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Leadership and Instructional Coaching: A Synthesis of Approaches and Practices that Promote Change

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Cover Page Footnote

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LEADERSHIP AND INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING:

A LITERATURE REVIEW OF APPROACHES AND PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE CHANGE

Educational leadership roles have transformed and expanded over the years. One change that many public-school districts are implementing is the role of instructional coaching. These additional positions were sought to provide job-embedded, high-quality professional development to teachers so they may improve their instruction to achieve professional goals and increase student success (Anderson & Wallin, 2018; Ittner, 2015). A deep examination of the leadership approaches and practices is necessary to encourage the success of current and future instructional coaches. Ideally, the success of teachers, students, and schools exhibited through instructional coaching will prompt school districts into incorporate coaching positions to their leadership teams. Effective instructional coaches must demonstrate appropriate leadership skills and mindsets while working with teachers to promote individual and organizational change.

Background of the Problem

Teacher burnout and attrition are issues in US public schools. Research estimates that approximately half of the teachers entering the profession exit within five years
(Ingersol et al., 2018), more than half of current teachers have considered leaving the profession earlier than planned (National Education Association, 2022), and 73% of trainee and newly qualified teachers have considered alternative career paths (Weale, 2015). Researchers have identified several causes of teacher attrition and burnout which include a lack of support, emotional labor, and feeling overwhelmed and stressed (Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Madigan & Kim, 2021). These statistics are concerning due to potential negative effects that can occur when teachers leave.

Research indicates that teacher attrition negatively impacts schools and students. One of the most prominent consequences of teacher attrition is a decline in students' academic progress (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Another negative outcome of teacher attrition includes a diminished sense of community and teamwork in schools (Guin, 2004). Also, it is costly to recruit, hire and train new teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2018). Schools are often left with no option but to hire unqualified or inexperienced teachers, increase class size, or eliminate nonmandatory courses (Sutcher et al., 2019). Given these statistics, a systematic change is necessary to increase teacher support and decrease teacher attrition.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this paper is to provide a literature-based synthesis of the leadership approaches and practices of instructional coaches that best support teacher development. The analysis draws on the incorporation or modification of instructional coaching practices that have the potential to increase teacher self-efficacy and decrease teacher attrition. The analysis includes a suggested leadership framework based on the transformational leadership approach (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Burns, 1978; Kouzer & Posner, 2002) with support from the dimensions of andragogical practices (Knowles, 2015), and the activities of care (Beck, 1994).

The application of these leadership practices may encourage effective teacher-coach relationships, promote teacher development and retention, and increase student success.

A Leadership Approach for Instructional Coaches

Instructional coaches work collaboratively with teachers to help them grow professionally. The roles and responsibilities of instructional coaches are expansive and may include data coach, resource provider, mentor, curriculum and instructional specialist, classroom supporter, and school leader (Killion, 2006). The overarching duty of instructional coaches is to effectively promote change in teachers, students, and the school. When considering a leadership style that best suits as an approach for change, transformational leadership takes precedent.

Instructional coaches partner with teachers to improve their instruction so that students are successful (Knight, 2018). Instructional coaching is a way to provide teachers with professional development to encourage student success. This may sound stream-lined; however, the role of instructional coaching is multi-faceted.

Instructional Coaching Training

To begin the process of becoming an instructional coach, one should earn a degree in education and gain classroom experience. Then, an advanced degree in education is recommended. Western Governor's University (2022) claims, "[A masters of education] will teach aspiring instructional coaches how to manage and be part of a team, how to develop and implement curriculums, and communication skills for handling teachers, parents, and students." However, training does not end there. Research indicates that coaches should be trained to have crucial conversations with teachers (Knight, 2018; Bambrick-Santoyo, 2016).

