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EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND
INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES PARTICIPATING IN VIRTUAL INSTRUCTIONAL
COACHING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By

Alyson J. Manion

Bachelor of Music from Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University
Master of Music from Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University
Master of Education from University of Maryland University College

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It was presented on
08/24/2022
and reviewed by:

Andrea Disque, Ed.D., Lead Advisor
University of New England

Glenn Brand, Ed.D., Secondary Advisor
University of New England

Noah Getz, D.M., Affiliate Committee Member
American University

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Alyson J. Manion



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Secondary Advisor Name: Glenn Brand
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## Table of Contents

|                                                        |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....                         | 1  |
| Definitions of Key Terms.....                          | 3  |
| Statement of the Problem .....                         | 4  |
| Statement of Purpose of the Study .....                | 5  |
| Research Questions .....                               | 5  |
| Conceptual/Theoretical Framework.....                  | 6  |
| Assumptions, Limitations and Scope .....               | 8  |
| Assumptions .....                                      | 8  |
| Limitations.....                                       | 9  |
| Scope .....                                            | 9  |
| Rational and Significance.....                         | 10 |
| Summary .....                                          | 11 |
| CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....                    | 13 |
| Conceptual Framework .....                             | 14 |
| Personal Interest .....                                | 14 |
| Topical Research .....                                 | 15 |
| Theoretical Framework.....                             | 16 |
| Evolution of Instructional Coaching .....              | 19 |
| Coaching is Not New.....                               | 20 |
| Coaching in Education.....                             | 21 |
| Benefits to Instructional Coaching.....                | 24 |
| Supporting Early Career Teachers.....                  | 25 |
| Teacher Retention.....                                 | 26 |
| Teacher Evaluation .....                               | 27 |
| Impact of Coaching on Teacher Development .....        | 28 |
| Impact of Coaching on Student Achievement.....         | 29 |
| Instructional Coaches and Leadership Development ..... | 29 |
| Coaching Models.....                                   | 32 |
| Teacher Centered Coaching.....                         | 33 |
| Student Centered Coaching .....                        | 36 |

|                                                                                 |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Relationship Driven Coaching.....                                               | 37 |
| Coaching as Professional Development.....                                       | 38 |
| Limitations to Instructional Coaching.....                                      | 39 |
| Instructional Coaching in the Virtual Setting.....                              | 41 |
| Summary .....                                                                   | 43 |
| CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....                                                | 45 |
| Site Information and Demographics/Setting.....                                  | 48 |
| Participants/Sampling Method .....                                              | 48 |
| Instrumentation and Data Collection.....                                        | 50 |
| Data Analysis .....                                                             | 51 |
| Limitations, Delimitation, Ethical Issues .....                                 | 52 |
| Limitations.....                                                                | 53 |
| Delimitations .....                                                             | 54 |
| Ethical Issues.....                                                             | 55 |
| Trustworthiness .....                                                           | 56 |
| Credibility .....                                                               | 56 |
| Transferability .....                                                           | 57 |
| Dependability.....                                                              | 57 |
| Confirmability .....                                                            | 58 |
| Summary .....                                                                   | 58 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .....                                                     | 60 |
| Analysis Method .....                                                           | 61 |
| Presentation of Results and Findings .....                                      | 63 |
| Presentation of Interview Question Responses .....                              | 64 |
| Presentation of Themes .....                                                    | 75 |
| Theme 1: Feedback Should Be Flexible to Address the Virtual Environment .....   | 75 |
| Theme 2: Co-Teaching is Necessary in the Virtual Environment.....               | 78 |
| Theme 3: Positive Relationships Were More Present During Virtual Coaching ..... | 80 |
| Summary .....                                                                   | 82 |
| CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION .....                                                     | 84 |
| Interpretation and Importance of Findings.....                                  | 86 |

|                                                                                |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Research Question 1 .....                                                      | 86  |
| Research Question 2 .....                                                      | 90  |
| Research Question 3 .....                                                      | 93  |
| Implications.....                                                              | 95  |
| Recommendations for Action.....                                                | 96  |
| Create Feedback Tailored to the Teaching Platform.....                         | 97  |
| Embedding Co-Teaching within the Instructional Coaching Model.....             | 97  |
| Learning How to Use Technology for Increased Student Achievement.....          | 98  |
| Recommendations for Further Study .....                                        | 98  |
| Recommended Qualitative Study #1 .....                                         | 98  |
| Recommended Qualitative Study #2 .....                                         | 99  |
| Recommended Qualitative Study #3 .....                                         | 99  |
| Conclusion.....                                                                | 100 |
| References.....                                                                | 105 |
| Appendix A. Email Invitation for Participation to Potential Participants ..... | 125 |
| Appendix B. Participant Information Sheet.....                                 | 126 |
| Appendix C. Full Interview Protocol.....                                       | 129 |
| Appendix D. Institutional Review Board Approval .....                          | 132 |

## **DEDICATION**

To my girls, Mavis Diane and Claudia Jean. We all follow a unique path in life and it is up to you to walk yours. Whatever you decide to do and however you choose to walk your journey, know you are loved and supported in all you do.

*For all the things my hands have held, the best by far is you. -Unknown*



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## LIST OF FIGURES

|                                                               |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Figure 1:</b> <i>The Partnership Approach Theory</i> ..... | 7  |
| <b>Figure 2:</b> <i>The Coaching Cycle</i> .....              | 32 |

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND  
INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES PARTICIPATING IN VIRTUAL INSTRUCTIONAL  
COACHING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public high school teachers (grades 9-12) and instructional coaches who have participated in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three research questions guided this study: (1) How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?, (2) How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe the changes in instructional coaching experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?, and (3) How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their relationships with their instructional coaching partner during the COVID-19 pandemic? The partnership approach theory was applied as the conceptual and theoretical framework for this study.

Semi structured interviews were used for data collection. Upon completion of coding and analysis, themes emerged which included the use of flexible feedback in the virtual environment, incorporating co-teaching as part of the instructional coaching model, and the presence of positive relationships in the virtual environment. The findings of this study focused on the lived experiences of public high school teachers and instructional coaches. Participants indicated frustrations with their experiences, a desire for flexibility with virtual instructional coaching and cited more present and positive relationships during the studied time period.

**Keywords:** CEIJ, Coaching, Coaching relationship, Instructional coach, Instructional coaching, Instructional coaching cycle, Professional development, teacher evaluation, teacher practices.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning are cornerstones in society that require school districts to strive for excellence (Aguilar, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Glickman, 1992). It is imperative that public school districts work to ensure they are providing the best education possible to the young people in their communities (Catalano, 2018; Goldrick, 2012). There is a proven need for instructional coaches to assist with the continued growth of teachers, as such, student achievement will be positively affected (Aguilar, 2013; Catalano, 2018; Chien, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Knight (2011) articulated it best: “when teachers stop learning, so do students” (p. 4).

At the heart of coaching, there is a focus to ensure that best version of professional development executed by both instructional coaches and teachers is reached. Instructional coaching is about motivating, collaborating, and committing to continued measurable improvement (Knight, 2018). This concept is true no matter how the coaching is executed, such as in-person or virtually, or the model used, such a teacher centered, student centered or relationship centered coaching (Knight, 2020). While many instructional coaching models have similarities in delivery structures, the differences derive from a variety of factors including environment, platform, experience, and execution (Knight, 2018). The differences can be as simple as how the instructional coaching is executed such as in-person or virtually or as complex as the variety of schools and school systems across the United States, ranging from urban to suburban, the level of importance administrations places on this particular form of professional development, the experience of instructional coaches and teachers as well as participant acceptance and engagement of this form of professional development. These differences are important to note as the study seeks to explore the experiences of public high school teachers in

grades 9-12 and instructional coaches who participated in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Including comprehensive and effective professional development programs where teachers are able to enhance their craft beyond one day workshops and conferences must be a high priority for school districts who are striving to increase student achievement (Hervey, 2021). When teachers are coached effectively, student achievement is dramatically improved and thus effective coaching should be the focal point of professional development within schools (Knight et al., 2015). In the last 10 years coaching programs in schools have shifted from only focusing on early career teachers to the entire faculty (Freeman-Mack, 2020). Instructional coaching programs have been proven to provide improved professional development experiences (Kang, 2016). By working with teachers to understand strategies and methods for instructional execution, students ultimately benefit through increased learning, preparing them for future careers (Fisher & Frey, 2016; Kang, 2016; Knight, 2018).

Instructional coaches have a challenging role as they interact and coach a wide variety of teachers who come from varied backgrounds and experiences (Stover et al., 2011). Instructional coaching, as it relates to in-person methods, has been widely researched (Kraft et al., 2018) and success criteria are well documented reaching as far back as the 1980's when Joyce and Showers (1980) first began to research and advocate for educational instructional coaches. However, there is little research on teachers and instructional coaches' experiences with instructional coaching models deployed in virtual environments (Knight, 2021). Almost all instructional coaching models, experiences, and guidance are targeted for in-person learning and very few studies address how instructional coaching takes place within the virtual environment (Knight & Lauer, 2020).

## Definitions of Key Terms

*Claim Evidence Impact Justification (CEIJ):* Instructional coaching model that follows the structure of making a claim, providing evidence, stating an impact and justifying findings or recommendations (Baeder, 2018).

*Coaching:* Coaching is a form of professional development where coaches work with professionals to strengthen research-based, best-practice instructional strategies to increase achievement and success (Johnson et al., 2016).

*Coaching relationship:* A two way partnership of trust between a teacher and coach that is specific, targeted and oriented towards movements focused on academic success (Knight, 2008).

*Instructional coach:* An on-site educational professional developer who works with educators to employ proven instructional methods (Knight, 2007).

*Instructional coaching:* A means of providing interventions for teachers to improve teacher and learning (Killion & Harrison, 2006) or a means to exchange pedagogical practices in an effort to propel someone forward from where they currently are to where they would like to be (Marzano, 2003).

*Instructional coaching cycle:* Regular and on-going steps that incorporate planning, teaching, observation and reflection conducted by an instructional coach that strives for improved teacher performance (Knight, 2007; Stefaniak, 2017).

*Professional development:* Programs that offer teachers opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills that are essential for continued use in the classroom (National Education Association, 2019).

*Teacher evaluation:* The process of collection data and conducting analysis to arrive at professional judgements about performance to inform decision-making and includes formal and informal observations (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

*Teacher practices:* Skills and strategies utilized by teachers in the classroom to support student learning and affect student outcomes (Killion & Harrison, 2006; Knight, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem addressed in this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of instructional coaches and teachers with instructional coaching in the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instructional coaching has been widely researched since it was first introduced in the 1980s (Flatt, 2019). This form of professional development, as it pertains to teacher growth, has a positive impact on school communities in a variety of areas such as relationships among peers in school communities, teacher effectiveness, professional development, and student achievement (Knight, 2011).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions around the United States flipped their delivery of educational services to online environments rapidly and with little training (Knight, 2021). This shift had potential impact on teacher growth and development as instructional coaches also had to shift their coaching models to the virtual environment (Knight, 2021). In a post pandemic world virtual education will likely remain an option in many school districts across the United States (Knight, 2021) and ultimately it is a school district's responsibility to consistently increase student achievement (Anderson & Wallin, 2018). The responsibility for increased student achievement doesn't mean only for in-person programs but in whatever platform for which students are receiving instruction (Hui et al., 2020). As learning has shifted to virtual environments, so have instructional coaching practices and as such, it is

imperative for public educational institutions to ensure that the same conditions that facilitate effective instructional coaching also remains effective in the virtual environment (Knight, 2021). Results of this study shed light on the lived experiences while exploring the use of in-person instructional coaching models in the virtual environment through the lens of instructional coaches and teachers.

### **Statement of Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public high school teachers (grades 9-12) and instructional coaches who participated in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is the role of the instructional coach to work with teachers in setting desired outcomes of the instructional coaching and then working on effective strategies to reach those outcomes, no matter the delivery method of instruction (Knight, 2018).

To ensure coaching in the virtual environment remains effective, it is important to understand the experiences of instructional coaches and teachers within COVID-19 response virtual programs. Engaging with instructional coaches and teachers who had a lived experience with instructional coaching in the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic was a key component to the study.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed after a review of the literature as it relates to instructional coaching history, practices, effectiveness, feedback and virtual response/execution as well as examining a number of theoretical frameworks.

**RQ 1.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?



**RQ 2.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe the changes in instructional coaching experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 3.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their relationships with their instructional coaching partner during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Conceptual/Theoretical Framework**

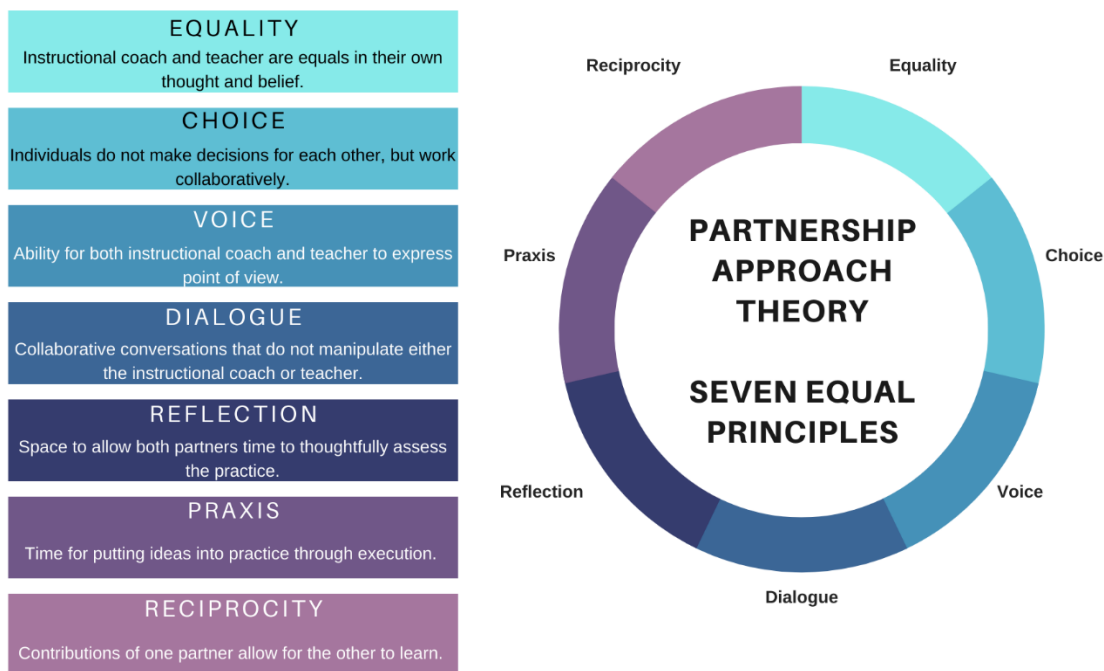
The conceptual framework is composed of three major components in alignment with Ravitch and Riggan's (2016) suggestion to include personal interest, topical research and the theoretical framework. The conceptual framework used in this study serves as the structure to the body of the work and informs the study throughout. According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), the conceptual framework allows for the researcher to view the study topic through a focused lens targeting specific aspects. According to Ravitch and Riggan (2016) the personal interests "are what drive you to do the work in the first place--your motivation for asking questions and seeking knowledge" (p. 8). In this research the personal interest stems from the researcher's career journey as a former teacher, instructional coach, and administrator. The topical research addresses the gaps in the literature as it focuses specifically on the area of study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016) which in this case is instructional coaching and virtual environments. Lastly the theoretical framework serves to address the varied relationships of the study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016).

The theoretical framework of this study uses the partnership approach theory by Knight (2008). The partnership approach theory addresses several principles including equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis and reciprocity, all of which guide the framework and allow for focus within the study (Knight, 2008). As shown in Figure 1, the seven principles in Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory are of equal importance. Equality addresses the ability for the

instructional coach and teacher to be equals in their thoughts and beliefs when engaging in the instructional coaching process. Choice addresses the partnership by not allowing one or the other individuals (instructional coach and teacher) engaged in the process to make decisions but rather collectively throughout the process. Voice allows for the freedom of both the instructional coach and teacher to express their point of view. Dialogue drives collaborative conversations where one side is not manipulating the other. Reflection gives space for each partner to assess the practice and engagement of the process while praxis allows for time to put ideas and thoughts into action. Lastly reciprocity allows for each of the partners to learn from the other throughout the instructional coaching experience (Knight, 2008).

**Figure 1**

*The Partnership Approach Theory*



*Note.* Equal principles of theory based on Knight (2008).

By using the partnership approach theory as a guide, the focus remains on effective instructional coaching practices through honest partnerships focused on improved professional development within the school (Knight, 2008).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope**

The focus of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public high school teachers (grades 9-12) and instructional coaches who have participated in virtual instructional coaching. The inclusion criteria of the sample ensures that all participants had experiences with in-person instructional coaching prior to the year 2020 and a virtual instructional coaching experience between the years 2020 and 2021. Further criteria for the study included that all instructional coaches and teachers had these in-person and virtual instructional coaching experiences within the same school district in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States to ensure the same instructional coaching model was experienced in both platforms.

#### **Assumptions**

In qualitative research assumptions include the decisions a researcher makes as it pertains to methodology choices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher assumed that most of the instructional coaches and teachers' will respond similarly as it pertains to their perceptions and lived experiences. It is also assumed that all participants will answer the interview questions honestly and thoughtfully. The researcher assumed that all participants would respond without bias in spite of current working conditions in the district. The researcher further assumed that the instructional coaching model experienced was delivered with fidelity on part of the individual schools based on district mandates during the timeframe being studied.

## **Limitations**

Limitations to qualitative studies include variables that are not able to be controlled by the researcher and these limitations may ultimately affect the outcome of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The limiting factor is that both instructional coaches and teachers use district specific guidance for the instructional coaching model employed at their school and that with a variety of instructional coaching models available, the model used at the site in this study is the Claim, Evidence, Impact, and Justification (CEIJ) model and does not necessarily mimic instructional coaching models of other districts around the country. Bias on part of the participants may cause limitations to the interview responses due to the current climate and working conditions within the district. The climate and working conditions may cause bias due to a return to in-person learning in school year 2021-2022 and may be potentially stressful which could skew a participant's perceptions. The methodology chosen for this study is also a limitation. Qualitative research, is dependent upon the participants' ability to share meaningful data as they self-report their experiences and stories. The participants' own responses are a limitation, and it is critical for the researcher to be a skilled interviewer (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## **Scope**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) maintain the importance of a study's boundaries to ensure the topic remains focused without being too broad or having too many objectives. The scope of this study was limited due to the researcher's use of purposeful sampling. Public high school (9-12) instructional coaches and educators in a singular school district in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States were chosen as the participants. The researcher only invited those instructional coaches and educators who had lived experiences with in-person instructional coaching using the

district mandated model of CIEJ in 2019 or earlier and who also had lived experiences with virtual instructional coaching using the same district mandated instructional coaching model in the years 2020 and 2021.

