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THE PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES REGARDING RELATIONAL
TRUST WITH TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

By

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Abstract

Instructional coaching continues to be a professional development model that many districts utilize to foster professional growth among their teaching staff. Although instructional coaches are usually content area and pedagogical specialists hired as experts, there is a high level of teacher resistance to instructional coaching due to lack of trust reported between coaches and teachers in the kindergarten through 12th grade setting. Although previous research has signified the need for instructional coaches to build trust with their teaching colleagues, few studies captured the lived experiences of instructional coaches in how they build relational trust. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of instructional coaches as they describe key conditions that need to be in place to build relational trust and diminish resistance to coaching, and to explore the structure of their trust building experiences with their teaching colleagues. Two research questions guided this study: (1) What human or environmental conditions do instructional coaches identify as key to establishing and building relational trust with the teachers they serve? (2) What are the perceptions of instructional coaches about how these key conditions mediate relational trust in the coaching context? Semi structured interviews were conducted with seven instructional coaches with six or more years of coaching experience. Data analysis followed Moustakas's (1994) Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) protocol to identify themes, patterns, and trends using a structured method developed by Moustakas (1994) for IPA qualitative data analysis. Six themes

emerged: (1) Many Hats, (2) Coaching Needs, (3) Resistance to Coaching, (4) Care Ethics, (5) Active Listening, and (6) Adult Learners. Results revealed that these expert coaches viewed their experiences building relational trust as mostly positive, with a minimal amount of resistance to instructional coaching. Each participant discussed ways in which they created space for their teaching colleagues to be vulnerable and take more risks as adult learners by building trust through caring relationships. Findings also showed that the advantages of instructional coaching as an in-house professional development model are abundant if established with care and critical understanding of the needs of adult learners. Educational organizations and administrators can increase the effectiveness of in-house instructional coaching models by implementing policies and procedures that minimize resistance and promote relational trust.

Key words: *Instructional Coach, Resistance, Relational Trust, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, Adult Learners*

DEDICATION

To my husband, Joe

Thank you for your constant support throughout this journey, and always. I am so thankful that you gently nudged me to begin my quest for more knowledge. I continue to be inspired by your love, care, and the amazing gourmet meals that sustained us both during the past three years.

Forever and a day . . .

To my children, Meaghan, Keleigh, and Kaitlin

You encourage me to be a better person every day. I feel so lucky to be your mom.

To my grandson, Oliver

I am so excited that your thirst for knowledge is so voracious. I cannot wait to see where our journey together takes us.

To Mary, my guardian angel here on Earth.

In memory of

My mother, Jan, and father, Joe

Although you left us too soon, you continue to guide us all to be the best we can be. Our family knows you still have a hand in the miracles that happen in our lives—this project is one of them!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Instructional coaches are skilled teachers with expertise in their own instructional practices who possess unique qualities and can transfer these while coaching adult learners (Neumerski, 2012; Sweeney, 2011). According to Barkley (2010), coaching is an ideal staff-development tool for schools to assist teachers to be successful at reaching students. In education, the term *instructional coach* is a teacher who provides a focus on teaching techniques for educators with a focus on pedagogical skills (Neumerski, 2012). Instructional coaches are usually hired as providers of in-house job-embedded professional development (Borman & Feger, 2006). Coaches may work with individual teachers modeling lessons, co-teaching, or observing, and providing individual feedback. They also work with teacher teams guiding curriculum development, data teams, and other forms of collaborative work (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). Providing large group professional development to entire faculty groups may also be part of their professional duties (Barkley, 2011; Borman & Feger, 2006; Knight, 2007). Some coaches may work in a split role; part-time as a content specialist, providing direct services to students, and part-time working with teachers (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). Borman and Feger (2006) noted that there is variation in how instructional coaches' time is spent; however, their main role is centered in the expectation that they assist their fellow educators adjust their teaching practices and improve student achievement (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016).

Teachers in these scenarios need to trust the collaborative nature of the coaching model to grow as learners themselves (Bissonnette, 2014; Kubek, 2011). The immediacy of adjustment to teaching practices does not always allow for the luxury of time to develop trust and respect

between coaches and teachers (Barkley, 2011). The absence of time to create strong relationships puts many coaches at risk for failure (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018).

Building trust with teaching colleagues in a non-evaluative coaching role is one of many conditions that has been identified as a key to a thriving coaching relationship (Borman & Feger, 2006; Kane & Rosenquist, 2018). Teachers who invite a coach into their classrooms are vulnerable adult learners who may become defensive if trust is not built first (Finkelstein, 2019). Instructional coaches who take the time to build trusting relationships by sharing common practices and purposes for learning while relying on mutual respect and relational equality will ultimately find success (Barkley, 2011).

Given the prevalence of instructional coaches in school districts across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts—almost half of all districts and charter schools employ at least one instructional coach (DESE, 2021)—previous research and literature has contributed to identifying the need to build trusting coaching relationships to create change in teacher pedagogy (Coggins & McGovern, 2014; Dozier, 2008; Finkelstein, 2019; Kubek, 2012; Schulze, 2016). These coaches may also have the title of literacy coach, math coach, technology coach, or instructional coach within their own districts, but the Commonwealth of Massachusetts codes them within their reporting system as instructional coaches (DESE, 2021). Providing the conditions necessary for building trust would allow instructional coaches to meet the needs of all teachers and create shifts in pedagogy that would enable them to transform their classrooms (Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016). Although much of the research cited to date emphasizes the need for coaches to build trust (Borman & Feger, 2006; DeWitt, 2020; Dozier, 2008; Walkowiak, 2016), how trust is built has not been as well documented up to this point.

Statement of the Problem

There is a high level of teacher resistance to instructional coaching due to lack of trust reported between coaches and teachers in the kindergarten through 12th grade setting (DeWitt, 2020; Finkelstein, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2018; Garbacz et al., 2015; Walkowiak, 2016). For a coach to be trusted, they need to be trustworthy and prove their merit (Kane & Rosenquist, 2018). Knight (2018) noted that instructional coaches who present themselves as experts and expect teachers to accept their advice at face value will likely encounter resistance. Routman (2012) described a successful coaching relationship as requiring talent and sensitivity by the coach, and an open and willing mindset by the teacher. This body of literature suggests that a successful coaching relationship will work only if there is a combination of trust and expert teaching. Dozier (2008) discussed the building of trusting relationships in a similar way. That study found that a coach needed to confirm the strengths of the teacher, find an accessible entry point potentially through the examination of student work, and work collaboratively to find solutions to potential issues. By working side by side with the classroom teacher, only then is the coach able to notice, name, and model effective instructional practices.

According to Finkelstein (2019), as instructional coaching “takes professional learning into the classroom during instruction, it is likely to raise feelings of vulnerability or defensiveness in teachers, many of whom have been enculturated to equate adult observers with evaluation and surveillance” (p. 318). Without this forethought, an instructional coach can be viewed to have positional authority—more official power to make important decisions like a principal or other supervisor—which can inhibit the growth of a trusting relationship. Relational authority that is based on trust, not power, when built well by an instructional coach, can enable

the adult learner to trust in the expertise of the instructional coach without fear of evaluation, and improve his or her teaching practices (Finkelstein, 2019), transforming their learning.

Barkley (2011) noted that trust is usually noticed by its absence and acknowledges that the basis of trust in peer coaching relies on mutual respect, the decision to trust one another, and acknowledgment of each other's abilities, thereby fostering equality in the relationship.

Finkelstein (2019) noted that there is no empirical evidence for recommendations for trust building with coaches as of the date of publication of her work; however, one suggestion that has merit is for coaches to present themselves as co-learners, not experts. Although they have expertise, they can provide nonevaluative feedback with the teacher's own learning goals at the forefront of their work (Finkelstein, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of instructional coaches as they describe key conditions that need to be in place to build relational trust and diminish resistance to coaching, and to explore the structure of their trust building experiences with their teaching colleagues. Instructional coaching, as a professional development model, must have several factors in place to be effective (Debacker, 2013; DeWitt, 2020). Not all instructional coaching models are successful for a variety of reasons, including lack of trust and understanding from the stakeholders who work with a coach (Dewitt, 2020; Jacobs et al., 2018). This study sought to identify those key conditions that enable coaches to build trust and work effectively by utilizing the conceptual framework of Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning and the theoretical framework of Knowles's (1980) adult learning theory. In this framework, as coaches work with adult learners, their goal is to help teachers transform their practice through critical self-reflection and discourse (Mezirow, 1991). This work investigated

the lived experiences of instructional coaches and their perceptions regarding their role within their own settings. The intent of this study was to provide data to other educational organizations regarding the conditions that are necessary for instructional coaches to succeed, so that these organizations are able to recruit, train, and sustain high-quality instructional coaches. Firsthand accounts from instructional coaches may give other districts the knowledge they will need to support these instructional experts as they work with the adult learner and build trust within their own teaching environments.

Research Questions

Based on the research that identifies the importance of instructional coaching as an effective professional development model, and by using transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) as a conceptual framework and Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy, or adult learning theory, as a theoretical framework, the researcher intended to answer the following research questions:

1. What human or environmental conditions do instructional coaches identify as key to establishing and building relational trust with the teachers they serve?
2. What are the perceptions of instructional coaches about how these key conditions mediate relational trust in the coaching context?

Conceptual Framework

Instructional coaching has a direct connection to Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory as a conceptual framework for improving performance. Mezirow (1991) indicated that transformative learning changes the way learners think about themselves and their own world. Mezirow (1998) stated, "learning to think for oneself involves becoming critically reflective of assumptions and participating in discourse to validate beliefs, intentions, values, and

feelings” (p. 197). Calleja (2014) noted that the theory of transformative learning has changed how we do pedagogy for adults. Kitchenham (2008) summarized the evolution of Mezirow’s (2006) two major elements of transformative learning as critical self-reflection and critical discourse in which the learner can validate their best judgment and monitor their acquisition of knowledge to implement transformative learning.

In a coaching relationship, the ultimate goal is for teachers to reflect on their teaching abilities within their own classrooms, while improving or transforming their instructional practices (Sweeney & Harris, 2017). The conceptual framework for this study was framed in the belief that instructional coaches who do not have perceived positive relational trust with their teaching peers will not be able to facilitate critical discourse that results in transformative learning. Relational trust can be built if certain conditions are in place within a coaching relationship.

Theoretical Framework

The social implications of transformative learning emphasized the need for adult learners to interact with others to find alternatives to potential old habits while gaining emotional support during the transformation process (Calleja, 2014). Knowles’s (1980) theory of andragogy underpins transformative learning as coaches work with their teaching colleagues to improve their pedagogical skills and support transformative learning, while simultaneously understanding the unique needs of adult learners. The interaction that occurs within this relationship rests on six key assumptions identified by Knowles et al. (2005). These adult assumptions include the need to understand a reason for learning, a need for self-direction and choice, learning that rests on prior experience, learning that results in a generalizable skill, real-life situational learning, and internal motivation on the part of the learner (Knowles et al., 2005).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Assumptions in qualitative research include the decisions that a researcher makes regarding the methodology of choice (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and believing that this methodology is the most effective for the specific study. Qualitative research does not provide a way to confirm data statistically, which can limit replication (Smith et al., 2009). Qualitative research requires the researcher to be a skilled interviewer able to collect valid data that is trustworthy and analyzed correctly. This is dependent on the researcher asking the right questions, which allow the participants to supply their own perspectives regarding the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) of instructional coaching. The assumption with qualitative research is dependent on the participants' responses to the interview questions and the assumption that their answers will be credible, honest, and based on their own experiences. It is also an assumption that all participants will be truthful and put forth their best interest regarding the research at hand (Smith et al., 2009)

This research was conducted as a qualitative phenomenological study. As a qualitative study, the stories of the participants provided meaningful primary source data and enable the researcher to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Choosing to conduct this study with instructional coaches outside of the researcher's own educational environment allowed for rich discussions as there was no power differential present. Although data is not able to be generalized with qualitative research, thorough documentation of procedures ensures transferability.

Participants were chosen according to the depth of their knowledge regarding the professional development model of coaching. This study included instructional coaches who work in schools in Massachusetts, and results may be generalized to other instructional coaches

who work in urban or suburban school districts elsewhere. Due to the various roles and responsibilities of instructional coaches, the lived experiences from participants in this study may be interpreted or perceived in different ways. Providing data to other educational organizations regarding the conditions necessary for building trust and avoiding resistance to instructional coaching was a goal of this research.

Rationale and Significance

Over the past twenty or more years, districts across the United States have created coaching positions with the intention of improving teacher pedagogy (Dozier, 2008). Research continues to expand regarding the impact that instructional coaches have on student achievement through the lens of instructional coaching as an in-house ongoing professional development model (Barkley, 2010). With the number of educational initiatives that continue to grow, districts turn to instructional coaching as a quick fix. This quick fix is usually done without considering the conditions that instructional coaches require to form trusting relationships, or the resulting resistance that occurs when trust is not formed (Jacobs et al., 2018). This study built on the current research regarding the specific formation of these trusting relationships and the resistance to coaching that exists.

Using interviews in this qualitative phenomenological study, instructional coaches in Massachusetts shared their individual experiences regarding their coaching relationships and how they were able to build or not build trust with their colleagues. Exploring their experience, particularly regarding potential resistance to coaching, provided actionable items for other coaches and teachers, and potentially help them avoid this resistance and build trust in their own coaching relationships. Through this study, the researcher expanded the literature on the topic of instructional coaching and its impact on creating transformational learning with adult learners.

This study may be used to inform other educational institutions about the optimal conditions they might create to ensure that their instructional coaches are successful in improving teacher pedagogy, which will ultimately improve student achievement.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were important to this study, were frequently used, or may have a unique meaning within the scope of this study.

Achievement Gap: An achievement gap is defined as a significant difference in academic performance among different groups of students (NAEP, n.d).

Andragogy: Andragogy is the adult learning theory developed by Malcolm Knowles (1980) which delineates the various ways in which adult learning is different from the way in which children learn, and include purpose of learning, self-direction, use of past experiences, desire to learn, authentic learning connected to life experiences, and internal and external motivation (Knowles et al., 2005).

Instructional Coach: Instructional coaches are professional development providers who work with teacher colleagues to help them implement research-based instructional practices while improving their pedagogy (Knight, 2007; Neumerski, 2012).

Pedagogy: Pedagogy is the art, science, or profession of teaching (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b)

Positional Authority: Positional authority is having official power to make important decisions (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a)

Relational Authority: Relational authority is the perception of having the ability to influence others in a specific relationship (quora.com)

Conclusion

Chapter one presented information regarding the role of instructional coaches and their ability to provide professional development to their colleagues in effective ways, mainly by creating trusting relationships and avoiding resistance to the professional development model of instructional coaching. Identifying the conditions that create opportunities for teachers to grow their expertise in a trusting relationship with a skilled instructional coach was the focus and purpose of this research. The research questions presented in this chapter were guided by Mezirow's (1991) transformational learning theory and Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy, or adult learning theory. Assumptions, limitations, and scope of this qualitative phenomenological study, as well as the rationale and significance of this topic, were also presented.

Chapter two reviews the research that considers who instructional coaches are, including their knowledge of adult learners, their expertise as teachers, and the coaching identity exhibited. It also highlights the successes and challenges instructional coaches face from a building and district perspective including adequate professional development and the perceptions and misconceptions instructional coaches face from those with whom they work, resulting in resistance to coaching. Chapter two concludes with a look at the skills and characteristics instructional coaches possess that enable them to build relational trust and make them effective transformative leaders. Chapter three includes the methodology used to identify the conditions that need to be present for instructional coaches to develop relational trust with their colleagues. This chapter provides the purpose, research questions, and design, as well as the site information and participants. The sampling method and data collection using semistructured interviews are further explored in chapter three. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) developed by

Moustakas (1994) will be used to analyze data. Chapter three concludes with identification of limitations and ethical issues.

Chapter four provides analysis and presentation of results. Chapter five provides interpretation of the findings, implications, recommendations for further action, as well as suggestions for continued research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To consider all aspects of instructional coaching and the specific need for the development of trust to be established in a coaching relationship, the researcher examined peer reviewed journal articles, current books, dissertations, videos, and podcasts to create an academic foundation for this study. As a guide to this process, search terms such as trust, andragogy, adult learning theory, transformative learning theory, instructional coaching, relational authority, and positional authority were used. The researcher utilized ProQuest, Google Scholar, Eric, Carrot2, and Ebsco as primary source databases, and obtained additional articles by reviewing the list of references from documents used in the review.

This literature review begins with the conceptual framework of transformative learning by Mezirow (1991) and is followed by the conceptual framework of Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy, or adult learning theory. Following a brief explanation of instructional coaching, the rationale for the study and the connection to adult learning theory and transformative learning is presented in three general sections that connect these to the work instructional coaches contribute to transform learning.

The first section of the reviewed literature broadly considers who instructional coaches are, including their knowledge of adult learners, their expertise as teachers, and the coaching identity exhibited. The second section highlights the successes and challenges instructional coaches face from a building and district perspective including adequate professional development and the perceptions and misconceptions instructional coaches face. The third section addresses the role of instructional coaches and the skills and characteristics they possess that enable them to build relational trust and make them effective transformative leaders. This

chapter concludes with a summary of the research, the gaps that were discovered, and the connection to the research addressed in chapter 3.

Conceptual Framework

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) define the conceptual framework “as the overarching argument for the work—both why it is worth doing and how it should be done” (p. 8). Ravitch and Riggan (2017) believe that, in the interpretive domain, the researcher makes the connections to theory based on past experience and interpretation. This is known as epistemology, defined as how an individual constructs knowledge by asking questions (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). In this domain researchers are considered interpreters who discover meaning within their data based on experience and the world the researcher lives in. Identity and positionality of the researcher shapes the argument made in the conceptual framework and is supported through the topical research and theoretical framework.

Instructional coaching has a direct connection to Mezirow’s (1991) transformative learning theory as a conceptual framework for improving performance. Mezirow (1991) believed that transformative learning changes the way learners think about themselves and their own world. Transformative learning theory:

- involves the most significant learning in adulthood, that of communicative learning,
- which entails the identification of problematic ideas, beliefs, values, and feelings;
- critically assessing their underlying assumptions; testing their justification through
- rational discourse; and striving for decisions through consensus building (Mezirow, 1995; Mezirow & Associates, 2000, as cited in Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

In a coaching relationship, the ultimate goal is for teachers to reflect on their teaching abilities within their own classrooms, while improving or transforming their instructional practices

(Sweeney & Harris, 2017). Mezirow (1991) highlights the transformative nature of adult learning theory as helping adult learners create, elaborate on, and transform their beliefs by reflecting on the content and process of learning while considering the social context and consequences of their decisions. Mezirow (1991) believes that this is the foundation of andragogy. Instructional coaches working under this theory can reinforce the supportive climate they provide by encouraging their teachers to take risks while they provide feedback on the progressive mastery of skills (Mezirow, 1991). The conceptual framework for this study is framed in the belief that instructional coaches will not be able to facilitate the conversations and reflection necessary for transformative learning to occur if they are not able to build trusting relationships. Relational trust can be built if certain conditions are in place within a coaching relationship.

Within this theory, Mezirow (1991) refers to Habermas's (1984) concept of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Meaning schemes are habitual rules that adults use for interpreting the world. These rules create the structure for new experiences to be assimilated or transformed while the learner is processing the new interpretation (Calleja, 2014). With a well-built trusting coaching relationship, the learner and coach can work together to interpret the current situation within the classroom, ponder alternative perspectives or ideas for change, and consider different models that may work within these new perspectives. This metacognitive process that transforms their mindset or frame of reference is the main goal of transformative learning (Cranston et al., 2006), and often requires the support of others, as well as a positive self-concept. According to Calleja (2014), adult learners eventually move to new ways to perceive, think, decide, feel, and act on their experiences.

Instructional coaching is centered on helping adult learners develop effective pedagogy in all content areas. Knight (2007) defines an instructional coach as a person who "collaborates

with teachers so they can choose and implement research-based interventions to help students learn more effectively” (p. 7). Some teachers have related trust issues with the instructional coaches and a misconception of the coach’s position, while others believe that only teachers who struggle need an instructional coach (Barkley, 2017). Marion and Gonzales (2014) noted that those who wish to transform must be aware “that they do not operate in a vacuum and that what is perceived as transformational to one group of people may not be viewed as admirably or even be understood by others” (p. 175). Mezirow and Taylor (2009) recognize that critical reflection among learners is the key to the development of transformative learning. “Dialogue becomes the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed” (p. 9). The dialogue that occurs within a coaching relationship is transformative when it emphasizes “relational and trustful communication” (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. 9).

Theoretical Framework

Instructional coaches within an educational setting serve as the educators of adults (Drago-Severson, 2009). There is a prolific history of research for adult learning theory. Learning theory, in general, has been researched since the late 1800s and several theorists have devoted their life’s work to the theory of andragogy. In their book, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, Knowles et al. (2005) created a historic list of over 100 major contributors to learning theory beginning in 1885. The genesis of adult learning theory began with the founding of the American Association for Adult Education in 1926 which studied the learning ability of adults. Eduard Lindeman published *The Meaning of Adult Education* that same year, which was the foundation for Malcolm Knowles (1980) seminal research. Knowles (1980) spent several decades researching and updating his

theory, and other colleagues have continued to conduct research around the theoretical framework of andragogy. In successful coaching relationships, several studies have shown the connection between the skill of a coach and their knowledge of the unique needs of adult learners (Drago-Severson, 2009; Linn, 2018; Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Schulze, 2016).

Knowles et al. (2005, p. 64–68) identified six key assumptions of andragogy that are different from the way children learn (pedagogy).

1. Adults have a need to know why they are learning before they start to learn.
2. Adults have a need to have self-direction and make choices in what they learn.
3. Adult experiences influence their learning in significant ways due to these prior experiences.
4. Adults have a readiness to learn due to a need to know and be able do something as a result of their learning.
5. Adult orientation to learning is life-centered—adults learn better in real-life situations.
6. Adults are motivated to learn due to internal and external pushes.

The teachers involved in an instructional coaching relationship have specific needs or desires to improve their craft, and this fits with the implications for practice that are inherent in Knowles's (1980) assumptions (Adult Learning Theories, 2011), that consider the need to:

- Set a cooperative climate for learning in the classroom.
- Assess the learner's specific needs and interests.
- Develop learning objectives based on the learner's needs, interests, and skill levels.
- Design sequential activities to achieve the objectives.

- Evaluate the quality of the learning experience and adjust, as needed, while assessing needs for further learning.

Likewise, coaches must understand the intricacies of working with adult learners as opposed to student learners (Barkley, 2011), which points directly to the theoretical framework of andragogy.

Review of the Literature

The internal or personal capacity of instructional coaches to provide instructional support to other teachers will influence their successes based on several factors. Studies showed that instructional coaches who have the motivation to lead see themselves as able to learn and grow, rely on their content expertise, work with adult learners by developing empathy and other soft skills, and do this type of specialized professional development (Barkley, 2011; Gwazdauskas, 2009; Knight, 2018; Northhouse, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016). Recent research on instructional coaching has shifted from mere descriptions of who instructional coaches are, to a more refined approach that identifies the effective skills of instructional coaches (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019; Schulze, 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016).

Instructional coaches can enter this profession with their own unique strengths but require more than that to be effective professional development leaders. Partnerships with building administrators is key if principals understand the role of the coach and how they can leverage their expertise (Knight, 2007, Wilson, 2016). It is also critical for a district to provide specific professional development support for this unique role (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019; Sweeney, 2011).

The way coaches present themselves to teachers is a critical skill that is sometimes overlooked (Jacobs et al., 2018). Not all teachers who are highly skilled content area teachers can

coach others (Barkley, 2011, Knight, 2007; Poglinco & Bach, 2004). Coaches need to develop a persona that is likeable, knowledgeable, and can effectively *read* their colleagues to know what their tolerance is for learning and growing (Dozier, 2008; Finkelstein, 2019). Maintaining trusting relationships while building teacher skills is a balance that effective coaches possess (Bissonnette, 2014; Kubek, 2011; Schulze, 2016).

Instructional Coaches: Transformative Leaders

According to Knight (2019), instructional coaches are full-time professional development providers who work with teachers within their own classrooms to help them improve teaching practices that align with their professional goals. They understand teacher and student needs, have a deep understanding of teacher strengths, are emotionally intelligent, and can foster trust that will lead teachers to learn necessary instructional practices (Knight, 2019). They must also have expertise in scientifically proven instructional practices including classroom management, content expertise, and assessment (Knight, 2007). In the best circumstances, instructional coaches develop unique partnerships with the teachers they coach; seeing themselves as partners who do not act as experts but also do not withhold their expertise (Knight, 2019). Knight (2019) found that coaching is effective when teachers have specific goal directed activities to work from. To effectively implement new or transformative practices, Knight (2019) identified characteristics of effective goals using the acronym PEERS: Powerful, Emotionally Compelling, Easy, Reachable, and Student-Focused. These particular characteristics connect well to Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory and Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy in a coaching model.

