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A Case Study on the Self-Perceptions of the Role, Responsibilities, and Professional Development Needs of Instructional Coaches

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A CASE STUDY ON THE SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

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Abstract

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This case study was an exploration of how instructional coaches self-perceived the role and the responsibilities of the role, the barriers encountered in the role, and the professional development needs of both novice and seasoned instructional coaches. Results revealed that the role of an instructional coach is ill-defined, and the role can often be complicated by the lack of a shared definition of the role. Data also revealed that a lack of time allocated for carrying out duties assigned to instructional coaches along with the lack of experience and understanding of the role serve as significant barriers encountered by coaches. An understanding of adult learning theory and practice was noted in this study as the most critical professional development need among coaches. Recommendations from this study include the need for school districts to develop research-based job descriptions for instructional coaches, increased opportunities for professional development specific to the development of an understanding of adult learning theory and practice, and with the establishment of preparation programs for educators entering the role of the instructional coach.

Keywords: instructional coaching, adult learning theory, pillar practices, job-embedded professional development

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Teacher quality has become a focus of educational policy in the 21st century" (Mangiante, 2011, p. 42). Educational reform movements have evolved from 1983 to 2010, now with the implementation of the United States Department of Education's Every Student Succeeds Act, otherwise known as ESSA. State level education departments throughout the nation were challenged with the task of categorizing teachers as either effective or ineffective. Paralleling the underlying components embedded in ESSA as well as in other reform movements such as A Nation at Risk and No Child Left Behind, a collective body of research has unveiled the significant role the teacher plays in student learning, which makes it evident that teacher effectiveness is a critical component to consider in educational reform efforts.

The quality of learning is a distinct function of the effectiveness of the individual teacher rather than that of the school; the system; or the local, state, and federal educational policies (Wunderle-Straessle, 2014). Kaplan and Owings (2004) claimed that "teacher effectiveness is one of the most decisive factors in students' achievement" (p. 1). Amador (2010) echoed this claim, contributing effective education as a derivative of both highly qualified teachers and highly effective teachers.

Teacher Effectiveness Reform

Based on these findings, it can be argued that the core of school reform should be focused on the classroom level of teaching practices and finding ways to build teacher capacity in a way that increases the percentage of effective teachers and decreases the percentage of ineffective teachers.

Teacher Effectiveness

While teacher effectiveness was highlighted through both ESSA and national education reform conversations of the 20th and 21st centuries as a crucial focal point in improving teaching and learning, defining effectiveness was still problematic for many states (American Institute for Research, 2016). "Considering the degree of the teacher's influence, we must understand what teachers should do to promote positive results in the lives of students in regard to school achievement" (Stronge, 2007, para. 4).

"Critics argue that it can be difficult for states to determine what makes an effective teacher" (Donachie, 2017, para. 3), but it is impossible to evaluate teachers and determine effectiveness without defining effective teaching (Danielson, 2008). The controversy surrounding the definitions, formulas, and criteria that states are developing in an effort to comply with this federal policy has led to increased discussion centered on research that delves into the careful examination of teacher practices that correlate with the status of an effective teacher (American Institute for Research, 2016).

In an effort to build capacity in teachers to increase levels of effectiveness as described and defined through ESSA legislation, educational leaders have been in search of the answers to *what* has significant and positive impacts on teacher effectiveness and *how* it can be implemented with success. Current research spotlighting teacher effectiveness begins to give educational leaders a glimpse of the qualities that are common among teachers who are considered to be effective, while also making recommendations about how to cultivate more effective teachers.

Teacher Preparation Programs

One response to the recent call for more effective educators was one with a

critical lens of the nation's teacher preparation programs. With the recent call for more rigorous college and career readiness for students and the legislative attention drawn to teacher effectiveness, teacher preparation programs also have been in the spotlight. Both state and federal policymakers have turned to increased accountability structures for teacher preparation programs across the United States and research related to the outcomes of programs (Cogshall et al., 2012). Accountability structures for preparation programs have evolved and have a renewed focus on not just the inputs of programs, but more on the outputs.

Collaboration

Another focal point of research aimed at illuminating the recipe for teacher effectiveness is centered on the need for collaboration among teachers in their professional practices. Lev Vygotsky, a Russian developmental psychologist, described how learning is a variable contingent upon the coupling of an individual with a more cognitively capable individual (Amador, 2010). "It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This theory, when applied to teachers as learners, suggests that professional practice can be amplified when effective educators are partnered with new, less experienced and less effective educators, and serves as a platform for increased collaboration among professional educators.

Time devoted to collaboration can serve as a meaningful professional development tool that "de-privatize(s) practice, allowing teachers opportunities to learn from one another's practice" (Alloway, 2013, p. 5). Collaborative discussions among teachers give

them “opportunities to talk and learn about each aspect of the instructional core” (Alloway, 2013, p. 5), thus contributing to more effective lesson design and giving way to more effective teaching practices.

Research from India reveals that teacher effectiveness is positively correlated to teacher self-efficacy, a by-product of both the level of collaboration and principal leadership (Sehgal et al., 2017). The study highlighted the need for schools to place emphasis on the level and frequency of which teachers collaborate with each other and the significant impact that collaboration can have on teacher performance. The study claimed that positive feedback parallels teacher self-efficacy and that collaboration often generates positive feedback from their peer group and eases uncertainties in their practices.

Feedback

Duff and Islas (2013) cited an array of studies that attribute increased teaching effectiveness to the influence of feedback from their high-performing peers. Collaboration with teacher leaders is described as being a “critical lever in building the capacity of peers to engage in a continuous cycle of learning and improvement” (Duff & Islas, 2013, p. 11). However, Duff and Islas also cautioned educational leaders, explaining that impactful work of teacher leaders exists only when the support of both the district- and school-level leadership are conducive to building structures of partnerships with teacher leaders.

Professional Development

Probably one of the most commonly used approaches in attempts to generate more effective teaching practices in classrooms is to provide teachers with professional

development sessions or workshops (Knight, 2007). However, research notes that traditional workshop models of professional development yield less than a 10% rate of implementation. Teachers report that this is largely due to lack of follow-up and failure to recognize the expertise of the classroom teacher in the structures of traditional professional development, which fuels a cycle of lost enthusiasm, disappointment, and blaming.

However, teachers engage in much more meaningful and practical professional development every day through collaboration and dialogue with other educators, which has proven to be much more impactful on teaching practices than the one-shot professional development models to which educational leaders and administrators often revert back. Reinforcing the ineffectiveness of traditional professional development, Aguilar (2013) cited a research study from 2009 that pinpointed a threshold of 50 hours of professional development in a particular area to positively impact their practices and student learning outcomes. It is likely that most educational leaders will agree that devoting 50 hours for a single area of professional development of a teacher's time is impractical in almost any context.

Legislative Efforts

Although legislators often present reform initiatives in the form of ultimatums requiring educators to improve or face penalties, sanctions, or consequences, research on human development is clear in the fact that threats are not effective in changing human behavior or developing skills (Aguilar, 2013). Aguilar (2013) noted, "with our children, we use a gradual release of responsibility model providing just enough help for them to do it, but not so much that they don't develop the skills by themselves" (p. 7). It can be

argued that adults need a similar structure of support in the learning process, meeting them where they are developmentally in their practice.

Pathway to Instructional Coaching

These collective attempts to build teacher effectiveness over time to include more rigorous teacher preparation programs increased awareness of the need for peer collaboration and collegial discussions, along with the development of job-embedded and differentiated professional development, have all contributed to the evolvement of the practice of instructional coaching (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). “Coaching offers a new set of tools that have the potential to radically transform our schools” (Aguilar, 2013, p. 5).

Research surrounding attempts to produce a more effective workforce of teachers in the United States initiated a paradigm shift in teacher support as well as professional development (Harris, 2014). Schools must be centers of learning that are “rich and textured mentoring communities, places where both adults and children can be nurtured to grow” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 274). This is where coaching models have been able to blend high-quality, job-embedded professional development with collegial inquiry and collaboration. Job-embedded professional development delivered through feedback, modeling, and dialogue with teacher leaders is proving to be an effective means for developing more effective teachers.

With the emergence of “coaching” in the educational world, professional development has transformed. The traditional workshop model typically consists of a one-moment-in-time session, or block of instruction with minimal ongoing support, and the impact is limited and short lived (Kho et al., 2019). Coaching structures allow for

professional development for teachers that is an ongoing dialogue between teacher and coach. The coach serves as “an on-site resource” for teachers in the role (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015, p. 180). The dialogue is representative of the learning process and is specific to the needs of each teacher and the application of best practices in instructional delivery.

Support structures of the job-embedded professional development of instructional coaching play a significant role in the comfort level of teachers in employing new practices in their work specific to differentiating instruction for a variety of learners (Whitten, 2017). Both novice and veteran teachers benefit from the guidance and support of an instructional coach who can provide individual assessment of their work and guidance on how to improve their work (Jones & Blake, 2018). Additionally, this kind of on-the-job training that is embedded in the everyday work of teaching that can be provided through a coaching structure is a model that is grounded in research on adult learning theory by allowing for differentiated supports and frequent follow-up (Jones & Blake, 2018; Whitten, 2017).

Kho et al. (2019) described professional development through coaching where teachers and coaches work “shoulder to shoulder to identify issues in the teachers’ practice and to reach mutually agreed upon learning goals” (p. 1108). Aguilar (2013) compared instructional coaching to parents supporting a child in the early stages of learning to walk; you support “standing close by and offering a hand when necessary” (p. 6). Furthermore, it is noted in research that professional development provided through a structured coaching model yields a 90% implementation rate compared to 10% of a traditional professional development model (Knight, 2007).

Problem

The concept of coaching is prevalent in a variety of settings and contexts and is typically a universally understood term on the surface. The term is defined holistically in dictionaries to be applicable to a variety of settings and scenarios. While some themes of coaching are consistent from field to field, some aspects of this role are distinguishably different.

The apprenticeship is one of the earliest forms of coaching in trades or professions where an "experienced practitioner welcomes a learner who improves [their] practice by watching, listening, asking questions and trying things out under the supportive gaze of the mentor" (Aguilar, 2013, p. 6). Oxford University originally began to use the term coach as an interchangeable term for tutor, or to "carry a student through an exam" (Morrison, 2010, text box below para. 7) as early as 1830. It was not until 1861 that the term was used in the realm of athletics as it is most commonly used today. Similarly, the term in both senses generically referred to a role played by a person who helps or instructs another person to successfully perform a task or series of tasks.

It is not surprising that the concept of coaching has expanded beyond athletics to a variety of fields with the evolving research behind adult learning theory. Businesses and industries continue to look toward research for insight into developing a more efficient, knowledgeable, and productive workforce. With coaching and mentoring at the heart of research, it is not uncommon for most professional workplaces to employ coaches in an effort to provide ongoing, on-the-job support and training.

Ambiguity of the Role

In the realm of education, the concept of coaching is not brand new, but the term

coach references a role that is still “inherently multifaceted and ambiguous” (Gallucci et al., 2010, p. 922) in many ways (Lang, 2018). To further complicate the development of a universal definition, it can be argued that the concept of a coach can also be a function of a person’s experiences. Some may ascertain that the qualities of a coach are derivatives of the qualities of coaches from their personal experiences of being coached. Qualities that an individual found to be helpful, transformative, or inspirational in a person who acted in the capacity of a coach in their experiences often manifest in a person’s conceptual understanding of the role a coach should play.

Although the goal of implementing an instructional coaching structure is to build teacher capacity and improve teacher effectiveness, the specifics of how to reach these goals in the role of the coach are often misunderstood (Whitten, 2017). Coaches often devote their time to tasks that are not consistent with what research has established as making an impact on the school and district reform efforts primarily because the role lacks clarity in definition and purpose. An empirical study by Deussen (2007) reported that 36% of instructional coaches’ time was spent on tasks that are not consistent with their role, including bus duty, attending meetings, paperwork, and even substituting in classrooms. However, the “crux of instructional coaching should be a daily, intentional, and purposeful engagement with all learners in the school community to support teaching and learning in innovative and transformational ways” (Lang, 2018, p. 1).

Even among researchers in the education field, definitions and functions of effective instructional coaching vary.

- Wang (as cited in Kho et al., 2019) described the four primary roles of the instructional coach as facilitator, instructor, collaborator, and empowerer.

- Hauser (as cited in Kho et al., 2019) identified four roles of an impactful coach: advisor, educator, catalyzer, and assimilator.
- Knight (2007) preferred to use the term “instructional collaborator” versus “instructional coach” to avoid some of the stereotypical qualities of a coach as depicted in Hollywood and from the athletic realm of coaching.

Considering the varied definitions found in the body of research related to instructional coaching and understanding the various needs, philosophies, and structures of districts that employ instructional coaches, it can be assumed that the term is interpreted in a variety of ways by coaches themselves as well as administrators who supervise them and teachers who enlist their support. It is not uncommon for instructional coaches to be expected to define their role themselves as they learn to do it (Gallucci et al., 2010).

Without a clear definition of the role, many instructional coaches have found themselves navigating an array of misconceptions concerning their role. Coaching too often has been associated with program implementation as the person who evaluates or monitors an instructional program (Aguilar, 2013). Likewise, coaches often find themselves in a position where they take on the role of a therapist for teachers and struggle to understand the boundaries between coach and mental health expert. Finally, coaching is often erroneously referred to as something that is “done” to a teacher as if it is a magical cure for poor instructional practices (Aguilar, 2013).

Lack of Preparation and Training for Instructional Coaches

The role of the instructional coach is further complicated by the fact that for many teachers who move into coaching roles, their own experiences of teaching tend to be the

extent of their training (Carver, 2016). Many teachers who transition to a coaching role are ill-prepared for the employment of the necessary skills needed for effective coaching (Gallucci et al., 2010). Just because a person was an effective teacher or administrator does not necessarily mean they have the skill set to be an effective coach (Aguilar, 2013). Lang's (2018) work around effective instructional coaching recognized that instructional coaches need their own systems of support and professional development to fulfill the functions of their job each day.

Gallucci et al. (2010) described the demands of instructional coaching as a nonsupervisory role that must rely on relationships and their expertise to influence positive change and require one to develop fundamental skills in communication, relationship building, change management, and leadership in providing professional development. Most teachers do not develop proficiency in these leadership skills naturally, and most require structured training.

Recent research has spotlighted the need for professional development related to supporting the needs of adult learners specific to the field of instructional coaching (Gallucci et al., 2010). While most coaches approach the job with a skill set in pedagogy and content knowledge, few have any experience or training related to adult learning strategies for overcoming cultural norms and the art of peer critique. Although most instructional coaches have extensive training in working with children, those skills do not necessarily translate into effective ways to work with adults. Most often, instructional coaches are faced with navigating the obstacles of adult learning in their job without any structures of support or training.

Knight (2006, as cited to in Gallucci et al., 2010) specified four essential skills for

impactful coaching including communication, relationship building, change management, and leadership for teacher professional development. Gallucci et al. (2010) made the point that this skill set is a "tall order for professionals" (p. 922) jumping into a role that, in most districts, is very ambiguous and not clearly defined. In many cases, the role is a balancing act between mentorship and system-wide improvement efforts without crossing over into a supervisory position or position of authority over teachers.

Barriers Encountered in the Role of the Instructional Coach

Research has revealed that instructional coaches face a number of roadblocks transitioning from teacher to coach (Carter et al., 2017). Carter et al.'s (2017) study surveyed 296 organizational coaches, of which 290 responded that they had faced significant barriers in their role as a job-embedded coach.

Instructional coaches report that delivering critical feedback was one barrier they faced in the role. The role of the coach to deliver actionable feedback to teachers is often a "gray" area for most coaches, as the feedback can often be perceived as evaluative although the role of the coach is a nonsupervisory role (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Thus, the feedback conversations often generate tension between the coach and the teacher. Gallucci et al. (2010) also mentioned that one-on-one coaching conversations can be difficult for coaches new to the role and coaches need their own coaching on how to approach critical dialogue in the feedback process.

Purpose

While the body of research around teams and leadership is abundant, the study of coaching in organizations is still in the infancy stages, specifically the systems of support needed for effective coaching models. Additionally, the ambiguity of the definition of

coach, as it pertains to education, generates uncertainty about the role which contributes to the difficulty in providing meaningful professional development and support for instructional coaches. Opportunities for instructional coaches to engage in professional development pertinent to their role as a coach are limited in part due to the lack of understanding of the job and the lack of research on the necessary support structures for coaches (Aguilar, 2013).

"Empirical studies are limited and focus only peripherally on the learning of coaches or on structural supports for their work" (Gallucci et al., 2010, p. 924). A large percentage of the limited literature on coaching tends to focus on illuminating aspects of successful coaching, while very little focuses on ways to avoid unsuccessful coaching or strategies to support the coach when barriers present themselves (Carter et al., 2017, p. 74).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of the instructional coach to determine the types of barriers encountered in the role, to understand supports needed prior to entering the role, and to identify professional development supports needed to assist instructional coaches in overcoming these barriers.

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are the self-perceived roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach?
2. What barriers have instructional coaches encountered in their role and carrying out their responsibilities?
3. What professional development needs, for both novice and veteran instructional coaches, can be identified?

Significance of the Study

This study will be significant to school districts that explore a research-based instructional coaching structure for building capacity in teachers in their efforts to generate a more effective teaching staff. Understanding how instructional coaches perceive their role will be helpful in clarifying misconceptions about the role of the coach and will assist in the development of a concrete definition of the role and job description.

In addition to defining the role of the coach in an educational setting, this research will contribute to the limited body of research around the barriers instructional coaches face in their roles. Understanding the barriers faced will assist school leaders in designing structures of support to avoid or eliminate barriers in providing an effective coaching model of support for teachers.

Moreover, data collected through this research can be applied in the design of professional development for instructional coaches to support them in transitioning to the role and the design of ongoing professional development for coaches serving in the role of coach. The data will also help determine if the needs of novice coaches compared to veteran coaches are distinguishably different, which will inform the efforts of school leaders in designing meaningful professional development for those at all levels of experience in the role.

Context

This study was conducted in a mid-size, rural school district in North Carolina. The district is comprised of 26 schools: 14 elementary schools, five middle schools, four high schools, one separate school, one alternative school, and one middle college high school. The district serves approximately 12,500 students and employs approximately

1,263 teachers, of which 312 are considered beginning teachers, as defined by the state of North Carolina as teachers in the first 3 years of their careers.

The district employs 32 employees who serve in an instructional coach capacity to some degree across eight departments including elementary, secondary, exceptional children, technology, academically and intellectually gifted, career and technical education, preschool, and English as a second language. However, this case study focused on the elementary and secondary instructional coaches whose time is more purely devoted to coaching.

Critical Perspective

In my experiences as a teacher, assistant principal, elementary principal, high school principal, and now a district level director, I have had the opportunity to view the role of the instructional coach through a variety of lenses. From these multiple perspectives, it has been my experience that the research tends to parallel the realities of instructional coaching. In my current position, it has become even more evident that the roles and responsibilities of coaches are ill-defined, and there is a lack of a comprehensive understanding of the role among teachers, school-level administrators, district-level administrators, and even coaches themselves. Additionally, it has also become more clear to me throughout my career that instructional coaches often do not have the full skill set needed to be effective in their role, which is further complicated by the limited opportunities for professional development for instructional coaches.

Summary

Instructional coaching has the potential to be a game changer in education. While the body of literature supports the use of coaching in the realm of education, research

around how to prepare and develop effective coaches and coaching structures is limited. For instructional coaching to be the catalyst that moves the teacher effectiveness needle, and thus positively impacting student achievement, it is important that educational leaders consider research-based implementation strategies. Otherwise, instructional coaching will be added to the growing list of failed initiatives in education.

This study has been designed as a qualitative case study to explore the role of the instructional coach and discover best practices for districts to support the role of the instructional coach. The purpose of the study is to inform educational leaders of specific roles and responsibilities that should define the work of an instructional coach, identify barriers that may impede the work of the instructional coach, and create professional development needs of individuals in the role of an instructional coach to be effective in their work. A series of data collection instruments including surveys, focus group interviews, and one-on-one interviews were utilized to explore the delineated research questions in the district designated for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The rise of instructional coaches is rooted in the 1990s and manifested from significant research studies that highlighted the concept of peer coaching as an effective tool in reshaping teaching practices and effectively assimilating new teaching strategies into classrooms (Galey, 2016). The on-site coaching model was designed for an experienced teacher to provide ongoing feedback, modeling, and collaborative problem-solving with other teachers (Stock & Duncan, 2010). The momentum of this new trend to provide peer coaching opportunities for teachers gave way to a new era of "school reform that grows from the *inside-out*" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 6). With the dawn of coaching, professional development has been redesigned in a way that moves away from the traditional model where one person delivers information to a large group in a single session with little to no follow-up and is focused primarily on what Drago-Severson et al. (2013) referred to as "informational learning" (p. 11) or simply "increasing the amount of knowledge or skills a person possesses" (p. 11). Instructional coaching allows for real-time professional development that is embedded in the day-to-day work of teachers and is more easily differentiated to meet the professional needs of each teacher.

In 1997, an article was published in the National Association of Secondary School Principals introducing a new role being piloted that was referred to as an instructional coach, one of the first formal attempts at establishing a coaching model in the realm of education (Makibbin & Sprague, 1997). The new role was modeled after the structure introduced in the 1980s as collegial supervision, which was designed to use teachers to coach other teachers on new instructional strategies and was based on the assumptions from research that

- Teachers need feedback to generate improvement; and
- Teachers prefer a nonevaluative support structure, and growth is typically ignited through nonevaluative measures.

In piloting this new role, the instructional coach was defined as an "educator who acts as a resource at the school level to assist the principal and the faculty with efforts to improve instructional practices for the purpose of improving student learning" (Makibbin & Sprague, 1997, p. 97). After 1 year of implementation, instructional coaches were surveyed to determine strengths and weaknesses of the job-embedded professional development model. Coaches self-reported that they felt confident in their pedagogical skills and understanding but very insecure in their skills in facilitation and coaching of adult learners. Just because a teacher has proven to be an effective classroom teacher does not mean that person has the skill set to be an effective instructional coach (Wilkins, 2014). Researchers call for training for instructional coaches to be expanded and to be more standardized. Two decades after these conclusions were drawn, educational researchers continue to arrive at this same conclusion and yet still report on the ambiguity of the role along with the minimal opportunities and structures for professional learning in the American education system for instructional coaches.

Defining the Role

The role of the instructional coach varies from district to district and sometimes from school to school. Galey (2016) realized that "despite the growing prevalence of coaching, there is no standard model or definition of an instructional coach" (p. 58). Researchers continue to point out that "there is a lack of conceptual clarity from research and from instructional coaches themselves about what an instructional coach is"

(DePasquale, 2015, p. 15). Because school systems are susceptible to rapid changes, this can further complicate the ambiguity of roles in an organization, such as an instructional coach (Debacker, 2013). Although, Galey (2016) claimed that the ambiguity of the role and the lack of concrete job descriptions for instructional coaches are not coincidences but a purposeful attempt to implement a policy tool that can be used in any way that a district deems necessary. Consequently, Debacker (2013) cited research that shows a negative correlation between role ambiguity and job performance. Still, there is a perceived universal assumption that educators know the role and function of the instructional coach (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009), yet the body of empirical research is limited in identifying specific and measurable attributes of an instructional coach that could give way to a concrete description.

More important than settling on a single definition of a coach is that educational organizations understand and know the role and definition of the coach as it applies to their practice (Parsloe & Leedham, 2017). Coaches self-report that they "operate best when their role is well-defined and they have professional and institutional support" (Galey, 2016, p. 64). DePasquale (2015) corroborated this finding through a qualitative research study that found that effective instructional coaches need to have clearly defined roles and functions. However, research reveals that when instructional supports, such as coaches, are used in ways that do not align to the defined job description, achievement can be impacted negatively and can scar relationships between teachers and coaches (Wilkins, 2014).

Unfortunately, most instructional coaches report that the functions of their job are unclear, and they often find themselves acclimating to their roles by delving into the field

work and then defining their own work (Aguilar, 2013). Steiner (2017) attributed some of the ambiguity of the role to the fact that most "instructional coaches find themselves wearing many hats" (p. 24). In fact, Aguilar (2013) recommended that coaches plan to develop their own vision for their work as a coach under the assumption that the role will not have clearly defined parameters, goals, and duties.

Galey (2016) concurred and recognized that because of the different roles encompassed by the overarching role of the instructional coach, often they are caught in the crosshairs where policy and practice meet. This intersection can become a swamp of conflict, where coaches are often placed in a "difficult position because they must support teachers' self-directed learning while also being responsible for getting teachers to implement specific instructional approaches advocated by school or district leadership" (pp. 57-58). Likewise, a case study conducted by Tolbert-Woods (2014) uncovered frequent roadblocks encountered by instructional coaches; one being that they often are forced to be the middleman between administrators (policy) and teachers (practice).

