the use of technology and newer content areas, such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), which require critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Providing teachers with opportunities to acquire these skills is possibly the difference needed to effectively teach and improve outcomes for 21st century learners.

One popular innovative model of professional development integrates instructional coaches within schools to support teachers and improve student achievement. In an essay about coaching and its potential for transforming education, Woulfin and Rigby (2017) defined coaches as the content and instructional experts who can bring about instructional reform through supportive coaching roles. Through a true coaching model, teachers and coaches partner to harness their strengths and develop their talents by examining and learning research-based instructional strategies. These partnerships may help cultivate instructional shifts that occur within classrooms and schools. Integrating instructional coaches within the classroom may be one way to change the trajectory of student achievement positively. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to identify the activities and actions that support

building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships by examining the lived experiences of reading specialists who coach for all or a portion of their roles and who have at least 3 years of experience in this role.

Study Background and Foundation

Professional development is a form of continuing education that enhances individuals' knowledge and skills. For many decades, educators have participated in professional development training designed to improve instructional practices, introduce new curricula or teaching materials, and prepare teachers and students for standardized assessments. Often, these professional development sessions occurred in a few workshops where teachers received the information with the expectation to understand it, retain it, and implement changes with little to no follow-up or support. In an article suggesting ways that schools provide powerful professional development, Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) affirmed this type of professional development rarely results in changes to teacher practice or student learning. Thus, finding ways to cultivate teacher learning requires an understanding of the elements of effective professional development.

Implementing various methods of professional development models to transform schools continues to be an area of interest for researchers. Offering professional development that can impact a school requires certain elements for success. In a study on state policies and the effect on school reform, Jacquith, Mindich, Wei, and Darling-Hammond (2011) suggested educational state policy include four factors for effective

professional development: leadership, infrastructure, resources, and organizational providers. For schools and teachers to improve, school leaders can invest in and support teachers' professional development. Thus, school leaders may carefully consider and evaluate professional development programs that come with claims of instant school reform, since no easy solutions to today's educational challenges exist.

Administrators in school systems who face challenges incorporating the changing landscape of 21st century learning may find these challenges are related to outdated materials and older technology. Often, schools' budgetary constraints contribute to challenges for school improvement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) reported from their review of the literature, current methods of advancing teachers' pedagogical skills lack the necessary elements to support 21st century learners. Therefore, locating funding sources to address the necessary professional learning that can help refine their pedagogical skills for both veteran and novice teachers' learning in a timely manner is advantageous for both teacher and student success.

Since teaching is complex, it requires those who teach to hone their pedagogical skills and content knowledge continuously. To do this successfully requires opportunities for teachers to collaborate with others and individually reflect on their skills or newly acquired learning. In an article on shifting literacy practices and teacher perceptions about instruction, Sailors et al. (2014) found one of the greatest impacts on successfully implementing literacy changes involves educational leaders and policymakers who understand the complexity of teaching. Since education changes rapidly, individuals

involved in evaluating and selecting professional development models can consider innovative ways to increase instructional effectiveness and help teachers advance their pedagogy rather than get a quick fix to boost test scores.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) suggested taking steps to improve teachers' professional learning is a vital component to improving academic achievement and transforming schools. This is especially vital due to the continuing teacher shortages in the United States. In a policy brief about the teacher shortage in the United States, Castro, Quinn, Fuller, and Barnes (2018) found evidence of a 10% reduction in enrollment in teacher programs in the United States between 2004 and 2012. In addition, approximately 250,000 teachers in the United States leave the profession each year. Therefore, providing support for improved teacher learning could also help reduce the teacher shortage.

Encouraging new graduates to select education as a career path is critical for the future of education. In an article about proven strategies for improving teacher recruitment and retention, Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, and Darling-Hammond (2017) suggested school systems that provide additional support in teachers' learning may also reduce the number of teachers who leave the teaching workforce. The added support could help teachers feel successful, thereby retaining the current workforce and supporting newly recruited teachers. Thus, the success of students and teachers relies on school leaders who are conscientious in finding ways to support continuous teacher learning.

Research on methods of professional development is not a new concept. In the past, teachers would often attend single sessions of professional development that may or may not be a topic of new learning for the attendees. Although one-stop methods of professional development may slightly vary in the content or delivery, overall, it is not helpful for teacher learning. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) posited the one-time delivery model is not useful for teachers and does not affect changes in the classroom. Quality professional development that is closely connected to teachers' daily experiences in the classroom has a greater impact on teacher learning. Thus, professional development that is differentiated to meet the varying needs of teachers may be useful, resulting in greater learning.

Studies that have focused on teacher professional development have revealed specific characteristics for effectiveness. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) suggested the following seven characteristics of effective professional development: (a) content focus, (b) active learning, (c) collaboration, (d) modelling, (e) coaching and expert support, (f) feedback and reflection, and (g) being sustained over time. Ensuring these characteristics exist in professional development models can guide teachers' learning. Offering teachers structured, consistent learning opportunities helps them acquire research-based teaching strategies that improve student achievement. These learning opportunities may have the greatest impact on sustained changes to instructional practices and increasing student achievement.

Effective professional learning engages teachers in active learning and collective participation. In a research study on transforming the classroom environment through supportive professional development, Spelman, Bell, Thomas, and Briody (2016) suggested teachers need opportunities to explore conceptual ideas deeply while they are learning. This job-embedded exploration should include a focus on students' thinking and student work related to the teachers' instructional practices while the exploration is also being sustained over time. Models of support that include this type of job-embedded professional development can help engage teachers in active learning that transforms teaching and improves student outcomes.

Although research on teacher professional development has consistently focused on aspects directly related to the teacher, including student work or data as a part of the learning can also help improve classroom practices. Involving teachers through collective participation allows teachers the opportunity to make choices in their learning. In a research study on the power of instructional coaching conversations, Thomas, Bell, Spelman, and Briody (2015) suggested engaging teachers in learning and decision making can often curb their resistance to mandates or suggestions for improvement. There is likely to be more teacher engagement when these conversations are student-focused rather than focusing on "fixing" the teacher. Similarly, in an article on teacher engagement in professional learning involving instructional coaches, Adams, Ross, Burns, and Gibbs (2015) suggested teachers are likely to be engaged when the focus of the coaching conversation is based on classroom data collected by the coach. Connor

(2017) reiterated this idea in an article about the common elements across coaching models. The author suggested helping teachers use student data to drive their instruction can make a difference in student achievement. Thus, professional development formats that involve teachers being actively engaged in their learning and decision making, including a focus on student data, can lead to greater changes and increases in student achievement.

Historical Background

Today, professional development models that include the teacher in decision making are distinctly different than in the past. Historically, administrators or school district personnel made decisions about the training teachers needed and attended. Sometimes, federal or state mandates for school improvement were the driving force for these decisions. However, recent legislation illustrates that policymakers may use information from the past policies to develop newer programs and mandates that are likely to make a difference for students. Recognizing stagnant or declining student achievement results appears to be the driving force for policymakers to see the need for valuable professional learning formats, as seen in the most recent federal legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015).

Recommendations found in Title II of ESSA (2015) that support excellence in teaching and learning require school systems to include innovative professional development models to accomplish this recommendation. Supporting continuous improvement using evidence-based instructional practices and providing opportunities for

educators to strengthen their content knowledge helps ensure that all students receive high-quality education. Programs, such as Reading First, that include instructional coaching are proving to be innovative and different. In a study of the effectiveness of Reading First literacy coaches, Bright and Hensley (2010) found adopting the use of instructional coaches through educational reforms, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Reading First, offered a sustainable form of professional development for teachers. These reforms showed promising results for increasing student achievement in many cases.

In contrast, not all research on professional development models illustrates a direct connection to student achievement. Researchers for the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance Institute of Education Sciences (National Center for Education, 2016) found while some existing professional development models help improve teachers' content knowledge and practice, this learning does not transfer directly to increased student learning. Therefore, identifying the models of professional development to support student learning, as well as teachers' content knowledge and instructional practices, may be the key difference when school leaders and policymakers enact educational reforms that attempt to reduce the achievement gap.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

A continuing need in the research includes taking a close look at the characteristics that both support coaching and address the challenges associated with implementation of an effective coaching program as a professional development model

(Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Researchers continue to express the need for further study in specific areas involving the effect of instructional coaching and its impact on changing teachers' instructional practices to increase student achievement (National Center for Education, 2016). The results of this study added to the empirical literature on these characteristics and factors that help create and support coach-teacher relationships and potential foci for instructional coach training. Further discussion and information about the current state of the field, historical context, and existing deficiencies in the literature are discussed in Chapter 2.

Problem Statement

Administrators in school systems and writers of federal mandates attempt to improve classroom instruction and increase student achievement through various teacher professional development models without success. The results of implementing traditional methods of professional development have not made differences in student achievement. Researchers have found that the one-time, sporadic training for teachers is ineffective in creating sustained changes to instructional practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Jaquith et al., 2011; Spelman et al., 2016). There remains a need for researchers to find ways to support teacher learning beyond the initial induction into the field of education. This is particularly significant for educators' continual learning as standards, technology, and student populations continue to change. Therefore, teachers and administrators are focusing on other professional development models to improve

classroom instruction. The design of some of these models includes the use of instructional coaches in the classroom.

Currently, instructional coaching is one topic at the forefront of educational research. While many researchers try to uncover the intricate details and components of coaching, there continues to be a need for additional research. Since the instructional coaching model incorporates many elements found in the literature about effective professional development, researchers continue to study the effect that instructional coaching has on teacher learning and student achievement. However, evaluating the effectiveness of coaching can be difficult due to the varying or limited skills and knowledge of coaches (Connor, 2017). In a study focused on coaching in the Texas School Ready programs, Crawford, Zucker, Van Horne, and Landry (2017) revealed a current need in the field to identify specific guidelines and frameworks that guide the research on instructional coaching. Specifically, the authors suggested focusing on the characteristics of effective instructional coaches and coaching models.

Similarly, in a review of instructional coaching literature, Kurz, Reddy, and Glover (2017) posited the need for further research on the efficacy of coaching components that directly affect student achievement. In addition, the authors suggested there is a need for further research to focus on the processes of coaching and the effective characteristics of teacher-coach partnership. Therefore, the specific problem is that there are no studies outlining the characteristics of the coaching process that influence the

coach-teacher partnership and those characteristics that influence changes to teachers' instructional practices.

Audience

School systems where an instructional coaching model has been used for systemic reform may benefit from a more impactful instructional coaching model. Implementing this model can be accomplished by using a model informed by evidence identifying the activities and actions that are important for building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships and the activities and actions that help facilitate shifts in teachers' instructional practices. Identifying those factors was the intent of this study. Creating useful models using the identified factors from this study may help sustain teachers' learning and improve student achievement, a key consideration for school systems that face limited funding.

Without research in this area, it is possible that the student achievement gap may not be affected due to minimal changes in teachers' classroom instructional practices. Embedding opportunities that engage teachers as learners and finding time for teachers to partner with colleagues while learning about content that directly aligns with their classrooms can help teachers engage in reflective thinking and learning about their pedagogical practices. Individuals responsible for supporting teachers may find this research valuable because implementing professional development models that support collaborative partnerships within the classroom may also support student learning, resulting in improved student outcomes.

Instructional coaches often move directly from working with students to working with adults. Making this transition can sometimes be challenging for individuals who do not have a solid understanding of andragogy. Thus, instructional coaches can continue improving their coaching skills to support these teacher partnerships by participating in professional learning focused on partnering with adults to support changes in the classroom. In a seminal book on instructional coaching, Knight (2009) suggested instructional coaches benefit from honing their skills in communication, relationship building, and leadership. Thus, school district leaders could use the information from this study to develop instructional coaching programs. Using this information could ensure instructional coaches receive support and continuous learning opportunities, which may strengthen the effectiveness of the coaching model and empower coaches as educational leaders.

Specific Leadership Problem

Effective leaders recognize and use different leadership approaches to engage with followers. Instructional coaches are no different than other school leaders. Knight (2011) posited instructional coaches need leadership skills as a part of their repertoire of skills and strategies for coaching. Sometimes school principals delegate instructional leadership responsibilities to instructional coaches, casting the coaches into leadership roles. In this capacity, instructional coaches may be responsible for increasing teachers' capacity for whole school reform. Additionally, instructional coaches can inspire others by offering regular support and feedback. Thus, instructional coaches who are purposeful

in their intent can develop successful partnerships with those around them. These coach-teacher partnerships are powerful avenues for leading and supporting others. By using a guiding principle of transformational leadership, instructional coaches can enable others to act and lead.

Transformational leadership is one approach that is gaining appeal. The transformational leader focuses on transforming others by closely connecting with followers and by being engaged and attentive to followers' needs. In the seminal work on the transformational leadership approach, Bass (1990) defined transformational leaders as those who use their charismatic power and influence to inspire others. Often this inspiration transforms cultures within organizations. Instructional coaches who recognize and use the charismatic principle of transformational leadership can inspire changes in teachers' instructional practices by first building relationships with them. Through these relationships, instructional coaches might learn more about the individual teachers, which can then lead to stronger relationships. These relationships can then be the basis for inspiring change in others.

Instructional coaches who create opportunities that empower teachers help cultivate a climate of learning that enables others to be their best. This aspect is also characteristic of transformational leaders. In a book about leadership approaches, Northouse (2016) asserted the primary goal of transformational leaders is to create new learning opportunities that help others develop and reach their fullest potential. Therefore, leaders who cultivate a learning culture within an organization help enable

others to act and lead. Similarly, Knight (2011) asserted one component of the coach's role is to empower teachers by offering them choices in their learning. Thus, instructional coaches who help teachers achieve their fullest potential also strengthen teacher learning communities, thereby enhancing a culture that supports student learning.

Building teacher learning communities requires school leaders who recognize the value of collaboration. Building a trusting environment that is conducive for collaborating and learning often occurs when a leader uses principles of transformational leadership. In a study comparing the impact of transformational and instructional leadership approaches on student achievement, Kwan (2016) posited leaders who build trust among individuals help achieve a culture based on a common vision that can positively affect student achievement. Similarly, in an article about transformational leadership qualities in school principals, Moolenaar and Slegers (2015) suggested principals who engage teachers in establishing a shared vision and goals build a culture that encourages teacher learning. Thus, leaders who build trusting environments can enact transformational leadership principles that cultivate learning communities, which support continuous learning for teachers and students.

Instructional leaders who recognize and exhibit transformational leadership principles understand useful methods for transforming schools. Therefore, this study addressed the ways in which instructional coaches establish and maintain partnerships with teachers, motivating them to be their best in the classroom and in schools. The focus of this study was to explore the activities and actions important for building and

maintaining coach-teacher partnerships and the activities and actions that help facilitate shifts to teachers' instructional practices. Identifying these activities and actions may help instructional coaches enable others to act and lead in today's classrooms.

The results of this study advanced the literature on leadership in schools. Providing specific information on leadership skills for instructional coaches helps empower coaches to enable others to act and lead, changing the current landscape of schools in the United States.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to identify the activities and actions important for building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships and those activities and actions that help facilitate shifts to teachers' instructional practices by examining the lived experiences of reading specialists who coach teachers for all or a portion of their roles and who have at least 3 years of experience in these roles. These reading specialists were employed in elementary schools located in school districts in the Northeast region of the United States. Identifying the activities and actions important for building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships and the activities and actions that help facilitate shifts to teachers' instructional practices can help instructional coaches work with teachers, resulting in effective instruction in the classroom and improved student achievement.

Methodology Overview

Researchers begin the research process by gaining a deep understanding of their worldview and reflecting on their philosophical beliefs. Researchers who understand their beliefs realize how these philosophical beliefs influence the selection of research methodologies. In an article comparing qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, Yilmaz (2013) summarized the philosophical assumptions related to qualitative methodology. Thus, the characteristics of qualitative research correlate to the following philosophical assumptions: ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological.

The ontological belief is best understood from the researcher's viewpoint about reality. In qualitative research, the researcher believes that reality is subjective and varied. Yilmaz (2013) suggested reality is explained through the multiple perspectives of the participants. The epistemological belief considers the interaction and involvement of the researcher on the topic itself. Therefore, researchers integrate themselves into the participants' natural setting and collaborate closely with them to gain a deeper understanding of their reality (Yilmaz, 2013). The axiological belief encompasses a researcher's values. Often, the researcher is closely connected to the topic of study. In a book about qualitative research design, Creswell (2014) posited researchers must recognize their biases and be forthcoming in addressing them early in the study. The rhetorical belief is associated with the language of the research. Thus, the nature of qualitative research often tells the participants' stories and, therefore, is often told in

narrative form (Creswell, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). The last belief is methodological and relates to the process of the study. Through inductive logic, the researcher continuously learns from the information gathered (Yilmaz, 2013). Considering philosophical beliefs help researchers select the best methodology for answering research questions. Thus, based on these philosophical beliefs, a qualitative methodology was the best method for this topic of study.

Selecting qualitative research methodology affords researchers an opportunity to deepen their understanding through personal interactions with participants, such as with interviews. In an article exploring the elements of Heidegger's phenomenological research, Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, and Dowling (2016) described interpretive phenomenology as a qualitative method design that has a focus on the participants' interpretations of lived experiences or a phenomenon. Thus, this study consisted of an interpretive, phenomenological design because the research has a focus on the lived experiences of reading specialists. In a seminal book about phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) posited phenomenology as shared experiences and perceptions that inspire knowledge and wonder. These experiences are often told through personal interviews and add depth in a shared story that conveys the essence of a common phenomenon or experience. Therefore, learning about the coach-teacher partnership was done by listening to coaches' stories.

The population for this study included individuals who are reading specialists. Many different responsibilities have evolved related to the title and role of reading

specialists in the United States. In some cases, reading specialists may act more as instructional coaches, while at other times their primary role may be to work with students. Exploring the phenomenon of being a reading specialist with coaching responsibilities was the focus of this study. Therefore, the reading specialists in this study spend all or a portion of their day as instructional coaches. Specifically, the study sample was purposefully selected and limited to reading specialists who have coaching responsibilities and who have at least 3 years of experience in this type of role. The selected reading specialists work in schools across the Northeast region of the United States. For this study, 11 participants were selected. More information regarding the methodology and data collection procedures can be found in Chapter 3.

The participants in this study were interviewed and recorded in a one-on-one setting using a semi-structured protocol. Afterward, the interviews were transcribed and coded. Data analysis of the participants' responses were clustered to distinguish themes resulting in identifying the activities and actions that are important for building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships and the activities and actions that help facilitate shifts to teachers' instructional practices.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What activities or actions do instructional coaches identify as important when building partnerships with teachers?

2. What activities or actions do instructional coaches identify as important when maintaining partnerships with teachers?
3. What activities or actions do instructional coaches identify as important when shifting teachers' classroom instructional practices in literacy?

Study Limitations

One limitation for this study might have been the participants' levels of trust in responding to the interview questions. Since the researcher is also a reading specialist, participants of this study could have perceived the researcher as an authority figure or evaluator. The reading specialists in this study could have felt they were being evaluated based on their responses and may have reported only those experiences which cast them in a positive light regarding their role as an instructional coach. To address this limitation, the semi-structured protocol included questions that helped reveal activities and actions of both positive and negative experiences that have an impact on the coach-teacher partnership.