One of the first educational initiatives was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This initiative was enacted as the United States' education law that showed

commitment to provide funding and resources for vulnerable students through federal grants to local systems (U.S. Dept. of Education, n.d.). Historically, instructional coaching as a concept was developed in the early 1980s in response to the need to respond to improving teacher learning (Neumerski, 2012). Instructional coaching, as it is known today, was brought about by several more recent federal initiatives.

This type of professional development started because of the Reading Excellence Act of 1999 and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. NCLB, a reauthorization of ESEA, required all schools who received federal funding to assess students in reading and math in grades three through eight and once in high school. With NCLB, all students were expected to meet or exceed educational standards by 2014 and was intended to close the achievement gap (U.S. Dept. of Education, n.d.). Each of these legislative acts required expanded student achievement, which led to pressure on school systems to improve teacher pedagogy. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, a reauthorization of NCLB, extended protections for disadvantaged and high needs students through advances in equity, required all students to be taught to high academic standards to be college and career ready, and require annual assessments toward these high academic standards (U.S. Dept. of Education, n.d.) Since NCLB and the reauthorized ESEA of 2015, which extended protections for disadvantaged and high needs students through advances in equity, required all students to be taught to high academic standards to be college and career ready, and require annual assessments toward these high academic standards, many school systems have implemented instructional coaching as a form of embedded, within the classroom, professional development, with varied success (Finkelstein, 2019; Garbacz, Lannie et al., 2015; Kubek, 2012; Reddy et al., 2019; Walkowiak, 2016).

Knigh (2007) shared that the impact of traditional professional development on teacher practices shows that teachers do not implement practices after one-shot opportunities and show lower expectations of change. “Poorly designed training can erode teachers’ willingness to embrace *any* new ideas” (Knigh, 2007, p. 2). In 2018, Knigh expanded his thinking to consider instructional coaches as partners with teachers employed to help them improve teaching and learning so students become more successful. Kho et al. (2019) also identified instructional coaching as a teacher professional development model where activities are tailored to the needs of the teachers with a focus on improving and sustaining effective teaching practices. The recency of instructional coaching and a deeper analysis of the coaching moves that affect relationships with teachers is becoming a more common theme in the research (Finkelstein, 2019). Research regarding instructional coaches, as seen in today’s classrooms, does not have the long history that the study of Knowles’s (1980) adult learning theory has. There have been numerous recent studies regarding instructional coaching (Reddy et al., 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016; Walkowiak, 2016); however, the connection to Knowles’s (1980) adult learning theory and instructional coaching is not as prolific.

Much of the literature reviewed shows that there are several conditions that need to be in place for the optimal learning for adults to take place (Knowles, 1980). The teachers involved in a coaching relationship have specific needs to improve their craft, and these needs seem to generally coincide with Knowles’s (1980) key assumptions of andragogy. Likewise, coaches must understand the intricacies of working with adult learners so that transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) can take place. According to Sweeney and Mausbach (2018), coaches who partner and work alongside teachers, use data and student work to analyze progress, consider

curricular materials as tools to move students, and develop trusting relationships are more successful with student impact.

Knight (2007) noted that successes and failures of a coaching program depend on several abilities on the part of the coach. The ability to communicate clearly with instructional expertise to support colleagues and provide useful feedback, know and understand their adult learning partners, and recognize themselves as instructional leaders while maintaining coaching relationships create successful coaching opportunities.

Knowledge Regarding Adult Learners

In Drago-Severson's (2009) book *Leading Adult Learning: Supporting Adult Development in Our Schools*, the author addresses the developmental capacity of educators as learners. "Developmental capacity concerns the cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities that enable us to manage better the demands of leadership, teaching, learning, and life" (p. 8). Adult learners bring many life experiences with them when afforded learning opportunities, and coaches must understand this to support new learning (Routman, 2012). Besides the content instructional coaches deliver, understanding adult learner's developmental capacity to meet the adaptive challenges that coaching relationships inherently add, is key to effective learning.

In a study by Linn (2018), high school instructional coaches were given professional development coaching opportunities but were not provided instruction for working with adult learners. The coaches in this study struggled to impact the performance of teachers, as tasks that were assigned by administration were unrelated to supporting adult learners. Knowing that adult learners may take longer to accept change based on their own developmental capacity, instructional coaches need to find a balance in maintaining relationships with the teachers they

coach and expecting them to make changes to their instructional practices (Linn, 2018). At the time of this study, there was an emphasis on student-centered learning. Linn (2018) found that more of an emphasis needed to be placed on the development of adult skills and professional knowledge that could then transfer to student learning needs.

Likewise, Will (2017) acknowledged that instructional coaches require a different set of skills to work with adult learners. Knowing how to entice adult learners into entering a coaching relationship, transition from teaching children to teaching adults, and earn teachers' trust needs to be at the forefront (Will, 2017). Of equal importance, Will (2017) acknowledged the need for coaches to understand the complexities of working with adult learners. Although there were a few generalizable trust building suggestions, such as allowing time for a trusting relationship to grow and allowing for transparency and clear communication (Will, 2017), clear-cut trust building actions to be followed were not well defined. However, the emphasis on allowing for ongoing professional development for coaches in understanding the multifaceted needs of adult learners was evident and focused on the need for a "coach of the coaches" (Will, 2017, p. 17) to allow for coach collaboration, as coaching is a unique job with little to no direct support.

The Importance of a Strong Coaching Identity

Instructional coaches' interactions with their colleagues must be measured so that strong relationships can be built, and trust can be established to enable adult learning to occur (Barkley, 2011; Knight, 2007; Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018). To accomplish this, coaches must possess or develop emotional competency skills that enable them to interact with a variety of personalities to be successful at teaching other adults. Fullan (2001) considers Goleman's (1998) personal and social competence traits of leaders for fostering emotional intelligence, such as self-awareness

and self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills as key to positive coaching and leadership styles.

In a mixed methods study by Tschannen-Moran and Carter (2016), coaches were provided with a twenty-hour professional development course aimed at improving their self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills as instructional coaches. Coaches who voluntarily participated in the twenty-hour course reported improvement in their listening and empathy, whereas those who were required to attend did not increase these skills (Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016). This study also looked at instructional coaches' perceptions of emotional intelligence as it relates to their role, and the importance to have these soft skills to partner with the hard skills they possess. Helping instructional coaches become attuned to their interpersonal skills can enhance their ability to navigate tough conversations with their adult colleagues. It is a skill that this study claims can be taught, if the coach is willing to participate and learn (Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016).

In a study by Wenner and Campbell (2018), self-identified and colleague-recognized teacher leaders (TL) were classified as having a “thick identity or thin identity” (p. 15). They described these identities in this way:

thick identity—that is, a TL identity that is deeply rooted in who the person is—as possibly more desirable than a thin TL identity, or a TL identity in which one might see themselves occasionally as a TL when they are called on to lead (p. 15).

When coaches can see themselves as instructional leaders, their ability to connect with their colleagues on this level is enhanced. Wenner and Campbell (2016), found that the leader had a “successful, thick, professional TL identity because his passion for leading around issues of equity and social justice was deeply rooted in who he was” (p. 15). This teacher leader was the

same, personally and professionally, at all times, which is evidence of being attuned to their interpersonal skills, as well.

Expertise in the Field as a Critical Characteristic of Coaches

In his book *The Impact Cycle*, Knight (2018) describes the expertise coaches possess as being “able to clearly describe a set of teaching strategies teachers can use to hit their goals” (p. 104). These strategies include content planning, formative assessment, instruction, and community building (Knight, 2018)—all skills that expert and skilled coaches can share with colleagues.

In a qualitative case study, Gwazdauskas (2009) found that the instructional coach must understand all grade level content within a school to be effective for teacher growth. This study considered the perspective of teachers who were coached at differing levels: average involvement, above average involvement, and below average involvement. Teachers who were interviewed believed an effective coach should have cross-grade level knowledge to promote collaboration around pedagogy (Gwazdauskas, 2009). Instructional coaching was relatively new for the district and the voluntary nature may have prohibited clear understanding of all facets of the role of the coach. Some resistance was noted in the findings due to a lack of confidence with some primary teachers and a coach who did not possess primary grade experience (Gwazduskas, 2009). Study participants were sometimes notably uneasy about being observed within classrooms, and some interview responses revealed varying relationships with the coach that may have affected the responses. Although participants were reminded that the questions were about classroom instruction, some had difficulty separating that from the personal relationship held with the coach (Gwazduskas, 2009) which resulted in potentially subjective answers.

Instructional Coaching Supports and Challenges

Effective instructional coaching is a partnership among all stakeholders (Knight, 2007). To be effective, instructional coaches rely on external support from principals, the district, and individualized professional development opportunities (Barkley, 2011; Sweeney, 2011). Despite effective support, instructional coaches face a variety of perception issues and misconceptions about their role as instructional leaders (Bissonnette, 2014; Knight, 2007; Kubek, 2011), resulting in resistance or refusal to be coached.

The Role of Principal Support

Most teachers do not enter their teaching career thinking they will one day be an instructional coach (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018). Principals' shifting roles from building managers to instructional leaders require them to distribute leadership to teacher experts who can help them lead new initiatives and to create buy-in (Venables, 2018). Their inclination is to surround themselves with these teaching experts—instructional coaches (Knight, 2007). With an increased focus on student achievement, principals rely on their instructional coaches as partners in instructional leadership to create a culture of change, which can lead to a misconception that coaches hold positional authority. Barkley (2011) stated, "It is crucial for both coach and principal to establish and understand the boundaries of what each will and will not do" (p. 93).

Wilson (2016) found that teacher leadership has shifted in waves from more traditional roles like department heads to team leaders and staff developers, to a third wave that "involves the re-culturing of schools through leadership" (p. 47). This re-culturing has challenged principals to become more than building managers, moving toward increasing their own pedagogical expertise (Wilson, 2016). This study sought to provide additional knowledge regarding professional learning communities (PLCs) and address the gaps in how these

communities encourage teacher leadership through specific actions of administrators. Ultimately, the study found that teachers felt that because PLC attendance was mandated by building administration, they did not have a say in whether or not these meetings were beneficial or increased their proficiency. There was not an increase in teacher buy-in and there was a lack of shared leadership among whom to make critical decisions (Wilson, 2016). To increase teacher leadership and empower teachers, Wilson (2016) suggested that principals involve teachers in planning and designing the professional learning community through shared decision making. It is also important for the principal to set the tone of their building's culture by encouraging this collaboration. If coaches are supported by their principals in this way, the culture of coaching may be seen in a more positive light.

Castleman (2015) found that some administrators create resistance to coaching by asking instructional coaches to help make building level decisions. It was noted that instructional coaches "bridge the gap between teachers and administrators, both of whom rely on them to inform decision making" (Castleman, 2015, p. 15). However, if this is not balanced, coaches are unable to help teachers take risks and trust that the coach is working with them. Resistant teachers in this study identified a lack of trust due to feelings of vulnerability.

This need to possess instructional expertise through collaboration has been fraught with both technical and adaptive challenges for principals more willing to rely on the expertise of coaches (Curtis et al., 2012). In the study, the authors found that initiating change within the district they studied relied heavily on principals acting as instructional leaders and working alongside a coach to create change. "The competence of the coach and the job-embedded nature of her work were critical factors" (Curtis et al., 2012, p. vi). Curtis et al. (2012) found that "principals' behaviors that were most associated with teachers' engagement with a coach

included public endorsement of the coach as an expert and active participation in the initiative” (p. 29). In this study, the literacy coach held a relational authority position, and the teachers who were a vital part of the literacy initiative in the district “viewed leadership as coming from the positional authorities and expressed concern about being referred to as leaders” (p. 79) themselves. One of the goals of that initiative was to develop more teacher leadership, but teachers were unwilling to take on that role. Due to the coach’s expertise, teachers followed her lead and changed instructional practices without her need to have positional authority (Curtis et al., 2012). However, this did not change the reluctance of teachers to also hold positional authority. Arguably, the principal as the positional leader and the coach as the relational leader can support a school climate where teachers may eventually see themselves as leaders (Schulze, 2016). In many studies, principals were more adept at handling the technical challenges of managing a building and were less adept with the adaptive challenges that working with a coach brings, such as building trust in a coaching model, identifying where instructional needs are, and creating a cultural shift where every teacher believes they deserve to be coached (Barkley, 2017; Debacker, 2013; Kane and Rosenquist, 2018; Wilson, 2016).

Knight (2018) claimed that coaching will flourish when administrators set their expectations and communicate that everyone needs to be engaged in improvement. Kane and Rosenquist (2018) conducted a two-year qualitative analysis of district-hired and school-hired coaches and found that even though principals valued coaches as knowledgeable experts, they assigned their school-based coaches many noncoaching duties due to pressure to increase test scores. Instead of spending most of their valuable time coaching teachers, tasks such as teaching or tutoring students, collating student data, or proctoring tests, were assigned (Kane & Rosenquist, 2018).

Similarly, in a study to identify how leadership was distributed in a literacy coaching initiative, Curtis et al. (2012) also identified the type of support principals gave during a coaching initiative. Instead of supporting cultural changes that would have potentially changed attitudes, beliefs, and trust, the principals felt that managing schedules and other technical behaviors were most important. Perceived support from principals differed from the needed adaptive support the coach and teachers needed to build successful coaching opportunities (Curtis et al., 2012). When principals share instructional leadership responsibilities, cultural shifts in school professional learning communities are possible (Curtis et al., 2012; Wilson, 2016).

To assist with defining roles within a school setting, Walkowiak (2016) considered five essential practices for communication that coaches possess about role, trust, and valuing teacher input, with student centered coaching moves:

1. The instructional coach and school leaders collaborate to define the role of the coach.
2. The instructional coach establishes trust with teachers at the school.
3. The instructional coach shows value for teachers' ideas.
4. The instructional coach sets very narrow and focused goals for instructional growth.
5. The coach focuses instructional conversations on evidence from students and on learning together as professionals.

Walkowiak (2016) emphasized the collaboration between the coach and school leaders as one significant factor to support instructional practices, especially for novice coaches. Most notable was the importance that the role of the instructional coach be clearly communicated to staff by the principal with shared goals for the coach's job function and expertise (Walkowiak, 2016).

The Role of District Support

Principal support is not the only type of support coaches need to be successful. Kane and Rosenquist (2019) discovered that in the second year of their analysis, the district they studied hired coaches to work in multiple buildings to increase coaching time working directly with teachers. Through a change in district policy, potentially productive coaching activities (PPCA) were identified and enacted to enable instructional coaches to devote most of their time to effective coaching responsibilities (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019, p. 1724). Buildings functioned with school-hired coaches as well as district-hired coaches, and principals still relied on their school-hired coaches to effectively increase student achievement scores. District-hired coaches did spend more time with PPCA activities, but relationship building was reportedly not as strong (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019). Recommendations came to fruition as the district created a hybrid model where the policy for district-hired coach responsibilities existed in fewer buildings than they were assigned before; assigning them to buildings with the lowest test scores, enabling coaches to have more time to build strong relationships with teachers and principals, spend more time with PPCAs, while creating systems for monitoring student progress toward end-of-year standards. These actions, though initially positive, were overshadowed by district pressure to increase accountability for student achievement, seemingly defeating the purpose of establishing coaching policies to increase potentially productive coaching activities.

Similarly, role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload were studied by Debacker (2013), which uncovered four common experiences supported by central office to increase coaching satisfaction. The study suggests that instructional coaches' roles overlap teachers and administrators and create a workable vision of coaching that is understood by administration. Creating opportunities for coach and administrator collaboration, having administrative

publication and ongoing support of coaching roles, and provision of professional development opportunities were all found to decrease role conflict and ambiguity (Debacker, 2013). This was further supported by this school's board of education's policy regarding coaching as a "professional growth mechanism" (Debacker, 2013, p. 81). In each of these studies, the support and acknowledgement of district administration seems to be a key factor for the growth of coaches in their ability to grow as instructional leaders with positive positional authority.

In a case study by Mangin and Dunsmore (2013), the authors highlighted one of the six coaches they studied who was placed in a perceived contradictory position by the district in which she was hired to coach. The coach participated in professional development training through the Literacy Coaches Network (LCN), which was developed by the district and was given clear facilitation parameters in this model for working with teachers. Learning included using conversational strategies that provided specific behaviors a coach should not engage in such as providing advice, making judgments about teacher effectiveness, or engaging in problem solving or direct instruction with the educator. The premise for this was to delineate the evaluative role of the principal and the nonevaluative role of the coach (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2013). Conflict occurred when the coach was asked to intervene with a teacher who was not performing well and who continued to make inadequate progress with coaching. Conflict also arose because school administrators did not adequately foster or discuss the coaching model in the setting. The coach aligned her support according to the LCN indicators and felt conflicted knowing the type of support the teacher needed would potentially cross the line between coach and administrator roles. This choice positioned the coach to downplay her literacy expertise, which inhibited her ability to directly support the teacher. The researcher in this case intervened with the coach and advised her to ask permission of the teacher to step into a consultant role

instead of the coaching role to provide direct advice to the teacher (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2013). This was admittedly an unexpected outcome for the researchers and could be interpreted by others as a researching conflict. It did, however, highlight the need for the district to be more openly supportive of coaching differentiation. This research did not address the effectiveness of the LCN model, which could be an avenue for further study.

Luther (2019) considered the importance of systemic value placed on the role of instructional coaches. The importance of support from the superintendent's office all the way down to parents and teachers' unions was considered in this mixed-methods phenomenological study. When the complex role of the coach is not understood at this level, value decreases and teachers are less likely to work with a coach. This study uncovered the need for a clear vision and structure in a coaching program, the importance of finding and retaining funding to support the model, the promotion of a district culture, and the importance of having the support of a site administrator who advocates for coaches to work with their colleagues—all important district level supports that led to potential implications for district policy expectations.

Professional Development Opportunities for Coaches

It is also critical for a district to provide specific professional development support for the coaches they hire (Sweeney, 2011). District supported targeted professional development to increase leadership skills has been shown to be effective if certain elements are present (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019; Sweeney, 2011). In a Three Stage Professional Development (TSPD) model developed in Israel, experienced environmental science teachers were put through a “‘basic training’ stage, a ‘master-teacher’ stage, and an ‘independent implementation’ stage” (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019, p. 57) in the hope that they would become teacher leaders. What was discovered was that roughly half of the participants chose not to pursue a leadership

role and did not define themselves as leaders, even though the professional development's aim was to create teacher leaders and content specialists, which is sometimes how coaches are perceived. The study claimed that leadership potential is not enough, but desire to be a leader is necessary if such a program is successful. They admitted that this was not explicitly taught in the first stage (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019).

Having the desire to lead and the skills to do so require a commitment from a district perspective (Muhammad & Hollie, 2012). In *Student Centered Coaching*, Sweeney (2011) discusses the need for a district to provide professional development for coaches that is focused on coaching practice, curriculum and instruction, and the “complexities of working with adult learners” (p. 161). Sweeney (2011) emphasizes the need to develop systems and structures to provide ideas for professional development that address coaches' unique needs and suggests strategies the district office can take to strengthen coaching, such as keeping the lines of communication among all stakeholders open (Principals, Coaches and the District), establishing tools to evaluate coaching effectiveness, managing time and support for coaches, and facilitating coaching labs.

Barkley (2011) noted that the professional development opportunity that instructional coaches provide to teachers is much more interactive than previously described. The interactive nature of instructional coaching is customizable for everyone based on specific skills a teacher identifies as needs. Knight (2007) recognizes the need for instructional coaches to continue their own professional development journey and suggests ways that instructional coaches can go deeper at the end of each chapter of his book *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction*, with additional suggestions for reading that can extend a coach's own professional learning, such as visiting the National Staff Development Council website, reading a

variety of coaching books or self-help books, visiting his instructional coaching website (instructionalcoach.org), and reading other leadership books as they navigate their own needs for targeted professional development.

Colleague Perceptions and Misconceptions of Instructional Coaches

Instructional coaches and the role they play has been developing over the past 20 or more years with a variety of perceptions and misconceptions (Dewitt, 2020; Jacobs et al., 2018; Sweeney, 2011). Successful development of a coaching program is often affected by fears and misconceptions of the peers coaches work with (Barkley, 2011). Poglinco and Bach (2004) stated, “coaches occupy a position somewhere between a teaching colleague and an administrator. The boundaries of their roles as coaches are ill defined, and the authority associated with being a coach is dubious” (p. 400). For coaches to be effective, this role needs to be clearly defined and supported by the teacher membership to which they belong and must be viewed as effective by the teachers they support (Schulze, 2016). Barkley (2011) cautions against instructional coaches being seen as “building a powerbase” (p. 92) that may intimidate the teachers they work with.

Many instructional coaches are recruited from within the teaching ranks to perform in a nonevaluative role (Sweeney, 2011). In a qualitative descriptive research study, Kho et al. (2019) found that coaches in Malaysia shifted among three nonevaluative roles—implementer, advocate, and educator. As implementers and educators, they fulfilled their job responsibilities as prescribed by their supervisors and became a teacher for teachers. In the implementer role, they conducted coaching sessions with typical pre and post conferences that also included lesson planning and implementation. In the educator role, coaches shared their knowledge and effective practices, and conducted professional development sessions. As advocates, “the coaches

expressed their aim to help the teachers take autonomy in their learning—without asserting the coaches’ authority upon the teachers and making them implement the suggested strategies” (Kho et al., 2019, p. 1124). Coaches gave support, identified teacher’s needs, and guided their instruction as advocates in a nonauthoritative role. Of significance, this study emphasized the need for teacher readiness to coaching. Some teachers exhibited resistance, which in turn created some role-shifting on the part of the coaches and adjustments to one-on-one coaching sessions so that resistance was minimized (Kho et al., 2019). Unlike the Mangin and Dunmore (2013) study, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia introduced the coaching model through the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (Kho et al., 2019) which emphasized the idea that “coaches play a crucial role in improving standards and performance of schools” (p. 1107). Resistance did not seem to be a result of poor administrative communication. Knight’s (2018) Impact Research Lab found that “Instructional coaches partner with teachers to analyze current reality, set goals, identify and explain teaching strategies to meet goals, and provide support until the goals are met” (p. 3). Knight (2007) emphasized the fact that instructional coaches are daily put in situations where they need to lead, or they will not be effective. He goes on to describe a traditional preconceived vision of a leader versus the partnership approach to which most instructional coaches subscribe. “They are often unable to immerse themselves completely in a school, simply because they are always trying to change it” (Knight, 2007, p. 214).

Another factor that can inhibit an instructional coach’s ability to create positive change is school culture, especially when that culture is not conducive to student learning (Schulze, 2016). “Culture can encourage or discourage transformative thought” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 3). “A school’s collective norms, expectations, and values are tightly linked to the productivity of its students” (Muhammad & Hollie, 2012, p. 21). To survive in a culture that can be accepted by

most as “the status quo,” Knight (2007) quotes Debra Meyerson’s (2001) suggestion that coaches become tempered radicals:

Tempered radicals are people who operate on a fault line. They are organizational insiders who contribute and succeed in their jobs. At the same time, they are treated as outsiders because they represent ideas or agendas that are somehow at odds with the dominant culture (Knight, 2007, p. 211).

Because coaches are viewed as leaders in their school but are usually members of the teaching staff, they are sometimes treated as if they are at odds with the school culture by their own membership. “As a result, they sometimes find themselves on the outside of the in-group, when the in-group is intent on gossiping, complaining, or blaming” (Knight, 2007, p. 214).

Conversely, in an article by Coggins and McGovern (2014), the claim from a turnaround school within the Boston Public Schools was that teachers see “highly effective teachers as their greatest resource and support formalized roles that facilitate teacher collaboration” (p. 20), not noting any issues with weaker teachers being supported by stronger teachers. The authors list five goals for teacher leadership: improving student outcomes, improving the access of students with high needs to more effective teachers, extending teaching careers and opportunities for growth, expanding effective teacher influence on peers, and creating a role for teachers to affect teacher practice policies (Coggins & McGovern, 2014). If teacher leadership is to last, it must prove to be influential, meaning it influences student achievement (Coggins & McGovern, 2014). An important note within this article was the importance of choosing teacher leaders who are the best—not necessarily the ones with the most experience—to improve teaching practices.

Instructional coaches need to be perceived positively in their role by their peers.