Researchers warn that in the absence of a clear framework for the work of the instructional coach, coaches are easily sidetracked and find themselves working in capacities that are not related to their role (Warfield, 2017). In frequent cases, the confusion is not only on the part of the coach but also on the part of the administrators who mistakenly view the role of the coach as another level of administrator, rather than a support for teachers and provider of professional development for teachers (Quattlebaum, 2017). These themes in the research are paralleled by a study that reported an average 40% turnover rate among instructional coaches following their first year serving in the role, with many that cited feeling overwhelmed and being ill-prepared for the role as

reasons for leaving the role behind (Faulkner, 2013). These themes are paralleled in research by Debacker (2013) that warns of "role overload" that can occur when the lack of role definition leads to a greater number of tasks that are possible in light of the time and training devoted to a person in an organization. Often, other duties (i.e., morning and afternoon duties, overseeing assessment/testing regulations, overseeing budgets, or direct student instructional roles) that are not related to the central functions/goals of an instructional coach are added as auxiliary duties, generating stress and feelings of frustration for coaches. "By taking on job responsibilities not involving the professional growth of teachers, instructional coaches risk being unable to complete their primary teacher professional development responsibilities" (Debacker, 2013, p. 20).

Aguilar (2013) described coaching as an embedded support of a "nurturing structure" (p. 9) that applies a constant, steady pressure for change. Similarly, Galey's (2016) research provides an operative definition for instructional coaching applied to educational practices as "striking a balance between mentoring individual teachers and engaging in whole-school, system-wide improvement" (p. 55). Table 1 displays the three primary roles an instructional coach plays according to Galey's research: cognitive role, organizational role, and a reform role.

Table 1

Evolving Roles of Instructional Coaches in U.S. Policy Contexts

Role attribute	Cognitive role	Organizational role	Reform role
Area of focus	Teacher development	Instructional capacity-building	Coherent and effective policy implementation
Main activity	Work with individual or groups of teachers to improve instruction	Charged with knowledge management and building structures for teacher's collaboration and professional development	Positioned as part of a larger reform effort and/or in the context of other reform efforts and must adapt and modify new policy information given local context
Drivers	Informal social influence and semi-structured interactions	Formal organizational influence and semi-structured time driven interactions	Formal and informal political influence and reform accountability/ fidelity driven interactions

Note. Galey, S. (2016). Evolving Role of Instructional Coaches in U.S. Policy Contexts. *The William & Mary Educational Review, 4*(2), Article 11.

Not only does the scholarly literature attempt to outline factors that should inform a definition of an effective instructional coaching model, there is also literature that points to descriptors of what an effective coach should *not* be. Aguilar (2013) ascertained that coaching should not be a vehicle by which a program is enforced, a method for "fixing people" (p. 15), a therapeutic role, or a consultant who trains others in one particular way of carrying out the functions of a teacher. However, this balance can be difficult for a coach to maintain.

Danielson (as cited by Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 114) recognized distinct characteristics of educators who often are successful in formal leadership capacities that should be considered when identifying individuals to serve in a formal leadership role as an instructional coach:

- Expertise in their field
- Confidence

- Persuasiveness
- Open-mindedness
- The ability to listen
- Optimism
- Enthusiasm
- Decisiveness
- Perseverance
- Flexibility
- Respect views of others

Likewise, Wilkins (2014) pointed out that coaches not only need a firm understanding of content and sound instructional strategies but also need to be well versed in ways to "model, observe and provide feedback to teachers" (p. 45). Additionally, it was revealed through Tolbert-Woods's (2014) case study design dissertation research that teachers valued effective communication skills and interpersonal skills of coaches above expertise in content knowledge. While content knowledge is recognized as important, themes emerged from survey data indicating that content coaching should not be the primary focus for instructional coaches.

Research conducted by Whitten (2017) examined teacher perceptions of instructional coaches that defines the role of the instructional coach through a different lens. Through the research, Whitten recognized a strong theme that emerged from survey responses regarding how instructional coaches could better serve teachers. Across all demographics of teachers surveyed, common responses identified the lack of sufficient time and interfering responsibilities that impede their ability to coach. While definitive

conclusions were unable to be drawn about the reasons for this response, it is noted that teachers believe coaches need more time in their day-to-day schedules to be in classrooms with teachers, on the frontlines of learning.

Ultimately, the body of scholarly research is limited in the empirical findings related to the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the instructional coach (Gallucci et al., 2010). However, the body of literature converges on the fact that instructional coaching should be grounded in sound adult learning theory and practices if the goal of coaching is to develop the instructional capacities of teachers.

Adult Learning Theory

Researchers present a variety of lenses through which adult learning can be approached; all are founded on the fact that "adults are not 'done' learning and growing simply because they've reached an age of maturity" (Drago-Severson, 2016, p. 2). The role of the instructional coach is centered around teaching adult learners and is designed as job-embedded professional development. Therefore, adult learning theory is critical to the role of the coach. While it is recognized in the research that the application of adult learning theories can be the key to understanding how to best support the personal and professional development of adults, Drago-Severson (2009) pointed out that the K-12 world largely underutilizes this tool; and Gallucci et al. (2010) called for the professional development of instructional coaches to center on supporting adult learners. While there are some fundamental learning theories that apply to both children and adults, research is clear on the fact that there are some evident differences in ideal conditions surrounding adult learning compared to those associated with the way children learn best (Warfield, 2017). Literature over the past century has presented a multitude of theories, principles,

and explanations for how to best respond to adult learning needs (American Institute for Research, 2016).

Andragogy

Knowles et al. (2005) fathered the theory of andragogical adult learning theory that is contrasted with pedagogical learning theories and is founded on assumptions that adult learning

- should become increasingly more self-directed,
- should be highly dependent on the experience of the individual,
- is most meaningful when in the context of a problem or new life experiences, and
- should be designed to be more intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsic (American Institute for Research, 2016).

Knowles et al.'s (2005) work is largely informed by the work of Carl Rogers, an experiential learning theorist whose work placed less emphasis on curriculum goals and more emphasis on the self-directed goals of the learner (Chinnasamy, 2013). Critics of Knowles et al.'s work claim that his theories lack empirical evidence, while others question how this approach defines adult learning distinguishably different from child learning.

Self-Directed Learning Theory

Other adult learning theorists prescribe to a theory coined self-directed learning theory that rests on the notion that learning happens beyond the walls of a classroom and is not dependent on the help of others but is self-initiated by the learner (American Institute for Research, 2011). Those who prescribe to this approach of adult learning

focus on ways to facilitate learning environments to promote self-directed learning opportunities and claim that this model is much more robust than a model where the learner is waiting to be taught by others (Canipe, 2001).

Constructive Developmental Theory

Kegan's (1982) constructive developmental theory stems from Piaget's theories of human development. Drago-Severson et al. (2013) explained that theory is comprised of three principles: constructivism, developmentalism, and the subject-object balance.

Constructivism. Swiss philosopher, Jean Piaget, the father of constructivism theory, explained learning as an active construction of knowledge rather than a "passive assimilation" (Graduate Student Instructor Teaching and Resource Center, 2019, para. 6) of given knowledge. Constructivism centers around the fact that humans construct meaning from their experiences (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). "How we interpret what we see and hear, and experience is qualitatively different from person to person" (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, p. 40). These individual interpretations produce different constructs of learning for individuals.

Developmentalism. Second, it is recognized that as humans develop overtime, reality construction becomes more and more complex over the course of a lifetime. Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) described developmentalism as a "promising notion that the way we make meaning of our experiences can become bigger and more encompassing over time" (p. 40). Kegan described this progression through a series of stages throughout an individual's life (Turknett & Turknett, 2005). These stages are what Kegan (1982) referred to as "orders of consciousness" (p. 11) and explained that they reflect how individuals interpret themselves in the context of the world around them

and how “they make meaning of their lived experiences” (Fantozzi, 2010, p. 2). Fensel (2016) explained that these stages, or orders of consciousness, described by Kegan are not correlated to age but a progression of the development of “how one comes to understand things and not the content of what is known” (pp. 6-7).

Subject-Object Balance. Progressing through the developmental stages, according to Kegan (1982), often requires individuals to see and reflect on themselves and their value system from an outside perspective, which is the third foundational component of his theory. Drago-Severson (2016) claimed that a person’s meaning-making system is dependent on this balance. Kegan’s theory embraces this evolution of knowing as individuals move through the stages of development, or orders of consciousness, to allow an objective lens of understanding (Turknett & Turknett, 2005). Drago-Severson et al. (2013) explained that individuals cannot reflect on experiences they are subject to because they are “run by” (p. 57) them, meaning they are embedded in it and are a part of it. Contrastingly, when individuals are able to remove the *self* from the experience and perceive it objectively, that is when true reflection and meaning making occurs (Fensel, 2016).

Two Distinctions of Adult Learning

Drago-Severson et al. (2013) called Kegan’s (1982) constructive developmental theory a “powerful and hopeful lens” (p. 26) through which one can view adult learning and development, which has only been applied recently to the development of those serving in the field of education. Additionally, Drago-Severson (2009) distinguished two kinds of adult learning in the context of constructive developmental theory: informational learning and transformational learning. Informational learning is learning that “centers on

increas[ing] *what* we know" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 56). Developing skills, knowledge, and competency are all examples of informational learning, which is recognized as a significant and critical form of learning for educators and educational leaders. However, Drago-Severson (2009) argued that informational learning cannot lead adult learners to "managing adaptive challenges…or build our own or other adults' internal capacities" (p. 56) as educators. Transformational learning, learning that impacts how a person knows and makes meaning of their experiences in the larger context of the world, is the key to "increasing cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 56) that help adults overcome adaptive challenges that are more and more present in the realm of education.

Branching from Kegan's (1982) constructive developmental theory on adult learning, Mezirow's theory on adult development zooms in on the adaptive learning challenges faced in adulthood. Although, some in the field criticize Mezirow's work claiming that it diverges from the widely accepted, scholarly definition of a theory and is more of a series of methods (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Nonetheless, as Kegan's constructive developmental theory approaches adult learning in a way that changes how adults make sense of the world around them and make a shift in their consciousness, so does Mezirow's transformative theory on adult development (American Institute for Research, 2011). Mezirow's work is grounded in constructive development theory and his transformational learning theory is described as a "rational process" (Howie & Bagnall, 2013, p. 817) by which individuals consciously reflect on their own underlying assumptions about the world and participate in discourse to challenge their assumptions and meaning structures and to consider other perspectives (American Institute for

Research, 2016). Drago-Severson et al. (2013) pointed out,

> When transformational learning occurs – there is a qualitative change in a person's way of knowing, meaning that there is an internal change in the structure of a person's meaning-making system and that person is able to take a broader perspective on himself or herself, other people, and the relationship between the two. (p. 57)

Drago-Severson et al.'s (2013) research dug deeper into the transformational learning progression describing a series of ways of knowing that give insight into how individuals construct meaning. As individuals progress from one way of knowing to another, their meaning making systems grow more complex. Drago-Severson et al. (2013) pointed out that although the structure of the ways of knowing are hierarchical, "one way of knowing is not necessarily better than another" (p. 59). However, some contexts call for more complex ways of knowing than others based on demands of the environment. Drago-Severson et al. (2013) used Kegan's(1982) constructive developmental theory to identify three ways of knowing most common in adulthood that align to the developmental stages (Table 2).

Table 2

Constructive Developmental Stages of Adult Development

Adult learning theory	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Kegan's term	Imperial	Interpersonal	Institutional
Drago-Severson's term	Instrumental	Socializing	Self-Authoring
Characteristics of learners	-Rule-based -Focused on self -Others are seen as obstacles to meeting needs	-Other focused -Driven by external authority -Holds others responsible for their feelings	-Reflective-self -Driven by internal values -Ultimate concern with one's own competence

Transformational learning is the by-product of transitioning from one way of knowing to another (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). The context in which adults are able to transition between these stages is known as a *holding environment*. "A holding environment is the context in and out of which a person grows" (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 66). According to Drago-Severson et al. (2013), efforts to support the growth of adult learners should focus on designing effective holding environments that support adults with different ways of knowing.

Instructional coaches are charged with developing the personal and professional capacities of adult learners and should therefore be skilled in creating effective holding environments from which they can grow. Drago-Severson (2016) recognized the complexity of this task. The key for instructional coaches is to develop meaningful, trusting relationships with teachers in their care that allows them to know how they understand and make meaning of the world. Then, subsequently, they are able to find ways to push them to their "growing edge" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 39) but do so in a way that avoids damaging the relationship and overwhelming the feedback loop. This balance is the result of providing what Drago-Severson (2016, p. 40) called both supports and challenges for the adult learner.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in constructive developmental theory in the context of adult learning and development as presented by Drago-Severson (2009), who also rented ideas from Mezirow's extension of constructive developmental theory termed transformational learning theory. Because instructional coaching is designed as actionable, job-embedded professional development to grow and develop the capacity of

adult learners in the field of education, the role of the instructional coach should also be studied in the context of this same framework.

Four Pillar Practices of Adult Learning

Drago-Severson's (2009) research identified four pillar practices to support adult learning: mentoring, teaming, collegial inquiry, and engaging in leadership roles. Within the context of these pillar practices, adults can be supported in their journeys of learning and improvement which are supported through longitudinal research studies. While these pillar practices will be examined independently, it is important to recognize the interconnectedness of the four practices and how they can be interwoven and seem to overlap when put into action, specifically when applied to the role of the instructional coach.

Mentoring. Theories on adult development inform the body of research practices of effective mentoring (Drago-Severson, 2009). Drago-Severson's (2009) research centered on adult learning theory has identified mentoring as one of the four pillar practices that support adult learning from a constructive developmental research perspective. However, other researchers in the field of adult learning have also revealed mentoring as a significant function of instructional coaches (Warfield, 2017). While instructional coaching and mentoring are not synonymous, research recognizes mentoring as one of the functions of instructional coaching. Stock and Duncan (2010) pointed out that instructional coaching has an embedded feedback loop that may or may not be present in a stand-alone mentoring relationship; but when instructional coaches embrace effective mentor and mentee relationships, teacher confidence and efficacy improve, resulting in increased student success (Warfield, 2017).

Mentoring is not unique to the field of education. Other professions are also calling for more research in effective mentoring practices. Parsloe and Leedham (2017) analyzed a framework of coaching that has been tailored to corporate and professional realms. This framework is composed of four generic coach-mentoring stages that are listed in linear fashion but assure his audience that the stages are cyclical in nature:

- Analyzing for awareness of need, desire, and self
- Planning for self-responsibility
- Implementing using styles, technique and skills
- Evaluating for success and learning.

Drago-Severson (2009) described the mentoring relationship through a constructive developmental perspective as "a safe context for broadening perspectives, taking risks, engaging in dialogue and reflective practice, examining assumptions and behaviors, and overtime possibly refraining from them" (p. 220).

It is important to note that scholars recognize mentoring as a critical component for improving teacher practices and thereby improving teacher effectiveness. It is not a stand-alone panacea for school improvement and can only be effective when working in tandem with other pillar practices (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). "Mentoring relationships need to be nested in a larger developmental set of connections or constellations" (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 40).

Standards for Mentors in North Carolina. Effective mentoring is a function of how mentors and mentoring programs are evaluated. North Carolina has outlined the role and responsibilities of those designated as formal mentors with five distinct standards (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2019; Appendix A). While not all

formally assigned mentors are instructional coaches in North Carolina, these standards can serve as guidance to those instructional coaches who do serve as formal mentors and also to those who serve as informal mentors to teachers.

The design of the standards directly parallels those that comprise the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Instrument. Each of the five mentor standards calls for mentors to support beginning teachers in developing proficiency in each of the Teacher Evaluation Standards. The language embedded in the standards reflect the qualities and characteristics in the research surrounding effective mentoring. Not only do the standards describe the overarching purpose of the mentoring relationship but also explicitly detail ways mentors can achieve those broader standards. However, there is little guidance in the standards instructing those serving in mentor capacities on strategies for developing effective mentoring relationships.

Challenges to Mentoring. Instructional coaches often find themselves problem-solving around barriers to mentoring. In a 2010 study of instructional coaches serving as mentors, the majority rated their experiences in mentoring as challenging, largely due to the lack of training and preparation they received specific to the mentoring capacities of their job (Gardiner & Robinson, 2010). Specifically, research by Tolbert-Woods (2014) recognized that coaches are ill-equipped to mentor teachers who are resistant to change, which requires a solid understanding of how adults learn and make meaning of the world around them (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). Stock and Duncan (2010) reported on findings that also highlight similar challenges faced by coaches serving as mentors in which mentors struggle to handle the conflict that emerges in a mentoring relationship when there is a difference of opinion or core beliefs about teaching.

A clear distinction should be made between mentors and supervisors, and districts should be careful of blurring the lines between the two when defining role responsibilities (Warfield, 2017). While supervisory roles are more evaluative in nature and illustrate a hierarchical relationship of one individual having power over another, mentoring relationships should not place one individual at a different level of power or influence over the other individual. However, it is noted in the research that instructional coaches often find themselves enforcing district and state policy or instructional mandates, which often give a perception of the coach as a supervisor or quasi-administrator. Research reveals that while coaches often do not perceive their role as authoritative in nature, the perception of authority still exists among teachers simply because of their formal designation.

Warnings emerge in the research also cautioning mentors to also avoid a "buddy-system" (Stock & Duncan, 2010, p. 60) approach to mentoring. While the mentor should not serve as a quasi-administrator or a supervisor, the relationship should, nonetheless, be one that is professionally grounded. Stock and Duncan (2010) recognized that a relationship that mimics the relationship of a friend might help with teacher retention but will have little impact on improving teacher effectiveness.

Research conducted by Nied (2016) recognized flaws in selection processes for teacher mentors, which can also be applied to the selection of instructional coaches who serve in mentoring capacities. Nied explained that because individuals may have proven successful as a classroom teacher does not always mean their experiences will translate into success as a mentor, a role that requires a different skill set than that of a teacher. In light of the findings in the research, Nied explained the significance of utilizing clearly

defined outcome criteria when selecting individuals to serve in mentorship capacities.

Finally, the research also warns that when coaches are new to the role, and specifically those new to their building, they have trouble establishing trust and credibility with the teaching staff (Nied, 2016). For this reason, it is important for district leaders to recognize the importance of allowing instructional coaches to develop roots over time to grow relationships with teachers, thus improving the impact of their coaching efforts.

Effective Mentoring. The body of research around mentoring is abundant, and the definitions surrounding good mentors are numerous among scholarly writers and researchers in the field of education. Nonetheless, research studies have highlighted qualities that are perceived to be associated with effective mentors. White (2017) recognized

> attributes of good mentors [to] include teaching optimism, listening skills, reflective dialogue, commitment to continuous learning and development, knowledge of fluid instructional methods to meet the needs of individual students, a collaborative nature, and the ability to understand and use data. (p. 27)

Comparatively, Lipton et al. (1999, as cited by Williams, 2009) described three primary functions of a mentor to involve providing support, generating a challenge, and establishing professional vision for their work.

Drago-Severson's (2009) research surrounding mentoring as a form of professional development has brought to light a series of other themes related to effective mentoring in the research literature, some of which parallel the work of White (2017):

- Mentors need training on how to be a good mentor.

- Trust is an essential component of a healthy mentor-mentee relationship.
- Time, energy, and commitment are required for mentoring to be effective.
- Mentors need to be accepting of individuals as developing professionals.
- Mentors should be reflective in their practice and show empathy rather than hasty judgements.
- Mentors should have an understanding of adult development.
- Mentors need skills in observing teachers in their classrooms and communicating about their observations while also sharing about their own experiences (diminishes tendency for feelings of isolation) to engage mentees in collegial dialogue.
- Mentors should be able to share research based instructional strategies for mentees to put into practice and share the advantages and disadvantages of each practice shared.

Drago-Severson (2009) further described mentoring as a "growth-enhancing practice that supports human development" (p. 211); and when applied to adult learning theory, she called it "crucial" (p. 211). Furthermore, she recognized that mentoring relationships are "safe contexts in which adults are supported and challenged" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 223). Additionally, her research revealed benefits for both the mentor and the mentee which also parallels the research of others in the field including dissertation research reported by Warfield (2017).

Trust as an Essential Component to Mentoring. A substantial portion of literature identifies trust as an essential component to building a relationship between teacher and mentor that fosters meaningful professional growth (Galey, 2016; Wilkins,

2014). “Coaches thrive in schools where people trust them and each other” (Galey, 2016, p. 63). In fact, Aguilar (2013) maintained that coaching cannot truly exist outside the constructs of a trusting relationship which is paralleled in qualitative research conducted by DePasquale (2015) that highlighted the theme of trust as a necessity for impactful coaching. Trust is also recognized as an essential component to mentoring in the North Carolina Mentor Standards are explicit in the fact that Standard 1 details the need for mentors to develop a trusting relationship with beginning teachers. Wilkins’s (2014) research revealed that trust allows teachers to “approach the instructional coach for support without feeling threatened” (p. 116).

Stock and Duncan (2010) identified trust as the critical element that impactful feedback and coaching dialogue hinge on for mentoring relationships. He described the formation of these relationships for coaches in three distinct phases: (a) developing a professional relationship with all educators with whom they will be working, (b) collaborating with small groups (grade levels or department teams), and (c) coaching one on one directly with individual teachers. The progression of the relationship allows for trust to be built through a scaffolded level of experiences between the coach and the teacher.

Galey (2016) suggested a similar scaffolding approach to building trust, the foundation of effective mentoring, between teachers and coaches where interactions are at first informal and low intensity in nature and over time evolve to more formal and more intense interactions. Because the research illuminates trust as a vital ingredient for an effective coaching relationship, it can be inferred that trust also translates into improved practices and improved student outcomes across a school and district.

Teaming. As one of the most frequently implemented pillar practices, teaming has been at the heart of most school reform efforts and professional learning over the last decade with the rise of DuFour's professional learning community (PLC) structures (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). Teaming essentially is the practice of bringing adults together to engage in dialogue (Drago-Severson et al., 2013; DuFour et al., 2008). From that practice, group reflection, nurtured innovation, and reduced isolation manifest. As a pillar practice in supporting adult learning, teaming serves as a critical element of effective coaching in the educational setting. Other researchers refer to this same practice as collaboration.

Aguilar (2013) recognized teaming as a by-product of effective coaching and attributed the development of the social infrastructure to a collaborative culture that results from sound coaching practices. Likewise, Knight (2007) illuminated collaboration as the "lifeblood of instructional coaching" (p. 27) to the point that he considered that the word coach could be replaced by the word collaborator to describe one of the "critical functions for an instructional coach of facilitating teams" (p. 27). In fact, Wilkins (2014) revealed that teachers value the facilitation of collaborative practices between teachers and coaches in both group settings and in one-on-one settings between teachers and coaches.

Leveraging and recognizing the power for change in a team, research and theory developed by Knight (2014) used a model of video learning teams where teachers use video as a catalyst for teams to engage in dialogue around their practices and learn from each other. Knight's (2014) model is grounded in the pillar practice of teaming and embraces the role of an instructional coach as a team leader to help guide conversation

and dialogue among the team. Similarly, Galey (2016) pointed to other ways instructional coaches can be impactful in creating team structures for professional collaboration including the organization of peer observation teams, providing context for shared professional development needs, and structures for sharing and distributing teacher-made resources.

While the research literature is clear that teaming is a critical component of professional development and adult learning and is therefore an essential component to an instructional coaching program, literature also reveals this as a challenge often met by instructional coaches (Aguilar, 2013; Lang, 2018). Lang (2018) explained that "coaches often meet heavy resistance to collaboration because their schools have had an impermeable culture of continuing with practices that *work*" (p. 5). Lang also warned of the dangers of relying too heavily on a collaborative culture that can overshadow the importance of allowing time for teachers to think and work independently.

Additionally, teaming and collaboration among teachers are more readily embraced by some more than others (Lang, 2018). Therefore, it is important for instructional coaches to develop practices that involve both introverted teachers and extroverted teachers in a way that does not foster groupthink mentality. Often, collaboration and conflict come hand in hand. While it is human nature to avoid conflict, it is important for the role of the instructional coach to embrace it and harness the conflict that might arise in teaming exercises as a way of promoting positive change.

Impact of Teaming on Teacher Practices. Because research illustrates the significance of the pillar practice of teaming on the professional development of teachers, educators would expect that this pillar practice would indirectly impact teacher

performance and classroom practices as well. Recent studies conducted by Berry et al. (2013) highlighted the relationship between student achievement and the levels of teacher collaboration. Statistical analyses conducted in the study revealed that student achievement is positively correlated to opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share expertise with each other, which supports the theories of coaching as a vehicle for teaming and collaboration by Drago-Severson (2009), Drago-Severson et al. (2013), Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016), and Aguilar (2013).