### **Rational and Significance**

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down school districts across the country, educators scrambled to flip their classrooms in a matter of days and adjust their teaching practice from that of an in-person instructional model to one that delivered virtual (Knight, 2021). This change was done without training, little notice, and minimal guidance from educational experts (Knight, 2021). As the pandemic continued it became clear that public-school educators were not returning to their traditional classrooms using pre-pandemic educational models (Sikka, 2020). Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, the role of the instructional coach became increasingly important to ensure that teachers were supported, classrooms were effective, and the skills that teachers needed were developed as they engaged in instruction during the pandemic and within the virtual space (Irby & Pugliese, 2020; Knight, 2019). This study specifically focused on public high school instructional coaches and teachers as they described their experiences with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic as it is the population who has the most structure for regular on-going instructional coaching within high schools in the chosen district for research.

Living and working in the 21st century means technology is not going away (Maryland Public Schools, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic opened conversations regarding school choice and what optimal learning environments look like for students and families (Maryland Public Schools, 2021). As stated by Maryland Public Schools (2021) “remote learning will likely remain a component of the instructional program for some time to come” (p. 51). It will be

imperative to study lessons learned during the COVID-19 educational virtual response, to strategically move forward ensuring effective instructional coaching takes place in the virtual environment (Knight, 2021). This study is significant to the educational institutions who are moving forward with long term virtual learning programs now that COVID-19 response learning plans have concluded. This is significant to the development of effective virtual instructional coaching programs and their long-term success. The instructional coaches and teachers who engage in virtual learning moving forward will benefit from this study and the best practices explored through previous experiences as it pertains to instructional coaching in the virtual environment.

### **Summary**

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experience of instructional coaches and teachers who have experience engaging in the instructional coaching process in both in-person and virtual environments. This study allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences of those participating in instructional coaching models in the virtual environment. The research problem, purpose, and research questions alongside the conceptual and theoretical framework were the guide for this work.

As data was collected and analyzed for this study, focusing on the experiences of those who have moved beyond COVID-19 pandemic virtual learning response programs was the singular focus. To understand coaching in the virtual environment, it is important to explore instructional coaches and teachers' experience with instructional coaching within COVID-19 response virtual programs so that these experiences can better guide educational communities moving forward with virtual learning in post pandemic learning environments. Engaging with coaches and teachers who had first-hand experience with instructional coaching in the virtual

environment was a key component to the study. This study yielded recommendations to the necessary adjustments that could be made in the virtual environment from the already proven effective in-person instructional coaching models.

Literature reviewed to support this study is discussed in the following chapter. Chapter Two will also explore the conceptual and theoretical framework that will be integral to the understanding of effective instructional coaching. It will also take a deep dive into the historical and varied aspects of instructional coaching and its effectiveness as it pertains to in-person instructional coaching models. Lastly, it will uncover research pertaining to instructional coaching in the virtual setting.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly community agree that educators need regular professional development to remain effective (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2011; Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). This targeted professional development should include gaining additional knowledge within their content, teaching strategies, and enhancing their skills (Aguilar, 2013). Beyond that, educators need practice that promotes continued growth, improvement, and reflection to master the art of teaching (Knight, 2019). Instructional coaching has emerged as a critical component of teacher training (Knight, 2007). According to Stover et al., (2011) coaching can probe the intellect, values, and practices of the individual and from that an individualized professional development plan can then be effectively executed. An instructional coach can build relationships with teachers that lead to honest reflection, robust conversations, provide a place for safe practice and reflection and in that relationship, improvement is acknowledged and celebrated (Wang, 2017).

Instructional coaches, through their methods, serve as on-site professional developers and provide regular and on-going professional development. Instructional coaches operate alongside teachers collaborating, modeling and empowering them to learn and execute research-based strategies that they can bring into their classrooms (Cornett & Knight, 2009; Knight, 2007). Interest in instructional coaching has grown over the last decade and school districts and states around the country have hired thousands of instructional coaches each year (Cornett & Knight, 2009). With this expansive interest in coaching, and the recent shifts that educational institutions have made transitioning from in-person instruction to virtual instruction and back again due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Knight, 2020), studying the experience of instructional coaches and teachers is important.



The framework for which the literature was reviewed was methodical, ensuring that it encompassed the history of instructional coaching and included a variety of instructional coaching models. Reviewing how instructional coaching can improve teacher performance, affect early career teachers, and teacher retention as well as ties to teacher evaluations are discussed. To fully understand instructional coaching the coach as a leader is reviewed, as well as the importance of the relationships built for purposes of instructional coaching. Impact and coaching as professional development are also reviewed to provide a complete picture of how instructional coaching is executed in schools as well as its potential limitations. Lastly, the literature touches upon coaching in the virtual setting using the limited literature that is currently available.

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to, and in alignment with, Ravitch and Riggan (2016) the conceptual framework for this research has three components: personal interest, topical research and the theoretical framework. All are of equal importance to the research and this body of research and ultimately serves as the structure throughout this body of work. Personal interest came from the researcher's former background as teacher and instructional coach, topical research focused on two major themes: in-person instructional coaching and virtual instructional coaching and the theoretical framework was grounded in Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory.

#### **Personal Interest**

The researcher's personal interest in instructional coaching stems from their career development from teacher to school leader. As a teacher, and without truly understanding their role and impact, they unofficially began to mentor and coach a young struggling teacher who was across the hall. This propelled the researcher to work on a mentoring program for their

school and eventually that work led to the researcher becoming a content lead, instructional coach and ultimately, a school administrator.

Throughout the researcher's career, they were regularly brought back to the guiding principles of instructional coaching in order to improve student success and to continue to develop and grow educators within their building. Knight (2011) stated that “educators need to engage in frequent, positive, useful, and humanizing learning experiences” (p. 8). This aligns directly with the researcher’s interest and belief that administrators and schools must focus their efforts on instructional coaching to ensure continued student growth and achievement (Knight, 2011). As the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered school buildings and educational institutions moved to virtual learning, the researcher’s interest in instructional coaching in the virtual environment emerged as a primary focus to ensure teachers were receiving the necessary support to ensure continued high-quality instruction for students. The focus on this area identified a gap in the research as it pertains to instructional coaching settings and effectiveness specifically in the virtual environment.

### **Topical Research**

The topical research for the study is reflected in two major themes: in-person instructional coaching and virtual instructional coaching. Within both environments, instructional coaching is conducted as a two-way professional development model grounded in “seven principles: equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity” (Knight, 2008). To better understand instructional coaching in virtual settings, the topical research demonstrates that instructional coaching is not a new concept by exploring various effective in-person instructional coaching models and effectiveness.

Instructional coaching models have shown to be effective when partners work together towards a common goal (Knight, 2011). In person instructional coaching models have been well researched and studied as is shown through the vast research and literature that is currently available. As this study works to understand the impact the virtual environment had on in-person coaching models, it is critical to assess the partnerships that took place, as instructional coaching is generally conducted by way of an instructional coach to teacher relationship. As instructional coaching is explored specifically as it relates to instructional coaching in the virtual environment, the theoretical framework must tie into the components of instructional coaching and the trust that is built through that relationship (Knight, 2008).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used for this study is the partnership approach theory developed by leading instructional coaching expert, Jim Knight (2008). There are multiple theories that can be used when studying instructional coaching such as Knowles (1977) adult learning or andragogy theory, which has a powerful impact on teacher motivation; Laing and Todd's (2015) change theory which explores the method for designing, executing, and evaluating change; or Bandura's (1993) social cognitive theory which explores modeling a behavior and the consequences of such.

Each of the above theories have contributed to research regarding instructional coaching. Knight (2008) indicated the importance of the instructional coach and teacher relationship and as the leading expert in the field, the trust relationship is a primary focus of this framework. With the use of the partnership approach theory, instructional coaches work to establish honest and thoughtful relationships which in turn create a more honest partnership (Knight, 2008) and as

such the use of the partnership approach theory (Knight, 2008) is in alignment with the conceptual framework of this research.

Using the partnership approach theory, instructional coaching is viewed as a two-way professional development model grounded in “seven principles: equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity” (Knight, 2008, p. 34). With these seven guiding principles, a conceptual and theoretical language is provided to guide the study based on how instructional coaches interacted and approached instructional coaching. These principles can be applied to and assessed within both in-person and virtual instructional coaching models. Partnerships require relationships and ultimately instructional coaching is a partnership between two, with a common goal of ensuring success with the instructional coaching process (Knight, 2008).

The first principle in the partnership approach theory is equality. Equality in the instructional coaching process means that coaches recognize the teacher they are partnered with as equals and value the teacher’s thoughts and beliefs (Block, 2013; Eisler, 1987; Knight, 2008). With this principle in the theoretical framework, it is believed that instructional coaches, when coaching, will listen, learn, understand, and respond without persuading teachers to fall in line with their own beliefs, thus creating a more honest partnership (Knight, 2008). The second principle in the framework is choice. This is where an individual in the partnership is not making decisions for another, because they are equals (Block 2013; Knight 2019). This allows for the partners to work more collaboratively and according to Knight (2008) “teacher choice is implicit in every communication of content and, to the greatest extent possible, the process used to learn the content” (p. 5).

Voice and dialogue make up the next principles in the partnership framework and address the ability for both partners in the relationship to have the opportunity to express their point of

view without one overriding another's idea of perspective (Argyris, 1990; Knight 2008; 2019; Wardman, 1994). Instructional coaches who act on this principle encourage teachers to express opinion about content, strategies, and the overall process (Berstein, 2008; Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; Knight, 2008, 2019). As this voice is valued it allows for honest dialogue of the partners without one "imposing, dominating, or controlling" the conversation (Knight, 2008, p. 5). The conversation instead leads to exploring ideas collaboratively while listening and avoiding manipulation of teachers on part of the instructional coach (Knight, 2008, 2019).

Reflection and praxis are the next principles within this framework and critical as the work individuals do within the instructional coaching process takes shape (Knight, 2019). The purpose of the partnership is to ensure that each voice has a chance to reflect and then move to put those ideas into practice (Freire et al., 2017; Gadamer, 2014; Senge, 1990). Each of the individuals in the instructional coaching process must be free to use the content and learning in a way that they consider to be most useful. As this principle is applied to the teacher's growth and development it means the instructional coach must offer multiple opportunities for reflection and the practical application of new learning (Freire et al., 2017; Gadamer, 2014; Senge, 1990, Knight, 2019).

Reciprocity is the final principle within the partnership approach theoretical framework. Reciprocity is simply identified by all participants learning when one member of the partnership contributes to an activity (Freire et al., 2017; Knight, 2019; Vella, 1995). With this in mind an instructional coach should, alongside their primary function of coaching, be able to learn and grow with their teachers. As an instructional coach is able to learn one's strengths and weakness it allows the coach to better assist with the implementation of new teaching practices that

ultimately elevate the instructional coach's ability to work with and "collaborate with all other teachers and the coach's skill in using the new teaching practice" (Knight, 2009, p. 7).

Instructional coaching is important and meaningful for teacher growth and should be an on-going practice (Cox, 2015; Kane & Rosenquist, 2018; Knight, 2019). As has been demonstrated through research conducted by Kraft et al. (2018) and Knight (2007, 2009), instructional coaching should be tailored to a teacher's needs as that is proven to have the greatest impact for teacher and ultimately student success. By using a theoretical framework that provides guidance for multiple principles (Knight, 2008) versus a singular framework that aligns with a specific instructional coaching model it will inform the study, allowing for flexibility among the principals of relationships but also remaining focused on lived experiences.

### **Evolution of Instructional Coaching**

Instructional coaching has evolved over the years. According to Anderson and Wallin (2018) "the concept of coaching originated from the premise that effective teachers could coach colleagues into becoming effective as well, thereby positively affecting teachers and students" (p. 53). Today, there is a general understanding among researchers that the concept of teacher coaching grew out of peer coaching (Anderson & Wallin, 2018; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight, 2019). However, coaching is not a new concept even though what it looks like in education is still being developed, structured, and defined (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Bloom (2005) asserts, "Coaching has been embraced in the private sector because it is a proven strategy for increasing the productivity and effectiveness of managers and executive leaders" (p. 7). Knight (2007) and Bloom (2005) acknowledge that while coaching is not new, it has been growing throughout public education over the last few decades.

## **Coaching is Not New**

Outside of education, coaching has taken place in a variety of forms for athletes, businesses, as well as personal/life coaching, birth coaching, and more (Bloom, 2005; Patti et al., 2012). There are hundreds of coaching services that can be leveraged, and many will train people to be coaches and offer official certifications upon completion of training (Bloom 2005; Killion & Harrison 2017; Knight, 2007). Among these services there are various coaching structures and models that exist. Education has been using a variety of these models to improve educator practice and provide training beyond the single workshop professional development structure that is most commonly used by educational organizations (Bjerken, 2013; Knight 2007).

Instructional coaching is described by Killion and Harrison (2017) as a new way of thinking as it pertains to educator training and Knight (2019) takes this further through his research on visible teacher training. When looking at examples outside of education and athletics, business coaches work to ensure that they are engaged in data collection, providing feedback, and working to develop plans aimed at achieving a specific result (Killion & Harrison, 2017; Whitmore, 2017). The term “performance coaching and the GROW (Goal, Reality, Options and Will) model” (Whitmore, 2017, pp. 54-55) was developed for these specific purposes. The idea behind this instructional coaching model and similar instructional coaching models is to ensure that employees actively set, work towards and ultimately reach success in meeting their goals and desired outcomes (Knight, 2008; Whitmore, 2017).

Personal life coaches are another example of how coaches are leveraged outside of education. Many people make the decision to hire coaches to assist in a variety of areas of their life such as health, birthing, finances and organization (Bloom, 2005; Fazel, 2013; Patti et al., 2012). Coaches who engage in matters such as these employ many of the same strategies and

skills as business coaches; when a focus is on a specific result after setting a focused goal or working to identify a need. The coaches work with their clients to find balance and focus for that in which the person seeks to achieve desired results (Bloom, 2005; Killion & Harrison, 2017; Knight, 2007). While personal coaches work to support others, ultimately the client is the one who makes the decisions as to the areas of need, desired timelines and is in full control of the goals and process (Killion & Harrison, 2017; Knight, 2007). Taking these ideas and practices Killion and Harrison (2017) as well as Knight (2008, 2019) believe the same strategies can and should be applied to instructional coaching within education.

### **Coaching in Education**

Peer coaching emerged in the 1980's after studies showed that educational reform efforts rarely led to improved teacher effectiveness and academic advancement of students (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Peer coaching was an approach to ensure that teachers were planning together, observing each other, while also offering feedback in order to grow teacher effectiveness (Killion & Harrison, 2017). Kraft et al. (2018) stated "a recent study found that pairing teachers with different strengths and weaknesses and encouraging them to coach each other is a promising strategy closely related to coaching programs" (p. 31). Pairing teachers in this way is designed similarly in the way the approach is taken with students when students are paired up with contrasting strengths and weaknesses (Waxman, 2019). Overall, "a well-designed and supported coaching program weaves core elements of effective professional development with the essential goals of professional learning communities in ways that advance both school and systemic improvement" (Killion & Harrison, 2017, p. 22).

Early educator training was based on two models that eventually shifted into instructional coaching. Both the industrial model and clinical model were used but both took on the



resemblance of factory workers (Glickman 1992; Joyce & Showers, 1980). The industrial model used between 1940 and 1960 focused on giving feedback to teachers from non-classroom teachers (Joyce & Showers, 1980). The focus of the feedback was on time efficiency, results, and quality control as the main driving factors (Glickman, 1992). In the 1960's the clinical model surfaced and focused on a "POP" cycle: pre-conference, observations, and post conference model (Dillard, 2018; Glickman, 1992; Goldhammer et al., 1993).

Peer coaching was one of the earliest effective forms of instructional coaching found within education. Joyce and Showers (1980) first advocated that coaching was an essential ingredient in using knowledge learned to change a teacher's practice and the effectiveness with which they executed their profession. Most often, early coaching involved teacher teams working in unison to improve their professional practice (Killion & Harrison, 2017). As teachers worked together they would critically examine each other's practice and provide feedback based on experiences within the classroom (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Early on, and to keep instructional coaching not to appear evaluative, feedback components of peer collaboration were eliminated and instead the focus shifted to collaboration (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Waxman, 2019). Kraft et al. (2018) state "the practice of teacher coaching remained limited in the 1980's and 1990's with most programs developing out of local initiatives" (p. 4).

### ***Early Models of Coaching in Education***

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### ***Collaboration and Modeling***

Instructional coaching "promotes collaboration and communication among teachers, increasing the likelihood that they will use new instructional practices and curricula" (Patti et al., 2012, p. 264). While there are many components to instructional coaching the most important are the collaboration and modeling components. Jewett and MacPhee (2012) state "collaborative sharing of knowledge about teaching and learning - as well as the ensuing questions that were generated - served as the core of the peer coaching experience" (p. 106).

Kretlow and Bartholomew (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of instructional coaching practices and emphasized the importance of modeling during the coaching process. Kretlow and

Bartholomew (2010) stated “if a teacher tries a new practice but makes some errors, the coach might model the strategy correctly and then prompt the teacher to try it again” (p. 281).

Modeling by instructional coaches is effective for demonstration of specific instructional skills and the opportunity for teachers to execute those skills in order to practice with the coach present (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010; Masser, 2020). According to Joyce and Showers (1980) "modeling, practice under simulated conditions, and practice in the classroom, combined with feedback" (p. 384) was the most productive training design and is still effective 30 years later. The evolution of instructional coaching transformed from the early teacher training practices to individualized teacher coaching and remains the most effective form of teacher professional development (Masser, 2020).

### **Benefits to Instructional Coaching**

There are a variety of ways teacher performance can be improved with instructional coaching. According to Chien (2013), “coaches can provide teachers with a quality professional development experience by mentoring, providing workshops, modeling, or encouraging professional growth” (p. 1). Instructional coaching can and should be leveraged to ensure that there is regular, sustained, and on-going professional development for teachers. “Research suggests that in those schools where teachers’ instruction improves, teachers of varying expertise work collaboratively towards a set of common goals” (Kane & Rosenquist, 2018, p. 25). The development of teacher effectiveness is necessary when educational institutions are seeking to improve student achievement and one way to achieve this is through improved teacher performance (Goodwin, 2018; Kane & Rosenquist, 2018; Knight, 2007).

