BRINGING EFFECTIVE COACHING TO SCALE: EXPERIENCES OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES IN A LARGE-SCALE COACHING PROGRAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Kristen Anne Skura

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2024

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Abstract

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the barriers that might exist for full-time instructional coaches in an established, large-scale coaching program in a large public school district on the East Coast of the U.S. The theories that guided this study were Knowles' adult learning theory and the partnership philosophy put forth by Knight as a theoretical foundation for quality instructional coaching. The partnership philosophy is built on the ideas of adult learning theory. Knight suggests seven principles of effective instructional coaching, though this study was focused on only four: equality, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity. The methods of this study included deep data collection through personal interviews, journal writing, and a focus group. All data was analyzed using a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological analysis provided by Moustakas in which a textural description of participants' voices and a structural description of the participants' experiences are integrated into a composite description of the large-scale-coaching phenomenon. This triangulation of data collection methods provided a saturation of themes so an accurate description of coaching in a large-scale program could be developed. The results of the study included common themes that emerged throughout the data analysis: The coaching process is varied, reflection is vital, coaching relationships take effort to establish, there are differing perceptions of the coach's role, there is an agreed-upon purpose for coaching, and there are many benefits of coaching. These themes led to a discussion of the various tensions faced by coaches in a large-scale program. The implications and limitations of the study were discussed, and recommendations for future research were made.

Keywords: instructional coaching, large-scale coaching, adult learning, professional development

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To my parents. To my mom, who instilled in me a love of learning, and to my dad, who always knew I would be a writer.

To Dr. Uffelman, who believed in my dream before I did.

To my husband and children, who kept me strong and loved me through the most challenging years of my life.

Acknowledgments

To Dr. Sharon, who was the calm in the storm.

To Dr. Janette Whitmore, who offered to be my accountability partner and turned into my biggest cheerleader.

To my former River Ridge Public Schools colleagues for agreeing to share their experiences with me. Their passion for improving public education is clear, and I will always hold them in high esteem.

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List of Abbreviations

Assistant Principal (AP)

Division Instructional Facilitator (DIF)

English Learners (EL)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Instructional Facilitator for Technology (IFT)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Professional Development (PD)

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

River Ridge Public Schools (RRPS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Instructional coaching improves teacher practice when done regularly over time using a cycle that includes classroom observation and teacher reflection (Hui et al., 2020). Instructional coaching is grounded in relationships fostered through personal interactions (Knight et al., 2015), as coaching is personalized professional development (Schachter et al., 2018). Over the past few decades, instructional coaching has developed to support teacher implementation of professional learning and improved teacher practices (Hui et al., 2020). Coaching has since become prevalent, though it takes many forms (McLeod et al., 2017). This variation of coaching methods and models seems to affect coaching effectiveness, especially as a coaching program is scaled up (Blazar, 2020; Schachter et al., 2018). Using the principles of adult learning theory developed by Knowles et al. (2015) and the partnership philosophy of coaching developed by Knight (2007), the researcher of this study seeks to explore the experiences of instructional coaches in a large-scale program. The author first discusses the historical, social, and theoretical background of instructional coaching and explains personal connections to the topic. This study's problem, purpose, and significance relate to the theoretical foundations of instructional coaching and address the gap in current research on large-scale coaching programs.

Background

Recent federal legislation, including the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), along with the associated mandated testing for accountability, have increased the pressure on schools and teachers to improve achievement scores, especially in reading (Kraft et al., 2018). The implied course of action from these pieces of legislation is that to improve student achievement, schools must enhance the quality of

teachers and effective instruction (Connor, 2017). As school leaders attempt to build the capacity of their teachers, traditional workshop-style professional development sessions are a common choice (Kraft & Blazar, 2018). Lecture and workshop-type models of professional development (PD) do not work for several reasons: teachers do not implement their learning into practice when there is little to no follow-up or support (Showers & Joyce, 1996), and teachers lose interest in yet another short-lived attempt to improve the complex issues found in teaching (Connor, 2017; Knight, 2007; Kraft & Blazar, 2017). These issues are even more profound when coaching is brought to scale (Kraft & Blazar, 2018).