In a typical coaching cycle, there are three stages: pre-conference, observation, and post-conference. First, the dyad discusses any goals or

reflections during the pre-conference. Then, the instructional coach collects qualitative and quantitative data through observations. Finally, the coach provides the teacher with data-driven feedback in a post-conference. The cognitive coaching model implements reflective, nonjudgmental, and developmental factors (Costa & Garmston, 2002), which are typically not part of the teacher evaluation process. Evaluations are reserved for principals and other school administration. It is crucial that instructional coaches are trained to conduct coaching cycles effectively and be readily prepared to serve and promote teacher development so they may be successful in the classroom.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership stands apart from other leadership approaches as it focuses on the needs and development of the followers (Bass & Avolio, 1990). This can be accomplished when the leader provides the followers with the confidence to perform beyond their expectations by broadening and elevating the followers' goals (Dvir et al., 2002). The transformational leadership approach aligns with the objective of instructional coaching, which is the development of teachers. The leader-follower relationship of instructional coaches and teachers can be explored deeper by examining the characteristics of transformational leaders and how they promote change in both the individual teachers and the school as an organization.

Characteristics and Practices of Transformational Leaders

An important practice of transformational leaders is to develop a shared vision with followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Bennis & Nanus (2007) elaborated on the importance of a shared vision by stating the vision should also be clear, grow out of the needs of the organization, and be developed by both followers and leaders. A shared vision gives followers a sense of self-efficacy and a sense of identity (Shamir et al., 1993). The relationship between instructional coaches and teachers encourages the development of a clear and shared vision as they work together to have a positive impact on student learning (Dewitt, 2020) while building their instructional skills.

Instructional coaches implement transformational leadership due to the great attention to the needs of their followers (Bass, 1985). Effective instructional coaching creates a relationship between teacher and coach that is based on trust and respect (Obara, 2010). This relationship also places a strong emphasis on the needs, values, and morals of the followers (Burns, 1978). Furthermore, Kouzes and Posner (2002) state that leaders can be exemplary when they enable others to act by fostering collaboration which makes it possible for others to do good work. The work of an instructional coach is complex, and the effectiveness relies heavily on the coach's display of interpersonal and communication skills

(Walkowiak, 2016). The transformational leadership approach provides the framework for the leader-follower relationship modeled by instructional coaches and teachers.

A Shift in Teaching Perspectives

Most individuals who become instructional coaches are previous K-12 teachers. They were trained in pedagogy, or the practice of teaching children. As they transition to teaching adults, they must shift their teaching practices towards those of andragogy, the method and practice of teaching adult learners. Knowles (2015) claims that using an andragogical approach is essential to those that teach adults, so the teachers are more effective, and their learners are more successful.

Dimensions of Andragogy

Following the dimensions of andragogy is essential to the success of the leader and follower. First, the goals and purposes of learning should be identified. This includes individual, institutional, and social goals for growth. Next, the teacher needs to examine the individual and situational differences of their adult learners. These differences are categorized into subject-matter differences, situational differences, and individual learner differences. Instructional coaches must identify these differences when leading adult learners with various personalities, prior knowledge, and experiences. The final dimension of the model includes six core adult learning principles; (1) the learner's need to know, (2) the learner's self-concept, (3) the learner's prior experiences, (4) the learner's readiness to learn, (5) the learner's orientation to learning, and (6) the learner's motivation to learn (Knowles, 2015, p. 6). Including the dimensions of andragogy into coaching practices will assist adult learners in their growth of knowledge and understanding.

Andragogy and Coaching Practices

The professional development offered by instructional coaches is highly influenced by data obtained from student assessments and/or classroom observations. Knight's (2018) instructional coaching framework provides a model that coaches can implement to guide team and individual professional development. A typical coaching cycle provides opportunities for coaches to model lessons, observe teachers, provide constructive feedback, and share their experiences and expertise (Thomas et al., 2015). Coaching cycles have the potential to include the dimensions of andragogy including the six principles if intentionally noted and implemented by the coach. For example, coaching cycles allow adult learners to establish goals and acknowledge prior knowledge and experiences. Coaching cycles also allow for the coach to establish a connection to

the learner's orientation to learning and the learner to become motivated. Teachers may receive highly effective professional development geared toward adult learners by incorporating the dimensions of andragogy into coaching practices.