In addition, as an experienced instructional coach, it was valuable to include the use of reflective journaling to help create an awareness of biases and individual beliefs throughout the research process. In a hermeneutic approach, the researcher's individual beliefs are not viewed as biases but rather as beneficial to the interpretive process. Thoughts and reflections were captured in a journal while gathering and reviewing the participants' lived experiences, creating the co-construction of understanding.

Another limitation that might have occurred was if the interviews were conducted over the phone, as opposed to face-to-face or Skype, due to possible scheduling conflicts. Variations can occur in the way a participant responds over the phone versus face-to-face. Every effort was made to conduct the interviews in a face-to-face setting, so this limitation did not occur.

Finally, due to the time of the school year, observational data or consistent responses could have been more difficult to obtain. Therefore, every effort was made to obtain responses in a timely manner to avoid scheduling conflicts that are typical within a school calendar year.

Study Delimitations

This study's delimitations included geographic limitations because it took place in school districts in the Northeast region of the United States. This means these data may only be relevant to these school districts. Also, this study focused only on instructional coaching in the field of literacy which may also be considered a delimitation in the study.

Definitions of Key Terms

The field of education, like other disciplines, may have terms that need further definition to fully comprehend this study. The following key terms are more fully defined below.

Andragogy is the art and science of teaching adult learners (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015).

Instructional coaching is onsite professional development that is supported by an individual (coach) within the context of the classroom environment (Knight, 2009).

Instructional leader is a role within a school setting; the person responsible for enhancing the quality of the instructional program within a school by establishing educational goals and evaluating teachers and teaching to promote measurable student outcomes (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016).

Instructional practices are specific methods that guide the interaction between teacher and students to support students' learning.

Literacy is interrelated components that include reading, writing, listening, and speaking; International Literacy Standards' shift from reading to literacy when focusing on the qualifications of literacy professionals (Bean & Kern, 2018).

Professional development is job-related training and ongoing learning specific to a content area, initiative, strategy, or skill.

Significance of the Study

Every person is responsible for ensuring that future generations are college and career ready. While parents, guardians, and community members play a role in this responsibility, educators have a significant impact on students' future success. Supporting continuous teacher learning plays a large role in helping students be successful. This study included information from reading specialists who coach teachers as a part of their role in schools. The information collected helps school leaders gain a deeper understanding of how teachers and coaches can collaboratively work together. The results

of the study provide information on how the coach-teacher partnership supports active teacher learning resulting in sustained changes to teachers' instructional practices. These shifts in practices could positively alter student achievement results and the way that schools and school districts approach professional learning opportunities for teachers.

Professional learning that promotes sustained changes in the classroom could be a powerful predictor of student success. The findings of this study can illustrate how the instructional coaching model could be a fiscally responsible way for policymakers and school leaders to positively change the trajectory of student achievement for all 21st century learners. Finding ways to offer job-embedded professional learning into teachers' daily schedules can help support innovative learning and sustained changes. Without this information, it is likely that leaders in school systems may continue to offer one-time workshops that rarely impact changes in the classroom resulting in little to no change in student achievement. Like professional athletes, educators may find that having coaches by their sides helps strengthen and enhance their existing pedagogical skills by collaboratively exploring high-leverage practices that move teachers from good to great.

Summary

Changes in educational settings, curricula, and student populations generate a need for teachers to enhance their pedagogical practices continuously. Many school systems face budgetary restraints due to financial cuts and increases to student populations that may result in fewer professional development opportunities. Finding ways to support teachers' learning continues to be challenging for many school districts

through these financially trying times. Therefore, finding methods of job-embedded professional learning may prove to be a fiscally responsible way to provide professional development. Researching instructional coaching to identify the activities and actions important for changing teachers' instructional practices may help school districts refine the way they offer professional development in schools. This information can help engage teachers in learning that supports sustained changes to teachers' instructional practices while also improving student outcomes. Chapter 2 includes additional information about professional development, instructional coaching, andragogy, phenomenology, and the importance of transformational leadership skills.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Enactment of many educational reforms take place in an attempt to reduce the ever-widening achievement gaps that occur despite school leaders' best efforts. Classroom teachers have a significant impact on how students learn and perform in school. Providing classroom teachers with additional learning to enhance their pedagogical practices is found in most school systems. Furthermore, ensuring that every student has qualified teachers is the responsibility of the leaders of school districts. However, continuous gaps in student achievement may be perceived as evidence that this method of professional development is not working.

Throughout educational literature, authors attempt to describe factors related to the effectiveness of classroom instruction (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Despite the recent efforts made by educational system leaders to create or adopt rigorous curriculum based on newer standards, the achievement gap continues to widen. Thus, curriculum implementation alone does not appear to be changing the trajectory of student achievement data. For this reason, educational leaders can look carefully at the professional development opportunities available to support teachers' learning of the research-based instructional practices that enhance 21st century curriculum and student learning.

First, this literature review contains information focusing on the evolution of professional development in education. Second, there will be an exploration of the connection between andragogy and instructional coaching and introduces various models

that incorporate instructional coaching. Third, there is information focusing on the relationship between coaches, teachers, and the coach as instructional leader. Fourth, there is additional information about instructional and transformational leadership approaches within school contexts. Finally, Chapter 2 concludes with ideas suggesting areas of further research.

Evolution of Professional Development

For decades, federal legislators have attempted to improve teaching by enacting reforms, such as NCLB (2002) and more recently, ESSA (2015). The goal of these initiatives is to reduce the achievement gap occurring in the United States public school system by providing students with high-quality, fair, and equitable education (ESSA, 2015). The intent of these types of reforms is to better prepare all students for the future.

Recommendations detailed in Title II of ESSA (2015) are designed to ensure high-quality education results from factors that support excellence in teaching and learning. These recommendations include using new and innovative professional development models that support educators' continuous improvement with evidence-based instructional practices and opportunities for educators to strengthen their content knowledge. In adherence to the ESSA (2015), leaders in state education agencies have been adopting more rigorous standards that continue to drive the need for continuous teacher learning and support.

In an article on closing the achievement gap, Darling-Hammond (2015) reported the results from a survey administered to 100,000 teachers and administrators across the

globe. In this survey, many teachers from the United States reported receiving inadequate support or feedback about their instructional practices, despite legislation such as ESSA (2015). Furthermore, teachers in the United States reported receiving the least amount of high-quality professional development and support, yet report facing more challenges than their global counterparts. These challenges included greater student poverty, larger class sizes, and longer instructional hours with students rather than time to collaboratively work with other teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2015). This inequity of valuable professional development could be contributing to the continual increases in the achievement gap in the United States and unveils the need for changes in the way school districts support teacher learning. These changes may need to focus on how and when teachers receive professional development, support, and feedback to enhance their instructional practices.

Job-embedded professional development is not a new concept; it is becoming more popular in the education field. In a study about creating a valid instrument to assess instructional coaching programs, Howley, Dudek, Rittenburg, and Larson (2014) posited the need for schools to adopt more job-embedded professional development since traditional methods, such as workshops or in-service approaches, were not sufficiently driving changes in the classroom. The success of job-embedded professional development occurs because it is more intensive and extensive than one-time workshops (Howley et al., 2014; Spelman et al., 2016) and is used to address the specific needs of each learner, resulting in sustained changes.

Research on professional development has revealed the most useful professional development models have several specific features. In an article illustrating the alignment between instructional coaching and professional development, Desimone and Pak (2017) highlighted features that included content focus, active learning, coherence, sustained duration, and collective participation. Similarly, Jacquith et al. (2011) advised that policies to improve student achievement should focus on teacher support that is intensive and sustained over time. This support should also help foster collaboration, build teacher content knowledge, and relate directly to teaching and learning in the classroom.

However, participating in professional development that is grounded in these features may or may not result in continuous professional learning. In an article synthesizing the elements of effective professional development, Bates and Morgan (2018) included the need for demonstration, practice, feedback, and reflection as essential elements for sustained professional learning. Therefore, school leaders can use information about these features to plan for or evaluate professional learning programs or models aimed at enhancing instructional practices that increase student achievement.

Recently, administrators in some school systems have been embracing the idea of instructional coaching within the classroom to address the need for enhanced professional development. This professional learning model embeds the features found in effective professional development literature and supports sustained learning because it focuses on the needs of the teacher. This teacher-centered model impacts instruction because teachers receive immediate feedback (Crawford et al., 2017; Spelman et al., 2016),

connecting their learning to the classroom. In a study on student-focused coaching, Wang (2017) contributed that teachers having a voice in the decision making about their learning and goals helps sustain more permanent changes to instructional practices. Similarly, Polly, Algozzine, Martin, and Mraz (2015) studied coaching from the literacy coach perspective and found instructional coaching provides a safe environment where teachers reflect and question while also focusing collaboratively on solving more immediate problems. These opportunities help connect teachers' learning directly to day-to-day classroom experiences, which is distinctly different than the past models of traditional workshops.

Conversely, the success of the instructional coaching model lessens when coaches or administrators decide what teachers should learn. In a research study about the community coaching cohort model, Miller and Stewart (2013) shared that the purpose of working with an instructional coach may be confused when teachers believe they are asked to work with a coach based on their own ineffectiveness. Therefore, understanding the role of an instructional coach is extremely important to ensure the effectiveness of the coaching model and to encourage participation by teachers. Identifying the coach's role also helps teachers understand what to expect when working with a coach.

Often, the roles and responsibilities of instructional coaches vary across contexts. In the seminal work on instructional coaching, Knight (2004) defined an instructional coach as a professional developer who is onsite and offers on-the-spot professional development support. Similarly, in an article reviewing changes to the 2017 International

Literacy Association (ILA) standards, Bean and Kern (2018) highlighted the role of a literacy coach as the individual responsible for supporting teacher learning and facilitating in-house literacy programs to improve classroom instruction. These definitions illustrate how instructional coaching is moving the pendulum of professional development and is now considering the needs of the adult learners, in contrast to past traditional models. Additionally, changes in today's educational workforce necessitate shifts in the way teachers learn.

Newer educators are entering the educational workforce with different technological skills and learning experiences than their predecessors. Instructional coaching offers a differentiated method of meeting individual needs, which is more appealing to many teachers. Coaching offers flexibility and immediacy to address the diverse needs of today's teaching workforce (Anderson & Wallin, 2018). The feedback offered by a coach can help teachers make immediate changes based on their current day-to-day practices and specific classroom challenges. This feedback empowers teachers to oversee their learning because they can identify their own problems of practice.

Sailors and Price (2015) introduced the support for the improvement of practices through intensive coaching (SIPIC) model and described the model in application to intensive professional development requiring time and support for teachers to become reflective and thoughtful in their instruction, resulting in improved student literacy achievement. Shifts to instructional practices are more likely to occur when teachers receive this immediate feedback and time to reflect on their practices, resulting in

sustained changes to instructional practices. In a study about implementing shared reading in preschool classrooms, Rezzonico (2015) found adding coaching sessions to teacher workshops improved teachers' pedagogical practices and directly impacted student outcomes. Similarly, in a study on embedding coaching through professional learning about an early reading intervention, Amendum (2014) reported that teachers valued the additional coaching support, which deepened their understanding of new learning and held them accountable for implementation. Thus, changes may occur more easily when the teacher requests support about a strategy and values the new learning. However, coaching that occurs through mandated reform may end up with differing results or resistance by teachers.

School leaders may implement instructional coaching as one method aimed at making changes for school reform. However, there are special considerations when selecting this method for both systemic and individual reformation. In a qualitative study about leveraging systemic and individual reform through instructional coaching, Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) found using instructional coaches as a method for reform requires careful planning and execution to ensure complete alignment between district goals and coach practices. Therefore, the implementation of a coaching program for school reform should include ways to monitor the implementation for fidelity to the reform goals.

In an article focusing on the results of 60 coaching studies, Kraft and Blazar (2017) posited instructional coaching models positively affect the quality of teaching methodology; however, when the coaching programs expanded to reach more teachers,

the positive results of coaching decreased. Thus, hiring and training coaches proves to be challenging when school administrators try to use coaching to support large-scale professional learning. Hence, finding ways to ensure instructional coaches recognize and adhere to the vision of the coaching program with fidelity is necessary for school improvement.

Instructional Coaching and Andragogy

Learners need to be actively involved in the learning process for new learning to occur. Teachers receive training to hone their pedagogy during preservice coursework. These pedagogical skills include the art and science of teaching children how to learn. Conversely, in the seminal work about adult learning, Knowles (1980) explored adult learning and developed the theory of andragogy, the art and science of adult learning. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2015) corroborated Knowles' original work by defining *andragogy* as "any intentional and professionally guided activity that aims at a change in adult persons" (pp. 39-40). Through Knowles' work, several beliefs emerged regarding adult learning. These beliefs include the following: (a) adults are motivated to learn; (b) adults want to learn life-centered subjects rather than content; (c) adults' previous experiences enhance their learning; (d) adults engage in inquiry; and (e) age changes individuals. Therefore, opportunities focused on adult learners must provide for these differences (Knowles et al., 2015). Thus, any activity aimed at enhancing learning in adults should recognize these andragogical beliefs throughout planning and implementation.

Instructional coaches who understand the principle beliefs of andragogy before working with adult learners may be more successful when working with teachers. By understanding the philosophical beliefs of andragogy, instructional coaches can readily prepare for high-quality, intensive professional development that offers adult learners professional support resulting in learning and growth (Sailors & Price, 2015; Wang, 2017). Offering teachers choices in their learning is a basic foundation that encourages teacher buy-in to the learning process.

While there are various areas teachers can focus on for coaching, it is imperative that the teacher is given input in the decisions for learning. The work that coaches do with teachers may be related to instructional processes or specific content knowledge; however, the teacher's decision to undertake coaching support should be based on their self-reflection (Knight, 2011). Similarly, in a chapter on learner-centered design theories, Knight, Hock, and Knight (2017) outlined instructional coaching choices may fall into one or more of the following high-leverage practices. These practices include content planning, formative assessment practices, instructional practices, and community building. For successful learning to occur, selection of a coaching focus and goal setting occurs after carefully reviewing student learning data or teacher observational data. Reddy, Dudek, and Lekwa (2017) focused on a classroom-strategies coaching (CSC) model in which coaches collect quantitative data as a formative measure of a teacher's growth in learning a new strategy. The CSC model is shorter in duration than other coaching cycles and incorporates coaching as an intervention to support strategy-based

classroom instruction. Regardless of the coaching model, teachers do not spend time learning to employ a practice without having an intended purpose focusing solely on improving student outcomes (Knight et al., 2016). Therefore, successful coaching requires the teacher to be an active participant in the decision-making process throughout the coaching cycle.

Coaches often create options for teachers to select as a focus for learning, which helps to facilitate teachers' reflective thinking and problem solving about instructional practices. Instructional coaches support teachers' learning through various actions that enhance teachers' metacognitive and reflective thinking (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Coaching practices align with the foundational ideas of adult learning and should include active and shared learning opportunities, such as observation, practice, feedback, and in-class coaching (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Spelman et al., 2016), that support the teacher's reflection. Teachers may be more willing to change when they have roles in the learning process and reflect on their growth in the process. Instructional coaches, however, must also recognize how their actions can impact teachers' willingness to learn.

A cyclical process of learning occurs when coaches intentionally move teachers throughout the learning progression. In an article describing factors for successful coaching programs, Knight (2016) posited instructional coaches need to understand their roles are not just relaying advice about good teaching skills. Instead, coaches must position themselves as partners supporting teacher learning throughout the coaching cycle. An example of this cycle occurs when coaches introduce research-based practices

and then support the implementation of the strategy, offer feedback, and guide the teacher's reflection about implementation and analysis of student outcomes. Similarly, in an article about cognitive coaching, Netolicky (2016) found that participation in coaching helped both the coach and the "coachee" grow and reflect on best practices in teaching. Knight (2004) suggested that most schoolwide improvement occurs because of the unique structures of the coaching cycle. Instructional coaches understand the importance of this coaching cycle, recognizing successful coaching cycles help teachers sustain their learning by supporting them in the establishment of attainable goals and then offering guidance and support throughout the learning process. In an article explaining the coaching cycle, Knight et al. (2015), using results from research at the Kansas Center for Research on Learning and the Instructional Coaching Group, explained that an element to the cycle includes teachers identifying their own goals. The authors suggested teachers' goals need to be easy, reachable, powerful, emotionally compelling, and student-focused for sustainable learning to occur. Instructional coaches can help narrow the goal selection at the outset of the cycle so teachers are successful. Using these goals, coaches and teachers then have a focus for their work.

While focusing on teacher-driven goals throughout the instructional coaching cycle, coaches use different types of support and specific actions depending on the teacher and context for coaching. Miller and Stewart (2013) identified these actions as stances coaches can take when working with teachers. Using a neutral stance, one where the coach does not give all the answers, helps create an environment where teachers learn

from collaborative problem solving. In stark contrast, a directive stance, one where the coach tells a teacher what to do, can often negate professional learning. In addition to the coaching stances, Kurz et al. (2017) found specific coaching actions that support teacher learning. These included focusing on reflective questioning, gathering and analyzing data, establishing goals, planning, modeling, critiquing, offering feedback, and adjusting for new goals. Designing a coaching program that allows coaches the opportunity to use these coaching stances and actions that support teacher learning is necessary for program success. Empowering teachers as adult learners places the ownership of learning in teachers' hands. Thus, when teachers learn, students learn (Knight, 2016), leading to positive changes in the trajectory of student achievement outcomes.

Coaching Variations and Models

Finding ways for teachers to receive regular feedback about their instruction could make a world of difference for students. Darling-Hammond (2015) reported the results of a survey that indicated teachers in the United States work harder and face more challenges than teachers in other countries. The author discussed teachers in the United States felt the feedback they received was inadequate to enhance their instructional practices. Teachers reported the lack of feedback as problematic because it was the administrators who were giving feedback rather than peers or colleagues. Teachers believed peer observations could provide more specific feedback because teachers are regularly involved with daily instruction more so than administrators (Darling-Hammond, 2015). However, in a study on embedding virtual coaching as a cost-effective method of

supporting teachers, Kotze, Fleisch, and Taylor (2018) warned of peer coaching models in school settings where the number of “good” models is limited. These authors suggested innovative methods using videotape as one way of ensuring high-quality models are available to teachers. Thus, finding a method for teachers to receive regular feedback about their instructional practices is something that teachers in the United States desire (Darling-Hammond, 2015) and need to elevate their teaching practices.

One successful model for helping teachers receive supportive feedback occurs with instructional coaching. Through coaching, teachers learn about research-based practices to help address challenges within the classroom. Knight (2004) categorized three areas that may explain why instructional coaching is a powerful professional learning model: (a) teacher choice, (b) dialogue, and (c) knowledge in action. These three areas also directly align with the adult learning phases identified in andragogy. These phases include deciding to begin, choosing the planner, and engagement of learning episodes (Knowles et al., 2015). Therefore, a combination of Knight’s (2004) and Knowles et al.’s (2015) ideas solidifies that successful coaching requires opportunities for the learner to be actively involved in making decisions, learning, and implementation, thereby creating a cycle of continual feedback and learning.

