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## Sustainable Instructional Coaching in Secondary Education

Laura Kniffen

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Sustainable Instructional Coaching in Secondary Education

Laura Kniffen

Northwestern College

A Literature Review Presented

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Education

April 19, 2020

Dr. Ashley Nashleanas

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### Abstract

With higher demands for student achievement and teacher efficacy, school districts have shifted from traditional professional development methods to instructional coaching. This literature review presents research on various models and analyzes the challenges that districts have discovered upon implementation. There are many factors that influence instructional coaches' effectiveness, yet their flexibility and collaborative skills remain among the most important. In all models, instructional coaches must adapt to each teachers' needs and juggle the variety of roles they are asked to fulfill. To help instructional coaches distribute their time effectively, research shows that districts must provide clear direction and support for instructional coaches, especially at the secondary level. Therefore, I intend for this literature review to provide insight on how to adapt established instructional coaching models to improve their sustainability and effectiveness for secondary educators.

### Sustainable Instructional Coaching in Secondary Education

Change is difficult, especially when considering systemic change that impacts multiple aspects of a person's career. Nevertheless, school districts are constantly evolving. Whether it is curriculum, grading expectations, or any other district reform, research shows that traditional professional development methods often leave teachers feeling unprepared to implement these changes. In fact, Kraft and Blazer (2016) suggest that there is little evidence that supports traditional professional development methods and their promotion of *any* systemic reform.

On the contrary, coaching has long been proven to positively impact professionals in a variety of settings. Even though there are several coaching models, all are contingent on a job-embedded, healthy working relationship that sustains individualized feedback and support (Killion & Harrison, 2017; Knight, 2007; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014). Whether analyzing the impact of a coach on an athlete's performance or a teacher's efficacy, relationships and collaboration are at the center of each coaching model. Knight emphasizes that an instructional coach's success is contingent on a partnership where both members are mutually responsible for identifying interventions, transforming together, and sharing ideas. Considering research emphasizes student-teacher relationships and their impact on achievement, it should come to no surprise that teachers, too, are more successful when they have this supportive, working relationship with an experienced educator.

Many schools have already moved away from traditional professional development methods. According to Knight (2007), their poor design is possibly the origin of teacher resistance toward systemic change. Yet, research suggests that instructional coaching models can be just as ambiguous. For example, Kraft and Blazer (2016) suggest that many developed

coaching programs focus on elementary education or literacy programs, leaving out other content areas and secondary programs. Moreover, there is little research describing how accomplished coaches actually work with teachers while balancing the many other roles that are placed on them (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Kane & Rosenquist, 2019). While Killion and Harrison (2017) argue that coaches must be flexible and capable of filling multiple roles simultaneously, research shows that coaches are spending a fraction of their time working directly with teachers. In Deussen et al.'s (2007) study of Reading First, a literacy-based coaching approach, they found that instructional coaches spent an average of 28 percent of their time with teachers. Unfortunately, other studies mirror these findings, indicating that coaches spend only 15 percent of their 40-hour workweek directly working with teachers on instruction. Whether due to demands placed on them by the building, district, or state, instructional coaches lack the time to adequately develop this partnership that Knight indicates as the most imperative part of their job.

So, while more and more districts invest in instructional coaches, fewer teachers are reaping the benefits because clearly, “there is a difference between being a coach and *doing coaching*” (Deussen et al., 2007, p. 5). This distinction is incredibly important to consider when evaluating the efficacy of a coaching program and advocating for funding. With many coaching models to consider, Mangin and Dunsmore (2014) advise that districts do not expect the sheer implementation of any coaching program to directly impact teacher efficacy and student achievement. Instead, they suggest that districts clearly define the coaches’ roles and help them gauge their distribution of time. Furthermore, districts must consider how they will train, support, and evaluate coaches. While research is still ongoing, Reddy et al. (2018) have developed one assessment model that offers performance-based feedback for instructional

coaches, fostering their growth and talents. With improvements, this tool has the potential to provide data that correlates a coach's practices with teacher efficacy and student achievement.