Coaching as a professional development option has been seen as the solution to closing student

achievement gaps, sometimes with little consideration for how this is perceived by the teachers who believe only those who need to be *fixed* need a coach (Knight, 2007). Previous studies have considered how coaches' roles are perceived and the correlation to student growth. Sugg (2013), studied the relationship between teacher leadership and student achievement looking at ELA scores from two urban middle schools and 42 teachers. Though no correlation was found, one recommendation was to consider the perception of teachers as leaders.

In a case study by Kubek (2011), the author's goal was to explore the attitudes of staff toward an instructional coach and their participation in professional development, and whether or not the district would implement a coaching model. As this study was written in 2011, NCLB legislation was still enforced, and districts were still trying to find innovative ways to improve instruction. Coaching was a new professional development model in some systems and had been tried in different ways in others. Kubek (2011) assessed "the attitudes and perspectives of varying stakeholders regarding professional development, as well as their attitudes and perspectives toward the *new* model of professional development, Instructional Coaching (IC) being implemented within the MA [mid-Atlantic] school district" (p. 56). The main descriptors for effective coaching described within this case study were trust and confidentiality.

Careful consideration was given to the use of what Knight (2007) has termed the big four as a starting point for teachers and coaches. The big four refer to the four big ideas used to manage and educate a class of students and include behavior, content, instruction, and formative assessment (Kubek, 2011, p. 99). These concepts were familiar to teachers and gave the instructional coaches a starting point when coaching teachers. This case study brought to life the struggles of implementing instructional coaching as a new form of professional development that

was not accepted by all. This mixed methods study relied heavily on qualitative data and found that it was important to involve building leadership to design and implement a coaching model.

Bissonette (2014) designed a study that considered the perceptions of coaches by the teachers they worked with and found a strong positive correlation between the activities they participated in and their increased instructional practices. Bissonette (2014) used statistical analysis of 287 kindergarten through fifth grade teachers' perceptions of the coaches with whom they worked to identify the most effective coaching moves to improve instructional practices for students. "Coaching activities that were deemed a higher level of intensity involved coteaching, modeling, classroom observations, and teacher-coach conversations. These higher intensity activities were correlated with a more positive perception of the literacy coach" (Bissonette, 2014, p. 22). Also, as coaching evolved, teachers' misconceptions regarding evaluation and other significant roles of the coach surfaced. The longer teachers worked with the instructional coach, the more positive their perception (Bissonette, 2014). This type of study, though simple in scope, is indicative of the trend to consider peer perceptions. Garbacz et al. (2015) created a detailed evidence-based practice list and framework that peers and coaches could use to guide effective practices. The list of components of effective coaching includes descriptors such as characteristics of effective coaches, coaching structures, intervention implementation, strategies to complete intervention implementation, and problem-solving, complete with sub-categories that coaches and teachers can evaluate (Garbacz et al., 2015, Table 1).

Reddy et al. (2019) highlight an assessment of instructional coaches called the Instructional Coaching Rating Scales and Interaction Style Scales–Teacher Forms (p. 104). They used psychometric evidence for two rating scales that were developed as possible assessment systems for the effectiveness of coaching skills to support teachers and students. Teachers and

supervisors rated their interactions with the coaches with whom they worked, and coaches rated themselves. According to the authors, “ongoing evaluation of key coaching competencies via technically sound assessments is essential to enhancing effective practices” (Reddy et al., 2019, p. 105). A big shift in this study was that it was guided by ESSA (2015) legislation, which “placed greater responsibility on state education departments for effective educator evaluation and professional development” (Reddy et al., 2019, p. 10). The rating scale used was thorough in scope. This online assessment can be used by the coach, the teachers with whom they work, and the coach’s supervisor. It provides “feedback reports to support the evaluation and development of instructional coaching talent” (Reddy et al., 2019, p. 105). Several charts, visuals, and rating scales are available to the coach for feedback regarding several coach-specific standards (Reddy et al., 2019).

Resistance to Coaching

In a study regarding teacher resistance to instructional coaching, Jacobs et al. (2018) discovered that most teachers involved in a Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) initiative who were resistant to coaching had more than ten years of experience, and those with less than ten years were more receptive to coaching. Several other factors reported by coaches as resistance were whether teachers prioritized time to meet with the coach, if the teacher was open to instructional feedback, or incorporated suggested revisions into their own lessons. In this study coaches worked on a literacy initiative where two-thirds were science and social studies teachers who also resisted coaching, showing a lack of buy-in to the program that was initiated. These resistant teachers did not show high growth for the project targets and did not teach the same number of lessons as the nonresistant teachers. Resistant teachers were more reluctant to invite

coaches into their classrooms and were more unavailable and unresponsive to requests to work together (Jacobs et al., 2018).

Castleman (2015) found that teachers inherently resist initiatives such as instructional coaching when the initiative does not relate to Knowles's (1980) principles of andragogy, such as self-directed learning, tapping into life experiences for new and relevant learning, learning that addresses current needs, and intrinsic motivation. Instructional coaches must always consider the relational aspect of working with adult learners, create mutual respect and trust, involve teachers in the decision-making process, and create collaborative learning opportunities to avoid teacher resistance (Castleman, 2015). Considering all of these factors "honors the capabilities of others and allows them to move toward self-actualization in a way that resonates with the needs of adult learners" (Castleman, 2015, p. 15).

In a study by Lowenhaupt et al. (2014), the authors analyzed the relationships of three literacy coaches with their teaching colleagues through a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. This framework considers the way in which people interpret and define their own world through practical behaviors as opposed to the ideal work that may be expected. They looked at the culture of schools and the adaptations that coaches made to form positive and trusting relationships. The three coaches they studied all found different degrees of resistance from the staff. Their everyday interactions with teachers included the need to remind teachers that they were also teachers, while feeling as if they walked a fine line between them and administrators. In many instances, they needed to modify their roles to try to develop trust with colleagues by including "symbolic gestures" (Lowenhaupt et al., 2014, p. 750), which included doing many other tasks that were unrelated to coaching. Providing these symbolic gestures helped ensure the development of relationships for each of the coaches in this study by providing

a more receptive culture. Lowenhaupt et al. (2014) argued that although many of these noncoaching tasks were unrelated to their official duties, the development of trust will enable coaches to eventually have more direct interaction with teachers regarding instructional practices.

Similarly, Atteberry and Bryk (2011) highlighted the diverse ways that systems implement coaching models that include the unique ways in which teachers enter a coaching relationship, and their perceptions and openness to coaching. This can be affected by the perceived instructional gains of an experienced teacher versus a novice teacher and the experience level of the coach, all teachers' willingness to take risks and improve their own practices, and teachers' willingness to enter a relationship with a coach. In this study, they found that coaches worked more frequently with newer teachers, those more willing to engage in innovative practices, and with those more willing to engage in a coaching relationship. Resistant teachers are often viewed as needing more effort and time to establish trusting relationships by coaches (Knight, 2009). Often, this resistance is due to the teachers' reluctance to change when they do not believe change is necessary, change has been unsuccessful in the past, they perceive change as threatening to their relationships within the school setting, or they want to maintain independence and instructional autonomy (Zimmerman, 2006).

Woulfin and Rigby (2017) considered another barrier that causes resistance to instructional coaching. When coaches are associated with evaluation, teachers are unlikely to request support from instructional coaches, especially if the evaluation system is attached to coaching practices. Resistance is caused when coaches are considered *intermediaries*. They believe that schools will need to create a culture shift in which all staff see the positive aspects of coaches collaborating with principals and teachers for instructional improvement, instead of the

evaluation system being a catalyst for coaching resistance. Woulfin and Rigby (2017) stated that coaching that supports experimentation and change will lead to instructional improvements and a greater “coherence between evaluation systems and ambitious instructional reforms” (p. 326).

Instructional Coaching Characteristics

For instructional coaches to be effective, their role needs to be clearly defined, supported by, and viewed as effective by the teachers they support (Finkelstein, 2019). Their role and coaching demeanor as instructional leaders can be perceived as evaluative if not carefully cultivated. A willingness to change on the part of the teacher, along with an element of risk-taking to share instructional needs, allows a coaching partnership to flourish (Gwazdauskas, 2009). Instructional coaches who build the trust and ability to work alongside their colleagues develop relational authority through a variety of coaching moves (Schulze, 2016), such as a student-centered coaching model which can shift the focus away from teaching behaviors to student behaviors. This shift can improve trust between colleagues and coaches (Sweeney, 2011).

Care Ethics in Education

Care ethics is an approach to moral philosophy that is widely recognized in many professions, including education (Noddings, 2012a). Care ethicists believe that human encounters include a carer and one who is cared for. These relationships are not always equal in responses and are dependent on the needs of those who are cared for (Noddings, 2012b). In order to establish and maintain a caring and trusting relationship, the carer must exhibit certain behaviors that elicit a response from the cared for (Noddings, 2012a; Noddings, 2012b).

The carer must be attentive and receptive to the expressed needs of the cared for and not the assumed needs of the educational institution (Noddings, 2012a). For a teacher, this is usually

not an issue as she is able to attend to the educational needs and as a carer, she may experience motivational displacement where her “motive energy is directed (temporarily) away from her own projects and towards those of the cared for” (Noddings, 2012b, p. 53). The carer responds to the expressed needs of, and is attentive to, the response from the cared for. If there is a response that shows that the caring has been recognized or received, the caring relationship has been established (Noddings, 2012b). Without a response, there is no caring relationship established and it does not matter how hard a carer tries to care (Noddings, 2012a).

In a caring educational relationship when trust and care has been established, a teacher will look to address the expressed needs of the cared for by looking for their cooperation in working on those needs or address other needs that may be discussed as the relationship continues to be built (Noddings, 2012a). Noddings (2012a; 2012b) believes that time spent on building this relationship of care and trust is not wasted time. Dialogue and reflection between the carer and cared for is critical to building a relationship of care and trust. According to Noddings (2012a), if a teacher has the time to do so and the competence to offer students multiple opportunities to make connections, they are able to establish a climate of care and trust. When presented with push-back regarding the time it takes to establish this climate of care with all of the demands of an educational environment, Noddings (2012a) believes that “establishing such a climate is not ‘on top of all the other things,’ it is *underneath* all we do as teachers” (p. 777). Noddings (2012a) stated that caring relations should be the goal for all teachers and administrators in order to meet the needs of all cared-for individuals.

Coaching Demeanor—Knowledge versus “Know it All”

Resistance to coaching can manifest for many different reasons. Finkelstein (2019) noted that because coaching takes professional learning into the teacher’s classroom, it is very likely to

cause defensiveness and vulnerability as many teachers equate adult observers with evaluation in the educational setting. Finkelstein (2019) found that “role definition within professional development settings—in particular, who holds authority for learning—often becomes contested space” (p. 321). If not presented as an asset, coaching can also be perceived as a punishment for ineffectiveness. Instructional coaches walk a fine line when presenting themselves to teachers as content experts. Finkelstein (2019) stated, “Although literacy coaches differ from principals in terms of their respective roles in the bureaucratic hierarchy, coaches are often perceived by teachers as holding more power. Such a perception has real impact on the creation of trusting relationships” (p. 320). Using critical discourse analysis and a theory and method of study, Finkelstein (2019) observed the relational trust between herself as an instructional coach and one teacher. Although this was a limited study, the tensions faced by instructional coaches regarding the daily interactions that may take place shed light on the importance of noticing and naming many verbal and nonverbal cues that allowed the researcher to adjust coaching to limit the power dynamics that were perceived by the teacher. Through a variety of coaching moves such as giving nonevaluative feedback, honoring teacher ideas, and collaborative reflection, the power dynamic was limited (Finkelstein, 2019).

Dozier (2008) included the importance of working side by side with teachers while working as their advocates. Of the eight principles presented in this study, two principles focus on helping teachers see the coach as a partner. The first is to find the strengths and entry points for teachers. In this way a coach “can avoid the trap of deficit driven theorizing” (Dozier, 2006 as cited in Dozier, 2008, p. 14). Another powerful strategy to help coaches avoid the *expert trap* is to work collaboratively. Dozier (2008) quantifies the idea that collaboration builds trusting relationships:

As a literacy coach, I embrace Brian Cambourne's (1995) co-learner model. While I have areas of expertise, I do not position myself as *the expert*. As I develop relationships with teachers, I seek, first, to be responsive to teachers' strengths, interests, and needs (p. 12). To establish trust and reduce the risk of resistance to coaching, Schulze (2016) confirmed the need for a coach to establish a trusting relationship before teacher learning can occur. Through a qualitative case study, six themes emerged that provide insight from one coach who was perceived to have gained the trust of their teaching colleagues. The themes for trust building included "exhibiting competence, maintaining confidentiality, creating and sustaining a positive environment, staying consistent, remaining present, and developing personal relationships" (Schulze, 2016, p. 121). The final two, which occur at an interpersonal level, were found to be new to the research on trust at the time of the study (Schulze, 2016).

Slightly different themes were discovered in a study by Axelson (2016), which found that communication, collaboration, and modeling of lessons were also important roles of the literacy coaches studied, when implementing new Common Core State Standards for ELA across multiple buildings within a district (p. 6). Kubek (2012) also looked at the instructional coach role and found that a significant percentage of teachers (59% year 1, 57% year 2) collaborated on instructional strategies and implementation with their coach (p. 162).

In his book *The Impact Cycle*, Knight (2018) further clarifies three approaches that instructional coaches frequently use to create impactful change during a coaching cycle. Table 1 references these approaches. The dialogical approach is more commonly used within the prescribed impact cycle that allows teachers to identify a goal that needs to be attained, learn how to obtain the goal, and improve upon the goal by making modifications to a teaching strategy (Knight, 2018).

Table 1*Three Approaches to Coaching*

Characteristic	Facilitative	Dialogical	Directive
Relationship	Sounding board	Partner	Expert / Apprentice
Teacher knowledge	Knows what they need to know to improve	Has valuable knowledge / need other knowledge to improve	Must implement new knowledge to improve
Decision making	Teacher makes decisions	Teacher makes decisions—goal oriented	Coach makes decisions
Approach	Coach does not share expertise	Coach shares expertise through dialogue—collegial conversation	Coach shares knowledge directly
Focus	Teacher	Student	Teaching practice
Mode of discourse	Inquiry—help teacher recognize what they already know	Balances advocacy with inquiry	Advocacy—clear expertise, modeling, constructive feedback to teach new strategy

Note: Modified from *The Impact Cycle*, Knight, 2018.

In the book *Quality Teaching in a Culture of Coaching*, Barkley (2010) describes several *agenda skills* for instructional coaches that rely on open-ended and closed-ended questions that open the door for reflective inquiry. Barkley (2010) suggests the need for instructional coaches to be skilled with these types of questions and ask “empowering questions that are creative, evaluative, and personalized” (p. 69). These types of questions allow the coach to elicit creative ideas from teachers, encourage teachers to move away from general facts to more purposeful reasons, and allow for a more personalized approach that signals to the teacher that the instructional coach is truly listening. Barkley (2010) believes that supportive and challenging questions encourage reflection.

Needs Based Support with Students at the Forefront

When entering a coaching relationship, the teacher and coach need to find a common ground from which to begin, and this can be achieved through a student-centered coaching model (Sweeney, 2011; Sweeney & Harris, 2017). In a student-centered coaching model, instructional coaches look for strengths and needs of students within the data collected by the classroom teacher, and cognitively reflect with the teacher to consider next steps for instruction (Sweeney & Harris, 2017). Coggins and McGovern (2014) call them “skillful facilitators of adult learning” and “evidence-based decision makers” (p. 19). The next steps instructional coaches take are critical to the success of the relationship with the teacher. The coach must *read* the situation and consider a variety of moves to be made based on that analysis. Tschannen-Moran and Carter’s (2016) study reiterated the importance of considering emotional intelligence and the soft skills paired with the hard skills they must use to help them decide the next best step with the teachers they coach.

Much of what a teacher will take from a coaching situation is based on the mindset of the teacher going into the situation. “Teachers traditionally have enjoyed both autonomy and isolation from their colleagues; some hope that a more organic, context-sensitive process of learning and personal investment in reform will result when teachers work more collegially to realize a shared vision” (Levine & Marcus, 2007, p. 118). The difference can be as simple as when the teacher believes they *need* a coach due to a flaw in their teaching, versus believing they *deserve* to be coached to grow as an instructional learner (Barkley, 2017; Knight, 2007). With these two diverse beliefs, coaches consider the coaching moves they will make before, during, and after working with the teacher—and these moves may be different with every teacher with whom they work.

With a focus on student work and data, some of this diversity can be eliminated (Sweeney & Harris, 2017). Neumerski (2012) identified several ideal steps coaches may take during a coaching cycle: planning, observation, modeling, and debriefing. However, Atteberry et al. (2008) found that coaches worked within this cycle only 4% of the time (Neumerski, 2012). “The coach needs to include the teacher in planning decisions, the on-the-spot teaching and assessing moves, the specific questioning to check for understanding, the evidence of learning, and how to use that evidence to shift instruction” (Routman, 2012, p. 58). Many coaches take on many more responsibilities, such as curriculum planning, assessment, providing professional development, finding resources, and membership on various committees and team meetings (Curtis et al., 2012; Neumerski, 2012). Some coaches use these other responsibilities to gain access to teachers who may be hesitant to request in-class coaching.

Coaches who build the trust and ability to work alongside their colleagues develop relational authority through a variety of coaching moves, with one of the most powerful being a student-centered coaching model (Sweeney, 2011). Teacher perceptions of coaches is equally important as a coach’s perceptions of teachers. However, knowing that adult learners’ developmental capacity has limitations to how much a coach can critique, student-centered coaching is an effective model that works for teachers needing to be eased into the adaptive challenge of accepting feedback from an instructional coach. Sweeney (2011) stated that:

student-centered coaching is about (1) setting specific targets for students that are rooted in the standards and curriculum and (2) working collaboratively to ensure that the targets are met. Rather than focusing on how teachers feel or on the acquisition of a few simple skills, we measure our impact based on student learning. (p. 7)

Providing this type of job-embedded continuous feedback, focusing on student learning and data, allows both teacher and instructional coach to develop a trusting relationship that builds the partnership that is desirable for coaching to be accepted. Dozier (2008) suggests teachers ground conversations in “the work of children” (p.15). Collaborative decision making regarding the acquisition of student goals is the premise for a student-centered model (Sweeney, 2011).

Knight (2019) summarized the connection of instructional coaching and visible learning by Hattie (2009) by connecting this work to classroom observation. He describes effective instructional coaching practices using the impact cycle of identify, learn, and improve. In this model, a coach partners with a teacher, works with him or her to analyze what is currently happening in the classroom, sets goals, works together to identify teaching strategies that will help achieve the goals, and works with the coach who provides support until the goals are achieved. This model considers coaches to be adaptive, responding to the unique situations within the classroom with the individual teacher and their students. For coaching to be effective, the coach needs to be fluent in the Ten Mindframes of Visible Learning (Hattie & Zierer, 2018).

The Ten Mindframes are:

1. I am an evaluator of my impact on student learning.
2. I see assessment as informing my impact and next steps.
3. I collaborate with my peers and my students about my conceptions of progress and my impact.
4. I am a change agent and believe all students can improve.
5. I strive for challenge and not merely “doing your best.”
6. I give and help students understand feedback and I interpret and act on feedback given to me.

7. I engage as much in dialogue as monologue.
8. I explicitly inform students what successful impact looks like from the outset.
9. I build relationships and trust so that learning can occur in a place where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others.
10. I focus on learning and the language of learning.

The coach then works to explain the importance of using effective strategies from the Hattie (2009) framework and a coach-created playbook (a list of effective teaching strategies with checklists), considers student-centered moves with the teacher, and guides the learning, with goals at the forefront of all coaching conversations and teacher decisions. The article also identifies strategies such as modeling teaching strategies for the teacher with students present, modeling during planning sessions, and encouraging teachers to observe other teachers live or through videos. It is also important for the teacher and coach to constantly monitor progress toward set goals and adjust teaching to achieve them. During the last stage (improve) the coach may suggest additional strategies from the Ten Mindframes. “Ultimately, the goal is for the teacher to be able to move through the cycle—analyzing reality, setting goals, identifying and learning strategies, and making modifications—with minimal help from the coach” (Hattie & Zierer, 2018, p. 13).

Similarly, Walkowiak (2016) identified five essential coaching practices that are also student centered, which include having the coach and school leaders collaborate on the definition of the coaching role, the importance of the coach establishing trust with teachers, making sure the coach shows that he or she values teacher’s ideas, the coach sets student centered narrow and focused goals for instructional growth, and the coach focuses instructional conversations on evidence from students and on learning together as professionals (Walkowiak, 2016). She

reiterated the fact that communication between the coach and teachers is critical for coaching to be successful.

Conclusion

Creating opportunities for instructional coaching within a school or district does not automatically equate with instructional improvement or transformative learning among adults. For the past twenty or more years, many studies have been conducted that consider the roles of instructional coaches as instructional leaders, their relationships with peers and administration, and their impact on student achievement (Bissonette, 2014; Finkelstein, 2019; Gwazdauskas, 2009; Helterbran, 2010; Kane & Rosenquist, 2018). In many studies instructional coaches have been elevated to teacher leader status, without administrative or evaluative functions or responsibilities (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Kubek, 2012; Schulze, 2016).

More recent studies have moved past simply identifying the initial need for instructional coaches within the professional development continuum to considering ways to identify or create more effective instructional coaches who are able to develop impactful and transformative instructional practices (Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016; Venables, 2018; Wilson, 2016). There have been several studies conducted within the past ten years or so that describe desired traits of instructional coaches, as well as pedagogical moves that make them most effective (Garbacz et al., 2015; Hattie & Zierer, 2018; Kho et al., 2019; Knight, 2019). Also, some studies point to the fact that coaches need the support of administration with positional authority to be effective, which was not as prevalent in earlier studies (Curtis et al., 2012; DeWitt, 2020). Identifying the most effective character traits, coaching moves, and the conditions for coaches to grow and maintain relational trust continues to be somewhat elusive and not consistent within the current literature.

Instructional coaches are moved into these roles because they are skilled teachers, but many do not understand how adults learn best, or how to create lasting change (Drago-Severson, 2009; Jacobs et al., 2018; Knowles et al., 2005; Linn, 2018; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). There is a high level of resistance to coaching due to lack of trust reported between instructional coaches and teachers in the kindergarten through 12th grade setting (Boardman et al., 2018; DeWitt, 2020; Finkelstein, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2015; Walkowiak, 2016).

Research was conducted using a qualitative model of phenomenology. With this research, I gathered pertinent data regarding the opinions, observations, and interpretations of instructional coaches as providers of ongoing professional development and the conditions they identify as necessary to be effective teachers of adult learners to build trust and avoid teacher resistance to coaching. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative phenomenological study probed the relationship between relational trust and the acceptance of or resistance to instructional coaching of kindergarten through 12th grade classroom teachers as part of an instructional coaching professional development model. Instructional coaching has been identified by many researchers as a welcomed alternative to traditional professional development models, which are sometimes poorly aligned to teacher needs (Barkley, 2017; Knight, 2018; Kubek, 2012). Effective instructional coaches customize professional development within the safety of teachers' own classrooms, building trusting relationships and creating individual learning opportunities to support the adult learners (Barkley, 2011). With the right supports, instructional coaches can help teachers flourish. Without these supports, however, this model falls short of expectations (Knight, 2018). A key feature of effective coaching is a trusting relationship between the coach and the teacher; there is a high level of resistance to coaching when trust reported between instructional coaches and kindergarten through 12th grade teachers is missing (DeWitt, 2020; Finkelstein, 2019; Garbacz et al., 2015; Jacobs et al., 2018; Walkowiak, 2016).

In this chapter, I describe the purpose of the study, state the research questions, describe the approach used to address the research questions, and describe the participants, the site where the study took place, and how data that informs this study was collected and analyzed.

Limitations, credibility, and ethical concerns are also discussed.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of instructional coaches as they describe key conditions that need to be in place to build relational

trust and diminish resistance to coaching and to examine the structure of their trust building experiences with their teaching colleagues. Instructional coaching, as a professional development model, must have several factors in place to be effective (Debacker, 2013; DeWitt, 2020). Not all instructional coaching models are successful for a variety of reasons, including lack of trust and understanding from the stakeholders who work with a coach (Dewitt, 2020; Jacobs, et al., 2018). This study sought to identify those key conditions that enable coaches to build trust and work effectively by utilizing the conceptual framework of Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning and the theoretical framework of Malcolm Knowles (1980) adult learning theory. In this framework, as coaches work with adult learners, their goal is to help teachers transform their practice through critical self-reflection and discourse (Mezirow, 1991). This work investigated the lived experiences of instructional coaches and their perceptions regarding their role within their own settings. The intent of this study was to provide data to other educational organizations regarding the conditions that are necessary for instructional coaches to succeed, so that these organizations are able to recruit, train, and sustain high-quality instructional coaches. Firsthand accounts from instructional coaches may give other districts the knowledge they will need to support these instructional experts as they work with the adult learner and build trust within their own teaching environments.