Leadership Ethics

Instructional coaches must hold high standards of ethical leadership and moral reasoning in order to perform effectively. Instructional coaches should promote fairness and equity within the professional community. They should also demonstrate honesty and trustworthiness when developing and maintaining relationships with teachers. Research indicates that instructional coaches should have a deep appreciation for teachers' professionalism (Knight, 2007). These ethical characteristics are important to the work of instructional coaches, but due to the unique relationship between coach and teacher, the ethic of care is also relevant and essential.

Promoting Human Development through an Ethic of Care

The relationships that develop between coach and teacher are often based on emotional and social support (Thomas et al., 2019) as the coach's role is to create a trusting, collaborative relationship with teachers to make the process inviting, to listen deeply, to seek to understand teachers' needs, and to support them in meeting their individual, team, and district goals (Killion et al., 2014). Mayeroff (1971) claims, "To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself" (p. 1). Gilligan (1982) elaborates to the effect that to demonstrate an ethic of care, one must have the ability to see and respond to the needs of others. These responsibilities, goals, and actions reflect a strong indication to demonstrate an ethic of care. According to Beck (1994), caring involves three activities; (1) receiving the other's perspective, (2) responding appropriately to the awareness that comes from this reception, and (3) remaining committed to others and the relationship. Instructional coaches model these actions as they guide teachers on a path of professional growth.

Nurturing Change as an Instructional Coach

Instructional coaching emerged as school districts began to recognize a need for a new and inventive framework to improve teacher effectiveness due to federal and state legislation. Knight (2011) claims that high-stakes testing and accountability standards have increased the need for instructional coaches. Even though instructional coaching has become more widely practiced in schools (Haneda et al., 2018), not all school districts offer such support.

Many school districts that utilize instructional coaching as a capacity-building instrument are promoting not only individual change but system-level instructional change (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017) but this is not always the case. Mangin & Dunsmore (2015) disagree by claiming instructional coaching is not always fully incorporated into the school climate; therefore, it is not fully leveraged for optional results for teacher and student improvement.
This claim indicates a change in the leadership approach and practices of instructional is necessary.

Overcoming a Resistance to Change

Leaders often face resistance from followers concerning necessary changes within an organization. Burke and Litwin (2016) claim that resistance to change can create a confluence of processes that are almost impossible to control and often extremely difficult to predict. However, the resistance can be managed through transformational leadership by finding a common ground, creating a sense of like-minded community, and raising the level of motivation and morality in the organization (Burns, 1978). Instructional coaches that utilize a transformational leadership approach have the potential to promote positive change by promoting teacher growth which increases student success.

Available knowledge suggests that effective implementation of instructional coaching acts as a key element to achieving safer and healthier work environments, where teachers are motivated to do their best efforts and improve their commitment to teaching, which leads to a reduction in withdrawal intentions (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Research also indicates that coaching is a more effective method of professional growth than most school-based interventions such as merit-based pay, extended learning time, and even student incentives (Kraft et al., 2018). Campbell & Malkus (2011) claim that student achievement is a by-product of instructional coaching as evident by standardized test scores. This evidence has led to an increase in the number of school districts incorporating the role of instructional coaching in their administration teams (Miller & Kastens, 2018); however, it is the coaches' approach and practice in leadership that will determine success.

**Promoting Change through a Synthesis of Leadership Approaches and Practices**

Instructional coaches as leaders have the opportunity to change an individual, change a group, or change a whole organization. Burke (2014) stated, "...leaders do make a difference, especially in terms of organizational change" (p. 278). There is a strong connection between the actions of caring for followers, instructional coaching practices, characteristics of transformational leadership, and the dimensions of andragogy (Figure 1).

As instructional coaches receive perspectives from teachers, they are recognizing their self-concepts and tapping into the teachers' prior knowledge and experience. This may occur during a conference or while providing feedback from observational or student assessment data. As these conversations occur, the coach and teacher are developing a professional working relationship while generating a shared vision concerning goals for self and organization.