## **Supporting Early Career Teachers**

Early career teachers need regular support in order to be set up for long term success. Pollard (2015) stated “quality and comprehensive induction and mentoring programs are crucial for the success of beginning teachers, students, and ultimately our schools” (p. 24). Studies conducted by both Golderick (2012) and Ingersoll and Strong (2011) suggested that well run new teacher programs accelerate the professional growth and learning of new teachers while simultaneously increasing the rate of retention and improving student learning. New teacher mentoring programs are essentially an instructional coaching service that provide reflective development in an early career teacher's first year or two in almost all fifty states (Golderick, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Pollard, 2015). New teachers look to instructional coaches in their first years to be guided by experienced teachers based on learned successes within the profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

High teacher attrition rates among public school districts continue to affect school communities across the nation (Pollard, 2015). While research has shown several indicators as to why, it has also shown that there are many early career teachers who stay in the profession regardless (Russell, 2019; Troutt, 2014). The United States Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) made a finding that only 17% of teachers left after five years. More recently that statistic has jumped. In a study conducted by Ingersoll et al. (2018), it was determined that 44% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years. The fact remains that early career teachers greatly benefit from mentors or instructional coaches on a variety of levels (Fensterwald, 2015; Pollard, 2015; Russell, 2019).

## **Teacher Retention**

Due to the personalized professional development that many instructional coaches provide, coaches often play a decisive role in teacher retention (Ingersoll et al., 2018). When examining the data from 2015 and 2018 that found 44% of teachers leave the profession after five years (Ingersoll et al., 2018) it is reasonable to engage coaches to improve that statistic (Irby, 2020). It has been found the teachers feel that isolation and lack of training within the first few years of teaching contribute to why they leave the profession and change careers (Gray et al., 2015; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Russell, 2019). Instructional coaches work to build relationships through sharing of their learned knowledge, skills, proven strategies, and can identify areas of need in younger and/or struggling teachers (Russell, 2019). When early career teachers begin to see improvement in their teaching translate to student success, they are able to feel confident in their work (Ingersoll et al., 2018). As teachers continue to be coached throughout coaching cycles and find continued success, teacher retention will improve based on the supporting environment that is built by instructional coaches (Russell, 2019).

While coaching cycles and a variety of formats for instructional coaching are present throughout school districts, research has shown that the execution of coaching positively impacts teachers, school communities, and student achievement (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). As cited in Knight et al.'s (2015) work Atul Gawande states that “coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance” (p. 11). In order to reduce the number of teachers leaving the profession, instructional coaching plays a critical role for increasing teacher retention (Knight et al., 2015; Russell, 2019).

## **Teacher Evaluation**

Within school districts throughout the United States, teacher evaluation and professional development (such as instructional coaching) are necessary and often blurred together (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011). Teacher evaluation should not be a reason for an educator to begin receiving instructional coaching nor should instructional coaching be a consequence of formal evaluations; however, this is often the case (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) advocate that a balance exists between evaluation and instructional coaching by ensuring that all teachers are executing effective teaching strategies and can demonstrate competency in the profession. This is in opposition to their advocating for coaching where educators work to expand their skill set and to push beyond their own potential, while working to increase student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011).

In a case study conducted in 2014 through Loyola University of Chicago, the role of evaluator as a coach was studied (Ensminger et al., 2015). Specifically, Ensminger et al., (2015) viewed the “evaluative inquiry framework and explored various types of coaching that set out to promote individual, team, and organizational learning” (p. 1). Seven years prior, Taut’s (2007) action research, revealed similar findings which showed that without an organizational culture and framework that supported teacher evaluation, there was only minimal growth among professionals. The evaluation coaching model case study conducted by Ensminger et al. (2015) further showed that institutions that employed an evaluation coaching model, ultimately improved teachers practice as well as organizational learning. When the individual is both evaluator and coach, there must be supported frameworks in place to ensure the balance between

coaching, promoting professional growth, and coaching being punitive in an evaluation setting (Ensminger et al., 2015).

### **Impact of Coaching on Teacher Development**

When working towards improvement Aguilar (2013) stated that “individuals need to participate in at least ten thousand hours of deliberate practice” (p. 7) to reach mastery of a new skill. Instructional coaching plays a critical role in teachers' work towards improvement. When teachers are professionally developed in large group settings this is not deliberate engagement of learning or practice (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2007). However, teachers working with a coach where they are assessing, goal setting, practicing, debriefing, and reflecting are deliberately working on their skills and practicing strategies or techniques that can foster growth (Aguilar, 2013). Knight (2007) explains that “collaboration is the lifeblood of instructional coaching” (p. 27). No matter the coaching model or size (individualized or small group) the coach and teacher(s) are collaborating through reflective practice, dialogue, and execution of a new skill (Sweeney, 2013). Collaboration will impact a teacher's learning by fostering growth and engagement that teachers might not experience otherwise (Knight, 2007).

Cox (2015) shares that adult learning theory explains that adults are more willing to engage in a process, learn a new skill or be open to reflective practice when they have a voice in the direction their learning is going. The ability for the instructional coach to build off knowledge the teacher already possess not only builds trust in the coaching process but allows for adults to be ready to accept and engage (Cox, 2015). The impact the coaching then has on instructional practices, which ultimately leads to improved student success, is the most beneficial aspect of instructional coaching (Knight, 2007).

## **Impact of Coaching on Student Achievement**

While instructional coaching programs work directly with teachers the ideal result is to improve student achievement (Hawk, 2020). It doesn't matter which coaching model is executed, the desired result is the same and that is to ensure that students are not only receiving the best education possible but maximizing their own potential through their studies (Hawk, 2020). Kraft et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of more than 60 studies on the effects of coaching and they determined that instructional coaching has an impact on student achievement. More notably however were their findings on the impact of instructional practices. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) agree that the research shows impact on student performance is a direct result of instructional coaching.

Through the meta-analysis conducted by Kraft et al. (2018) it was discovered that small, focused, and intentional coaching programs were twice as effective as the larger coaching programs on both student achievement and instructional practices. Wang (2017), explained that smaller coaching programs are more effective because coaches can spend more time with, focus on, and dedicate their coaching to smaller groups. Researchers conclude that larger coaching programs that are spread too thin do not have the same impact on student achievement and are less likely to achieve desired results (Kraft et al., 2018; Wang, 2017).

## **Instructional Coaches and Leadership Development**

Whitmore (2017) explains instructional coaching as “unlocking people’s potential to maximize their own performance” (pp. 12-13). One of the many roles of leadership within organizations is to empower their employees to work to their highest potential in a way that benefits the whole environment (Whitmore, 2017). Leaders who can effectively do so, not only inspire their employees but lift them to grow and move past standard expectations (Wiseman et



al., 2013). Ultimately instructional coaches must be effective leaders so they are able to empower, grow, and inspire teachers to aid them in their professional growth so they can positively affect student achievement (Knight, 2019).

Mieliwocki et al. (2019) state that leaders who build positive relationships with others are not only effective but have a deep knowledge and understanding of adult learners and lead by modeling behaviors they want to see in their teachers. Whitmore (2017) also speaks to the responsibility leaders' shoulder to enact "values and vision and to be authentic and agile and internally aligned" (p. 224). Whitmore (2017) stresses that teacher development is a journey guided by leaders and coaches both who play an integral role in the process. Important qualities that coaches as leaders must encompass are to be driven, led by a vision, be able to relate to others in multiple ways, harness the ability to listen, ask questions, provide feedback, and convey learning in an effective manner that enacts change (Jones & Ringler, 2018; Mieliwocki et al., 2019; Whitmore, 2017).

Goodwin (2018) addresses that when coaches can focus on a teacher's professional practice this ultimately improves student achievement. Jones and Ringler (2018) claim that "one essential skill for instructional leadership is instructional supervision" (p. 88). A large part of this process includes teacher buy-in. According to Kraft et al. (2018) teacher buy-in is when teachers agree to and authentically participate in the instructional coaching process. Kraft et al. (2018) further state:

the need for teacher buy-in presents a second major challenge for scaling-up coaching programs. No matter the expertise or enthusiasm of a coach, coaching is unlikely to impact instructional practice if the teachers themselves are not invested in the coaching process. (p. 31-32)

This can be a huge obstacle for school-based leaders if they are not able to possess the essential skills necessary to lead the work (Kraft et al, 2018). If leaders can work with teachers in a non-punitive manner and are able to listen and respond in order to affect change, then according to Chien (2013) “teachers are more likely to ‘buy-in to’ and change their own instructional practices when coaches come into their classrooms” (p. 3).

Leaders who also fulfill the roles of coaches are charged with igniting a teacher’s curiosity (Fazel, 2013). They should be focusing on improved teacher performance which ultimately leads to improved student performance. Teacher motivation is a key component to elevating student academic success. When adults are simply given directions on how to do something, they are less likely to change their behavior (Hawk, 2020). According to Mieliwocki and Fathereee (2019) effective coaches and leaders can elicit changes in adult behavior by igniting a teacher's will and curiosity on new ways of executing their skills, all of which lead to improved instructional practice and student outcomes. When leaders who are coaches can push a teacher’s desire to change by asking questions and collaboratively working to improve practice, student learning is positively affected (Hawk, 2020).

The benefits of teaching coaching have a large impact in a variety of areas within an educational institution. The benefits can be seen in the early development of teachers, teacher evaluation, student success, teacher retention and leadership development (Knight, 2008; Masser, 2020; Pollard, 2015). While instructional coaching may not have a standard definition, research shows that it is an effective form of professional development, more so than what is currently offered to the general masses of educators. The impact of coaching not only affects teachers and their professional growth and development, but students reap the benefits of well-developed teachers who can execute their craft effectively (Aguilar, 2013; Hawk, 2020; Knight, 2017).

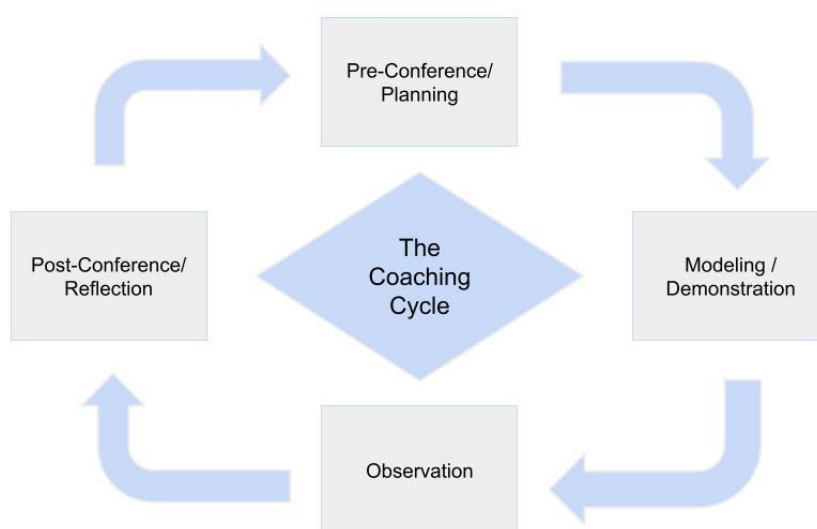
Instructional coaching has been met with high levels of success which indicates that the collaborative model approach is effective for educators (Heineman, 2017). Various studies have proven the effectiveness on teacher and student development (Gallucci et al., 2010; Knight, 2007) and coaching as ongoing professional development is not only sustainable but provides high level experiences for teachers which positively impact their practice and student success.

### Coaching Models

Instructional coaching models found within school systems can be broken into three main categories: teacher centered coaching, student centered coaching, and relationship driven coaching (Knight, 2007). While these categories are broad, each are targeted and focused coaching models that all work towards the same goal. No matter the focus of the instructional coaching model or the set goal, most models follow a similar cycle as illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*The Coaching Cycle*



*Note.* Example of a coaching cycle based on Knight (2007) that demonstrates the cycle that is repeated throughout the coaching experience.

Ultimately the primary goal of instructional coaching is to improve student performance and to do so a teacher's instructional practice must be effective (Killion & Harrison, 2017; Knight, 2007). The main difference among the teacher driven, student driven, and relationship driven coaching categories is the focus of the coaching and the subsequent changes made between coach and teacher because of that focus.

### **Teacher Centered Coaching**

Teacher centered coaching models are designed where coaches work with teachers to help them with professional growth and professional awareness that ultimately leads to instructional changes (Knight, 2007). Knight (2007) suggests that most teacher centered models follow the pre-observation conference, observation, reflective conference cycle. Guided questions are asked of the teacher to determine a professional growth goal along with a determination of how to collect data (Knight, 2007). With this model teachers are encouraged to lead the conversation to help them work on identifying their own areas of need (Aguilar 2013; Knight, 2007). Using this process, the instructional coach guides the teacher to identify a skill they wish to improve, a change they want to make, or a new instructional practice they wish to execute (Aguilar, 2013).

As the coaching cycle progresses the teacher should start to become self-aware of how the skill is improving or if they are seeing the change they hoped to elicit based on the chosen focus of the coaching cycle (Knight, 2007). In the event the teacher does not achieve the desired results or reach the goal, the coaching cycle can be renewed while identifying additional adjustments that may enact change (Knight, 2007, 2008, 2011). As teachers begin to engage with self-awareness, Whitmore (2017) states this is also the first step in growing their desire to

change. The use of a structured teacher centered coaching model is one of the most common models found within educational institutions (Aguilar 2013; Knight, 2007).

### ***Coaching using Claim Evidence Impact Justification (CEIJ)***

As previously noted, there are times when coaches act in dual roles of coach and formal evaluator. When the coach is executing the role of formal evaluator it is not their job to grow a teacher, but rather evaluate them (Baeder, 2018). When they act in the capacity of their coaching role, it is to help teachers grow. Teachers who are coached are guided to grow themselves by listening, engaging in honest reflection, adjusting, adapting, and making changes to their practice (Baeder, 2018). One method an evaluator can use when acting in their coaching role is to ensure that their feedback in the coaching cycle is evidence based and that teachers clearly understand the evidence and justification behind the feedback. This eliminates any potential disputes of the feedback if it is coming from a previous lesson or preconceived notion regarding the teacher (Baeder, 2018).

Using a coaching cycle where feedback is formatted a specific way allows for a clear picture and understanding of the summary and removes any possible questions on part of the coach and focuses solely on the teacher (Knight, 2011). When using claim, evidence, impact and justification (CEIJ) feedback it forces the coach to make a claim, provide evidence, state an impact and justify findings or recommendations (Baeder, 2018). If the coach is unable to provide evidence of a claim, they may need to reevaluate their claim and reflect on themselves as a coach and adjust to develop a different claim. The coaching model, paired with this feedback structure stresses the most important part of the observation in the coaching cycle is collecting accurate and high-quality evidence (Grant, 2018).

As teachers are presented with evidence of their observation and coaches can tie this evidence back to the pre-observation conference, this will often encourage more honest reflection on part of the teacher (Baeder, 2018). According to Thurlings et al. (2012) “If feedback is goal directed, specific, detailed, corrective, and balanced between positive and negative comments, then it is more effective than feedback that is person directed, general, vague, non-corrective, and either too positive or too negative” (p. 196). With the use of CEIJ it grounds the focus on evidence which allows for a teacher focused conversation which also works to build trust on part of the coach, an important facet when the coach is faced with dual roles (Baeder, 2018).

### ***Cognitive Coaching***

Cognitive coaching has been defined as “a model or one set of comprehensive strategies to teach, develop, and enhance teacher decision making or reflective processes” (Townsend, 1995, pp. 169-170). Costa and Garmston (2006) referred to cognitive coaching as “a simple model for conversation about planning, reflecting, or problem resolving” (p. 4). Additional research into cognitive coaching defines it as a systematic approach that is conscious, contains deep reflection and ultimately results in professional growth (Bjerken, 2013; Cochran & DeChesere, 1995; Costa & Garmston, 2006; Townsend, 1995). One essential skill to building, sustaining, and fostering future growth is to develop a teacher's ability to process and behave professionally throughout their career (Bjerken, 2013).

Opposite of early clinical coaching models, the cognitive coaching cycle includes Knight's (2007) suggested format that follows the pre-observation conference, observation, reflective conference cycle. The cognitive coach guides the teacher to assist them in self-reflection, summarizing a teacher's findings and then pushing for a deeper reflection of the

teacher's practices, actions, and identification of adjustments needed to further their understanding and professional growth (Bjerken, 2013). At the core of cognitive coaching is the teacher who is the focus of learning to self-direct, self-reflect, and adjust their practice based on their own findings so their capacity for self-directed learning increases (Costa & Garmston, 2006).

### **Student Centered Coaching**

School systems that are investing time and money into coaching models often want to know that their investment is working (Sweeney, 2013). Student centered coaching models do just that with the primary focus being on student success versus teacher improvement, as was seen in the teacher centered models. The idea with student centered coaching is that the focus is around student success and the evidence that proves it (Sweeney, 2013). Coaches and teachers set their sights on student improvement and in doing so have goals of setting learning targets and proper design of formative assessments to monitor student progress (Hawk, 2020; Sweeney, 2013).

Hasbrouck (2016) specifically designed a student-centered coaching model with a focus on literacy and ultimately this model has been used in all content areas expanding beyond the scope of English language arts. In alignment with this model, Aguilar (2013) defined the student-centered model as not being designed to correct a teacher's instructional practice but rather execution of effective practices to enhance and improve student learning (Aguilar, 2013; Hasbrouck 2016). The student-centered model is often viewed as a more positive coaching environment as the teacher is more likely to buy-in as they are less likely to feel their instructional practice is under attack (Aguilar, 2013; Hasbrouck 2016). According to Hawk (2020):

the focus on student work may lead to a change in instructional performance, or it may lead to the coach assisting the teacher in other ways, such as designing better assessments. The student-focused coaching model utilizes student work as evidence with less emphasis on teacher reflection (p.11).