Instructional coaching, on the other hand, provides focused, sustained support as teachers apply their learning to their immediate contexts (Knight et al., 2018; Kraft & Blazar, 2018). While there are many forms of coaching, most include some standard features, such as cycles of observation and feedback in a collaborative process (Connor, 2017; Kraft & Blazar, 2017; McLeod et al., 2017). Some specific features, what Knight (2007) calls the partnership principles, are grounded in what researchers know works best for adult learning and can help to ensure an effective coaching program.

Historical Context

The study of coaching in education first came to light in the 1980s when Joyce and Showers (1981) recognized coaching as a more effective approach to ensuring teacher implementation of professional development and training. The earliest definitions of coaching included only a cycle of observation and feedback (Joyce & Showers, 1981). Coaching developed throughout the 1990s as federal funding and legislation were increased to improve student achievement, especially in reading (Showers & Joyce, 1996). Showers and Joyce (1996) updated their idea of coaching to exclude verbal feedback in favor of non-evaluative

collaboration for teacher planning. At the turn of the century, there was much more literature on coaching models and methods than studies on the effectiveness of coaching or its impact on student achievement (Kraft et al., 2018).

Coaching models have included modeling high-quality instruction (Showers & Joyce, 1996), utilizing coaching teams focused on collaborative planning (Showers & Joyce, 1996), goal setting and various reflection techniques (Husbye et al., 2018), working with teachers on problem-solving (Schachter et al., 2018; Toll, 2017), and combining general classroom practices with content instruction (Connor, 2017). There is consensus that while multiple models and methods exist, coaching has an overall positive effect on teacher practice and implementation of professional development as well as student outcomes (Blazar, 2015; Connor, 2017; Davis et al., 2018; Kraft et al., 2018; Weiser et al., 2019).

Social Context

As educational leaders seek to improve student learning experiences and outcomes, improving teacher practice is critical (Blazar, 2020; Connor, 2017; Kraft & Blazar, 2018). The teaching field is collaborative, and coaching facilitates productive discussion about teaching (Husbye et al., 2018). Coaching connects teachers with trained professionals who consistently support the teacher's planning, practice, and improvement (Hui et al., 2020). Coaching generates a relationship of trust, builds self-esteem, increases creative thinking and problem-solving, and supports the personal and professional achievement of goals (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017).

Coaching done via technology has the potential to be more time-efficient and cost-effective (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2015; Weiser et al., 2019) as well as provide coaching opportunities to teachers who would not otherwise have access, such as those who teach in rural

areas (Carson et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018), who often lack the support provided in more urban areas (Courtney, 2020). Unfortunately, large-scale coaching programs seem less effective than smaller-scale models (Kraft et al., 2018).

Theoretical Context

Joyce and Showers (1981) first brought instructional coaching to light in the early 1980s to encourage and ensure teacher implementation of professional development. The idea was that teachers who are learning new skills might not put those skills into practice successfully without the support of a coaching cycle of observation and feedback (Joyce and Showers, 1981). Through time, as greater focus was placed on student achievement as part of federal legislation like No Child Left Behind and the Every Student Succeeds Act, it was an accepted theory that improving teacher quality and instructional methods positively impacts student achievement (Kraft et al., 2018). While traditional forms of PD often fail to influence teaching practices, coaching has been shown to improve not only teacher practices but also student achievement (Kraft & Blazar, 2018). Such instructional coaching utilizes adult learning theory, as developed by Knowles, to increase teacher learning and their implementation of new strategies (Knowles et al., 2015). As coaching has become more popular as an effective way of improving teacher practice, various coaching methods and models have been developed (Kraft et al., 2018). The partnership philosophy builds on the ideas of adult learning theory and suggests seven principles of effective instructional coaching (Knight, 2007).

The foundation of coaching, though, continues to be the collaborative effort of the coach and teacher to work toward improved instruction and student gains (Connor, 2017; McLeod et al., 2019). The principles of choice, voice, and dialogue are common in coaching research (Haneda et al., 2017; Knight, 2019b). McLeod et al. (2017) found that coaching was most

effective when focused on the strengths and needs of teachers. Similarly, Schachter et al. (2018) suggested that coaching time be aligned with teacher needs.