Research Questions and Design

Based on the research that identifies the importance of instructional coaching as an effective professional development model and by using transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) as a conceptual framework and Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy, or adult learning theory as a theoretical framework, my intent was to answer the following research questions:

1. What human or environmental conditions do instructional coaches identify as key to establishing and building relational trust with the teachers they serve?
2. What are the perceptions of instructional coaches about how these key conditions mediate relational trust in the coaching context?

This research was conducted as a qualitative phenomenological study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe phenomenological research as a qualitative method that “describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (p. 13). Participants in a qualitative study are able “to express themselves and their ‘lived experience’ stories the way they see fit without any distortion and/or prosecution” (Alase, 2017, p. 9). Qualitative research helps the researcher explore emerging questions or complex situations to interpret data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants were invited to share information about their lived experiences as instructional coaches across a variety of school districts. Semi structured interviews were used to gather information from experienced instructional coaches, specifically probing the conditions they see as necessary for them to create trusting relationships with their teacher colleagues.

Site Information and Participants

According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE, 2021), there are currently 75,152 full-time teachers in the state. Close to 83% are considered experienced in their field. There are 954,773 students in the state, and the average student / teacher ratio is 12.6 to 1. Among the 402 districts and charter schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the 2021 data shows that 189 districts employ instructional coaches. Table 2 shows a slight downward trend from a somewhat steady rise in instructional coaches employed within the state, as well as the percentage of districts that employed instructional coaches over the past ten years (DESE, School and District Profiles).

Table 2*Number of Districts / Charter Schools with Instructional Coaches*

School Year	Number of Instructional Coaches in Massachusetts	Number of Districts / Charter Schools Employing Instructional Coaches	Percentage of Districts / Charter Schools Employing Instructional Coaches
2011–2012	1018.7	116 of 388	29.8%
2012–2013	996.7	126 of 391	32%
2013–2014	1033.8	124 of 396	31%
2014–2015	1062.2	136 of 393	34.5%
2015–2016	1,142.6	149 of 409	36%
2016–2017	1,138.9	146 of 405	36 %
2017–2018	1,303	163 of 408	39.9%
2018–2019	1,268.8	179 of 408	43.8%
2019–2020	1,437.2	199 of 405	49%
2020–2021	1,366	189 of 402	47%

Note: DESE: School and District Profiles (2021).

It is unclear the extent to which COVID-19 conditions may have affected these trends; currently, there is no data to inform conclusions. That said, the previous steady rise seems to be indicative of the trends for districts to utilize the instructional coaching model in their schools.

The study was conducted by interviewing seven instructional coaches from urban and suburban school districts across Massachusetts, using a semi structured interview process. Purposefully choosing a smaller number of participants with three or more years of coaching experience was intentional as I intended to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of

instructional coaching and the development of trust building relationships while reaching a saturation point. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), saturation is achieved when all major themes are identified, and no new themes or details can be added to the list of themes. This was achieved with the number of participants interviewed. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) also stated that it is typical in qualitative research to study fewer individuals to provide a more in-depth view of the phenomenon being studied.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling is typically used in qualitative research due to the selection of “information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p.186). Instructional coaches with three or more years of coaching experience were asked to participate due to their potential for having gained insight and experience in an instructional coaching role. As a member of an assistant superintendent and superintendent list serve, I requested permission from districts that employ instructional coaches to request assistance in identifying potential participants to enroll in this study. This detailed letter including criterion for participants, information regarding the purpose of the study, and contact information was emailed to selected superintendents within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts who employ instructional coaches, requesting they forward the request to their instructional coaches. They were also requested to send a letter of support to confirm potential participation of their instructional coaches. The email that was sent to coaches included the researcher’s contact information along with pertinent information of the study, and the request for a 45 to 60-minute interview. If more than ten qualified coaches responded, I would use simple random sampling so that all participants would have an equal chance of

participating. A consent form was sent to all willing participants and required signatures before interviews began.

Instrumentation Data Collection

Data for this study was obtained via semi structured interviews with instructional coaches. Semi structured interviews help to “facilitate more focused exploration of a specific topic, using an interview guide” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 193). A qualitative research interview is often described as a purposeful conversation that is informed by a research question (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 57). I conducted semi structured interviews utilizing an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) structure. The researcher in these types of interviews does not claim to be objective due to the “bonding relationship that the approach allows for the researchers to develop with their research participants” (Alase, 2017, p. 9), the nature of the questions asked, and the probing that may occur. In IPA, the data collection process through interviews is intended to obtain detailed experiences from the participants which should also elicit their thoughts and feelings and is the preferred method for collecting data (Smith et al., 2009). The goal was to have self-revealing conversations generated from all participants. With phenomenological interviews, the researcher attempts to come at the research question *sideways* to facilitate the discussion of important topics and allow the research question to be answered through analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

The use of semi structured interviews allowed for most predetermined questions to be answered by all coaches, while permitting flexibility to dig deeper as necessary. I created a question bank (Appendix) with four central questions, each with between two and five sub-questions designed to narrow the degree of focus and allow for additional probing questions to provide additional information about each topic of discussion. Questions were formulated based

on the work of Knight (2018), Drago-Severson (2009), and Knowles (1980) and their definitions of effective behaviors of instructional coaches as teachers of adult learners. Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning also guided the formulation of interview questions to seek information regarding coaches' abilities to consider ways in which they help transform learning with the teachers with whom they work once trust has been established. Anecdotal data collected by me as a former instructional coach enhanced the focus of the questions.

Interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom and were also recorded using Otter.ai® as a secondary transcription service. Zoom allows the researcher and subject to virtually *see* one another which will enhance the researcher's ability to watch for visual cues as questions are being answered. The interview process was entered understanding that there could be a perceived power differential. This was addressed as the purpose of the study was introduced to each participant. Decisions about the order of questions were based on feedback received from the participant as the interview was conducted. Probing questions were added for clarity at the discretion of the researcher. An atmosphere was created that allowed participants to engage in thick, rich, and deep conversations regarding their instructional coaching positions. Due to possible difficulty in making sense of some responses, the researcher carefully probed using predetermined questions, while allowing for a fair exchange of viewpoints throughout the interview session. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe semistructured interviews as a format that "allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 111).

Instrument Validation

I used the expertise of the instructional coaches from my own district to pilot the interview questions and develop an interview protocol to follow. These were revised as needed

based on their feedback, before conducting the formal interviews using the four-step interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework developed by Castillo-Montoya (2016). Using the IPR framework, I ensured there was alignment between the interview and research questions, ensured an inquiry-based conversation was constructed, received feedback from my own coaches regarding the interview protocol, and pilot tested the interview questions until satisfied that the data answered the research questions. Data obtained within my own district was not included in the final analysis.

Data Analysis

Once all interviews and observations were conducted, I transcribed and organized all notes and coded the data using a coding service such as Atlas.Ti® and used the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) protocol to identify themes, patterns, and trends using a structured method developed by Moustakas (1994) for IPA qualitative data analysis (Alase, 2017). The coding process began by reading through each response line by line to identify common words or phrases and then rereading for clarity two to three times. Once that was completed, semantic content and language were noted, focusing on anything of interest with a “descriptive core of comments, which have a clear phenomenological focus and stay close to the participant’s explicit meaning” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). Step three included identifying themes and categorizations that were coded and analyzed for “significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas (1994) called an essence description” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 198). This process involved three “generic cycles” (Alase, 2017, p. 16) that gradually coded and condensed larger generic statements into fewer words to accurately represent the lived experiences of the participants and categorize the “‘core essence’ of the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participant without distorting or misrepresenting the

‘core essence’ of what the participants have experienced” (Alase, 2017, p. 16). According to Smith et al. (2009), “the end result is always an account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking” (p. 80). The cycle began again with the next participant’s responses until all were complete. Patterns and connections were then identified across cases that allowed for potential reconfiguring or relabeling of themes, which were then only “fixed through the act of writing up” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 81).

Limitations of the Research Design

I knowingly created some delimitations including the time of year of the study. The choice to interview only instructional coaches within Massachusetts as a limited sample size may impact transferability. Conducting interviews via Zoom or Google Meet could impact interpretation of responses by participants who were not familiar to me as a researcher. Using Mezirow’s (1991) conceptual framework of transformative learning and the theoretical theory of Knowles’s (1980) adult learning theory to guide in the coding process also helped uncover data that may provide some subjectivity during analysis (Anfara, 2015).

In conducting this phenomenological study as a previous literacy coach, my personal experiences could have limited the interpretation and coding of the data objectively. “The truth claims of an IPA analysis are always tentative and analysis is subjective . . . that subjectivity is dialogical, systematic, and rigorous in its application and the results of it are available for the reader to check subsequently” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). IPA is inherently interpretive—the researcher produces an account of what he or she believes the participant is thinking (Smith et al., 2009), which limits replication, but may also be considered a strength. Phenomenology is sensitive to the lived experiences of the participants, which is vastly different from quantitative

studies that are limited to statistical analysis. The following sections discuss the plan for mitigation of limitations within this study.

Credibility

Credibility is the internal validity of the study that identifies if the participant's perceptions match the researcher's portrayal (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). As part of this process, I first described and included personal experiences with instructional coaching as advised by Creswell (2013) as cited in Alase, (2017), to confirm that the researcher's own experiences could be inserted into the lived experiences of the research participants during the process of data analysis. Careful verbatim transcription of all interviews recorded the conversations that occurred. The following procedures were followed to ensure this study's credibility.

Member Checking Procedures

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) define member checking as a process whereby the researcher asks participants to check the accuracy and true reflection of what they intended to portray during the interview process. All interview data were transcribed concurrently, and patterns and trends identified after all interviews were completed. After interviews were completed, each participant was asked to read the transcripts and findings via email exchange. Participants' did not provide any revisions or feedback. Due to this, capturing the essence of the interviews was assumed. All transcripts and findings were checked to ensure clarity before publication.

Transferability

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) defined transferability as "the fit or match between the research context and other contexts as judged by the reader" (p. 205) and the context-relevant

findings can be viewed in an applicable process that is not expected to be generalized to other settings. As one form of criteria for assessing validity and reliability of a qualitative study, transferability can be determined through the documentation of the steps and procedures taken during this study. A detailed account of protocols used, definition of codes, and publication of interview questions was designed to enable others to gauge the extent to which the findings from this study are transferrable to other contexts. Creswell and Creswell (2018) caution against generalization in qualitative research as it is impossible to do so with individual sites outside of a study. The value of qualitative research is brought forth through individualized themes found through the context of individual sites. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) also stress the need to include rich descriptions to communicate a clear understanding of the research participants experiences, as well as detailed information regarding all other pertinent information so that readers can make comparisons to their own organizations without replication. To ensure transferability, this study proved to have dependability and confirmability.

Dependability (Validity)

To achieve dependability, the researcher needs to clearly document the research process so that it is logical and traceable (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In this study, I used semi structured interview questions to gather data from instructional coaches who work in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Interviews were recorded using Zoom and transcribed using Otter.ai. Individual transcripts were sent to participants for the purpose of member checking. Data was analyzed using the IPA method (Moustakas, 1994).

Confirmability

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) describe confirmability as a way for the researcher to establish that the findings are “clearly derived from the data” (p. 204), and those findings are

adequately explained by the results of the research, and not because of the biases of the researcher. I spent an adequate amount of time interviewing each instructional coach to accurately capture the phenomenon of instructional coaching. This was predetermined during the field test with my own instructional coaches and was documented for each interview conducted. Data from the semi structured interviews was reviewed several times to justify the themes presented. The data analyzed were addressed using Moustakas's (1994) IPA method, and conclusions were stated accordingly to ensure that should subjectivity emerge, it would be discussed as a result of the data. Any bias brought to this study was adequately reflected as part of the IPA process. The trustworthiness of the findings depended on ongoing critical reflection as well as through member checking. It was also important to present any negative or discrepant information that may not represent the identified themes, to ensure credibility to this report. Every effort was made to provide detailed descriptions of all aspects of the findings. Using a peer debriefing protocol added to the validity of the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Ethical Issues in the Proposed Study

The Belmont Report (1979) was used in elements of informed consent, risk/benefit assessment, and the selection of subjects, to ensure the protection and rights of the research participants. Consent forms were sent to all participants before the study began. No research was conducted without signed and understood consent forms. The benefits of this study include production of a cohesive set of guidelines for effective relational trust building between coaches and teachers that does not exist in the current literature, and this was discussed with all participants prior to interviews. To ensure the protection of participants, as an external researcher it was imperative that I made my position clear throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and final publication. Choosing to study instructional coaches outside of my district

allowed for unbiased observations throughout the interview process and reduced the potential for any conflict of interest. An agreement of confidentiality was maintained throughout the process and was reviewed with each participant. Pseudonyms or codes were used for all participants instead of actual names, and site names were not revealed. Data was stored on an external hard drive and placed in a locked file cabinet in my personal residence, so that information remained confidential and safe for time that is required by the University of New England's (UNE) Institutional Review Board (IRB) (2021).

The ethical principles of respect for persons as autonomous agents, beneficence for protection from harm, and justice in treating every participant equally from the Belmont Report (1979) were also maintained. If at any time an instructional coach wanted to withdraw from the study, he or she was free to do so without consequence. Maintaining trust was of the utmost importance between the researcher and all participants. The IRB for the Protection of Human Subjects (University of New England, 2021, n.p.) requirements were also strictly adhered to.

Conflict of Interest

My role as a previous instructional coach afforded the unique knowledge of the importance of maintaining confidentiality regarding the instructional coach's role and the researcher's desire to improve their ability to provide quality professional development to all teachers. Full disclosure regarding the purpose of this study to all participants was made clear throughout the process of data collection. The goal of this study was to identify additional conditions that our district and others can provide coaches to ensure their success in all settings.

Summary

Using IPA, I pursued the answers to this study's research questions in order to provide data to other organizations regarding the conditions that are necessary for instructional coaches

to succeed, so that these organizations are able to recruit, train, and sustain high-quality instructional coaches. Semi structured interviews were used to gain the perception of instructional coaches. Ethical research and expectations were at the forefront while collecting and analyzing data so that validity, confidentiality, and confirmability maintain trustworthiness during the entire process. Chapter 4 provides analysis and presentation of results. Chapter five provides interpretation of the findings, implications, and recommendations for further action, as well as suggestions for continue research.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of instructional coaches as they described key conditions that need to be in place to build relational trust and diminish resistance to coaching, and to explore the structure of their trust building experiences with their teaching colleagues. Instructional coaching, as a professional development model, must have several factors in place to be effective (Debacker, 2013; DeWitt, 2020). Not all instructional coaching models are successful, for a variety of reasons, including lack of trust and understanding from the stakeholders who work with a coach (Dewitt, 2020; Jacobs et al., 2018). This study sought to identify those key conditions that enable coaches to build trust and work effectively by utilizing the conceptual framework of Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning and the theoretical framework of Knowles's (1980) adult learning theory. In this framework, as coaches work with adult learners, their goal is to help teachers transform their practice through critical self-reflection and discourse (Mezirow, 1991). This work investigated the lived experiences of instructional coaches and their perceptions regarding their role within their own settings. The intent of this study was to provide guidance to other educational organizations regarding the conditions that are necessary for instructional coaches to succeed, so that these organizations can recruit, train, and sustain high-quality instructional coaches. An analysis of firsthand accounts from instructional coaches may give other districts the knowledge they will need to support these instructional experts as they work with the adult learner and build trust within their own teaching environments.

Based on the research that identifies the importance of instructional coaching as an effective professional development model and by using transformative learning theory

(Mezirow, 1991) as a conceptual framework and Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy, or adult learning theory, as a theoretical framework, the following research questions were answered:

1. What human or environmental conditions do instructional coaches identify as key to establishing and building relational trust with the teachers they serve?
2. What are the perceptions of instructional coaches about how these key conditions mediate relational trust in the coaching context?

This qualitative phenomenological study probed the relationship between relational trust and the acceptance of or resistance to instructional coaching of kindergarten through 12th grade classroom teachers as part of an instructional coaching professional development model.

Instructional coaches with three or more years of coaching experience were asked to participate due to their potential for having gained insight and experience in an instructional coaching role.

Semi structured interviews were used to gather information from experienced instructional coaches specifically probing the conditions they see as necessary for them to create trusting relationships with their teacher colleagues. Participants shared information about their lived experiences as instructional coaches.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is an overview of the data collection and analysis. The second highlights the demographics of the participants with a brief description of each. Gathering demographic information and writing the narrative for each participant allowed for a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. The third and final section highlights the themes and subthemes that emerged from the instructional coaches' lived experiences.

Analysis Method

Data collection began after permission was obtained from the University of New England's Institutional Review Board. An email was sent to all potential instructional coaches from the list of public-school systems from whom I received superintendent letters of support. The email contained all pertinent information regarding the requirements for participation in the study and the contact information to communicate directly with the researcher to schedule an interview if they decided to participate in the study. Ten potential participants replied initially. Of those ten, one instructional coach had less than three years of experience in a coaching role, and two did not reply after receiving an email with the letter of consent. Interviews were scheduled with the remaining seven participants.

Semi structured interviews were conducted via Zoom individually with each participant at the time of their choosing. The use of a semi structured protocol allowed me to ask a mix of basic demographic, structured, and open-ended questions. The initial part of each interview gathered descriptive information regarding time in their current instructional coaching role, longevity in the teaching field, and their general impressions of their role as a coach. The second part of the interview asked participants to describe their experiences building and maintaining relationships with their adult teaching colleagues and their understanding of the requirements to navigate a variety of teacher and student needs across content areas. This section also explored participants' experiences working with adult learners and their ability to engage them in transforming their teaching practices. The final section asked participants to consider their own needs as teachers of adult learners and engaged participants in critical reflection as instructional leaders within their own districts. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai®, a transcription technology platform. Transcripts were reviewed and a copy sent to

each participant via email for member checking to confirm that data was accurate (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019). No revisions were made by any participant. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to protect their privacy.

All notes were transcribed and organized, and the data coded using the coding service Atlas.Ti®. The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) protocol was used to identify themes, patterns, and trends using a structured method developed by Moustakas (1994) for IPA qualitative data analysis (Alase, 2017). Data was analyzed through the process of descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments (Smith et al., 2009). Using the Atlas.Ti® software, the coding process began by reading through each response line by line to identify the first impressions of each participant. During the second read, I focused on the linguistic comments by exploring the specific use of language while noting semantic content and language with a “descriptive core of comments, which have a clear phenomenological focus and stay close to the participant’s explicit meaning” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). The third read was focused on considering the concepts that emerged within each participant’s transcript. Themes and categorizations were identified, coded, and analyzed for “significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas (1994) called an essence description” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 198). This process involved three “generic cycles” (Alase, 2017, p. 16) that gradually coded and condensed larger generic statements into fewer words to accurately represent the lived experiences of the participants and categorize the “‘core essence’ of the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participant without distorting or misrepresenting the ‘core essence’ of what the participants have experienced” (Alase, 2017, p. 16). The cycle began again with the next participant’s responses until all seven were completed. Then patterns and connections were identified across cases, which allowed for potential

reconfiguring or relabeling of themes. Initially, 167 labels, including quotations and descriptions, were created and eighty initial codes emerged from this process. Of these eighty codes, eight code groups of emergent themes were created that categorized the core essence of each instructional coach's lived experiences.

Presentation of Results

This section includes the demographic information of the participants of this study, including their instructional coaching title, the type of public school district in which they work, the number of years of teaching experience, and subsequent coaching experience each participant had. Participants also shared their leadership styles and advice for future coaches. Six overarching themes—Many Hats, Coaching Needs, Resistance to Coaching, Care Ethics, Active Listening, and Adult Learners—and seventeen subthemes complete the rest of this section, concluding with a brief summary of results.

Participants

Seven instructional coaches from a variety of public schools in the MetroWest and Central Massachusetts area were interviewed. Five of the seven worked in urban districts, one worked in a suburban district, and one worked in a regional district. Experience as an instructional coach varied from four years up to fourteen years. Previous teaching experience for participants ranged from six to twenty-six years. Although the Commonwealth of Massachusetts identifies all coaches as instructional coaches, two participants self-identified as math coaches, two self-identified as literacy coaches, one identified as a language development coach, and two participants identified themselves as instructional coaches.

Anne

Anne was an elementary instructional coach in an urban district with six years of prior teaching experience and six years in her current role. Her interest in instructional leadership led her to seek out the role as an instructional coach. Anne professed her interest in instructional leadership:

Instructional leadership is something that I was just always really interested in. Even when I was a classroom teacher. So when this role opened in my building, it was really exciting to me. I just love talking about learning with other learners and other educators. I just think there's nothing better and I think it's so exciting to have conversations about how to best serve students.

Anne's coaching responsibilities included a scheduled coaching day where teachers were provided substitute coverage and chose to meet with her to discuss their instructional needs. She split the rest of her time between district curriculum project initiatives, building instructional leadership work, and direct in-class support of her teaching colleagues. Anne considered herself a responsive leader. She stated, "I try to let whatever the teacher wants to do guide the work. . . . I'd like to just coach in response to what the teacher feels is a priority." Part of the responsiveness that Anne described considers the need for an instructional coach to be empathetic and "remembering what it was like to be in a classroom with 25 learners every day and then have to be in a meeting learning about a new program."

When reflecting on specific advice she would potentially give to future instructional coaches, Anne revealed:

I think you have to remember that teachers are continuous learners. Like, any educator is a continuous learner, so I think you go into this role, you're a teacher. That doesn't

change. You're just a teacher with a new name. So, you're still a colleague, you're still supporting students. All of that is the same. It's just now you have a little bit more capacity to support your colleagues in a different way. You almost have more time to be able to support your colleagues in the work that we all do. But I think as much as your title changes your role, your role doesn't change that much. You're still a teacher, and that's still the fundamental part of the work and you're still talking to colleagues and having productive conversations about students in progress. It's just the name is different.

Bill

Bill was an elementary math coach in a regional school district with 26 years of teaching experience. He was entering his fifth year in his coaching role within the district with an additional opportunity of first year coaching in a new building. His passion for math as a specific content area was the impetus for him seeking out a coaching position. He shared:

So after about 13 years of math, this position came open and so this is what I want to do . . . the more people I can affect . . . 100 kids at a time each year and making them love math. If I can do that with a teacher who's going to each touch 100 kids then even better if I can get the love of math out there.

Bill saw his coaching responsibilities in the two buildings he was working in very differently due to the difference in experiences teachers had with instructional coaching. Bill reflected on this difference:

My relationship with them is different in this school even though I am at both at the same time. They just met me here. So, I am still early in the helping out. Hey, can I make a copy for you, can I go and grab that chair for you. Somebody needs the custodian to bring a chair, I say, hey I'll go get that for you. I'm still at that very early, let them know I am

here for them, stage because when a new adult comes in in this position, they are not sure what am I there for. Even though we said it, my job description has gone out. They are all aware, but they don't know what that really looks like or means and they haven't seen it before.

Bill's typical responsibilities for math coaching included supporting a new math initiative within the district, individual coaching sessions within several classrooms, and supporting students through student-centered opportunities through coaching cycles developed in tandem with his teacher colleagues. Bill described his coaching style in a unique way:

I tend to take a Columbo approach to it. I just go in and say, I like what you are doing there but can I teach that lesson? I'm really curious about something. I want to try something and see if you can give me some tips on it.

Bill reflected on the advice he would give future instructional coaches in this way, "be passionate about it, believe in it and build the relationships. A lot of it is the passion that you've got."

Claudia

Claudia was an elementary literacy coach in a suburban district. She had 25 years of teaching experience with the past seven as a coach, all in the same building. She identified this as a positive aspect of her role, as well as the longevity she attained in multiple grades from preschool to grade two. Her content area expertise led her to seek out a coaching role. Claudia identified the literacy coaching role as part of a district-wide multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) initiative. Through this initiative, her coaching responsibilities included conducting common planning time meetings with teacher teams, using data with teachers to make instructional decisions, supporting teaching colleagues through coaching cycles within the classroom, and helping teachers plan and implement small group instruction that supports a

response to intervention (RTI) model within the building. Claudia said that she leads by example. While working with her teaching colleagues, she listens to their needs, and gives options for what has worked for her in the past but does not require them to do what she did. She theorized that it is “about being a good listener, being understanding of what they're saying and sympathetic but not to the point where, you know, it's taking away from what their ultimate goal is.”