Researchers have suggested teachers learn best when participating in professional development that is cyclical. Hence, the instructional coaching cycle should include opportunities for teachers to identify, learn, and improve (Knight, 2016; Knight et al., 2015). One element within the coaching cycle is the opportunity for coaches to offer real-

time feedback and support to teachers (Desimone & Pak, 2017). In a study focused on coaching teachers with inclusion to support students with special needs, Gallagher and Bennett (2018) found immediate feedback from coaching had the potential to integrate best practices with exploratory and reflective teaching. Thus, the immediacy of feedback through several types of coaching models supports teachers regardless of content and context.

Varied models of coaching have emerged since the inception of coaching. These include cognitive coaching (Netolicky, 2016), problem-solving coaching or student-focused coaching, and reform coaching (Kurz et al., 2017; Wang, 2017). Other types include directive and responsive coaching (Sailors & Price, 2015; Sailors et al., 2014), classroom strategies coaching (Reddy et al., 2017), content coaching (Howley et al., 2014; Miller & Stewart, 2013), and instructional coaching (Knight, 2004, 2009, 2011).

Extant research frequently categorizes these diverse types of coaching under the larger umbrella of instructional coaching. Regardless of the coaching model, the role of the coach becomes critical in supporting teacher learning. The role of the instructional coach must be defined within the context and setting of the desired outcomes of the professional development model for coaches to be successful. Some instructional coaches may find they have a variety of roles and responsibilities within a school or district that can impact the success of a coaching program (Crawford et al., 2017). Identifying clear goals within a coaching program and establishing clear roles for the coach are key to successful implementation (Miller & Stewart, 2013). Blurring the lines between a coach's

responsibilities and realities of day-to-day activities can impact the effectiveness of the coach's role or the coaching program itself.

In a study on coaching discourse, Heineke (2013) studied four coach-teacher dyads and found instructional coaches often shoulder other responsibilities unrelated to directly supporting teacher learning. These additional responsibilities take time away from helping teachers learn. These interruptions to the coaching process may occur more often if the coach does not have extensive knowledge to meet the needs of a wide range of teachers (Crawford et al., 2016) or if the structures that support effective coaching are not in place (Heineke, 2013). Therefore, identifying the roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach at the outset of a coaching program can help teachers and coaches be more successful and ensure coaches have a strong knowledge base.

Knowledge is critical for instructional coach success. It is not enough for coaches to only have content knowledge; it is vital for coaches to have both content knowledge and an understanding of the various formats of coaching. Instructional coaches who know there are different formats can use various styles of coaching and strategies that simultaneously build individual and systemic capacity for change (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). In addition to the coaching formats and strategies, coaches should recognize the multiple roles through which they need to move as they support teacher learning. These roles may include facilitator, instructor, collaborator, and empowerer (Wang, 2017). Many different coaching models include various aspects and descriptions of similar roles.

Having a wide range of skills can help coaches successfully engage with the varying needs of different teachers.

Ensuring that coaches are well trained and prepared in their role of supporting teachers is vital for the success of any coaching model. Coaches who recognize and understand andragogical principles and have deep content knowledge are more likely to be successful when working with teachers. By offering learning that is job embedded and collaborative (Spelman et al., 2016), coaches support teachers' acquisition of new knowledge or exposure to new initiatives, programs, or materials (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Sailors et al., 2014). For this reason, adding instructional coaches to schools in the United States could be one way that teachers receive the necessary, immediate feedback and support to create sustainable changes in the classroom. Implementation of this model would also require useful professional learning for coaches.

Finding ways to hire and support coaches, as instructional coaching becomes more popular in schools, is required for the successfulness of any program. In an analysis of previous research on instructional coaching, Barshay (2018) found significant changes do not occur when coaching programs expand to more teachers. These results can be problematic for the future of instructional coaching. Therefore, one area that may increase the successful implementation of instructional coaching is to offer coaches training and information about building and sustaining collaborative relationships when working with more teachers.

Coaching and Relationships

Using coaching as a method of providing professional development is not a new concept in many organizations. Coaching is becoming popular in schools and school districts focused on closing the achievement gap. Coaching offers teachers someone with whom to collaborate. Darling-Hammond (2015) suggested school structures that provide teachers time to collaborate and learn together show significant results in student achievement. Also, professional learning opportunities that include features of effective professional development, such as ongoing and intensive support, help teachers acquire new skills and knowledge more easily. Of more importance, school initiatives that focus on teaching and learning support collaborative relationships with teachers (Jacquith et al., 2011). Thus, teacher collaboration is an element for school success.

Finding ways to cultivate a climate of collaboration is valuable for school leaders. Building time in the day for job-embedded learning helps sustain teacher learning (Desimone & Pak, 2017). When coaches are a part of this job-embedded learning, changes in teachers' practices occur. Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) found coaching had the greatest impact on developing teachers' skills. Similarly, Knight et al. (2015) posited teachers' performances dramatically improved with quality coaching. Hence, building in ways for teachers to learn within their day-to-day routines may show great promise for changing instructional practices that impact student learning.

Establishing structures that promote individual and collective learning in schools could be a primary factor for reducing the achievement gap. In a study on the community

coaching cohort model, Miller and Stewart (2013) established a protocol for supporting entire teams of teachers with an instructional coach. These researchers found that building time in a coaching program for both team collaboration and individual coaching allows each member space to learn and grow. Similarly, in an article about teacher collaboration and student achievement, Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom (2015) studied 9,000 teachers to investigate the quality of collaboration and its relationship to student achievement. These researchers noted collaborative structures have a direct effect on improving individuals and teams of teachers, resulting in increases to student achievement. Thus, ensuring structures are in place to support teacher and student learning is necessary for collaboration; however, simply placing groups of teachers together does not result in collaboration. Consequently, individuals supporting the collaborative structures must recognize the elements that help facilitate collaboration and ensure these elements are a part of each collaborative opportunity.

Instructional coaching involves more than coaches just sharing information. Coaches must balance how much information they give or how much they do for a teacher because teachers may become dependent if the coach eliminates any of the teacher's ownership of learning by explicitly telling them what to do. In an article on strategies for successful coaching, Foltos (2014) suggested coaches who help facilitate learning empower teachers as learners. This empowerment occurs when coaches involve the teacher in the decision making and goal setting of their learning. By engaging in conversations that help empower teachers in their learning, instructional coaches position

themselves as partners with teachers resulting in valuable collaboration and coaching. Likewise, in a study on ways that coaching supports teacher change, Collett (2015) posited that coaches scaffold the learning and release the responsibility on to teachers as they learn a new skill. The coach's decision to adapt their support was based on their understanding and observation of the teacher's newly acquired skill. Furthermore, Heineke (2013) suggested an element to successful coaching is evident when the teacher perceives the coach-teacher partnership as positive. Therefore, establishing a partnership with teachers requires the coach to carefully consider how to engage with teachers in a positive manner.

Instructional coaches who understand the power of dialogic exchanges with teachers are more likely to find success in their role. Coaches who recognize how their words and behaviors may influence the teachers' practices (Sailors & Price, 2015) is a principal skillset for coach success. Teachers report resenting coaches who come across as powerful or knowing more (Heineke, 2013). In an article about dialogic discourse between coaches and teachers, Hunt (2018) suggested the exchange between teachers and coaches has the potential to transform professional learning when the discourse is not authoritative. Similarly, Knight (2004) suggested a powerful antecedent to becoming an effective coach relies on the instructional coach's belief that teachers are their equals and see themselves as partners. Consequently, finding ways to express respect for teachers' autonomy and offering learning choices (Knight, 2016) helps solidify the partnership and is a powerful predictor of coaching success.

Coaches who approach the coach-teacher partnership with an understanding of the power of teachers' autonomy recognize the need to be effective communicators. Knight (2016) suggested coaches need good communication skills to engage with teachers. These skills must include both expressive and receptive communication, so coaches listen to their teacher partners and clearly communicate to those partners. School district leaders often hire coaches to be a conduit of information from the district to the classroom with the specific purpose of implementing system-level changes.

Leading successful system-level reform can often be challenging for individuals. Woulfin and Rigby (2017) indicated the complexity of coaching includes leadership actions that involve shared understanding, brokering ideas, and modeling. Coaches who build trusting, healthy relationships with teachers are more likely to succeed with schoolwide instructional shifts. These meaningful relationships can help generate success and help coaches pass the ownership of innovative ideas to teachers (Knight, 2004, 2016). Thus, coaching can support the implementation of larger reform initiatives in addition to cultivating a curiosity for learning high-leverage practices.

Hunt (2018) suggested there is a careful balance when communicating policies and reforms. In these situations, it is suggested coaches find ways to validate teachers' professional judgment so meaningful learning opportunities may still occur within the coaching conversations. Additionally, in an article about the effects of reading coaches on the implementation of Reading First policies, Coburn and Woulfin (2012) found teachers were more likely to change instructional practices when receiving policy information

from instructional coaches. Hence, coaches should have excellent communication skills to know how to relay messages about an initiative or school reform when partnering with teachers. It is also just as imperative for coaches to recognize the best opportunities for sharing these types of messages.

Finding opportunities to coach teachers can be challenging in the daily routines of school. Employing a coaching cycle embeds opportunities for coaching conversations to occur as a regular element of the coach-teacher partnership. Coburn and Woulfin (2012) suggested establishing a coach-teacher partnership can also influence instructional aspects that are more challenging to change. In a positive teacher-coach partnership, teachers can transfer their learning of skills and strategies to their classroom environment with the support of their coach (Wang, 2017). However, in a study that included information from three literacy coaches, Lowenhaupt, McKinney, and Reeves (2014) found building the necessary relationships for positive partnerships is time-consuming and may not be considered aspects of coaching when evaluating specific elements of a coaching program. This information suggests that any steps a coach takes to build the coach-teacher partnership is necessary for instructional coaching and requires time during which coaches and teachers can converse.

A principal element in the development of coach-teacher partnerships is allocating coaches and teachers time to talk. Thomas et al. (2015) postulated coaching conversations evolve between instructional coaches and teachers as the coach-teacher partnership solidifies. These researchers found the conversations in a strong coach-teacher

partnership move along a continuum from topics about lesson implementation toward teacher reflection about specific instructional practices. Coach-teacher exchanges that focus on what the students are doing and learning helps direct the coaching conversation to be about student learning (Foltos, 2014). Likewise, Desimone and Pak (2017) suggested the shifts in conversations between coaches and teachers occur because of the cyclical nature of coaching. Thus, the coaching cycle allows coaches and teachers frequent opportunities to partner together as they discuss and practice high-leverage strategies that support student success.

Coaches can support teacher growth by moving through various roles throughout the cycle of coaching. Within each step, coaches support teacher reflection, provide encouragement, help build a repertoire of skills, and enhance collaboration (Wang, 2017). Additionally, coaches who use probing questions in the cycle can guide teacher reflection (Foltos, 2014) and encourage teachers to set and attain improvement goals, based on classroom data (Adams et al., 2015; Connor, 2017). Teachers remain actively engaged by collaborating and partnering with coaches throughout the decision-making process (Reddy et al., 2017), which supports teachers' self-directed learning (Miller & Stewart, 2013; Netolicky, 2016). Empowering teachers as learners can significantly impact students' lives (Knight et al., 2015) because teachers continue to acquire high-leverage practices that make a difference in the classroom.

Coach as Instructional Leader

Instructional coaches often have many roles, which may or may not support successful coaching models, in the school or district. Although an instructional coach's primary role is to help classroom teachers teach more effectively, many situations call for the coach to act in a leadership role. In a study focusing on how literacy coaches view themselves as leaders, Calo, Sturtevant, and Kopfman (2015) suggested coaches' expectations sometimes blur their roles in supporting individual teachers and the entire school program. Therefore, determining the role of the instructional coach is necessary and may require the coach to acquire additional skills, depending on how the school uses the coach's position.

Establishing the role of the instructional coach within a school requires an infrastructure that supports coaching success. Professional development that successfully incorporates coaching is embedded within a comprehensive system of learning and improvement (Jacquith et al., 2011). Just as important, districts and school leaders who openly support a coaching model of professional development build structures for its effectiveness and regularly communicate the importance of coaching (Knight, 2016). In an article about content-focused coaching, Bickel, Bernstein-Danis, and Matsumura (2015) referred to this process as *right-sizing* the focus for coaching. These authors characterized right-sizing as establishing a coaching goal that is realistic, manageable, and observable. Administrators who ensure that structures are in place and who positively communicate messages around coaching can help the successful implementation of

coaching programs and initiatives being introduced by coaches. This is especially valuable when the coach is responsible for leading the change.

Instructional coaches are sometimes given leadership roles within a school setting to implement initiatives and changes successfully. In an article regarding Reading First instructional coaches, Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen, and Zigmond (2010) found in some cases, school leaders release their responsibilities for instructional leadership onto coaches or view them in more of a director or mentor capacity. Kwan (2016) suggested instructional leadership encompasses roles that help build the capacity of teachers, rather than supervisory roles that entail evaluating teacher performance. Bean et al. (2010) explained when coaches are instructional leaders, they may be responsible for more than mentoring teachers. In this role, the coach may also be expected to coordinate professional development to engage whole school reform, interpret and share school data, and lead efforts for school district reform (Bean et al., 2010; Calo et al., 2015).

Instructional coach actions and roles can play a part in reform success. Coburn and Woulfin (2012) indicated two types of roles that coaches may play when implementing reform initiatives. These authors described the first role is educative; that is, helping teachers learn instructional practices and supporting changes within the classroom. The second role is a more political role that includes influencing teachers by selectively sharing certain aspects of the initiative or forcibly persuading them to implement changes per the reform. Thus, instructional coaches who possess leadership

skills may find themselves better prepared to handle the various roles regardless of context.

In addition to leadership skills, coaches need a comprehensive set of teaching strategies and communication skills to adequately support teachers' professional learning (Foltos, 2014; Knight, 2016). For coaches to be successful, they need to receive professional development to help build their skills and navigate the complexities of adult learning (Knight et al., 2015). This additional learning may include content knowledge depending on the type of coaching and the coach's experience. Miller and Stewart (2013) found an element to coaching success required using knowledgeable and qualified coaches. In a study on using evaluative tools to assess instructional coaching skills, Reddy, Glover, Kurz, and Elliott (2019) posited that effective coaching required high-level skills in problem-solving, modeling, interaction style, data, and facilitative practice to support professional growth in others. Additionally, Calo et al. (2015) suggested instructional coaches need multiple opportunities for professional learning to refine their coaching knowledge and skillset, especially when focusing on learning leadership skills. Woulfin and Rigby (2017) posit the additional learning for coaches becomes a vital component when school leaders are designing and implementing coaching programs for the first time.

Strengthening a coach's leadership skillset may also help coaches advocate for their role in schools. Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) found in some cases, school leaders expressed the need for coaches' focus to be primarily on questioning and dialogue that

promotes teacher reflection, while also being responsive to teachers. These school leaders did not value the component of offering the teachers immediate feedback. Thus, identifying the best methods for training school leaders on the value of the coaches' work is an important consideration, especially when considering the everyday realities facing coaches (Lowenhaupt et al., 2014). Similarly, administrators who understand the role of the coach can be more selective in the hiring process to ensure that they hire a coach who can be effective in their specific school context (Calo et al., 2015). This hiring process is especially vital when the coach's role is embedded as a part of a larger systemic change and should be a consideration when school district leaders conduct the hiring for larger reform initiatives.

As with any change, coaches may be met with resistance from teachers or school leaders. When met with opposition, coaches who have leadership skills may find themselves persuading others to embrace the change. Of more importance, instructional coaches who understand how various leadership approaches impact followers may find greater success when attempting to make changes that support either systemic reform or improve individuals' performance.

Regardless of the goals for implementing a coaching program, successful leaders develop a wide range of behaviors from various leadership approaches. In a study about the impact of leadership approaches on followers' achievement levels, Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse, and Sassenberg (2014) found effective leaders use a range of leadership behaviors depending on the context of the goals. For example, leaders were more

successful when using transformational behaviors when trying to increase mastery skills that included learning and developing. In contrast, transactional behaviors created competitive environments where followers sought to outperform each other. Therefore, it is advantageous for instructional coaches to be knowledgeable of a wide range of leadership approaches.

A coach's success can also be determined by the ways that administrators introduce the idea of coaching. Administrators who clearly collaborate with the coach and communicate the role of the coach with staff can help demystify the coaching process (Calo et al., 2015). Establishing contexts for coaching and continuous teacher learning is where authentic transformation in the classroom occurs (Miller & Stewart, 2013). This authentic transformation of learning is found within collaborative learning environments which are supported by administrators who value teacher collaboration. Goddard, Goddard, Kim, and Miller (2015) found in their research on instructional leadership and collaboration, that schools led by principals who were strong instructional leaders and who valued collaboration among teachers, positively increased student achievement outcomes. Thus, leaders who provide innovative models of professional learning that empower teachers to hone their craft within the classroom support transformative schools that make a difference for students.

Transformational Leadership

Regardless of industry, organizational leaders are always competing to be the best. Often, this competitiveness relies on effective leadership. One of the most valued

assets stakeholders seek in individuals is that of an effective leader (Northouse, 2016). In the field of education, school districts need strong leaders who can improve student outcomes.

Historically, school administrators were considered instructional leaders, focusing primarily on classroom instruction throughout the school. In an article about the leadership approaches of effective principals, Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) defined an instructional leader as the individual primarily responsible for managing teaching and learning to improve student outcomes. Recently, the literature addressing school reform and the process of improving student outcomes has included information regarding school leaders as transformational leaders (Day et al., 2016; Kwan, 2016). This shift in leadership approach appears to be surfacing due to the range of behaviors successful leaders need across different contexts (Hargis et al., 2011). Hence, further study centered on how leadership impacts school improvement may continue to help school leaders make changes that improve student outcomes.

The study of leadership focuses on the relationship between leaders and followers. Bass (1990) suggested leaders and followers have a relationship based on exchanges or transactions. Through these interactions to engage followers, leaders may use promise and reward for good performance and threat and discipline for poor performance. It is how the leader uses these interactions that defines a specific approach.

Transactional leadership focuses on the rewards and punishment types of exchanges and may lead to mediocrity (Bass, 1990). Conversely, a transformational

leadership approach shifts the focus from rewards or punishments to motivating individuals toward collective effort and group success. Hamstra et al. (2014) found leaders of organizational cultures who encourage individuals to compete against each other should use transactional leadership. Conversely, organizational cultures requiring followers' learning and development should promote a transformational leadership approach. Thus, the leadership approach a leader uses plays a significant role in successfully accomplishing the goal.