In further support of this practice, Berry et al. (2013) reported from a 2009 survey of American teachers that 90% of teachers attribute individual teacher effectiveness to their colleagues. Corroborating these findings, qualitative dissertation research conducted by Goldstein (2015) examined teacher perceptions on collaborative teams and highlighted evident themes that linked collaboration to increased teacher morale.

Collegial Inquiry. Educational research and literature highlights reflective practices as instrumental in the personal growth and professional development of teachers (Drago-Severson, 2016). However, researchers now highlight collaborative reflective practice, which Drago-Severson et al. (2013) coined as collegial inquiry, as an even more effective tool to increase teacher effectiveness (p. 154). In fact, Drago-Severson et al.'s (2013) research shows that nearly all school administrators participating in her research recognize the significance of purposeful, reflective practices among teams of teachers. Collegial inquiry is not a practice that can be conducted in isolation but requires two or more to purposefully engage in dialogue about their professional practices. In fact, Lang (2018) explained that coaches can be instrumental in the professional growth of teachers by facilitating inquiry practices and contributing to teaching through asking questions

about their practice.

Drago-Severson et al. (2013) insisted that all adults in a school should practice reflectivity on their work and engage in meaningful reflective dialogue with others to examine their practices. Wilkins (2014) challenged coaches to use questioning as a catalyst for reflection and to engage teachers in collegial inquiry practices, claiming that this practice can "give the instructional coach an opportunity to listen to the teachers' perspectives of their own instructional practices" (p. 38). This dialogue not only helps the coach clarify a problem of practice but can later be used as a leveraging point for coaching.

Educational researchers Hirsch and Killion (as cited by Drago-Severson et al., 2013) emphasized the need for educators to meet with each other regularly and involve themselves in collaborative dialogue and reflection as learning experiences that will better their teaching practices. This statement was echoed by Garmston (2007), who also called for collaborative learning structures for educators but recognized the complexity of creating a culture of collegial dialogue. Garmston promoted a theory of balanced conversations where every adult actively contributes to the discussion; and the dialogue is approached with structures such as processes, protocols, and strategies to guide conversation. Based on this theory of collegial inquiry and reflective dialogue, it can be argued that an instructional coach would need to be proficient in leading these conversations and having an understanding of effective processes and protocols used to engage teachers in these structured conversations.

Drago-Severson (2016) revealed a list of practices that emerged from her research that educators have found effective in engaging them in collegial inquiry practices that

include learning walks, informal conversations, meeting with teachers on a regular basis, analyzing student performance, and engaging in goal setting. Also, through her research, it is noted that school administrators note four distinct reasons they find collegial inquiry valuable:

- Allows others to engage in leadership responsibilities
- Allows relationship building
- Allows for both organizational and individual growth
- Allows adults an avenue for managing change and the complexity of the teaching profession.

However, Drago-Severson et al. (2013) recognized that there is a learning curve for teachers in engaging in meaningful and reflective collegial inquiry practices while also recognizing the need to teach teachers how to engage in collaborative, reflective dialogue and protocols. Instructional coaches can not only be valuable catalysts for collegial inquiry but also can be the models and teachers of how to effectively engage in reflective dialogue practices that translate into improved teaching practices.

Feedback is another term closely aligned to collegial inquiry practices. Lang (2018) described a reverberation cycle that is a cycle of dialogue and feedback between teachers and the instructional coach and highlights the significance of the two-way communication loop of feedback for both the coach and the teacher. It is further explained in the literature that the reverberation cycle can serve as a reflective tool that not only benefits the professional development of the teacher but also serves as a valuable professional development tool for the coach.

Providing Leadership Roles. The pillar practice of providing leadership roles is

closely related to teaming because teachers emerge as leaders in the constructs of teacher teams (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). Educational researchers including Elizabeth City, Richard Elmore, and Michael Fullan, recognized the increased call from the field of education to develop cultures of shared leadership and responsibility for ***all*** educators. Nations that lead the world in student achievement play a significant and purposeful focus on building capacity in teachers to lead in the profession (Berry et al., 2013). Leadership roles can support the needs of teachers with a variety of needs and preferences related to professional growth (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). This is paralleled by Galey's (2016) research that signifies the practice of "giving teachers formal leadership roles [that] build a sense of collective responsibility for learning and increases commitment to organizational goals" (p. 61).

Richard Elmore is credited by Drago-Severson et al. (2013) in calling for a new structure of leadership in response to emerging research that identifies a global outcry for developing capacity for school leadership where teachers embrace both formal and informal responsibilities as professional leaders. Lambert (2003) ascertained that school leadership is not just the responsibility of the administration but of everyone in the school. Lambert elaborated to explain that teacher leaders should carry the weight of responsibility for the learning and development of their colleagues, which is the ultimate goal of the instructional coach. In fact, the fundamental origins of instructional coaching were based primarily on this pillar practice, as the intent was to formally recognize teachers as leaders in the profession to illicit improved teaching practices among their colleagues.

"Teachers know firsthand what is needed to improve student learning" (Drago-

Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, p. 112) which gives way to the idea of formal teacher leadership in the form of instructional coaching to help improve the practices of other teachers. Aguilar (2013) cited research conducted by the Annenberg Foundation for Education Reform, a 2004 comprehensive study on coaching. One of the key findings of the report is the conclusion that the support of a coaching structure can help develop collective leadership across schools and school systems. In light of this research, a fundamental component of Aguilar's vision for instructional coaching is centered on leveraging relationships to build capacity for emerging leaders while maintaining focus on student learning. Instructional coaches can use teacher leadership as a leverage point for building trust among groups of teachers. Williams (2009) pointed out that "teacher leaders bring foundational knowledge ...[and] perspective" (p. 18) to the profession and therefore have potential to manifest trust among a group of educators. When teachers are recognized as leaders and are invited to collaborate with instructional coaches on school improvement efforts, trust is fostered among the group, and teacher buy-in to instructional initiatives increases.

Evolvement of Teacher Leadership. Berry et al. (2013) referenced the evolvement of teacher leadership as described by York-Barr and Duke in three waves. First, teacher leaders were formally recognized as a leader with titles such as grade level chair or department head, which were typically titles that insinuated some managerial responsibilities for the leader. In the second wave of teacher leadership, Berry et al. described a more instructional leadership role with teachers leading professional development and serving as teacher mentors as prescribed by new teacher induction programs offered in most districts. Then, in the final wave of teacher leadership

evolvement, teacher leaders begin to emerge in what has become commonly referred to as PLCs that are intended to foster collaborative efforts among teacher teams. However, Berry et al. advocated for a new wave of leadership that devotes time and space for teachers to serve in leadership capacities and they are rewarded for their leadership work.

Williams (2009) reported on the dilemmas facing impactful teacher leadership. Most often, informal teacher leadership roles do not allow for structured time away from the responsibilities of their classroom to engage in the leadership practices. To further complicate the practicality of teacher leadership is the hierarchical perception that can sometimes be presented when elevating teachers to roles of leadership and even perceptions of favoritism when administrators push teachers into these leadership roles. Instructional coaches can be instrumental in building leadership capacity in teachers they serve.

Professional Development for Coaches in the Context of the Four Pillar Practices

Because the role of the coach is varied and the coaching structures of school districts are ill-defined, the career pathways for coaching are also murky, at best (Aguilar, 2013). In most cases, individuals in coaching roles have backgrounds that typically involve serving successfully as a teacher who "demonstrated mastery of content and pedagogy" (Aguilar, 2013, p. 10) and felt either an intrinsic or extrinsic nudge of confidence and encouragement to delve into the role of the coach. While research is clear that career pathways and preparation for instructional coaches are in most cases nonexistent, the professional development support available to those in the role is also scarce. Just because instructional coaches often serve as the hub of professional development, it does not mean they are exempt from the need to grow and learn in their

professional practices. In fact, recent studies examining the role highlight the hunger for formal professional development structures, both formal and informal, among those serving in the role of instructional coaches (Gallucci et al., 2010; Tolbert-Woods, 2014; Warfield, 2017). As instructional coaching continues to grow and take root as a significant form of professional development for teachers in schools, it is important that the professional needs of the coaches themselves are not neglected (Stock & Duncan, 2010).

Research conducted by Stock and Duncan (2010) revealed training and professional development as one of the most prevalent self-perceived barriers of instructional coaches being effective in their roles. A lack of formal professional development structures for instructional coaches, researchers warn, will result in coaches reverting back to only the practices and strategies they know rather than tailoring to the needs evidenced by the performance of the teacher (Faulkner, 2013). Consequently, these flawed attempts to coach and improve teacher effectiveness will most likely not translate into improved student outcomes.

The first portion of this literature review examined the functions of an effective instructional coach through the lens of a constructive developmental theorist with a focus on the four pillar practices of adult learning as identified by theorist and practitioner, Eleanor Drago-Severson. This same framework will be used in the latter portion of this literature review to examine the professional development needs of the instructional coach as the learner.

Mentoring. Stock and Duncan (2010) posed the question, “Who mentors the mentors” (p. 68). Drago-Severson et al. (2013) pointed to research that illuminates the

need for mentoring relationships to support the development of not only teachers but also other roles within the educational setting, including coaches. The relationships "help them meet the multiplicity of challenges inherent in contemporary leadership and also reduce the isolation of what can feel like a solitary responsibility" (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 40). When instructional coaches were asked about their own mentors, over half responded that they did not have a mentor (Warfield, 2017). Likewise, research conducted by Stock and Duncan corroborated these findings that an overwhelming majority of instructional coaches report that they have not been assigned a formal mentor. Their research further revealed that instructional coaches, both novice and veteran, in the field yearn for mentoring structures to assist them in carrying out the many functions of their job. While research has convinced practitioners of the necessity of mentoring in building capacity in adults, structures to support the learning of the mentors are rare.

Unfortunately, instructional coaches report that time serves as a significant barrier to mentoring opportunities in their practice (Stock & Duncan, 2010). In a qualitative research design that utilized semi-structured interviews with coaches, time emerged as a recurring theme in responses with many commenting specifically on the lack of time for them to be mentored due to the overwhelming load of other responsibilities in their roles. One possible solution illuminated through their research would be for school districts to find ways to weave mentoring and professional development for instructional coaches into their day-to-day work, so it is not perceived as a stand-alone task.

As previously mentioned, the research is clear that trust is an essential component in a mentor relationship with a teacher, and therefore it stands to reason that the same would be true for mentors of those who mentor, which in this study is the instructional

coach (Stock & Duncan, 2010). However, the problem still lies with the lack of formal mentoring structures provided to those entering the role of the instructional coach.

Teaming. Aguilar (2013) recognized teaming as a critical foundation of ongoing professional development for the coaches themselves. For coaches to maximize their coaching practices, coaches need "formalized, systematized structures in which to learn together" (Aguilar, 2013, p. 268). Likewise, Gallucci et al. (2010) described a professional development structure for instructional coaches that is a purposeful, coordinated effort for collaboration among multiple coaches serving in similar capacities in a district. Tolbert-Woods (2014) revealed professional development structures and practices that were valued by instructional coaches. One of the five themes that emerged from the qualitative study was the value placed on professional development structures that are built on collaborative practices and networking. Likewise, Faulkner (2013) highlighted the significance of a collaborative relationship among instructional coaches in a district that allows for frequent collaborative discussion and a team approach to problem-solving around issues that arise in their roles. This theme parallels constructive development theory that highlights teaming as a pillar practice on which professional development should be based.

Collegial Inquiry. According to Drago-Severson et al.'s (2013) work surrounding adult learning theory, collegial inquiry serves as one of the four pillar practices for professional development because we know that "the more often educators are engaged with their peers in effective professional learning, the more they will learn and the more likely it is their practice will improve" (Mizell, as cited in Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 7). As mentioned before, Drago-Severson et al. (2013) recognized the

importance for the professional development of all educators to be grounded in these pillar practices. If we hold to this theory, it would be important for instructional coaches to not only facilitate collegial inquiry with teachers but also engage with others about their own practices as a coach.

Faulkner (2013) suggested that instructional coaches should have opportunities to engage in reflective dialogue with instructional coordinators regularly. The problem is that very few districts have structures in place for this type of collegial exchange and professional learning. It is difficult to have job-alike discussions within the context of the day-to-day operations of the role because more often than not, schools only have one person who serves in this role. Therefore, district administrators are left with the responsibility of designating time and developing structures for instructional coaches to engage in professional dialogue and reflection on their practices.

Leadership Roles. Instructional coaches are teachers by trade who have been elevated to a position of leadership aside from a hierarchical structure that is typically associated with leadership positions. The role of the coach is a derivative of a new age of reform that Gallucci et al. (2010) called standards-based reform that aims to build organizational capacity as a means of school improvement. Such reform efforts call for distributed leadership and are designed for teachers and others in a school to carry some of the instructional leadership load in the school. The instructional coach is a formal title to this type of teacher leadership role.

However, once teachers find themselves in the role of the coach, they begin to "live" in this leadership capacity. One can argue that navigating the waters of this constant level of leadership can be professional development in the most organic state

and can be the challenge that Drago-Severson et al. (2013) claimed can push instructional coaches to their "growing edge" (p. 82). However, it is important to remember that when adult learners are presented with challenges, it is equally as critical to present supports to ensure that growth is nurtured. Without supports, Drago-Severson et al. (2013) claimed that the challenges alone will stifle the growth of adult learners.

Conclusion

In light of the current literature surrounding adult learning theory, blended with the research examining the role of the instructional coach, there is an evident gap in scholarly study of the professional development needs that parallel a clear job description for those serving in the role. This case study investigated the self-perceived professional learning needs that correlate to the core specific, job-related tasks of instructional coaches in a rural, mid-size school district in western North Carolina. A constructive developmental lens of adult learning theory was used to conduct the study to make recommendations for the district to generate a role-specific job description that mirrors specific professional learning practices to support adults transitioning into the role.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the roles and responsibilities of instructional coaches and the professional development needs of instructional coaches to perform the functions of their role. In this chapter, the methodology of the research is thoroughly explained.

The professional development needs of instructional coaches are unclear due to the ambiguity of the role and the lack of research that has explored professional development for instructional coaches. Therefore, this study explored the self-perceived supports needed for instructional coaches to effectively meet the demands of the role. This research problem will be explored more specifically through the following research questions:

1. What are the self-perceived roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach?
2. What barriers have instructional coaches encountered in their role and carrying out their responsibilities?
3. What professional development needs, for both novice and veteran instructional coaches, can be identified?

Creswell (2015) identified explanation (quantitative) and exploration (qualitative) as the qualifying standard for researchers to consider when choosing either a qualitative research design or a quantitative research design. A qualitative research design was selected for the methodology of this study, as the intent of the study was to develop a deep understanding of the research questions and how they could collectively explore the self-perceived supports needed for instructional coaches. Qualitative research design

collects data in a way that allows researchers to learn from the participants in the study and will allow them to develop a theory or make meaning based on the perspectives of the participants, which in the case of this research will be the perspectives of those serving the role of an instructional coach (Creswell, 2015).

Case Study Research

Creswell (2015) explained that a "case study is the exploration of a bounded system (e.g. activity, event, process or individuals) based on extensive data collection" (p. 469). Baxter and Jack (2008) explained the philosophical underpinnings of case study research, recognizing that constructivist theory bases truth on the perspectives of individuals. Further, one of the benefits of a case study approach to qualitative research involves participant storytelling as a means for describing their "views of reality [which] enables the researcher to better understand the participants' actions" (Baxter & Jack 2008, p. 545). Gillham (2000) described this qualitative case study approach as an "inside-out" examination from the perspectives of individuals directly involved in the research topic being studied. Additionally, case study research offers a holistic vantage point for researchers and has the potential to offer in-depth explanations (Idowu, 2016).

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) described case study research as "fertile grounds for conceptual and theoretical development" (p. 8) through an in-depth approach. Another strength of case study research is that it allows for the exploration of topics of complexity and develops a more comprehensive understanding that cannot be derived from larger scale studies. Case studies "retain some of the noise of real life" (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001, p. 4) that researchers often seek to tease out of data collection, when often the noise may be instrumental in the overall understanding of the research topic.

For this reason, this case study was designed to collect authentic data through the perceptions of a purposely selected group of participants in a single district. It was anticipated that this qualitative case study would shed light on themes surrounding the role of the instructional coach that will serve as a springboard for further research. Additionally, this case study was intended to inform the work of this district and surrounding school districts in designing a clear job description for instructional coaches paralleled by professional development that can support them in carrying out the tasks outlined in the job description.

Case Study Critiques

Creswell (2015) pointed out the multiple, in-depth perspectives gathered through case study designs. The multiple sources of evidence that can be used to make meaning and draw conclusions allow for increased validity in the research (Gillham, 2000). However, Gillham (2000) pointed out that case studies sometimes draw criticism for this reason with some calling them "nothing much more than a good story" (p. 22). Similarly, Idowu (2016) identified criticism associated with case studies claiming that they lack "empirical clout" (p. 184). However, Yin (as referenced in Idowu, 2016) conceded that there may be some limitations associated with case study research design and the ability to generalize findings to larger populations, but the rich and thick descriptions derived from case study research do allow for transferability of findings to other contexts for research.

While case study research can be a valid and informative approach to exploring research questions, there are some pitfalls of which experts caution researchers. Case study research should be approached with an open mind (Gillham, 2000). The closer a

researcher is to the problem being studied, the more likely they are to have developed preliminary assumptions that could impact data interpretation and analyzation. For this study, my position as supervisor of instructional coaches could have led to preliminary assumptions prior to data collection. Therefore, it was important to use data collection and analysis protocols that eliminated assumptions as much as possible and allowed for an open-minded analysis of the data collected. Idowu (2016) referenced Eisenhardt's three remedies to guard against researcher subjectivity or drawing on preliminary assumptions:

- Using multiple sources of evidence
- Use key informants to review case study reports
- Establishing a chain of evidence

Despite the criticisms and critiques of case studies that have emerged among the world of research, Harrison et al. (2017) recognized that "case study research has grown in sophistication and is viewed as a valid form of inquiry to explore a broad scope of complex issues, particularly when human behavior and social interactions are central to understanding topics of interest" (para. 9).

Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to select 11 instructional coaches to participate in this study with the expectation that at all 11 would consent to participate. Participants purposefully selected were individuals who served in the capacity of an instructional coach (seven elementary instructional coaches and four secondary instructional coaches) and served in the same school district. The qualitative, single case study design was intended to capture an in-depth understanding of the research questions

in the context of the studied school district. Therefore, participants were selected solely from this district. Additionally, a small sample size was selected to allow access to a comprehensive, deep understanding of the professional development needs as perceived by the participants, as qualitative research is focused on depth rather than breadth.

Permission from my dissertation chair and committee was requested in addition to a letter of support and permission from the district's superintendent (Appendix B) once permission was been granted. I obtained informed consent from each of the 11 participants and ensured that they understood that they could withdraw from the study at any point (Appendix C). The full scope and intended purposes of the study were thoroughly reviewed with each participant prior to obtaining written consent to participate in the case study. Participants could access to the proxy-researcher via email and phone throughout the research process, in the event questions or concerns arose about their participation. It was made clear that participation was voluntary and that participation could have been terminated at any point throughout the research process.

Data Collection

A sequential exploratory design was used to collect data in this study. In an effort to triangulate data and to eliminate any researcher bias, a 3-pronged data collection approach was used to collect data for this study: surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews. Triangulation is the research terminology used to describe a researcher's attempt to corroborate evidence from different sources of data to derive valid themes presented in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2015). Carter et al. (2019) added that triangulation allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic being explored.

Instrumentation

This section will explain the three instruments designed for data collection in this study: 2-part survey, focus group protocol, and a one-on-one semi-structured interview protocol.

Surveys

In this sequential design, the first data collection instrument administered was an initial survey to each of the participants. The survey (Appendix D) includes items related to each of the three research questions. Creswell (2015) recognized that good survey instrument design is both challenging and complicated. Therefore, the Lawshe Method of Content Validity was used to determine the content validity of each survey item. The Lawshe Method is a research method used to ensure that instruments for data collection are empirically grounded using a content evaluation panel (Gilbert & Prion, 2016). A content evaluation panel comprised of experts in the field of the study was utilized to rate the validity of each survey item. A content validity ratio (CVR) was determined from the panel ratings of each item, and a content validity index (CVI) was determined to evaluate the validity of the survey instrument as a whole. Both of these measures are statistics used to determine item retention or rejection for each item of the data collection instrument.

The survey consisted of two parts, with the first part consisting of 15 open-ended questions. The second portion consisted of 16 Likert scale response items. Both sections contained items that addressed all three research questions. Participants accessed the survey online through a Google Form. Google was selected as the survey platform because the district has adopted Google as the primary application platform, and

participants in this case study were familiar with the format and functions of Google Forms. The survey was distributed through the email of a proxy-researcher to add another layer of anonymity for participants. Creswell (2015) mentioned that web-based surveys could prove to be problematic for some studies as this avenue could cater to a certain demographic. However, considering the participant pool and the familiarity of web-based applications for this group, this concern was confidently ruled out for this particular case study. The survey window remained open for 2 weeks in total. After the first week, an email reminder was sent to participants about the survey completion.

Additionally, it was important to note that the surveys were anonymously submitted, and identifying information that might have led the participants to believe that a correlation could be made between the survey responses and the respondent was limited. Some participants may have been reluctant to answer survey questions honestly if identifying information was included in the survey due to the limited number of participants in this case study. This decision was made based on Creswell's (2015) recommendation to ensure participant anonymity as a significant component of good instrument design.

Focus Groups

The second layer of data collection consisted of focus group interviews. Nyumba et al. (2017) described the use of focus groups in qualitative research studies as a method for collecting "data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population" (p. 20). Each of the nine purposefully selected participants participated in one of two focus group sessions: one session for the elementary coaches and one session for the secondary coaches. This

allowed the exploration of themes that may have been different between the two groups of participants. The intent of the collection of the focus group data was to corroborate data findings from the survey and to gather in-depth information from the participants that helped explain the findings of the survey.

Raibee (2004) recognized the "unique" data that can be derived from focus group interviews that result from the "synergy of the group interaction" (p. 656) when participants are comfortable with each other and fully engage in the dialogue. For this reason, participant groups selected for the focus group research were groups that were alike or homogenous to some degree. For this study, all participants served in job-alike roles in the same school district. It was anticipated that the focus group interviews would allow for shared group discussion around common issues and experiences of instructional coaches in the district, and that data would emerge in the dialogue that would not be representative in the survey data. Some researchers advise against convening groups of participants with existing relationships. However, Kitzinger (as cited by Raibee, 2004) advocated for familiarity among participants claiming that "acquaintances could relate to each other's comments and may be more able to challenge one another" (p. 656).

Krueger (2002) from the University of Minnesota has published specific criteria around designing and conducting focus group data collection. In referencing his work, the focus group protocol (Appendix E) was designed and validated a focus group protocol that parallels the described methodology. Probing questions that were used to guide the focus group discussions were generated from the survey responses. The survey analysis was used to guide the design of the focus group probes in an effort to drill down into the survey responses and explore the data that emerged from the survey on a deeper level,

which led to the development of a richer understanding of the survey results.

Both Krueger (2002) and Raibee (2004) recognized the significance of the moderator or group facilitator in a focus group. Krueger recommended that the moderator selected be familiar with the topic of discussion and have some commonalities with the participants. Additionally, Raibee described a skillful moderator as one who can facilitate a level of comfort for participants in a way that encourages participation and free exchange of feelings, ideas, and views on the topic. This study used a moderator who is an acquaintance of each of the participants but is not in a position of authority over the participants, with the intent that the familiarity would inspire full participation from each participant. The moderator has a doctoral degree, is familiar with ethical research methods, and has a functional understanding of the role of the instructional coach. Additionally, the focus group protocol was carefully reviewed with the moderator prior to conducting the focus group sessions.

It was anticipated that each focus group session would last approximately 90 minutes, which was included in the informed consent provided to each participant. Ethical researchers ensure that participants are adequately informed of the time commitment associated with each component of research participation (Raibee, 2004). Additionally, in accordance with the methodology of Krueger (2002), snacks were available to participants throughout the focus group session as a form of hospitality and gratitude for participation but also to assure that participants were not distracted through the duration of the protocol by fatigue or hunger. Participants were seated around an oblong table along with moderator.

Interviews

According to Jamshed (2014), interviewing is the most popular data collection method among qualitative research studies. To fully triangulate the data collected in this study one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants. The interview instrument (Appendix F) was designed to drill another layer deeper into the data collection to derive a more in-depth understanding beyond the themes that emerged from the focus group. A proxy-researcher was used to conduct each interview in an effort to ensure anonymity for the participants and to align with ethical research methods since some of the interviewees were employees that I directly supervised in my role in the district.

A semi-structured approach was selected to allow for a structured framework for an interview protocol and also to allow the interviewer some flexibility to ask follow-up questions that may not be outlined in the interview protocol. Ryan et al. (2016) highlighted the benefit of a semi-structured approach is that it "permits the exploration of spontaneous issues raised by the interviewee" (p. 310).