While considering how difficult being an instructional coach can sometimes be, Claudia reflected on this advice to future coaches:

I would say find . . . someone in the equal role . . . I have a set of coaches . . . and we have developed a great relationship. We feel comfortable with one another, we know one another. We, you know, just like everybody else, we need someone to vent to and we have a great trusting relationship. With that respect, we also are able to take all of our strengths and put them together to work together. So, I think finding the colleague or colleagues that you feel comfortable with that you can do that with, and you always know that you have someone to go to seek out information from. So, I would say developing a bond that way in finding people that are going to help you in your position as a coach.

Jill

Jill was an elementary math coach in an urban district who had 11 years of teaching experience prior to her past four years as a coach. As a middle school math teacher in her last year of classroom teaching, she stated, “I also stepped into the role of a math coordinator / coach. And that's where I discovered that I really rather enjoyed this side of things.” Her desire to affect change came from personal experience:

I ended up moving into a math instructional position and that really came from a lot of experience in college and in my early years in teaching in fifth grade math. I was a student that really struggled in math all the way along. A lot of teary nights over fractions and percentages and never really saw myself as a quote unquote math person. Once I started teaching fifth grade math, I really discovered that I'm not alone in that feeling. And if I approached my instruction with that growth mindset of yeah, this is really hard. I didn't understand it for a long time either. Let's see if we can work through it together. My students really liked that—they really worked with me on that—and I saw a lot of growth not just in them, but also in the way that their parents thought about math and worked with math. Changing that perspective really helped me to see how I could better support that instruction. Since then, as a coach, it's always been about developing a sense of curiosity in numbers and helping our students see the beauty and the joy in math and not the anxiety because it can be it can be very anxiety producing. . . . I found that it's not just about working with the students anymore but it's about changing the mindset of math in adults, as well. And it can be really challenging because there are a lot of adults that still have an amazing amount of anxiety when you say math. That feels very uncomfortable in a content area. They are often less willing to be vulnerable about that uncertainty. And it's, I see my position as one that's both a little therapeutic. Coming to terms with how people have developed their relationships with numbers and math, and where we can go from there with it.

Jill's coaching responsibilities included grade level team meetings with a focus on math data and pedagogy, individual coaching sessions that are student-centered, facilitating intervention programming meetings, attending district meetings regarding curriculum and assessment, and

collaborating with fellow coaches from across the district on a weekly basis. Jill shared that as an instructional leader, she needs to find the balance between wanting to move teachers along at her pace and listening and finding the balance for what teachers need and following their lead. In that vein, Jill's advice for future instructional coaches was:

I have found that the more I listen, the more I realize that people already have the answers that they need. And they're not always looking for someone to problem solve or tell them what to do. Although there are some. Overwhelmingly, people have their answers. So, the best thing that you can do is listen.

Pia

Pia was an elementary instructional coach in an urban district with 15 years of prior teaching experience and eight additional years in her current coaching role. Prior to this year, she coached in two separate buildings, but currently concentrated her time in one building, coaching grades kindergarten through grade two. As a previous kindergarten teacher, Pia believed that learning new curriculum alongside her teaching colleagues was a positive for her coaching role:

I'm learning along with the teachers, which also does help a little bit where I'm like, yeah, let's do it together. I'm learning right alongside them. . . . I have a couple of new, quite a few new teachers to that grade level that have also not taught second grade so we can kind of learn together.

Pia's responsibilities included one coaching day to work individually with teachers outside of their classrooms. Other days involve in-class modeling for teachers, observing teachers to provide feedback, helping teachers create intervention plans, and attending common planning team meetings. One afternoon per week was devoted to working with other instructional coaches within the district on curriculum initiatives. As a leader, Pia identified her style as warm, helpful,

and a listener who holds people accountable for the expectations of what students need. Pia summarized her advice to future coaches in this way:

Just be open. Being open to hearing the teachers and their needs. Be ready to juggle lots and lots of hats. And I guess don't forget where you came from, from being in the classroom. It's a tricky job being a teacher. There're so many things that they're juggling that just don't forget what it was like being in the classroom, so that you can help be relatable to the teachers and just support them.

Tara

Tara was an elementary language development coach in an urban district with 13 years of prior teaching experience. She was a coach for the past five years in the same building in her district. She stated that as a language development coach, her role “is to support the school, supporting the students, the teachers and other staff people to be able to help the students make their strongest language gains in the classroom.” Typical responsibilities for Tara included conducting coaching cycles with individual teachers, working with grade level teams to differentiate instruction for English learners, managing testing schedules and registration, and placement decisions for incoming students. Of all these responsibilities, Tara declared:

Being an advocate is my most important responsibility. So, I advocate for our students and for our program. I also am a liaison. So, I'm the liaison between the students and the teachers, liaison between the teachers and the administration, liaison between our administration and the district office of multilingual education. . . . I'm also the liaison between the ESL department and the administration. And so I feel like those are kind of my two most important roles and responsibilities.

As a leader, Tara claimed that she tries to anticipate upcoming challenges and continues to advocate for her team and her students. She said, “I think that as a leader, I really try to get everyone to do their best or try their best.” She also shared:

It is a shift . . . working from teaching students to teaching teachers and so I want them to know that like, even if I have expertise in a specific area that I know they have expertise in other areas. I don't want to discredit that by any means.

As a coach giving advice to future coaches, Tara offered:

The best advice is to very, very quietly insinuate yourself as a most valuable resource in this role . . . because it takes a lot of observation and a lot of really well worded emails. Don't shoot yourself in the foot and I know this from experience, like sending emails and pressing send too soon. Definitely look at things and look at the lens and make sure that there's no way that your words could be misconstrued as evaluative or dismissive or disrespectful or anything like that. It's all about building, building those relationships and building the trust and being able to support people and support the students. And so that's when you're most successful is when they see you as a valuable resource and a valuable contributor to them.

Terry

Terry was an elementary literacy coach with 25 years of teaching experience including the past 14 years as a coach in an urban district. Terry's responsibilities included being a member of the leadership team meetings, which discuss a variety of topics from student needs to curriculum decisions for the building. She also divulged that she works individually with teaching colleagues to help improve their pedagogy, supervises reading interventionists in her building, and was helping teachers implement a new phonics program. Terry revealed that she

works with a small group of students each day, “just to kind of help out and kind of know what’s going on and keep me in the game with the kids.” Terry said, “I think giving teachers the space and time to be reflective, just helping them to think about their own teaching and the students in front of them” was her most important responsibility. She affirmed:

Our goal is to coach ourselves out of our job . . . to teach the teachers how to be reflective about their work. So often, the teachers can come up with the best things on their own.

It's just giving them the space and time to talk about it.

Terry framed being an instructional leader in this way:

I feel the most successful when we are kind of in this mindset, where our heads are. We have a problem to solve, and we put our heads together and we're solving it together and I definitely can offer structure and keep us on track.

Terry’s advice for future instructional coaches was, “I would just say listen, and you're not the one to solve the problem.” She also verbalized:

Give them time to talk. You have to work differently with different people. The goal is for them to kind of come up with ideas on their own and figure out how that can happen. Not to take it personally, that can be hard sometimes.

Emergent Themes

The researcher highlighted emergent themes to understand the lived experiences of instructional coaches working in some Commonwealth of Massachusetts public school systems. Initially, 167 descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments emerged from analysis. The second round of data analysis revealed 80 potential codes. Using Atlas.Ti®’s code group function, each code was categorized into one of six emergent code group themes based on similarities. This enabled triangulation of data by looking for patterns across all

participant data. Although not all participants experienced each subtheme, the occurrence of these subthemes supported triangulation and saturation in the data. Table 3 shows the six emergent themes and seventeen subthemes acquired from data analysis.

Table 3

Instructional Coaches' Experiences and Perceptions With Relational Trust: Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Many hats	Content specialist Bridge between teachers and administrators Part of a larger academic district model
Coaching needs	Availability of coaching colleagues Targeted professional development for coaches Time to collaborate
Resistance to coaching	Clearly defined role versus perceived role Personality conflicts Teacher choice
Care ethics	Relationships before academics: Walk a mile in their shoes Trust and respect
Active listening	Expert versus facilitator of learning Collaboration and critical reflection
Adult learners	Teacher-led coaching: Gradual release of responsibility Teacher baggage Vulnerability and risk taking Understanding adult learning theory

Coach Perception # 1: Coaches Wear Many Hats

This theme was selected because all seven participants discussed a variety of jobs they accomplished each day that went beyond the typical description of an instructional coach. All

viewed their roles as a valuable resource to the teachers they worked with and described balancing the multiple hats they wear as part of their responsibility as an instructional coach.

Coaches Need to Be a Content Specialist

When coaches are asked to coach in a new grade level that they did not teach before, they learn alongside their teaching colleagues. Three coaches discussed their role in helping teachers implement new phonics programs and their ability to try things out together with their colleagues without fear of failure. Pia also stated that it is important for coaches to continue to be in the classroom with teachers and to not forget all the hats that teachers are wearing, too.

Five of the seven participants identified as content or skill specific coaches. Bill and Jill were math coaches, Terry and Claudia were literacy coaches, and Tara was a language development coach. Pia and Anne were instructional coaches who are responsible for understanding all content areas. As content area specialists, all coaches identified supporting multiple grade levels within their own buildings. Each participant has time in their schedules every week to be in their colleagues' classrooms to model lessons, co-teach with their colleagues, or give feedback regarding the content that is taught by the teacher. All expressed a comfort level with the curriculum they taught. Bill shared, "Part of the added challenge in this particular position is I know where they [students] need to be in seventh and eighth grade," which shows his need to be a content area expert. Pia said that when she works with other district coaches on curriculum content:

Friday afternoons we get together as the seven coaches from the elementary schools.

That's where we meet and work on curriculum because our job is actually 50% instructional coach and 50% curriculum coordinator. So, the 50/50 really doesn't happen a lot. But that's where we do a majority of the curriculum work—building curriculum.

Coaches Act as Bridges Between Teachers and Administrators

All seven participants clearly stated that they were part of the teacher contract and not administrators. Most felt that they were viewed as the bridge between teachers and administrators and were sometimes viewed as “a messenger for the district about different things” as Terry shared. Pia said:

You know, a lot of times we as coaches, even though we're not administration, do have to share out things that do come from above. So that I think that trust factor is that they can kind of talk to me and know that even though I'm being directed to tell you this they still feel like they could talk to me about how they feel about something. How we could make it work for both parties, I guess. A lot of times we're kind of in the middle of the two even though we are teacher salary and teachers' pay scale, we're still, we're kind of a weird gray area between teachers and administration so that they feel that they can still trust us even though we're kind of delivering the administrative messages.

Tara professed that she is a “liaison between the teachers and the administration, liaison between our administration and the district office of multilingual education . . . and the liaison between the ESL department and the administration.” Both Tara and Bill felt that it was important for them to advocate for their teachers and will act as a buffer for their teaching colleagues. Bill gave an example of a teacher who wanted to try something new in their class but was afraid that administration would not approve. He advocated for the teacher and the result was:

My principal said if you both think it's a good idea, give it a try. Alright, so we're going to implement some little things like that where I can be a go between, between them and to help build that trust. Because I'm willing to take the hit if I think it's a good idea. I will

say I think this is a good idea. We should do it. If they say no then that's on me but we're going to try and advocate trust; you need to be an advocate.

Claudia voiced her belief that, “coaches play an integral role in sometimes fixing or changing the direction of a school.” She also said that she is a support for them that they necessarily might not have, like if they didn’t feel comfortable going to administration.

Coaches Help Initiate and Facilitate District-Level Programs

All seven coaches identified larger district initiatives that they were an integral part of. Each coach was responsible for helping teachers initiate new programs across the districts where they work. Two school districts designated coaching days, where principals obtained substitute teachers so that collaboration could occur. All coaches facilitated common planning times with their teaching colleagues. Tara worked across the district as the manager of testing schedules for English learners. Claudia commented that her position is an integral part of the MTSS Framework district wide. Anne stated that on days where she is not involved in a coaching cycle, her time was split between district curriculum work and building instructional leadership work. When she was not working on district curriculum projects and initiatives, she was working with teachers. The following theme provides stories of participant experiences of needs for being an effective instructional coach.

Coach Perception # 2: Coaches Need Specific Support in Order to Thrive

All seven participants identified several needs that have helped them survive and thrive in their current roles. The following three subthemes highlight the most prevalent needs of the participants.

Coaches Need to Have Coaching Colleagues to Share Their Perceptions

Six of the seven participants discussed the benefit of having other coaching colleagues that they work with in their roles as a coach. In two of the districts, weekly district designated coaching meetings provided an outlet for coaches to problem-solve or vent with job-alike colleagues. Claudia declared, “We feel very comfortable in our coaching meetings. We know that what we say is confidential within the realm of the coaching meeting.” She claimed that she and her fellow coaches have “developed a great relationship. We feel comfortable with one another. Just like everybody else, we need someone to vent to and we have a great trusting relationship.” Jill discussed meeting with the other math coaches in her district. “We’re merging that into more of a PLC model for ourselves so that we can also continue to learn from one another.” Pia made similar remarks. “On Friday afternoons we get together as the seven coaches from the elementary schools. And that’s where we meet and work on curriculum.”

Bill was the only coach who did not have a coaching colleague with whom he could work. However, he sought out a similar colleague when he needed some advice:

There was one time there's a reading specialist over there who I heard had similar job paths and there was one time where I had a teacher who I couldn't read. . . . They made a lot of like facial and hand gestures that I just did not, for whatever reason, I didn't understand them. There's like little subtleties I could not pick up on so I asked her [reading specialist] to come to one of the meetings. I asked her, I just want you to watch what she's doing and tell me is it something I need to address? Something to be worried about?

Pia also recommended the potential of seeking out another coaching colleague when necessary. She said:

So, if I don't have the answer, I'm seeking it out elsewhere. . . . Or if it's a bigger issue, I'm finding resources for her or other people to bring in that can support her with what she needs . . . finding that resource within the school.

Coaches Need Targeted Professional Development

Every coach talked about the need for targeted professional development, and all saw themselves as continuous learners. Informal on-the-job training was prevalent for most of the coaches when they began their coaching roles, with only two discussing receiving formal training in specific areas such as setting up coaching cycles or working with adult learners. Anne said, "I feel like I constantly need training to do this work just in terms of always wanting to be on the forefront of what is best practice." Claudia voiced the need to learn how to have difficult conversations, and how to potentially approach those better as the need arises. Jill considered professional development around helping teachers critically reflect about their teaching practice. She pondered:

I don't know if I'm really great at that yet. I personally reflect almost to a fault and I struggle to support another person in really getting there themselves. So right now, part of my practice is to pose the questions and see where it leads. And I really do try to just listen instead of like imposing anything that could come across or be perceived as judgment. I withhold and I tried to use the phrases *I hear you*, or *say more, can you say more*, just to get them doing the talking. And once they're talking, at some point, they get to it, but it could just be kind of a bumpy path. Some conversations I find are still, at least to me, I perceive it to be more superficial and I want to get them a little bit deeper. But they're either not thinking about it the same way that I am. They're not in a place at that

moment where they can have that conversation. It's just there's so many factors that go along with introspection.

Bill shared a professional development course he was taking that he felt was a current need for his coaching toolkit:

So our last lesson, our last meeting was on listening, which we all know how to listen, but that doesn't mean we can't not think about it. Right? So, it was an inventory on what kind of listener you are. And for me that's huge, because that's a big chunk of what I do.

Tara communicated that she has attended some outside professional development sessions lately and she had not felt the same gain as she once did:

When I first became a coach . . . I can remember we had an educational consulting firm, a specific educational consulting firm, work with us about coaching. And that helped me. That helped me so much as a brand-new coach to know like what is coaching and how do you do coaching sessions. So, all of that, like at the beginning was so helpful. And that was when we first kind of rolled out instructional coaching. . . . I used to go to MATSOL (Massachusetts Association of Teacher of Speakers of Other Languages) and I would come back from it like rejuvenized have all these new ideas and all these things. But now I feel like I go, and they don't. And so like, it's hard to kind of be at this part in your career.

Tara shared that she continues to self-select ways to build her own professional development and has considered the idea of publishing a book for other coaches with another colleague that would share ways for coaches to listen, reflect, and respond. She said, “We never wrote the book, but we used that phrase all the time with our students.”

Coaches Need Time to Collaborate

Most participants cited the need for quality collaboration with their coaching colleagues, and their teaching colleagues to effect positive change. Terry voiced a concern about the potential for too many meetings that take the place of quality coaching time. In two districts, time for collaboration is scheduled by the administrative team. Coaches can block off their schedules for teachers to choose to collaborate with them. Claudia described her ideal use of time working with her teaching colleagues:

My common planning times are all day Monday and Tuesday. So, I am at four common planning times. In each of those days, one day is devoted to looking at data. Another day is devoted to looking at lessons. How can we enhance those lessons? Look at higher order thinking? Student engagement checks for understanding? things like that.

Claudia also described an outcome from the pandemic that has positively affected meeting times for her district:

With the restrictions on things [last year] we ended our day an hour early and we had to work together collaboratively, which is great. So, we really worked hard to incorporate that into our back to our normal hours this year to be able to do it this year. And I would say, this year has been the best so far. I mean, I know it's only the beginning—November [2021]—but the most discussions that we've had . . . working together for a common goal and learning things together, discussing things looking at other people's points of view. So . . . I come away feeling really good this year about where we're headed and what we're doing and what our purpose is. I couldn't always say that in the past.

Bill shared that he spends a lot of time going into math classes and sitting in to interact with the students. He also feels like it is his job as a coach is to save his teachers the time from completing mundane tasks:

I don't like when something comes down. They need something done. And it's torturous to the teachers like I would rather do it myself and not torture them. Right, some new piece of paperwork that needs to be filled out. I'm like, you know what, here's what I'm going to do. I've been told that you need to do this. I'm going to do this part of it because I can do all of this up in here. I just need you to put that finishing touch because I don't know that part because they don't need more—there's a lot of work for them right now. So, if I can advocate and be a buffer of some sort, that goes a long way.

The next theme identifies experiences from the participants' perspectives regarding coaching resistance and several subthemes that can be potential roadblocks to positive coaching relationships.

Coach Perception # 3: Coaches Face Resistance From Teaching Colleagues

This theme was identified by all seven instructional coaches as an issue that all have faced. Their perceptions of some of their colleagues' resistance or non-resistance were varied but included the following three subthemes.

A Clearly Defined Role Versus Perceived Role Helps Avoid Resistance

All seven participants stated that they were part of the teaching units in their individual districts. The importance of the non-evaluative role for all coaches was a concept that was clearly delineated. All coaches except for Bill coach in one building versus multiple buildings. Tara divulged that when she first began coaching, she was one coach in three middle school buildings. She shared that she feels fortunate to be in one building and that administration sees the benefit

to being able to build relationships. Bill said, “Being a coach is very precarious because you’re not quite a teacher anymore. But you’re not an administrator and they see you as something above.” Claudia revealed:

You know, really stressing that, coaches in our districts are on the teacher contract. So, we don't evaluate anyone. So letting them know that the trust between what is happening in our coaching cycles between the teacher and the coaches is not, you know, the admin are not part of that they may have recommended someone for a coaching cycle, but that's about it, the extent, so it's really that trust. So that they, you know, we're there to help them and to enhance them and to improve what they're already doing.

Claudia also commented that keeping coaches off an administrative contract is important so that teachers do not see them as evaluators or part of the evaluation system. Pia reiterated the need for trust building and having “teachers understanding that relationship so that they trust you—that you are not an administrator, and we are not evaluators . . . we are just that listening ear and there to help them—there’s no judgments.” Each coach also reiterated the need for boundaries to be set for conversations between themselves and teachers or between themselves and administration. Pia voiced the dilemma that coaches sometimes face in a role that is sometimes not clearly defined:

It's that gray area where we are in conversations too with administration, hearing things so that they know that they can trust us to not share everything that we do hear in some of those administrative conversations. I think sometimes also, you know, we are there to support all teachers. So there has to be the trust. From the administration, if there are teachers who they do see that need some extra support that they can share out with us

what they'd like this teacher to work on. . . . We respect the teacher things that are going on with that teacher to kind of just keep that between us as a teacher or an administrator.

Terry remarked, “teachers have to believe that you’re not going to go and tell the principal exactly what you’re saying.” She also stated the importance of being “really clear about what you’re doing, what notes you’re taking.” She added:

I remember once when I was working with a teacher in the very beginning, and I was taking notes, and was asked, ‘What are you doing with those notes? Who's gonna see those notes?’ So, making sure they know . . . what you're going to communicate to the principal.

Claudia shared that she has a unique relationship with the administrator in her building as he was a former coach. She expounded, “He understands the coaching concept. So, he isn’t one to take advantage of that . . . we have mutual respect both ways . . . this is the most trust and comfortability that I’ve had in this role with the current building administration.” Claudia also shared the importance of other groups seeing the value of coaching. She said that the new teacher mentor program recommends that teachers reach out to the coach for support early in their careers. She said, “it’s a group effort.”

Jill raised an issue that occurred when there were not enough substitute teachers in her building, and her administrator requested her help. She offered, “We are team players. She came to me today and said I need a sub and that's not your job,” Jill knew this would satisfy the needs of the building and the needs of her administrator. It would also take time away from her coaching responsibilities. She said, “But sometimes you just gotta do it.”

Bill described a recent situation he was in where he felt that his reputation could be perceived in a different way:

The other day I was joking because I was sitting, we were having lunch with the two principals. I thought, I hope nobody sees this because this will not help my street cred. I can't be seen with these two because it looks bad.

Tara summed up coaching success in this way, "So that's when you're most successful, is when they see you as a valuable resource and a valuable contributor to them in their classroom." Besides the perception of a coach's role, another blockade to coaching is the potential for personality conflicts.

Personality Conflicts Can Cause Resistance to Coaching

Besides having a clearly defined role as a coach, many of the coaches described resistance that stems from personality conflicts and described how important it is to not take those personally. Claudia professed, "I'm sure this is everywhere. There are always very strong personalities . . . it's important to keep it professional." Tara agreed and said:

I have had a few personality conflicts. And so that has been kind of tragic because that ended and for both of us professionally, and because my main job is making sure the students are supported. And so, if I can't connect with the staff person, then the students may or may not be supported. That's too bad.

Pia described a situation where she needed to adjust her coaching based on the personality of the teacher:

I feel like sometimes you have to get some buy in to some of the people who do pull back a little bit or don't feel very, maybe the trust isn't there yet. I almost feel like giving them little gifts of like, Hey, let me help you with this data collection or you're you know, you're having a difficult time with that. Let me come in and teach that lesson. So you can

kind of just observe your students. That's fine. You need to kind of give them those little gifts to just start to tiptoe into them trusting you.

Anne described a situation where at first, she felt as if a teacher was resistant to coaching but was instead overwhelmed by demands. Anne framed it in this way, “and there’s an urgency because students really need this work. . . . She was kind of shutting down to the point of not even wanting to do it.” By taking the time to listen to the teacher’s needs, offering to work together in a longer coaching cycle, co-planning and co-teaching, she was able to help the teacher overcome the resistance to the point where the teaching is happening with fidelity. Anne described the teacher’s reaction, “she is enjoying it and also getting a chance to step back and actually really enjoy her students which is really powerful.” Anne reflected, “Sometimes when there’s another person to kind of take the instructional load, then you actually really get to just enjoy the progress.”

Resistance to Coaching Can Be Caused by Giving Teachers Choice

Most coaches shared that inviting a coach into their rooms is by teacher choice. However, all believe that all teachers deserve to be coached and aim to include all teachers in their coaching routines. Two coaches, Bill and Terry, shared the difficulty of working with more seasoned teachers who were resistant to coaching. All coaches attributed their successes to administrative support.

Anne shared that she has faced resistance in this role where teachers have been hesitant to work with her. Her approach in situations like this is to “step back a little bit and ease into it.” She disclosed:

I really just try to adapt to what they need and be responsive. If I'm getting feedback from them, that we're going too fast or it's uncomfortable. Just kind of hold back a little bit, but

never abandon. So that's the thing. So, I never, you know, if it's not working, never walk away, just step back and reflect and then try to come in at a different entry point to see if we can move forward.

Tara shared the need to involve administration in a conversation about what to do when coaching was refused:

Unfortunately, if that hasn't worked, then I have had to kind of get other people involved, whether it be kind of a colleague to kind of do some sort of mediation or another coach that they might respond to better or unfortunately, I did have one in the past where someone just really shut down. And so, I had touched base with the administration and kind of asked them how they wanted me to respond, and they said, just fall back. Give the person a couple of months, and then try it again. I did do that. And the principal kind of intervened, but it wasn't something that we could recuperate. But so unfortunately, that was just that. I mean, that was one very specific scenario.