Transformational leaders exhibit four characteristics that positively facilitate changes in followers to shift the focus away from individual success toward group success: charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1990). Leaders who exhibit these characteristics develop relationships with followers. Through these relationships, leaders can positively change the culture of an organization to a more trusting environment conducive for learning (Kwan, 2016). A school culture that encourages learning by administrators, teachers, and students is central for positive student outcomes.

The four characteristics of transformational leadership help to define how leaders engage with followers. The first characteristic, *charisma*, further described as *idealized influence* (Bass, 2000), suggests charismatic leaders influence others through behaviors that cause followers to perceive the leader as powerful and confident. Through these behaviors, transformational leaders motivate others to develop a sense of mission within an organization, which further supports collaboration.

The second characteristic of transformational leadership is *inspiration*, or *inspirational motivation*. Leaders who exhibit inspiration exert their influence by communicating an idealistic vision that focuses individuals on striving toward futuristic goals (Hamstra et al., 2014; Hargis et al., 2011). Through vision, transformational leaders help others develop a sense of purpose within an organization.

The third characteristic of transformational leadership is *intellectual stimulation*. Leaders who demonstrate intellectual stimulation encourage others to be innovative and creative. These leaders encourage followers to gain mastery (Hamstra et al., 2014) by learning more to improve their skills and to problem solve (Hargis et al., 2011). This self-improvement helps individuals feel more confident in their abilities.

The last characteristic of transformational leadership focuses on *individualized consideration*. Leaders who exhibit individualized consideration focus on helping others pursue their fullest potential (Hargis et al., 2011). In a study correlating transformational leadership and authentic leadership approaches, Joo and Nimon (2014) found that transformational leaders know their followers' individual desires and can increase followers' potential through coaching and feedback. Taking the time to know individuals' strengths and areas for improvement can help leaders modify the ways in which they encourage growth in others. Inspiring others to achieve the successes they desire is the goal of transformational leadership.

Leaders who encourage and support others to achieve their fullest potential help build a stronger collective group. Transformational leaders know their followers

personally and encourage individuals' growth through these personal relationships, thereby strengthening the entirety of the group they lead.

Summary

Instructional coaching remains a topic of interest for many educational researchers. Aligning what researchers have learned about the features of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Jacquith et al., 2011; Spelman et al., 2016) and the research on instructional coaching (Knight, 2004, 2015; Knight et al., 2015) provides a wealth of information for school district leaders to consider when designing and implementing an instructional coaching program. However, there are still gaps in the research identified in the empirical literature.

Much of the research to date illustrates that there is high regard for instructional coaching as a tool for helping improve instructional practices within the classroom. Although this extant research has defined many specific elements to support the implementation of coaching, throughout the literature, authors have still expressed a need for further study of coaching elements (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Kurz et al., 2017; Sailors & Price, 2015) and the impact coaching has on teachers and students (Calo et al., 2015; Rezzonico et al., 2015). Additionally, there is a need for focusing on coaching components that influence sustainable teacher behaviors and increase teacher content knowledge, resulting in student learning. These shifts in teacher behaviors include creating rich classroom experiences through coaching (Desimone & Pak, 2017), supporting teachers' growth in various circumstances (Howley et al., 2014), identifying

components of coaching that directly impact student learning (Kurz et al., 2017), determining the components that sustain teacher behaviors and increase student learning (Reddy et al., 2017; Rezzonico et al., 2015), and creating professional development that helps increase teachers' competencies and knowledge (Spelman et al., 2016). The suggestions listed focus on the components of the coaching model that can influence long-term changes to a teacher's instructional practices. Engaging teachers in professional learning that is supported by a coach may help transform today's schools.

Other suggestions expressed as a current need in the research focus on the relationships between teachers and coaches. These suggestions include research on the characteristics of the coach-teacher partnership (Kurz et al., 2017) and focusing on factors that support teachers' growth. Howley et al. (2014) suggested identifying factors that support building trust between coaches and teachers may allow for deeper coach-teacher interactions, which could influence and change teachers' practices. Additionally, finding ways to sustain professional growth beyond the immediate coaching support is needed (Kraft & Blazar, 2017) to ensure that the time and money spent in instructional coaching remains a long-term investment for schools.

Clearly defined elements of successful coaching models could help school administrators and teachers successfully implement coaching programs on either a wider-scale basis or perhaps in a more financially efficient way. In either case, policy and funding for instructional coaching can help ensure it is sustainable and ubiquitous (Connor, 2017). Therefore, conducting this research study to identify the activities and

actions that are important to build and maintain coach-teacher partnerships and facilitate shifts to teachers' instructional practices helped reveal factors for coaching success. The findings are valuable for school leaders who are considering the adoption and implementation of a coaching program through job-embedded professional learning programs that sustain teacher learning and positively increase student achievement.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Curiosity and questioning lead researchers to gain a deeper understanding of a topic. The goals of this study included identifying the activities and actions important for building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships and those activities and actions that help facilitate shifts in teachers' instructional practices. These goals were accomplished by examining the lived experience of reading specialists who engage in coaching teachers for all or part of their job roles. The reading specialists in this study had 3 or more years of experience in this role.

First, in this chapter, there is information regarding qualitative methodology and why this was the best method for this study. Second, information is presented explaining why quantitative and mixed methods were not the best fit for this study. Third, information about interpretive phenomenology research design used for this study is outlined as well as information about the instruments used and the participants selected. Finally, there is information about the data analysis methods used to understand the experience of being a reading specialist who also has a role as an instructional coach. Information pertaining to the limitations to this study are also included in this chapter.

The focus of this qualitative, interpretive, phenomenological study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What activities or actions do instructional coaches identify as important when building partnerships with teachers?

2. What activities or actions do instructional coaches identify as important when maintaining partnerships with teachers?
3. What activities or actions do instructional coaches identify as important when shifting teachers' classroom instructional practices in literacy?

Research Method

The focus of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of reading specialists who act as instructional coaches for all or part of their job roles. Qualitative methodology was selected because qualitative research allows the researcher to interact personally with the population under study. Although qualitative research is complex, this method of research offers opportunities to study individuals and phenomena in their natural environments. In an article explaining the differences between qualitative and quantitative research methodology, Graue (2015) suggested qualitative research allows the researcher to be closer to the topic by gaining a more in-depth understanding of the participants' points of view. Graue also explained the selection of a research methodology occurs based on the researchers' epistemological beliefs. Similarly, Yilmaz (2013) indicated qualitative researchers are grounded in the belief that reality is socially constructed, and individuals gain meaning from experiences. Thus, qualitative methods allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and how they perceive these psychologically constructed encounters.

In stark contrast to qualitative research is quantitative research. O'Dwyer and Bernauer (2014) outlined the distinct differences between these contrasting research

methods to help both qualitative and quantitative researchers select the appropriate method for research. These authors posited that quantitative research is grounded in the beliefs that there are causal relationships between isolated variables (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). In quantitative research, the participants and researcher are separate and independent of one another. Usually, the sample is random and much larger than qualitative research (Creswell, 2015). Hence, researchers can more easily distance themselves from the participants and topic under study to aid the objectivity of the researcher. The randomness of the sample also allows the results to be generalizable to a larger population (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). Often, quantitative researchers use closed-ended instruments to find patterns in the data about experimental treatments or programs (Creswell, 2014). Thus, quantitative researchers can intentionally trigger experiences for participants, thereby controlling the information gathered and failing to gain insight into participants' experiences.

An additional research methodology is mixed methods. In mixed-methods research, the researcher uses quantitative and qualitative research designs. Depending on the topic being studied, the results of one design are used to refine the focus and design of the other. In an article about mixed-method research design, Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) asserted the convergence of the qualitative and quantitative methodology as a point of integration. These authors added that this point of integration may result from mixing any of the research components, such as purposes of the study, research questions, methods, methodology, data collection, data analysis, and findings. Therefore,

mixed-method research requires multiple stages and is more complex than the scope of this study and is therefore not the best fit.

In qualitative research, the researcher and participants engage during the study, which leads to a better understanding of how experiences influence individuals' actions and behaviors. The emphasis of qualitative research is grounded in the constructivist belief that reality is socially created, and individuals have multiple perspectives of a situation or event (Creswell, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). Thus, since coaching occurs within a social context based on interactions between individuals, understanding those interactions that occur within the coach-teacher partnership is best discovered through qualitative methodology.

Research Design

Qualitative research encompasses various designs. These designs help researchers conduct inquiries through varying approaches that include case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology. Each of these approaches informs the procedures of the study (Creswell, 2014). Determining the approach that is best to achieve answers to the research questions is the goal for researchers.

Case study research is a research design often used in the social sciences. In a seminal book on case study research design, Yin (2014) outlined certain conditions evident in a case study. First, a case study can focus on either a single case or multiple cases. Next, in a case study, the research is bound by time and place and involves studying a case within a real-life context. Case study researchers answer “how” and

“why” research questions and require multiple pieces of data to triangulate the evidence. The focus of this study was to identify the activities and actions that instructional coaches use to build and maintain coach-teacher partnerships that help facilitate shifts to teachers’ instructional practices. Case study was not the best fit for this study because the focus of the study is not on how or why teachers change and is not bound by time or place.

Ethnography is another qualitative approach for research. With ethnography, researchers study an entire culture-sharing group to examine shared patterns of values, beliefs, and behaviors (Creswell, 2014). Ethnographic research takes time for the researchers to embed themselves within the culture. While reading specialists may be considered sharing similar aspects of their day-to-day roles, usually schools have only one reading specialist per school, which makes the true aspect of culture non-relevant for this study. Thus, ethnography was not a good fit for this research.

Grounded theory is an additional approach for qualitative research. With grounded theory, the researcher’s primary goal is to end the research by developing a theory based on a process or action that was a part of the data collected during the study (Creswell, 2014). Since the goal of this research was not to develop a theory based on data, grounded theory was not a good fit for this study.

An additional research design in qualitative research is phenomenology and was the research design choice for this study. Exploring experiences based on an individual’s perception is the foundation of phenomenological research. In a book about using qualitative research methods in the study of leadership, Klenke, Martin, and Wallace

(2016) defined phenomena as the appearance of things with which individuals attribute meaning and thus become an experience unique to the individual. The study of phenomenology moves the focus of the study away from individuals to focus on the phenomena itself which becomes the unit of meaning. In an article on the true meaning of phenomenology, van Manen (2017) explained phenomenology has a focus on individuals bringing an awareness of experiences into light retrospectively, and the researcher works to gain meaning and meaningfulness from an experience. This living meaning becomes the lived experience related to the phenomenon itself. Klenke et al. (2016) reported the purpose of phenomenological research as a way to understand a phenomenon through an individual's perception of the experience. Thus, an individual's experience carries powerful meaning about the phenomenon.

Within phenomenological research, there are two different concepts of thought, which are descriptive and interpretive. In an article explaining the differences between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology, Reiners (2012) suggested Husserl's descriptive phenomenology is described as the everyday consciousness or awareness of an event or object. Therefore, Husserl believed individuals must bracket themselves to avoid influencing the data collected due to any preconceived ideas or opinions. In contrast, Reiners explained that Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology focused on the individual's interpretation of the event or object that brings to light its meaning for the individual. Heidegger believed an individual could never fully remove preconceived

beliefs and ideas, and therefore the researcher's experience with the event adds to the depth of the interpretation of the phenomena (Reiners, 2012).

The intent of phenomenological research is to describe and understand phenomenon. Researchers capture experiences by allowing individuals the opportunity to communicate their thoughts and experiences through observations and interviews that explore the phenomena. Moustakas (1994) explained that the shared experiences and individual perceptions gathered from personal interviews help contribute knowledge and wonder, adding depth to the study. These contributions converge in a shared story that conveys the essence of the phenomena. It is a process that helps unveil wonderings about an idea, which drives curiosities and creates unity between past and present. The uniqueness of phenomenology allows any event to become a focus when drawn into the lens of phenomenological research (van Manen, 2017). From this information, researchers can fully interpret how individuals attach meaning to experiences as they live through them (van Manen, 2017; Yilmaz, 2013). For this reason, interpretive phenomenology can help explain the essence or shared story of being a reading specialist with instructional coaching responsibilities.

Data Collection Procedures

It is advantageous to consider all aspects of collecting data in research. In a book about considerations for beginning researchers, Hancock and Algozzine (2017) suggested the researcher carefully plan for data collection from interviews. These suggestions include using an interview protocol, consideration for interview setting, and using audio

or video recording to ensure accuracy of details. For this study, each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) and audio recorded. In each interview, participants received the same interview protocol to ensure consistency. Each of these interviews lasted less than 1 hour, so a follow-up session was not needed to complete the interviews. In addition, participants were not contacted for clarifying questions after the interviews since none arose after the data analysis occurred. In each of these instances, participants would have had the option to decline participation.

Each interview occurred in the participant's own environment; however, some were face-to-face and in-person, and others were face-to-face using online technology. The interviews conducted in-person face-to-face were audio-recorded. The interviews using online technology were done via Skype, Zoom, and FaceTime and were also audio-recorded. In these cases, there was extensive work to ensure that the Skype, Zoom, and FaceTime interview was consistent with the quality of the face-to-face in-person interviews. All audio recordings were transcribed upon completion of the interviews. In an article about the ethical considerations related to interviewing peers, Quinney, Dwyer, and Chapman (2016) suggested careful consideration about a neutral interview is essential and that environment impacts the rapport between interviewer and participant, which may also influence the participants' responses and the quality of the recording. Therefore, in both settings, all efforts were made to ensure a pleasant atmosphere that was conducive for recording occurred.

All participants were also offered an opportunity to partake in synthesized member checking (SMC) to enhance the credibility of the results. In an article describing the SMC method of member checking, Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) outlined SMC as a 5-step protocol for member checking. Participants receive a synthesized summary of the data, along with illustrative interview quotes. Participants review both the summary and the quotes and comment on whether the results resonate with them or if they desire to add any additional comments. The added data are integrated into the findings (Birt et al., 2016). Using the SMC in this study offered participants the opportunity to ensure the accuracy of their thoughts and statements. Adding member checking into the data analysis process added to the credibility of the findings of this study.

Field notes were also collected during the interviews when appropriate. The additional field notes provided supporting information used in the analysis. All these items were stripped of personal identifiers to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

Instruments

The primary instrument that was used in this study was a semi-structured interview protocol. The questions asked during an interview help participants tell their stories. The design of the interview questions used in the semi-structured protocol helped encourage the participants to expand on their thoughts about their experiences with instructional coaching related to the research questions in this study. Additionally, the

questions helped participants share their thinking and reactions about exchanges that occur within the coach-teacher partnership. Any adaptations to the questions only occurred for clarification purposes. The open-ended questions helped the researcher gather information related to feelings of success and non-success, individual's growth, and releasing power or authority from one individual to another.

Peer review and piloting of the interview protocol instrument was done as an external check and an additional reliability strategy for this study. Therefore, administering the interview protocol for this study to reading specialists outside of the focus population occurred with one reading specialist to ensure instrument reliability. Based on the feedback, there were no changes made to the instrument.

Researcher as Instrument

Qualitative researchers help interpret participants' perceptions of a phenomenon under study. To do this, researchers need to be involved with the participants to fully gain an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. To fully gain the necessary information, the researcher needs to become the research instrument (Yilmaz, 2013). When researchers are the instrument, they are in close contact with the participants during the data collection. One example of this type of interaction is through face-to-face interviews. By allowing themselves to gather the necessary information for rich, detailed, descriptive information, researchers must be cautious of influencing the data collected.

Phenomenological theorists maintain different beliefs regarding an individual's awareness of being present in the moment. Horrigan-Kelly et al. (2016) noted

Heidegger's philosophy of separating oneself from the context of a situation requires reflexivity to remain cognizant of one's own preconceptions. Sorsa, Kiikkala, and Åstedt-Kurki (2015) further explained the researcher and participants together create new understanding of a topic through conversations that may include prior knowledge, understanding, and experiences. Thus, qualitative researchers seeking to conduct phenomenological research must reflect on their beliefs and experiences and recognize how these can influence their understanding of the topic. This process, called *reflexivity*, helps researchers bring an awareness throughout the research process to ensure that they do not prejudice or add biases to the study, thereby ensuring credibility.

Epoche and Bracketing

In any research study, it is essential for the researcher to remain unbiased. In this qualitative study, minimizing bias was done through the epoche process. Moustakas (1994) described the *epoche process* as a way for the researcher to clear the mind of thoughts or experiences. In an article reviewing the hermeneutic approach, Heinonen (2015) depicted epoche as freeing oneself, or bracketing oneself, of preconceptions or judgments throughout the research process. Bracketing offers ways for the researcher to set aside personal knowledge and assumptions while focusing on the participants' viewpoints about a topic. Hence, a principal consideration for researchers is to find ways to bracket themselves throughout the research process.

Researchers who are knowledgeable about the topic of study should engage in strategies that help them reflect on their beliefs and biases. In interpretive

phenomenology, Heinonen (2015) suggested the researcher brackets their understandings of the phenomenon and uses the method of reduction to integrate their own meaning and understanding to the phenomenon being studied. Bracketing can include strategies such as mental preparation to identify one's beliefs, careful consideration and planning of the literature review and interview guide, and including validation processes in data analysis. In an article about mindfulness practices in qualitative data collection, Lemon (2017) explored mindfulness practices as an extension to reflexivity in the data analysis stage of qualitative research. Through mindfulness activities such as memoing or journaling, researchers ensure credibility and quality of the data (Lemon, 2017). For the purposes of this study, using reflexive journaling to engage in bracketing and to create an awareness and mindfulness during data collection and analysis occurred. Additionally, clarifying the epoche process occurred at the outset of the study.

Participants

In qualitative research, the focus of a study may call for the researcher to include a specific group of individuals as the sample in the study. The word *sample* is derived from the Latin word *exemplum* or example (Merriam Webster, 2018), aligning with the idea that phenomenological research is derived from examples of the phenomenon under study. Creswell (2014) described purposeful selection in a study as the selection of individuals that inform a central phenomenon. For this study, it is advantageous to clarify the population from which the sample was purposefully selected. The ILA recently updated the Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals (2018). In these

standards, the association clarified the roles and responsibilities of literacy professionals. According to the standards, reading specialists' primary role is to work with students for a majority of their time, while supporting teachers and system initiatives that are included within their job assignment. Conversely, the standards define a literacy coach's role as working primarily with teachers and supporting system initiatives and students less of the time. Within these roles, however, the reality is that there are no clear distinctions between the roles in many cases, and often these individuals have a wide range of responsibilities (Bean & Kern, 2018). Therefore, the purposeful selection of participants in this study was limited to reading specialists who had at least 3 years of experience as reading specialists and who also coach teachers as a part of their specialist role. These reading specialists were employed in multiple school districts in a Northeast region of the United States.

As an additional selection method, the use of referral sampling, or linear snowballing sampling, in which each participant recommends one other, was also used to identify additional participants. In an article on strategies for purposeful selection within qualitative research, Palinkas et al. (2015) suggested the snowball method of sample selection helps narrow the range of participants to focus on specific similarities. This method of sample selection helps to identify those participants who fit the criteria of potentially experiencing the same phenomenon.