Additionally, taking a semi-structured approach to the one-on-one interviews, open-ended questions were developed to guide the interview discussion with the flexibility to ask clarifying questions or follow-up questions as necessary. Again, it was important to realize that the interviewing probes were not developed until after the focus group data were analyzed so the questions could be tailored to further explore the themes that emerged from the focus group conversations.

Guidelines presented by Ryan et al. (2016) were followed to design the interview protocol, including the structured questions for the interview and the arrangement of

questions. “The sequencing of questions should allow the interviewee to be aware of what specific area he or she is being asked about” (Ryan et al., 2016, p. 311). Therefore, this instrument was designed by category. In addition to these recommendations, participants were afforded an opportunity to ask any questions prior to engaging in the interview protocol.

To ensure validity, the Lawshe Method of content validity was used to derive a CVR for each survey item. Items were considered valid when evaluated by three or more experts and the CVR was equal to or greater than 0.80. Additionally, a CVI as prescribed by the Lawshe Method was used to measure the validity of the total instrument (Gilbert & Prion, 2016). A threshold of 0.80 for the CVI was set as the minimum ratio required to consider the instrument valid.

Five of the 11 instructional coaches asked to participate in this study were purposefully selected for the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. In an effort to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role of the instructional coach and professional development needs that parallel the role, a minimum of two instructional coaches who serve the elementary schools and two who serve the secondary schools were selected from volunteer participants to participate in the interview protocol. It was anticipated the interviews would take approximately 60 minutes each, which was communicated with participants in the informed consent and then again when the interview was scheduled.

Each interview took place in a neutral but familiar facility in the district. Interviews were not conducted at the schools where the instructional coach serves to eliminate any potential worries among interviewees that others in the building may

overhear responses in the interview conversation. Because the intent of the sequential design of this study was to identify major themes from the survey and focus group interviews, the interviews were designed to dig deeper into the themes that emerged from the previous data collections methods. The role of the interviewer is critical in the research process, as the semi-structured interview process will allow them to actively engage with participants and ask clarifying questions that are pertinent to the research.

Data Analysis

According to Baxter and Jack (2008), data collection and data analysis are often concurrent phases of qualitative research. Qualitative data can generate an abundance of data that can be overwhelming to both established and novice researchers and can seem like a journey through a "maze of complicated paths of information" (Raibee, 2004, p. 657). A key function of data analysis is to siphon significant data from insignificant data, thus reducing data in an effort to develop understanding and meaning from a situation rather than to determine truth and cause, as in quantitative research analysis.

Surveys

The first part of the survey that was comprised of the 16 open-ended response items was analyzed and coded for themes in responses after the responses were aggregated and downloaded into a Google Sheet. Coding is described by Dudovskiy (2019) as a way to categorize raw data, extracting recurring words and phrases. The Google Sheet allowed for the data to be aggregated by item number and then each item was coded independently. Subsequently, themes were grouped according to the intended research question each item was intended to address. The themes that emerged from the surveys informed the design of the focus group probes.

The second portion of the survey was comprised of 20 Likert scale response statements. According to Creswell (2015), Likert scales are considered quasi-interval scaled responses, as the design intends for equal intervals between responses (i.e., strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree); but there is no guarantee that participants will consider equal distances between responses. While some researchers claim that errors in research that consider Likert scale data as true interval data are minimal, other researchers strongly suggest analyzing Likert scale responses as ordinal data. Therefore, survey responses in the second portion of this study were analyzed as ordinal data. The ordinal data were analyzed through simple frequency charting, which was then represented through visualization data analysis tools. A frequency count of responses was used to examine trends in the data which also served as an instrumental tool for the design of the focus group probes.

Focus Groups

Because I was not an active participant in the focus group protocol, it limited my ability to conduct firsthand analysis of the data. In an effort to collect data accurately from the focus groups, each focus group session was audio recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed to allow more intimate work with the data in text form. Transcriptions of the sessions were used to systematically code responses and to discover patterns and emerging themes in the data following the recommendations for analysis as outlined by Krueger (2002). Themes were categorized by each research question for analysis and interpretation of results.

Interviews

Similar to the analysis of the focus group data, a systematic approach was used to

analyze the data collected through semi-structured interviews. Again, in an attempt to gather data in the most accurate form, each interview was audio recorded. Subsequently, the audio recordings were transcribed for systematic coding of responses. Steps delineated by Creswell (2015) were followed in coding data and discovering significant themes that emerged in the data. Following coding and identifying aggregate themes, interrelated themes were identified for layering of the analysis, and any contrary evidence was sifted out of data that did not support the themes outlined.

Audiences

Although this research was based on the perceptions of instructional coaches, the findings are significant to the work of coaches, administrators, and individuals considering the field of instructional coaching. Conclusions drawn from this research will be shared with coaches, school-based administrators, and district-level administrators in the district being studied. Additionally, it will be shared with superintendents and administrators in surrounding districts. It was hypothesized that this research will be meaningful to these groups and will allow them to develop a comprehensive job description for instructional coaches and strengthen the professional development designed for both novice and veteran instructional coaches.

Chapter 4: Results

This case study aimed to investigate the self-perceived roles and responsibilities of instructional coaching in a mid-size, rural, western North Carolina school district. Nine of the 11 instructional coaches invited to participate gave consent for participation in the first layer of the research process involving a 2-part, anonymous survey. The second layer of the research conducted involved the same nine instructional coaches who participated in one of two focus group sessions. Finally, five of the nine coaches participated in one-on-one interviews. This chapter reports the results of the survey, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews.

The data are presented for each research question in the sequential order in which they were presented. Each layer of research (survey, focus group, and one-on-one semi-structured interviews) is organized around the three research questions that this study was designed to explore. The themes derived from the qualitative research analysis serve as the subheadings under each research question.

Research Questions

This study was designed to explore the role of the instructional coach and identify professional development needs to support instructional coaches assuming the role. Specifically, the following research questions served as the guiding questions of this study:

1. What are the self-perceived roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach?
2. What barriers have instructional coaches encountered in their role and in carrying out their responsibilities?

3. What professional development needs, for both novice and veteran instructional coaches, can be identified?

Participants

A purposive sampling method identified 11 instructional coaches to participate in this case study research. Of the 11 identified, nine chose to participate in the study: seven who serve elementary and two who serve secondary schools in the district. Two of the secondary instructional coaches invited to participate chose not to participate. Data detailing experiences for each participant that were collected through the initial survey are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Experience

Participant	Number of years serving in the role	Number of years as a teacher
P_1	0.33	13
P_2	6	16
P_3	7	10
P_4	8	13
P_5	6.5	19
P_6	6	10
P_7	1.5	24
P_8	12	9
P_9	10	10

Instrumentation

Three instruments were designed to investigate the three research questions: 2-part anonymous survey, focus group protocol, and an interview protocol. The Lawshe Method of content validity was used to determine a CVR for each survey item. Items with a CVR of 0.78 or greater were used in the survey. Additionally, a CVI was calculated to determine the overall validity of each instrument. Each instrument's CVI

was 0.90 or greater.

Survey

An initial anonymous survey (Appendix D) was administered to each participant consisting of two parts. The first part consisted of 15 total questions (two demographic questions related to experience and 13 open-ended questions). The second part of the survey consisted of 16 Likert scale response items. Survey items correlated to each research question are shown in Table 4. All three research questions were explored through both Part 1 and Part 2 of the survey.

Table 4

Survey Item Correlation to Research Question

Research question	Part 1: Correlated survey items	Part 2: Correlated survey items
1	9, 10, 11, 12, 13	28, 29, 30, 31
2	14, 15	21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27
3	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	16, 17, 18, 19, 20

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group probes were designed to drill deeper into the themes presented through survey data collection and assist in developing a clearer understanding of the self-perceived roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach. Each participant was given the option of two focus group sessions in which they could participate. Eight of the nine participants participated in the focus group discussions. As part of this sequential, explanatory study design, the focus group probes were designed to drill deeper into the themes that emerged from the survey data. Focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were read and the data were filtered into themes categorized by research question.

One-on-One Semi-Structured Interviews

Five of the nine participants volunteered to participate in a 1-hour one-on-one semi-structured interview. The 14-question interview was designed to drill deeper into the themes that emerged from the focus group discussions to better answer each research question.

Research Question 1

What are the self-perceived roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach?

Survey – Part 1

Five survey items (Items 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13) in Part 1 of the initial survey explored the job-related duties and the intended role of the instructional coach from the perspective of the coach. Qualitative data analysis was used to analyze survey responses. Clear themes emerged that gave a glimpse of the self-perceived role and responsibilities, along with the skills needed for coaches to carry out the responsibilities associated with the role. It was apparent that a wide variety of duties fell under the umbrella of an instructional coach, and a great deal of variability in the role existed among participants within the district.

Duties and Responsibilities of an Instructional Coach. Participants were asked to review a list of duties typically associated with coaching and identify which duties were included in their role. Each of the following duties (12 of 16 listed) were identified by 100% of the participants as a duty associated with their role as an instructional coach:

- Observing teachers
- Providing professional development
- Facilitating meetings

- Facilitating planning
- Facilitating data discussions
- Sharing instructional resources
- Mentoring teachers
- Monitoring lesson planning
- Providing instructional feedback to teachers
- Managerial tasks
- Assisting teachers in using instructional technology
- Assisting in district level events

In addition to the provided list, participants were asked to list any other duties associated with their role as an instructional coach. Each of the nine participants listed at least one other duty; and in total, 18 other duties and responsibilities were identified by participants, indicating a large degree of variability in the role. Other duties and responsibilities identified most frequently by participants in the survey include

- Modeling lessons for teachers
- Behavior/classroom management support
- Maintaining websites and web resources
- Serving on interview committees
- Assisting principals in making decisions as requested
- Implementing district initiatives
- Assisting with testing and assessment

This eclectic list of duties and responsibilities illuminates the ambiguity of the role and points to the lack of role definition of the instructional coach in the district. One

participant noted that “some of the duties change year to year depending on who [they] have for principals,” which reinforces the theme of ambiguity that emerged from the survey portion of this study. It was inferred from the data collected that coaches lack a shared definition of the role across the district. One participant's response gave insight into one plausible reason for the degree of variability in the role mentioning the eb and flow of the role with the seasons, stating that “it depends on the season as some of the duties are needed more during certain times of the year.” The sequential, exploratory design of this study allowed investigation of the reasons for variability in the significant duties of the instructional coach more in depth in the next phase of research.

Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on the duties they identified and extract the specific duties they perceived to be the most significant to the role of the coach. Responses were coded and analyzed to derive the following most frequently mentioned duties by participants:

- Mentoring (6)
- Sharing instructional resources (5)
- Providing instructional feedback to teachers (4)
- Providing professional development (4)

One participant noted that while the role may be seasonal, “feedback, modeling and co-teaching are at the heart of what [they] do,” which also aligns to the four duties identified as significant. In further examining these four most frequent responses, it was noted that all four duties identified as most significant to their role are contingent on the relationship the coach has built with teachers and should be explored in subsequent layers of this study.

Survey – Part 2

Ordinal data were collected through four Likert-scale survey items (Items 28, 29, 30, and 31) in Part 2 of the survey and were analyzed through a qualitative research lens. Just as in Part 1, the items were also designed to explore the self-perceived understanding of the role of the instructional coach.

Variability in the Role. Participant responses revealed that the role of the coach looks different from school to school, with 100% of participants indicating that their role is dependent on the school in which they are serving. Five respondents (55.5%) not only agreed but indicated a strong level of agreement, indicating the significant degree of variability in the role between schools in the district. Additionally, survey results also indicated that the role of the coach sometimes mimicked the role of an administrator, adding another layer of variability of the role and role confusion. The data also indicate that the role and responsibilities may not only be blurry for coaches themselves but also for those who utilize the services of the coach including teachers and administrators.

Additional survey data indicated some level of consensus among participants in regard to their own level of understanding of their role, with 88.8% of participants describing their level of understanding of the role as a "firm understanding." Additionally, the same percentage of participants indicated on the survey that they clearly understood the standards on which they were evaluated. This indicated that the instructional coaches who participated in this study were confident in their own understanding of the role even with the significant degree of variability in the definition and scope of the role throughout the district. It was important to further explore how the participants developed such a solid understanding of their role as an instructional coach

despite the extent of their perceptions of the variability and ambiguity of the role within the district.

Survey Data to Consider in the Next Phase of Research. Data collected in Part 1 and Part 2 of the survey were used to develop the next layer of research. The themes derived from this initial survey were further explored through the focus group interviews. The focus group probes were designed to specifically dig deeper into the following themes related to the first research question:

- Specific, perceived, variables that impact the role of the instructional coach and create variability and ambiguity in role across the district
- Specific duties, as perceived by instructional coaches assumed by or assigned to the instructional coach that are often associated with the role of an administrator
- How instructional coaches in the district have developed an understanding of the scope of their role and responsibilities despite the degree of variability that surrounds their role.

Focus Group Data

Five of the eight focus group probes were designed to further explore the themes that emerged through survey data collection around Research Question 1. The following themes emerged from these eight probes which gave a clearer understanding of the self-perceived role and responsibilities of the instructional coaches in this case study:

- Role variability and ambiguity
- Building relationships
- Providing professional development

- Facilitating dialogue and conversation among teachers
- Providing feedback
- Serving as content experts

Role Variability and Ambiguity. Through data analysis and coding of focus group discourse, it became more clear that the participants lacked a shared understanding of the role. The ambiguity of the role in the district studied became more evident from participant responses to focus group probes, and the variability in the duties associated was even more distinct through the coding process of the data.

It was discovered through the focus group conversations that the role ambiguity of the instructional coach stems from a lack of a shared definition. It was pointed out by several of the coaches participating in the focus group that the role lacked a formal job description. Even the coaches themselves struggled to explain what their role is. One participant described the struggle she faced early into taking on the role of a coach: "I was concerned about where my spot was…how much of my job is this and how much of my job is that." Participants commented on the lack of a shared understanding of the role, not only among coaches themselves but among teachers and administrators as well. It was noted by one participant that administrators have a better understanding of the role now, but some still "do not understand what an instructional coach should do or how [the role] should look."

Other comments further exposed the blurry lines that can often exist between an instructional coach and an administrator, with many finding themselves serving in an administrative capacity due to the lack of an explicit role description. The multiple dimensions of the coaching role were described by one participant: "There is a

curriculum coach part and then there is an instructional coach part, and then maybe there is an administrative coach part to the role of a coach."

Expanding on the administrative coach facet of the job, another participant explained that "sometimes principals are outside their own background content knowledge, and I think that is when it is important to have a coach that can help in that transition while they are learning." Other participants felt very strongly that it was important for there to be a clear distinction between their role and the role of an administrator, with one participant explaining that "there definitely needs to be a line between what an instructional coach is and [what] an administrator is." Another coach added,

> It is not good for us to be seen as administrators, —being caught in the middle all the time, but I have said it more than once, I am not your boss, I am not one that can make decisions about their employment or anything about that. I think that kind of stating that up front helps them be more receptive to feedback and open to understanding and listening to whatever it is you have to say to them.

From a broader perspective, participants illuminated how the coaches are perceived differently than those in other districts, with one participant explicitly pointing out that "it looks so different in every county." Another participant concurred but also included intra-district differences by pointing out that while "it has the same title, but from district to district or even elementary to secondary, I think what your job entails and how you are expected to fulfill the duty can look very, very different."

Variables that Impact the Role of the Coach in a School. Other discussion points revealed how instructional coaches perceived the impact that certain characteristics

of a school can have on their role as a coach. One referenced the role as a by-product of the "flair and flavor of the school." It is evident that the coaches perceive that the ambiguity of their role and the varying definitions of their role are manifestations of these combinations of characteristics held by each school they serve. The two primary variables that emerged from the focus groups were the school administrator and the number of beginning teachers in a school.

Participant conversations in focus groups identified the school administrators as one of the most significant variables that define the role of the instructional coach at each school. Many pointed out that their role is often contingent on the strengths and weaknesses of the school administration along with how the administrator perceives the role the instructional coach should play in a school. Participants pointed out that their role at each school is designed to complement the role of the principal. Focus group conversations discovered that the role of the instructional coach is more curriculum driven at schools that have principals who are not strong curriculum leaders, while the role tends to be less curriculum driven at schools that have principals who are strong curriculum leaders. One participant explained that she "[does] a lot of curriculum stuff at some schools, whereas [at] other schools, the principal handles that."

Another significant variable identified by participants in the focus group conversations that impacts the role an instructional coach plays at school is the number of beginning teachers (BTs) housed in a school. "Your role looks different [in] a school with a lot of BTs," explained one participant. Coaches reference the time devoted to supporting beginning teachers in their role and how other duties and responsibilities can be overshadowed by the need to formally and informally support new teachers as their

assigned mentors.

Building Relationships. Focus group analysis revealed the self-perceived significance of building relationships in the role of an instructional coach with a frequency count of 18 comments throughout the conversations that referenced this skill. Participants explained on a surface level that the relationships built between teachers and coaches are significant to the work because it helps establish a level of trust and a nonevaluative relationship. “The more those relationships are able to develop, the more they are able to see that you are a part of them,” explained one coach. Another participating coach expanded on how she felt her investments in relationship building were imperative to her role: “I build the relationship [because] I [did not] want them to feel like that I was making suggestions or saying things to them that were going to come back and make them paranoid about me being around.”

Some additional comments derived from the focus group transcripts suggested that coaches should make efforts to have conversations outside of PLCs or formal school conversation settings and even discuss real life beyond school to build personal relationships with teachers. Several mentioned the importance of using a “teacher lens” in the role and becoming a part of their team rather than a separate entity, while others mentioned that the “relationships built also help coaches build credibility with teachers they serve.”

Participants emphasized how detrimental turnover can be on their role because of the impact it can have on the relationships they have built over time. Some pointed out that time invested in building relationships can be “undone” when a coach is moved to another school, and the incoming coach is forced to start over in the relationship building

process. One participant noted that they find “teachers are hesitant or afraid to build a relationship because there has been so much turnover.” She explained by adding,

> One of my schools I have been the whole time I have been an instructional coach, like seven years, and I feel like that school really uses me effectively and I think that those relationships are really strong there, whereas another one of my schools, I think I am probably the fourth instructional coach they have had in about 6 years, and so it is really taken me some time.

Participating coaches explained that relationships provide an entry point to coaching, as explained by one participant: “Relationships do not happen unless you have a chance to start on some kind of a level where you can make a connection and then you can get to where the real work can happen.”

Providing Professional Development. Instructional coaches perceived that a significant part of their role is providing professional development and learning opportunities for teachers. Several mentioned the need to effectively deliver professional development that is meaningful and practical to teachers. One participant referred to the role of the coach as a facilitator of learning in the context of professional development. Several others noted the importance of the coach in helping teachers understand “the why” behind professional development for more willing participation among teachers. One participant explained that “if they know why they are doing things, they are more apt to do it.” Another participant agreed with this statement but went on to say that instructional coaches need more training in helping teachers understand the “larger picture” and “the why” behind some professional development.

Additionally, coaches stressed the importance of coaches providing professional

development opportunities that are meaningful for teachers. One of the participating coaches shared,

> For me, the thing that helps me most or I think that has helped me most with the providing professional development part is always remembering that they are—that we were teachers one time, too, think back to how long did we want that PD to be? And how much really can they handle at one time, and just real—making it relevant and useful to them and not just a meeting to have a meeting.

Another coach added to the conversation by explaining that "professional development should be relevant and helpful. I do not want it to be something that they have to come to and check off a box." Conversations went on to explain how the role of the coach is critical to knowing and understanding the professional development needs of teachers while providing choice and voice in the delivery of professional development. Participants mentioned using surveys to help determine what teachers need and using information from surveys to inform how they support teachers and design professional development opportunities: "We want teachers to give us honest feedback [on professional development] and use it to guide our future professional development."

Facilitating Dialogue and Conversation. Through the qualitative coding methods used in this study, 12 comments throughout the focus group discussions described the instructional coach as one who facilitates dialogue and conversations with and between teachers. Some participants referenced leading PLCs, grade-level meetings, and data meetings with groups of teachers as regular tasks associated with their role. However, several participants commented on the level of skill needed to facilitate conversations productively and that this task associated with their role takes time to learn

for a coach. One participant commented that in these conversations, they "learned to be in tune to body language" as a helpful skill learned to pull reluctant teachers back into those conversations over time. Similarly, another participant mentioned that they learned to "read people" and over time learned how to adjust their approach to conversations to fit the group dynamics. Several participants admitted that this was an area in which they felt less confident and needed more training.

Providing Feedback. Ten comments were identified through the coding process of the focus group data that highlighted "providing feedback" as a significant element of the role of the instructional coach. Several pointed out that providing effective feedback was an intricate skill that a coach must master and that knowing when, how, and what kind of feedback to teachers is critical.

The focus group conversations illuminated the trials and errors the participants have experienced in giving feedback to teachers and the lessons learned from those experiences. They shared strategies they learned over the course of their tenure in the role and ways they have been able to provide more effective feedback. Many of the conversations in this portion of the study that highlighted the skill of providing feedback in the role of the instructional coach were closely tied to the conversations that also highlighted building relationships as an essential skill for an instructional coach. The participating coaches recognized that the two skills were contingent on one another, noting that without the relationship, it would be essentially impossible for a coach to provide feedback that would positively impact a teacher's professional practices. One coach explained the entanglement of these skills in their role:

It is much easier to have those difficult conversations and to provide feedback

> with someone that you have known for a long time, you have worked with them, there is that respect now because they know who you are, and that you are on their side, and you are trying to help them.

Additionally, coaches explained that in providing feedback in their role, they should be specific and intentional. One participant explained that the "feedback should be direct, but of course keep it positive." Another participant agreed, saying that "teaching is a difficult job, and I think that the feedback…they take that a lot better if they feel like you are on their side, and you are cheering for them." However, at the same time, the group explained that it was important for the coach to also "make sure that we tell them exactly what, you know, what the concern is or what we have observed." One coach shared that she often would ask teachers, "What is it that you would like for me to look for so that I can provide you specific feedback around that skill or that strategy." She shared that asking teachers for permission to give feedback has been helpful as well.

Additionally, participating coaches shared that the art of providing feedback also has an element on gauging how much feedback should be given:

> I might go in a room and see 10 things that need to be changed or did not go over very well, but, pick a couple specific things to talk about with that teacher instead of trying to hit all 10 at one time. Let us focus on these two and then once I see her doing better, then I can maybe pick two more things.

Serving as Content Experts. The final theme derived from focus group conversations in relation to Research Question 1 that closely examined the role of the instructional coach was the need for the instructional coach to be content experts for the grade level spans they served. Six comments were identified in coding frequency related

to this theme. One participant explicitly described criteria for being an effective instructional coach as one who "has been a master teacher when they were in the classroom, to know their content and to be respected as a great teacher." However, participants were divided on how significant this skill was in the overall role of the instructional coach. One participant explained, "I feel like I should be at least as knowledgeable, or more so, than they are." Other participants recognized that they "cannot know all things about all things," but they should be experts in "good teaching and learning no matter the content."

During the conversation, the participants recognized that the content knowledge element of the role carried more weight among secondary instructional coaches than in the role of elementary instructional coaches in the district being studied, with the secondary coaching structure being aligned to their specifically trained field (served as a coach for specific academic departments), while the elementary coaching structure was more aligned to specific schools (served as a coach to all instructional staff in the school they served for all academic content areas).

One-on-One Interviews

The one-on-one interview protocol was designed to drill deeper into the themes that emerged from the focus group discussions. In light of the data collected through focus group discussions regarding the first research question that explores the role and responsibilities of instructional coaches, the one-on-one interview portion of this research was designed to drill deeper into the following themes explored. The one-on-one interview questions were designed to further explore the following:

- What other specific variables impact the role of an instructional coach in a

school?

- What factors generate the ambiguity of the role in the district and what could help to more clearly define the role across the district?
- How important is it that an instructional coach be an expert in the instructional content areas and why?
- How important is the skill of providing feedback for an instructional coach and what skills are needed to provide impactful feedback?
- What specific skills does a coach need to facilitate effective conversations among teachers and instructional staff?

Five of the 14 interview questions addressed Research Question 1 and further explored the self-perceived role and responsibilities of the instructional coach. The data are presented in this section by each of the five questions. Participants are referenced as P_1, P_2, P_3, P_4, and P_5; and responses of each are detailed below each question.

Why is Building Relationships So Important to the Role of the Instructional Coach? Participants described building relationships in their responses with phrases such as "cornerstone," "critical," and "essential." All interviewees recognized that building relationships was a key skill needed to effectively carry out their role, with one participant even calling it the "most important thing [they] do."

- *P_1*: I think the relationship piece is the cornerstone of everything that we do because teachers will not ask for, or even accept, offered help if they do not trust you, or think that you have their best interests in mind. And trust is something that has to be built over a range of time and shared experience, so I think it takes time to build those relationships, but without that time being

invested up front no effective coaching can really take place.