Figure 1

Organizational of the Leadership Practice and Approaches of Instructional Coaches
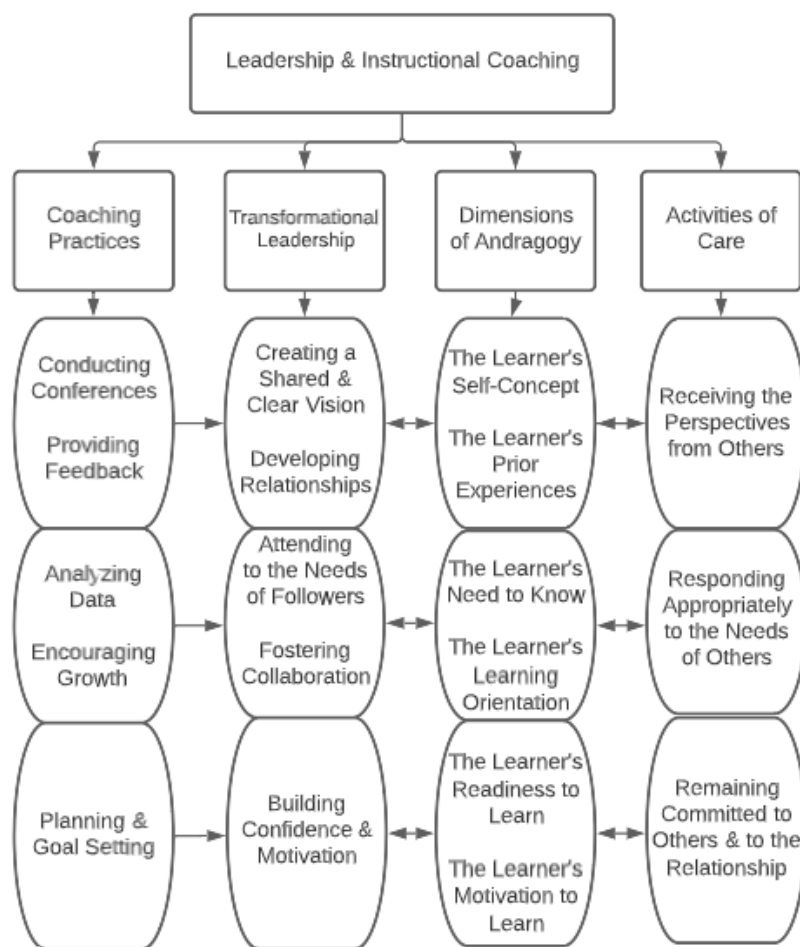
Note. This figure was generated to provide a visual representation to describe how instructional coaching practices (Knight, 2018) correlate with the transformational

leadership approach (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1990; & Kouzer & Posner, 2002), the dimensions of andragogy (Knowles, 2015), and activities of care (Beck, 1994).

Beck (1994) claims that the next step in modeling activities of care is to respond appropriately to the needs of others. Transformational leadership also indicates a need to attend to the needs of followers and foster collaboration. The dimensions of andragogy indicate a need to respond to the needs of others when the leader is recognizing the learner's learning orientation and establishing a connection to the learner's need to know. Finally, instructional coaches to remain committed to their followers and to the organization. This may take the form of building confidence within the followers, promoting a sense of motivation and stimuli, and setting and evaluating goals.

Conclusion

A literature-based synthesis of the leadership approaches and practices of instructional coaches that best support teacher development was discussed. The analysis draws on the current issues of teacher burnout and attrition and the need to address some of the underlying causes which include the teachers feeling of lack of support, feeling overwhelmed, and stress. Instructional coaching has the potential to alleviate these teacher concerns by providing a stable support system that focuses on the professional growth of teachers.

Existing literature provided the framework to promote effective instructional coaching practices including transformational leadership, andragogical practices, and activities of care. The application of these leadership practices may promote the changes necessary to encourage effective teacher-coach relationships, promote teacher development and retention, and increase student success. Further research is required to determine if the identified leadership approach and practices does indeed supply instructional coaches with the necessary framework to promote teacher professional development.

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