To begin the process of snowball sampling required a process of initially identifying Participant 0. The process began by contacting three colleagues from different

school districts who are reading specialists and who have contact with other reading specialists. Through informal conversation, these colleagues had expressed a willingness to be potential candidates for Participant 0 and help with the recruiting process. These colleagues received a copy of the recruitment script (see Appendix B) to share with the potential research candidates. In this recruitment script, potential candidates were provided contact information and were asked to reach out by email if they were interested in participating. Once contact was made, these potential participants were emailed a letter (see Appendix C) formally inviting them to participate in the study. Each of the candidates who agreed to participate were asked to recommend an additional participant. For this study, 11 participants were selected. This selection process continued until an adequate sample size was determined for saturation of the data.

Instructional coaching occurs throughout many different content areas and contexts. For this study, the participants were reading specialists who also coach teachers for all or part of their roles. Therefore, this study focused specifically on instructional coaching that occurs within the field of literacy instruction.

Data Analysis Methods

The interviews were conducted, and audio recordings of each interview occurred. After each interview, transcription of the audio recording occurred using a professional service for transcription. Once the data were transcribed, the process of further analysis of the data occurred.

Moustakas (1994) indicated phenomenological research analysis includes a reduction process. Through Phenomenological Reduction, each experience of a phenomenon is captured through statements and considered individually during a phenomenological study. The qualitative researcher studies these statements to describe, classify, and connect concepts across the phenomena (Graue, 2015). These meaning statements are derived from reading and re-reading the participant transcripts and artifacts in search of common thoughts, ideas, and words.

The cyclical nature of the reduction process can be done using the hermeneutic circle. In an article about using the hermeneutic circle as a method of text analysis, Longxi (2018) depicted the hermeneutic circle as an interpretive process of continuously circling between reading the entire text and reading individual parts for textual data analysis. Throughout this process, irrelevant, repetitive, and overlapping statements are deleted, leaving the 'horizons' of data and each statement is considered equal (Moustakas, 1994). The meaning statements develop from coding of the horizontalized statements, which were then clustered into themes. The themes supported the interpretation or essence of the lived experience of the participants in response to the research questions and are reported as the findings of the research in Chapter 4.

Limitations

One limitation for this study might have been the participants' levels of trust in responding to the interview questions. Since the researcher is also a reading specialist, participants of this study may have perceived the researcher as an authority figure or

evaluator. The reading specialists in this study might have felt they were being evaluated based on their responses and may have only identified those experiences, which cast them in a positive light regarding their roles as instructional coaches. To address this limitation, questions were asked through the interview protocol that helped reveal activities and actions of both positive and negative experiences that have an impact on the coach-teacher partnership. In addition, the researcher having experience in instructional coaching may have introduced biases toward the topic under study. Use of reflective journaling occurred throughout the study to bracket biases and create awareness of individual beliefs.

Another limitation that might have occurred was if the interviews were conducted over the phone, as opposed to face-to-face or Skype or other online technologies due to possible conflicts. Variations can occur in the way a participant responds over the phone versus face-to-face. Every effort was made to conduct the interviews in a face-to-face setting, so this limitation did not occur.

Finally, due to the time of the school year, observational data or consistent responses might have been more difficult to obtain. However, every effort was made to obtain responses in a timely manner which helped to avoid scheduling conflicts that are typical within a school calendar year.

Study Delimitations

This study's delimitations include geographic limitations because it took place in school districts in the Northeast region of the United States. This made these data only

relevant to these school districts. Also, this study focused only on instructional coaching in the field of literacy, which may also be considered a delimitation in the study.

Summary

Finding commonalities across various individuals who encounter similar experiences offers greater understanding from which to learn. Many school districts employ certified reading specialists with the intent of implementing school reform initiatives focusing on literacy skills. Gaining a deeper understanding of how that role impacts instructional changes can be significant as school systems continue to face the challenge of declining student achievement scores.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to identify the activities and actions that support effective coach-teacher partnerships by examining the lived experiences of reading specialists who spend all or a portion of their time coaching teachers. The commonalities in this study were determined after conducting interviews with coaches. The data were then coded, and information gained from the participants helped identify themes which were consistent across the coaching experiences. Conducting interviews with instructional coaches to understand the relational nuances of building and maintaining partnerships with teachers helped advance the literature for instructional coaching models. The information from this study could help school districts better prepare professional development opportunities that support teacher learning and potentially improve instructional coaching efforts. School leaders

and other practitioners could also use the findings of this study to design programs that support instructional coaches.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to identify the activities and actions that are important for building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships and those activities and actions that help facilitate shifts in teachers' instructional practices. A discussion of the lived experiences of reading specialists across the Northeast region who were responsible for instructional coaching as the entire or a partial part of their roles is outlined in this chapter. Three research questions helped guide this study:

1. What activities or actions do instructional coaches identify as important when building partnerships with teachers?
2. What activities or actions do instructional coaches identify as important when maintaining partnerships with teachers?
3. What activities or actions do instructional coaches identify as important when shifting teachers' classroom instructional practices in literacy?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 individuals who were responsible for coaching teachers in literacy instruction to determine activities or actions that existed within their role as an instructional coach. Transcription of the interview data occurred, and each participant was assigned a participant number. The purpose of the participant number was to afford each participant confidentiality in their participation in this research. These individuals had unique titles for their specific roles that included reading specialist, literacy specialist, literacy strategist, transition specialist, instructional specialist, and reading support teacher. For this study, the participants are referred to as

either the participants or instructional coaches. Each participant shared their unique lived experience of coaching teachers in literacy instruction. The 11 participants had a range of experiences as educators and instructional coaches (see Table 4.1), which ranged from 15 to 38 years of experience as educators and between 4 and 19 years as a coach. Five of the instructional coaches were responsible for coaching at a single site, while three participants were coaching in two sites, and two participants coached across more than two sites. Included in the table is the identified percentage of their role spent on coaching.

Chapter 4 is structured around four themes identified from the content of the interviews: (a) Experiential Learning, (b) Collaboration, (c) Inspiration, and (d) Responsibility. The conceptual categories were identified from patterns found across the interview data. Within the themes were Mindset, Reflection, Trust, Relationship, Passion, Purpose, Leadership, Ownership, Caretaking, and Courage. The findings include the themes and conceptual categories identified from the participants' data, which helped address the research questions in this study.

Presentation of Findings

All 11 participants were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. Of these 11 interviews, four were conducted in person and seven were conducted via online technologies including Skype, Zoom, or FaceTime. Prior to the interview, each participant was provided with a formal invitation to participate (see Appendix C). Once the formal invitation to participate was returned, each participant received a copy of the consent form (see Appendix D). At the start of each interview, the researcher reviewed the consent form in its entirety with the participant. For the participants who interviewed

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

Participant Number	Years as Educator	Years as Coach	Number of Schools	Percentage of Time Spent Coaching in Role
1	18	6	2	100
2	30	5	2	100
3	38	7	1	70
4	20	4	1	30
5	35	15	1	50
6	26	10	1	60-70
7	29	4	2	100
8	30	11	1	80-90
9	15	4	> 3	5-10
10	23	4	1	100
11	37	19	> 3	65

online, the consent form was provided ahead of time. These participants read, signed, and returned the consent form via email prior to the interview. After reviewing the consent form, participants had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. None of the participants asked any questions prior to the start of the interview. Each participant was given a signed copy of the consent form to keep for his or her records. For the interviews conducted online, the participants retained their original signed copy of the consent form. For the interviews conducted in person, the participants were provided a copy of the signed consent form. All interviews were audio-recorded, and the researcher took field notes during the interviews. Each participant was asked a series of nine questions (see Appendix A). As participants responded to the interview questions, the researcher asked additional clarifying questions as needed. Appendix A also includes these additional prompts.

Upon completion of each interview, the audio recording was transcribed using the Temi online transcription service. Upon completion of the transcription, a line-by-line review of the transcription was done to ensure accuracy and make any changes necessary. Once the interviews had been transcribed, all of the transcripts were read in their entirety. This review of the transcripts began the interpretive process of data analysis using the hermeneutic circle method of analysis. The hermeneutic circle method requires the researcher to continuously review and analyze the data collected by reading the whole text and then parts of the text in a cyclical manner (Longxi, 2018). Throughout this cycle, notes were taken in a reflective journal to stimulate awareness of individual beliefs and subjectivity related to similar experiences shared by the researcher. This journaling was especially valuable given the researcher is also a reading specialist with coaching responsibilities. The text of the interviews was then coded in order to determine statements revealing common thoughts, ideas, and words. Continuous review of the interview text and coding of the text occurred to analyze, refine, and reduce the codes and statements to those that answered the research questions. Continuing to use the hermeneutic process helped to identify meaning statements, clustering them into broader conceptual categories. A sample of the meaning statements and the related conceptual categories are in Table 4.2.

The conceptual categories that developed from the meaning statements were clustered into the identified themes. By continuously reviewing the conceptual categories and statements helped to identify connections to the essence of being a reading specialist

Table 4.2

Meaning Statement Samples and Conceptual Categories

Conceptual Categories	Meaning Statements
Mindset	<p>“But what’s the mindset they have towards growing first?” (Participant 7)</p> <p>“You need to have an open mind. You need to have a growth mindset.” (Participant 4)</p>
Reflection	<p>“Because I think without reflection, any kind of reflection, teachers don’t ever improve their practice.” (Participant 3)</p> <p>“For me that was a really great coaching experience because it was somebody who was very entrenched, very resistive, getting them to buy in through that model-coach-apply process and then even sharing through her reflection, what a difference that made for her was really important.” (Participant 11)</p>
Trust	<p>“I have so many more customers now than I had earlier in my career. I think I’m better at building trust. I know I am.” (Participant 5)</p> <p>“I always try to leave a little note and that has gone a long way in building trust.” (Participant 1)</p>
Relationship	<p>“I’m a firm believer that the big thing is that relationship building. You really need to build that relationship with the teachers.” (Participant 6)</p> <p>“It took a long time to really kind of build that relationship for her to realize that I’m not there to criticize her, that I’m really there to just work with her and have it be a partnership.” (Participant 9)</p>
Passion	<p>“There’s a satisfaction when you see success and you see teachers making growth and teachers being successful and productive in their classroom and you see their pride and their job satisfaction, so you have satisfaction.” (Participant 10)</p> <p>“I’m a learner myself. And, so, I definitely start with the mindset that people want to learn, people want to grow. And I think that’s an essential part as an educator.” (Participant 7)</p>
Purpose	<p>“I’m very much a strong advocate that you have to deal with the beliefs. You can’t just deal with the practices.” (Participant 7)</p> <p>“I am bred, I mean it is deep in my bones teaching. And so as soon as I recognize something that someone doesn’t understand, I go into teach mode. But as a coach, that should not be my first reaction. My first reaction should be what I’m trying to do more of and that is, ‘talk to me more about . . .’” (Participant 2)</p>
Leadership	<p>“It started spreading to other people on her team. And she was stepping into this leadership role that I don’t think she really recognized was in her and really leading this work.” (Participant 2)</p> <p>“We get so wrapped up in classroom time and testing and we forget to kind of carve out that time for teachers to reflect on their practices and it’s so important for them to do that.” (Participant 9)</p>
Ownership	<p>“I get very emotionally involved in it and if I don’t see the success, I take it as a failure. I think you have to be very careful with that because you can’t control everything that a teacher puts into it” (Participant 6)</p>

Conceptual Categories	Meaning Statements
	“Well you always feel like it’s a nonsuccess if the kids don’t do well, but you keep going and you try to keep thinking of different ways to get it, to get to the issue of why a child or groups of children are not performing and what you can do about it.” (Participant 8)
Caretaking	“I don’t know, I just see the human behind the teacher a lot more and I worry about teachers because we don’t do a lot of caretaking of ourselves. So often I’ll be the person that provides a little bit of the caretaking for the teachers.” (Participant 5) “You’re there to really build their capacity to be the best that they can be for the kids.” (Participant 8)
Courage	“I’m not someone who feels comfortable saying I don’t know publicly, I can admit it to myself, you know, and, and people that I have built trust with, I can say, ‘You know what, I really don’t know the answer to this.’” (Participant 2) “I don’t know everything. . . . I’m not going to ask the teacher to do anything that I wouldn’t do myself. Teaching is a hard job.” (Participant 11)

who coached teachers. From this stage in the hermeneutic process, the conceptual categories were then clustered into themes; the themes are shown in Table 4.3.

The participants had an opportunity to participate in SMC as a part of the hermeneutic process. Birt et al. (2016) reported using the SMC offers participants the chance to review both a summary and the quotes from the data collected and add any additional thoughts or comments based on their review.

The participants received copies of the synthesized data for their review and feedback. The participants who responded confirmed their agreement to the themes, conceptual categories, and meaningful statements. Using SMC offered the participants an opportunity to extend or revise their ideas and added validity to this study.

Experiential Learning

Throughout the interviews, participants expressed multiple examples of experiential learning opportunities. By providing hands-on experiences for teachers, reading specialists (instructional coaches) help teachers learn through active, rather than

Table 4.3

Themes and Conceptual Categories

Themes	Conceptual Categories
Experiential Learning	Mindset
	Reflection
Collaboration	Trust
	Relationship
Inspiration	Passion
	Purpose
Responsibility	Leadership
	Ownership
	Caretaking
	Courage

passive, learning experiences. Within the theme of Experiential Learning, two conceptual categories emerged from the research: Mindset and Reflection. These two categories were a fundamental part of this study. Participants frequently shared their thoughts, including comments related to their mindset and reflection, as well as the importance of teachers having a growth mindset and reflective behaviors while learning.

Mindset

The concept of Mindset came up 17 times across five cases. Similarly, the idea of assisting teachers in shifting their mindset about their learning came up in two additional cases. The reading specialists (instructional coaches) shared the importance of reflecting on their mindset. Participant 6 shared:

I know when I first started, I was of the mindset like, “Hey, you know, I’m telling you, like, I just, I’ve gone to school. I know what I’m talking about. Like you need to do this.” But I’ve learned, you know, it’s not personal. People are where they are, and I just need to keep trying and keep finding other ways to present it to them.

The participants also noted the value of assessing where a teacher's mindset was on a continuum between fixed and growth mindsets before starting any coaching experiences.

Participant 4 shared, "I think it's that growth mindset that makes a huge difference and that ability to evolve and be willing to be open to say let's look at it another way."

Similarly, Participant 7 stated:

For me, it was a big learning curve of recognizing where is the teacher starting in their growth mindset process. And making sure that I'm starting there, more so than, this is the instructional practice that we need to improve on.

Participant 2 remarked, "I think even once you can kind of shift that mindset, then it even makes the actual PD [professional development] time more engaging because it's not the eye rolling." Additionally, Participant 6 explained, "Some people don't have the right mindset or are not ready." Participant 6's use of the term "not ready" also demonstrates the importance of coaches believing in a teacher's ability to grow and change and illustrated the coach's growth mindset. Participants also shared that their skills developed when engaging with teachers who had a fixed mindset. Participant 7 commented, "I learned that it took a lot of patience to get through to someone like that because she had a very, 'I can't do' attitude."

Throughout the interviews, the participants expressed thoughts and ideas that pertained to the value of having a growth mindset as a learner. Often, the participant's stories illustrated connections between a teacher's mindset and thoughts and comments related to the use of reflective practices. In other words, the participant's stories demonstrated that teachers' growth or fixed mindsets often impacted their use of reflective practices.

Reflection

The concept of reflection came up frequently across many of the interviews. Sometimes it was the coach reflecting on their skill set, while other times it was the coach finding ways to help teachers reflect on their learning in the process. During analysis, the terms *reflection*, *reflective*, or *reflect* came up 21 times across eight cases. Using reflection to develop their coaching skills, Participant 6 remarked, “I’ve been reflecting on it lately, that I just, what else could I do? And going forward, if I have that situation, what else can I do? Like how else? You know, I get very emotionally involved in it.” Sometimes the participant’s stories spoke to how their work with individual teachers lifted their coaching skills. Participant 2 talked about her work with a teacher:

She’s an active learner, always pushing herself, very reflective. I always kind of set her as my litmus test because I know if I do something that I know moves her instructional practice, then I know I’m hitting my goal of continuing to move the work forward and not just becoming stagnant with the work.

In many responses, however, the participants referred to reflection in the work they were doing to develop teachers.

Often, the participants used opportunities in their coaching to build teachers’ reflective skills. Participant 7 spoke of questioning practices that help build reflection by sharing, “A lot of questioning, so they’re building their reflective practice and it’s not just me giving them feedback but facilitating their own reflective practice to grow.”

Participant 9 shared similar practices:

You know, there’s a lot of just those reflective questions like, you know, “Can you tell me why you did this? Or why do you think he responded this way?” So, I try very hard to let them lead the discussion and then, you know, throw in my kind of coaching tidbits when it feels appropriate to do so.

In these examples, the coach was careful to assess when they believed teachers were ready to begin the reflection process.

Some of the participants used a teacher's reflective skills as a measure of their success. Participant 3 noted, "My idea of success is more in the implementation and the idea that the teacher becomes a little more reflective about themselves." Participant 5 shared a similar feeling: "When I see evidence of teachers being reflective on their own, really seeing them begin to think through their own practice without me prompting them are ways that I measure my success as a coach."

The participants' ideas about reflective practices provided insight into the importance of helping others develop metacognitive awareness in the learning process. Of the participants who shared ideas centered on reflective practices and mindset, this notion of helping others develop these skills through experiential learning became evident throughout the stories.

Collaboration

Throughout the interviews, the participants shared stories of working closely with individuals and teams to build teaching capacity. The concepts of trust and relationships were prevalent throughout the interviews. There were 29 ideas related to these concepts across 10 of the cases. Within these ideas, the participants consistently mentioned that trust was a vital factor in developing relationships that fostered the collaborative work necessary for valuable professional learning.

Trust. Participants frequently mentioned the importance of establishing trust in the coach-teacher partnership. Establishing trust appeared to be the foundational factor in coach and teacher success. Taking the time to build trust is an investment in moving teachers' instructional practices toward implementation of high-leverage practices. The result of this investment was evident when Participant 2 stated, "I feel like I'm being able to dig in a little bit deeper with teachers more now than I was and I think that speaks to just the trust." Participant 1 reported the result of not having taken the steps to establish trust by saying, "I definitely think it's that investment piece. I think sometimes it could be that teachers are not invested because they don't trust me, and I have not taken enough time to build that relationship which is so huge." Similarly, Participant 9 remarked, "I had to really build that trust with her and get her to buy into the [coaching] program because that's the biggest thing, you know, it is getting the teachers to buy in."

Confidentiality between the coach and teacher appeared to be a vital part of the trust between coaches and teachers. Participant 8 shared, "You have to build that trust and knowing that you're not there to spy on them and go run and tell your principal." Participant 7 also commented, "It's so critical to maintain the trust in a coach relationship to keep what happens between the two of you confidential."

The steps coaches take to build the trust between themselves and the teachers they coach tend to be the beginning stages of the relationship building that is necessary for coaching success. A few of the participants indicated that a trusting relationship often leads to a lifetime connection between coaches and teachers. Frequently, coaches shared

stories about teachers reconnecting with them even when the coach is no longer on site, which speaks to the importance trust plays in long-lasting relationships.