### **Relationship Driven Coaching**

Coaching that is driven by relationships is another category among coaching models. It begins with the “act of making a genuine effort to know, understand, and support others in the organization, with an emphasis on building long-term relationships with immediate followers” (Liden et al., 2008, p. 162). Coburn and Woulfin (2012) conducted a study that showed the critical role in which coaches and teachers interact. It was through this study that the recommendation for further evaluation on relationship driven coaching models be conducted. Subsequent studies conducted by Reinke et al. in 2013, Spelman and Rohlwing in 2013, Anderson et al. in 2014 all set out to understand the relationships between the coach and the teacher. What these studies revealed is that in order for instructional coaches to be truly effective the relationship must be in the forefront of the coaching (Valles, 2017). Patti et al., (2012) state:

Establishing trust is the first step in the coaching process. Once trust is established, the coach helps the leader explore and expand a personal vision as well as a vision for the school or classroom. This visioning work serves as the heart and mind of the motivational process. It provides ownership, directionality and commitment to achieve desired change. (p. 266)

In relationship coaching there is an emphasis on less teacher accountability and more on support from the coach (Stover et al., 2011). Instructional coaches must be ready and willing to



understand and listen to a teacher's thoughts and beliefs while recognizing their value (Knight, 2008). Stover et al. (2011) state the following:

The core of professional development is the trusting relationship between teacher and coach. When this relationship is fostered, literacy coaches come to know, understand, and appreciate the teachers' level of experience, expertise, and interests. Because of this knowledge, the coach can more effectively support them in their professional growth. (p. 499)

When instructional coaches can create an authentic relationship with teachers, they are able to foster a safe environment where the teachers feel they are able to be honest and vulnerable. This is considered by Ferlazzo (2019) to be the most effective coaching model. After the relationship that is built on trust is formed, then the coach can proceed in a way that makes the most sense for the individual and this creates a credible and meaningful differentiated coaching environment (Ferlazzo, 2019; Jones et al., 2015).

### **Coaching as Professional Development**

Instructional coaching is considered one of the single most effective forms of teacher professional development (Knight, 2007). The traditional form of educator professional development are typically one day workshops where large groups of teachers assemble to learn about new skills, tasks, technologies, initiatives or strategies and are largely ineffective (Hawk, 2020; Knight, 2007; Kraft et al., 2018). Many of these traditional workshops provide a general message versus focused strategies that afterwards show no sign of improvement on behalf of teachers or students (Garet, et al., 2008). When teachers do not buy-in to the one-day workshop or do not feel it pertains to them, not only is time wasted but it is money wasted on part of the school (Garet et al., 2008). School districts across the United States have spent millions of

dollars on professional development that has yielded little to no change on behalf of their teachers or student achievement (Garet et al., 2008). Due to this, school districts are leveraging instructional coaching as an effective way to provide meaningful professional development to their educators (Garet et al., 2008).

Instructional coaching is an effective alternative form of professional development that is more individualized, can be aligned with school district priorities while providing ongoing regular effective teacher development (Garet et al., 2008). Snyder and Delgado (2019) state “coaching is a beneficial approach for helping teachers reflect on and improve teaching practices” (p. 53). When schools have effective coaching programs the ineffective mass professional development days are replaced with differentiated, focused, and individualized learning for employees (Kraft et al., 2018). Cox (2015) claims that a key component of instructional coaching is having an awareness of adult learning theory to better execute coaching cycles. In traditional forms of professional development, learning is designed by small groups of leaders and then pushed out to teachers, whereas instructional coaching professional development has a coach work directly with an individual or small group of teachers to maximize effectiveness (Cox, 2015). Instructional coaching allows for these smaller groups to focus their professional development towards a set of individual or common goals and allows for teacher voice and choice within the professional growth process (Cox, 2015).

### **Limitations to Instructional Coaching**

Even though instructional coaching has proven to be beneficial, a major question for educational institutions is whether it is ultimately worth the cost (Cox, 2015; Garet et al., 2008). It can be argued that with the millions of dollars that are spent on traditional professional development, followed by evidence that lacks results, proves that instructional coaching is a

smart investment as it provides evidence of improved results (Roy, 2019). To make the investment truly beneficial school districts, leaders, and teachers must engage the coaching as it is designed, the program needs to be sustainable, realistic and be given overall support by those involved (Knight, 2019; Roy, 2019). When school administrators need to make decisions regarding their school and/or programming, it is often easy to allow instructional coaching to be first cut from the budget (Roy, 2019). If they are being pressured to apply funds elsewhere or those in a power of authority above them do not understand or see the benefits of coaching, principals may have to make the decision to no longer support the work of the coaches in his/her building (Bjerken, 2013).

Kane and Rosenquist (2018) identified areas in which coaching programs failed and the primary reason was the coaches were spread too thin. Instructional coaches were unable to execute the role of coach due to being pulled away to complete other assignments or tasks as determined by school administration. Later when it came time for staffing decisions, coaches did not have the data to support their work and ultimately the instructional coaching model failed, not to the fault of the coach (Roy, 2019; Kraft et al., 2018) but rather due to lack of data. Kane and Rosenquist (2018) further studied failed coaching models and those were typically poorly planned and poorly executed models that did not have the support needed in order to survive beyond their first year of implementation.

According to Kraft et al. (2018), further limitations on instructional coaching happen when teachers do not respond well to those who are coaches and as such do not buy-in to the process. Instructional coaches who do not spend the time building the necessary relationships or who are also formal evaluators may face challenges to engage with teachers (Kraft et al., 2018; Pollard, 2015). Research conducted by Ippolito (2009) further shows that the title of instructional

coach may also be met with distrust if the coach is an ally of the principal as this can be seen as putative. Other teachers may be jealous of the role if they were not selected to be an instructional coach or some teachers simply might not believe in the position (Pollard, 2015). The research brief presented by Ippolito (2009), of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, shared that principals often form behaviors that are often neglectful, partnering, or interfering. When the neglectful or interfering behavior emerges, it places unnecessary limitations on the coaching progress as it ultimately interferes with the coach-teacher relationship (Freeman-Mack, 2020).

### **Instructional Coaching in the Virtual Setting**

In 2014, Artman-Meeker et al., studied the effects of distance coaching (within the context of this study identified as virtual coaching) on teachers. This study of virtual coaching showed how using technology is a viable means for the delivery of professional development to educators through the use of technological tools. This study explored the specific tools used to execute instructional coaching and has been used positively to enhance teacher's skills (Artman-Meeker et al., 2014). As stated by Artman-Meeker et al. (2014):

Other studies have used larger, more comprehensive online systems to share video and facilitate reflection and feedback. The systems used by Pianta et al. (2008) and Powell et al. (2010) included access to a personalized website, video models, and expert coaching.

Both interventions involved feedback twice per month. (p. 328)

A major feature of the study by Artman-Meeker et al. (2014) was done through email and the coaching interventions were conducted in a similar manner. While not ideal for relationship building, the instructional coaching conducted showed that it is possible for coaching to take place with the use of technology and leveraging the best practices of a coaching cycle (Artman-

Meeker et al., 2014). While the study showed it was possible to conduct virtual instructional coaching it did not explore the increased effectiveness of teacher performance.

In March of 2020, when school districts across the country were forced to transform their educational programs overnight due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Knight, 2020), there was little research to leverage as it pertained to best practices for schools in their new environments. Teachers and administrators were doing the best they could to adapt to their new roles while finding ways to ensure they were connecting, being authentic, and providing meaningful experiences for students (Camacho & Legare, 2021). As the pandemic continued, it was clear many schools were not returning to a traditional teaching model in the fall of 2020 and it was time to look at pre-pandemic programs for best practices of instructional coaching in the virtual space (Camacho & Legare, 2021; Knight 2020). In an effort to support teachers there was a need to look in the past to assist the future (Knight, 2020). According to a presentation in Washington, DC in June 2015, Lara-Alecia et al. indicated the following findings of virtual mentoring and coaching with teachers in their research project:

- (a) just conducting mentoring or coaching virtually does not make for effective lessons by the teachers; rather, preconference notes and purposeful, supportive structured observation and feedback sessions with a follow-up processing session can improve instruction for teachers,
- (b) the mentors must create a collaboration and must communicate well with the teachers,
- (c) provision of times of silence when processing the lesson with the teacher is called for as the teacher is reflecting on the lesson, and
- (d) the use of a reflection cycle that advocates for analysis, appraisal, and transformation is needed during the mentoring sessions. (p. 1)

Knight, who has spent more than two decades as an instructional coaching researcher, stepped up to provide guidance during the pandemic. Knight (2020) stated “one way coaches can help others see reality more clearly is by offering to record them in action” (p. 17). Teachers were not aware of how they were presenting in the virtual space, and it became helpful for them to see themselves not as they perceived but as they were (Knight, 2020). Irby and Pugliese (2020) addressed the additional issues of coaching during the pandemic and the adjustments to instructional coaching practices that needed to happen to ensure the coach-teacher partnership remained effective. Examples of the adjustments are that the coach must continue to be a source of support through the virtual environment, there must be recognition that teachers are in greater need of emotional support, and that the priority of the coaches should be the person instead of the skill. Lastly, instructional coaching should be executed with a focus on ways that teachers can provide alternate assignments, take-home lessons and a means to connect with their students (Irby & Pugliese, 2020).

### **Summary**

There are limited resources surrounding the impact the virtual learning environment had on instructional coaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. While many studies exist that cover instructional coaching as it pertains to its history and evolution, a variety of coaching models, and its use as professional development, there are limited studies that specifically look at the impact on the effectiveness of coaching during the shift to the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic (Camacho & Legare, 2021; Knight, 2020). There is an understanding that instructional coaching has a positive impact on teacher development and student academic success when it is executed and supported with a structure that focuses on specific outcomes and is differentiated for the educator (Aguilar 2013; Ferlazzo, 2019).

There are numerous instructional coaching experts who published blogs, articles and guides for coaches during this time period. What does not exist in the literature reviewed are studies from the perspective of coaches and teachers who had a lived experience with instructional coaching in the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research highlighted in the literature illustrates the importance and impact of instructional coaching. It shows that professional development for teachers needs to adhere to adult learning theory, what should be meaningful and on-going (Cox, 2015; Kane & Rosenquist, 2018). Professional development for teachers is not effective when it is a one-day workshop but rather ongoing differentiated coaching cycles have proven to have the greatest impact (Kraft et al., 2018; Knight 2007).

Further, the literature shows that even with a wide variety of coaching models, coaching is effective if it is done so with fidelity, trust, and is evidence based (Baeder, 2018; Grant, 2018). Lastly, the literature showed that a key component to effective instructional coaching is centered on the coach-teacher relationship. Without this, there is a potential lack of buy-in from the teacher and can potentially mean a less honest coaching conversation that does not allow for teacher growth and development (Aguilar, 2013; Hasbrouck, 2016; Hawk, 2020).

The methodology for this qualitative phenomenological study is presented in the next chapter. Chapter Three will provide a look at how an interpretative phenomenological approach will allow for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of instructional coaches and teachers in the virtual environment. It will reveal how the research was not only conducted but supported through Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory. Limitations, delimitations, ethical issues, trustworthiness; including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, will all be addressed.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to explore lived experiences that both instructional coaches and teachers had with instructional coaching, specifically as it related to effectiveness of virtual instructional coaching programs when they were moved from in-person models to virtual models during COVID-19 response virtual programs. As the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered educational institutions and forced a shift to the virtual environment, many in-person instructional coaches' practices were simply transported to a virtual platform without adjustments to fit the virtual environment (Knight, 2021). The problem with this shift was that while many instructional coaching models and practices were proven effective for in-person coaching, it was unclear if the same instructional coaching practices remained effective in the virtual environment (Knight, 2021). School districts are always responsible for increased student achievement (Anderson & Wallin, 2018), and during the shift to the virtual environment it was imperative for instructional coaches to remain effective (Knight, 2021) to ensure continued student achievement and teacher wellness (Ficke, 2020; Knight, 2021).

It is anticipated that this research may ultimately provide insight for future effective execution pertaining to virtual instructional coaching models. Future virtual instructional coaching models will be able to leverage the results of this research to garner best practices as districts, schools, and programs work to ensure continued effectiveness of instructional coaching. Education itself will likely continue to see shifts to the virtual platform where the process of teaching, learning and coaching will take place (Knight, 2021). To gain understanding of the experiences of instructional coaches and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, this researcher attempted to explore the experiences of instructional coaches and teachers in virtual



environments as well as the perceived changes that need to be made for future virtual instructional coaching models. The primary research questions posed in this study are:

**RQ 1.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 2.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe the changes in instructional coaching experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 3.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their relationships with their instructional coaching partner during the COVID-19 pandemic?

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), an interpretative phenomenological approach allows researchers a deeper understanding of lived experiences. The methodology selected focuses on exploring the experiences of teachers and instructional coaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Smith et al. (2009), qualitative research focuses on meaning, sense-making and action through the perceptions of how people make sense of their lived experiences. Results from qualitative data allow for themes to be identified and placed into broad categories in order to best represent findings (Creswell, 2018) that can guide future adjustments to virtual instructional coaching models.

The qualitative method for this research is coupled with the phenomenological research approach. According to Fraenkel et al. (2019), a phenomenological study works to understand perceptions of a particular phenomenon, which in the case of this research is the movement of instructional coaching from in-person environments to virtual environments. This research uses the phenomenological approach to analyze instructional coaches' and teachers' experiences, guided by the principles of Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory. This framework underscores the effectiveness of instructional coaching practices in the virtual

environment. Drawing from the seven principles found in Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory: equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with both instructional coaches and teachers to explore their experience with instructional coaching in the virtual environment. This research focused on those who had a lived experience with both in-person and virtual instructional coaching and their perceptions of their experience in both environments.

This phenomenological study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, as defined by Creswell (2018), where the interviewer only asks a few predetermined questions, and the remaining questions will not be planned but asked as prompts based on a participant's answers. Data related to the lived experiences of in-person and virtual instructional coaching on part of both the instructional coach and the teacher will be gathered. The focus of the interview questions will be based upon seven principles as found in Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory. The partnership approach theory focuses on the relationship of both the instructional coach and teacher in order to leverage an effective instructional coaching cycle (Knight, 2008).

Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory provides seven principles of necessary importance in the instructional coaching experience; it also grounds how to approach data collection and analysis. Using interviews where participants can offer open-ended feedback honors the principles of equality, choice, dialogue, voice and reflection on part of the participants (Knight, 2008). In offering structured questioning this further honors those same principles while including the remaining principles of praxis and reciprocity (Knight, 2008). In examining instructional coaches' and teachers' lived experiences, this research explored the experience each had with instructional coaching in the virtual environment.

### **Site Information and Demographics/Setting**

The qualitative phenomenological study was conducted with both high school instructional coaches and teachers from a public school district in which the researcher previously served as an Assistant Principal. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that site access is a key step in the research process and that selecting a site in which there is a relationship or the ability to build a relationship provides a means for quality data collection. The school district involved in the study is located in the Mid-Atlantic region in the United States. The district is an urban school district serving upwards of 90,000 secondary students and has granted permission for the study to be conducted. Instructional coaches are full time coaches within each high school site for a specified time period. Potential participants included teachers and instructional coaches who were actively engaged in the instructional coaching process in a high school and within the same school district. Participants who elected to engage in this qualitative research and meet specified criteria were selected due to their lived experience and knowledge of the significant event (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019); participating in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and sharing what their experiences of virtual coaching looked like at their particular site during the specified time frame.

### **Participants/Sampling Method**

Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling and the participant sample consisted of instructional coaches and teachers within the same urban school district in the Mid-Atlantic who had instructional coaching experiences at the high school level. All participants were asked to self-identify as an instructional coach or classroom teacher who worked in one of those roles during virtual instructional coaching for the identified timeframe (2018-2021). Participants must have had a lived experience of in-person (either school year 2018-2019 or

2019-2020) and virtual instructional coaching experiences (school year 2020-2021) as they were best able to share their experience with the central phenomenon as it pertains to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Site authorization was secured and a recruitment email and a participant information sheet (Appendix A) was sent to all full-time instructional coaches and teachers within the same school district, from the researchers' email address at the University of New England (UNE). A list of potential participants and their emails was gathered by contacting school secretaries from at least 5 different high schools within the district to request teacher and instructional coach contact information (name and work email address). Interested participants were instructed to respond to the recruitment email via the researcher's UNE email address within ten days and would subsequently be invited to participate in the study. The first four interested participants who self-identified as meeting the criteria and are instructional coaches and the first four interested participants who self-identified as meeting the criteria and are teachers were invited to schedule a 45-60 minute interview conducted via Zoom.

According to Ellis (2018), a sample size between 6 and 20 individuals is appropriate for a qualitative study. Vasileiou et al. (2018), state "qualitative research experts argue that there is no straightforward answer to the question of 'how many' and that sample size is contingent on a number of factors related to epistemological, methodological and practical issues" (p. 2).

According to Robinson (2014), samples in qualitative research are usually smaller to best support the depth of analysis that is needed within the qualitative mode of discovery.

Recruitment was opened for two weeks. During the first 10 days of the recruitment period, four instructional coaches and four teachers volunteered to be interviewed. The researcher utilized a master list of participants with identifiable information during the

recruitment process, this included the name of the participant and their email. The identifiable information on the master list was destroyed after transcription had been completed and verified by the participants and the themes had been member checked by the participants. All participant data was maintained in a password protected electronic folder on a password protected computer accessible only to the researcher.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Data collection happened through 45-60 minute interviews conducted via Zoom following the researcher created protocol (Appendix C). Participants were sent a password-protected Zoom link for the interview where they could participate in any location that the interviewee deemed private and comfortable. Participants also had the option to not turn on their cameras during the Zoom interview. These interviews were recorded and transcribed using Zoom. Interview transcripts were stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected laptop. Any identifying information was de-identified to protect the participants and minimize potential harm (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019). The interview questions were developed and grounded using Knight's (2008) seven principles found within the partnership approach theory framework.

The interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts were sent to each participant who had five days to review the transcript for accuracy and provide revisions as needed. Six of the eight participants responded that the transcripts were accurate and the remaining two never responded. As there was no further communication from the remaining two participants after five days, the transcription was considered to be accurate. All recorded interviews were destroyed after all transcripts had been verified for accuracy by the participants. Once all ten interviews were complete and transcripts verified, coding and identifying common themes occurred.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in order to provide a level of confidentiality. Data was only collected for instructional coaching experiences that took place prior to schools engaging in COVID-19 response plans (prior to March of 2020). Furthermore, data was only collected from those who also had experience with instructional coaching through their schools COVID-19 response plans and/or those teachers and instructional coaches who remained in the virtual environment through post-COVID-19 response plans. These plans/experiences typically ranged between the school years 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted on the responses to the semi-structured interviews. Prior to coding, all identifying information was replaced with pseudonyms. All participant interviews were coded and analyzed. According to Saldana (2016) “coding is a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories because they share some characteristic” (p. 8). Codes were assigned to topics and ideas that emerged throughout participant interviews. According to Crewell and Guetterman (2019) “coding is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes” (p. 243).