Even though there are many influencing factors that impact the success of an instructional coach, this literature review will examine the most commonly researched models, both at the elementary and secondary levels. By comparing their design and practices and evaluating the roles of instructional coaches, this review will discuss future implications for instructional coaching specifically at the secondary level.

### **Literature Review**

Looking back at public education reform, there is a clear disconnect between efforts, funding, and student achievement. Despite the increase and expansion of professional development spending, Roy (2019) claims that students still struggle to meet the demands of post-secondary education, and many professionals in the workforce attest to under qualified employees regarding basic mathematics and reading skills. While some place blame on student apathy or outside factors that impact a student's academic performance, the reality remains the same: education is not keeping up with the pace and demands of our ever-changing world.

In response to the failing efforts of traditional professional development, Kraft and Blazer (2017) argue that stakeholders should refocus their attention on teaching practices. However, teaching is a profession closely tied to personal beliefs and identity, making it more delicate to confront. Considering this tight-knit, vulnerable connection, Kraft and Blazer suggest that instructional leaders work within the teacher's classroom context. By doing so, research indicates that teachers are more willing to openly share and implement new ideas. To extend the impact of instructional coaching beyond one classroom, honest communication and effective collaboration

are key. Keeping in mind individual school culture, Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) advocate for a system-wide approach that establishes coherence within a district and includes shared agreements, otherwise known as collective capacity. This shift from a traditional, one-size-fits-all professional development approach to one that is sustained over a long period of time, focused on collaboration, and provides for personalized job-embedded feedback is known as instructional coaching (Killion & Harrison, 2017; Knight, 2007).

One common concern regarding instructional coaching is how to identify which model corresponds best with a district's goals. There is limited research on content specific coaching beyond literacy and math, and leaders continue to debate whether coaching should be directive or reflective (Deussen et al., 2007; Gross, 2010; Wilder, 2014). However, districts that have implemented instructional coaching report that both principals and teachers alike attest to improvements in behavior management and student achievement (Killion & Harrison, 2017; Knight, 2007; Kraft & Blazer, 2017; Roy, 2019). Students also report that teachers who worked with instructional coaches challenged them with more rigorous materials and higher expectations. Research finds that both of these teaching methods positively impact academic achievement. Despite this qualitative data, Kraft and Blazer underscore that there is mixed evidence regarding which instructional coaching model is most effective. Likewise, Deussen et al. argue that a clearer definition of instructional coaching is required before it can be directly tied to student achievement. Considering their research found that some instructional coaches within the same districts defined their work in vastly different ways, Deussen et al. emphasize this need for a detailed, transparent job description. Expanding research to clarify the daily roles of instructional coaches and their impact on systemic change will help offset yet another common argument against instructional coaching: funding.



Beyond the many discrepancies in instructional coaching models, the cost also makes it difficult to promote. Many districts find that because of the individualized and cyclical nature of instructional coaching models, it simply is not cost efficient or pragmatic (Kraft & Blazer, 2012; Roy, 2019). Research places most instructional coaching models at 6 to 12 times more expensive than traditional approaches to professional development. Knight (2012) found that what appears to be most expensive are the coaches' salaries and the hidden cost of collaborating teachers' salaried non-contact time with students. In his study, he presents evidence that allocates a minimum of 10 to 15 teachers per coach per year as the most cost-effective approach that still has a positive impact on teacher efficacy and student achievement. In order to better distribute costs, Gross (2010) recommends that districts need an instructional coaching model that could be implemented across a variety of grade levels and contents. Research also advocates for instructional coaching models that empower distributive leadership and professional learning communities to offset the cost of individualized instructional coaching models (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Knight, 2007; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014; Many et al., 2018). Therefore, it is best to evaluate how coaches can most effectively use their time, distribute leadership, and optimize professional learning communities within an instructional coaching model.