Relationship. Throughout the interviews, the participants remarked that a factor in overcoming teacher resistance was often the relationship between the coach and teacher. Frequently throughout the interviews, participants mentioned the importance of starting at the beginning and dedicating time to building the coaching relationship. In some cases, the coach used time in the beginning to listen and appraise the knowledge and experience levels of the teacher. Participant 6 described the importance of listening by saying, “Listening to the conversations and seeing who has what to offer and what information they bring. Again, it was that building that relationship at the very beginning.”

Similarly, Participant 9 reflected on the length of time it can take to build a trusting relationship by saying, “I mean it can take up to 2 or 3 months before you even get to the meat of coaching because you’re just building the relationship and trying to get them to trust you.” Participant 1 considered the importance of being committed to building the relationship by saying, “I think one of the main things is I do what I say, and I say what I do . . . those simple little things, I think, are what develop that relationship.”

The coaches in this study referenced teacher buy-in as a prerequisite for instructional change. The mention of teachers “buying in” to instructional shifts or ideas was often related to the coach-teacher relationship. Throughout the coaches’ stories, there was evidence of the value a coach placed on nurturing relationships with teachers. The participants reported that the status of the relationship determined whether teachers

viewed the coaching as valuable or just seen as a task to check off. Participant 2 mentioned, “I’m a firm believer in you can’t bring change in a person until you’ve established a relationship with them. I know it’s true of kids, but it is especially true of adult learners.” Likewise, Participant 1 stated, “But without that relationship, it can often be that my words can go in one ear and out the other.” However, Participant 5 openly shared a reflection about the delicateness of the coach-teacher relationship by explaining:

I think now what I understand is it’s about the interaction and how she feels when she’s sitting there vulnerable and being open. And then understanding that that’s like a very, like it’s such an honor to be sitting next to the person who’s opening up to you saying, “I don’t know how to do this.”

Recognizing the vulnerability of individuals in the coaching relationship is central to successful coaching. Participant 3 shared, “I think the biggest part of coaching is building those relationships in which people feel comfortable enough to ask those questions.”

Similarly, Participant 6 affirmed that idea by saying:

I’m a firm believer that the big thing is that relationship building. You really need to build that relationship with the teachers. They need to believe that you believe in them and you know that they can do their best.

Taking the time to establish strong relationships with individuals appears to be a vital factor in maintaining long-lasting coach-teacher partnerships. Participant 5 shared:

I would say that the relationship with the people with whom I’m not successful, and there’s not a lot of that, is remains sort of, you know, they don’t come to me, they just stay in their bubble and they work their job and they go home.

Thus, successful coaching relies on the time and energy spent building relationships between coaches and teachers. When the coach-teacher relationship is grounded in trust,

it often inspires a lifelong desire for learning in teachers and frequently nurtures a long-term relationship between the coach and teacher.

Inspiration

Stories of success are often born from inspiration. When individuals inspire others, it is often through their passion, purpose, and leadership. In each of the 11 interviews, participants exhibited a passion for developing others. Many of the participants commented on a ripple-type effect where the influence they have on teachers' instructional practices effects student learning. Throughout this study, participants told stories of their passion for the coaching role and ways that inspired passion in others.

Passion. Seeing the passion in an individual can often be inspiring for others. In the realm of education and coaching, the way a coach's passion for teaching emanates can be the difference between success and failure in inspiring others. Providing opportunities for teachers to see a coach's passion is necessary in developing a successful professional learning culture. However, sometimes a coach's response to an individual when driven by passion resulted in negative consequences if not carefully crafted.

Participant 2 reflected on this idea by saying:

Sometimes I find that what I think is like, "oh my God." Misunderstanding isn't actually an "Oh my God." It's an, "Oh, let me just give you this one little piece and it's going to fix that or it's going to add on so that now you're solid in that understanding." But if I'm immediately going into my teacher mode, then I haven't given that opportunity.

Through these types of passionate exchanges, coaches can often influence an individual's learning experiences. Participant 7 described this with an analogy of fire by saying

“That’s the dream, you know, when they are so eager and already engaged themselves that they want to learn. So there, you’re just fanning the fire kind of thing.”

In some cases, the participants reported having experiences where they were not even aware of their influence yet helped teachers be successful. Participant 4 experienced this and shared this story:

The next day I get the email at the end of the day, she’s like, “I just want to let you know I did it. I put a warm-up on the board, and they responded in their reader’s journal.” I about fell over. I’m like something that little and she was just gushing over it and how much of a difference it made.

Similarly, Participant 11 mentioned ways in which teachers’ passions are evident after coaching by reporting how teachers follow up by sending student work samples, “Giving me some of the students’ samples, sending me pictures, sending me video snippets and things of that sort.” Participant 5 also described a similar experience by sharing:

Here’s how I know when I’m being successful is when the teacher continues to follow up and she’ll share a success, or she’ll chase me down in the hallway and tell me that a student, you know, surpassed a goal we had set or that she’s ready for the next step.

Each of the participants exhibited a passion for their role in helping to develop others. When telling their stories, the participant’s excitement was evidenced by their body language, smiling as they shared and reflected on these experiences. Thus, a coach’s passion for teaching and learning appears to be a factor for inspiring others and cultivates the purpose for the work they do.

Purpose. School leaders determine the purpose of the coaching role within a coaching program. The participants in this study spoke of various purposes for their coaching role. In some cases, the coach was a part of a districtwide coaching model that

supported all teachers within their assigned schools. In other cases, the coaches were assigned to support teachers who were not meeting the standard set for high-quality teaching and were compelled to work with a coach as a part of an action plan. In other cases, coaches worked with new teachers. No matter what the assignment entailed, participants shared ways in which they guided teachers to understand their role and purpose in the coaching partnership. Participant 9 spoke of the importance of explaining the coaching model as the first step of building the coach-teacher relationship by saying:

The purpose of this is not for me to come in and critique you. It's really a partnership. It's really a back and forth. I show them some of the action plan worksheets that we'll be working on, giving them a preview of what's going to happen, so they don't feel like they're coming into it blind.

It is vital for coaches to help teachers understand the benefits of a coaching model. Often explaining the benefits for teachers and students is all it takes. Participant 7 discussed the importance of establishing the purpose and relating it to the outcome with teachers by remarking, "Spending that time to really understand how this is going to benefit the students as well as benefit the teachers." Similarly, Participant 11 stated:

I think the willingness of me to work with them as opposed to telling them what to do was effective because they saw that I wasn't out there to get them. I was there to show them what I knew to help them implement what I knew worked and show them how to do it. But it really was up to them on whether or not they wanted to implement it and use the feedback that I was giving them.

Recognizing the coach's impact and influence is often the motivating factor for a coach's purpose in what they do. Participant 8 shared, "I guess in a weird way it's a sense of feeling like you are accomplishing something, and you have a broader range because a teacher changes, then she, in turn, imparts that on 25 kids."

The purpose of a coach is to support the development of teacher learning. In some cases, however, the additional support can enable those not to flourish as they become dependent on the help. There is a fine line that instructional coaches must walk to serve their higher purpose of building teacher capacity. This fine line could be the primary motivator for leading others.

Leadership

Instructional coaches lead others toward change. Sometimes these changes may be for systemic reform or school improvement. In this study, seven of the 11 participants reported their primary coaching role was to lead instructional change that supports either the programmatic vision or school improvement plans. Therefore, the instructional coach role was a vital leadership role for school reform and improvement.

Finding ways to lead others is a skill set for coaches. The participants in this study shared ways they worked to support a change in schools and with teachers. Many of the participants shared the importance of starting small by planting ideas. In some cases, the participants referred to these ideas as “seeds.” Participant 6 reported:

I’m able to build on what they see. So, I put that seed in there. Then I saw them, you know, they grew. They sprouted. They got the knowledge. They started collaborating and then I’m able to add more information.

Likewise, Participant 1 spoke of a plan to help move a resistant teacher by sharing, “My plan is to plan with her and try to plant a seed of change in her so that she can think that it’s her idea and I want her to then find and see the success in it.”

A similar example about teachers owning their successes was noted by Participant 7 who remarked, “As they make progress and as they own it and as they start to see this

success, then encouraging them with having some next steps, providing feedback.” In many cases, the examples participants shared exhibit characteristics of effective leadership by planting seeds that nurtured the growth in others.

Also, effective leaders strengthen an individual’s capacity to work well with others and become leaders themselves. This aspect is true of coaching and is seen in an example Participant 2 shared, “They work in partners. So, then they’re coaching each other as well and that’s been, that’s a really powerful learning experience for teachers.” A similar example shared by Participant 6 was “They see the success of their students, they see that it was their impact and the things that we talked about in our PL [professional learning] and the things that we have been practicing, that I’ve been coaching, that’s the success.” Participant 10 had a similar story with a slightly different outcome. In this case, when a teacher let down her guard to work with a coach, the teacher became more of a model resulting in a greater impact across her team. Participant 10 explained:

I actually was able to show her something when she was really hesitant, and it wound up kind of, the other teachers on the team kind of picked up on some of the things that we were doing and then they wanted me to come in and show them how to do that. So, it changed really the dynamics of a whole team instead of just a teacher.

A leader can plant a seed in others and nurture it until it bears fruit, like a farmer planting and tending to their crops. The fruit that it bears is the reward for the time endured doing the work, the patience while nurturing, and the belief that it will grow. In many cases, it is the fruit of this labor that ensures the growth cycle continues.

Responsibility

Instructional coaches often take on a tremendous sense of responsibility when it comes to coaching teachers for an instructional change. Added to this responsibility is the sense of urgency for making changes that affect future generations. The theme of responsibility encompasses a coach's sense of ownership for teacher and student success, caretaking of the teachers with whom they work, and the courage to face each challenge the work brings with it.

Ownership. Throughout the interviews, the participants exemplified ownership toward the coaching process in addition to the students and teachers with whom they worked. When asked about a success story, each participant effortlessly shared a story that illustrated their ownership of the success. Similarly, when asked about a nonsuccess, the participants took as much ownership in the lack of success as they did with the successes. An example of this ownership was shared by Participant 4 who was speaking about a nonsuccess story in which the teacher's contract was not renewed: "Again, that's not the ending that I would've wanted to see. It happened. I lost one. I never lost one before. It's really hard. It was really hard." The sense of losing a teacher demonstrates the commitment coaches often take when working so closely with teachers.

Coaching involves a large time commitment for both coaches and teachers. The participants in this study recognized and expressed gratitude for the work a teacher did with them. In some cases, the participants reflected on the vulnerability of the teacher. Participant 2 explained it this way, "I can't expect teachers to roll up their sleeves and be

messy and say, 'I actually don't have a clue what I'm doing right now' if I'm not willing to do that myself." Participant 10 described it similarly by saying:

I feel like when teachers actually try some of the things that I asked them to do, even if they're feeling hesitant about it or negative about it, but they actually do it just because I'm asking them to. And I've given them background on why they should and then they actually do it and then it's successful and it makes an impact on kids, that's when I feel good about my role.

Sometimes coaches use these situations that include a teacher's vulnerability or hesitancy to evaluate their success. Participant 10 expressed a similar thought when explaining, "When I see teachers come and work with me on something and then go and implement it and then come back and tell me that it was really successful, that is when I feel really good about my job."

Overall, the participants' self-reflections frequently connected to the ownership over a teacher's lack of buy-in or change. Participant 8 commented, "Essentially that comes back on me if they are not performing well, I take that personally and that somewhere I've fallen down or haven't done enough to make a change."

Many of the participants referred to additional time spent working through ways to encourage teacher buy-in or overcoming teacher resistance to change. The time a coach spends engaging in ways that push for teacher success illustrates the coach's commitment to instructional reform. Participant 10 shared, "It takes a lot more time on my part, and it takes the least amount of time on their part, but it makes the most impact." The positive attitudes the participants have regarding their coaching roles illustrate their commitment to the students and teachers with whom they work. Through this sense of

ownership, the participants continuously expressed genuine care for their teachers as they told their stories.

Caretaking. Educators are natural caregivers to others. Instructional coaches caring for their teachers' success is no different from teachers caring about their students' success. In some ways, coaches consider their caseload like a class of students in which they are responsible for helping them grow. Creating the conditions for learning requires the learner to experience a sense of caring and safety. This nurturing can often be done by gradually introducing ideas in manageable steps so that the learner experiences success and is motivated to learn more.

Developing an environment that is conducive for learning in this manner is vital for coaching success. Participant 5 explains a method of successful coaching by saying, "I'll coach them to be gentle on themselves and to try a small thing and then to take a minute and reflect on it. We can chat about it and then try another small thing."

Participant 7 had a similar strategy for coaching success and explained:

Really supporting that learning process, that learning curve for them as well. And so being able to celebrate right from the beginning that sometimes it's just the risk taking. You tried it. Yay! That might be the best place to start with your celebration. But really reinforcing the positives along the way and showing them where they're making the success. And only exposing them to like one new step at a time for growth rather than throwing the whole bucket of water at them, kind of the thing.

Establishing ways to create supportive learning environments that help teachers feel successful is one way coaches demonstrate their genuine care for the teachers and students. Sometimes facing resistive teachers is uncomfortable and places the coach in a

vulnerable position. Coaches that recognize the importance of their work understand that taking small steps in the coaching process can help build courage in teachers.

Courage

Courage is moving forward in the face of fear. Coaching requires courage to face hurdles the coaches may encounter throughout the coaching process. Whether the coach is serving as a messenger of district initiatives, supporting a challenging administrator, or facing resistant teachers, instructional coaches develop the courage to overcome these hurdles. Sometimes a coach's work is also to build courage in others and is done through a trusting, safe environment.

Sometimes instructional coaches are the messenger of district initiatives or school reform. In many cases, the coach is responsible for ensuring that the staff's professional learning aligns with the school improvement plan set forth at the beginning of the year. Coaches can often meet resistance from those receiving the district's or school's reform initiatives. Participant 10 shared a story related to new curriculum implementation and teacher resistance. "I got a lot of pushback because it's teaching to the test is how they were taking it. And no matter what I said, they would not stray from that thinking." In this case, Participant 10 noted ways to build up courage for future exchanges with this team by saying:

So, I feel like having experiences like that makes me work harder and makes me maybe learn more about something that I might not have had to otherwise learn about so that I can prepare for those kinds of confrontations the next time they happen.

Thus, sometimes finding the courage in being the messenger helps coaches hone their skillset and knowledge, depending on the content they are sharing. In many cases, instructional coaching can be a thankless position. Frequently, there is only one coach assigned to a site which brings isolation to the position. Finding ways to remain courageous during challenging times develops with experience and is often aided by the positive support of administrators.

Coaches need to feel safe in the coaching environment to successfully do their job. Administrators who believe in and support coaching as a method of professional development provide this type of safe environment. Six of the 11 participants claimed the importance of administration or supervisory support for the coaching model. Participant 8 shared the experience of having a supportive administrator:

I'm so fortunate with the administrative team that I work with that they're real instructional leaders. For example, my two building principals will co-teach units with their teachers so that they can understand the work better. So, they really know their teachers, they know their teachers' strengths and weaknesses.

Similarly, Participant 8 asserted the importance of an administrator's belief in the coach by saying:

I think it all stems from the top. And I think if you don't have an administrator that gives you carte blanche or has a belief in you, then you're not going to get anywhere. No matter how much knowledge you have, they have to communicate it to staff that I am the literacy leader.

Administrators who believe in the coaching model and establish a professional learning culture within the school help instructional coaches be more successful. However, in each interview, participants spoke of experiences within their career of facing teacher resistance.

Coaches often need to find ways to celebrate successes of teachers as a method of building courage in others. Teacher resistance often occurs from fear of the unknown or fear of failure. Participant 1 shared thoughts about an experience facing a resistant teacher:

I want to be able to come into her room and see one success and be like, “Whoa, oh my goodness! Did you notice when you did this? And the child did that? That’s amazing!” Like I just need a little nugget, just a little nugget. And I think her resistance wall will start to come down. But if I go in there, guns a blazing, try this, try this, do this, she’s going to shut me out, which the door is already three-quarters of the way closed. So, I just need to find a little nugget where I can, I can get her to come up with an idea of change and then see her do it and just celebrate it.

Helping to develop courage in others requires individuals to have a strong sense of self. Throughout the interviews, coaches shared the various ways they try to build up others’ confidence and capacity. The work of a coach is challenging and can be emotionally draining. Seldom do the coaching models have supports in place for coaches. Participant 5 shared this intimate thought:

I wish there were more support for a person like me. . . . I guess that’s the only thing I’d say about coaching is it’s very important. We don’t take it seriously enough and we need to provide support for the coaches.

The challenging work that instructional coaches do to support teachers’ and students’ learning is vital for future generations of teachers and students. Therefore, listening to the experiences of those who are forging the path for instructional change can help current and future coaches.

Summary

The data collection for this study came from interviews with 11 reading specialists who were also responsible for coaching teachers. Although the participants' years of experience varied, each told similar stories of their experiences with successes and nonsuccesses when coaching teachers. The responses provided through this phenomenological study helped to describe the essence of being an instructional coach.

Analysis of the responses using the hermeneutic process resulted in four emerging themes of relevance to the identified problem statement. These themes were: (a) Experiential Learning, (b) Collaboration, (c) Inspiration, and (d) Responsibility. These themes helped add to the research on instructional coaching and serve to answer the three research questions of this study, which are outlined in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

School leaders across the United States face many challenges when attempting to enact school reform initiatives resulting in increased student achievement. According to the current NAEP statistics, student achievement in literacy is not showing gains, even though most school systems have adopted more rigorous English language arts standards (Bandeira de Mello et al., 2018; NCES, 2017). The federal government's attempts to change the trajectory of student performance has resulted in the enactment of the ESSA (2015) mandate, which suggested school systems consider different ways to provide professional development for teachers. Instructional coaching is one of the suggested professional development models gaining increased attention in the literature.

The purpose of this study was to identify the actions and activities that instructional coaches perceive to be important when building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships. Additionally, identifying activities and actions that coaches perceive to have the greatest impact on changing teachers' instructional literacy practices. The extant literature on coaching offers information about the roles of instructional coaches and the effectiveness of the coaching model (Bickel et al., 2015; Foltos, 2014; Knight et al., 2015); however, identifying specific characteristics that help a coach build and maintain partnerships with teachers through the lens of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) was still needed and guided this study.

The three research questions addressed the identified gap in the literature. The research questions included determining the activities and actions instructional coaches

identified as effective in building coach-teacher partnerships, maintaining coach-teacher partnerships, and the activities and actions that shift teachers' instructional practices.

All 11 participants in this study were experienced educators with a minimum of 4 years of experience in their respective coaching roles. Using a semi-structured interview protocol provided opportunities to prompt for clarifying or additional information to the responses provided. Exploring the lived experiences of the 11 participants helped create the narrative story of being an instructional coach and provided answers to the research questions in this study.