To arrive at an understanding of the lived experiences of instructional coaches and teachers, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used. According to Smith et al. (2009), using this approach allows for the researcher and participants to be able to understand the interpretation of multiple perspectives as the researcher codes participants description of their lived experiences. Using IPA allows for gained insights into the lived experiences of those who have similar experiences for the pre-determined specified time period (Alase, 2017; Moustakas, 1994).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis protocol has its roots in phenomenology and it allows for a hermeneutic approach, a process which allows for discovery and interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences, while remaining focused on the individual and the experience itself (Pringle et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2009). With the flexible and responsive approach found when using IPA there is an opportunity for an organic flow of questioning, interpretation and an opportunity to make meaning for both the researcher and participant as the research unfolds (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2013). This process not only involves looking at the words being said, but beyond that, questioning what those words potentially mean in the broader context of the experience being researched. IPA differs from traditional phenomenological approaches because it identifies and capitalizes on themes while giving the ability to highlight the value of differences as to not only focusing on commonalities (Pringle et al., 2011).

After data analysis was completed, the themes were sent to each participant for member checking through email. Five of the eight participants responded that the coded themes were accurate. There was no further communication from the remaining three participants after five days, and as such, the coded themes were considered accurate. The identifiable information on the master list were destroyed after the transcripts and the themes had been member checked and verified by the participants. After three years, all transcripts and data will be destroyed, aligning with federal guidelines and those set forth from the UNE IRB of documented evidence, minimizing confidentiality risks.

### **Limitations, Delimitation, and Ethical Issues**

The research presented has several limitations and delimitations as well as potential ethical issues that are noted. It is important to acknowledge, address and mitigate these

throughout the study to ensure the research is credible and that the study can be used for future research and potentially identify best practices for those engaging with future instructional coaching in the virtual environment (Smith et al., 2009). The methodology itself brings about several of these limitations and delimitations simply by research design.

### **Limitations**

Study limitations are potential weaknesses within a research design that may influence the overall outcome of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Interpretative phenomenological analysis calls for the focusing on the details and lived experiences of a small number of participants (Smith et al., 2009). It is important to note that this is a direct limitation of the study where only eight participants in total contributed to the research. This small number alongside the purposeful sampling, which may exclude some teachers or instructional coaches based on when they were employed, means the results are not meaningful to all and in particular to school districts who do not regularly execute instructional coaching.

An additional limitation to this study includes potential unconscious biases on part of the researcher and as such may not allow for the true lived experiences of the participants to speak for themselves. This bias may involuntarily lead participants to answers that the researcher wanted to hear. The researcher will purposefully lean into biases, record them in bracketing notes and made sure to acknowledge them before each round of research or prior to any follow up interview session. This ultimately defines the difference between an interpretative or hermeneutic phenomenological analysis (Norm Friesen et al., 2012). One component of leaning into biases is accepting that bracketing is only going to be partially achieved and the researcher recognizes that in this body of research (Smith et al., 2009). Upon interview completion, bracketing will continue throughout the data analysis and will be in the forefront of the



researcher's work to ensure a careful balance between bracketing preconceptions and using them to define the focus of the research analysis. Tufford and Newman (2012) as well as Finaly (2012) aligned concerns that too much reflexivity creates researcher preoccupation with their biases and thus using bracketing allows for relief of preconceived notions.

The final major limitation of this study will be time and the technology tools used within the virtual environment. This research will focus on the time period in which COVID-19 pandemic response virtual learning programs were executed which was generally between the early spring 2020 and the fall of 2021. Participants had to have engaged in instructional coaching during a pre pandemic time frame as well as throughout the pandemic in order to participate. Further, there may have been mandates on the type of technology tools high schools in the district could use to execute virtual learning during this time period, which meant instructional coaching was limited to those same technology tools as defined by the school district during the time period of the COVID-19 response plans. The limitations on technology tools could potentially affect participants view on effectiveness within the virtual environment.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the choices the researcher has made, such as boundaries put in place as the research is planned (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Time can be considered both a limitation and delimitation of this study. Like the limitation, the delimitation of time is imposed by the researcher for a specified period of time in which the lived experience had to have occurred. This research specifically captures the COVID-19 pandemic educational virtual response time frame because it is important to understand how the shift to the virtual environment affected the experience of instructional coaching and as such, participants needed to have the experience over a shared period of time. The researcher placed trust in the participants to accurately recall their

prior experiences which potentially go back as far as two years. This places trust with the participants to recall with fidelity their instructional coaching experiences during a time of stress within the educational community due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research, as stated by Creswell and Guetterman (2019), should deeply explore the central phenomenon often during a set period of time, which supports the research design of a specific time period to be studied.

Further delimitations on this research are the sole inclusion of high school instructional coaches and teachers as participants and those who engaged as an instructional coach or teacher in middle or elementary grades during the time frame will not be invited to participate as the focus of the research is on high school grade bands. Lastly, the study only included participants from a singular urban school district. This was done to ensure that the experienced phenomenon was similar in nature as all high schools within this school district had implemented instructional coaching as part of their school communities.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethical considerations were taken on part of the researcher that are in alignment with *The Belmont Report* (1979). According to the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979) there are three main areas of basic ethical principles that are relevant to the ethics of research involving human subjects: respect of persons, beneficence, and justice, identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms to support confidentiality of the participants. Participants in the study were provided with a participant information sheet (Appendix A) that describes the overall research and participant's rights, risks, benefits, compensation, privacy and questions should they choose to participate in the study.

Due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform to ensure participants physical safety. Throughout the research confidentiality was maintained by removing all names from transcripts and notes and replaced with a pseudonym. Destruction of recorded interviews occurred after the transcripts were verified by participants. At any time participants were able to ask questions and withdraw from the study. If a participant chose to withdraw from the project, any data collected was deleted and was not used in the project.

### **Trustworthiness**

When researching within the social sciences, one of the most challenging aspects is being able to determine if the research is credible and truthful (Schwandt et al., 2007). Schwandt et al. (2007), offer two approaches when addressing the researcher's interpretations and ensuring trustworthiness with the study. First, the researcher should address trustworthiness including the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the body of research. Further Schwandt et al., (2007) claim that the work should be authentic (ontologically, educationally, and catalytically) as well as fair. The trustworthiness of the data in this study and its subsequent results may be influenced by the biases of each participant. To ensure the trustworthiness of this research several methods were used to ensure its credibility.

### **Credibility**

According to O'Kane et al. (2019), credibility is defined as the truth of the participant views and the interpretation and representation of them by the researcher. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that the concerns of credibility appear when results are not congruent with reality. While the researcher might have unconscious bias, the use of bracketing ensures credibility is maintained throughout the research and this will be done throughout this body of work. To

further support credibility the researcher will conduct triangulation by clarifying their bias through self-reflection, accurately capturing details of participant views, engaging in collection of multiple sources of data from multiple participants, and conducting the member checks with all participants involved in the research. Triangulation is a method in which the credibility and validity of research findings will be increased due to multiple data sources: in this research that will include multiple participants and member checking (Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Transferability**

Transferability allows for others to duplicate research or conduct the same research in other environments and context (Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While the focus of this study specifically gains perspectives from secondary instructional coaches and teachers, in a singular urban district, instructional coaching programs are not unique to this site or district. The experiences of teachers and coaches with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic are not unique to those involved with the study and as such the results of this study may be transferable to other schools districts who have experienced the same central phenomenon.

### **Dependability**

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) state that dependability means other researchers could retrieve the same results using the same methods but it should also be noted that O’Kane et al. (2019), share that replicability cannot be expected and a second researcher may choose a varied path to explore the same data. As such the researcher kept detailed records and notes, performed member checking of Zoom recorded interviews, and ensured all data collection and analysis were reported in a way that others could arrive at similar interpretations should data be reviewed

(Nassaji, 2020). The researcher's notes as it pertains to thematic coding, grouping of participants, participant self-identified criteria and analysis should allow for future researchers to arrive at similar interpretations using Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory replicability.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability takes the place of objectivity in a qualitative study and the practice of reflexivity supports the creation of confirmability within a body of research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; O'Kane et al., 2019). The researcher engaged in the use of reflexive journaling to ensure that unconscious bias does not influence the choice of questions or interpretation of answers. This practice supports the idea that answers are not made up, but instead derived from data and input from participants ensuring all sources are transcribed and reported (Creswell, 2018). To further support confirmability in this study member checking was used and any discrepancies were recorded and addressed. The themes were sent to each participant for member checking through email. Participants had five days to respond with adjustments to coded themes. Five of the eight participants responded that the coded themes were accurate and the remaining three participants never responded. As there was no further communication from the remaining participants after five days, the coded themes were considered to be accurate.

### **Summary**

Studying instructional coaches and teachers experience with instructional coaching programs in the virtual environment is a complex phenomenon. This phenomenon is best suited for an IPA approach as IPA focuses on understanding the lived experiences of people and explicitly exploring the common themes surrounding those perceptions (Pringle et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2013). The research was guided by the following questions:

**RQ 1.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 2.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe the changes in instructional coaching experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 3.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their relationships with their instructional coaching partner during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The research was grounded by Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory which was used to develop semi-structured interviews that were conducted with participants in an urban school district located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling to seek participants who had participated in instructional coaching programs during pre-pandemic and pandemic school years and engagement in both in-person and virtual coaching experiences. Semi-structured interviews were transcribed, member checked, coded and analyzed for themes pertaining to the lived experiences and perceived effectiveness.

While this research has limitations and delimitations, appropriate steps were taken to mitigate these and ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Mitigation strategies included journaling and auditing throughout the research process and member checking. Any potential ethical issues or concerns were addressed by protecting participant rights, ensuring safety and wellbeing of all involved and remaining transparent and fair throughout the process.

The findings of this research will be discussed in the following chapter. Chapter Four will present the findings of this study and explore the analysis of the data including coding schemes, pattern identification, themes and comparisons. There will be a presentation of results and findings organized logically and an inclusion of and an accounting of all collected data.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public high school teachers (grades 9-12) and instructional coaches who have participated in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Kelly and Knight (2019), instructional coaching must have certain elements to be successful. These elements include partnership, a coaching process, teaching strategies, data, communication, leadership and a support system. Yet not all instructional coaching experiences are successful, due to a variety of reasons including the lack of relationship between the teacher and instructional coach (Dewitt, 2020; Dubisky, 2020; Jacobs et al., 2018; Knight 2019). The theoretical framework used in this study was the partnership approach theory by Knight (2008). This framework underscores the effectiveness of instructional coaching practices as it draws on the seven principles found in Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory. The seven principles are "equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity" (Knight, 2008, p. 34). The research questions that guided this study were:

**RQ 1.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 2.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe the changes in instructional coaching experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 3.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their relationships with their instructional coaching partner during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Data collection utilized one-on-one semi structured interviews and were the sole data collection tool within this research. The interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed via Zoom. All identifying information collected was deidentified with pseudonyms. Data analysis

was conducted on the responses to the semi structured interviews. All participant interviews were coded and analyzed to identify themes that emerged from the participant interviews. To arrive at an understanding of the lived experiences of teachers and instructional coaches, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used. According to Smith et al. (2009), using this approach allowed the researcher to understand the interpretation of multiple perspectives through the coding of the participant's descriptions of their lived experiences.

### **Analysis Method**

Participants for this study were recruited through a recruitment email that was sent to teachers and instructional coaches at five high schools at the identified school district inviting teachers and instructional coaches to participate in the study. The first eight participants (four teachers and four instructional coaches) who self-identified as being eligible were invited to schedule a 45-60 minute semi-structured interview conducted via Zoom. The total number of participants was selected after noting Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation that participant sample sizes of six to eight persons presents a sufficient pool for qualitative analysis.

Through the use of an interview protocol (Appendix B), participants had the opportunity to share their lived experiences with instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants described their experiences by responding to a series of interview questions that allowed for deeper responses based on the experiences the participant choose to share. The questions developed for the interview protocol fell into one of the following three sections: overall experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, changes experienced during virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, and relationships during virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview provided participants an opportunity to share their lived experiences and to elaborate



on their specific experiences by being asked to share details and elaborating upon experiences that were brought up by the participant during the interview.

Immediately following each interview, the researcher transcribed the interview via Zoom. Upon completion of data collection and subsequent member checks, the researcher began coding. Using spreadsheets, notes, codes, theme notation, and data categorization emergent themes were developed. An additional area of recorded information included job function (teacher or instructional coach) for each participant. Data was analyzed by identifying descriptive comments that clearly connect to the participant's explicit meaning keeping a close phenomenological focus (Smith et al., 2009). Additional analysis included the identification of the participant's feelings of their experience based on key words related to emotion.

The researcher began analyzing the data by listening to the recording of each participant's interview. During the initial listen, the researcher simply reviewed the initial notes taken during each participant's interview to review for accuracy of notes. The researcher then listened to each interview two additional times, each time making additional notes to ensure they were able to capture all areas of the interview. Coding began by reading through each response line by line to first identify the participants lived experience with instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon a second review of participant interview responses, the researcher focused on the feelings participants shared about their experiences and explored the specific use of language making notes of "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 review of each data set focused on concepts that emerged within each participant transcript. Creswell and Creswell (2019) state that themes and categories should be identified,

coded and analyzed for significant statements and the acknowledgement of the participants feelings, which was the researchers aim during the third review of each transcript.

The data analysis process took three cycles that condensed larger statements codes. These codes accurately represented different aspects of the lived experiences of the participants and captured the lived experiences of each participant. This process was repeated for each participant until all eight interviews were coded. Patterns and connections were then identified across participants which allowed for theme identification across all data sets. Initially there were a total of 182 labels, including quotations and descriptions which created 75 initial codes emerging from this process. Of these 75 codes, six code groups and three emergent themes were created that categorized the participants lived experiences. The three emergent themes identified are: (1) feedback should be flexible to address the virtual environment, (2) co-teaching is necessary in the virtual environment and (3) positive relationships were more present during virtual coaching. These themes, as well as findings are presented below.

### **Presentation of Results and Findings**

The researcher gathered information from both teachers and instructional coaches within the same urban school district in the Mid-Atlantic who all experienced instructional coaching. Participants were asked to self-identify as a high school teacher (grades 9-12) or instructional coach who worked in one of those roles during virtual instructional coaching for the identified timeframe (2018-2021). Participants must have had a lived experience of in-person (either school year 2018-2019 or 2019-2020) and virtual instructional coaching experiences (school year 2020-2021) so they could best share their experience as it pertains to the study. Four teachers, Maddin, Zallis, Minnin and Torina, and four instructional coaches, Vincenzo, Vissard, Razagul and Weebbyseamus, participated in the study.

## **Presentation of Interview Question Responses**

Interview questions were grouped into three sections. Section one addressed the participants overall experiences with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. These questions focused on the instructional coaching model that was used, what the participants overall experiences was like, as well as perceived success and improvements during the identified time frame. Section two focused more specifically on the coaching model identified by the participant during the section one questions. These questions asked participants to describe changes, or lack of changes, made to the model when moving to the virtual environment. Questions also encouraged details that asked participants to describe how the virtual instructional coaching model related to their overall experience with virtual instructional coaching. The third section of questions focused on the relationships each had with their coaching partner. Participants were asked to describe the relationship by sharing examples and details surrounding the interactions and relationship they had with their partner during virtual instructional coaching. Participants were also asked to describe what they felt a relationships should look like in order to have the greatest amount of success in the virtual environment.

### ***Section One: Experience with Virtual Coaching***

Section one questions focused on the participants overall experiences with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants had the opportunity to detail their overall experiences and how their individual experiences unfolded during this time period. Participants were asked to describe the coaching model that was used, share specific experiences that the participant felt was important, areas of success and areas they experienced that needed improvement.

**Teacher Participant Responses to Section One Questions.** The overall description that captured teacher participant experiences with virtual instructional coaching was frustration. Zallis explained that much of their experience with virtual coaching was frustrating. They felt that this was partly due to their attendance being required at training which often felt repetitive often irrelevant because the connections to the virtual space were not apparent or even present. According to Zallis, sitting through training that wasn't helpful took time away from being able to complete necessary tasks which would have helped meet the needs of students. Minnin stated that,

It was frustrating because leaders needed to think differently about what they wanted from teachers in the virtual space but they couldn't get their brains out of the physical classroom. They wanted us to continue sharing best practices yet none of those best practices focused on the shift to the virtual environment.

Both Maddin and Torina described their overall experiences as overwhelming and at times frustrating when trying to figure out how to build a successful virtual learning environment. and instructional coaching at times, felt like a nuisance.

Teacher participant responses when describing their general experience were alignment with each other as it pertained to the model used for virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Maddin explained the model succinctly when stated "I met with my instructional coach via Zoom in five week cycles. The cycles consisted of setting instructional goals, being observed, and debriefing to determine next steps where I would either adopt my goal, amend or abandon it." Minnin shared the five week cycle experience with Maddin but went on to add that:

It was very confusing and challenging to use the old model and not try to adjust using it within the virtual space. I felt like teaching in general, and then virtual learning was the

complete opposite of what most teachers sign up for when becoming a teacher so to use a model aligned with pre-pandemic practices in a new space that wasn't geared for virtual instruction was wasteful.

Zallis and Torina indicated similar cycles only broken down over eight week periods and explained utilizing the same steps of goal setting, observations, and debriefing, specifically referring to it as the Claim, Evidence, Impact, Justification (CEIJ) model.

Successes and failures were described by each teacher participant. In general teachers indicated success when it came to learning digital tools. Maddin described areas of success pertaining to virtual tools that were leveraged to enhance teaching and learning activities. They were able to incorporate new tools with known teaching strategies that ultimately assist in more productive academics and engaging lessons. Maddin followed up to further state that “giving me feedback about my strengths and growth areas with actual suggestions on how to do better next time would be have been valuable but it was not always present, but at least I had a coach who cared how I was doing emotionally”. Zallis and Minnin both had similar success citing an increase in the use of digital tools but citing a lack of suggestions from feedback. Torina shared,

My instructional coach supported me and encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and adopt technologies that I otherwise probably would not have during the virtual time.

I'm very thankful that this push was made as many of these strategies are ones that I still use and have now adapted them for in-person learning.

Torina went on further to describe the failure that coincided with their success was the feedback received was not tailored to teaching strategies just the “fun virtual tools that I had to learn to weave into my teaching practice”. Minnin cited feedback as an area for improvement because as they explained the coaching that was given was focused on traditional teaching and

learning methods. There was little guidance on how to embrace new strategies in order to move students forward in the virtual environment. Minnin made a point to state that “my coach was amazing at always checking in on my wellbeing”. Zallis echoed the sentiment surrounding feedback when they stated,

Virtual instructional coaching was always limited by unrealistic suggestions that seemed shoehorned into expectations set forth by the district and my coach didn't have suggestions that felt realistic for working with my students in the virtual setting and kept defaulting to in-person strategies while wordsmithing it to make it fit our virtual platform.

Maddin indicated that the feedback was not always present and with a high learning curve for virtual learning there should have been feedback that was intentionally geared towards virtual learning.