- P_5: That is really the most important thing we do as coaches is build that relationship with the teachers, the principals, whoever we are working with. Without that piece, it is very hard for them to trust us, to want us in their classrooms providing feedback, to model lessons for them. So, we really, pretty much, I think I can speak for our team, that like relationships are the most critical thing that we do.

What Causes the Role of the Instructional Coach to Be So Ambiguous and How Could the Role Be Made Clearer and More Consistent? Participants mentioned a variety of variables that impact the role of the coach which causes the role to look slightly different in each school they serve. All five participants recognized the impact the administrator had on the role, and each commented on how their role evolves based primarily on how strong of a curriculum leader the principal of the school is.

Additionally, participants recognized that the lack of a clear definition and job description adds to the ambiguity of the role. Because teachers, principals, and coaches themselves all interpret the role relative to their own experiences, the role is not clearly understood. While participants agreed that a job description could be helpful in helping all better understand the role, some participants were hesitant to suggest a concrete, detailed list of duties for coaches, explaining that because of all the variables that can affect the role of the coach at each school, it may not be completely possible or even necessary to do so.

- *P_1*: I think a lot of that is just because every building is so different. And every administrator in the building sees the new job of the instructional coach a little

bit differently. Our role has changed dramatically in the years that I have been doing this job, and I think the principal's understanding of what a coach really needs to spend their time doing has evolved and improved. But still, a lot of our principals do not truly understand what an instructional coach should be doing. So, we do a lot of administrative type things. So, I think that is part of the problem, it is just a lack of understanding. I think if our roles were more clearly defined at the administrative level, that would probably help, and I think they have, I think that has improved over the past couple of years.

- P_5: I think part of what causes the role to be ambiguous is [that] every school culture is different and every school and the group of teachers that work there have different needs. I also think that different counties, and probably different states, have a different job description or a definition of the role. I know just in talking to friends of mine who have jobs similar to mine in other counties across North Carolina, they have different responsibilities depending on the schools that they serve or the way that their job is put into the overall budget. I think that in elementary schools, it looks different than secondary schools because the curriculum is different and the way teachers approach teaching, and the age of the students is different. That is why I think it is ambiguous because there are so many factors that play into it. As far as making it more well defined, I am not sure. I think it can be defined to some degree from a district level when you say certain things that the coaches should all be expected to do. But I also think if you try to define it too much, then you may miss out on meeting needs of specific schools that the coach

would be able to meet if they had that in their skill set, so I definitely think it should be as well-defined as we could. But to make it too rigid, I think could also be a bad thing because it might keep teachers from getting the most benefit, and principals, and students, really, ultimately, from getting the most benefit out of the coach and what he or she is able to do.

How Important is it that Instructional Coaches Have Content Expertise and Why? Participating coaches recognized that content expertise is important to some degree. However, most explain that when coaching a variety of grade levels and content areas, it is almost impossible for each coach to be an expert in all areas. Responses revealed that the coaches perceived the importance of a coaching team that allowed for them to rely on each other for content-related questions so that collectively, the team was an expert in all areas.

Participant responses further revealed that the significance of content expertise varied slightly from elementary to secondary because secondary coaches were hired specifically for content areas across the district, while elementary coaches were hired for specific schools for all content areas. Several participants made reference to the coach's skill to obtain answers to content-related questions, and assisting teachers in doing the same was more critical to the role than being a content expert. However, it is noted by several participants that without a solid level of content knowledge, coaches lose credibility with teachers and can encounter difficulties in supporting teachers and instruction to the degree necessary.

- *P_1:* It is pretty important. In the elementary school, of course, we serve Pre-Kindergarten through five, so we are not going to know every standard and

every nuance of the content, but we all have our expertise and we lean on each other, and if we have questions about areas that we are not as comfortable with, we can easily reach out to another coach. But just having a general broad understanding of the content is important. If you do not have that understanding, teachers are going to know, and they are [going to] dismiss you pretty quickly.

- *P_2*: I think it is very important, but at the same time, I almost feel like a coach's ability to get stuff or obtain stuff or have relationships where they can get answers is almost more important, because things change so much from year to year. Not necessarily with standards, but with delivery and things like that. There is no way to have, when you are serving six grade levels, really no way to have full content knowledge of all six grade levels and every standard in every subject area. But to have those connections and those relationships and those resources [and] to be able to access content appropriately and effectively is almost more important than knowing it coming into it.
- *P_4:* I think it is extremely important. I keep coming back to [the fact] that the teachers come to us for support, and I feel like if I am not knowledgeable in the content, then I am not able to serve teachers or support teachers in the way that they need to [be]. I think our team does a very good job of going to each other for help when we are not as competent in an area. You know, I am always seeking out—if I have fifth-grade questions that is not really a strong area for me so that is an area that I know if a teacher asks for help and I can not help them related to content then I might need to study up on whatever

they are asking for help in or reach out and find an answer to [the]questions they have.

Describe the Significance that "Providing Feedback to Teachers" Plays in the Role of the Instructional Coach? Participant responses indicated that providing feedback to teachers is a critical skill in the role of the instructional coach, and several highlighted how providing feedback is contingent on the relationship between the coach and the teacher, noting that the relationship paves the way for effective feedback that results in improved instructional practices of teachers. Some responses indicated that coaches in the district perceive that the feedback component of their role can produce the most growth among teachers served.

- *P_2:* I think it kind of makes or breaks any initiative you have. I love the professional development side of coaching. I love trainings, I love teaching new things, but none of that works or none of that is effective unless there is the follow-up in the feedback piece that comes along with it. I mean, it is the same as teaching a group of kids. You can deliver the most awesome thing ever, but if you are not checking in, checking for understanding, and then providing feedback where they missed the mark or where they still need to work, then your initial intention is not going to be carried out without that feedback piece.
- *P_3:* I think that is the biggest component [for] growth, to be honest. If I give the wrong feedback, a teacher is going to shut down and not listen to me. But if I give feedback that is meaningful and applicable to the teachers, then they are going to take my feedback and potentially shift their teaching, or at least

take into consideration the feedback that I am providing, and it will make them a better teacher. But I have to learn how to give that feedback truthfully, but still constructive and meaningful to them. And so I think that is also where the lines of communication are important because I can not always give completely positive feedback, and so I need to be able to give both positive and negative and have them be able to respond to both. So, I think it is really important, but that takes trust to be able to give appropriate feedback.

What Skills Does an Instructional Coach Need to Facilitate Effective Discussions and Conversations with Teachers? In response to this question, participants again recognized the importance of building solid relationships with teachers they serve and how the relationship leads to effective discussions and conversations. It is important to point out that the participants were specific in the kind of relationship that was necessary for effective coaching; a relationship that allows teachers to understand that the role of the coach is a nonevaluative support role. Additionally, the relationship allows the coach to know how to frame questions and how each individual will approach a conversation, so they can differentiate how they lead them in the discussion. Participants also mentioned that kindness and approachability are significant factors in facilitating effective conversation among teachers that helps eliminate anxiety for teachers in conversations and assists them in reflective practices and professional growth.

- *P_2*: Probably first and foremost is an approachable personality. Where they kind of need to see a coach on a humbl[ed] level. They need to see the coach as an equal in the grand scheme of being a lifelong learner and an advocate for change. And then the coach needs to have the skill to know when to talk and

when not to, when to listen and when to speak, and also, just knowing how to ask questions to get teachers to think that things are their ideas or their plans instead of telling them exactly what they need to do. You need to let them be the problem-solvers along with you, being a guide in the discussions instead of a sage on the stage.

- P_3: They have to be kind first. If you come across harsh or that the teacher is maybe not your favorite person, they are going to sense that, and they just shut it down. So, you have to come across kind when you walk into the room. Also knowing how to say things in a variety of ways in order to meet the learning style of that teacher. So not every teacher can take things the same way and you have to be able to relate to a variety of different personalities in order for the teacher to hear you. You also have to be calm. A lot of teachers, their first instinct is to get defensive and so you just have to remain calm and kind of get them to see your side and your thoughts on the situation. So, I think you have to be calm, and you have to be knowledgeable of what you are talking about. If you do not have the backing, then they do not respect what you are saying.
- P_5: Well, I definitely think you have to have emotional intelligence in how to deal with people. You have to be able to try to read people well, and that is a skill that takes time to develop. I think you have to be very aware of circumstances and body language and the context of what is going on in the conversation and in the classroom if you are in there observing. I also think that you have to develop listening skills, which is something that I am having to learn. As a teacher for such a long time, I listen to my students, but it is

> different when you work with adults because sometimes you cannot just tell them what to do; you have to help them discover what to do, and lead them in that direction to help them discover it on their own. Otherwise they are not [going to] internalize that as much or they are [going to] feel more threatened by what you are sharing with them. So, I think listening is definitely an important skill.

Research Question 2

What barriers have instructional coaches encountered in their role and in carrying out their responsibilities?

Survey – Part 1

Two items from Section 1 of the survey were designed to explore the barriers encountered in the role of the instructional coach.

The first item correlated to the second research question asked participants to list challenges of the job. Themes in responses included the following:

- Delivering professional development
- Time management
- Conducting walk-throughs
- Learning multiple curriculums and programs
- Data analysis

Delivering Professional Development. One participant explained how delivering professional development was a challenge as a coach and gave insight into how a coach might be better supported in transitioning to the role to help minimize this as a barrier in the role:

> I do not feel that I have the resources to deliver the professional development that teachers might need. Thankfully, I have other instructional coaches in the district that I can depend on to help with this. I feel that other teachers are more knowledgeable on certain areas of professional development and I struggle to be confident in my ability to deliver professional development to these teachers.

Time Management. Several participants mentioned feeling an internal struggle with time management due to serving a number of schools. Responses indicated that they felt less effective in their coaching when they were spread so thin. One participant explained,

> The most difficult aspect of this role is the large number of schools/teachers I serve. Splitting three schools every week limits quality time/discussions with teachers. I feel I would be much more effective if I could serve at one school.

Another response indicated a similar struggle but also noted a benefit to serving multiple schools:

> At times [I feel] stretched too thin with multiple schools, but on the other hand, that helps me be even more productive when I am in a school building, because I know I am only there for one to two days.

Responses also indicated that coaches struggle to balance time in classrooms, providing job-embedded professional development for teachers, and other managerial tasks associated with the role. One participant claimed that she "wants to spend all of [her] time in classrooms" but recognizes the need to spend time finding resources, analyzing data, and assisting teachers with planning.

Conducting Walk-Throughs. One participant commented on the strain that

conducting walk-throughs puts on her role and how it blurs the line between administrator and coach:

> While some principals expect walk-throughs to be done by me, it moves into an evaluative format and I seem to lose ground with the other roles that carry more impact with the teachers, like spending quality time planning, mentoring, and assisting with curriculum understanding.

Learning Multiple Curricula and Programs. Survey responses gave insight into the coach's struggle to become an expert in multiple grade levels and content areas when transitioning from a classroom teacher role to a coaching role. One coach described the struggle in her response: "Getting out of my comfort zone of the classroom and having to learn so much at one time when I started was quite overwhelming. I almost quit about a month into the job my first year." Another response described similar challenges with not only being knowledgeable in multiple curriculums but also the programs that support the curriculum: "[Biggest challenge is] staying an expert on all of the many curriculum programs we use even though I have not actually used most of them in a classroom."

Using Data in the Role of an Instructional Coach. One response to this survey question indicated that coaches felt ill-prepared to analyze and use data from a district level lens:

> Before I started my job as an instructional coach, I had only looked at my own data in Schoolnet and Educator Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS). Now that I am responsible for creating benchmark assessments for End-of-Course Exams (EOCs) and spreadsheets to help analyze trends and patterns to inform

instructional adjustments that need to be made to teach the standards, I needed to have much more instruction in this area.

Subsequently, the other survey item asked participants to rate how prepared they were for the role of the instructional coach in an effort to explore how their own skill level may have served as an initial barrier in transitioning to the role. Of the nine responses, only one participant rated their own preparedness as "very prepared," with five rating their preparedness as "adequately prepared." The other three described their level of preparation as "somewhat prepared" for the role. Responses indicated that "inadequate coach preparation" is a plausible barrier for instructional coaches and was further explored by Research Question 3.

Survey – Part 2

The survey further explored Research Question 2 in Part 2 of the survey with Likert scale response items. These items were designed to explore the self-perceived skill level of participants to determine if the lack of the skill created a barrier for the coach in effectively carrying out the duties of their role. The following skills were examined in the survey as potential barriers for instructional coaches that were cited in the research:

- Giving teachers formative, instructional feedback
- Understanding of sound, research-based instructional practices
- Managing potential conflict from feedback conversations
- Balancing time in classrooms with other tasks during the instructional day
- Developing relationships with teachers
- Understanding of adult learning theory and strategies
- Understanding of content knowledge associated with the grade levels served

Further data analysis allowed for an understanding of which skills participants self-perceived as weaker and therefore posed as more significant barriers for coaches. It was clear from the responses that the participants self-perceived the following skills as the most problematic for them in their role: managing potential conflict from feedback conversations, balancing time in classrooms with other tasks during the instructional day, and the development of a firm understanding of adult learning theory and strategies posed as more significant skill barriers for the coaches in this case study. These areas were further explored in subsequent layers of this study.

Contrastingly, participants indicated that they were more comfortable with each of the following skills, which created fewer barriers for them in carrying out the role of the instructional coach: giving feedback to teachers; understanding of sound, instructional based practices; developing relationships with teachers; and understanding the content knowledge associated with grade levels each served.

Focus Group Data

The survey portion of this study revealed a comprehensive list of barriers participants faced serving the role of the instructional coach. These barriers were further explored through focus group discussions including the following: time management, coach preparation, conducting walk-throughs, learning multiple curricula and programs, and data analysis from a district level lens.

Two of the eight focus group probes were designed to further explore barriers encountered by instructional coaches and to dig deeper into the themes that emerged from the survey data. After coding focus group transcripts, similar themes emerged as were found in the survey along with newly discovered barriers. A surface level understanding

was developed of how the identified themes posed as barriers to the instructional coaches successfully carrying out their responsibilities.

Time as a Barrier. Time emerged as the most prevalent theme associated with the barriers faced by instructional coaches through focus group data analysis. With a frequency of 10 comments coded, time was expressed by all participants in both focus group sessions as a significant barrier. While the survey indicated that time allocated for instructional coaches at each school was a barrier, the focus group data revealed more specific insight into the lack of time inhibiting coaches from carrying out their role effectively. Participants reference time from two distinct perspectives: (a) "time" as in the time assigned to schools for coaching opportunity and (b) "time" as in the time for collaboration with other instructional coaches.

The first perspective of participants on time as a barrier for the role of the instructional coach confirmed data collected through the survey that exposed how the number of schools and teachers a single coach is responsible for can impact the effectiveness of an instructional coach. Participants shared in focus groups that when time is limited, it is more difficult for them to form the relationships needed with the adult learners in their care. One participant explained, "Coaches need time in the schools to be in the teachers' planning periods in their classrooms so that they can learn more about them personally and professionally." Another participant added that "trust does not get built…if you are quickly sticking your head in the door" and that this level of "trust is not built through texts and emails."

Consequently, without the relationship, they shared that their entry points for coaching are limited. Another participant explained that feedback is not always given in a

timely fashion because of scheduling. In some cases, they explained that if a coach is only assigned to a building 1 day each week, an entire week could lapse before they are able to follow up on feedback conversations. One coach explained the struggle: “finding time to just get back together to provide that person feedback,…there is a lot of turnaround time because of our varying schedules and responsibilities.”

Other participants concurred and explained that more time in each school would help increase their coaching effectiveness. One participant said that “three schools is too much” and does not allow for them to be in the classrooms as much as they feel is necessary. Another coach added to the conversation saying, “I feel like all I am doing is disseminating information.”

Participants also referenced time as a barrier in the context of the time allocated for collaboration with other instructional coaches. Focus group data revealed that the participants valued time with each other to build their own professional capacity and learn from each other. One participant shared that efforts to collaborate and work together to support instruction across the district was difficult due to the few opportunities of “structured times where [they can] meet with other instructional coaches.” Participants expressed desires to plan professional development together, problem solve around instructional issues collaboratively, and learn from each other.

Lack of Direction. Participants referenced a lack of direction and communication from superiors in their responses. The lack of communication becomes a barrier that can contribute to role ambiguity as explained by one participating coach: “I am not always sure what is expected of me.” It becomes more problematic and more of a barrier when others are unsure of what is expected of the coach as well, especially administrators, who

ask coaches to take on tasks that may not be appropriate for the role. One of the participating coaches gave the following example: “We went through a phase where I felt like we were asked to do evaluative stuff and that put up some walls.” Discussion points indicated that not only are coaches lacking direction in their role, but administrators lack direction in how to effectively utilize an instructional coach. Coaches shared that they struggle with tasks given to them that may not suit their role, as one coach explained, “I am worried [that] if I do not do it, it will not get done.”

Lack of Experiences. Focus group responses indicated that several coaches felt that lack of experiences contributed to barriers in their initial transition to the role of the coach. In most cases, each coach only had experiences teaching one or two grade levels and may have strengths in one content area over another. One coach explained,

> I specialized in kindergarten through 2nd grade, which is good, and I mean some of my responsibilities as an instructional coach now focus on the primary grades. But I do think it is good experience to have taught in multiple grade levels or a tested grade level, at least at some point in your teaching career.

Another coach concurred and added, “A variety of teaching experiences, I think has been helpful for me with just being able to bring different things to the table, but also with credibility with teachers.”

Lacking on-the-job experience as a coach creates an initial barrier that can only be eliminated by spending time in the role, honing the skills of a coach. One participant gave the example that “it is a lot easier now for me to give feedback than it was 10 or 11 years ago when I first started in this role.” Additionally, another coach gave the example that coaches who may struggle with delivering professional development can usually be

remedied with experience: “The more times you give PD, the better you are going to be at it.”

Speaking from personal experience, one of the coaches in this study frankly explained that experience is the best remedy for some barriers encountered in the role: “My first two years as a coach, I was out to solve the whole [world and] fix everybody and everything, and wisdom comes with experience. And I really feel like some of that is really not trainable.” Another coach added, “I think that is probably the most significant piece, just having that experience and falling flat on your face as a coach.”

Lack of Emotional Intelligence. Participants brought to light the self-perceived need for those in the role of the instructional coach to develop emotional intelligences. One participant explained, “I do not know if you can teach that part of it…but some of that really does just involve emotional intelligence and just being able to read people. And sometimes you get it right, and sometimes you do not.” Another participant agreed and added that as coaches, “you [have] to read situation[s], too. If somebody is in a deep issue, they do not want you to ask a bunch of questions, they need for you to help them.”

Coaches elaborate on the need for emotional intelligence to handle the feelings of solitude that can often be associated with the role of a coach. “I feel like the coaching roles, the way that it is set up here can be kind of lonely and solitary.” Moreover, coaches added that emotional stressors also stem from being “caught in the middle all of the time” between teachers and administrators. One participant explained that as a coach, “you feel like you are the middleman, like you are trying to do all the work, but you do not have any of the decision-making power.”

Additionally, participants commented on how coaches have to find ways to avoid

allowing personal feelings about a person to impact how they carry out their role. As one participant clarified, “I know I am helping the teacher in reality, but I cannot let that teacher’s feelings and that teacher’s behaviors consume me when I have got to keep the kids at the forefront of my mind.”

Other coaches added to the discussion, recognizing the need for emotional intelligence needed to balance the self-inflicted stress that comes with the role of an instructional coach. Participants mentioned how, in the role, one wants to “fix” any issues that arise; but the role of the coach is to lead teachers in fixing their own issues. One participant described how she learned this valuable lesson as a coach:

> Those first few years, you want to save the world, you just want to give them the quick fix, you want to save it and help them, but that is what I am learning is okay, to just to ask more questions.

Another participant added, “I have had to learn that it is okay to not [to] be the fix, or to not have the answer. That is hard, and it is humbling.” Additionally, coaches alluded to the level of emotional intelligence they have gained over the time serving in the role with the realization that coaches should “remember is that it did not get in the state that it was in, in one day, so, it is not going to get fixed in one day, either,” while another coach reminded the group that their role is about “progress not perfection.”

One-on-One Semi-Structured Interviews

Focus group data revealed additional barriers for instructional coaches that were not revealed in the initial survey portion of the study. The focus group data began to unravel the reasons behind some of the barriers identified and gave clues as to how the barriers could be mitigated. However, perceived barriers were further explored in the

one-on-one interview portion of this study, and a better understanding of supports that could help instructional coaches avoid these barriers was developed. Specifically, the focus group data led to further exploration of the following barriers: lack of time as a barrier, school assignment as a barrier, lack direction and communication in the role, and how program implementation and initiatives create barriers for coaches.

Barriers encountered in the role of the instructional coach were further explored through four of the 14 interview questions in the one-on-one interview portion of this study. The four items were designed to expand on some of the barriers discovered through both the survey data and the focus group data collected. The data are presented in this section by each of the four questions. Participants are referenced as P_1, P_2, P_3, P_4, and P_5; and responses of each are detailed below each question.

Lack of "Time" Was Noted as a Significant Barrier Often Faced by Instructional Coaches. In What Ways Does the Lack of Time Impact the Degree to Which an Instructional Coach Carries Out the Responsibilities Associated with the Role? Participants described in the one-on-one interviews how the self-perceived time constraints of instructional coaching in the district negatively impacted their effectiveness in coaching. The data also present the ongoing struggle coaches face in prioritizing their time in schools. Coaches reported that choosing certain tasks over others presents an ongoing internal conflict in the role, where they are consciously choosing not to engage in certain tasks because of other tasks that take precedence. Coaches who serve both one school and coaches who serve multiple schools were interviewed. In analyzing the data, it is recognized that coaches serving in only one school perceived that they were better able to form meaningful relationships and engage in more meaningful coaching due to their

time being less divided among multiple schools. Additionally, it is recognized that the turnaround time for feedback to teachers seems to be significantly reduced for coaches who only serve in one school compared to the struggle described by those who serve multiple schools.

- *P_1*: The way we are structured can be handicapping as far as what a true instructional coach can be doing or should be doing. In an ideal world, what we would like to do [is different from] what we are able to do when you go to a building one day a week. The follow up piece is just very difficult. You want to go back the very next day and have that follow-up conversation. And you can not; you just physically can not be back in that building for another week. If you are there two days a week, you know that—that is, I think, the constraint, is the time that goes from the initial time you are in the classroom to offer feedback to when you get to come back and follow up. And then a million other things get in the way of that. So just being able to really focus in on the needs of that teacher is just a little bit scattered. If you can time it well, to go in and give feedback before their planning, but that just does not always work. So that is a critical factor, if you were in one building for longer periods of time during the week, I think you would see the role of the coach really, really change.
- *P_5:* I think sometimes the lack of time may make you feel rushed in dealing with people that you have to deal with and you are not able to dig in to building those relationships or take the time, as much time as you would like, to have the kinds of conversations that you need to really make change and

instruction happen faster. Because investing the time up front with a person is going to help them to want to listen, and help you understand more what they need for you to share with them. So, I think that is one thing. I think another thing that time constraints do is it makes you have to sometimes prioritize things that have to get done because there [are] only so many hours in the day, and if you have many roles and responsibilities, for example, around test time, you may have to put a lot more effort into looking at data and preparing, you know, those kinds of documents to have conversations with teachers, and that might let some of the other conversations and visits that you need to be doing, maybe in beginning teachers' classrooms with classroom management, and some of those things have to kind of take second place. And that can be frustrating, especially if there are situations that need to get handled. I think sometimes if you have lots of teachers that you serve, whether that is because of the way that your duties have been assigned for schools, or because you have a lot of beginning teachers that need help and support, that can also be a big time constraint because you may feel like you are not able to really give your hundred percent best to every single one of those teachers, and if there is a teacher that is really struggling, then you might shorten the time that you need to spend with them because you [have]so many others, or you might have to spend more time trying to help that one specific situation and then other parts of your job feel like they suffer because of that. The other thing I will say is this, sometimes the continuous feeling that you do not have enough time, or that you are trying to make more time pushes you to work longer

hours and eats into other time that you ought to be spending doing, maybe things like with your family, and that happens with every job, I get it, but I think that can sometimes maybe eventually cause burnout. Just like with teaching, and I think it could happen in a job like this if you did not find ways to try to balance your time because it would feel like you were never turning off the job because you always have something that needs to be done.