### **Literacy-Based Coaching**

While No Child Left Behind (2001) and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (2010) are often held responsible for the notion that *all* teachers are reading teachers, Wepner et al. (2014) suggest that this movement dates back to the 1960s. At that time, it became clear that language and literacy development could not cease at the elementary level. As texts become more complex, Wepner et al. contend that students need explicit and continued instruction in how to use reading as a mode of learning. This shift in reading instruction further

developed into what is now known as content or disciplinary literacy. According to Wepner et al., content literacy instruction is more than just setting a purpose for reading; it also cultivates the students' abilities to write, think, and learn, using the text as a guide. Traditional teaching methods such as reading the textbook and answering narrow, text-based questions are no longer acceptable methods for literacy-based instruction. Gross (2010) echoes this belief by describing how literacy has once again transformed in the twenty-first century. Now, literacy not only includes how students comprehend and communicate their understanding of a text through reading and writing, but it also includes literacy modes such as speaking, listening, viewing, and using technology. Unfortunately, Wepner et al. indicate that secondary teachers still do not receive adequate training in reading instruction, causing them to feel unprepared to implement strategies that would promote literacy development in the twenty-first century. Hence, the development and demand for literacy-based coaches.

While literacy-based coaching models exhibit similar qualities and practices of other instructional coaching models, Gross (2010) distinguishes them as coaches who specifically promote multiple modes of literacy and learning as to inspire student curiosity through inquiry and problem-solving. At both the elementary and the secondary level, literacy-based coaches help teachers intertwine literacy into individualized content lessons. These coaches demonstrate strategies that will not only develop literacy skills, but also prompt students to form meaningful connections and understandings of the content. By emphasizing vocabulary development, modeling close reading, providing opportunities for expressive writing, and promoting active student oral discussion, Gross argues that literacy-based coaches provide the support that many secondary content area teachers need in order to enhance their content literacy instruction.

In their research, Matsumura et al. (2012) delve deeper into Content-Focused Coaching®, a program that supports a comprehensive literacy-based coaching model. Even though the program originally was designed for mathematics and then adapted to elementary literacy, it has now evolved into a discussion-based approach to comprehension instruction that extends across grade levels and content areas. The study provides evidence that Content-Focused Coaching® can support students of all ages to apply higher level cognitive skills in classroom discourse. According to Gross (2010), this higher-level thinking is a result of literacy-based teaching strategies that inspire critical thinking and creativity in all content areas. However, two other contributing factors are especially important to consider when evaluating the impact of literacy-based coaching at the secondary level: pedagogical expertise and teacher participation. Gross reiterates that the success of literacy coaching reflects the coaches' abilities to intervene uniquely with each teacher, promoting a more collaborative school culture.

### **Content-Based Coaching**

Even though it was not an easy sell, Gross (2010) finds that on-site literacy-based instructional coaching received more praise from secondary educators than traditional professional development methods. According to Gross, this model of instructional coaching fostered genuine, open-ended discussions about curriculum and facilitated a more collaborative culture within the building. However, Wepner et al. (2014) describe some unique obstacles at secondary level including the number of students per teacher and the departmentalization of curriculum. To avoid resorting to remedial reading strategies, Wepner et al. describe specific literacy performances for each content area in hopes that this instructional coaching strategy highlights the intertwining of disciplinary knowledge and language development. They also suggest literacy-based instructional coaches to develop expertise in one specific content area,

thoroughly understand content-specific standards, and have experience working with adolescents in order to be effective and increase buy-in from secondary educators.

Bearing in mind this unique challenge at the secondary level, Wilder (2014) delves further into the impact of an instructional coach who is a “disciplinary outsider.” In his study, Wilder evaluates literacy-based coaching practices and their impact on a high school Algebra classroom. He found that the coach’s limited experience in the discipline could potentially provide insight for student learning needs. According to Wilder, experienced secondary teachers may struggle to remember the difficulties of the content, especially when applying a literacy lens. Therefore, in contrast to Wepner et al. (2014), Wilder suggests that the lack of content knowledge could in fact strengthen the partnership. Because the instructional coach in Wilder’s study was able to set aside his ego and depend on the knowledge and experiences of the cooperating teacher, they collaborated and capitalized on each other’s expertise.