The literature review in Chapter 2 and the findings in Chapter 4 are the foundation for the discussion in Chapter 5. The intent of this research was to refine the current information on instructional coaching and add additional information to accurately identify characteristics of the coaching process that can foster the coach-teacher partnership. Chapter 5 includes the following sections: (a) Introduction, (b) Discussion of the Findings, (c) Application of the Findings to the Problem Statement, (d) Application to Leadership, (e) Recommendations for Action, (f) Recommendations for Further Research, and (g) Concluding Statement.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

The literature review in Chapter 2 includes a foundation for the three research questions identified in this study. The semi-structured protocol aligned with the research questions and provided the data to answer the research questions of this study. A synthesis of the literature review in Chapter 2 and the thematic findings in Chapter 4 provided relevancy to the discussion in Chapter 5. Within this study, four themes

emerged from the data analysis: (a) Experiential Learning, (b) Collaboration, (c) Inspiration, and (d) Responsibility. The following information depicts the activities and actions that the instructional coaches identified as necessary and provided the answers to the research questions of this study.

Research Question 1

The first research question in this study was: What activities and actions do instructional coaches identify as important when building partnerships with teachers? The portrayal of the instructional coach role was corroborated throughout the interviews, and the data revealed instructional coaches must possess the skills and knowledge to build partnerships with teachers. The instructional coaches identified actions such as offering teachers choices in their learning, listening to teachers, and modeling lessons as ways to build the necessary foundation for coach-teacher partnerships. The coaches also reported the importance of taking the time to celebrate teacher successes as an activity that helped develop relationships with teachers.

Experiential Learning: Teacher Choice

Establishing ways to embed choice as a condition of learning is a valuable method for all learners. By offering choice, learners become empowered and engaged in the process because they feel entrusted with the decision making (Netolicky, 2017). Shared decision making is especially vital for adult learners and is characteristic of andragogical practices. The participants in this study found ways to include teacher choice by using surveys and other methods of gaining input on professional learning activities. This coach action aligns with literature suggesting adult learners are more invested in learning when

they participate in shared decision making about their learning (Knowles et al., 2015; Wang, 2017). The coaches also reported the importance of teachers setting their goals when beginning a cycle of coaching. This finding aligned with the literature on the coaching cycle that includes three steps: identify, learn, and improve (Knight et al., 2015). The process of goal setting is a way for coaches and teachers to begin building partnerships that can transform teacher learning.

Regardless of whether the coaching is voluntary or compelled, coaches are most effective when finding ways to offer teacher choices in the learning process (Knight, 2011; Thomas et al., 2015). Participant 5 noted a situation when facing a teacher who was resistant to receiving coaching support. In this story, Participant 5 suggested the administrator offer the teacher a choice between two individuals for coach support. This option empowered the teacher to have some ownership in the decision making, even though the coaching was a requirement set forth by the administrator. This example illustrated how empowering teachers in the decision-making process can occur when teachers resist coach support.

Collaboration: Listening

The participants frequently mentioned the importance of actively listening while conversing with teachers. The coaches explained having these conversations with teachers was a tool for gauging a teacher's knowledge, level of buy-in, and mindset about learning. In some cases, the instructional coaches reported teachers' perceptions of working with a coach was an administrative directive based on the teacher's ineffectiveness. In some cases, this might be true, but it is not true in all situations. Miller

and Stewart (2013) corroborated this idea and validated the importance of clarifying the coach's role in advance to help alleviate the confusion. Therefore, the conversations with teachers were also an important time for the coach to communicate their beliefs in the teacher's abilities. Knight et al. (2015) expounded that during the coach-teacher conversations, coaches should express ways in which they honor the teacher's professionalism, which encourages an authentic partnership. By talking together, coaches and teachers establish trust, strengthening the partnership, regardless of how or why the teacher is assigned a coach.

Coaches consistently shared time was a critical factor in establishing successful partnerships with teachers. The information about coach-teacher conversations aligned with the literature on instructional coaching suggested by Anderson and Wallin (2018), who posited coaches need to find the time to have critical conversations with teachers. During these conversations, it is imperative that coaches actively listen to what the teacher is saying. By not intervening with expert advice, the coach can discern the level of support and the teacher's needs through these critical conversations. Both Participant 2 and Participant 6 documented their success stories when actively listening to teachers. Participant 2 shared the importance of listening to teachers to identify misconceptions by saying, "If I immediately go into my teacher mode, then I have not given that opportunity."

Similarly, Participant 6 remarked that conversations are a foundation for professional learning by stating, "I could see what each of them had, what they were capable of, and then we use them to start leading the [professional learning]." Thus,

establishing time for conversations with teachers is vital for coach success. Coaches who actively listen help build strong relationships with teachers because the teachers view the coach as an equal partner in the learning.

Inspiration: Celebrating Teacher Successes

It is human nature to desire recognition from others, especially when individuals believe they are performing well. Regular feedback on performance is found to be an element that is missing in many U.S. schools today (Darling Hammond, 2015). The participants identified various ways of providing feedback to teachers, including debriefing sessions and written forms of feedback. The coaches in this study commented on the importance of following up with teachers through a debriefing session, which could follow either a modeled lesson, an observed lesson, or after planning. Hammond and Moore (2018) found providing feedback that is detailed, specific, and direct helps move teachers' practices. Furthermore, Knight et al. (2017) explained practice and feedback help move new learning from an idea to a habit. Hence, taking the time to provide feedback to teachers builds trust within the partnership.

In some cases, the coaches suggested finding celebrations as a method of offering feedback which builds the coach-teacher partnership. Participant 1 suggested small gestures, such as leaving a positive note on the teacher's desk during each classroom visit helped to build relationships. Participants 5 and 9 suggested introducing new learning by providing small, attainable goals gave the coach multiple opportunities to inspire and motivate teachers. Hammond and Moore (2018) described the importance of creating manageable goals so that coaches can provide specific feedback on these targeted skill

gains. Affirming the learner and building upon the things the teacher is doing well helps strengthen the bond between coaches and teachers because each member feels valued within the partnership.

Responsibility: Modeling Lessons

The participants reported modeling lessons was a powerful way to build trust in a relationship with teachers. For many coaches, modeling lessons was the first step in the learning process. Modeling is the best method of showing teachers how to do a practice, unlike workshops that tell teachers what to do (Anderson & Wallin, 2018). By demonstrating high-leverage instructional practices, instructional coaches began the process of releasing the responsibility onto the learner. Often, the participants reported a coaching cycle that included, “I do. We do. You do,” in which the coach first modeled a strategy or practice, followed by side-by-side coaching with the teacher, and then observation of the teacher implementing it on their own. Participant 2 indicated the importance of giving teachers and coaches the freedom to “get messy” in the learning as a method of connecting. Anderson and Wallin (2018) posited modeling helps teachers feel safe in taking risks because the coach is right there to support the teacher. Throughout the interviews, the coaches reported feeling a sense of responsibility in supporting the teacher’s learning. Using the model-coach-apply process in learning new skills is one method that helped coaches and teachers partner together.

Delineating the role of the coach is also needed at the outset of any coaching program. The participants frequently mentioned the importance of teachers understanding that the coaching role is not evaluative. By letting teachers know the coach was there to

support and not judge was an important consideration for new and experienced coaches. Finding opportunities for coaches and teachers to explore, learn, and celebrate successes in the classroom was the first step in building the coach-teacher partnership.

Research Question 2

The second research question in this study was: What activities and actions do instructional coaches identify as important when maintaining partnerships with teachers? All successful relationships require work. The instructional coaches in this study were no different and noted the need to find ways to maintain the coach-teacher partnership. In many cases, maintenance of the partnership included ways to enrich the learning between coaches and teachers. The coaches reported using actions such as building reflective practices, studying student work, fostering leadership skills in others, and establishing practices to sustain learning as vital steps in maintaining the coach-teacher partnership.

Experiential Learning: Reflective Practices

Active learning requires the learner to engage through practice and reflection. The reflective process, however, does not often come naturally for learners. Through reflective questioning, coaches can help build this practice so that it becomes a natural part of a teacher's repertoire. Participant 3 asserted, "Teachers who do not reflect on their learning often do not improve their practice." As the coach-teacher partnership continued to strengthen, coaches reported feeling successful when their conversations with teachers shifted to the coach speaking less and the teacher reflecting more. Often, the coaches in this study measured their own levels of coaching success with how well the teachers with whom they worked became reflective in their teaching. Mangin and Dunsmore (2015)

explained the conversations coaches have with teachers are a platform for facilitating teachers' problem solving and reflection. Sailors and Price (2015) described the importance of teachers engaging in extensive professional development that supports the reflection on their practices. Establishing a trusting relationship between coach and teacher allows the brain to learn and helps teachers feel comfortable reflecting honestly (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Helping teachers engage in reflection requires a coach who knows how to ask questions that stimulate a teacher's thought process.

Collaboration: Studying Student Work

Collaboration is central to all coaching models. Ideally, when teachers take the time to work with a coach, they begin to see the partnership as "we" instead of "me" when it comes to student learning. The coaches in this study reported the importance of planning sessions shifting away from the expert-novice model to one that includes collaboration between the coach and teacher. Often, coaching grounded in student work samples helps guide the coaching model. Coaches remarked that helping teachers analyze student work samples often triggered the next steps in the coaching model. For Participants 1 and 7, who were in multiple sites, this process of analyzing student work was often the only opportunity they had to incorporate coaching with teachers. These coaches believed their efforts in this model resulted in impacting more students through a ripple-type effect where teachers applied what they had learned with coaches to all students' work, not just those which were part of the analysis. Participant 11 described that teachers would often send student samples as confirmation of the teacher's learning or implementation of the newly acquired skill. The coaches, in these cases, may not have

seen the direct impact of their coaching success; however, through student work samples coaches saw the effects of their efforts.

Inspiration: Leadership

Inspiring individuals to learn is the key to empowering them. Teachers desire to empower students and coaches desire to empower teachers. Often, successful coach-teacher partnerships can be a catalyst for inspiring teams of teachers within a school. The instructional coach can play a vital role in leading this change by connecting with teachers. Many of the coaches conveyed the importance of finding those teachers who had a strong desire to learn. In these instances, the coach empowered the motivated teacher who could then lead others in the learning. When this occurred, the coach shifted to more of a facilitator role rather than the expert. Participant 11 indicated this experience as “working side by side with them rather than being the imparter of knowledge.” Balancing this power is vital for teacher learning to occur. Knight et al. (2017) validated that situations placing the teacher as a novice and coach as an expert decreases the likelihood that the teacher will implement practices. Often, this power imbalance may result in teachers disregarding the information the coach shares or the teacher becomes resistant to change. Thus, instructional coaches should lead others by consistently communicating and demonstrating ways in which coaches partner with teachers in the learning process, thereby balancing the power within the partnership and empowering and inspiring change.

Empowering others as leaders is the goal for many coaching programs. By increasing the capacity of others, instructional coaches act as instructional leaders and

inspire continuous professional learning. Motivating others as learners requires strong instructional leadership and is often the catalyst to changing a school's culture. Effective instructional leaders create environments that encourage and support learning by both adults and students. Of most importance, effective coaches recognize they are not experts and demonstrate their willingness to learn alongside others.

Responsibility: Sustainable Learning

Throughout the interviews, instructional coaches shared their concerns about teachers not sustaining newly learned skills upon completion of coaching cycles. In some cases, the coaches reported teachers might perform the newly acquired skill in front of them but then stop upon completion of the coaching cycle. When this occurred, a few coaches mentioned that they felt they were just a "box to check off" rather than a resource that truly shifted pedagogical practices. In some cases, the coaches ascertained that embedding follow up with teachers was necessary for truly shifting practices. Sustainable professional development is confirmed in the literature on effective professional development. Finding ways to engage learners over extended periods helps solidify the learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The coaches referred to this practice of sustainable professional development as "spot checking" and "dropping in," which were informal ways to ensure teachers were still using the instructional practices and offering opportunities for teachers to have time for further clarification about the learning. Following up with teachers helped maintain the partnership long after the coaching cycle occurred. Frequently, when sharing success stories, the participants in this study spoke of long-term relationships that began as coaching partnerships. Therefore,

instructional coaches should consider embedding follow up opportunities when planning for professional learning experiences. When coaches take the time to visit teachers after a completed coaching cycle, it sent the message to the teacher that their learning was important and helped maintain the coach-teacher partnership.

Research Question 3

The third research question in this study was: What activities and actions do instructional coaches identify as important when shifting teachers' instructional practices in literacy? Each of the 11 participants reported a successful coaching experience in which a teacher's instructional practice changed. Within these narratives, coaches spoke of the importance of teachers' learning being grounded in theory, involving peers, inspiring student learning, and increasing student achievement.

Experiential Learning: Theory

Sometimes when school leaders implement school reform initiatives, teachers react to making changes by resisting or acting defensively. The coaches reported that teacher resistance is often born out of fear of the unknown or fear of failure. Sometimes this fear escalates when coaches first begin working with teachers. The coaches in this study indicated providing teachers with research or theory at the outset of new learning often helps curb teachers' resistance to change. Offering research-based instructional practices helps move a teacher's pedagogical knowledge and often provides teachers with the "why" behind new ideas. Phillips et al. (2016) addressed the idea that professional development that equips teachers with content and pedagogy is an investment that has a high payoff in student success. Including research and theory within the context of

professional learning helps build the teachers' capacities to apply the learning across contexts rather than in isolation.

Similarly, the coaches in this study noted the importance of their thorough understanding of the content so that they could identify misconceptions ahead of time and be prepared to redirect negativity, if it arose, by ensuring teachers had a clear understanding of content. Participant 10 noted a step in preparing for professional development with teachers included a thorough review of current research on the topic. Participant 10 learned this lesson after a challenging professional development session in which teachers became extremely resistant to the presented content. Thorough preparation is a consideration if the coaches have limited knowledge in a content area or program. Knight et al. (2017) posited the importance of coaches having a deep understanding of high-leverage practices and content. These authors explained a coach's deep understanding is necessary for guiding others to learn, use, and internalize the information. Exposing teachers to high-quality rationale helped elevate the teacher's skills and often helped with teachers' buy in and shifted their instructional practices.

Collaboration: Peer Influence

Creating an environment that is conducive to learning is every teacher's goal. An instructional coach also aspires to create a similar type of environment for teacher learning. A coach's actions in creating this type of environment often mirror structures seen in classrooms. Creating cooperative learning experiences for teams of teachers is one way a coach can cultivate peer learning. Some of the instructional coaches in this study operationalized a planning structure that would support teachers learning from each

other. Participant 4 described a planning protocol that helped guide “organic” discussions. In these situations, time was allotted for teachers to explore and share ideas. When teachers were actively engaged in this process, professional learning became a natural result of the time spent working together while coaches acted as facilitators. The idea of collaboration aligned with the literature on effective professional development, which suggested active learning occurs through social learning processes, such as collaborative planning (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). The level of teacher engagement increases when teachers work together (Slegers et al., 2014), building a cohesive learning community (Bickel et al., 2015). Similarly, Ronfeldt et al. (2015) posited teachers improve at a greater rate when working in groups with better collaboration. Therefore, the idea of establishing opportunities for teachers to work collectively should be a primary consideration for coaching.

Other models that support peer learning included the coaches arranging peer visits for teachers to see a practice in action or establishing lab classes. Participant 2 described the lab class setting as teachers learning a new skill, planning and implementing it with students in front of their peers, and then participating in debriefing conversations where the teacher received immediate feedback from their peers. Reshaping the conversations between teachers to include professional learning and feedback on newly acquired skills has proven to be an effective method of enhancing professional development (Bickel et al., 2015). Instructional coaches who value peer learning act to create these experiences that can support and inspire teacher learning that shifts instructional practices within the classroom.

Inspiration: Student Learning

Getting students excited about learning is the goal of many educators. Similarly, instructional coaches often hope to inspire a continued love of learning within teachers. Sometimes, coaches can accomplish this goal by focusing the coaching on student learning outcomes. The coaches in this study felt a sense of pride when visiting classrooms and seeing evidence of students or teachers actively engaged and successful, especially when the coach observed teachers implementing the newly acquired skill or knowledge. The coaches believed the work they did with teachers helped teachers feel good about what they were doing in the classroom. This positive connection between professional learning and student learning was often how the coaches inferred their success.

Conversely, a teacher's resistance to change might result from a teacher's disconnect between their practice and student results. Participant 1 shared, "I believe that teachers are resistant because they do not see their role in the success or not success of the students." In these situations, coaches can often begin working with resistant teachers by collecting data on student behavior or engagement rather than teacher practices. In some situations, using a video of a lesson may help teachers reflect. Participant 9 spoke of using video and explained, "They're able to see things that the students have done that maybe they didn't notice when they were teaching the whole group. And so, they're really able to see how their teaching is affecting the kids." Desimone and Pak (2017) delineated video interactions in coaching as a dynamic give and take that supports active teacher learning. Using video helps teachers see their interactions with students or the

implementation of instructional practices. Viewing themselves in “real time” provides the teacher with opportunities for reflection and decision-making about shifts in their practices. In addition, video data is a powerful tool for measuring professional growth. Thus, providing real-time data for teachers to see how they play a role in student learning is a way to shift instructional practices.

Coaches may not feel they have a direct impact with students. However, instructional coaches who use tools, such as peer visits and video, help teachers learn new skills that can shift practices in the classroom. By guiding this work, instructional coaches have a broader impact that is vital for making changes for students.

Responsibility: Student Achievement

The current decline of student achievement is often the driving force for educators to incorporate innovative models for teachers’ professional learning. Instructional coaching models help embed professional learning into the day-to-day responsibilities of teachers. Although it is becoming a more popular model of professional learning, research on coaching is not reporting enough evidence on positively shifting student achievement data (IES, 2016). However, in many cases reported by the coaches in this study, positive student data was one way the coach could substantiate their success. Frequently, coaches noted that using student achievement data was a positive way to help encourage teachers to continue learning and refining their pedagogical skills. Equally significant, the coaches noted the value of student achievement gains as motivation for teachers to take an interest in participating in professional learning. Participant 8 described an experience with a teacher whose student achievement data outranked the

other teachers on the team after participating in a coaching cycle. By using student data, coaches can help motivate the learning across teaching teams. Ronfeldt et al. (2015) reported this ripple-type effect using gains in student achievement data as a catalyst for collaboration among team members. By analyzing student data, teachers can greatly impact each other's performance through strong collaboration resulting in increases in student achievement.

Similarly, the participants in this study consistently communicated their ownership of student achievement data within their schools. Frequently, the coaches in this study mentioned that the students and student success were the driving factors keeping many of the coaches motivated to make changes and inspired to be their best.

Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement

Administrators and teachers face challenges to create dynamic learning environments for 21st century learners. Addressing challenges such as time, money, a declining workforce, and the implementation of rigorous standards in all content areas requires school leaders to be innovative in finding ways to overcome these challenges while increasing student achievement. In many cases, school leaders recognize the power of supporting the workforce through job-embedded learning. Helping teachers refine their pedagogical skills throughout the school day can inspire the adults in schools to learn alongside their students. This job-embedded learning becomes something that adults can be excited about rather than feeling as if it is an added responsibility. Adults and students who learn together create a culture that models the importance of having a growth mindset about learning.