**Instructional Coach Participant Responses to Section One Questions.** Participants who identified as instructional coaches had a mostly neutral feeling when it came to their overall experience with virtual instructional coaching. Vincenzo, Razagul, and Weebbyseamus all stated that they neither had a positive nor a negative experience. Generally, all three felt like they were checking a box when it came to instructional coaching because they went through the motions and filled out the paperwork but they all tried to focus more on the support that was needed by their teachers versus the job they were handed to do. Razagul shared:

I ended up creating a PLC with other instructional coaches which ultimately helped my teachers be able to keep their head above water. I would execute the coaching cycles to check the box for my boss but it wasn't what my teachers needed during the time, so I created what I could for them.

Vissard and Weebbyseamus both had similar examples of providing support outside of the coaching cycle as these were identified as areas of need for their teachers, but it didn't fit into the CEIJ format of how the district wanted instructional coaching to be run. Vissard focused more on technological and emotional support while Weebbyseamus indicated focusing more on sharing the teaching load to give their teachers some breathing room. Vissard had a positive experience and felt they gave their best type of coaching both individually during the coaching cycles and when running large group sessions. Vissard described their best experiences with instructional coaching was when they were able to go into the classroom and leverage the technology tools because of their personal comfort level with technology.

All four instructional coach participants described the coaching cycle as having three main areas of focus. Goal setting, observations and feedback. Vissard detailed goal setting sessions that targeted teacher's areas of growth, observations to identify improvement and feedback based on observations linked to the districts metrics for success using the instructional framework. Razagul, Vincenzo, and Weebbyseamus all shared a similar process and all four instructional coach participants operated on a five week coaching cycle.

Instructional coach participants all indicated success during their interviews. Vincenzo stated that they "got really good at looking at in person learning materials and identifying or creating a virtual space equivalent for students". A failure that Vincenzo went on to discuss was that it was a struggle to help their teachers execute that equivalent. Razagul had a similar sentiment regarding identifying the need for virtual materials. Razagul said,

I never felt like I was able to fully support my teachers in their execution of the materials and that much of what I had to write on paper was strict based on District guideline. It was frustrating because there was never enough time for me to go back and show my

teachers the vision I saw and at times I struggled with communicating the new way to execute a lesson.

Vissard shared how easy it was to enter and leave a classroom and being able to have a more honest experience. Vissard stated that “I believe my teachers never really knew I was there and less often the students did because I could come and go from Zoom undetected because most people don’t notice an extra camera square on Zoom”. Weebbyseamus said an area of success was “the ability to have more private one on one conversations which led to more honest conversations”. Lastly, all four instructional coaches cited that an area for improvement would have been the opportunity to co-teach so they could better support their teachers by stepping into their shoes, taking a risk by trying something new or modeling a strategy they saw work elsewhere.

### ***Section Two: Changes Experienced with Virtual Coaching***

Questions in section two focused on the participants experienced changes with instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants had the opportunity to detail changes they experienced with the instructional coaching model when it was moved from a pre-pandemic experience to the virtual environment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were further able to share how these experiences affected their overall experience with virtual instructional coaching.

**Teacher Participant Responses to Section Two Questions.** Teacher participants all shared details that showed that the instructional coaching model used in the virtual space remained largely unchanged in the virtual environment. Maddin stated, “there were not a ton of changes, for me. I was made to set goals when I didn’t know what I was doing or how to even



target myself for growth. It would have been great had someone decided to model what they were talking about.” Zallis shared,

I do not believe there were many, if any, changes to the coaching model when we went virtual. The only differences was that I was observed a lot more and I think that is because the coaches had nothing else to do and didn't get pulled in other directions like when they were in the building.

Both Torina and Minnin shared similar details and identified that little, if any changes were made to the execution of the instructional coaching model. Minnin described the biggest change was that some week they were not coached at all and when feedback did arrive it wasn't useful. Minnin explained the need for support or demonstrations and felt if they at least received that, then they may have been more effective.

In general teacher participants said the biggest change that would have been helpful would have been to have feedback that meant something. According to Zallis, “instead we got feedback that was draconic in nature, not helpful and rarely related to the virtual environment”. Maddin also shared that “beyond just giving me more EdTech tools and programs to use, actual feedback as it pertained to instruction or student engagement that came with demonstrations would have gone a long way”. In addition to the teacher participants experiences with feedback they all also voiced continued frustration on the way instructional coaching was executed during this time period.

**Instructional Coach Participant Responses to Section Two Questions.** Instructional coaches largely had similar shared experiences as it pertains to changes within the coaching model. Vincenzo said:

The overall stress and demands of virtual learning and building the plane as we were flying meant some things simply didn't change. For our building it was instructional coaching. While other instructional coaches and I tried to adjust, our administration told us we had to follow the district mandated instructional coaching platform and sticking to the CEIJ model.

Vissard shared "no changes were necessary as instructional coaching still provided goals, observation and feedback which teachers needed during this time". Razagul expressed their opinion that not adjusting the coaching model did additional hard as it created stress levels as teachers and instructional coaches compared the virtual space to in-person learning.

Weebbyseamus wanted to teach alongside their teachers in order to support them, show them they weren't alone and to "try out new strategies in real time and understand what my teachers were dealing with". Weebbyseamus went on to express frustration with all the paperwork that came with the traditional instructional coaching model that was still required in the virtual environment. According to Weebbyseamus using an in-person instructional coaching model impacted their overall experience. They hoped that their administration would have been considerate and gracious in the feedback they were directed to give but there was little room for adjustments. Weebbyseamus expressed the feelings of being "beat up by being forced to do something that was not authentic".

### ***Section Three: Relationships Experienced with Virtual Coaching***

Section three questions focused on the relationships the participants had with their instructional coaching partner(s) during the COVID-19 pandemic virtual learning response program. Participants had the opportunity to describe in detail the relationship they had with their partner. If participants felt the relationship they had was the best one possible they were

asked further details surrounding their experience and if participants did not feel the relationship was the best possible they were asked to detail what they felt would have made it better.

**Teacher Participant Responses to Section Three Questions.** Largely similar, teacher participants felt the relationship they had with their coach was positive as it was honest as discussions surrounding virtual learning were constant. Maddin stated,

Having the same primary topic and not continually shifting gears made me more honest with my coach. While I don't feel the coaching was effective the relationship I had with my coach as someone I could offload on was invaluable.

Minnin shared a similar experience as "positive and productive as it was a space to acknowledge stress, discuss frustrations and fears and I found myself more vulnerable the longer we were together". Zallis and Torina both noted that they had more time with their coach which ultimately brought forth a relationship with their instructional coach that they had not experience during in person learning. Tonia stated "I valued instructional coaching from my department lead who was compassionate and understanding of the ever changing scenarios and who told me to forget all the District mandates and focus on my students and our wellbeing". Zallis stated that their "instructional coach could sense when to back off and did so without question and would even call me to check on me after hours, it meant a lot during a time when so many things were questionable."

Teacher participants all shared that while the relationship was better than when they were in person, the relationship could have been even stronger. Minnin stated "if the district would have allowed them any type of flexibility instead of fitting us into a box we could have gained what we needed emotionally and with support on a more regular basis". Zallis stated:

Teachers should have had input in what the coaching cycle should look like and help determine what a reasonable time frame would have looked like, if we were part of the discussion the relationship would have been more fruitful.

Maddin and Torina both shared that there should be specific expectations for virtual learning and if the teacher can't implement it then they should be shown how to with structure and modeling. They both felt that this would lead to even stronger relationships among the teacher and the instructional coaching partner. Both Maddin and Torina expressed frustration with their partner being good at identifying problems but not so good at coming up with actionable solutions. Both participants expressed appreciation with the care that each of their own instructional coaches took to ensure they were mentally stable during virtual learning and both participants expressed the ability to speak freely and openly with their instructional coach surrounding the frustrations of not having actionable items to use when a coaching session was complete.

**Instructional Coach Participant Responses to Section Three Questions.** Instructional coach participants overwhelmingly felt they were connected to their teachers in the virtual environment more so than when they were in person. Razagul stated that “I had less duties and my only focus was my teachers, how they were teaching and student engagement”.

Weebbyseamus shared,

I had a positive experience with each and every teacher. Even ones with whom I had a contentious relationship with pre-pandemic. It was like all I had to do was listen, show some support and you could see a sigh of relief from them and just being there was clearly needed and necessary.

Vissard and Vincenzo said they had positive relationship and often found themselves in more of an emotional support role instead of instructional coaching. Vissard went on to share that “once I got a handle of the emotional support needed from my teachers I was better able to start addressing the academic needs of the students and weaknesses within the classroom.”

Razagul, Vincenzo, and Weebbyseams all felt that a co-teaching model would have been more effective and would have built even stronger relationships when they were able to carry some of the weight of their teachers. Razagul stated that “my teachers took too long to trust me academically in the virtual space that I knew I lost time. I was never able to show them I knew what I was doing”. Weebbyseamus brought up norming and that the fact that they did this with their teachers “by engaging in a norming process I was able to build a better foundation of trust which led to much more honest conversations with my teachers”. Vincenzo identified the fact that implementing a lesson together took stress off their teacher because “everyday was a risk and that just wears on a person so why not help shoulder that risky load when you can?” Vissard found that the more often they were present with their teachers then

The more my teachers would talk to me, I could check in on them, I really got to know them and I could sense the days the vibe was off and usually I followed up whenever I could to make sure they were okay.

All instructional coach participants identified ways that did strengthen or could have strengthened the relationships they had with their instructional coaching partners while also making note that each felt the relationships they were able to harness in the virtual space was better than when they were in-person.

## Presentation of Themes

Interwoven throughout all sections of the participant's interview responses there were three primary themes that emerged. The three emergent themes identified are: (1) feedback should be flexible to address the virtual environment, (2) co-teaching is necessary in the virtual environment and (3) positive relationships were more present during virtual coaching. These themes are presented in order of highest frequency as they emerged during the interview and analysis process.

### **Theme 1: Feedback Should Be Flexible to Address the Virtual Environment**

All participants in this study spent time describing feedback they received during their virtual instructional coaching experience. They described that much of the instructional coaching feedback was structured in accordance to the in-person instructional coaching model which was used prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to participants, feedback was written based on district mandated sentence starters which largely consisted of fill in the blank feedback that was ultimately submitted to school administration and district personnel. Razagul expressed anger and frustration that they were “not able to pivot from the prescribed coaching model even though it made little sense in the virtual space. I had more productive private conversations versus the documentation I had to produce.” Echoing this Weebbyseams said,

I wanted to give meaningful feedback but how could I do that when I had never done this before either? Yet I was required to follow a model designed for in-person learning with no consideration given to the technological challenges of our school, students and teachers and no flexibility for the stress in which we were all under.

Vincenzo described the experience as good but felt they could have done more as it related to the feedback that was developed. Vincenzo described feelings of being limited in how feedback

could be provided due to the limited training that was given, required use of sentence starters and mandated connections to the district's instructional framework. Vincenzo further shared that they felt the "quarterly cycles to focus on specific teach actions tied to the instructional framework was good in theory but it didn't allow for any flexibility to adapt to the virtual experience of students and teachers."

According to Torina,

The feedback I got was typically either praising what I was already doing well (such as differentiating instruction using platforms like Jamboard, Quizlet, Google Forms, Shared Google Docs, Kahoot), or pitching ideas that weren't incredibly useful in terms of advancing academics or my own teaching.

All participants indicated that the feedback made use of sentence starters and targeted very specific teaching strategies. According to participants, when instructional coaching moved to the virtual environment feedback remained structured for in-person learning and did not adapt to the virtual environment. Minnin explained that they felt the coaching model should have included training and support within the virtual space and it should not have been locked into marking someone as partially evident or not-evident with no action items for improvement. Vissard described feeling as though the feedback given was sometimes impossible to execute in the virtual space but there was other ways to share it because of the prescribed method in which it had to be done. Zallis articulately stated "the feedback was something I could have written because it often felt canned and that it was developed using a fill in the blank process instead of actually focusing on the set goal or actions in the classroom" Razagul further detailed the idea of a fill in the blank feedback process by describing "the forms that had to be completed left little

room for actual meaningful written feedback and was mostly prewritten just fill in some verbs type feedback”.

All participants referenced the feedback given/received in the virtual space was the same structured feedback they gave or received during in person instructional coaching. According to Burns (2021), virtual environments and technology can severely limit and constrain an instructional coaching experience when it mimics in-person instructional coaching even though it may provide continuity for participants. Furthermore Blumke (2021) states that in order to support teachers through the instructional pivot they were forced to make during virtual learning, adapting to the virtual environment was imperative. Participants overwhelming identified the need for different feedback and feedback that was tailored not only to the teacher but the situation. According to Maddin,

What would have been most helpful is recommending specific tools for improving instruction, virtually. What most improved my instruction was learning tools from other teachers that I could use in the virtual classroom. Had the coaching model incorporated teaching strategies targeted for the virtual space I would have had a more successful experience.

Participants identified the need for feedback to not have been boxed in based on the district’s guidelines and requirements. Participants all shared their experiences with a structured feedback form with teachers and instructional coaches regularly referencing in-person learning techniques. Zallis stated “it was crazy because we weren’t in person, we were virtual, yet everyone seemed to want to ignore that part”. Torina, Vissard, and Vincenzo all expressed a need for a variety of feedback with instructional coaching during virtual learning. They shared that not addressing the needs of those within the classroom and needing to fit into a required form was



not effective and it was not flexible. Minnin ultimately shared this “time was pretty traumatic for me both personally and professional and as such I regret that whatever feedback I was given I was not necessarily able to process and implement.”

## **Theme 2: Co-Teaching is Necessary in the Virtual Environment**

All eight participants cited a need to co-teach in the virtual environment. They referenced the need to co-teach in all areas of the interview. Razagul outlined the identified need for a partnership during this process who had content knowledge. They went on to explain that leveraging the teaching skills of both partnership to try new concepts or to simply operate as a support system would have been highly beneficial. Zallis touched upon working directly with their partner in the classroom when they said,

I was frustrated with being told what to do and not always being shown. I mean, I’m not a kid so I don’t have to be shown but during that time when everything was upside down it would have been nice. I know that higher quality instruction was attainable in virtual instruction but I never got there because there were no actual actionable suggestions for teaching, just words. Had I seen it maybe things would have turned out differently.

Torina, Vincenzo, and Maddin expressed their experience with co-teaching during virtual learning. Both cited examples where their instructional coaching partner not only talked through goals and feedback but within a few short days came into the class and taught alongside them. Torina described a beneficial experience because working alongside their instructional coaching partner allowed them to be able to grow and learn in real time. Vincenzo and Maddin both described similar experiences to Torina where both partners actively taught, reflected and shared thoughts and ideas on how to manage the lessons and try out new concepts. Both shared that they

felt their experience was more valuable and ultimately useful in being able to develop their instructional practices within the virtual environment.

Weebbyseams and Minnin did not get the opportunity to co-teach but noted the need. Weebbyseamus described the instructional coaching mode as awkward because they found themselves giving advice on how to teach but never really knowing if it was the right advice. Weebbyseamus shared their belief that instructional coaching may have been more effective if the co-teaching opportunity had been present. Minnin also shared the idea that co-teaching would have been effective when stated:

I needed to take risks with my teaching that I wasn't comfortable taking. I was awkward on camera and hated being there. I would see other teachers do demonstrations in professional development but I was never brave enough myself to try new strategies. If instructional coaching had allowed for co-teaching I might have had the confidence to really go out of my comfort zone and try something new.

According to Cook and Friend (2017) co-teaching is defined as two individuals working together, planning, sharing students, organization, delivery and assessment of instruction. While Vissard used the term co-teaching in the interview it may have been more aligned with demonstrations. Demonstrations are when something is clearly shown (Glavin, 2019) and in the case of Vissard, their experience was more along the demonstration lines and not the co-teaching lines. Vissard described going into their partner's rooms, executing the use of technology by modeling a portion of a lesson with the new technology tool, later going back to watch the teacher execute the same technology and then provide feedback on the teacher's execution.

### **Theme 3: Positive Relationships Were More Present During Virtual Coaching**

Each participant interviewed for this study noted the positive relationships with their instructional coaching partner during COVID-19 pandemic virtual instructional coaching. Most participants also cited the importance of the emotional support that was present versus the academic support that was given. Weebbyseamus and Zallis both shared that their positive experiences with their coaching partner was mainly due to the care their partners expressed.

Zallis stated:

While I don't feel my partner actually knew what they were doing that didn't bother me. Did I need help with all the things, yes. But I needed emotional support more. I had sick family members, my students were offloading on me and I was stressed in a way I have never experienced. My partner made a point to care enough to check on me as a human and from there our relationship grew.

Zallis went on to share that while they didn't feel the instructional coaching portion was as effective as it could have been that was okay because the emotional support was what was needed at the time. Weebbyseamus shared a similar experience when said:

The emotional toll on everyone was immense. I made a point to check in on my partner and just ask the simple questions, like, are you okay? I knew given the space we were in no effective coaching would have happened when emotions were running hot. I knew it helped or at least hoped it did.

According to Calais et al., (2020) "when it comes to effective coaching in a virtual or hybrid environment, the process does not change but the needs are different. Maintaining or building positive relationships provide additional support that was not typically needed before." (p. 98)

Vissard shared that the relationships were present and active. Vissard noted that their partner was more engaged and felt this was due to not being pulled in multiple directions like professionals normally are during a normal school day. Torina had a similar experience and shared “it was much easier for partners to connect more regularly because you could click a button and be together instead of fighting all the other things to make the time”. Both Torina and Vissard stated that the relationship they had with their instructional coaching partner looked different in the virtual space than when they were in person. Torina expressed:

I feel like even though instructional coaching didn't really change in terms of setup, the approach of my partners changed, which helped. I feel like with all the anxiety floating around during that time that had the emotional support not been present even more things would have fallen apart, and that was a good thing even if the rest of it was junky.

Minnin and Razagul expressed an appreciation for their instructional coaching partner.

According to Minnin “I wouldn't have survived without my coaching partner, I mean I would have but to have that ear and shoulder got me though”. Razagul echoed the sentiments of Minnin and explained how they made a point to focus on positive relationships and paying attention to how their partner was reacting to things and following up as much as necessary based on those observations. Vincenzo's experiences with relationships during virtual instructional coaching reflect one of support and positivity. Vincenzo explained the extra time that was invested into relationships specifically because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Vincenzo said,

I hated jumping directly into coaching conversations or goal setting sessions. It felt forced and my partners had other things on their minds. While they all wanted to do well I listened to frustrations from overwhelmed partners who barely felt like they were keeping

their heads above water, I couldn't force the instructional coaching but I could nurture the relationships, so I did. It became an unwritten part of the job and a natural one.