School Assignment Was Noted as a Significant Barrier for Instructional Coaches Through Focus Group Discussions. What Variables Should Be Considered When Assigning Instructional Coaches to Schools? Responses among participating coaches revealed a number of variables one should consider in assigning instructional coaches to schools, since school assignment continues to emerge in the research as a barrier for coaches in the district. Several mentioned that allowing coaches to serve over multiple years in one school could be beneficial and would help eliminate barriers to building relationships with the staff from year to year. Additionally, coaches perceived that the size of the school should be considered when assigning coaches in addition to the level of need in the school and the number of beginning teachers in a school. Coaches recognize that school performance, a factor that has historically driven coaching assignments in the district, is a factor that should be considered but should only be one of several factors that help determine coaching assignments. Some coaches revealed in this layer of the study the perceived importance of considering coach personalities and administrator personalities when matching coaches with schools as well.

- *P_1:* I know in the past, a lot of those things have been determined by test scores, which, that is important, but when you are in a very large school, I

mean you have got more teachers to serve. So, I think the size of the school, I think the number of beginning teachers in the school needs to be looked at, [and] I think the level of experience of the administrator needs to be looked at. So I think that all of those things need to play a part in school assignments, I also think you need to think about, again, that relationship piece. A lot of times we have been moved just because of test scores, and we get different schools every year. I have not had that problem, but I know across the board, it has been an issue over the years. So you are starting over, I mean it is just like the first quarter you are getting to know those people. So just the continuity of staying in the same schools, unless there is a big problem.

- *P_4:* I think some coaches might work better with certain principals, so having that in mind, I think, can play a factor in the successfulness of the coach at that school. I think in the past, assessment scores were looked at, so maybe looking at that and then the coach's strengths, so what are the needs of that school? What did the teachers need support in, and then who on the coaching team could fulfill those needs and be the most beneficial? I also think maybe looking at if one school is a one day a week school, and maybe, you know, spreading out. I guess what I am trying to say is not every coach needs to have the same amount of schools.

What Contributes to the Lack of Communication of Expectations that Was Noted by Instructional Coaches as a Significant Barrier and What Could Be Implemented to Alleviate this Barrier? Participants were inconsistent in their answers to this question. Some coaches did not perceive lack of communication or direction to be

a barrier in their role, while others felt that a more clearly communicated job description would be helpful to them. Some participants suggested a district-wide job description with overarching expectations that were flexible enough so the coach would have the autonomy to mold the responsibilities of their role to fit the unique needs of each school they serve. However, another participant mentioned the need for explicit goals and expectations set by their superiors. Some interviewees alluded to the fact that although there may not be a significant lack of communication from district level superiors, sometimes the barrier is generated at the school level with the lacking communication of school administrators.

- P_2: I do not know if I actually feel like there is a lack of communication with expectations. With both directors I have worked with, I feel like I have just been trusted to make—I kind of felt like I knew what their expectations were for me at each school. And I have just always kind of looked at it as if I was not doing what they expected they would let me know. So, I do not know if I feel like there is a lack of expectations. I feel like I am just trusted to see needs and jump in and work on them. I do totally have three different roles, but I feel like the roles are almost necessary for how I do them. I feel like if I would not fulfill one of the roles at one of the schools, things would not get done, and I do not to make it sound like I think I am so important that that school would fall apart without me, but I feel like if I do not have different roles at that school, that that school would get left behind when it comes to district-wide initiatives if I was not there filling in some gaps.
- *P_4:* I think just maybe laying [it] out, and it does not have to be so specific,

> but here is the role of an elementary instructional coach and here is what we do. But, I also think as an instructional coach, I can speak for myself, I find myself not adhering to those descriptors because I am a helper, and if a teacher needs something and I can do something that is not related to my task or my role, then of course, I am going to help them. I am not going to ask them to reach out to somebody else if I am able to help them, but then if I do that, then that takes time away from, --- then that contributes to the whole time factor, too. So, I think laying out some descriptors of what our role is, but then also what the role of the other support people that we have in our district [are]. Then all of us come together and discuss those descriptors, and then communicating that with principals. But also, principals have to listen to that in order to take it in and understand the role of an instructional coach. I am not saying all principals do not listen, but there are some that I think just see us as the fixer of all things.

Explain How Programs and Initiatives Create Barriers in Fulfilling the Role of the Instructional Coach? Participants explained that multiple programs and initiatives are self-perceived as taxing on their time as a coach. Although all participants felt that it is important to support teachers in program implementation and administrators on school and district initiatives, they do recognize that a considerable amount of time can be spent on those tasks. Often, logistical tasks associated with programs and initiatives fall to the coach which can be very time consuming for coaches. Additionally, the data revealed that coaches feel a sense of responsibility for the success of programs and initiatives in schools they serve and therefore are highly invested in ensuring that

teachers are trained properly and take on tasks of monitoring them to be sure teachers are carrying out the expectations with fidelity. Several participants recognized the strain that multiple and varying programs between schools can put on the coach and how it can weaken the coaching structure. They explained that because coaches, in most cases, have not personally used the programs as classroom teachers, they have a steep learning curve in not only knowing and understanding each program to the extent needed to support teachers but also to the extent that they can train others in using them as well. Several mentioned that when this is multiplied by multiple programs, it can become overwhelming to them.

- *P_3:* A lot of time we just have a new program and it gets put on us to implement it and to make sure it is done to fidelity. And so that often comes before other expectations that I have, because we have so many new programs that come out. It kind of gets put on us to, number one, when it first comes out, we have to figure it out ourselves. Then we have to create some training and get other teachers and make sure they are using it correctly and then answer their questions and all of that whole process. It occupies a lot of our time.
- *P_4:* I think sometimes rolling out new programs can get in the way of us spending time in classrooms and supporting teachers. And, I find myself being inadequate sometimes because I am not familiar with some of the programs because I have been out of the classroom. So sometimes I think, when we change up programs, or we offer a lot of programs, then that can take away from using one program really well over a span of a few years, versus just

changing. I think we are doing better at that, though, as a district. I really think the six goals that we have been focused on has helped to bring that continuity between schools, and it has helped me stay focused. So, when I did serve more than one school, I knew the district initiatives and so that has been a focus within all the schools. But transitioning from one school to the next, we at least have that in common. Because some schools use different programs that can sometimes take away from supporting teachers with content or with modeling lessons or just being in their classrooms with them.

- *P_5:* I think every school that I work with does not have the same programs that are either paid for by the district or that all the teachers are on board with using or that all understand how to use or have access to. That creates a barrier for me being able to help teachers in the schools where that does not exist. If I prepare some kind of a PD that is about that specific program, but some teachers do not use it or do not have access to it, then I am not able to share that with them because they do not have the same resources, or they do not choose to use the same resources. So I think that is one thing that creates a barrier because they do not have a level playing field and I cannot offer expertise or support in the same way if they do not have access to the same programs or they choose not to use the recommended programs. I think there are initiatives that are put out by the district, and some schools interpret those initiatives in one way and others a different way. That creates a barrier too, because you feel like your job is different, and it needs to be different with the culture, that is true, but if there are expectations that are school or district

> initiatives, then those need to be consistently followed wherever you are so that your response to questions about them or ways to help teachers with them is the same. Otherwise, if that is inconsistent, then, you know, it makes you look inconsistent as a coach and it also keeps you from being able to fully support the district and the principal in the schools, whatever it is that they are trying to do to pull their staff together.

Research Question 3

What professional development needs, for both novice and veteran instructional coaches, can be identified?

Survey – Part 1

Six open-ended items were used in Part 1 of the survey to initially explore the professional development needs as self-perceived for instructional coaches in the district. Participants were first asked to list the formal professional development opportunities that helped each instructional coach develop the skills necessary for coaching prior to transitioning to the role. Of the nine participants, four (44.4%) indicated that they did not have any formal professional development or training specific to the role and skills of coaching prior to their experience as a coach. The other five participants listed the following experiences as helpful in preparing them for the role:

- Three participants (33.3%) listed master's level course work as helpful in developing skills needed for the role of the coach although a variety of master's programs were cited by participants to include master's in elementary education, master's in reading, and master's in administration.
- Mentoring modules through the North Carolina Department of Public

Instruction were cited by two participants (22.2%) as being helpful in preparing them for the role.

- Three participants (33.3%) listed various curriculum trainings and curriculum program trainings as professional development that helped prepare them for coaching.
- One participant (11.1%) recognized National Board certification as helpful in preparing for the role of the instructional coach.

Similarly, participants were also asked to list the *informal* professional development opportunities that each research participant found helpful prior to their role as a coach. Three primary themes are noted in their responses, which include

- Serving as a mentor teacher: Three participants (33.3%) noted that serving as informal mentors to new teachers before officially transitioning to a coaching role helped prepare them for their role as a coach. One mentioned that serving as a cooperating teacher for student teachers was also an experience that helped build capacity as an instructional coach.
- Participation in a variety of curriculum-based professional development sessions: Four participants (44.4%) recognized the significance that participation in curriculum-based professional development opportunities has on building capacity as a coach. Not only did participants note how the content of curriculum-based professional development helped build knowledge that was helpful in their role but also observing other instructional coaches deliver curriculum-based professional development helped give insight into the role of the coach.

- Leadership opportunities: Five participants (55.5%) recognized how taking on leadership positions within the school contributed to building their capacity as a teacher leader and helped prepare them for leading as an instructional coach. Some leadership opportunities mentioned by participants include participation in the district's Teacher Leaders Forum, school leadership team membership, and leading professional development at their school as a classroom teacher.

Participants were also asked to reflect on the *formal* professional development that has been helpful to building skills for coaching since taking on the role. Eight of the nine participants (88.8%) listed structured coaching retreats and times provided by the district for coaches to collaborate and learn together as some of the most beneficial professional development opportunities they have participated in since taking on the role of an instructional coach in the district. Four participants (44.4%) noted book studies centered on coaching practices and adult learning theory had been instrumental in developing their skills as a coach. Other professional development mentioned included

- Reading Research to Classroom Practice through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
- Math Foundations through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
- 21st Century Mentoring through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
- North Carolina Educator Evaluation System Training (NCEES)
- Education Value-Added Assessment System Training (EVAAS)
- Graduate coursework on adult learning and coaching

Next, participants were asked to reflect on the value of any informal professional development experiences that have been helpful in their role as an instructional coach since transitioning to the role. Seven of the nine participants (77.7%) identified unstructured times for discourse and networking with other coaches in the district to be valuable informal professional development while serving in the role. Coaches described such experiences in their responses to this open-ended survey question as "times for general discourse," "networking," "getting advice from other coaches," "role-playing difficult conversations," and "sharing ideas and best practices." Other responses included observing other instructional coaches deliver PD, following the research of nationally renowned experts in the field of instructional coaching, and general on-the-job experiences as being helpful in their continued skill development as an instructional coach.

In an effort to continue to explore the professional development needs of instructional coaches, the survey asked respondents to detail specific professional development needs for novice instructional coaches. Two distinctive themes emerged from the participant responses:

- Support for novice coaches within the team: Five of the nine instructional coaches surveyed (55.5%) mentioned the significance of the need for novice instructional coaches to receive support from other instructional coaches through teaming structures such as mentoring, shadowing, and informal collaboration and discourse. One participant explained that "the most important thing a new [instructional coach] can have is a supportive team." Another coach suggested that "novice instructional coaches be given the

opportunity to shadow a veteran coach."

- Understanding adult learning: Six instructional coaches (66.6%) mentioned in their responses the need for novice instructional coaches to develop an understanding of adult learning theory and strategies for giving feedback to adults. One respondent mentioned that the work is "so different from working with a classroom of young children," highlighting the need for training in adult learning. Another coach claimed that "it is critical [for] new coaches to learn about adult learning styles."

Participants were also asked to detail the professional development needs of veteran instructional coaches. Primarily, responses were very similar to the responses given for the professional development needs of novice coaches, with an emphasis on continuing support for those areas. However, one notable theme that emerged for suggested continued support for veteran coaches included the need to maintain familiarity with the latest instructional resources, specifically technology. One participant pointed out that veteran coaches "need to stay abreast of the latest teaching strategies that include the latest technology resources that teachers are expected to use." Additionally, the need for content and curriculum professional development for veteran coaches was noted by four respondents.

Survey – Part 2

Six Likert scale survey items were designed to gauge the professional development needs of instructional coaches in Part 2 of the survey of this study. Participants were first asked to rate how their formal preservice experiences prepared them for the role. Overall, six participants (66.6%) expressed that their formal preservice

experience was helpful to some degree in preparing them for the role of instructional coach, while three (33.3%) expressed that their preservice experiences did not prepare them for the role to any degree.

Similarly, participants were then asked to gauge how the informal preservice experiences prepared them for the role of the instructional coach. Responses indicate that participants perceived that their informal preservice experiences were slightly more valuable in preparing them for instructional coaching, with seven (77.7%) respondents indicating that informal experiences helped prepare them to some degree for the role and only two (22.2%) indicating that the informal experiences did not help in their preparation for the role.

Participant responses were divided when asked to consider the necessity of a master's degree for instructional coaches. Four (44.4%) agreed that instructional coaches should have a master's degree or higher, while five (55.5%) participants did not agree with that statement. Similarly, the survey measured coach perceptions of how National Board certification impacted the role of the instructional coach. Again, four participants (44.4%) indicated that National Board certification is necessary for the role, and five participants (55.5%) indicated that it is not necessary.

Finally, participants were asked to rate how important it is for a coach to have a history of being "effective," according to EVAAS. A majority (88.8%) of instructional coaches agreed with the fact that instructional coaches should be effective according to a value-added model of teacher effectiveness, with only one coach disagreeing.

Focus Group Interviews

Survey data illuminated a need for continued professional development for both

novice and veteran instructional coaches to better understand adult learning strategies, to stay abreast of educational technology trends and content-related best practices, and to hone coaching skills. Participants identified both formal and informal professional development experiences that were helpful in their development as a coach on a surface level. The next layer of research will be designed to further explore the self-perceived formal and informal experiences that coaches find most beneficial in building their professional capacity as a coach.

Two of the eight focus group probes were designed to further explore the professional development needs of both veteran and novice instructional coaches. Through qualitative coding processes, five clear themes emerged from the data that gave a more detailed description of the self-perceived professional development needs of coaches in the district.

Collaboration and Teaming. Teaming and collaboration emerged as a strong theme through data analysis with 21 comments coded. While survey data gave glimpses of this same theme, it was even more pronounced in the focus group portion of the study, as it became clear that the coaches in the district highly valued the time provided for collaboration and teaming with others who served as instructional coaches in the district. One coach explained that through collaboration in the district, “there is a lot of opportunity to build [a] web of networking and to make it stronger for everybody.” Another participant pointed out that “monthly instructional coach meetings are so helpful as far as having that time to collaborate and listen.” Similarly, another coach highlighted the value of “time and opportunity to collaborate with our own colleagues that have areas of expertise.”

Coaches further recognized the need to not only collaborate within the district but at a regional and state level as well. One participant further explained,

> I feel like we need to have opportunities to go outside [of] _____ County to make sure that we are staying with initiatives coming through the pipeline, either with the district or just national research, or new research that comes out, because we get so caught up sometimes in district-wide initiatives [that] we need to make sure we are keeping up with the outside world, too.

Mentoring. Focus group discussions revealed the value of mentoring structures for instructional coaches, especially those new to the role. Participants commented on the power of learning from someone who has experience in the role, whether it was a formal mentor or an informal mentor.

One form of mentoring that was mentioned frequently among the group was "shadowing." One participant shared in the discussion that she "could learn so much from spending just one day" with the other coaches in the group. Similarly, another coach shared that "the best PD for me might be to follow somebody who has done this job around for a day and watch." Others reflected on their own experiences as novice coaches and retrospectively realized how helpful a mentoring structure could have been for them in adapting to the role. One coach explained,

> If I had had more opportunities, I think to maybe shadow an instructional coach and kind of see them in action it would have been helpful to me, just because, coming straight out of the classroom, I really did not have any kind of idea of what an instructional coach did day to day, hour to hour, and so I think that could have been beneficial for me.

Participants highlighted the fact that mentoring structures would also provide a resource for them to use when questions or dilemmas arise in the role. Several of the participants reflected on the informal mentors they have had in the role and the significance of their mentorship. One coach shared how she uses one of the other coaches she considers a mentor:

> Sometimes she just kind of helps me understand that this might not be the solution for this, but she just has, like knowing the people that you can go to, to say, what would you do? Or do you have a suggestion? Because I can not always think of the answers.

Another coach described her informal mentor as a person who "gives the best advice and it is not always a fix." Similarly, one coach referenced a mentoring relationship as she highlighted the need to have that dialogue with someone in the "meeting after the meeting."

Role-Playing as a Format for Professional Learning. Through the focus group discussions, it became apparent that coaches, like most adult learners, prefer a variety of professional learning formats to assist them in honing their skills as a coach. Not only do they value the set-aside time for collaboration and discussion, they also value structured professional development that is more than a "sit and get" format. Participants mentioned throughout both focus group sessions how valuable, although rare, role-playing opportunities have been for them in building their professional capacity as a coach. One participant underscored the value of "time where we learn about some strategies that would help us, but then we [go] into those sessions and we practice." Participants also pointed out the value of professional development designed as book studies that allows

them to read about best practices in the expanding world of instructional coaching but stressed the importance of having time to digest the readings as a group and practicing strategies learned. One participant explained that this time to try out coaching strategies with colleagues is about "bringing it to life and having it and modeling it and practicing it."

Collegial Inquiry. Participants identified collegial inquiry as a significant component of professional development for instructional coaches. While the time for collaboration and role-playing is important, they also pinpointed time for productive dialogue, or collegial inquiry, and discussion as important tools for building their professional practice. As one participant simply explained that it is a "time to talk it over with others" in similar roles. One of the coaches in this study mentioned that she finds it beneficial when they "have time where [they] could just sit around the table and share concerns." In the discussion, one participant gave the example of how collegial inquiry supports their professional practices by pointing to another coach in the group, saying, "I called you that night and I said, 'I need a critical friend's protocol,'" exemplifying how the team of coaches rely on each other as significant sources of professional development.

Several coaches positively refer to the district's Joint Instructional Group (JIG) meetings where coaches are given the opportunity to share concerns and problems with colleagues and receive feedback or advice on how they should handle them. One of the participants explained,

> I would love a time we could come, maybe to a JIG meeting or just another time we pick where we could bring our biggest feedback problem and ask people or

roleplay, like, what would you say? How would you handle it?

Similarly, another coach shared that "JIG meetings are helpful, and we talk about problems and situations."

On the Job Experience. Coaches point out through focus group dialogue that much of what they learn about the role of the coach is learned from experiences on the job. Several mentioned that simple experience in the role is the best way to further develop coaching skills and "learning from [their] own mistakes," as one coach mentioned in the focus group dialogue. Simply put, one coach explained that "I do not think you know what you need until you are on the job." Other participants indicated agreement with that statement in the conversation. Furthermore, coaches mentioned that much of what they learn through modules, book studies, or other formal professional development is not meaningful to them until they experience it on the job through real life experiences as a coach. One coach explained that "wisdom comes with experience, and I really do not know if some of that is really trainable."

One-on-One Semi-Structured Interviews

Focus group data revealed five distinct themes related to the professional development needs of instructional coaches perceived by participants. Each of the five themes were further explored through the one-on-one semi-structured interview layer of this research.

Five of the 14 questions posed in the interview protocol were designed to dig deeper into the themes that emerged from focus group discussions. The data are presented in this section by each of the five interview questions. Participants are referenced as P_1, P_2, P_3, P_4, and P_5; and their responses are detailed below each question.

Time for Instructional Coaches to Collaborate Was Identified as a Professional Development Need for Coaches. Describe How Time for Collaboration Could Be Designed to Best Support the Professional Development Needs of Instructional Coaches. Participants described in the one-on-one interviews how they perceived that the increased opportunities for collaboration with other coaches could help build their professional capacity. Several coaches recognized that while there were some opportunities for collaboration and dialogue, more opportunity combined with varied structures for collaboration could increase the degree to which their professional practices were strengthened. Some coaches pointed out that the structured times for collaboration are often driven by an agenda, such as crafting a professional development experience for teachers, analyzing data, or discussing instructional initiatives within the district. Participants expressed a desire for time that would be more structured to target specific problems and issues they are facing in their role as a coach and to seek input and feedback from colleagues on these issues.

- P_3: I think if we met once a month and we came with an area of weakness or an area of need, and so we come maybe with an area of weakness and a strong area, and then we come, and we discuss those. And so, if I kind of throw my area of need out there, then we can all kind of problem-solve together how to solve that issue. So we can bounce ideas off of each other in order to best meet the teachers' needs. A lot of times I will have an issue and it would be beneficial to get other people's input on how to handle that situation, but since I need to be confidential of the teachers you know, of the teacher, I do not want to take that problem necessarily to other teachers, and so the other

instructional coaches would be a good kind of group of people to throw those ideas onto the table so they can give suggestions. But if we came prepared with our problems and strong areas, then we kind of have a goal before we come together.

- P_4: I think we need time spent together, not just discussing initiatives and getting a pulse check on how things are going throughout the district and within our schools and then, we spend time talking about assessment data. I think all of that is important, but I also think we need time to collaborate on just being creative and coming up with new ideas together, brainstorming. It might be how we deliver PD or, "hey, I tried this out at my school." "Have you guys tried this before?" Or if we have tough teachers within our schools, collaborating, time to collaborate ways to support those teachers so that they can grow professionally and just having that time to dialogue and bounce ideas off each other and share resources.

In Thinking About the Professional Development Needs of Both Veteran and Novice Instructional Coaches, How Significant is Collegial Inquiry (Time to Talk with Other Coaches)? Participant responses indicated that coaches in the district highly valued time to discuss the role with each other. All respondents indicated that they currently do not have many opportunities for this kind of professional dialogue that results in learning from each other. Coaches recognized the benefits of collegial inquiry and dialogue for both novice and veteran coaches.

- P_3: For me, it is very important being new to this. They do a lot of stuff that I am just learning how to do, and so time to talk with them, and not even me

talking, but just listening to them problem-solve what they do gives me a lot of insight [into] ways that I could become a stronger instructional coach. Since I am at the same school every day, I am kind of sheltered to what they do all day long and so it is very beneficial to me just to kind of get together with them and hear them talk and then it gives me ideas of how I could better serve the teachers that I am working with.

- P_5: Well, I will just reiterate that I think it is really crucial. Especially if you have got veteran coaches that are combined with newer coaches, because I have taken times in our meetings that we have been together to ask specific people that I know have worked with situations that are similar to what I am dealing with, that might have been working at it longer than I have. I think it is just like me, as a veteran teacher working with a new teacher, I think that piece is really important. I also think that the professional development and the way that you talk to your colleagues and get ideas back from them is really important for perspective sharing, because we may hear the same exact presentation, but somebody who is in a different role or works with a different grade level or has a different [perspective]. Like an IT person might, you know, have a different spin on how to handle a problem with access to material that I would have thought, as, you know, just a content coach. So I think that it is so crucial that we continue to do that, because I mean, I can go to some things on my own and I benefit from those, especially if it is content-related, that builds me up and helps. But the things that involve issues that we are all handling and facing and make us better coaches, I think that the

collegiality of it is really important.

How Helpful Could a Formal Mentorship Structure Be for Instructional Coaches to Grow Professionally in Their Role? Overall, participant responses indicated that a formal mentorship structure would be beneficial to coaches, especially those new to the role. Coaches expressed a need for novice coaches to have one person to go to with questions or concerns, even though there was clear consensus among the group that the group as a whole is willing to help when new members are added to the team. There was mention that only having one mentor could be limiting to some degree, because each member of the team has something different to offer novice coaches. They explained that when assigning just one person as a mentor, the novice coach could miss out on learning experiences from other coaches on the team.

- P_2: I assume it would be beneficial, but I think it would also be limiting. Just thinking of the setup with _____ County, like we have a team of seven and as much as I—like if I was thinking if I was just coming on board as an instructional coach to be paired up with a veteran instructional coach in our county, I would not choose just one to be my mentor. Like I think it is a team of giftedness, it is not one person…I think if there was a larger structure that would be totally necessary, but the way we are, we just all mentor each other.
- P_3: I think it is very beneficial. I think we depend on each other anyway, and so I reach out to them if I have a question. But having one mentor that I could go watch or that I could, you know, would be the one person I went to with questions would be very beneficial in order to learn my role. I think it would give—sometimes I feel like when I ask too many questions that I am

bothering them and so if I had just one person that was like my go to person, they knew that I would be coming to them and so I would not feel as troublesome to them. Also, the ability to go and watch them in action would be beneficial to me.

Experience and "On-the-Job" Training Were Noted as Significant Sources of Professional Development. Explain Why Experience and "On-the-Job" Training Are Essential to Growing an Instructional Coach's Professional Practice and How Could These Experiences Be Simulated for Coaches Without Varied Experiences? Participants pointed out in their responses that experience on the job is the most effective way to learn about the role and the responsibilities of an instructional coach. Some coaches said that the experience in the role is "crucial" and "key" for building capacity as a coach. Others pointed out that even experiences prior to coaching can also help prepare individuals for the role. One participant mentioned that "the more experiences you have in the classroom in different grade levels, the bigger your perspective."