Based on Wilder’s (2014) findings, not all research directly connects an instructional coach’s content knowledge to their success with secondary educators. In fact, Gibbons and Cobb (2017) agree that a coach’s lack of experience in a specific content area could provoke a much-needed disciplinary inquiry that deepens teachers’ understanding of standards and curricula design. Rather than providing all the knowledge, Gibbons and Cobb suggest inquiry-based activities to help secondary instructional coaches overcome the challenge of being “disciplinary outsiders.” Much like the practices illustrated in Wilder’s study, Gibbons and Cobb support cognitive coaching methods that place the teacher back in the role of a student. This reflective exercise provides insight to student learning needs and guides teachers to integrate more student-centered practices. However, research shows that success in this instructional coaching method heavily depends on an effective use of time, a complex challenge for all instructional coaches.

## Coaching Roles

Whereas there is substantial research that advocates for both literacy and content-based instructional coaching at the secondary level, there is great variety in what these jobs actually entail. Matsumura and Wang (2014) contend that this open interpretation of instructional coaching at the secondary level impedes the potential impact of any program. According to Deussen et al. (2007), districts struggle to appropriately distribute roles among secondary instructional coaches, leaving them feeling inadequate or overwhelmed. Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) suggest that districts and buildings be wary of this ambiguity as it can quickly lead to similar consequences of traditional professional development methods. To ensure the efficiency of instructional coaching at the secondary level, researchers set out to identify and define the most essential roles and practices for instructional coaches.

Cognizant of the challenges specific to secondary education, the first role that Gibbons and Cobb (2017) suggest for content-focused instructional coaches is that of a curriculum specialist. Since research has proven that instructional coaches should not depend solely on their expertise, Gibbons and Cobb suggest that instructional coaches capitalize on their cooperating teachers' content knowledge. Facilitating a respectful discussion that compels teachers to justify and explain their content requires them to honestly assess their curriculum rather than just implement it. Killion and Harrison (2017) also attest to the importance of this role as it helps the instructional coach establish their mutual, trusting relationship with secondary teachers. Without this credibility, instructional coaches may struggle to build a partnership and gravitate toward other, less effective roles such as a resource provider. Whereas these other roles may be useful in some contexts, according to Kane and Rosenquist (2019), they do not provide space for teachers to reevaluate their curriculum design and analyze the foundation of their instruction.

Both Killion and Harrison (2017) and Gibbons and Cobb (2017) acknowledge that effective instructional coaches partake in this curriculum specialist role simultaneously with that of an instructional specialist. They argue that as instructional specialists, coaches build a teacher's capacity to select instructional methodologies that align with specific reforms or adjust them to meet their students' learning needs. While some teachers can identify best practice strategies, they still struggle to decipher when and how to implement them within their standard curriculum. According to Killion and Harrison, this role helps fill gaps of teacher preparation programs and transfers theory into practice. Coaches who act as instructional specialists conduct lesson studies, guide backwards planning, and facilitate professional learning communities. Gibbons and Cobb indicate that these activities also combat teacher isolation, promote a common language among teachers and instructional coaches, and align with Knight's (2007) goals of developing self-directed leaders that value collective capacity.

According to Gibbons and Cobb (2017), both the curriculum and instructional specialist roles prioritize making teaching more public. To further promote this idea, they suggest using classroom videos to guide discussions or lesson studies. They claim that this practice not only encourages collaboration, but it also inspires honest reflections about the realities of the classroom. Killion and Harrison (2017) refer to this role as a classroom supporter where the coach is present in the room with the teacher and students. To ensure that teachers do not view this as an evaluation, Woulfin and Rigby (2017) and Knight (2007) emphasize the importance of balancing constructive feedback with praise in order to not damage the partnership. Since this role places teachers in a vulnerable state and is most effective when implemented on a cycle, Killion and Harrison suggest both instructional coaches receive specific training to effectively implement this practice. Therefore, this role may be the most time-consuming and challenging to

implement; yet, Killion and Harrison argue that it has the greatest potential to directly impact teacher efficacy and student learning.

To complement the use of classroom videos and further publicize best teaching practices, Gibbons and Cobb (2017) advise instructional coaches to examine student work with their cooperating teachers. Again, in efforts to fill gaps of traditional teaching preparation, Killion and Harrison (2017) stress that instructional coaches must support teachers through each step of the data analysis process. If not, the discussion may solely focus on correct and incorrect answers rather than student reasoning and thinking. Gibbons and Cobb echo these findings and emphasize that instructional coaches must be purposeful in the data they select in order to identify gaps in learning and instruction. Deussen et al. (2007) cite that this practice convinced teachers that change was needed and fostered more collaboration among team members. Therefore, by placing student work at the center of inquiry-based discussions and reform, instructional coaches are better equipped to address the resistance to change often found at the secondary level.