A desire for learning is an element for teacher and student success. Skillfully trained instructional coaches can frequently be the catalyst for creating an environment rich in a culture of learning. The idea of coaches possessing a set of skills that deems them “highly qualified” is still unclear in the research. Crawford et al. (2017) called for studies on guidelines and frameworks to define the characteristics of effective coaches. Kurz et al. (2017) expressed the need for research on the processes of coaching and characteristics of the coach-teacher partnership.

Furthermore, Sailors and Price (2015) postulated the necessity of teachers receiving time and support from highly qualified coaches. However, having a knowledgeable coach is not enough if the coach does not possess the expertise to address the relational side of the coach-teacher partnership. Thus, the findings of this study help guide instructional coaches with activities and actions to build the necessary relationships that can forge partnerships between coaches and teachers and help shift teachers’ instructional practices.

Embedding practices that align with the themes of this research study can help new and experienced coaches build relationships with teachers. Using the actions and activities recommended in this study that align with experiential learning, collaboration, inspiration, and responsibility could be primary differences that help coaches shift teachers’ instructional practices and improve student achievement.

Application to Leadership

The current state of American education and 21st century learning illustrates a great divide between practices from the Industrial Revolution and today. Classrooms

filled with 21st century learners require modifications to classroom arrangement, instruction, and learning tasks for successful learning to occur. The differences require teachers to engage students and act as facilitators of learning rather than imparters of knowledge. Modifications in lesson planning or implementation of newer instructional practices, however, may be difficult for some experienced teachers who still maintain the mindset and training of the past. Similarly, newer teachers may default back to familiar practices based on their own school experiences. Therefore, engaging instructional coaches as change agents may help guide shifts that are necessary to transform 21st century classrooms.

Various leadership styles influence individuals in different ways. One leadership style that continues to draw attention is transformational leadership. Bass (1990) identified four characteristics of transformational leadership behaviors that influence followers to change. The characteristics of transformational leadership include charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Transformational leaders who espouse these characteristics have a desire to help individuals be their best. A transformational leader seeks ways to encourage others to be their best by developing close relationships. The actions and activities of an instructional coach identified in this study closely align with transformational leadership characteristics. Instructional coaches who use transformational leadership behaviors can positively facilitate changes in teaching and learning within the classroom resulting in increases in student achievement.

Administrators in school districts often employ coaches for reform and the mission of the reform is already established. When school leaders hire coaches with a certain mission or outcome in mind, instructional coaches may be responsible for gaining teacher buy-in to the changes set forth by the district. In many cases, the coaches are leading the reform or may oversee implementation of programs to achieve organizational goals. By enacting *idealized influence*, transformational leaders motivate individuals to achieve a mission successfully. Systemic and individual changes occur when leaders communicate a vision and individuals recognize the value and mission of the reform (Hamstra et al., 2014). Many of the coaches in this study reported their foci for coaching teachers being directly related to the school's improvement plan. The school improvement process is often directly aligned with district organizational goals and requires strong buy-in for successful implementation. Thus, instructional coaches may use idealized influence to encourage teacher buy-in and engage teachers in positively supporting the organizational mission of the reform.

Inspirational motivation is the second characteristic of transformational leadership and aligns with the results of the Inspiration theme in this study. Transformational leaders have high expectations and frequently communicate these expectations to followers (Northouse, 2016). By inspiring others to be their best and communicating their beliefs in teachers, instructional coaches help teachers continuously learn and grow, building their sense of self-efficacy (Sleegers et al., 2014). The coaches in this study reported evidence of teachers feeling inspired by their new learning. Through emails and quick hallway conversations with the coaches, teachers boasted of

their newly learned practices or student successes. The coaches also shared the importance of communicating their beliefs about teachers to help inspire them to grow.

Intellectual stimulation is the third characteristic and is the primary component and purpose for instructional coaching. Transformational leaders use intellectual stimulation to encourage and stimulate innovative ideas to solve organizational issues (Northouse, 2016). Opportunities for instructional coaches and teachers to work together may stimulate creative ideas (Knight, 2004, 2016) that could transform educational landscapes. By providing theory and research of high-leverage practices instructional coaches increase a teacher's knowledge, helping them become more confident in their abilities. The coaches in this study articulated the need to know the content they were delivering well so that they could teach others. Additionally, providing theory and demonstration was a way that teachers learned best.

Individualized consideration is the last characteristic and supports the theme of collaboration. By strengthening individuals, the transformational leader encourages others to work collectively for the good of the group. Slegers et al. (2014) found teachers were more likely to experiment with teaching practices when the learning was connected to collaboration with peers. Goddard et al. (2015) further explained the importance of formal structures for collaboration in schools. These authors specifically stated the need for leaders to be active participants in the collaboration. The coaches in this study reported multiple formats in which they created collaborative learning opportunities for teachers. Through collaborative work, coaches can strengthen individual

skillsets and engage teams of teachers in successfully accomplishing goals that support the school improvement process.

Leaders empower and encourage others to be their best and is characteristic of transformational leaders. When individuals strive to be their best, they can often exceed the goals set forth by leaders. Hence, instructional coaches are instructional leaders who can enhance the quality of instruction in classrooms (Reddy et al., 2019). Instructional coaches who enact transformational leadership behaviors can inspire teachers to learn and grow, transforming today's classrooms and increasing student achievement.

Recommendations for Action

This study's findings may be applicable to school leaders and leaders of instructional coaching programs. Many school leaders are responsible for implementing programs that embed professional development for individuals. The findings in this study supported the idea that collaborative practices help transform teacher learning. Hence, leaders should design professional learning models that embed protocols for collaboration and learning for teachers. In doing so, the systems and structures that encourage and support collaboration can increase teacher and student performance (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Instructional coaches can be a vital component to support teacher collaboration. Some coaches also noted the importance of having a collaborative coach network. Since instructional coaches are often isolated within their schools, developing a support system for the coach is recommended.

The results of this study also suggested ensuring individuals hired for coaching have both content knowledge and relational skills. This information may be of value in

the design phases of recruiting coaches or training current coaches. It should not be assumed that a strong content teacher will make a good instructional coach. The data from this study suggested relationship-building skills are critical for coach-teacher partnerships and creating changes to instruction. Hence, it is imperative for coaches to have the training to simultaneously build individual and systemic change (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Preparation of instructional coaches could include training that focuses on coach actions such as providing teacher choice, actively listening, celebrating teacher successes, modeling lessons, using reflective practices, and leadership skills, may help coaches find success in building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships.

Additionally, providing coaches with training on activities that help transform teacher practices might include studying student work, incorporating theory to create change, creating opportunities for peer learning, and assessing student learning and achievement. Such findings may also be of interest to graduate schools that offer degrees in specific content areas, such as literacy, which could position graduates for roles in instructional literacy coaching.

Likewise, the information provided from this study may be useful in creating a training program that supports the implementation of a coaching model for systemic change. Of most importance, aligning the coach's skills to the needs of the school or district is necessary for making a change. Calo et al. (2015) substantiated this idea by also including the importance of understanding that the determination of a coach's role should be delineated and matched to the needs of the school.

Implementing instructional coaches as a component of school reform is proving to be a successful method for making changes in classrooms. However, the results of this study suggested that a coach's actions to build and maintain a relationship with teachers have a significant impact on shifting practices. Thus, it is important to ensure that coaches clearly understand their behaviors have lasting impacts on teachers and students.

Recommendations for Further Research

School administrators often determine the qualifications of instructional coaches for which they are attempting to hire. Although researchers have identified specific criteria to aid evaluative systems for instructional coaching skills (Howley et al., 2014), it is often the school administrator that judges the criteria when hiring and evaluating coaches. Thus, further research on evaluating instructional coaching skills, for example, analysis of instructional coach effectiveness in relation to a coach's prior teacher training and classroom experiences, could help add to the literature on coaching.

While the focus of this study did not include analysis of student achievement data, the coaches in this study reported specific narratives in which student literacy data increased following specific coaching cycles. Therefore, further research analyzing student achievement data directly related to coaching remains a need. Specifically, studying geographical locations that report higher literacy achievement data or well-established coaching programs may lead to specific characteristics of efficacious literacy coaching models. Similarly, narrowing the focus on measurable student data in classrooms that incorporate instructional coaching may include comparative data on

classrooms with intense, little, and no coaching support to extend the research on literacy coaching and student literacy achievement.

Furthermore, data representing the teachers' voices were not included and could be an extension of a similar qualitative study. Including information from coaches and teachers from different perspectives may help add to the coaching literature. An additional extension to this type of research may include student-voice data connecting student learning to teacher learning. Also, a similar qualitative study with mentors who are assigned to work with teachers could also add to the literature on teacher professional learning.

Postsecondary education is a requirement for all teacher certifications in the United States. While undergraduate degrees in education have been around for centuries, teacher preparation continues to be at the forefront of school reform initiatives. Ensuring that the most at-risk students have the most highly qualified teachers is one of the positive outcomes from the NCLB (2002) mandate. From the interviews, all participants reported coaching and modeling the basic tenets of developmental reading instruction. Additionally, mention of the disparity between prepared and unprepared novice teachers was noted throughout the interviews. With the rigorous demands of the Common Core State Standards, it is imperative for teachers to enter the workforce with a strong pedagogy in literacy since literacy skills are the foundation for accessing all other disciplines. Therefore, further research evaluating literacy courses in teacher preparation programs at post-secondary levels is needed.

While this research concluded with actions and activities that instructional coaches identified as necessary when building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships, as well as shifting teachers' literacy practices, further questions arose from the information not gleaned in the responses. The participants in this study exemplified the commitment required to coach teachers successfully. Throughout the interviews, participants shared stories of facing resistant teachers, which could often cause coach frustration or disappointment in themselves. However, participants did not note any formal support systems currently in place for coaches. As noted previously, the literature on the importance of active learning through social learning processes (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017) and increased engagement through collaborative opportunities (Sleegers et al., 2014) may also extend to coaches who face emotional challenges related to the coaching role. Further research identifying ways to address the emotional side of instructional coaching is also needed.

Concluding Statement

Instructional coaching is not a new idea; however, it is gaining increased attention as schools and districts in the United States continue to face challenges in preparing future generations. There are some activities and actions that coaches naturally do as a part of the coaching role. Planning, modeling, and providing resources or research regarding literacy instruction are the primary responsibilities of an instructional literacy coach. Sharing information or content related to a school or district reform, in addition to supporting school improvement processes, may also be the coach's responsibility.

However, it is the more nuanced activities and actions related to the identified themes of experiential learning, collaboration, inspiration, and responsibility that could effectively provide engaging professional learning to teachers. Coaches who use *experiential learning* opportunities that include teacher choice, reflective practices, and integration of theory into coaching sessions may help teachers solidify their understanding of new content and instructional practices thereby strengthening the teacher's craft. Through *collaboration*, coaches can use active listening, study student work, and provide peer influence to engage teachers in learning from each other. Instructional coaches who *inspire* teachers celebrate successes, use empowering leadership, and motivate teachers to measure their success through student learning. Instructional coaches who demonstrate *responsibility*, model lessons, ensure that teacher learning continues, and of most importance make changes that increase student achievement. Therefore, instructional coaches who develop their skills related to the identified activities and actions in this study can set themselves apart from ordinary to extraordinary.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol: LEARNING WITHIN THE CLASSROOM: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF INSTRUCTIONAL LITERACY COACHES

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Daria Teti

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

This project is exploring coach-teacher partnerships to see which activities and actions of the partnership affect teachers' instructional practices in literacy. More specifically, I am exploring the activities or actions that you perceive may contribute to building and maintaining these partnerships. In addition, considering those activities or actions that help facilitate these changes to teachers' instructional practices. I appreciate and thank you for your participation in this research project. I want to remind you that your comments will remain confidential and anonymous. (sign the consent form) You may take a break at any time and feel free to ask me any questions throughout the interview. Do you have any questions?

Questions:

1. How many years have you been an educator?
2. How many years as a reading specialist/literacy coach?
3. What has been your role as a reading specialist (instructional coach)?
4. Describe a memorable time about coaching a teacher.
5. Take me to a time when you felt successful as a coach. What was that like?
6. Take me to a time when you did not feel successful as a coach. What was that like?
7. Explain your perception of the difference between the times you were successful and the times you did not feel successful.
8. Try to remember the last time you felt a teacher changed an instructional practice and tell me anything you can about the situation, about what you felt, did, or said.
9. How do you offer teachers opportunities to be in control of their own learning?
10. If there is something more you'd like to add about a coaching experience that I have not asked please describe that for me.

Additional questions for depth and breadth to the above questions:

Would you expound on that?

Tell me more.

How would you describe that in a different way?

I would like to hear more about that.

Would you clarify that for me?

What was the effect of that incident?

What were the consequences?

What was your reaction to that behavior?

Take me through your thought processes during that time.

Field Notes

Length of activity:

Description	Reflective Notes
	Map of Room

Note: Adapted from Field Notes (p. 165) by P. Hawkins & J. Ehrlich in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Approaches* edited by J. Creswell, 2013, Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello.

My name is Daria Teti and I am a doctoral student from the School of Applied Leadership at City University of Seattle. I'm searching for reading specialists to participate in my research study. This project is exploring coach-teacher partnerships to see which activities and actions of the partnership affect teachers' instructional practices in literacy.

Reading specialists in this study should coach teachers for all or a portion of their role and have at least 3 years of experience in the role.

Participants in this study will be asked to participate in a 1-hour interview that will be audio-recorded for later transcription. Interviews may occur in-person, via Skype, or by telephone. Participation is completely voluntary, and participants may choose to stop at any time.

If you believe you're eligible and would be willing to participate, or know someone who is, please contact me at XXXXX@cityuniversity.edu.

Thank you so much.

Daria Teti
Doctoral Student
City University of Seattle

APPENDIX C

INVITATION FOR STUDY PARTICIPATION

Project Title: Learning Within the Classroom: A Phenomenological Study of Instructional Coaches

Researcher: Daria Teti

Dear Reading Specialist/Instructional Coach:

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted through City University of Seattle. The purpose of this study is to identify the activities and actions that support effective coach-teacher partnerships by examining the lived experience of reading specialists.

Procedures: If you decide to participate, the researcher will interview you face-to-face in a setting of your choice. However, if you are unable to meet face-to-face, a phone or Skype interview may also be acceptable. Field notes and digital recordings will be made during the session. The recording will be transcribed. You will be asked to participate in an approximately ten-question interview.

Benefits: Information obtained in the study will add to the literature on professional development with teachers using the instructional coaching model. Additionally, the information may add to the research on ways to support instructional coaches' learning.

Risks/

Discomforts: There is minimal risk involved while being involved in this study. All data will be coded during transcription. All field notes and audio recordings will also be coded.

Confidentiality: Reading specialist identity in all portions of this study will remain confidential. The school district's identity will not be revealed in any report on the findings or results.

The interview will last approximately one hour. If the entire interview protocol is not covered during the allotted time, you may be asked to extend the interview time. In addition, if any additional clarifying questions arise after the interview, you may be asked for permission to be contacted for further questioning. You have the option to decline in either of these instances.

Other considerations:

- You do not have to be in this study if you choose not to be.
- You have the right to stop participation at any time during the study without giving a reason and without penalty.
- If you have any questions about this study at any time, you may contact Daria Teti (240) XXX-XXXX or at XXXXX@cityuniversity.edu.
- You will get a copy of this consent form to keep.
- Results of this study will be made available to you for your review.

This study is intended to add to the knowledge on instructional coaching as a professional development model for enhancing literacy practices.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Reading Specialist Name (Please print)

I have read and understand the above statement and hereby agree to participate in the study outlined above.

Reading Specialist Signature

Date

Researcher

Date

Daria Teti
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

School/Division of Applied Leadership

CITYU RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, agree to participate in the following research project to be conducted by Daria Teti, faculty member or student, in the Doctorate of Educational Leadership Program. I understand this research study has been approved by the City University of Seattle Institutional Review Board.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form, signed by all persons involved. I further acknowledge that I have been provided an overview of the research protocol as well as a detailed explanation of the informed consent process.

Title of Project:

LEARNING WITHIN THE CLASSROOM:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF INSTRUCTIONAL LITERACY COACHES

Name and Title of Researcher(s):

Daria Teti

For Student Researcher(s):

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Howard Jacobs

Department: School of Applied Leadership

Telephone: (240) XXX-XXXX

E-mail: XXXXX@cityuniversity.edu

Program Coordinator (or Program Director):

Dr. Joel Domingo

Sponsor, if any:

n/a

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to identify the activities and actions that are important for building and maintaining coach-teacher partnerships and those activities and actions which help facilitate shifts to teachers' instructional practices by examining the lived experience of reading specialists who coach teachers for all or a portion of their roles.

Research Participation:

I understand I am being asked to participate in this study in one or more of the following ways (the checked options below apply):

- Respond to in-person and/or telephone Interview questions;
- Answer written questionnaire(s);
- Participate in other data gathering activities, specifically, _____;
- Other, specifically, _____.

I further understand that my involvement is voluntary, and I may refuse to participate or withdraw my participation at any time without negative consequences. I have been advised that I may request a copy of the final research study report. Should I request a copy, I understand I may be asked to pay the costs of photocopying and mailing.

Confidentiality

I understand that participation is confidential to the limits of applicable privacy laws. No one except the faculty researcher or student researcher, his/her supervisor and Program Coordinator (or Program Director) will be allowed to view any information or data collected whether by questionnaire, interview and/or other means. If the student researcher's cooperating classroom teacher will also have access to raw data, the following box will be checked. All data (the questionnaires, audio/video tapes, typed records of the interview, interview notes, informed consent forms, computer discs, any backup of computer discs and any other storage devices) are kept locked and password protected by the researcher. The research data will be stored for 5 years (5 years or more if required by local regulations). At the end of that time all data of whatever nature will be permanently destroyed. The published results of the study will contain data from which no individual participant can be identified.

Signatures

I have carefully reviewed and understand this consent form. I understand the description of the research protocol and consent process provided to me by the researcher. My signature on this form indicates that I understand to my satisfaction the information provided to me about my participation in this research project. My signature also indicates that I have been apprised of the potential risks involved in my participation. Lastly, my signature indicates that I agree to participate as a research subject.

My consent to participate does not waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, and/or City University of Seattle from their legal and professional responsibilities with respect to this research. I understand I am free to withdraw from this research project at any time. I further understand that I may ask for clarification or new information throughout my participation at any time during this research.

Participant's Name: _____
Please Print

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: Daria Teti

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

If I have any questions about this research, I have been advised to contact the researcher and/or his/her supervisor, as listed on page one of this consent form.

Should I have any concerns about the way I have been treated as a research participant, I may contact the following individual(s):

Dr. Joel Domingo, Program Coordinator (and/or Program Director), City University of Seattle, at 521 Wall Street, Seattle, WA 98121, (206) XXX-XXXX, jdomingo@cityu.edu.