Maddin, like Vincenzo, had an experience where the relationship was natural and "for once didn't feel forced". Maddin was able to focus on a support system emotionally which allowed for an instructional coaching partnership to develop amidst the stressors of virtual learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Maddin said "without the relationship, I wouldn't have improved as much as I did".

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public high school teachers (grades 9-12) and instructional coaches who have participated in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eight participants all from the same urban public school district were interviewed and shared their lived experiences through a series of questions that fell into three sections: overall experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, changes experienced during virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, and relationships during virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Upon completion of the interviews there were a total of 182 labels with 75 initial codes emerging from this process. Of these 75 codes, six code groups and three emergent themes were created that categorized the participants' lived experiences. The three emergent themes identified were: (1) feedback should be flexible to address the virtual environment, (2) co-teaching is necessary in the virtual environment and (3) positive relationships were more present during virtual coaching.

Participants felt that feedback should be flexible to meet the needs of the virtual environment. Participants shared their experience with giving or receiving feedback that was pre-designed and how it offered little to no room for deviation. Participants found this experience to be frustrating that it was limited to District mandates as it pertained to the structure of the feedback.

Co-teaching being a necessary component in the virtual environment was indicated by all participants. Participants either had a lived experience of co-teaching through instructional coaching in the virtual environment or expressed the recognized need for it during this time frame. Positive relationships being more present during virtual coaching was evident through participants' lived experience. Participants identified the extra time, ease of access and emotional support experienced by their instructional coaching partner during virtual instructional coaching.

The following chapter will be the conclusion to this study. Chapter five will discuss the interpretation and importance of findings as they relate to the research questions. It will discuss implications of results and recommendations for action. Lastly it will conclude with recommendations for further study linking conclusions, presenting benefits to stakeholders and describing how results may be disseminated.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public high school teachers (grades 9-12) and instructional coaches who participated in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instructional coaches and teachers around the United States tackled professional challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and the abrupt transition to virtual learning was no exception (Marshall et al., 2020). Instructional coaching partnerships that are effective usually embody trust, vulnerability, reflective practice, and honest conversation (Knight, 2018; Sweeney, 2011). Borman and Feger (2006) noted that there are variations on how instructional coaching partnerships are executed, however, the main concept is centered on the idea that fellow educators are ultimately able to adjust their teaching practices and improve student outcomes (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016). The concept that educators are ultimately able to adjust their practice and improve student outcomes did not go away when educational institutions shifted their practice to the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study focused on three research questions aimed at guiding this study after a thorough review of the literature as it relates to instructional coaching history, practices, effectiveness, feedback and virtual response/execution. The following research questions were created to explore the lived experiences of instructional coaches and teachers with instructional coaching in the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic:

**RQ 1.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 2.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe the changes in instructional coaching experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 3.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their relationships with their instructional coaching partner during the COVID-19 pandemic?

To ensure instructional coaching in the virtual environment remains effective, it is critical to understand the experiences of instructional coaches and teachers within the COVID-19 response virtual learning programs (Knight, 2022).

Using Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory, and the several guiding principles including equity, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection and reciprocity guided the theoretical framework of this study. This theoretical framework serves to address the varied work and personal relationships of the study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). The topical research addressed the gaps in the literature as it focused specifically on the area of study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016) which in this case include instructional coaching and virtual environments.

Qualitative data was gathered through semi structured interviews conducted with participants to understand the lived experiences of virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants interviewed for this study included four full time instructional coaches and four teachers all who self-identified as having had pre pandemic instructional coaching experiences and were actively engaged in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants were part of the same Mid-Atlantic urban school district and worked in grades 9-12. After interviews were conducted and transcribed, data was analyzed using an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). An IPA protocol was utilized to identify themes, patterns and trends. A total of 75 initial codes emerged from this process. Of these 75 codes, six code groups and three emergent themes were created that categorized the participants



lived experiences. The three emergent themes identified were: (1) feedback should be flexible to address the virtual environment, (2) co-teaching is necessary in the virtual environment and (3) positive relationships were more present during virtual coaching. This chapter discusses the interpretations and importance of findings, implications, recommendations for action and recommendations for further study.

### **Interpretation and Importance of Findings**

Over the course of this research, data was collected from eight participants using semi structured interviews. Interview questions were grouped into three sections: (1) experiences with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) changes experienced with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (3) relationships during instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, that allowed for an understanding of the lived experience of participations for each of the three research questions. Participants were asked to describe experiences by providing examples and details surrounding their lived experiences as well as their thoughts on ways their experience could have been improve or enhanced during the specified time frame.

#### **Research Question 1**

The first research question, “How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?”, was created to explore the experience of public high school teachers and instructional coaches with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research question focused on understanding the participants’ lived experiences with virtual instructional coaching and to understand the impact the virtual environment had on participants' experience with instructional coaching. Participants described their experiences as lacking,

frustrating, overwhelming, unchanged, and disappointing. Four of the eight of the participants said they were neither positive nor negative regarding their general experience with virtual instructional coaching.

The remaining four of eight participants had an overall poor experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the participant Maddin, “Virtual instructional coaching was not okay and I felt a lot of pressure instead of being helped or motivated”. Other participants described their experiences as lacking when it came to being coached and the perception was due to instructional coaches also being new to the virtual environment. According to Brown et al. (2021) instructional coaching programs were not able to develop responsive models due to the challenges of the online platform. This was due largely in part to “a lack of training, resources, and funding to adequately provide what everyone needed” (Brown et al., 2021, p. 6) There were multiple areas of instructional coaching that participants touched upon during data collection ranging from the model used, feedback, time, partnerships and professional development.

All participants identified the same instructional coaching methodology used during the COVID-19 pandemic as Claim, Evidence, Impact, Justification (CEIJ), and they also identified this as the same model that was executed during in person learning. “CEIJ focuses on the instructional coach making a claim about an area of practice, presenting the evidence that supports the claim, making a statement about impact on the learning and justifying an assigned effectiveness rating” (Grant, 2018). According to Zallis, “the virtual instructional coaching was the exact same, even though we had to shift our entire professional practice online and make appropriate adjustments, instructional coaching did not.” Participants did not identify any areas in which there were adjustments made to reflect accommodations for the virtual environment.

Knight (2022) states that one must go right into a situation, such as when the shift happened from in person to virtual spaces, figure out the challenge and work to discover how to succeed.

According to the participants in this study, figuring out the challenges with the coaching model wasn't apparent and instead the instructional coaching program pushed ahead without changes.

While participants experiences were not positive with the coaching model used, virtual coaching has been empirically validated (Stapleton et al. 2017; Wake et al., 2017; Weiss et al., 2020) and employs the same strategies of observation, practice and reflection/feedback, but in the online environment (Keefe, 2020). Participants in this study experienced the use of strategies that align with observation, practice and feedback but did not feel their experiences were successful in the virtual environment. According to Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory the principle of praxis encourages the understanding that people learn best when they apply ideas to their day to day experiences. This principle was not highlighted or apparent in the research participant's experiences.

Teachers must continually adapt, change, and shift to meet the changing needs of students and never was it more critical when schools shuttered during the COVID-19 pandemic (Keefe, 2020). Instructional coaching needed to do the same to meet the needs of the coaching partnerships and the needs of each person involved with instructional coaching (Keefe, 2020). Participants in this study expressed consistent frustration with the lack of adjustments particularly as it pertained to feedback. Participants described how feedback had to be written, which was methodical, targeted and specific, and linked to the instructional coaching framework of the district. Razagul shared that they felt "as though my hands were tied. I was locked into writing very specific verbs into a box and there was no room for deviation."

Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory embodies the principle of reflection. According to this principle, instructional coaching should be a collaboration that includes looking back, looking at and looking head in order to make future improvement and feedback is a large component to this concept. Maddin regularly spoke about feedback that "wasn't helpful because while I could execute many of the ideas in a traditional classroom, it just didn't work in the virtual space". Elmore (2002) writes, "Improvement is not random innovation in a few classrooms or schools. It does not focus on changing processes or structures, disconnected from pedagogy" (p. 13). Feedback is critical within instructional coaching as it gives a different perspective or the time for self-reflection (Knight, 2019).

Elmore (2002) describes the importance of teachers sharing successful strategies with each other and ending isolation in instructional practice. According to Arnold (2020) providing feedback and leadership structures ultimately help foster collective teacher efficacy and ultimately build stronger instructional coaching practices, specifically in the virtual environment. Vincenzo and Weebbyseamus described their overall experience with feedback as static. While they understood not changing the instructional coaching model because it worked and targeted academic improvement, they felt there was a missing element which was to understand the needs of the adults during this turbulent time. Zallis stated "There were moments when my takeaways from coaching were useful the overall feedback should have included consideration for virtual learning". Torina and Minnin both shared the experience that their needs were not being met specifically as it related to feedback. They cited a need for feedback based on the way teaching was being executed but shared the experience of receiving feedback that was, according to Minnin "out of touch with the virtual platform". The overall experience of participants was neutral or negative with participants citing a lack of flexibility with the instructional coaching

model, specifically highlighting the lack of useful feedback and an overall limited willingness on behalf of the instructional coaching model to adapt to the virtual environment which ultimately cause participants to be frustrated and disappointed with their experience.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question, “How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe the changes in instructional coaching experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?”, was created to understand participants' lived experiences and the changes that were executed and/or changes that participants identified as needing to be present to have had a successful experience with instructional coaching when shifted to the virtual environment. Other than taking an existing model and executing it in the virtual environment, participants in this study did not share that they experienced any changes with their instructional coaching experience in the virtual environment versus when it was executed in person. A few participants had the opportunity to co-teach with their instructional coach but it was not part of the instructional coaching process and for each it only happened 1 or 2 times. Vincenzo describe multiple times the opportunity to co-teach presented itself with their instructional coaching partners. He said “The most impact I feel I had was when I could co-teach as a method to coach while simultaneously taking pressure off my teacher”. In large, Maddin, Razagul, Torina and Vincenzo felt that changing the instructional coaching model to include co-teaching would have been effective. According to Weebbyseamus and Minnin co-teaching would have been beneficial on a whole but would have deeply impacted their instructional coaching experience if it was a component to the coaching cycle. According to most participants in this study, additional feedback that included instructional methods that leveraged technology, and the ability to self-

identify goals for each of the coaching cycles would have been a change that carried a positive impact on their virtual instructional coaching experience.

Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory identifies the principles of choice and voice. Choice specifically acknowledges the autonomy of others to allow for a more honest partnership while voice allows for those choices to be shared, listened to, and respected (Knight, 2008). When participants in this study did not experience changes to the instructional coaching model in the virtual environment, it did not work in concert with the partnership approach theory as it dismisses these principles. Gallway (2000) said, "When you insist, I resist" (p. 14), when referencing the need to allow for instructional coaching stakeholders (coach and teacher) to have a voice in structure of an instructional coaching cycle. According to a study by Zimmer and Matthews (2022) educators should be collaborators of learning. In this study participants did not indicate collaboration within the virtual environment but they did indicate a general collaboration between teachers and instructional coaches. Participants in this study cited the ability to self-identify areas of focus during goal setting but they were not able to identify specific classes or times for observations. According to Torina "While I was able to choose my goal, it had to fit along whatever part of the framework the school said we were focused on" and Vissard cited the "balancing act of when to observe teacher versus other duties which didn't always allow me to see the best lesson demonstration growth towards a goal".

While the data collected showed general collaboration between teachers and instructional coaches the data also showed areas in which collaboration did not happen. Several participants indicated thoughtful conversations where each would bounce ideas off another and it allowed some flexibility for when the instructional coach would come back to observe the teacher. Maddin said "I appreciated the ability to share ideas and talk through my thoughts on

instructional approach”. However, all participants indicated the structure around goal setting was limited. Vincenzo and Torina both shared experiences where they either told, or were specifically told which areas of the districts instructional framework the goal must be centered around. Torina said “a little flexibility or collaboration as it related to my actual goal would have been more useful. Being told what to focus on rather than letting me self-identify my need for growth was limiting”. According to McKee (2022), instructional coaching is most effective when it is tailored to the teacher so that they have a voice in the process, as a result of this they are more likely to find greater success.

In a traditional classroom co-teaching engages both parties to be equally involved from the planning to execution of a lesson. In the virtual environment co-teaching should be used by both parties to monitor, support, engage students, and manage technology and to leverage the individual skill to motivate and advance the classroom (Chizhik & Brandon, 2020). One of the changes that all participants felt was necessary, and only a few had the opportunity to do, was to co-teach during the COVID-19 pandemic alongside their instructional coaching partner. Being able to co-teach alongside an instructional coaching partner opens the opportunity for immediate student support, mentorship, risk recovery (if something doesn’t go right) and moral support (Chizhik & Brandon, 2020; Knight, 2021). Maddin, Vincenzo, and Torina shared specific examples of co-teaching with their instructional coaching partner. Vincenzo said “being able to roll up my sleeves and experience firsthand what was happening in the classroom gave me valuable insight so I could better coach my teachers”. Maddin and Torina both expressed a benefit from their co-teaching experience because it gave them a chance to take risks knowing there was someone else there to help them recover or to reflect with and perhaps more easily accept another perspective.

Knight's (2008) partnership approach theory addresses equality and reflection both of which were highlighted by participant experiences. These were noted through the co-teaching experiences where the teacher and instructional coach has a perceived equal part in the teaching and learning. Further, when teachers were to reflect on their goals and lessons that support their goals they were able to dive into deeper reflection with their instructional coaching partner because both partners had a shared experience. Vissard explained "being able to experience the classroom allowed me to give better advice and guidance as we moved through the instructional coaching process". Any teacher-centered instructional coaching model "should utilize a co-teaching structure as this not only provides mentorships, guidance and support but it builds trust and positive relationships" (Wang, 2017). Participants in this study made regular references to a desired co-teaching experience if they did not receive one during instructional coaching throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question, "How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their relationships with their instructional coaching partner during the COVID-19 pandemic?", was created to understand participants lived experiences as it related to their relationships with their instructional coaching partner during the COVID-19 virtual learning response program. Participants described their relationships as positive, present, and stronger when compared to the relationships they had with their partnerships during in person learning.

The theoretical framework, the partnership approach theory by Knight (2008), used in this study grew out of themes that were repeatedly found in literature from the fields of education, psychology, philosophy of science and others (Knight, 2011). The partnership approach theory encompasses how people think about instructional coaching and that ultimately



leads to success as it is grounded in a partnership approach, an approach you cannot have if you do not have strong positive relationships (Knight, 2011). Participants in this study overwhelmingly stated they had better relationships in the virtual environment than when they were in person. They felt that this was due largely in part to the emotional support that was given throughout instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants described relationships with their coaching partners as ones of support and Minnin stated that their partner “cared about my emotional wellbeing, which had never happened before”. Other participants recognized their success in the classroom as being tied directly to their instructional coaching partner, not due to the coaching itself but due to the human to human relationships.

According to Calais et al. (2020) when it comes to effective coaching in the virtual environment the process of coaching teachers doesn't change but the recognition that teachers need additional emotional supports must be in the forefront of instructional coaching practices. “It is the instructional coach's role to consider what new needs may arise in a virtual learning environment and how to provide solutions to those needs” (Calais et al., 2020, p. 98).

Participants in this research cited their experiences ranging from having their instructional coaching partner be an emotional support or they described acting as one. According to Zallis “it seemed as though we were in survival mode and I would have drowned had my partner not checked in on my emotional state”. Vissard and Vincenzo both described experiences where they regularly checked in on their coaching partner's needs, asking about emotion states prior to even thinking about starting an instructional coaching conversation. Participants all shared experiences where the emotional support was front and center in what they were doing.

The work of teaching and learning draws on social and moral support of colleagues in a school building (Knight, 2008). When the shift to virtual learning due to the COVID-19

pandemic happened many teachers lost that support (Hargreaves, 2021). Positive interactions are a key component to success in the schools and instructional coaching played a role in creating and/or maintaining those (Knight, 2022). Participants all cited stronger relationships with their coaching partners than during in person learning. Participants described relationships where they were more focused and felt heard. Several participants felt this was due to a removal of other duties that instructional coaches typically had during the school day so they were able to, according to Razagul, “spend more time getting to know my teachers versus dealing with situations that arose during the school as I was making my way to a teacher’s classroom”. Participants cited an ease of access to each other with a click of a button versus getting distracted on their way to meeting by others in the school community.

### **Implications**

The results of this study may benefit teachers, instructional coaches, school administrators and districts who engage in virtual learning moving forward beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Pitts et al. (2022), virtual learning is not going away and school districts must improve teacher effectiveness. “The rapid move to emergency remote learning when schools closed across the globe created a large-scale, unplanned experiment that came with new opportunities for researchers to study how achievement and instructional coaching can improve” (Pitts et al., 2022, p. 6). This study gathered perceptions of both teachers and instructional coaches, based on their lived experiences in the virtual space that supported that not only is improvement necessary but that instructional coaching can be effective and adapted to the virtual environment. Using these experiences school administrators and districts could take into consideration possible improvements for future virtual instructional coaching programs. These

improvements may directly affect the experience of future teachers and instructional coaches to have more positive future instructional coaching experiences.

According to Knight (2022), instructional coaching in the virtual environment may look similar to in person instructional coaching on the surface but it offers more opportunities for increased achievement by making changes to virtual instructional coaching programs.

Improvements surrounding instructional coaching in the virtual environment can be carried out regionally, statewide, and nationally as other K-12 school districts continually develop long term virtual learning options for their school communities. Additionally, there is an opportunity for improvement with the instructional coaching structure that is used in the virtual environment. These improvements can leverage additional technology tools, partnership growth, and deeper relationships between coaching partners (Knight, 2022).

### **Recommendations for Action**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public high school teachers (grades 9-12) and instructional coaches who participated in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is the role of the instructional coach to work with teachers in setting desired outcomes for improvement (Knight, 2018) as well as school administrators and leaders to ensure effective outcomes within school communities (Anderson & Wallin, 2018). The results of this study may be meaningful and important for the continued improvement of instructional coaching within the virtual environment. Based on the findings from this study there are three recommendations for action pertaining to feedback, co-teaching and the use of technology within the virtual environment.

### **Create Feedback Tailored to the Teaching Platform**

All participants discussed the feedback they either gave or received during instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Bajwa et al. (2020) personalizing instructional coaching and feedback “improves skills, self-reflection, teaching effectiveness, verifying learner understanding and defining learning objectives” (p. 663). In order to meet the unique needs of developing virtual learning teaching practices the instructional coach must be able to tailor feedback to meet the needs of the individual (Knight, 2022). This is important because teacher preparedness programs are not training teachers for the online environment, but for traditional pedagogy (Ficke, 2020). It is recommended that feedback from instructional coaching should be tailored to the instructional environment, teacher skill, and proven online teaching methodology.