While research suggests that these four roles (curriculum specialist, instructional specialist, classroom supporter, and data coach) are most likely to impact teacher efficacy and student achievement at the secondary level, simply naming them will not determine success. In fact, Matsumura et al. (2012) claim that even when roles are defined at the district level and instructional coaches are provided training, instructional coaches are still spread thin. In their research, Matsumura et al. discovered that only 16 of the 54 teachers in the Content Focused Coaching® program received coaching in all the intended practices. Needless to say, reducing the amount of coaching roles and clearly aligning them to district goals is only the first step to enhance a coach's efficacy. Matsumura and Wang (2014) suggest that this uncertainty in program design leads to a high rate of coach turnover, which hinders the effectiveness of any

coaching program. Therefore, to avoid this turnover and burnout, research also suggests that school districts must evaluate each building's culture and professional learning community in order to effectively design an instructional coaching program for secondary teachers.

### **Building-Level Expectations**

While many instructional coaching programs are designed at the district level, Knight (2015) suggests that a building's culture and leadership are just as imperative to a coach's success. To further analyze this relationship, Kane and Rosenquist (2019) explore how one school district's variety of policies and expectations at both the district and building level impact an instructional coach's distribution of time. In search of the most effective model at the secondary level, their study compares the roles of three different coaching models: a district-hired coach who works in several schools, a district-hired, school-based coach who works in one school, and a school-hired coach who works in one school. After two years of collecting data, they conclude that coaches hired at the building-level develop a closer relationship with their principals and staff. While this trust is conducive to instructional coaching, many school-hired coaches reveal that they were often assigned duties unrelated to instructional improvement. In fact, school-hired coaches report working directly with teachers only 43% of the time. Even when a principal acknowledged that an instructional coach's most important role is to support teachers, they often distributed administrative responsibilities to school-hired coaches, taking time away from their schedule to impact instruction.

In addition to the implications of the school-hired coaches, Kane and Rosenquist's (2019) also suggest that principals impact district-hired coaches. Regardless of the fact that district-hired coaches report spending up to 92% of their time directly working with teachers, they describe feelings of marginalization when working in schools. According to Kane and Rosenquist, this



was most likely a result of infrequent visits and a lack of communication with principals. Because they did not directly report to the principals, district-hired instructional coaches confess that it was difficult to build relationships and influence school improvement plans. Rather than working with all teachers, principals often assigned district-hired coaches to new or struggling teachers. Unfortunately, by narrowing the scope of their work, coaches found it more difficult to fulfill their assigned coaching roles, achieve district and building goals, and carry out coaching practices such as a lesson study or horizontal curriculum alignment.

Like Knight (2015), Kane and Rosenquist argue that building principals heavily influence an instructional coach's effectiveness. Therefore, regardless of whether a coach is literacy-based or content-based, hired by the district or by the school, principals must hold themselves accountable for a coach's success. They can do this by coordinating and negotiating the coaches' roles with the district leadership. In their research, Matsumura et al. (2012) assert that a principal's commitment to the instructional coaching program can facilitate the design and goals of the district. By inviting principals to attend instructional coach training, they are more likely to support coaches in their buildings, allocate time for teachers to meet with coaches, and even release teachers of other professional duties as needed.

In his evaluation of the cost of instructional coaching, Knight (2012) also emphasizes the impact of school leaders on an instructional coaching program. He designates more or less an hour a week for coaches to meet with principals, reiterating its importance. Furthermore, he describes how administrative buy-in influences the distribution of other instructional coaching costs. Since design and cost go hand and hand, Knight argues that principals who foster collaborative culture are more likely to optimize the cost of their instructional coach. If coaches lack this support from principals, specifically at the secondary level, they find it more difficult to

efficiently meet with groups of teachers. Therefore, whether an instructional coach is working district- or building-wide, they must work in harmony with principals.