Coaches had different ideas about how the on-the-job experiences could be simulated for coaches who need those experiences to grow in their professional capacity. One interviewee was unsure if the experiences could be simulated because they are so different from year to year, while other interviewees thought that professional development support structures like job shadowing and role-playing could be instrumental for building capacity in coaches by simulating experiences coaches often face.

- P_2: I think on-the-job training is the total key because—I do not know if you could simulate it because every year is different, is totally different needs and

totally different situations and programs change, initiatives change, expectations change, principals change, and what would be simulated one year would be a totally different simulation the next year. Like it is more about flexibility and rolling with the punches and building your own repository of resources and experiences to pull from. I mean, that kind of goes back to the relationship piece when, you know, teachers know you have maybe seen it or been there or done that, then it helps them with opening up to a relationship piece.

- P_5: Well, I think because both of those, experiences and on-the-job training, are really the only ways that you are trained to be a coach. I mean, you do not get a degree in it. It is not something that you do a student coaching, not yet anyway... you are learning as you go, and you find a new resource that makes you better, that you will use again next year, just like with teaching, but except you are working with teachers and you are looking at it from a different lens. I mean, in my personal experience…I have had to have a lot of on-the-job training with working with spreadsheets and with, you know, interpreting some of the numbers and things that are coming back from test scores, because that is never something as a teacher, that I did much of. I did my own, but not to the scale that I am doing now with the schools I serve. So I have some experience, but the experience of working with other coaches who have kind of shown me what to do, and practicing with it and doing it hands and having the meetings myself and going through and asking for help from administration who knows how to do those things, that has been invaluable.

> And that has made me a much better coach. So, yeah, I do not think you can separate that because there is no degree or schooling, official schooling that you can learn, and honestly, most of the stuff that you would learn is book learning that until you put it into practice, and tweak it and make it something that is your own, you are not going to be effective. So, do I think that doing the simulations could help us feel more prepared to deal with some of the curveballs? Yes. But I think that is stuff that requires planning and figuring out and might require coaches to say, "hey, I really need more help with x." I guess I compare it with beginning teachers; it is the same way that I can talk to them about calling a parent, and we can role-play and I can be the parent and I can give them some tips about it, but until they actually call the parent and deal with the stuff that comes up, some of that you just get better with as you are in those situations.

The Following Topics Were Mentioned as Significant Topics for Ongoing Professional Development Through Focus Group Interviews: Curriculum Updates, Updates on District, State and National Education Initiatives, Navigating Difficult Conversations and Providing Feedback, Adult Learning Theory, and Instructional Technology. Of These Topics Mentioned, Which One Is the Most Important to Growing the Professional Practices of Instructional Coaches and Why? Overall, participants struggled to identify just one as the most important, recognizing that all topics were significant in their role. However, most participants highlighted "adult learning theory" and "navigating difficult conversations" as two of the most significant professional development topics for instructional coaches, with one coach also

recognizing the importance of receiving updates on district, state, and national education initiatives. Coaches pointed out that knowing and understanding adult learning theory helps them understand how to frame conversations and feedback, which are the tools they perceive will grow teachers the most. Additionally, the participants recognize that their experiences prior to the role have primarily been centered on understanding how children learn, and that when taking on the role of the coach, they have had very little instruction on understanding how adults learn and grow.

- $P_{1:}$ In my opinion, as far as the coaching piece goes, probably the most important ones would be navigating difficult conversations and providing feedback, as well as the adult learning piece. I think coaches are going to get the curriculum updates; it is important because they need to be very current, but we kind of do that naturally. I think knowing—going from teaching children to teaching adults, you really need to have a good understanding of what that needs. And it is very different. So I think adult learning and navigating difficult conversations and providing feedback would be the most important of those listed. I think that is how we are going to grow the teachers. We need to understand how adults learn so that we can provide them the feedback in a way that they are going to grow from it. Because adults learn differently than our kids do, I mean it is just, there is a lot of research on it. And we have had some training in it, and it has been good, but I think having a better understanding, a deeper understanding, of adult learning so that you can easily say, “okay, I have got teacher x, and she is going to respond when I give feedback in this way and so that is how I am going to be able to help her

grow," and then follow that up with the curriculum piece. But I think you [have] to be able to understand how they are going to learn so that you can get them feedback that will help them grow.

- P_2: I almost feel like [receiving updates on district, state and national education initiatives] is kind of the most important for instructional coaches just because sometimes our district looks to us as to are we moving in the right direction and are we doing what research says is best? And we need to have a good pulse on [it] not only to make sure our district is in line with the state, and is the state in line with national research, and I feel like our teachers look to us for that pulse. I mean, even with what we are dealing with right now with remote learning. I mean there are so many teachers that are like, "well, what are you hearing when you are in these other meetings with other coaches?" People look to us to kind of be the liaison of what is happening outside of their classroom and outside of their school.
- P_4: Adult learning theory I think would be the most important. Because I think in order to help adults grow, we need to have some type of understanding of how to do that and the research behind that. And I think understanding adult learners would benefit us in providing feedback, navigating conversations in those pieces. I think curriculum, I think the other ones are important as well, however, if we are just talking about growing coaches, I think the adult learning theory is the most significant. And maybe that is because our team is very dynamic and we are always learning new curriculum and we are always, you know, up to date on the state and national updates and district updates.

> But I think that adult learning theory could help those last two as well, navigating conversations and providing feedback.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of a case study designed to explore the self-perceptions of instructional coaches. Three guiding research questions guided this study to develop an understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the role of the instructional coach, the barriers often encountered in the role of the instructional coach, and the professional development needs for both novice and veteran coaches. The next chapter further analyzes the findings of this study and relates the findings to the existing body of literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The educational climate in which we live is "heavy and serious these days" with an urgent and ever present need to improve schools (Aguilar, 2013, p. xii). In the last decade, instructional coaching has become a widely utilized form of job-embedded professional development in school systems across the United States. The role of the instructional coach in many districts is still in the stages of infancy and early development. Educators, over the course of the last 10 years, have become increasingly knowledgeable about the role of the coach and how coaches can positively impact student achievement through their work in building the capacity of adult learners. While research centered on the role of the instructional coach is still somewhat limited, the literature that does exist has made it clear that there are specific skill sets required for the role. Aguilar (2013) explained, "Coaching can be perceived as a mysterious process, but in fact it requires intention, a plan, and a lot of practice; it requires a knowledge of adult learning theory and an understanding of systems and communication" (p. xii).

Programs and educational paths for teacher leaders to explore the world of coaching are practically nonexistent. Most instructional coaches find themselves plucked from the classroom and flung into the role of a coach with little to no training on how to develop capacity in adult learners, and in most instances find themselves in a situation where, as the saying goes, they are "building the plane as they are flying it."

Some districts struggle to find the value in coaching due to a lack of evidence between coaching structures and improved student achievement. However, without the proper understanding of the role, training for the role, and clear expectations set for the role, effectiveness is drastically reduced. These assumptions were explored throughout

this case study from the perceptions of instructional coaches and revealed a need for districts and schools of education to reconsider how instructional coaches are utilized and trained to more effectively make an impact on student learning.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the self-perceived role and responsibilities of instructional coaches. The study was guided by three primary research questions:

1. What are the self-perceived roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach?
2. What barriers have instructional coaches encountered in their role and in carrying out their responsibilities?
3. What professional development needs, for both novice and veteran instructional coaches, can be identified?

This chapter analyzes the findings of this study within the theoretical framework of the four pillar practices of adult learning as defined by constructive developmental theory: mentoring, teaming, collegial inquiry, and leadership roles. Subsequently, this chapter connects the findings of this study to the existing literature, provides recommendations for future research, and makes recommendations for K-12 school districts that employ instructional coaches.

Analysis of Findings

Findings of this study are in the order of each research question. Each question is answered using a constructive developmental lens to analyze and interpret the data collected in this study. Results are framed in the context of each of the four pillar

practices that support adult learning.

Research Question 1: What Are the Self-Perceived Roles and Responsibilities of an Instructional Coach?

The first research question will be answered by analyzing the findings from the survey, focus groups, and one-one-one semi-structured interviews to determine how instructional coaches self-perceive the role of the instructional coach and the responsibilities associated with the role. A lens of adult learning theory will be used to connect the findings to the theoretical framework on which this study was designed.

Mentoring. The central function of an instructional coach is to support the development of the adults, primarily the teachers, in the world of education. As literature around adult learning explains, "mentoring supports adult development in the context of a personal relationship" (Drago-Severson, 2009, pp. 214-215). Merriam (1983, as cited by Drago-Severson, 2009) described a mentor as "a friend, a guide, and above all else, a teacher" (p. 214). Through this lens, mentoring and relationship building are synonymous and are clearly perceived as significant components of the role of the instructional coach. Each layer of the research revealed mentoring and building relationships as essential responsibilities of the instructional coach. Mentoring was identified by all participants in the survey portion of the study as a responsibility of the instructional coach and was recognized by six participants of one of the most important responsibilities associated with their role. Focus group data also revealed the significance of building relationships and mentoring teachers as one of the most frequently noted themes that emerged through data analysis. Similarly, the one-on-one interviews specifically asked participants to explain why relationship building was so important to the role of the coach since the

theme of mentoring and relationship building was so prevalent among the earlier phases of the research. All interview participants explained how critical building trusting relationships with teachers is to the role and expounded on the fact that the mentoring relationships serve as the foundation for everything else they do in their role. Without the context of a healthy mentoring relationship, participants believed that other functions of the role would be impossible.

Teaming. Similar to the pillar practice of mentoring, teaming is rooted in the relationships between colleagues. Barth (2006, as cited by Drago-Severson, 2009) recognized four kinds of interpersonal relationships among colleagues: parallel play, adversarial relationships, congenial relationships, and collegial relationships. Adult growth and development is best supported by collegial relationships, which are built through intentional teaming structures. Participants in this study recognized the need for instructional coaches to not only build collegial relationships with teachers but also to facilitate collegial relationships between teachers and across the school or grade level.

Survey data indicated that participants perceived that facilitating teaming structures such as grade-level meetings, PLCs, and data team meetings while engaging teachers in dialogue and collaboration through these structures was a significant element of the role of the instructional coach. However, it is important to recognize that in both the focus group discussions and the one-on-one interview, participants often referenced how teaming facilitation in their roles was contingent on the administration of each school they serve, which could be one of the sources of role ambiguity that served as a central theme throughout the study. Some participants alluded to the fact that the degree to which they were able to facilitate effective teaming was largely determined by how

each principal utilized the instructional coach and that they often feel limited in opportunity by the boundaries set by administrators.

Collegial Inquiry. Collegial inquiry, the pillar practice of collaborative reflection, was not explicitly addressed by participants in responses to the survey, the focus-group interviews, or the one-on-one semi-structured interviews. However, participants referenced responsibilities that are associated with collegial inquiry practices as described through a constructive developmental theory of adult learning. Drago-Severson (2009) pointed to the role of the building principal as the key player in building a collaborative school culture and supporting reflective practice. However, the instructional coach can play a helpful role in establishing systematic structures for supporting critical reflection. Data collected in this study revealed coach perceptions of the role that responsibilities associated with their role should support this pillar practice. Focus group discussion data and one-on-one interview data substantiated the fact that instructional coach roles are highly dependent on the vision of the principal, and the extent to which they carry out responsibilities that are aligned to the pillar practice of collegial inquiry are largely influenced by how the building principal views the role of the instructional coach.

All participants pinpointed the responsibility of "providing instructional feedback to teachers" as a key responsibility of the instructional coach in Part 1 of the survey. Focus group data also highlighted the self-perceived responsibility of coaches to provide instructional feedback to teachers. Drago-Severson (2009) claimed that "developing structures for reflection and shared dialogue about instructional matters is a vital step" (p. 160) for engaging adults in the pillar practice of collegial inquiry. Participants referenced how they use reflective questions to engage teachers in feedback conversations and invite

them to participate in shared dialogue in their efforts to provide feedback. Coaches recognized the importance of listening as a part of the feedback process, indicating shared dialogue and collaborative reflection as significant to the role.

Leadership Roles. "Great schools grow when educators understand the power of their leadership lies in the strength of their relationships" (Donaldson, 2007, as cited in Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 110). School leaders build capacity in other adults through inviting teachers to take on leadership roles in the context of meaningful, trusting relationships. Drago-Severson (2009) again pointed to the role of the school principal as the primary facilitator of this pillar practice for adult growth and development. She also claimed that these ideas are true for others in positions to build capacity in adult learners.

Through the data collected in this case study, inviting teachers to assume leadership roles was not perceived by the participants in this study as essential in the role of the instructional coach. However, both the survey and the focus group data illuminated the fact that coaches often feel that their role is confused with the role of an administrator. Because school principals typically have the "power" to elevate teachers to positions of leadership in a school, coaches may tend to separate themselves from such decisions in an effort to more clearly draw the line in the sand between coach and administrator. Instructional coaches perceived their role to have a strong mentorship component; so while they may not be the person who extends the invitation to teachers to embrace leadership roles in the school or district, they can serve as valuable mentors who can support teachers in making decisions to take on these roles when approached by administrators.

Overall Findings of Research Question 1. Coaches perceived their role to be

highly dependent on the ability to form trusting relationships with the adults with whom they are entrusted to grow and develop, which paralleled constructive developmental theory of adult learning. Each of the four pillar practices outlined by Drago-Severson (2009) effectively build capacity in adults only in the context of a trusted relationship.

Participants perceived duties and responsibilities linked to the pillar practice of mentoring to be the most significant in the role of the coach. Additionally, coaches also perceived teaming and the facilitation of effective teaming structures to be significant in their role in developing the adults in their care. While participants did not explicitly highlight the pillar practice of collegial inquiry as a duty related to the role, they did recognize skills and duties that are closely related to collegial inquiry as significant in their role, such as providing feedback and engaging teachers in reflective dialogue. The pillar practice of providing leadership roles was not identified in the data as significant to the role of the coach.

It was clear through the data collected that instructional coaches perceived that their role often merged into administrative duties and felt that there was a need for the role to be more clearly distinguished from the role of the principal and that the role needed more clearly defined terms to develop a shared understanding of the role of the instructional coach across the district to provide consistency in the role.

Research Question 2: What Barriers Have Instructional Coaches Encountered in Their Role and in Carrying Out Their Responsibilities?

Using the same constructive developmental lens for adult learning theory and practice, this section uses the data collected to answer Research Question 2. The barriers instructional coaches encounter in the role are analyzed as they relate the four pillar

practices of supporting adult learners.

Mentoring. Survey data, focus group data, and one-on-one interview data all revealed that the most significant barrier perceived by instructional coaches in carrying out mentoring responsibilities of their role was the barrier of time. Participants explained how lack of time impeded their ability to spend quality time with teachers and that the depth and frequency of conversations and coaching were limited due to the number of schools they often served. Additionally, coaches reported that the time allocated for mentoring teachers and engaging in coaching conversations is further inhibited by the variety of additional duties associated with the role. Coaches often sacrifice meaningful time that could be devoted to mentoring teachers to take care of other responsibilities that have been assigned to them but often do not align to the role of the coach.

Mentoring capacity for instructional coaches is also complicated by the blurred lines that the data revealed between coach and administrator. Coaches reported that because their role is sometimes not clearly distinguishable from an administrator, molding a mentoring relationship with teachers can be difficult. Drago-Severson (2009) explained that the "mentoring relationship is a private, reciprocal one that is oriented toward supporting growth" (p. 220). Although school administrators support the professional growth of teachers, they carry out an evaluative, nonreciprocal role that in many situations is not compatible with the role of a mentor. The evaluative part of the relationship threatens the vulnerability mentees need to have with their mentors (Drago-Severson, 2009).

Teaming. Drago-Severson (2009) identified six key elements of successful teaming. She pinpointed allocating time as the most significant element to consider for

effective teaming structures. Similarly, participants in this study recognize time as an essential ingredient to their success as an instructional coach. However, all three layers of this study revealed the lack of time for facilitating teaming as a barrier in the role of the instructional coach. Instructional coaches reported that the time to engage in practices, such as teaming, to support teachers in growing professionally is not sufficient.

Coaches not only recognized the lack of time to facilitate teaming structures to grow the teachers in their care, they also recognized the lack of time for teaming among themselves as a barrier to their own professional development. Instructional coaches in this study described a need for structured time for collaboration and discussion with other coaches in the district. They recognized the recent development of the monthly meeting of the JIG as a teaming structure that is much appreciated and valued by instructional coaches across the district. However, they also expressed a need for even more time for collaboration and teaming with other coaches and suggested that some of the time devoted to professional development for the JIG team be reallocated for time for coaches to meet and dialogue. Similar to Drago-Severson's (2009) description of teaming as a "fresh pathway for adult collaboration and dialogue" (p. 75), coaches in this study also described the need for time devoted for this teaming structure to support their own development as instructional coaches.

Collegial Inquiry. Drago-Severson's (2009) research recognized the importance for "all adults in a school [to] engage in reflective practices" (p. 155), as reflective practices such as collegial inquiry are critical tools for professional growth and development. Much like mentoring and teaming, structures for collegial inquiry require time set aside that is devoted to building a culture of reflective practice. However,

instructional coaches participating in this study reported that their time is stretched so thin between all of the schools they serve and that time to engage teachers in reflective conversations is often limited. Additionally, participants reported that the time lapse between reflective conversations with teachers poses a problem in their roles as well. When coaches are only assigned to a school 1 day each week, a 1-week time lapse, and sometimes longer, transpires before coaches are able to follow up on conversations or to give feedback about a lesson observed.

Drago-Severson (2009) recognized the important role school principals play in establishing a collaborative school culture and fostering an environment conducive for reflection and collegial inquiry. Instructional coaches reported that their role is often defined by the leadership practices of the building principal and that when working in schools with principals who do not facilitate structures for collegial inquiry, their role can be limited. In the absence of these structures including "the physical act of allocating time in master schedule for collaborative meetings, including faculty and staff in a collaborative, shared decision making process, and engaging with faculty and staff as equal partners" (pp. 158-159), instructional coaches and teachers alike are disadvantaged in the frequency and quality of opportunities for collegial inquiry practices. When the building principal does not create these formal structures to facilitate reflectivity and collegial inquiry practices, coaches are charged with finding creative ways to overcome this barrier in their role and engage teachers in the practices of collegial inquiry in the absence of these structures.

Additionally, the multiple layers of this study revealed the lack of emotional intelligence, specifically for novice coaches, to pose as a barrier for engaging teachers in

collegial inquiry practices. Coaches reported that it takes time through experience in the role to develop the emotional intelligences needed to overcome fears and anxieties with giving constructive feedback to teachers without allowing personal feelings to take precedence over the necessary conversations that need to take place to foster professional growth and development. Additionally, coaches reported that it takes time and experience in the role to develop the needed emotional intelligences to understand how to use different strategies to pull teachers into conversations and gauging when they are ready to receive feedback.

Leadership Roles. Inviting teachers to partake in the shared responsibility of leadership roles was not identified by coaches as a part of the role of the instructional coach, and therefore barriers for coaches in facilitating this pillar practice were not addressed in this study. Drago-Severson (2009) shared two common challenges often associated with this pillar practice of supporting adult learning:

- Typically, the building principal is ultimately responsible for the functions of the school, and it is difficult for them to totally hand that responsibility over to others, such as instructional coaches or teacher leaders, to share that responsibility.
- Providing feedback to colleagues is difficult for teachers who step into leadership roles.

While coaches in this study did not explicitly identify this pillar practice as critical to their role and therefore did not elaborate on barriers to this pillar practice, it is important to recognize that these two challenges from the research most likely are the variables that cause coaches to eliminate this pillar practice from the duties associated

with their role. Coaches in this study perceived a need for their role to be clearly distinguishable from the role of the principal. It is likely that participants did not feel that the coach has the authority to elevate teachers to positions of leadership. While it may be true that this pillar practice of supporting the growth and development of adult learners is primarily reserved for school administrators, instructional coaches can still share in this responsibility by supporting, encouraging, and providing feedback to the adults invited to these roles of leadership by school administrators.

Overall Findings of Research Question 2. Overall, coaches reported time as the most significant barrier in their role, which critically impacts their ability to effectively engage the adult learners in their care in the four pillar practices of adult learning. Time constraints were noted by participants in all layers of this research and were attributed to the fact that instructional coaches serve multiple schools, an eclectic range of duties added to their plate that should not be the responsibility of an instructional coach, and the fact that their role is contingent on the principal's perception of the role of the instructional coach and how their time should be allocated. Additionally, instructional coaches can be limited by their own barriers that stem from lack of experience and time in the role.

Research Question 3: What Professional Development Needs, for Both Novice and Veteran Instructional Coaches, Can Be Identified?

The data collected that gave insight into the professional development needs for both novice and veteran instructional coaches are analyzed through the same constructive developmental lens on adult learning. Participant perceptions are again be presented through the four pillar practices of adult learning.

Mentoring. Drago-Severson (2009) recognized the significance in the pillar practice for adult learning and development as essential for new teachers and new principals and assistant principals, noting that adults construct knowledge from their experiences but often keep this knowledge to themselves. However, mentorship relationships allow for adults to share the knowledge they gain from their experiences which help absolve feelings of isolation, enhance reflectivity, and support professional development and growth in the context of a structured and meaningful partnership (Drago-Severson, 2009). It can be argued that adults transitioning from a teacher role into an instructional coach role can benefit from the same level of support a mentoring structure can provide.

Paralleling the ideas presented in the literature, the first layer of this research indicated an overall need for both formal and informal mentoring for instructional coaches, specifically for novice coaches as they acclimate to the role. Participants recognized the significance of a supportive team in the growth and development of novice coaches. More specifically, focus group data revealed more insight into the mentoring needs for new coaches, as participants explained the need for formal mentorships and shadowing experiences for new instructional coaches. Although it is reported that coaches in the district have not historically been assigned a mentor, participants recognized the significant impact the informal mentoring relationships had on their personal growth and development as an instructional coach. Subsequently, interview data collected reinforced the notion that instructional coaches, especially those new to the role, can benefit from formal and informal mentoring structures. Participants revealed that in the absence of being assigned a formal mentor, the team of instructional

coaches naturally develop mentoring supports for new coaches.

Teaming. Researchers in the field of adult learning and development highlight the pillar practice of teaming as a means by which collaborative cultures can be built and adults can share in the decision-making process (Drago-Severson, 2009). Additionally, it is recognized that teaming and building collegial relationships is not only important for teachers in a school system but is also important for other adults across and within the system, including administrators and instructional leadership.

The data extracted from this study paralleled the research cited by Drago-Severson (2009) that networks of professionals value the trusted relationships of the team, which allows for vulnerability and learning among the team members. Similarly, survey data indicated that coaches participating in this study value teaming and collaboration with other instructional coaches and yearn for more time to be allocated for structured teaming experiences. Likewise, collaboration and teaming was one of the strongest themes that emerged from focus group data revealing the value and emphasis coaches in the district place on teaming structures to support them in their role. Participants recognized the need for developing networks with each other through which experiences can be shared and problems can be solved in a collaborative setting. Specifically, participants pinpointed how teaming structures that allowed for time and space for coaches to engage in role-playing a variety of coaching scenarios would support them in their professional growth and development as an instructional coach. The one-on-one structured interview data collected reinforced the need for coaches to have more structured time for collaboration and collective problem-solving. Participants again recognized the benefits of the recent development of the JIG meetings the district

recently designed but echoed their perceived need for additional time for similar collaborative conversations.

Collegial Inquiry. The pillar practice of collegial inquiry requires personal reflection in the context of dialoguing with others (Drago-Severson, 2009). Drago-Severson (2009) recognized the importance for all adults to engage in collegial inquiry practices, reflecting privately on mistakes or missteps, and acknowledging them publicly among peers. It is clear that instructional coaches who participated in this study also perceived collegial inquiry practices as an important support to their growth and development as an effective and impactful instructional coach. Initially, the survey portion of this study did not give much insight into how collegial inquiry practices supported the professional development needs of instructional coaches. However, data collected through the focus group discussions revealed that coaches perceive collegial inquiry as a significant support and value reflection and dialogue with colleagues. Additionally, one-on-one interview data further supported the fact that coaches highly value time for reflective conversations with colleagues. Not only did participants report the value of collegial inquiry for novice coaches but also recognized the important role it can have in the continuous learning process for veteran coaches.

Leadership Roles. Instructional coaching by the nature of the role elevates individuals into roles of leadership such as providing professional development to teachers, engaging teachers in instructional dialogue, and providing instructional feedback. Drago-Severson (2009) detailed the following as teacher leadership roles in school settings:

- Delivering presentations

- Leading faculty meetings and/or professional development workshops
- Sharing ideas, learning, and expertise in informal ways
- Examining student work and teaching practices
- Mentoring and modeling for student interns
- Researching, adapting, and implementing models

Some may argue that the list presented by Drago-Severson could be synonymous with responsibilities that should be included in an instructional coach's job description. Therefore, the role of the coach itself distinguishes them as teacher leaders among other teachers in the district and multiplies the number of learning experiences through leadership opportunities. Drago-Severson (2009) explained that these experiences allow for firsthand experiences of leadership which broadens the perspective of individuals and fosters potential for personal growth.