### **Embedding Co-Teaching within the Instructional Coaching Model**

The data collected in this study included participants discussing co-teaching and the need for this component within an instructional coaching program. According to Arrellano et al. (2022) co-teaching as a partnership in an instructional coaching model can achieve common learning objectives and will have an overall positive impact on the improvement of teaching practices. According to Cook and Friend (2017) co-teaching is defined as two individuals working together, planning, sharing students, organization, delivery and assessment of instruction. Based on participant’s experiences, lack of pedagogy for virtual learning and positive lived experiences with co-teaching during instructional coaching, co-teaching should be infused into an instructional coaching model in the virtual environment.

## **Learning How to Use Technology for Increased Student Achievement**

A unique aspect to virtual teaching environments is the endless possibilities for an increased use of educational technology tools to enhance student engagement and positive student outcomes (Ozkan Berkiroglu et al., 2021). During this study participants indicated a desire not just for professional development surrounding educational technology tools, but for pedagogy on how to effectively use those tools to create a technology rich environment beyond the COVID-19 response virtual tools that were available. It is recommended that instructional coaching include targeted educational technology tools that enhance teaching and learning based on the individual teacher and academic content.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

This study was meaningful for those who were interviewed but the study itself was limited in scope. There were additional questions that emerged during the research that may require further study. All participants stated the desire to witness successful virtual learning programs with an effective instructional coaching component. Many participants made note that personalized coaching was important for all teachers and most participants made mention of future virtual learning programs and questioned what teacher coaching looks like in future virtual instructional coaching programs.

### **Recommended Qualitative Study #1**

This research was limited to a singular school district. One way to understand what successful instructional coaching programs look like is to continue researching the lived experience of teachers and instructional coaches in the remote environment beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. As teachers are the focus of instructional coaching, future qualitative research on the lived experiences of teachers across a region or state, and not limiting the study to singular

instructional coaching model, would yield a deeper understanding of successful virtual instructional coaching program components. Specific components within virtual instructional coaching programs could be identified that participants find effective.

### **Recommended Qualitative Study #2**

This study was limited by the use of Claim, Evidence, Impact, Justification (CEIJ) as the major component to the instructional coaching model used at the site of this study. A future study that looks at personalized instructional coaching within a singular school or district that targets the needs of the individual is important to ensure continued success in the virtual instructional coaching environment. This study may be able to provide insight on teacher development as it pertains to the individual when it is not constrained by a standard set forth within the school or district. It is recommended that a qualitative study be executed for grades k-12, in a singular school or district that assess the effectiveness of personalized instructional coaching models.

### **Recommended Qualitative Study #3**

This research focused on past virtual learning programs and the lived experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. To further understand effectiveness of instructional coaching in the virtual environment, a regional study of current, non COVID-19 response virtual instructional coaching programs is necessary to understand the effectiveness of instructional coaching in the virtual environment. This study should include the perceptions of both teachers and instructional coaches in grades 9-12 who are engaged in non COVID-19 virtual response virtual instructional coaching programs. This study may or may not be limited to a singular instructional coaching model.

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed issues of virtual teaching and learning to the forefront, as schools across the United States shifted to a variety of models for virtual instruction (Brown et al., 2021). Among this, came a variety of instructional coaching models that were executed during the same time period (Brown et al., 2021). Knight (2022), a leading instructional coach expert, claims “all teachers, schools, and classrooms face their own unique challenges and ensuring an established and effective process for instructional coaching will continue to lead to academic success” (p. 27). The problem addressed in this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of instructional coaches and teachers with instructional coaching in the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the role of the instructional coach is to work with teachers for desired outcomes (Knight, 2018), engaging with instructional coaches and teachers who had a lived experience with instructional coaching in the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic was a key component to this study. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public high school teachers (grades 9-12) and instructional coaches who participated in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Three research questions guided this study and were developed after a thorough review of the literature as it relates to instructional coaching history, practices, effectiveness, feedback and virtual environments. A review of the literature included a look at the evolution of instructional coaching, benefits, including teacher support, retention and evaluation. The literature reviewed also covered a variety of instructional coaching models, how instructional coaching serves as professional development, limitations of instructional coaching and instructional coaching in the virtual environment. The three research questions that grounded this research were:

**RQ 1.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their experience with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 2.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe the changes in instructional coaching experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**RQ 3.** How do public high school teachers and instructional coaches describe their relationships with their instructional coaching partner during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Four high school teachers and four high school instructional coaches serving grades 9-12 participated in this study. Data for this study was collected through virtual semi structured interviews using the Zoom platform. Interview questions were developed and grounded using Knights (2008) partnership approach theory and its seven principles of “equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity” (p. 34). After interviews were conducted all interviews were transcribed, member checked, and de-identified. To arrive at an understanding of the lived experiences of instructional coaches and teachers, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used. Data collected was analyzed and through the use of spreadsheets, notes, codes, theme notation, and data categorization emergent themes were developed. Initially there were a total of 182 labels, including quotations and descriptions which created 75 initial codes emerging from this process. Of these 75 codes, six code groups and three emergent themes were created that categorized the participants lived experiences. The three emergent themes identified were: (1) feedback should be flexible to address the virtual environment, (2) co-teaching is necessary in the virtual environment and (3) positive relationships were more present during virtual coaching.

The first theme, feedback should be flexible to address the virtual environment, was the primary finding in this study. All eight participants addressed feedback and the challenges



associated with being mandated to write it a certain way, the required use of sentence starters and the inability to deviate away from the linking it to the districts instructional framework. All participants agreed that feedback should have been tailored to meet the teachers where they were at emotionally, pedagogically, and the individual skill level with the technological resources available for teacher use.

The second theme, co-teaching is necessary in the virtual environment, emerged as a prominent theme with seven participants directly speaking about their experience or desire to experience co-teaching embedded in virtual instructional coaching, and one participant believing they co-taught, but ultimately conducted several demonstrations throughout the COVID-19 virtual response program. Participants described a positive and effective experience when their coaching partner agreed to deviate away from the prescribed instructional coaching plan and co-teach. During these co-teaching sessions the instructional coaching practice was perceived as effective as both partners were able to shoulder the responsibility of teaching virtually while then understanding what the other was experiences through direct teaching, self-reflection and targeting growth for students.

The final theme, positive relationships were more present during virtual coaching, was apparent by participants experiences with their instructional coaching partner and the openness to which all eight participants spoke about their experiences. Most of the participants expressed a deeper appreciation and thankfulness for the support they received not only academically but emotionally. Most of the participants cited a more positive experience as compared to their pre pandemic instructional coaching relationships.

The results of this study are important in regards to future virtual instructional coaching programs. Based on the findings, improvements to virtual instructional coaching should be

considered. When teaching and learning are transported to the virtual platform adjustments are made to ensure effectiveness and as such, the same should be done for instructional coaching. To that end there are three recommendations for action for future virtual instructional coaching programs. First, feedback should be tailored to the teaching platform. One would not offer the same pedagogically advice to a first year teacher as they would to a twenty year veteran teacher. As such, feedback should not be tailored to the pedagogical practice of in person learning when teaching is being executed in the virtual environment.

Second, the instructional coaching model should have co-teaching embedded in the practice. A co-teaching partnership within an instructional coaching model will have an overall positive impact on the improvement of teaching practices in the virtual environment. Lastly, coaching on how to leverage technology tools will increase student achievement. With the vast amount of educational technology tools available it is imperative for instructional coaches to coach teachers on how to effectively use tools to increase student achievement and not avoid using tools because they are fun yet provide little academic meaning inside the classroom.

Ultimately this study provided insight into the perceptions of high school teachers and instructional coaches who participated in instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. However there are three recommendations for future study due to additional questions that arose throughout the course of the study. The first recommendation is to conduct a qualitative study of teacher only perceptions across a region or state as it relates to virtual instructional coaching. As teachers are the focus of development during instructional coaching it will be important to gain a broader understanding of the effectiveness of instructional coaching and the benefit teachers are receiving.

The second recommendation for further study is to understand the impact of a personalized instructional coaching within the virtual environment. This would be able to provide insight on teacher and instructional coach development as individuals and would be able to better measure effectiveness of coaching models if they were tailored to the individual across more grade bands than only high school. Lastly, a future recommendation for study is to understand the effectiveness of instructional coaching in the virtual environment of current, non COVID-19 response programs across a region or state. This would answer the question of whether or not lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic response programs were applied to the future state of virtual instructional coaching programs.

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## Appendix A

### Email Invitation for Participation to Potential Participants

Dear PARTICIPANT,

My name is Alyson Manion and I am a doctoral student at the University of New England. I am also a former staff member within your school district and previously served as an Assistant Principal. I am reaching out to ask for your participation in my doctoral research study.

Through the use of a semi-structured interview conducted over Zoom, I am exploring instructional coaching in the virtual environment. The intention of this study is to identify best practices for instructional coaching in the virtual environment based on the lived experiences of high school instructional coaches and teachers.

The study involves one 45-60 minute interview conducted via Zoom.

Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation will not affect your relationships with either the University of New England or your School District. There is always the potential of risk with any research, especially around privacy and breach of confidentiality, but the risks will be minimal and mitigated by the use of pseudonyms for any identifying information.

If you self-identify as a high school instructional coach or high school teacher who has participated in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic virtual learning response program, and have previous in-person experiences with instructional coaching and would like to participate in the study please review the attached participant information sheet email me at [amanion@une.edu](mailto:amanion@une.edu) to express your interest in your participation. I will respond to your email with an invitation to set up an interview at a time that is convenient for you.

If you have any questions concerning this research, you may contact Alyson Manion, primary researcher at 443.802.1215 or by email at [amanion@une.edu](mailto:amanion@une.edu).

Thank you for your time and participation.

Best Regards,

Alyson Manion, M.M., M.E, Doctoral Candidate, University of New England



## Appendix B

### Participant Information Sheet

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Information Sheet Version<br>Date: | April 28, 2022                                                                                                                                                        |
| IRB Project #:                     | 0422-10                                                                                                                                                               |
| Title of Project:                  | EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES PARTICIPATING IN VIRTUAL INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC |
| Principal Investigator (PI):       | Alyson Manion                                                                                                                                                         |
| PI Contact Information:            | <a href="mailto:amanion@une.edu">amanion@une.edu</a> 443.802.1215                                                                                                     |

#### INTRODUCTION

- This is a project being conducted for research purposes.
- The intent of the Participant Information Sheet is to provide you with pertinent details about this research project.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions about this research project, now, during or after the project is complete.
- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- The use of the word ‘we’ in the Information Sheet refers to the Principal Investigator and/or other research staff.
- If you decide to participate, you have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time without penalty. Upon withdrawal from the study any data that was collected will be destroyed and it will not be included in the research.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of public high school teachers (grades 9-12) and instructional coaches who have participated in virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This project is in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of doctor of education and is being researched in

the form of a dissertation. Through a series of semi-structured interviews conducted on Zoom (to ensure participant safety due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic) the project seeks to understand both instructional coaches and teachers perspectives on the effectiveness of instructional coaching models in the virtual environment and their perception of necessary changes to instructional coaching models.

### **WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT?**

You are being asked to participate in this research project because you are either an instructional coach or teacher who has had experience with instructional coaching models in a secondary school including both in-person and virtual experiences.

Selection criteria for participants are as follows:

- Must be part of the targeted school district
- Must be a high school (grades 9-12) instructional coach or teacher
- Must have been involved with both in-person and virtual instructional coaching somewhere between the school years 2018-2019 and 2021-2022

### **WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT?**

If selected for the study participants will be asked to do the following:

- Self-identify as being eligible to participate in the research.
- Participate in a video interview on Zoom that will be recorded. This interview will discuss the participant's experiences and perceptions as it pertains to both in-person and virtual instructional coaching experiences.
- Review the written transcript and researcher summary of the completed interview for accuracy and ensure that the researchers summary/analysis accurately capture the participants perceptions.

### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

The risks involved with participation in this research project are minimal and may include possible breach of confidentiality (which will be mitigated by using a randomly assigned participant pseudonym and password protected files stored on a physical device to which only the researcher will have access) and possible discomfort in answering questions (which is mitigated by the participants' right to skip any questions or stop the interview and cease participation at any time).

### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

The possible benefits you may experience from being in this research project include the opportunity to reflect on your professional practice and potentially influence the direction of future instructional coaching experiences in the virtual environment.

### **WILL YOU BE COMPENSATED FOR BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

You will not be compensated for being in this research project.

### **WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY?**

We will do our best to keep your personal information private and confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Additionally, your information in this research project could be reviewed by representatives of the University such as the Office of Research Integrity and/or the Institutional Review Board.

The results of this research project may be shown at meetings or published in journals to inform other professionals. If any papers or talks are given about this research, your name will not be used. We may use data from this research project that has been permanently stripped of personal identifiers in future research without obtaining your consent.

The following additional measures will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality:

- All participants will be assigned a random participant pseudonym which will be used in the study in place of participant's names.
- All other identifiable information will be removed.
- Specific school sites and the district will not be named and identifiable information regarding schools and the district will be removed.
- All research records will be kept in the home office of the principal investigator or in a password protected file which will be stored locally (not in the cloud). As an added provision of privacy, the identity of participants will not be revealed at any time.
- All recordings from the research study will be destroyed after the interview is transcribed. All identifying information will be removed from the transcript.
- The interview and transcription will only be done by the primary investigator.
- Only the researcher's advisor and the IRB Committee at the University of New England have the right to review the study data.

### **WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PROJECT?**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research project. If you have questions about this project, complaints or concerns, you should contact the Principal Investigator listed on the first page of this document.

### **WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?**

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Office of Research Integrity at (207) 602-2244 or via e-mail at [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).

## Appendix C

### Full Interview Protocol

#### *Opening Script*

Welcome and thank you for participating in today's interview. My name is Alyson Manion and I am a doctoral student at the University of New England and conducting research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Leadership in Education. Thank you for taking the time to sit and participate in what should be a 45-60 minute interview. We will go through approximately seven questions regarding your experiences and perceptions with virtual instructional coaching. Before we begin I hope to obtain your permission to record this interview so I will be able to accurately document the information you share here today. If at any point you would like me to stop recording please feel free to let me know and I will do so. All responses will remain confidential and will only be used to gain a better understanding of your perception of instructional coaching in general terms, as it relates to in-person and virtual coaching models as well as successes and challenges. Do you have any questions?

I would like to remind you that I will be recording and transcribing this interview for accuracy. I would also like to remind you that your participation in this interview is voluntary and if at any time you need to stop, take a break or discontinue please let me know and we will do so. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission I would like to begin the interview.

Participant Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

This first series of questions focus on your experiences with virtual instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic response programs. Specifically during the time periods from March 2020 to June 2021.

**Question 1:** Can you describe what the virtual instructional coaching model was like during the COVID-19 pandemic virtual response learning program?

*Prompt:* You mention \_\_\_\_ tell me what that was like for you?

*Prompt:* You mentioned \_\_\_\_ describe that in more detail.

*Prompt:* Do you feel the model you have used for virtual coaching was successful? Why or why not?

**Question 2:** How would you describe your overall experience with instructional coaching during this time frame?

*Prompt:* You described \_\_\_\_ can you tell me more about that?

*Prompt:* You mention \_\_\_\_ you can go into more detail?

**Question 3:** Can you describe some areas of success you experienced with virtual instructional coaching?

*Prompt:* You shared \_\_\_\_ can you give some more details surrounding that?

**Question 4:** Can you describe some areas in need of improvement as it pertained to your experience with virtual instructional coaching?

*Prompt:* You brought up \_\_\_\_ could you provide more context or details?

The next section of questions will focus on changes you experienced with instructional coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and the same time frame for the first set of questions, March 2020 – June 2021.

**Question 5:** During virtual instructional coaching, what changes did you experience with the instructional coaching model when it was moved from a pre-COVID experience to the virtual environment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

*Prompts:* You mention \_\_\_\_ can you explain further how that was a change for the virtual experience versus the in person experience?

*Prompt:* You don't mention many changes that took place. Can you describe where you feel changes would have been effective / necessary?

**Question 6:** Can you describe in detail how (insert change mentioned) affected (or would have affected) your overall experience with virtual instructional coaching?

These last few questions will focus on the relationship you had with your instructional coaching partner(s) during the COVID-19 pandemic response programs, again the time frame being from March 2020 – June 2021.

**Question 7:** Can you describe the relationship you had with your partner during the COVID-19 virtual learning response instructional coaching program?

*Prompt:* Can you describe how this partnership worked?

*Examples:* Was it honest? Was it knowledgeable? Was it effective? Did you [gain/give] value from this experience?

**Question 8:** How would you describe what a virtual coaching partnerships should look in order to have the greatest amount of success?

**Question 9:** Before we close, are there any other experiences or moments you would like to talk about or add in as it pertains to your experiences with virtual instructional coaching?

*Closing Script*

I am extremely grateful you took the time to participate in this interview today and I thank you for your time and thoughts as it relates to instructional coaching. If you would like to contact me at any time you can reach me via email at [amanion@une.edu](mailto:amanion@une.edu). I will be contacting you in a few days with a transcript of our conversation today along with a summary of my notes and would appreciate your feedback to ensure I have accurately captured your responses and perceptions. Upon completion of this research, I will contact you one final time with the study interpretations and conclusions. Thank you again for your time and assistance, I truly appreciate it.

## Appendix D

### Institutional Review Board Approval



Institutional Review Board  
Julie Longua Peterson, Chair

Biddeford Campus  
11 Hills Beach Road  
Biddeford, ME 04005  
(207) 602-2244 T  
(207) 602-5905 F

Portland Campus  
716 Stevens Avenue  
Portland, ME 04103

DATE OF LETTER: April 29, 2022

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Alyson Manion  
FACULTY ADVISOR: Andrea Disque, EdD

PROJECT NUMBER: 0422-10  
PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Public High School Teachers and Instructional Coaches Participating in Virtual Instructional Coaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic

SUBMISSION TYPE: Exempt Project  
SUBMISSION DATE: 4/14/2022

ACTION: Determination of Exempt Status  
DECISION DATE: 4/29/2022

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption Category # 2(ii)

The UNE Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above referenced project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104.

Additional IRB review is not required for this project as submitted. However, if any changes to the design of the study are contemplated (e.g., revision to the protocol, data collection instruments, interview/survey questions, recruitment materials, participant information sheet, and/or other IRB-reviewed documents), the Principal Investigator must submit an amendment to the IRB to ensure the requested change(s) will not alter the exempt status of the project.

Please feel free to contact me at (207) 602-2244 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu) with any questions.

Best Regards,

Bob Kennedy, MS  
Director, Research Integrity