Claudia described a similar issue with a teacher where she felt it necessary to ask for assistance from administration:

I will go to my principal and say I'm having a very difficult time with this person and feeling this person is being very combative. You know, the tone of some emails have not been received well. And I've tried to answer numerous things that are not satisfying that person because they're not getting the answer they want. So, the principal said, I can have a conversation, not necessarily bringing in a specific example. He's very good about the relationship between the coaches and the teachers and we don't want to break that relationship. So he is very good about being kind of global in his example . . . last year, it was a time where I was like, you know, I've reached my limit. How many times I'm

explaining myself and just being professional about it, and it's just not working. As I realized that at that point, a third person needed to be involved because it just had to. In that situation, the relationship with the teacher has been great this year . . . we had more respectful conversations than we did before.

Terry shared some resistance she has felt from some teaching teams, and her reluctance to finding a way to change their mindset:

I feel like I have some teams that are more difficult than others and sometimes I want help with those and sometimes I also just feel like I have to kind of let it go because they're all retiring in a year and move on from that idea.

Conversely, Claudia discussed how tricky it can be when teachers are new to the profession. "You don't want to overwhelm them." Offering them options for coaching sessions is one way she hopes to fend off resistance. She will offer, "I'm here to model lessons for you. I can co-teach with you. I can set up a week's worth of lessons . . . in that respect it's just a lot of reaching out, making myself known, but not in a pestering way."

Bill expressed that he has "been fortunate that I haven't had any that are adversarial. I certainly have some who are more old school and so maybe less receptive to this newfangled coaching concept. A lot of that is persistence." He also discussed working with a colleague who would not invite him in for a coaching cycle. His solution was, "I will just walk into a person's room because I know they're teaching math. I'll just go in and act as if I'm supposed to be there." In one situation he described, he jumped into the conversations the class was having and interjected important concepts the students needed in his self-described Columbo manner. He later described that this worked for this particular teacher as she began using the same concepts without crediting his coaching. Not personalizing the coaching rebuff was something he felt was

important because in the end, the students benefited from her teaching the appropriate concept. Bill also received administrative support and believed that it is another reason he has had success:

I think part of why it worked so well . . . he believed in coaching, and he believed in building those relationships . . . if I needed to push a little bit, I knew he'd have my back and . . . would be there to support and say that's what I want him to do.

Following the three previous themes of the many hats a coach wears, the specific needs of coaches, and the resistance some have faced, the next theme provided information regarding the need to genuinely care about teaching colleagues.

Coach Perception #4: Care Ethics Is an Integral Part of Coaching

All seven participants described the need to see their coaching colleagues as people who have lives to live outside of their individual schools. They shared important information about how they build appropriate working and personal relationships, considered what their colleagues bring to the coaching table each week, and ways in which they soften the feedback they give teachers through a student-centered coaching lens.

Coaches Recognize the Need to Put Relationships Before Academics

When discussing the steps that they take to build a trusting relationship, all seven participants discussed the need to develop a relationship with their teacher colleagues and walk a mile in their colleagues' shoes before introducing content or academic needs. Bill talked about daily conversations he has before the teaching day begins:

My morning is typically, I walk around in the classrooms, just touching base with teachers. They're putting chairs down, so I'll go in and help them put the chairs down and just sort of have a conversation, how was your weekend? Sort of making that sort of

connection. Oh, you know, your kids came to visit. That's great. How are they doing? And I try to remember, and sometimes I'll take little notes, but I try to remember little connections with them. So, the next time I mean, I can say oh, you know you were at that wedding last week. Did you end up making, you know, you worried you weren't gonna make the flight or, whatever the story. I spend a lot of the morning just sort of walking around touching base.

Terry shared a similar experience. "I try to really think about what the person is telling me. What story are they telling me? I try to think about what would be helpful to them. If this is where they are in their life and their teaching." Tara said it this way, "The most important piece is the time. Being able to spend time with them in those relationships and getting to know them, and help because that builds the collegiality, that builds a friendship, that builds trust." Claudia said, "Trying to get into their shoes, see what their thought process is so I can try to help them . . . maybe see a different point of view." Jill stressed the importance of seeing teaching through the lens of the teacher. She revealed, "Teaching is so personal. And when you walk into someone's classroom, especially in an environment where you're not really used to or accustomed to people being there . . . it makes it really challenging." Pia shared the importance of following through on promises, which shows that she cares about the teachers she works with. Anne also agreed that creating personal relationships is the key to a successful coaching partnership. "I think first of all, it's the personal relationship, and a sense of belonging and community that's so important, regardless of the role." All participants shared the need for building relationships and stressed the importance of considering the previous experiences teachers bring to the coaching table.

Coaches Recognize That Trust and Respect Take Time

As important as developing a caring relationship, all seven participants shared that creating trust and respect takes time. Terry declared, “Trust, trust is the big one.” All coaches had several steps that they used to create or build trust with their colleagues. Most stressed the need to create positive relationships first, getting to know their colleagues. Jill discussed that in her first coaching year, she was ready to dive in and “change the world.” She professed, “I was fortunate to have a mentor that encouraged me to just pause and step back and get to know people, and that was absolutely the right thing to do.” They also considered how they support teachers outside of the classroom. Some coaches, like Bill, availed themselves to mundane tasks that took the burden from the teacher like filling out paperwork or getting chairs from a custodian. Other coaches saw themselves making copies, helping to plan lessons, and giving teachers pertinent information about their students as ways to ease themselves into classrooms. Others discussed having an open-door policy where teachers felt free to come to them to ask questions. Tara stressed the need to “be as open and honest with them as possible. And try to give them as much information as I have.” Tara also shared that she finds different ways to connect with them on a personal or a professional level. As a next step, being present in classrooms and working through a student-centered lens was one strategy used by Pia:

I think the first step is just being present, that the teachers see us in classrooms, that we are on the ground with them in the trenches, just ready to do whatever . . . it helps a lot with building trust and getting to know the teachers but also getting to know the students so you can support them.

Another step participants used to build trust was to be genuine with words and actions. Most coaches stressed the need to follow through and deliver what they promised. Delivering materials

on time, being in their classrooms when they said they would be there, and not breaking confidentiality were all important actions that helped to build and maintain trust. All seven participants discussed confidentiality between themselves and their teaching colleagues as something that can break a relationship with just one breach. Bill discussed the need to sometimes assure teachers that if he is having a discussion with a principal, it is only about math, and never about the teachers he worked with. Bill also reiterated:

I think the key is you need to be, you need to be what they need in that moment. Like sometimes I'll go in and they don't want to talk about math. They just want to talk about something that just happened with them. Right, and they need to, but they need to know that I'm there to listen to that as well.

Claudia shared a similar circumstance and discussed a time when she had a teacher come to a coaching session who needed to vent instead of working on the content they had planned to discuss. By allowing the teacher to air her concerns, Claudia helped the teacher understand that she was in a safe space, her concerns would not be shared with anyone, and they would get to the academics the next time. After receiving an email that night from the teacher thanking her for the space to vent, Claudia said she knew that the teacher had developed trust in their relationship.

Anne offered, "If someone doesn't feel safe with you, you're really not going to get very far. So, I think trust is the foundation. And I think that there's an openness of your dialogue that is really productive." Jill discussed the importance of not always going after what the coach believes to be the next step. Following the lead of the teacher and what they want to work on is also a way coaches build trust. Jill expressed it this way:

Then you know, maybe like in the back of my head, I'm like, here are some things that we really should work on. How can I weave these things like into the work that we're

doing? But it's not. It's not hey, I'm noticing that your mini lesson is like 20 minutes, and we really need to cut that down. Of course, I would love to do that. But if that's not where they are, then that's not what we're going to be working on. So really offering them what it is that they want to what work they want to do and what they want to change. And how even support them through that process really helps to create and establish longevity in the relationship.

Bill shared an example of how he knew that trust had been built within a coaching relationship:

The best coaching relationship I have right now is thinking of a teacher who is someone where she and I have been open and listening like communication, but I think also we've been honest with each other. There are moments where I have literally walked into her room and she's looked me in the eye and said, Now is not the time. Okay, I can respect that. And I leave, but that means that I'm listening to her. So then the next time I walk in, she's like, Okay, I'm sorry. She explains, you know, this is what was going on. I just couldn't. But there's an honesty about it. And I think that's part of it. The ones who maybe I don't have a strong relationship coaching-wise yet, is because they're not honest.

The final theme considers the unique needs of adults as learners. The participants in this study shared their experiences in how they worked to understand their colleague's needs and keep those in mind while coaching.

As part of a caring relationship, the next theme and subthemes gave specific examples of how instructional coaches were able to guide the learning of the teachers they coached.

Coach Perception # 5: Coaches Need to Be Active Listeners

The theme of active listening was clearly articulated by all seven participants to help foster coaching relationships. All described their leadership style as a facilitator of learning. All

found it important to guide the colleagues they coached to discover their own answers through guided facilitation without the coach being seen as the expert. Through collaborative critical reflection, each coach found a way to listen, reflect, and respond in a way that fostered growth with teaching colleagues.

Coaches Consider Presenting as an Expert Versus a Facilitator of Learning

All seven coaches described ways in which they facilitated learning conversations with their teaching colleagues without appearing to be the expert in the specific content they were teaching. One example shared by Terry was when a teacher asked if a lesson was good. She shared that she would ask what the teacher's goal was, or what they wanted to students to be able to do, not saying what she thought about the lesson. She will guide the teacher to consider whether or not the students were able to do it so that she as the coach does not appear to be the expert at teaching a particular concept. Similarly, Tara remarked that, "the biggest role of the coach is helping the student or the teacher kind of come up with the solution themselves. You're sort of guiding them and giving them ideas." Bill said that if he were to enter a room and stated, "Hey, this is how we're going to teach this," most teachers would not be open to that and would just shut down. Claudia discussed shifting her coaching focus over the previous years to asking teachers what they thought of a lesson before she jumped in to give feedback. In this way, she can give the teacher the ability to reflect and respond without appearing to be the expert regarding the lesson. Jill found that, "The more I listen, the more I realize that people already have the answers they need. They're not always looking for someone to problem solve or tell them what to do." She also decided as a more veteran coach that she does not need to prove herself anymore:

For a while, I pushed this idea of like, trying to prove myself almost like I thought you know, I taught for 10 years, I know what I'm talking about. But they don't care. They don't care at all where I actually came from or what I did. . . . They need to know that I'm here now.

Pia stressed the notion of learning alongside teachers, especially if both the teacher and the coach are learning content for the first time together. Likewise, Anne also proclaimed, "I actually prefer when I'm in there and something doesn't go well because that is where the real good dialogue is. It's like, that was tough. And let's problem solve and let's talk through kind of our thinking about that." Along with not appearing to be the expert, participants found that helping teachers critically reflect collaboratively with them was an important way to build trust.

Coaches Understand Collaboration and Critical Reflection Needs

Each of the seven participants saw critical reflection as a collaborative coaching process. All identified the need to be an active listener in the critical reflection process. Anne saw the importance of modeling critical reflection for teachers. She noted that you cannot force someone to be reflective, so she models how to be reflective "in a way that's really honest . . . almost being critical of myself but showing that it's important." She believed that this could open the conversation between coaches and teachers and "makes it a little bit easier to guide them in that direction." Terry articulated that she believed it was important to give teachers the space and time to be reflective about their teaching. During her initial training as a coach, she was told that the goal of a coach is to coach themselves out of a job by teaching teachers how to be reflective about their work. She also said that she believed that it was always important to not answer a teacher directly at first, not feel as if you needed to solve their problem right away, but to give the space for the teacher to come back to the solution. In that way, many times, teachers can

come up with their own solutions. Bill also stressed the importance of teacher self-reflection.

“There’s just a few you just want to shake and go, I need you to reflect right now! But that’s not how it works.” Tara shared that she believed that “people have to be open to reflection, they have to be open to feedback, open to trying new things.” Even when things don’t go well, helping teachers to honestly reflect without judgment is important to teacher growth:

That actually was one of the biggest the biggest pieces . . . helping the teacher see, okay, well, if I did this lesson, or I did this unit, what went well, and what didn't go well? And then the things that didn't go well, how can we incorporate the scaffolding and the strategies to support English learners better tomorrow, or next week? So looking at those pieces specifically, and having a toolbox and kind of like an idea or a list to be able to share with them and I think kind of, as I said before, asking questions, asking probing questions and having that time to do the reflection, I think makes us all kind of stronger, stronger and stronger reflectors.

Tara and a previous coworker developed a mantra that she still used in her coaching experiences.

Listen, reflect, and respond. She shared this experience:

In the middle of a lesson sometimes things are not going the way that you had planned or informed and so I would say, okay, I’m listening. And I’m seeing that this isn’t going well, and I’m reflecting and I’m going to respond.

Jill said, “I’ve learned that I don’t need to fill the space. Silence. I’m very comfortable in silence.” She had recently read a book by Jan Severson about the importance of creating a space for critical response and reflection. She attempted this with a colleague who did not feel that they could change their teaching practice and remove themselves from being one of the math workshop activities. Jill asked some critical reflection questions and gave the teacher the space to

consider what would happen if she made a change and left herself more open to being responsive to the student needs in her classroom. Jill divulged:

We had this conversation about well, what if you weren't? Let's play it out. What would that look like? What would that feel like? What would it sound like? And very much like setting up a workshop in the first place. And through this process, she was like, maybe, maybe it is worth trying for a day or two and seeing how it feels. Sure. It could be a hot mess. You might not like it, no harm, no foul. So, all right, I'll try it. In the first day, she said I love this. I will never go back to being a rotation. She's at a point where she will talk to anyone who's willing to listen about how great it is to not force yourself, not pigeonhole yourself into this place because you can be so much more responsive to kids' needs when you're not tied to one spot.

Bill also considered ways in which he distinguishes between what teachers need when they are venting to him so that he can build empathy for their needs:

One of the first questions was, are you venting because you need me to listen, are you venting because you need me to fix it? Because those are two different listening skills. . . . Okay, I just want to vent, I don't need to think. Okay, then let's talk about it versus I need you to fix this because it's not, this isn't right. This is what needs to be happening. Well, that's a different kind of listening so I guess, just like anybody, we constantly need training.

Coach Perception # 6: It Is Critical to Understand Adult Learners

Adult learners are complex learners with many years of experience that can enhance or deplete their ability to take in new information. Participants shared an active knowledge of how adults learn best, including a need for self-direction and choice; learning that relies on prior

experiences, real-life situational learning, and the need for teachers to possess internal motivation.

Coaches Guide Learning Through a Gradual Release of Responsibility

An assumption made when working with adult learners is that teachers need self-direction and choice to make learning palatable. Some of the participants in this study found that they needed to help teachers develop a growth mindset when it came to new learning. Claudia shared that she needed to consider how to get teachers to embrace looking at data:

I can do cartwheels about it and really be enthusiastic about it, but if they're frightened of it, or unsure of it, there's kind of like that closed mindset and they're not going to but they're going to have a hard time being receptive to it.

Tara shared the importance of teacher generated coaching:

I think some of my most successful coaching cycles have been the teachers have kind of sought me out and said, hey, can I do a coaching cycle with you? Because there's a few different pathways to start. There's that where they just say, hey, can you give me support in this specific area with a specific student? And then there's places where I see this teacher has this many English learners in the classroom, perhaps they need some support. And then there's kind of a third trajectory where the administration says, I want you to coach this teacher. And so all of those groups can be successful. But definitely I feel like when someone reaches out to me, they're open.

Terry shared a time when she worked with a teacher who reached out to her for support in moving her students' achievement. The teacher told Terry:

I want them to go up. I don't know how to do it. And so, we tried a bunch of different strategies that she took to help these kids make progress. And at the end of the coaching

cycle, we kind of looked at all the different things we tried, and she picked the ones that she really liked, and that she was going to kind of keep in her practice. And two of the kids made progress and one of the kids didn't and so we thought about different things for them. So, it just, it was just, it was really successful. And it was one of those times it felt like we were figuring it out together.

Anne discussed the need to give teachers “voice and choice, everything that we do in coaching, I want them to drive, essentially, because it’s their work and I’m just trying to support them.”

Coaches Understand That Teacher Baggage Can Hinder Relationships

Adult learners have more positive and negative experiences that can hinder their ability to learn and grow. Bill and Terry agreed that there is a lot more to consider regarding the baggage that adults carry. Terry professed:

Adults just have more baggage, right? Like it's just more on me. Well, unfortunately, some kids have a lot of baggage too, but adults, you know, adults have to keep their job. And so, there's just, there's more political baggage and it can just be a little bit more complicated.

Tara discussed some of the negative feelings some teachers have regarding feedback and the care she takes to be sure this was not breached:

I think trust is a really big piece knowing that when people disclose things to me, I obviously I would never laugh; I would never try and make people feel bad about themselves. Because I know we're always growing on that trajectory. And I myself am going to be so open to feedback, both of those things go a long way to building connections with people.

Jill shared an example of a teaching team she is working with that is composed of all veteran teachers. Her solution to the baggage that can be carried by teachers with extended experience is the following experience:

My second grade is probably a perfect example. They're all veteran teachers, and they love to remind me that they have been teaching for as long as I've been alive. Within five years of retirement, it's really hard to start developing a relationship where they do trust you enough to try something different in their classrooms. And so, I leaned a lot on love languages for them. Many of them are, they like gift giving. So, when I came to them with things that made life a little bit easier, it helped to create a foundation of our relationship like I'm here to support you. This is my number one role, like it's not to come in and tell you that you're a bad teacher and we've got to change all these things. It's, I want the supportive partnership that we all know that we're in this together for the same reason. We want our kids to thrive.

Coaches Understand Vulnerability and Risk-Taking

Vulnerability on the part of the adult learner requires an understanding and reason for learning and an assumption that there is a need to be vulnerable to learn a new skill that may rest on prior experience. Anne voiced the importance of considering the vulnerability that adult learners share. “There’s this piece of vulnerability. I don’t want them to think of me as someone who knows more of anything. . . . It’s more like we’re in this together . . . these are our students, let’s work together.” Jill shared an experience from her coaching that is an example of the baggage that some teachers do carry. She discussed how some teachers are more guarded when it comes to content or pedagogy that they are not comfortable with. She shared that it is difficult for some teachers to say that they don’t know something and worry that it could lead to

embarrassment or punishment. The anxiety that is produced when this is said out loud is not something that many teachers would willingly share. Jill inferred:

Especially with math, there's anxiety, there's embarrassment, I don't get it. Teachers don't mind joking and saying that they could never handle like fifth grade math when they're in second grade. But to actually look at second grade or third grade material and say I don't get this. And I don't know how to be a responsive educator in this way. That's hard. It's really hard. So how do you create that space, that environment that Severson says where you have a holding environment that allows people to put themselves out there in a very risk-free way? Knowing that the more that they learn, the better they can do for their kids.

Coaches' Understanding of Adult Learning Theory Is Critical

All seven participants have worked with adults for several years in their coaching roles and have developed several understandings about how they can best serve their adult colleagues. Many saw similarities and differences comparing adult learners to the students they also work with. Pia stated that she felt adult and student learners need organization when they receive new information. She felt that younger learners are more like sponges, but adult learners “can be reluctant to change.” Pia also felt that just like students, adults have different learning styles that coaches need to be aware of. Choice in learning is also a commonality that Pia noted for all learners. Bill articulated that adults tend to be slower to change than student learners and this can be a challenge. He acknowledged that this is due to the vast experiences adults have and their belief systems and opinions are more established. Jill reiterated that thought and commented that “mindset is a lot harder to shift when you get older.” She considered that when she works with adult learners; she thinks about who they are as learners, and what kind of learner they are. She offered that she believed that adults are more guarded as learners. Tara also noted that adults are

“more set in their ways, have more years of experience under the belt” and she acknowledged that a big challenge that is met in schools is the phrase, “this is the way we’ve always done things.” Tara said that overcoming that mindset is important for adults to learn. She believed that adult learners can be more open to feedback since they can be more reflective than younger learners. Jill saw a particular challenge while coaching teachers in math. Jill said that changing the mindset of math:

can be really challenging because there are a lot of adults that still have an amazing amount of anxiety when you say math. That feels very uncomfortable in a content area; they are often less willing to be vulnerable about that uncertainty. And it's, I see my position as one that's a little therapeutic. Coming to terms with how people have developed their relationships with numbers and math, and where we can go from there with it.

Anne noted that for adult learners: “It’s very different than feeling safe to be imperfect with someone.” She stated that there is:

some insecurity to being a teacher because you really want to serve your students well, and it’s really hard work, and it’s really hard to do and there’s no way to do it perfectly. Being imperfect is vulnerable, so it’s just such an interesting dynamic to the role, but trust is just so important to really make headway and make an impact on student outcomes.

The previous six overarching themes—Many Hats, Coaching Needs, Resistance to Coaching, Care Ethics, Active Listening, and Adult Learners—and seventeen subthemes in this study illustrated the experiences and perceptions of instructional coaches and their ability to build trust and diminish resistance to instructional coaching.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of instructional coaches as they describe key conditions that need to be in place to build relational trust and diminish resistance to coaching and to examine the structure of their trust building experiences with their teaching colleagues. Seven participants were interviewed and talked about their experiences as instructional coaches. The participants came from a variety of public-school systems in the MetroWest and Central part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Originally 167 codes or themes emerged from data analysis. The themes were organized based on their similarities into six overarching themes: Many Hats, Coaching Needs, Resistance to Coaching, Care Ethics, Active Listening, and Adult Learners. Seventeen subthemes emerged from the data analysis. All the participants were instructional coaches with at least four years of coaching experience, and between six and 26 years of teaching experience. Participants viewed coaching to effect change in pedagogy for the teachers they worked with and saw the importance of building trust with these teaching colleagues. Building relationships and trust required a variety of conditions to be in place.

Participants shared a variety of hats as instructional coaches that enhanced or detracted from their primary function as coaches. They saw themselves as being a necessary bridge between teachers and administration and believed that their primary function in that respect was to make sure that there was no overlap in responsibilities. All coaches saw themselves as an integral part of a larger academic instructional model within their respective districts.

The participants identified a variety of coaching needs that would help them survive and thrive as an instructional coach. Their ability to connect with job-alike partners, attend targeted

professional development, and give and get time to collaborate with colleagues were identified as important needs.

When considering the ever-present resistance that instructional coaching creates, the participants identified the importance of a clearly defined role versus the perceived role that sometimes marred their reputation. Of utmost importance, administration understanding the role of the coach and the need for confidentiality were two non-negotiable conditions. Instructional coaches in this study also identified the personality conflicts that sometimes interfered with productive coaching cycles. Of note, some participants discovered that teacher choice for working with a coach was sometimes a hindrance to productive coaching relationships.

The ability to care and build relationships was at the forefront of all participants' goals within this study. The instructional coaches interviewed believed it was important to recognize how to view their coaching colleagues' environments to effectively work with them. They considered the prior experiences or teacher baggage that comes with adult learners and considered ways in which they could overcome these past experiences. Participants also considered ways in which trust and respect are built incrementally so that long-term relationships can be built.

As an important step in building trust, participants shared information regarding their ability to portray themselves as facilitators of learning versus expert teachers. They also shared information regarding the ways in which they collaborate and build critical reflection skills with their teaching colleagues. Lastly, in conjunction with critical reflection, participants shared ways in which they conducted teacher-led coaching and facilitated the gradual release of responsibility for their teacher colleagues. They showed ways in which they understood the vulnerability of their teachers and facilitated risk taking so that teachers were able to expand their teaching

practices. Most importantly, the instructional coaches in this study shared their understanding of adult learning theory and the ways in which this understanding allowed them to create the best scenarios for teachers to transform their teaching. The following chapter will conclude this study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Effective instructional coaches are skilled teachers with expertise in their own instructional practices who possess unique qualities and can transfer these while coaching adult learners (Neumerski, 2012; Sweeney, 2011). According to Barkley (2010), coaching is an ideal staff development tool for schools to assist teachers to be successful at reaching students. In education, the term *instructional coach* is a teacher who provides a focus on teaching techniques for educators with a focus on pedagogical skills (Neumerski, 2012). Instructional coaches are usually hired as providers of in-house, job-embedded professional development (Borman & Feger, 2006). Coaches may work with individual teachers modeling lessons, co-teaching, or observing, and providing individual feedback. They also work with teacher teams guiding curriculum development, data teams, and other forms of collaborative work (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). Providing large group professional development to entire faculty groups may also be part of their professional duties (Barkley, 2011; Borman & Feger, 2006; Knight, 2007). Some coaches may work in a split role; part-time as a content specialist, providing direct services to students, and part-time working with teachers (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). Borman and Feger (2006) noted that there is variation in how instructional coaches' time is spent; however, their main role is centered in the expectation that they assist their fellow educators adjust their teaching practices and improve student achievement (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016).