### **Coaching Professional Learning Communities**

Another important aspect of instructional coaching to consider is whether coaches should meet with teachers individually or in groups. While both have their advantages and disadvantages, it is important to keep in mind that time and cost are two of the most prominent factors that hold programs back from effective implementation, especially at the secondary level. While working individually with teachers fosters a strong, working relationship, Killion and Harrison (2017) highlight that this design also implies coaches work with fewer teachers, having less of an impact on the student population. Furthermore, Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) reveal that when coaches work with teachers individually at the secondary level, a teacher's individual needs and struggles often take precedence over those of the building or district. This leads to a more a more responsive approach which greatly narrows the impact on systemic change. Many (2018) refers to this type of coaching as "teacher centric." Therefore, to combat the common isolation and discord at the secondary level, Roy (2019) and Many (2018) suggest that with the support of principals, instructional coaches at the secondary level can broaden their impact if they work with professional learning communities (PLC).

While the concept of a PLC is not new, it has taken on many shapes and forms over the years. At the elementary level, teachers often work in grade-level teams, where at the secondary level, teachers may be divided in a variety of teams including grade-level, content-specific, or even groups based on instructional goals. Regardless of how the PLC is formed, there are elements that are essential to function effectively. According to Many (2018), teachers must have the time to develop a collaborative capacity with their PLC members, and all members must be

committed to learning. Considering this process may not be natural for teachers to conduct themselves, research shows that when working with PLCs, instructional coaches can help teach collaboration and collaborative inquiry just as they do good teaching practices.

In addition to opposing work in isolation, Many (2018) highlights other benefits of the collaborative instructional coaching model. When working with a PLC, a coach can expand a teacher's access to resources and content-specific strategies. According to Wilder (2014) this collaboration among teachers widens the scope of disciplinary knowledge and experience which also relieves the pressure off the instructional coach to be all-knowing. Furthermore, Killion and Harrison (2017) agree that this collective capacity positively impacts teachers' accountability and openness to new strategies. This shift can simultaneously realign a school's culture to that of one more focused both on student and teacher learning.

While recent research in instructional coaching supports this collective approach through PLCs, it does not imply that it is easier for instructional coaches. Killion and Harrison (2017) explain that PLCs may cause some teachers to become withdrawn or hesitant to share because of their public nature. Furthermore, working in PLCs does not eliminate the difficulties that come with working with adults. According to Mangin and Dunsmore (2015), instructional coaches must be expert communicators, and if working in PLCs, Many (2018) advocates for coaches to receive specific training in their design and purpose. Despite these challenges, research strongly suggests that by aligning instructional coaches with PLCs, districts and buildings can decrease the cost of their instructional coaching program (Knight, 2012; Many, 2018; Roy, 2019). According to Knight, there is no one right answer to making instructional programs more affordable for schools; however, by collaborating with a larger number of teachers in an effective PLC format, coaches will surely demonstrate they are worth the investment.

## **Application**

In the past ten years, I have taught in both private and public-school settings. While I loved the tight-knit community at my private school in Puerto Rico, I did not have instructional leadership or job-embedded support. I can personally attest to how this lack of investment into my professional development led to feelings of inadequacy and burn-out. In turn, these feelings impacted my students' achievement. Even though there were many factors that influenced my decision to return to South Dakota, the established instructional coaching program in the Sioux Falls School District was near the top of my list. Considering I simultaneously started my Masters in Teacher Leadership, I was eager to collaborate with instructional coaches who would enrich my understanding with their perspective and experience.

As a Spanish immersion middle school teacher in the Sioux Falls School District, I am lucky enough to have two instructional coaches. One of my coaches is content-specific; she helps me dissect content standards and align my instruction to promote student engagement. My second coach helps me ensure that students simultaneously develop their Spanish language proficiency through the specific content area. While both of my coaches receive professional training in instructional coaching, are curriculum and instruction specialists, and are excellent communicators, I quickly discovered they are stretched way too thin to be effective. Because I was learning about instructional coaching, I often knew how to optimize my time with them. However, I also came to realize how difficult it is to implement an effective instructional coaching program, especially in a large school district.