Data produced by the data collection instruments designed to answer this research question did not directly reveal that instructional coaches perceive that the leadership experiences embedded in the role of the instructional coach play an important role in supporting them in their professional development needs. However, focus group data revealed that coaches perceive on-the-job experiences as one of the most impactful means by which instructional coaches grow in their skill as a coach. Because the role itself is a leadership position, it can be argued that coaches do grow in their coaching capacity through the experience of the leadership role of the job of the instructional coach.

While the role of the coach may essentially provide leadership experiences for coaches as a leader among teachers, there is another level of professional development in assuming leadership positions among groups of coaches, according to the literature.

However, there was no indication through the data collected (survey, focus group, or one-on-one interviews) in this study that instructional coaches perceived that assuming leadership roles among coaching colleagues assists in their own development as a coach and leader.

Overall Findings of Research Question 3. Overall, instructional coaches perceive that the pillar practices of mentorship structures, combined with teaming structures and reflective collegial inquiry practices, most support the growth and development of both novice and veteran instructional coaches. While it is implied through the nature of the role of the coach that assuming leadership roles contributes to the professional growth and development of coaches, the data were not explicit. Additionally, the results of this study did not suggest that coaches perceived that leading among coaching colleagues was a professional development support that was significant in their own development as a coach, although the literature claims that these experiences in leadership roles can broaden their professional capacity in their role as a coach.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study, grounded in the theoretical context of adult learning theory from a constructive developmental standpoint, may contribute to the overall understanding of the role of the instructional coach. Additionally, school districts can benefit from these findings by reexamining how instructional coaches are utilized and trained for the role, while considering the employment of structures designed to support the role of the coach. Institutions of higher education can also utilize the findings of this study to consider ways they might contribute to the improved development of educators interested in instructional coaching.

Job Descriptions

This study revealed a need for districts to have a shared understanding of the role of the coach and that the duties and responsibilities of instructional coaches should align to the overall purpose of their role. School districts can utilize the findings of this study to develop comprehensive job descriptions for instructional coaches that clearly define their role along with the duties and responsibilities that should be assigned to them in their role. The development of a formal job description for instructional coaches in the district will assist in eliminating ambiguity of the role and clearly distinguishing the role of the coach from the role of an administrator. Additionally, clarification of specific duties and responsibilities that should be associated with the role of the instructional coach will help districts avoid using the role for multiple purposes that are not aligned to supporting the adult learning needs in the district.

Intra-District Instructional Coach Preparation Programs

This study identified a gap in training for instructional coaches between their training and preparation for the role of the teacher and their training and preparation for the role of the instructional coach. Teachers transitioning to the role are specifically ill-prepared for the role in their understanding of adult learning theory and practice. Results revealed that professional development structures supporting coaches prior to their transition to the role of the instructional coach were limited. These findings suggested that school districts should reexamine how teacher leaders are groomed for the role of the instructional coach and develop professional development structures to support teachers transitioning to the role such as the development of intra-district instructional coaching academies that are designed around each of the four pillar practices that support adult

learning.

District Professional Development Structures for Instructional Coaches

Additionally, the research indicates a need for structured professional development for instructional coaches currently serving in the role. After the transition to the role, instructional coaches can continue to grow and develop their coaching practices from structured, set-aside time for collaboration and reflection combined with opportunities for them to take on leadership roles within the group. Data collected from participants in this study spotlighted the value that instructional coaches attribute to the district's recent development of the JIG meetings. Coaches pointed out that this time allows for intentional development of their skill set for instructional coaching, collaboration with other coaches facing similar issues in their role, and a shared time of reflection on their practice. It is recommended that districts design formal professional development opportunities on a regular and frequent basis that allow coaches to engage in the four pillar practices of adult learning which will assist them in continuing to build their capacity as an effective instructional coach.

Higher Education Instructional Coach Preparation Programs

This study also provided insight for institutions of higher education and schools of education that focus on preparing educators and educational leaders in K-12 school systems, as the findings revealed a gap in formal education and training for teachers interested in exploring a career path toward instructional coaching. Findings suggest that teachers who transition to the role of the instructional coach have limited opportunities to develop skill sets through intentionally designed programs of study specific to the development of an understanding of adult learning theory and practice, which the

literature implies is necessary for effective coaching. This study could help ignite conversations for institutions of higher education around the development of courses specifically designed to develop the capacity for educators exploring the world of instructional coaching. It is recommended that school districts and institutions of higher education develop partnerships by which professional development needs and gaps in training can be examined and explored, allowing a collaborative problem-solving approach for supporting the leaders of adult learning in K-12 schools.

Instructional Coach Mentorship Structures

Assigning novice coaches a veteran coach as a mentor can positively impact the growth and development of coaches who are new to the role, while simultaneously supporting the continued professional growth of the veteran coach serving the leadership capacity as the mentor. In alignment with adult learning theory, and as one of the four pillar practices for professional development, this study revealed the value in mentorship structures for new instructional coaches. Instructional coaches participating in this study expressed how valuable a mentor, whether formally assigned or informally assigned, was in their first years as a coach. Participants explained that having a person to whom they could pose questions and concerns, collaboratively problem solve with as needed, and guide them in reflection on their practice was helpful to them, especially in the formative years of their role.

Additionally, mentorships could open up opportunities for novice coaches to participate in shadowing experiences of their mentor coaches, which would allow for them to develop an understanding of the role firsthand. One participant explained that "the ability to go and watch them in action would be beneficial." This study revealed that

coaches new in their role often have a vague understanding of what is expected of them in the day-to-day functions of the role. Through mentorships, and shadowing specifically, novice coaches would have the opportunity to better understand how to structure their time in schools more effectively, pick up on strategies for dialoguing with teachers, and glean strategies to intentionally build relationships with teachers that will open doors for impactful coaching opportunities.

Limitations and Delimitations

The findings of this case study are limited to the district in which it was conducted. The small sample size of nine participants in a mid-size, rural school district in North Carolina restricts the findings from being generalizable for other districts and can only give a glimpse of the possible perceptions of instructional coaches in other districts and spark further research to explore these findings in a larger context.

It is also important to recognize that participants in this study could have a limited perspective on the role of coaching due to their limited experiences of the role outside the context of the district. Only one of the participants has experience teaching and coaching outside of the district in which this study was conducted, while eight of the nine have only served in this district for the entirety of their careers.

This study was designed to eliminate the influence of my authority as a district supervisor through the use of a proxy-researcher. However, it cannot be guaranteed that results were not minimally impacted by this fact. Additional research safeguards were maintained to provide as much anonymity for the participants as possible. Considering the small sample size of this study and my familiarity with the district and the participants, it cannot be guaranteed that the results of this study were not influenced on

some level by the participants possibly feeling that their anonymity was compromised to some extent.

Despite these limitations, this study has the potential to impact how districts define the role of instructional coaches, eliminate barriers to fulfilling their role, and provide meaningful professional development experiences to build capacity for coaches to support adult learners in their care. Additionally, the data collected through this study can be used for comparative analysis in future research.

Further Research

This study presents opportunities for further research related to instructional coaching. The replication of this study with a larger sample size and in a larger context (larger district or participants from multiple districts) would allow researchers the opportunity to compare findings to determine if the themes and conclusions drawn were unique to the district in which this study was conducted, or if findings could possibly be generalized to the larger population.

Additionally, considerations for further research would be to explore the perceptions of instructional coaches at different levels, elementary and secondary. This study included both participants who served as instructional coaches at the elementary level and coaches who served as instructional coaches at the secondary level. Novice coaches and veteran coaches participated in this study, and the data were not analyzed to compare perceptions of these two subgroups, which could also lead to further research opportunities.

One of the findings of this study was that the role of the building principal served as a significant variable in how the role of the instructional coach was defined. Future

research opportunities could further explore the relationship between principals and instructional coaches and investigate how the relationship dynamics impact the role of the instructional coach.

Additionally, this study revealed that instructional coach school assignments and allocations to schools are critical to the role. Data indicated that instructional coach assignments to schools impacted their role; however, the data were conflicting to some degree. Some participants indicated that serving more than one school was difficult and inhibited them from carrying out the role effectively because their services are spread too thin over multiple schools. Other participants indicated that they perceive the role of the coach can be enhanced when they serve more than one school because it allows for them to observe a variety of teaching practices and it somewhat protects them from developing a mindset that is congruent with just one school culture. Some participants claimed that serving in more than one school gave them a larger lens through which they could view teaching and learning. Further research could explore these conflicting perceptions and develop a more in-depth understanding of factors district leaders should consider when allocating coaching positions to schools.

Furthermore, this study strictly investigated the self-perceptions of instructional coaches on their role. Perceptions of administrators and teachers on the role and functions of the instructional could also be explored through future research to compare findings to those of this study and other studies that were designed to concentrate solely on the perceptions of the instructional coach.

Conclusions

Instructional coaching has the potential to be a catalyst for significant school

improvement and increased student achievement through the intentional and strategic growth and development they can foster in teachers in their care. However, if the role is not clearly defined and grounded in research that is aligned to best practices in adult learning and if individuals lack the skill set and training needed for effective coaching, the value of instructional coaches can be significantly diminished. This study unveiled components of the role of the instructional coach that are significant in effectively developing and growing the professional capacity of teachers, barriers instructional coaches encounter in their journey to learn the role and effectively carry out the role, and the professional development structures coaches need to be effective in their role.

Ultimately, this study has produced data that has led to recommendations and conclusions for schools to more effectively and efficiently reap the benefits of instructional coaching. Through research-based, job-embedded professional development, instructional coaches can be a key factor in leading school systems to improving district-wide instructional practices, resulting in improved student learning outcomes.

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Appendix A

North Carolina Mentor Standards

North Carolina Mentor Standards Overview

Standard 1: Mentors Support Beginning Teachers to Demonstrate Leadership – Mentors utilize effective communication skills to establish quality professional and confidential relationships with beginning teachers to impart knowledge of ethical standards, instructional best practice, and leadership opportunities. Key elements of the standard include building trusting relationships and coaching, promoting leadership, facilitating communication and collaboration, sharing best practices, imparting ethical standards and advocating for beginning teachers and their students.

Standard 2: Mentors Support Beginning Teachers to Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students – Mentors support beginning teachers to develop strong relationships with all learners, their parents or guardians, and the community through reflective practice on issues of equity and diversity. Key elements of the standard include supporting relationships with students, families, peers and the community, honoring and respecting diversity, creating classroom environments that optimize learning, and reaching students of all learning needs.

Standard 3: Mentors Support Beginning Teachers to Know the Content They Teach – Mentors have strong knowledge of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) and 21st century goals and assist beginning teachers

in the utilization of these tools to promote student achievement. Key elements of the standard include imparting and utilizing the NCSCOS and 21st century goals into beginning teacher practice. **Standard 4: Mentors Support Beginning Teachers to Facilitate Learning for Their Students -** Mentors support beginning teachers in their understanding and use of student assessment tools to drive student achievement. Mentors also support beginning teachers to understand their professional licensure obligations and pursue professional growth. Key elements of the standard include developing and improving instructional and professional practice and understanding and analyzing student assessment data.

Standard 5: Mentors Support Beginning Teachers to Reflect on Their Practice - Mentors continually work on improving their mentoring and observation skills to improve their effectiveness with beginning teacher support. Key elements of the standard include allocating and using time with beginning teachers, developing reflective practitioners and gathering data on beginning teacher practice.

Appendix B

Letter of Support from District Superintendent

Letter of Support to Conduct Research

To the Institutional Review Board of Gardner-Webb University:

Karen Auton has fully explained the research she intends to conduct in Burke County Public Schools titled, *A Case Study on the Roles, Responsibilities, and Professional Development Needs of Instructional Coaches*.

I understand that this project will entail surveying and interviewing employees of _____Public Schools.

Throughout the research, I understand and agree to the following:

- The research will be carried out following sound ethical principles as approved by the University's Institutional Review Board.
- Employment participation will be strictly voluntary and will not have an impact on an employee's employability or workplace conditions.
- There will be no adverse employment consequences as a result of participation or non-participation in this study.
- Data collected will remain confidential to the extent possible in accordance with State and Federal laws.
- The name of our organization will not be published or reported in the results of this study.

As a representative of _____ Public Schools, I give consent for Karen Auton's research project to be conducted in the school district, involving school district employees. Karen Auton has my support to ensure employees that participate in this study is voluntary throughout the research process and is free from adverse job-related consequences for participation or non-participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Superintendent
_____ Public Schools

Appendix C

Participant Informed Consent Form

Research Project title: A Case Study on the Self-Perceived Professional Development Needs of Instructional Coaches
Principal Investigator: Karen D. Auton
Department: Educational Leadership - Gardner-Webb University
Contact Information: Dr. Stephen Laws

Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider About this Research

I agree to participate in this research project, which is to investigate the professional development needs as perceived by those serving in the role of an instructional coach. The results of this in-depth study will be used to develop topics of discussion and exploration for school districts to consider in regard to professional development for instructional coaches. The ultimate goal is to develop a concise job description for the instructional coach that parallels a professional development structure to support those serving in the role to be effective in carrying out the duties outlined in the job description.

Eleven instructional coaches will be approached to serve as participants in this qualitative, case study within the school district, with the expectation that at least 10 will participate. Each interview will last approximately sixty to ninety minutes. The interviews will be held away from the participants' own schools. It is hypothesized that conducting interviews in a neutral location will alleviate fears of appearing unprepared for the principalship. Since the interviews will be in a different location, participants may be more apt to give honest answers.

Initially, an online, selected response survey will be given to participants using Google Forms. Next, instructional coaches participating in the study will be participate in one 90 minute focus group interview. To fully triangulate the data, a third phase of data collection will begin after survey data and focus group interview data are analyzed. This phase will include individual interviews that will be conducted to mine the data collected and to drill even deeper into the survey responses and focus group conversation themes. For this study, a semi-structured interview will be conducted with 5 participants, allowing some flexibility but maintaining structure around the three driving research questions. A list of guiding questions will be developed after focus group data is coded and analyzed. These questions will be asked, as will follow-up questions that might not be part of the guiding questions.

I understand the interview will be about themes associated with the perceptions of instructional coaches that will lead to a more complete picture in determining the perceived professional development needs in the context of the perceived job responsibilities of an instructional coach.

I understand that there *are no foreseeable risks* associated with my participation. I also know this study may be shared with administrators, superintendents, surrounding school districts, and institutions of higher education.

I understand that the interview(s) and the focus group sessions will be audio recorded and may be published. I understand that the audio recordings of my interview may be used to develop professional development for instructional coaches and to inform a comprehensive job description for the instructional coach if I sign the authorization below.

I understand if I sign the authorization at the end of this consent form, photos may be taken during the study and used in scientific presentations of the research findings.

I understand I will not receive compensation for the interview.

I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and there are no consequences if I choose not to participate. I also understand that I do not have to answer any questions and can terminate participation in this research at any time with no consequences.

Please initial one option below:

_____ *I request that my name <u>not</u> be used in connection with tapes, transcripts, photographs or publications resulting from this interview.*

_____ *I request that my name <u>be used</u> in connection with tapes, transcripts, photographs or publications resulting from this interview.*

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have read this form, had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and received satisfactory answers, and want to participate. I understand I can keep a copy for my records.

_____

Participant's Name (PRINT)

_____ _____

Signature **Date**

By proceeding with the activities described above, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the research procedures outlined in this consent form, and voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

***[If applicable]* Photography and Video Recording Authorization**

With your permission, still pictures (photos) and/or video recordings taken during the study may be used in research presentations of the research findings. Please indicate whether or not you agree to having photos or videos used in research presentations by reviewing the authorization below and sign if you agree.

Authorization

I hereby release, discharge and agree to save harmless Gardner-Webb University, its successors, assigns, officers, employees or agents, any person(s) or corporation(s) for whom it might be acting, and any firm publishing and/or distributing any photograph or video footage produced as part of this research, in whole or in part, as a finished product, from and against any liability as a result of any distortion, blurring, alteration, visual or auditory illusion, or use in composite form, either intentionally or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the recording, processing, reproduction, publication or distribution of any photograph, videotape, or interview, even should the same subject me to ridicule, scandal, reproach, scorn or indignity. I hereby agree that the photographs and video footage may be used under the conditions stated herein without blurring my identifying characteristics.

_____ _____

Participant's Name (PRINT) **Signature**

Appendix D

Two-Part Survey Instrument

Instructional Coach Survey

Part I - Open-Ended Response

1. How many years have you served in the role as an instructional coach?

2. How many years did you serve as a classroom teacher prior to your role as an instructional coach?

3. What formal professional development experiences helped prepared you for the role of the instructional coach prior to taking on the role?

4. What informal professional development experiences have prepared you for the role of the instructional coach prior to taking on the role?

5. What formal professional development experiences have helped you in your role as an instructional coach since taking on the role?

6. What informal professional development experiences have helped you in your role as an instructional coach since taking on the role?

7. What kind of professional development needs do novice instructional coaches (Years 1-3 in the role) have?

8. What professional development needs do veteran instructional coaches (3+ years in the role) have?

9. Rank the following skills that you believe are most important in your role with one being the most important and ten being the least important:

- Ability to provide instructional feedback
- Having a solid understanding of content knowledge
- Having a solid understanding of pedagogical strategies
- Proficiency with the use of instructional technology
- Ability to build trusting relationships with peers
- Presentation skills for delivering professional development
- Organization
- Having a solid understanding of adult learning theory
- Facilitating teaming
- Proficient skills in analyzing and interpreting data

10. In your role as an instructional coach, which of the following activities or duties are included in your role… (Check all that apply)

- Observing teachers
- Co-teaching
- Providing professional development
- Facilitating meetings
- Facilitating planning
- Facilitating data discussions
- Sharing instructional resources
- Evaluating curriculum and instructional resources
- Mentoring teachers
- Fidelity monitoring of instructional programs
- Monitoring lesson planning
- Conducting walk-throughs
- Providing instructional feedback to teachers
- Managerial tasks (i.e., textbook inventories, collecting information, running reports, etc.)
- Assisting teachers in using instructional technology
- Covering classes
- Assisting in district-level events

11. What other duties or tasks are associated with your role as an instructional coach?

12. Which duties identified above do you feel are most significant to your work as an instructional coach?

13. Which duties take up the largest portion of your time in your role as an instructional coach?

14. What has been the most challenging for you in the role of the instructional coach. Please explain your answer.

15. What roadblocks have you faced in your role as an instructional coach?

16. Describe your level of preparedness for the role of the instructional coach using the following scale, and explain:
1 = ***Very prepared*** **2 =** ***Adequately Prepared*** **3=** ***Somewhat Prepared*** **4=** ***Not Prepared***

Part 2 - Likert Rating Scales

Use the following 6-point Likert scale for the following statements...
1 - strongly disagree
2 - disagree
3 - somewhat disagree
4 - somewhat agree
5 - agree
6 - strongly agree

- My formal pre-service experiences have prepared me for the role of the instructional coach.
- My informal pre-service experiences have prepared me for the role of the instructional coach.
- An instructional coach should have a master's degree or higher before entering the role.
- An instructional coach should be a National-Board Certified Teacher.
- An instructional coach should have a history of being "effective" according to a value-added model (i.e., EVAAS)
- Formative, instructional feedback is difficult for me to give to teachers.
- I lack a firm conceptual understanding of sound, research-based instructional practices.
- I am uncomfortable with potential conflict that may come from feedback conversations.
- I struggle with finding time during the instructional day to spend time in classrooms.
- Teachers value the formative, instructional feedback I provide them.
- Novice teachers reach out to me for help frequently.
- Veteran teachers reach out to me for help frequently.
- I struggle with developing relationships with teachers.
- I have a firm understanding of adult learning theory and strategies.
- I have a firm understanding of content knowledge associated with the content and grade levels I serve in my role as an instructional coach.
- I have a clear understanding of my role as an instructional coach.
- I have a clear understanding of the standards on which I am evaluated.
- Others in my district (Principals and teachers) have a clear understanding of my role as an instructional coach.
- My role is different based on the school in which I am serving.
- My role can sometimes look like an administrative role in schools.

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol Instrument

Instructional Coach Focus Group Protocol

- Welcome Participants and thank them for participating in this research.

- Describe the Purpose of the Discussion
  The purpose of today's discussion is to explore the following research questions from the perspective of an instructional coach:
    - *RQ1: What are the self-perceived roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach?*
    - *RQ2: What barriers have instructional coaches encountered in their role and in carrying out their responsibilities?*
    - *RQ3: What professional development needs, for both novice and veteran instructional coaches, can be identified?*

- Establish Guidelines for the Discussion:
    - We have allocated a 90 minute block of time for this discussion
    - No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view.
    - We are recording, one person speaking at a time. Because we will be transcribing the conversation it is important that only one voice is speaking at one time.
    - My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion.
    - Remember this is a conversation, and you should feel free to talk with one another and not just respond directly to the moderator.
    - Remember that participation is strictly voluntary. If at any time you wish to discontinue your participation in the focus group conversation, you should feel free to leave.

Discussion/Interview Probes-

1. All survey participants ranked the skill of "building trusting relationships with peers" as one of the top two skills needed in the role of the instructional coach. What does a coach need in order to develop this skill? ***RQ1***

2. What are the qualities of the most meaningful professional development experiences for instructional coaches? (What do you need now, that you are in this role, to continue to grow in your professional practices?) ***RQ3***

3. Providing professional development and giving feedback to teachers were mentioned frequently as significant duties to your role as an instructional coach. What has helped you develop the skills needed for these duties? What do you think would be helpful in sharpening the skills of instructional coaches to more effectively carry out these duties? ***RQ1 & RQ2***

4. How could your role be altered to help alleviate the "time" pressures that many mentioned as difficulties encountered in fulfilling the duties of the role of instructional coach? ***RQ1***

5. How could the district help coaches and administrators develop a common understanding of the role of the coach? ***RQ1***

6. In what ways does the role of the instructional coach cross over into an administrative role? How can this be alleviated, or should it be alleviated? ***RQ1***

7. What pre-service experiences do instructional coaches need to be more prepared for the role? ***RQ3***

8. What other barriers have you encountered in your role that we have not discussed, and how might those be mitigated? ***RQ2***

- Thank the group for their participation in today's conversation.
- Remind them that all information provided during today's conversation will remain confidential.
- It is important that all participants respect the confidentiality of the other participants of today's conversation by not sharing about the responses provided by others.
- If you would be willing to participate in a one on one interview as the third layer of this research, please notify the moderator before leaving today.
- Invite them to take candy/snacks with them as they leave.

Appendix F

One-on-One Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

One-on-One Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Research Questions:

- RQ1: What are the self-perceived roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach?
- RQ2: What barriers have instructional coaches encountered in their role and in carrying out their responsibilities?
- RQ3: What professional development needs, for both novice and veteran instructional coaches, can be identified?

RQ1:

1. Why is building relationships so important to the role of the instructional coach?
2. What causes the role of the instructional coach to be so ambiguous and how could the role be made clearer and more consistent?
3. How important is it that instructional coaches have content expertise and why?
4. Describe the significance that "providing feedback to teachers" plays in the role of the instructional coach?
5. What skills does an instructional coach need to facilitate effective discussions and conversations with teachers?

RQ2:

6. The lack of "time" was noted as a significant barrier often faced by instructional coaches. In what ways does the lack of time impact the degree to which an instructional coach carries out the responsibilities associated with the role?
7. School assignment was noted as a significant barrier for instructional coaches through focus group discussions. What variables should be considered when assigning instructional coaches to schools?
8. What contributes to the lack of communication of expectations that was noted by instructional coaches as a significant barrier and what could be implemented to alleviate this barrier?
9. Explain how programs and initiatives create barriers in fulfilling the role of the instructional coach?

RQ3:

10. Time for instructional coaches to collaborate was identified as a professional development need for coaches. Describe how time for collaboration could be designed to best support the professional development needs of instructional coaches.
11. In thinking about the professional development needs of both veteran and novice instructional coaches, how significant is collegial inquiry (time to talk with other coaches)?

12. How helpful could a formal mentorship structure be for instructional coaches to grow professionally in their role?

13. Experience and “on-the-job” training were noted as significant sources of professional development. Explain why experience and “on-the-job” training are essential to growing an instructional coach’s professional practice and how could these experiences be simulated for coaches without varied experiences?

14. The following topics were mentioned as significant topics for ongoing professional development through focus group interviews: Curriculum updates, updates on district, state and national education initiatives, navigating difficult conversations and providing feedback, adult learning theory, and instructional technology. Of these topics mentioned, which one is the most important to growing the professional practices of instructional coaches and why?