Teachers in these scenarios need to trust the collaborative nature of the coaching model to grow as learners themselves (Bissonnette, 2014; Kubek, 2012). The immediacy of adjustment to teaching practices does not always allow for the luxury of time to develop trust and respect

between coaches and teachers (Barkley, 2011). The absence of time to create strong relationships puts many coaches at risk for failure (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018).

Building trust with teaching colleagues in a nonevaluative coaching role is one of many conditions that has been identified as a key to a thriving coaching relationship (Borman & Feger, 2006; Kane & Rosenquist, 2018). Teachers who invite a coach into their classrooms are vulnerable adult learners who may become defensive if trust is not built first (Finkelstein, 2019). Instructional coaches who take the time to build trusting relationships by sharing common practices and purposes for learning while relying on mutual respect and relational equality will ultimately find success (Barkley, 2011).

This study investigated two research questions to understand instructional coaches' experiences in building and maintaining trust with their teaching colleagues:

1. What human or environmental conditions do instructional coaches identify as key to establishing and building relational trust with the teachers they serve?
2. What are the perceptions of instructional coaches about how these key conditions mediate relational trust in the coaching context?

This study also used Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory to understand how instructional coaches assist their teaching colleagues to improve instructional practices. Mezirow (1991) indicated that transformative learning changes the way learners think about themselves and their own world. Mezirow (1998) stated, "learning to think for oneself involves becoming critically reflective of assumptions and participating in discourse to validate beliefs, intentions, values, and feelings" (p. 197). Calleja (2014) noted that the theory of transformative learning has changed how we do pedagogy for adults. Kitchenham (2008) summarized the evolution of Mezirow's (2006) two major elements of transformative learning as critical self-reflection and

critical discourse in which the learner can validate their best judgment and monitor their acquisition of knowledge to implement transformative learning.

In a coaching relationship, the goal is for teachers to reflect on their teaching abilities within their own classrooms, while improving or transforming their instructional practices (Sweeney & Harris, 2017). The conceptual framework for this study was framed in the belief that instructional coaches who do not have perceived positive relational trust with their teaching peers will not be able to facilitate critical discourse that results in transformative learning. Relational trust can be built if certain conditions are in place within a coaching relationship.

The social implications of transformative learning emphasized the need for adult learners to interact with others to find alternatives to potential old habits while gaining emotional support during the transformation process (Calleja, 2014). Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy underpins transformative learning as coaches work with their teaching colleagues to improve their pedagogical skills and support transformative learning, while simultaneously understanding the unique needs of adult learners. The interaction that occurs within this relationship rests on six key assumptions identified by Knowles et al. (2005). These adult assumptions include the need to understand a reason for learning, a need for self-direction and choice, learning that rests on prior experience, learning that results in a generalizable skill, real-life situational learning, and internal motivation on the part of the learner (Knowles et al., 2005).

Qualitative data was gathered through semi structured interviews conducted with participants to understand how instructional coaches describe their experiences coaching adult learners and the role that relational trust plays during these experiences. Participants interviewed included seven instructional coaches from a variety of public schools in the MetroWest and Central Massachusetts area. Five of the seven participants worked in urban districts, one worked

in a suburban district, and one worked in a regional district. Experience as an instructional coach varied from four years to fourteen years. After interviews were transcribed, they were sent to each participant for member checking. Data were analyzed through the lens of Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory and Knowles' (1980) adult learning theory. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) protocol was utilized to identify themes, patterns, and trends using a structured method developed by Moustakas (1994) for IPA qualitative data analysis (Alase, 2017). Initially, 167 descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments emerged from analysis. The second round of data analysis revealed 80 potential codes. After a third round of data analysis, six overarching themes emerged with subthemes throughout all main themes. They included Many Hats, Coaching Needs, Resistance to Coaching, Care Ethics, Active Listening, and Adult Learners. This chapter includes an interpretation of findings in the context of the six emergent themes. This chapter also discusses implications, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study.

Interpretation of Findings

Participants viewed their experiences building relational trust as mostly positive, with a minimal amount of resistance to instructional coaching. Each participant discussed ways in which they created space for their teaching colleagues to be vulnerable and take more risks as adult learners by building trust through caring about them as people first and learners second. All participants saw their role as a middle ground between teachers and administration, but all made it clear that they were not in an administrative role and were part of the teaching contract in their respective districts. Four of the participants saw themselves as a positive bridge between teachers and administration. All participants cited the fact that when their role was clearly defined, there was less ambiguity and the perceptions from their teaching colleagues was positive. Personality

conflicts, previous teacher experiences and teacher choice were mentioned as potential roadblocks to the development of long-term relationship and trust building by all participants. All participants felt that it was necessary to work alongside their teaching colleagues and needed to step back and give teachers the space to discover their own next steps for learning instead of sharing their expertise in an overt manner. When they gave teachers space for, and facilitated, critical reflection, their ability to form and foster positive collegial relationships was enhanced. All participants were able to identify their own needs for further professional development, the need for space and time to collaborate with other instructional coaches, and the critical importance of obtaining and maintaining administrative support as instructional leaders in their roles. The following two subsections describe the interpretation of findings related to the two research questions of this study.

Key Human and Environmental Conditions For Trust Building

Results in this section answer research question one regarding the key human and environmental conditions participants shared regarding trust building. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) rests on the need for adult learners to interact with others to effectively change old habits while gaining emotional support during the transformation process (Calleja, 2014). Knowles's (1980 Adult Learning Theory underscores transformative learning as coaches work with their teaching colleagues to improve their pedagogical skills and support transformative learning, while concurrently understanding the unique needs of adult learners. Data from this study supported research completed by Barkley (2017), Bissonette (2014), Debacker (2013), DeWitt (2020), Finkelstein (2019), Jacobs et al., (2018), Kho et al., (2019), Kubek, 2012), Poglinco and Bach (2004), Routman (2012), and Woulfin and Rigby (2017) who found that instructional coaching as a professional development model must have several factors

in place to be effective, primary among them being building and maintaining relational trust. Participants described their experiences as instructional coaches as mostly positive with their teaching colleagues and the administrative teams they worked for. All participants described positive coaching experiences with colleagues within their schools and attributed these to taking the time to build relationships and the ability to build and maintain trust. This finding was supported by Walkowiak (2016) who considered establishing trust as one of five essential practices for coaching, along with the coach showing value for teacher ideas, setting focused goals with the teacher, focusing on instructional conversations, and a collaborative definition of the role of a coach.

All participants in this current study felt it important to truly care about the people they worked with and needed to understand them as people first and learners second. This included the need for active listening and critical reflection. Data corroborated with Bissonette (2014), who found that critical reflection with a coach was considered a higher level of intensity as a coaching activity. The amount of time to work with a coach was another factor that produced a positive perception of the coach. In the Bissonette (2014) study, it was found that longevity can have a direct effect on understanding the needs of teaching colleagues as they move into more structured learning activities.

Participants maintained that it was imperative that their roles were clearly defined by administration and understood by their teaching colleagues. This clear definition was supported by Debacker (2013) who noted the importance of creating a workable vision of coaching that is understood by administration. Barkley (2011) stated the need for the coach and administrator to establish boundaries for the coaching role. Castleman (2015) argued that coaches bridge the gap

between administrators and teachers, and if this is not balanced well, coaches are not able to build relationships with teacher colleagues.

Instructional coaches in this study discussed the importance of understanding their colleagues as adult learners with more specific needs, as opposed to student learners. Routman (2012) stressed the need for instructional coaches to understand an adult learner's capacity to accept and thrive in a coaching relationship. Linn (2018) found that instructional coaches who were not provided instruction for working with adult learners struggled to impact teacher performance. The complexities of working with adult learners was identified as equally important by Will (2017), who also noted the need for coaching collaboration to gain more direct support for teaching adults. The following findings delineated the human or environmental conditions that instructional coaches in this study identified as key to establishing and building relational trust with the teachers they served, and the literature that supported these findings.

Coaches Need Time to Build Relationships Through True Caring

A human condition that all participants stressed was the need for time to build relationships with their teaching colleagues. Some current research that suggested the need for a coach to build trust (Finkelstein, 2019; Schulze, 2016) did not delineate the amount of time necessary to build trust. However, Will (2017), Kane and Rosenquist (2019), and Noddings (2012a) recommended the need to allow time to build strong relationships while underscoring that this is not wasted time. Instructional coaches in this study discussed ways in which they build appropriate personal and professional relationships prior to working in a more academic realm. Some created space where daily personal conversations preceded coaching conversations. Others discussed the importance of putting themselves in their colleagues' shoes to consider where they are coming from and what they might be ready for before attempting to coach into

the content they are responsible for. Many conducted simple tasks for their teaching colleagues in their early meetings with them to start to develop trust and show that they care and understand how busy they are. Lowenhaupt et al. (2014) coined these *symbolic gestures* and found that these noncoaching tasks helped develop trust, which enabled coaches to eventually have more direct interaction with instructional practices.

The importance of helping teachers see themselves as part of a larger community of learners was stressed by the participants. Marion and Gonzales (2014) underscored the need for learners who want to transform their teaching need to be aware that they do not operate in a vacuum. All participants verbalized the need to be genuine with their words and actions by following through on promises they made. Many discussed adult baggage that they said sometimes interferes with the transformative nature of learning that occurs while working with a coach. When this baggage is recognized and understood by instructional coaches, teachers can take risks as learners and transform their teaching practices. Routman (2012) emphasized that adult learners bring many different life experiences and that coaches must understand this when supporting new learning. Two coaches helped teachers overcome issues by being a sounding board and giving them space to vent when they needed to voice their issues or frustrations without concern that they would share this with others. Active listening was another key condition cited by all participants as a key to building and maintaining trust.

Noddings (2012b) considered critical reflection a key to building a relationship of care and trust. Guiding conversations and creating space for critical reflection was a behavior that all instructional coaches articulated. The skill to ask just the right questions at appropriate times was described by all participants as an important one to possess as an instructional coach. Barkley (2010) described the need for coaches to be skilled at asking open-ended and closed-ended

questions to allow coaches to pull more creative ideas from teachers. All participants described the need to always maintain confidentiality. This non-negotiable behavior was something all participants described as a something that was not to be breached at any time. Breach of confidentiality was highlighted by Mangin and Dunsmore (2013) and Kubek (2012) as negative behaviors that erode a coach's ability to maintain trust.

A Clear Definition of the Role of Instructional Coach

Another human and environmental condition identified by participants as key to building and maintaining relational trust is a clearly defined role that is understood by both teachers and administrators. Several studies (Debacker, 2013; Finkelstein, 2019; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2013; Walkowiak, 2016) corroborated the need to clearly define the coaching role. Most participants spoke about the importance of overcommunicating the role of an instructional coach. All participants stressed the importance of being in a nonevaluative role, even though they were considered instructional leaders. Woulfin and Rigby (2017) found that when coaches are associated as evaluators, teachers were unlikely to request instructional coaching support. All participants were working under their own teacher contracts and believed it would not be possible for them to work and maintain trust without being an equal with their teaching colleagues. Many participants described administrative support with clear boundaries for maintaining confidentiality essential for teachers to feel comfortable working with coaches. Mangin and Dunsmore's (2013) study highlighted one coach who was put in an evaluative position with a teacher who was not performing well. The coach was not able to provide the type of support normally given due to being placed in this position. Although several participants described themselves as liaisons between teachers and administrative staff, coaches advocated for teacher needs and saw this advocacy as a positive way to identify themselves as part of the

teaching staff in their respective buildings, which was similar to the study by Dozier (2008) that included working with teachers as their advocates. Kho et al. (2019) identified three nonevaluated roles that coaches subscribed to—implementer, advocate, and evaluator—which helped coaches give support, identify teacher needs, and guide instruction. Conversely, Woulfin and Rigby (2017) found that coaching resistance is found when coaches are considered intermediaries.

Understanding Colleagues as Adult Learners Is Key to Developing Trust

All participants shared an active knowledge about how their teaching colleagues learn. They described the importance of teacher choice and facilitating coaching sessions that were led by what teachers desired to learn as next steps. This was confirmed by Dozier (2008) who noted that seeing the coach as a partner involved finding strengths and entry points with teachers. This human condition revealed positive coaching sessions by participants that were initiated by teachers instead of sessions that are mandated by administration. The participants saw themselves as facilitators of adult learning who created space for vulnerability and risk taking. Finkelstein (2019) found that coaches are sometimes perceived as holding more power. This perception was reduced by having the coach give nonevaluative feedback and honor teacher ideas. Many instructional coaches saw that resistance occurred when anxiety for new learning was present, which resulted in a fixed mindset and less of a growth mindset. All participants shared that they needed to be clear about the type of feedback they gave their colleagues and also needed to be aware that adults have different learning styles for which they need to adjust their coaching practice.

Collaboration and Critical Reflection Help Teachers Transform Learning

All seven participants articulated the need to model and encourage critical reflection with their colleagues. They noted that critical reflection done by teachers is a powerful way for teachers to gain new skills, improve their pedagogy, and transform their teaching. According to Calleja (2014) critical reflection allows adult learners to ponder alternative perspectives and ideas for change when a well-built coaching relationship is established. All participants described ways they facilitate critical reflection but believed that teachers need to be open to reflection and change before new learning could occur. All participants felt that this was an ongoing skill that could be taught and generalized to other content areas once teachers felt comfortable in risk-taking and being open and honest with their coaches. Most described the need to stay silent, and not jump in with how they saw a lesson go before having the teacher reflect first. Those who were able to stay silent and give the teacher space to respond first, found critical reflection to work well as a coaching skill. Allowing teachers to reflect on their own teaching with a coach helps transform instructional practices (Sweeney & Harris, 2017).

The next section describes a few potential human or environmental conditions that could be considered roadblocks to trust building or that could foster resistance to coaching and answered the second research question.

Key Conditions That Mediate Relational Trust

Results in this section answer research question two regarding the key conditions that mediate relational trust. Participants cited several experiences as instructional coaches that impacted their ability to mediate relational trust and avoid resistance to coaching. Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy cites six key assumptions that are necessary for adults to learn new skills. Knowing why they are learning and having self-direction and choice are two key

assumptions. Adult prior experiences can foster or inhibit growth and unless learning is life-centered or focused on real life scenarios, adults may not choose to learn new skills. Adults need to be able to apply their learning to real-world contexts and to have internal and external motivators (Knowles, 1980). Each participant identified potential roadblocks or avoidable behaviors or actions that could be a detriment to trust building with adult learners. Mezirow (1991) believed that transformative learning involves the most significant learning of adulthood, which forces learners to critically assess their most basic beliefs, values, feelings, and problematic ideas. If transformative learning is accomplished, it changes the way learners think about themselves and their own world. The challenges that all coaches in this study faced at some point in their coaching careers can be viewed as technical or adaptive challenges.

Technical Challenges Can Interfere with Building Relational Trust

Technical challenges are problems that can be solved by an expert based on past experience. As opposed to an adaptive challenge, the cause of a technical challenge or problem is clear and it is easier to see how it can be solved. (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). In this study, giving teachers choice and not mandating coaching is an example of a technical challenge that all coaches faced. In a study by Wilson (2016), teachers who were mandated to attend professional learning communities (PLC) meetings were not found to be effective, as teacher buy-in was not increased. Possessing content expertise was another technical challenge that coaches in this study addressed. Curtis et al., 2012; Gwazdauskas, 2009; and Knight, 2018, all addressed the importance of coaches who were content experts and possessed the skills necessary to teach adults. A third technical challenge that can be mitigated is the need to provide targeted professional development to instructional coaches. Only two of the seven participants received formal coaching training. Sweeney (2011) stressed the need for districts to provide targeted

professional development focused on coaching practices, curriculum and instruction, and learning that focused on teaching adults. The technical challenge of time for collaboration is a fourth problem identified by the participants in this study. Kane and Rosenquist (2019) discovered that a district policy change to include potentially productive coaching activities (PPCA) enabled coaches to devote most of their time to effective coaching responsibilities. The following technical challenges were noted by participants as potential roadblocks to effective coaching.

Teacher Choice to Work with a Coach

Several participants commented about the choice that teachers had to work with a coach. Although giving teachers choice for working with a coach seemed like a positive option and a technical challenge that could be overcome, some participants discussed the difficulty of not having all teachers participate in coaching. Coaching was not mandated in any of the districts of the participants, even though some participants saw themselves as part of a larger academic model or initiative. Wilson (2016) suggested that empowering teachers to make key decisions regarding new initiatives like professional learning communities may encourage collaboration. Some participants claimed that resistance to working with a coach came more from experienced teachers and less from newer teachers. Jacobs et al. (2018) studied a coaching initiative where teachers who were resistant to coaching had more than ten years of experience. Teachers with less than ten years' experience were more receptive to coaching. Atteberry and Bryk (2011) also found that coaches in their study worked more frequently with novice teachers, and they were more willing to participate in innovative practices than more experienced teachers. All participants in this study were of the belief that teachers deserve to be coached, and aimed to include all teachers in coaching routines, whether through actual coaching cycles, through

common planning team times, or by providing resources outside of actual coaching cycles.

Barkley (2017) noted a misconception that only teachers who struggled needed a coach. Creating a culture where every teacher believes they deserve to be coached is a culture to strive for (Barkley, 2017; Debacker, 2013; and Kane and Rosenquist (2018). When faced with resistance, participants found ways to step back and take the lead of their colleagues or try to involve other coaches or administrators in the decision to step back or continue to pursue coaching. Those who faced resistance used administrators as a last resort to intervene, and some noted that administrator intervention did not always resolve resistance issues. This was evident in Mangin and Dunsmore's (2013) study, as well.

Coaches Need to Have Expertise in Their Field to Build Trust

Hiring instructional coaches with content expertise is a technical challenge that each participant addressed. All participants discussed the importance of having content expertise to be an effective instructional coach. Five of the seven coaches interviewed were content specific coaches—math, literacy, or language development coaches. Two participants were instructional coaches, responsible for all subject areas as a coach. All participants described needing to know the content as an expert to build trust with their colleagues. The importance of knowing just a bit more than the people they coached provided a level of comfort for their teaching colleagues to take risks in learning new skills as adult learners. Knight (2007) believed that coaches need to continue to build their own professional development. Similarly, Atteberry and Bryk (2011) shared that coaching models can be affected by the instructional gains perceived by experienced teachers versus novice teachers and the experience level of the coach. A caveat to possessing expertise was described by several participants. To facilitate learning, some coaches noted the need to help teachers reflect on their teaching instead of giving them feedback immediately.

Most noted the need to actively listen to their colleagues and not jump in as the expert teacher, as they believed most people that they coached already possessed the answers they were seeking. Cranston et al. (2006) described a metacognitive process where teachers and coaches can work together to consider the current classroom situation, think of alternative ideas for change, and consider different models to promote transformative learning. Likewise, Sweeney and Mausbach (2018) described the need for coaches to work alongside teachers while using student data to analyze progress and utilize curricular tools to improve pedagogy and improve trust. Understanding that this form of teacher-led coaching is a gradual release of responsibility to the teachers was a high priority for all participants.

Coaches Need Targeted Ongoing Professional Development

Providing targeted professional development is a technical and environmental challenge that can be addressed for instructional coaches to be successful. All instructional coaches in this study emphasized the need to receive ongoing professional development that is targeted to their specific needs as coaches. Conversely, Linn (2018) identified a flaw in a professional development opportunity given to high school coaches who were provided coaching professional development but not instruction in working with adult learners. Necessary professional knowledge regarding adult skills was needed. Each participant in the current study saw themselves as continuous learners. Most received more informal training as coaches versus more formal training to be instructional coaches. Those who received training stressed the need for more as new needs arise. All voiced the need for more in-depth professional development in several areas, including having difficult conversations, helping teachers critically reflect on their teaching practices, and being a more active listener. Barkley (2011) emphasized that the professional development that coaches provide to teachers must be customizable based on the

needs of the teacher. Participants addressed this fact and recognized that this professional development is not readily available. One participant noted the difficulty in finding just right professional development as a coach. Needing to be at the forefront of learning best practices is a skill that all participants communicated.

Time for Collaboration and Building Coaching Relationships Is Critical

Building time into a schedule can be seen as a technical challenge that can be solved with creative schedule building and the understanding from administration to allow coaches to do what they do best: coach. Most participants identified the need to create time to build quality collaboration with their teaching colleagues. Kane and Rosenquist's (2019) study noted that when the district they studied changed a policy to increase the time coaches devoted to effective coaching responsibilities of district-hired or school-hired coaches, relationship building was not as strong for district-hired coaches until the district-hired coaches were assigned to fewer buildings. When allowed to spend more time in productive coaching activities in fewer classrooms, stronger relationships increased. Most participants in the current study independently built time within schedules for coaching cycles, including teacher observations, modeling lessons, observing students, planning lessons, and working with teaching teams. Borman and Feger (2006) reported that there is limited evidence regarding the optimal amounts of time coaching should occur. Participants noted that their administrative team designated two common planning time days where teachers could schedule one-on-one time with a coach. Effective times for meetings was something that all coaches felt enhanced their ability to form positive relationships with their colleagues. Other scheduled planning times with coaching colleagues was seen as a positive experience for those who had the opportunity. When time was not given to coaching or was removed due to other daily building obligations such as being asked to be a

substitute teacher, participants felt this detracted from their ability to be effective at their jobs. This issue was also seen in Debacker's (2013) study, which identified role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload. The need to have a workable vision of coaching that is understood and practiced by administrators was identified in the Debacker (2013) study.

Adaptive Challenges Can Interfere with Building Relational Trust

As opposed to a technical challenge, an adaptive challenge is one without an easy or quick solution:

An adaptive problem asks for new ways of thinking, experiments and adjustments from numerous places in the organization from the people who are actually experiencing the problem. Without learning new ways—changing attitudes, patterns, and values — people cannot make the necessary leap to be successful (Wijers, et al., 2019, p. 42).

Participants in this study claimed that administrative support was paramount to building trust in the coaching realm. Coaches singled out principal and district support received. Venables (2018) noted that principal roles are shifting from building managers to instructional leaders, which leads them to allocate instructional leadership to teaching experts who can help them create buy-in and lead new initiatives. Barkley (2011) also noted the importance of principals and coaches to understand the boundaries of their own positions. Coaches in this study described resistance from teaching colleagues that precipitated from potential personality conflicts and teachers' prior experience that could be considered teacher baggage. Attitudes and perspectives regarding instructional coaching in the Kubek (2012) study showed the difficulty in implementing instructional coaching as a new professional development model that was not accepted by all. Vulnerability of adults who are in a coaching relationship is another adaptive challenge that participants identified. Atteberry and Bryk (2011) examined the diverse ways in which teachers

enter a coaching relationship with a willingness to take risks. Zimmerman (2006) noted that teachers may be reluctant to work with a coach if they perceive a threat to the relationships within a school or want to maintain instructional autonomy. Of utmost importance, all participants raised the importance of time to build trusting relationships before any change in teaching practices could be attained. Noddings (2012b) claimed that in a caring educational relationship when trust and care have been established, the carer [coach] will look to address the needs expressed by the one cared for [teacher] as the relationship continues to be built. These adaptive challenges were noted by participants as potential roadblocks that can be mediated with time, relationship building, administrative support, and trust.

Administrative Support Can Improve Successful Coaching Relationships

All seven participants clearly described that having administrative support and understanding about the role of a coach was imperative to avoiding resistance to coaching. Coaches described support from building administration or district administration. Curtis et al. (2012) found that public endorsement of the coach as an active participant and expert with relational and not positional authority was perceived positively. Conversely, Castleman (2015) identified administrator created resistance by asking instructional coaches to be part of building decision making. Although current participants had private conversations with administrators in their buildings, they discussed the need for boundaries to be set and not crossed in either direction, which was in opposition to the Mangin and Dunsmore (2013) study. Confidentiality with administrators was also mentioned as imperative with all participants as a key condition for maintaining trust with teachers. Barkley (2011) cautioned against coaches being seen as gaining power based on their relationship with administration. Poglinco and Bach (2004) shared boundaries of coaching roles are sometimes ill-defined as some see them existing somewhere

between teaching colleagues and administrators. Without administrative support and the right mindset regarding instructional coaching, this is an adaptive challenge that might not be easily overcome.