Knight (2012) suggests that to be cost-efficient and effective, instructional coaches should manage anywhere from 10 to 15 teachers. However, last year, my social studies instructional coach was responsible for approximately 65 teachers across five school buildings

and three grade levels. While her schedule was complicated, it was nothing compared to my Spanish immersion instructional coach who was responsible for all K-12 Spanish immersion teachers. Even though he only had to migrate among three buildings and manage 50 teachers, he had to accommodate to a wider variety of student ages, contents, and teaching philosophies.

To promote professional learning communities and unique building goals, this year, our district assigned a middle school coach to each building. I was initially excited to see how this shift would impact the efficacy of the coaching program and promote collaboration among teachers. Unfortunately, however, the district did not relieve the coaches of their content-specific duties. Therefore, while I was fortunate to have my social studies coach assigned to my school building, I actually received less “coaching” from her this year. In the few times we met, she spoke candidly about her struggle to manage the curriculum specialist role assigned by the district in addition to the many new roles assigned by the building administration. She also felt unprepared to meet the needs of other content-area teachers even though she was allocated time to meet with them in PLCs. This was disheartening as I could attest to her potential as an instructional coach.

Because it was a middle school initiative, this new approach also impacted my K-12 Spanish language coach. While this change allocated more time for us to meet as a PLC, his job became further complicated with the continuous growth of the Spanish immersion program. The district added a dual-immersion program with two kindergarten classes and expanded the Spanish immersion classes offered at the high-school. So, even though his building assignment did not change, he disclosed that his roles shifted to focus more on the curriculum and program development rather than teacher efficacy and instruction. In order to balance everything, there

were also times that he asked me to facilitate discussions or initiatives as a teacher leader. While I was honored, it stood as another example of poor instructional coaching design.

Even though research supports building appointed instructional coaches, the district did not establish firm parameters for administrators or reevaluate the coaches' content-specific roles. Currently, the district's middle school instructional coaches are overwhelmed and rarely have the time to implement best coaching practices. Therefore, to remain effective and true to its intent, I suggest the district invest in hiring one instructional coach per content in addition to one instructional coach per building. These additional coaches would allow for a better distribution of coaching roles and foster the much-needed collective capacity at the secondary level. While I understand that additional coaches would be a hefty investment for the school district, I argue that they are less expensive than the cost of poor program design and implementation which could have a lasting effect on teacher buy-in. Furthermore, with a better distributive model, the instructional coaching program has the potential to offset other challenges our growing district faces including promoting equity and access to rigorous curriculum and instruction.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the vast amount of research that supports instructional coaching over traditional professional development, it is difficult to link coaching practices to teacher efficacy and student achievement. This disconnect is a result of the many variables that impact an instructional coaching program's design and its effectiveness. For example, whereas there is a great deal of research on literacy-based instructional coaching, many secondary instructional coaches face unique challenges. Rather than simply implementing any instructional coaching program, districts must take into consideration the unique goals at each building and grade level. In order to make this more feasible, Roy (2019) and Many (2018) suggest that instructional coaches work

directly with professional learning communities at the secondary level. By doing so, instructional coaches are better able to optimize their time, capitalize on teachers' content knowledge and experience, and promote collaboration.

As research on instructional coaching at the secondary level continues to develop, districts must also continuously assess their program. Transparency throughout this assessment is essential because as Woulfin (2018) asserts, the messiness and constant change to an instructional coaching program at the district level can hinder teachers' responses to the reform. Therefore, to avoid ambiguity and confusion, Kane and Rosenquist (2019) further suggest that instructional coaches are directly involved in the negotiation of their work. A collaborative approach to designing an instructional coaching program at the secondary level ensures that all those impacted receive training and provide feedback. Teachers must understand the role of their coach within the PLC, coaches must allocate time to meet individual teacher needs, and administration must adhere to clear parameters in assigning roles and duties. As Peter Block points out, "It is difficult to live another's answer, regardless of the amount of goodwill with which it is offered" (as cited in Knight, 2007, p. 28). Therefore, if districts include all stakeholders in their instructional coaching model and design, more instructional coaches at the secondary level will successfully build collective capacity and promote the instructional coaching program's effectiveness.

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