Personality Conflicts and Teacher Baggage Can Cause Resistance

Participants described teacher resistance to coaching from a few of their teaching colleagues. Those who voiced these conflicts described trying to work with a teacher who did not want to be coached and having to find ways around their hesitancy to be coached. As an adaptive challenge, this resistance sometime ended in a teacher refusing coaching even though administration may have preferred that all teachers enter a coaching cycle. Knight (2007) noted that coaches are put into situations daily as instructional leaders, which can make them unable to fully immerse in the school as they are always trying to make changes. Schulze (2016) cited school culture as a factor that can inhibit coaching ability to create positive change. Mezirow (1991) believed that culture can build or undo transformative thought. Most participants cited roadblocks such as previous negative experiences with evaluation, negative feedback, and the concern that they will be judged by the coach as potential resistance instigators. Knight (2007) also noted that coaches often try to challenge the status quo, which can put them at odds with their own membership. One participant divulged that veteran teachers being asked to work with a newer coach can also cause feelings of resistance. The resistance from experienced teachers was also noted by Jacobs et al. (2018). A few participants described finding resources or other less-impactful actions that they hoped would encourage their resistant colleague to reach out for more, which Lowenhaupt et al. (2014) identified as *symbolic gestures* or doing other non-coaching tasks to create a more receptive culture. Some participants described stepping back and giving time for more relationship building before the academic demands that coaching places on

teachers. Although two participants found strong personality conflicts insurmountable, many found that taking the time to listen to teacher needs and not automatically assume that resistance was permanent allowed for a more honest conversation that created space for coaching to eventually take place.

Vulnerability of Adult Learners Can Cause Resistance

An adaptive challenge that most participants commented on was the need for coaches to understand the vulnerability that learners need to transform or change their teaching. Many coaches saw this behavior as an important first step to risk-taking on the part of adult learners. The reluctance to change, or the tendency to be slower to change, was attributed to belief systems being more established, and adult learners being more guarded in their approach to new learning. Zimmerman (2006) concurred with this resistance and claimed that it is usually due to teacher reluctance to change when not viewed as necessary, when change has not been successful in the past, when change may threaten current relationships, or teachers want to maintain independence. Participants saw that adult learners sometimes possessed a fixed mindset and less inclination to move away from the way things have always been done. Some saw insecurities in admitting not knowing a skill and having the appearance of needing a coach versus deserving to be coached. Knight (2007) and Barkley (2017) share the opinion that everyone deserves to be coached. Overcoming the adaptive challenge to be vulnerable with a coach was something that all participants understood as necessary for their teaching colleagues to overcome to enable them to transform their teaching. Finkelstein (2019) agreed that as coaches enter the teacher's classroom, feelings of vulnerability arise as many equate adult observers with evaluation, which can inhibit the ability to build a trusting relationship.

Care and Respect Are Cornerstones to Successful Coaching Relationships

All seven participants expressed the need for time to build relationships before true collaboration, change in pedagogy, and trust in the coaching relationship can occur. Barkley (2011) noted that trust building relies on mutual respect, deciding to trust one another, and understanding each other's abilities, which fosters equality. The importance of getting to know their teaching colleagues as people, starting with small tasks or providing resources, and maintaining confidentiality were three important behaviors all participants raised as adaptive challenges. Others noted the importance of being genuine with words and actions and delivering on promised activities to build trust. Finkelstein (2019) shared that coaches should present themselves as co-learners and not experts. Sharing nonevaluative feedback regarding the teacher's own goals was found to be one way Finkelstein (2019) believed would gain trust. Each coach in the current study described the importance of following the lead of the teacher, and not moving too fast to want to fix everything they perceived as incorrect. Stopping to actively listen to what teachers believed was their next step in learning was a skill that all participants framed as key to building strong caring relationships with their teaching colleagues.

Implications

This study revealed that instructional coaching as a professional development model must have several factors in place to be effective, primary among them being building and maintaining relational trust. Participants identified the human and environmental conditions that were key to establishing and building relational trust with the teachers they served. These results aligned with studies by Barkley (2017), Bissonette (2014), Debacker (2013), DeWitt (2020), Finkelstein (2019), Jacobs, et al., (2018), Kho et al., (2019), Kubek, 2012), Poglinco and Bach (2004), and Woulfin and Rigby (2017). This study validated the findings of Castleman, (2015), Jacobs et al.

(2018), Kane and Rosenquist (2019), Lowenhaupt et al. (2014), Schulze (2016), and Zimmerman (2006) that resistance to coaching is multifaceted and can be diminished by building trusting relationships. Similarly, the results of this study supported Borman and Feger's (2006) and Walkowiak's (2016) findings regarding key effective instructional coaching techniques.

This study also identified the perceptions of instructional coaches about how the key conditions they experienced mediate relational trust with their teaching colleagues. Findings of this study corroborated studies by Cranston and Mezirow (2006), Drago-Severson (2009), Knight (2019), Knowles et al. (2005), Linn (2018), and Mezirow (2006) that coaches need to understand how to work with adult learners to help them transform their learning and improve teaching pedagogy. Similar to participants in the study by Kane and Rosenquist (2018), participants in this study shared concerns about being spread too thinly to make lasting changes with their teaching colleagues. The results of this study aligned with Noddings (2012a) and Noddings (2012b) who found that in a caring relationship, the person who gives care in a relationship must be attentive and receptive to the needs of the person they are caring for. Developing a caring relationship and building and maintaining trust were at the forefront of the perceptions of the participants in this study.

Implication # 1: Time Dedicated to Building Relationships Is Time Well Spent

Administrators and instructional coaches should consider the benefits of allowing adequate time for a coach to build relational trust and develop caring relationships before requiring academic changes or implementation of new initiatives. This was corroborated in a study by Kho et al. (2019), which emphasized the need for teacher readiness to coaching. When hiring new coaches or educators, administrators may want to reflect on how important building relationships is for the long-term effects of coaching to be beneficial. Instructional coaches in

this study all described the benefits of building relationships as an important first step to gaining the trust of the colleagues with whom they work. Several participants shared the importance of listening to the needs of the teachers they coach and following those leads even if that took them on a different path than what was originally intended. Those who made the decision to take the time to walk in their colleagues' shoes found that their trusting relationship grew the partnership they were attempting to create. This type of decision was supported by Knight (2019), who found that when coaches saw themselves as partners in the learning, coaching was effective. Some participants professed that some relationships were more cooperative than collaborative, and the small steps they took to build trusting relationships were moving them toward more collaborative work with their teaching colleagues. Lowenhaupt et al. (2014) called these small noncoaching tasks *symbolic gestures* and suggested these allowed coaches to develop a more receptive culture. Administrators and instructional coaches may want to consider building time for collegial conversations into coaching schedules to enhance trust-building behaviors.

Implication # 2: Administrators Should Consider the Role of Autonomy

Administrators may want to consider whether coaching should be mandatory or voluntary. Not mandating coaching allows coaches to develop relationships with teachers who want to be coached, while waiting to attract other more resistant colleagues. Participants who faced resistance to coaching cited difficulty gaining trust and divulged needing to step back and offer less impactful actions to build a relationship with some teaching colleagues. Borman and Feger (2006) found:

Voluntary versus mandatory coaching may not affect coaches' core activities (such as lesson demonstration or co-planning), but it does appear to influence the ways that coaches work and with whom. In the voluntary programs, coaches often had to work to

build a clientele, informally “marketing” their services to teachers and gradually establishing collaborative interactions. Voluntary and mandatory coaching programs may also intersect with collegial peer coaching versus expert coaching models (p. 7).

Their study further emphasized that in some mandated coaching programs, teachers viewed coaches in a more evaluative role than in non-mandated programs which resulted in teacher resistance.

Instructional coaches in this study who did step back and ease into the relationship found that they may have been moving too quickly or made their colleague feel uncomfortable. One participant shared a coaching relationship that was not able to be repaired, even with time and administrative intervention. Not mandating that this coach continue to work with a reluctant teacher allowed the coach to salvage their reputation and continue to work with others who wanted to be coached. Another participant described a similar scenario with administrative support to discontinue working with a combative teacher. Coaching was not mandated by this administrator and time was allowed to help repair the situation. Wilson (2016) found that mandated professional learning communities (PLC) did not increase teacher buy-in nor were they found beneficial by teachers. However, Wilson (2016) suggested that it is important for a principal to set the tone of building culture by encouraging collaboration. Participants all found resistant teachers within their work environments and found creative ways to diminish resistance without mandating coaching. None of the coaches took this resistance personally, though all professed wanting to effect change with all the teachers they were responsible for coaching. Each participant stressed the fact that they were well-supported by the administrators they worked for.

Implication # 3: The Coaching Role Should Be Clearly Defined

Participants in this study all described the need for clear definition of their coaching role as part of the teacher's contract. Research conducted by Debacker (2013) corroborated the findings of this study and the need for administrators to create a workable vision of coaching. When the instructional coach role was not clearly defined, some coaches in this current study described the perception as a gray area that can interfere with trust building. When teachers were unclear about the role of the coach, misconceptions occurred. Schulze (2016) underscored the fact that coaching roles must be clearly defined and viewed as effective by the teacher membership of which they belong. Walkowiak (2016) stressed the need for school leaders and instructional coaches to collaborate to define the role of the coach. School districts should take the responsibility to create a clear definition of the coaching role and write a thorough job description when recruiting instructional coaches.

Implication # 4: Critical Reflection About Student-Centered Data

Another condition that instructional coaches and administrators should consider is focusing on instructional conversations through collaborative reflection and student-centered data. Sweeney and Harris (2017) framed the common ground that allows teachers and coaches to begin to build a coaching relationship through student-centered coaching. All participants communicated the need to actively listen to their teaching colleagues to promote critical reflection and collaboration. Engaging in critical reflection required coaches to model this behavior, give teachers the time and space to reflect, and do so without judgment. In a nonevaluative role, instructional coaches can promote self-reflection and respond in ways that give honest feedback regarding what they see students are able to do, or not do, yet. Coggins and McGovern (2014) saw instructional coaches as facilitators who help teachers cognitively reflect

on next steps for instruction. Participants in this study found that the administrators they worked with supported this type of model, which allowed these coaches to collaboratively reflect with their teaching colleagues. Wilson's (2016) study suggested the need for principals to set the tone of their building culture by encouraging collaboration, which corroborated the result found by participants.

Implication # 5: Coaches Benefit from Targeted Professional Development

Another implication that administrators and coaches should consider is the fact that coaches need to understand how to work with adult learners to help them transform their learning and improve teaching pedagogy. Will (2017) acknowledged that instructional coaches need to understand the complexities of working with adult learners, which is a unique job usually with little to no direct support. Promoting teachers into a coaching role without professional development regarding the specific needs of adult learners may result in an ineffective coaching relationship. Sweeney (2011) supported the critical need for districts to provide specific professional development for their coaches, including the "complexities of working with adult learners" (p. 161). All participants in this study understood the needs of the adult learners they worked with, and the roadblocks faced with adults who have prior knowledge or experiences that interfered with transformative learning. Two of the seven participants received direct instruction in working with adult learners, while the other five participants received more on-the-job training as instructional coaches. Most of the participants in this study understood the adult baggage that comes with learners with more negative experiences and found ways to work around these challenges. The vulnerability and risk taking involved in learning as adults is something administrators should consider before requiring all adults to work with an instructional coach.

Implication # 6: Overworked Coaches Often Feel Undervalued

A final implication in this study is the environmental condition that many coaches in this study faced—being spread too thinly with their coaching responsibilities. Castleman (2015) identified resistance to coaching being caused by placing coaches in decision-making roles. Several coaches in this current study described many other duties that were not directly connected to instructional coaching such as building district curriculum, attending district meetings, working with student groups, creating district resources, and attending student meetings. All participants seemed to enjoy the many hats they wore and believed they were a valued resource in their districts. Although it may seem that instructional coaches are extra staff members who can be used as substitute teachers or used to fill in extra duties, instructional coaches' schedules should not be adjusted or compromised for normal building needs. Although one coach in this study said she felt it was important to be a team player, being used as a substitute teacher took time away from working with her teaching colleagues in her coaching role. Curtis et al. (2012) identified issues with principals relying heavily on the coach for initiating change within their district, which created both technical and adaptive challenges. For coaching to be valued by all stakeholders, administrators should try to avoid using instructional coaches to fill gaps in their building staff needs. Built on the implications in this study are recommendations for action described in the following section.

Recommendations for Action

This study sought to identify those key conditions that enable coaches to build trust and work effectively by utilizing the conceptual framework of Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning and the theoretical framework of Malcolm Knowles (1980) adult learning theory. In this framework, as coaches work with adult learners, their goal is to help

teachers transform their practice through critical self-reflection and discourse (Mezirow, 1991). This work investigated the lived experiences of instructional coaches and their perceptions regarding their role within their own settings. The intent of this study was to provide data to other educational organizations regarding the conditions that are necessary for instructional coaches to succeed, so that these organizations can recruit, train, and sustain high-quality instructional coaches. The findings of this study suggested ways in which educational organizations and administrators can increase the effectiveness of instructional coaching to minimize resistance and promote relational trust.

Recommendation #1—Hire coaches with Content and Interpersonal Expertise

Administrators should seek out educators with content area expertise and interpersonal people skills to increase the possibility of building effective and long-lasting coaching relationships that transfer to teacher transformational learning. Although some administrators may feel compelled to promote effective teachers to a coaching role, consideration of interpersonal skills is key. Gwazdauskas (2009) identified the need for instructional coaches to understand all grade level content to be effective leaders of teacher growth. Knight (2018) described the expertise of coaches in a set of strategies such as content planning, formative assessment, instruction, and community building that are critical to guiding teacher colleagues. Conversely, Barkley (2011) and Knight (2007) found that not all teachers who are highly skilled content area teachers are able to coach others. Fullan (2001) considered the personal and social competence of leaders for fostering emotional intelligence and empathy as key to positive coaching experiences. Tschannen-Moran & Carter (2016) found that instructional coaches need to learn to become attuned to their own interpersonal skills so that they are better equipped to navigate tough conversations with their colleagues. Possessing content area expertise in

conjunction with the interpersonal skills to work with adult learners can increase the likelihood that instructional coaches will find success in working in educational settings and improve teacher pedagogy. Participants in this study possessed content area expertise and understood the necessity to consider the emotional needs of the teachers they worked with. Pia shared her thoughts about being a coach in this way:

We're just that listening ear and there to help them—there's no judgments. Really. I think it's so important for us to be in the classrooms, which I think is just a great role that we do. Having that balance of being in the classrooms—that they can see that we are teaching lessons and dealing with behaviors and all of that—that we understand where they're coming from.

Claudia said, “It’s about being a good listener, being understanding of what they’re saying and sympathetic but not to the point where it’s taking away from what their ultimate goal is.” She also shared, “You know, I’ve learned to give myself grace to say I don't need to respond right away to what they have to say.”

Recommendation # 2—Allow Time for Relationships to Be Built

Another recommendation was to have administration allow the time and space for instructional coaches to build relationships with the teachers they will be coaching. Although curricular goals may be central to the purpose of deploying instructional coaches, if relationships are not given the time to mature, those curricular goals may take longer, or not be achieved at all. Will (2017) acknowledged the need to allow time for trusting relationships to be built; however, clearly defined trust building actions were not evident in that study. Participants in this study identified the need to take the time to build relationships and trust before moving to suggesting changes in pedagogy with their teaching colleagues. In those situations, the coaches found true

collaboration and built strong coaching relationships. Noddings (2012a) stated that caring relations should be the goal for all teachers and administrators to meet the needs of all cared-for individuals. Participants found that trusting relationships take time to nurture and if rushed, may not flourish at all. Anne shared, “I just love talking about learning with other learners and other educators. I just think there’s nothing better and I think it’s so exciting to have conversations about how to best serve students.”

Recommendation # 3—Coaches Should Follow the Lead of Teachers

Another coaching practice that is recommended for administrators and coaches to consider non-negotiable is the need for instructional coaches to follow the lead of the teachers with whom they work. This helps mediate relational trust as coaches consider ways in which they follow a teacher-led coaching model. Participants in this study noted more success when they gave teachers choice for what they wanted to work on and helped them create a growth mindset around new learning. The importance of voice and choice and allowing teachers to drive their own learning was a human condition that all coaches perceived to build receptive learners willing to make substantive growth. Walkowiak (2016) identified instructional practices that helped coaches promote trust by valuing teacher input. The collaborative nature of coaching was defined by the administrators and coaches in the Walkowiak (2016) study, and the instructional coach showed value for the teachers’ ideas. If administrators mandate learning that must take place, the risk of not having teacher buy-in for the instructional coaching model may occur.

Bill discussed how he sees his coaching responsibilities for giving teachers choice and following their lead:

So I think my position is a little bit different because not only do I have to go in and offer some instructional coaching on you know, maybe classroom management or

environmental adjustments, something global like that. But then I also have to go in and make those teachers who aren't necessarily comfortable with math, at least comfortable or preferably fall in love with math.

Tara shared the way in which she follows the lead of her teachers:

So for a big piece of my coaching it's supporting the students and I do that by supporting the teachers and helping them have differentiated instruction. We consider objectives and having scaffolding built into their lesson plans. And so I can do a coaching cycle with individual teachers or with teams of teachers. And when I do that, we kind of focus on one sort of aspect of their classroom instruction that they're looking to improve upon with their students.

Recommendation # 4—Expect and Accept Resistance to Instructional Coaching

Understanding that resistance will logically occur while not imposing mandated coaching allows space for instructional coaches to create mutual trust and respect and acknowledges the unique needs of adult learners. All participants in this study faced resistance to coaching at one time or another in their coaching careers and identified a variety of reasons for resistance. In education there are no quick fixes to make every teacher an expert teacher. Knight (2018) claimed that coaching will flourish when administrators expect that everyone must be engaged in improvement. Conversely, allowing coaches to step back from resistant teachers and work at creating relationships in a variety of ways was seen as a positive from the participants in this study because of the administrative support they received to do so. Participants shared that if they faced resistance, at times they did step back, or tried to be a resource for resistant teachers in ways that were acceptable to the adult resistant learner. Castleman (2015) found that teachers who resist initiatives like instructional coaching did so when the initiative did not relate to adult

learning principles like self-directed learning, experiential learning, learning that addressed current needs, and intrinsic motivation on the part of the adult learner. Terry voiced concern about resistance in this way:

I do think that there's a challenge when you're being told so many things you have to do, and so how do you find that balance about what's really best for the kids in front of you while you're still doing what you have to?

Jill shared her perspective about coaching conditions that helped a relationship with a teacher thrive:

Honesty, reliability, willingness to try things on both of our parts. You know, it wasn't just his vulnerability and saying, I don't understand this concept. But it was also mine and saying, like, I'm still a relatively new coach, and this is what I'm also working on. So maybe we can work on this together and really created a partnership rather than me always just telling you what to do.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study supplemented existing literature on instructional coaching and the experiences of participants from a few districts in Massachusetts who employ instructional coaches. Additional research could be valuable for educational institutions, administrators, and instructional coaches in understanding the experiences of instructional coaches. Below are recommendations for further study.

Recommendation # 1—Include Instructional Coaches Outside of Current Study

Because this study inherently included a small sample size from the central and MetroWest regions of Massachusetts, the findings may not be representative of all experiences of instructional coaches. Coaches in different states or different regions in Massachusetts may have

different perceptions regarding their coaching experiences as state policies or requirements may differ as compared to those in this study. As a result, it is recommended that this study be expanded to include other instructional coaches in a variety of environments across other locations.

Recommendation # 2—Study Coaches with Less Experience

Another recommendation is to conduct a study that compares the experiences of newer instructional coaches and more experienced instructional coaches. Although I chose to interview coaches with three or more years of experience, hearing the experiences of new coaches may give a unique perspective that was not addressed here. This study added to the body of literature that addressed the importance of building trusting relationships and minimizing resistance to coaching. However, limited studies exist that compare the experiences of seasoned coaches to newer or less experienced instructional coaches. This type of study could help educational institutions and administrators navigate how to best support instructional coaching models.

Recommendation # 3—Explore the Relationships of Coaches and Teachers

The decision to study the perceptions of instructional coaches was purposefully chosen for this study. However, understanding the dual perceptions of instructional coaches compared to the teacher colleagues with whom they work would give a unique perspective not found in current literature. Considering the findings of this study supported building trusting relationships, the perspectives of teachers who receive instructional coaching would add to the current research.

Recommendation # 4—Identify the Perceptions of Administrators

Current research does not identify administrative perspectives regarding instructional coaching and how it is supported in districts. Decisions regarding implementation, funding,

professional development needs, and rationale for sustaining this model are interesting perspectives that were not explored in this study. This type of study would give administrators and educational institutions practical information regarding implementation of instructional coaching as a professional development model.

Recommendation # 5— Gather Perceptions of Administrative Coaches

Although all participants in this current study were part of their individual teacher contracts, interviewing administrative instructional coaches could provide a unique perspective regarding building relational trust. This type of research study could provide valuable information for educational institutions about the evaluation system currently used in school systems and whether feedback from an administrative coach could be perceived in the same way as feedback from a nonevaluative instructional coach.

Conclusion

Many existing studies demonstrated the need for building trust with teaching colleagues in a nonevaluative coaching role as one of many conditions identified as a key to a thriving coaching relationship (Borman & Feger, 2006; Kane & Rosenquist, 2018). Teachers who invite a coach into their classrooms are vulnerable adult learners who may become defensive if trust is not built first (Finkelstein, 2019). Instructional coaches who take the time to build trusting relationships by sharing common practices and purposes for learning while relying on mutual respect and relational equality will ultimately find success (Barkley, 2011). The study presented is significant because it shared the experiences of instructional coaches regarding their ability to build trusting relationships and diminish resistance to instructional coaching, which was not prevalent in the current literature. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of instructional coaches as they described key conditions that need to be

in place to build relational trust and diminish resistance to coaching and to explore the structure of their trust building experiences with their teaching colleagues. Results revealed that these experienced coaches viewed their experiences building relational trust as mostly positive, with a minimal amount of resistance to instructional coaching. Each participant discussed ways in which they created space for their teaching colleagues to be vulnerable and take more risks as adult learners by building trust through caring relationships. Personality conflicts, previous teacher experiences and teacher choice were mentioned as potential roadblocks to the development of long-term relationship and trust building by all participants. Participants saw themselves as facilitators of critical reflection with their adult teaching colleagues and identified the critical importance of obtaining and maintaining administrative support as instructional leaders in their coaching roles.

Although participants in this study experienced minimal resistance to coaching, results revealed some critical areas for educational institutions and administrators to consider when hiring instructional coaches and establishing a coaching model. Addressing these critical areas may help instructional coaches create relational trust with their colleagues and transform their teaching practices with minimal resistance to changing pedagogy. This study demonstrated the advantages of instructional coaching as an in-house professional development model are abundant if established with care and critical understanding of the needs of adult learners.

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APPENDIX:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Statistical and Priori Selection Questions

- a. How many years have you held your position as a literacy coach in your school district?
- b. Can you begin by telling me a little about yourself and your role as a coach?
- c. What does a typical coaching day look like for you?
- d. What do you see as your most important responsibilities or tasks as a coach?

Interview Questions*Correspondence of Research Questions, Interview Questions and Literature*

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Literature
RQ1: What human or environmental conditions do instructional coaches identify as key to establishing and building relational trust with the teachers they serve?	1. What do you believe makes a successful coaching relationship? Describe a successful coaching relationship you are building with a teacher.	Barkley (2017) Bissonnette (2014) Castleman (2015) Jacobs et al. (2018) Knight (2018)
	2. What conditions help this coaching relationship to thrive?	
	3. Who is responsible for these conditions to be in place?	
	4. How does trust factor into your relationship with the teachers you coach? The administrators you work with?	Finkelstein (2019) DeWitt (2020) Schulze (2016) Venables (2018) Zimmerman (2006)
	5. What steps do you take to build trust?	
	6. How do you navigate through a coaching relationship that is not working? What are some of the conditions that hinder this relationship? What supports do you need to restore this relationship?	

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Literature
RQ2: What are the perceptions of instructional coaches about how these key conditions mediate relational trust in the coaching context?	7. How is working with adult learners similar to working with younger learners? How is it different? 8. What have you learned about working with adult learners? 9. Describe a time you experienced a teacher you work with make a significant change in their teaching practice. What are some of the conditions that led to this change in their practice?	Knowles (1980) Callega (2014) Cranston et al. (2006) Drago-Severson (2009) Kitchenham (2008) Knight (2018, 2019) Linn (2018) Mezirow (2006)
	10. Describe your leadership style as a coach.	Coggins & McGovern (2014)
	11. In what ways do you help teachers engage in critical reflection about their teaching practice?	Curtis et al. (2012) Debacker (2013) Godlesky (2018)
	12. If you had an opportunity to attend a professional development session about teacher reflection, what would you want to learn in the session?	Neumerski (2012) Will (2017) Woulfin & Rigby (2017)
	13. Do you feel you need any additional training to do this work? If so, in what areas?	
	14. What is one piece of advice you can give the next generation of instructional coaches?	
	15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your coaching role?	