Over the years, interest in instructional coaching programs has ballooned (Hunter & Redding, 2023). Coaching has grown in popularity so much (Bachkirova et al., 2015) that educational institutions spend thousands of dollars on coaching their teachers (Blazar, 2015). However, as coaching programs are scaled up, the variety of implementation methods increases, and effectiveness can dwindle (Schachter et al., 2018). In a recent meta-analysis of coaching effectiveness, researchers found a negative correlation between the size of a coaching program and its effects (Kraft et al., 2018). It seems that large-scale coaching programs are simply less effective than smaller-scale efforts (Blazar, 2020; Kraft & Blazar, 2018). While small-scale coaching continues to be effective (Horner et al., 2019), concern has risen about the lesser effects of large-scale coaching (Kraft & Blazar, 2018). Possible factors influencing large-scale coaching efforts may include the quality of coaches (Breslow, 2017; Connor, 2017; Knight et al., 2015; Kraft & Blazar, 2018) and the coaching methods used (Blazar, 2020; Hui et al., 2020). There is also a gap in the literature when it comes to studying large-scale programs that span multiple content areas, especially beyond literacy (Blazar & Kraft, 2015; Kraft & Blazar, 2017).

Problem Statement

The problem is that large-scale coaching models do not seem to support teacher practice. There is little evidence of effective, large-scale coaching programs that impact teacher practice and student outcomes across contents (Kraft & Blazar, 2017). Coaching brought to a large scale seems to lose effectiveness (Blazar, 2020; Kraft & Blazar, 2018; Kraft et al., 2018). As coaching is scaled up, the variance of implementation and effectiveness increases (Barrett et al., 2024; Schachter et al., 2018). While research documents effective models and features of coaching

programs (McLeod et al., 2017, 2019), studies have been focused mainly on small-scale literacy programs (Blazar & Kraft, 2015). Studying the coaching experiences of instructional coaches in an established and growing large-scale program may reveal ways coaching, especially large-scale implementation, can be improved.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of barriers in established, large-scale instructional coaching programs for full-time instructional coaches at an East Coast Public School District in the United States. At this stage in the research, experiences of barriers in established, large-scale instructional coaching programs will be generally defined as the tensions or problems experienced or perceived by the coaches that interfere with regular coaching activities and formal coaching conversations. The theories that guided this study were Knowles' adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 2015) and the partnership philosophy put forth by Knight (2007) as a theoretical foundation for quality instructional coaching.

Significance of the Study

The findings from the study contribute to the general understanding of coaching along with the methods and features of a large-scale coaching program. This study also adds to the current body of literature, addressing gaps around large-scale programs and coaching in grade levels and contents outside of early literacy. A qualitative approach is an appropriate addition to recent findings of reduced effectiveness in large-scale programs to gain a deeper understanding of coaching experiences. The study also has the potential to benefit the participating coaches, their school district, and the students within.

Theoretical

Coaching has proliferated as a method of choice for improving teacher practice and student achievement (Bachkirova et al., 2015). Because teachers are adult learners working collaboratively with coaches to put professional development into practice, both adult learning theory, as described by Knowles et al. (2015), and Knight's (2007) partnership philosophy apply to this study. Adult learning theory maintains that adults want and need to be treated differently than children to make learning valuable and necessary (Knowles et al., 2015). The partnership philosophy further describes the essential qualities of a successful coaching relationship (Knight, 2007). Studies on coaching have revealed various methods and models (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017; Husbye et al., 2018), especially in large-scale programs (Schachter et al., 2018), which brings variability to the effectiveness of the coaching program (Blazar, 2020). Research points to some common features and identified best practices for instructional coaching (Garrett et al., 2019; Knight, 2019a; Kraft & Blazar, 2018; McLeod et al., 2017). However, even with the use of effective strategies, there seems to be a difference in approaches to large-scale coaching and their effectiveness (Garrett et al., 2019; Kraft et al., 2018). This study adds to current research as it addresses principles of adult learning theory found in coaches' experiences in an established, large-scale coaching program that spans content areas. More specifically, the study focuses on fundamental principles of quality instructional coaching partnerships as they are experienced in a large-scale program.

Empirical

Current research shows that coaching effectively influences teacher practice and student outcomes, but little is known about the effectiveness of specific methods and features of coaching (Connor, 2017; de Haan & Nilsson, 2017). Because coaching is done with such

variability, it cannot be used to address broader issues of teacher practice without displaying a variety of effectiveness (Blazar, 2020). Because there is a difference in the effectiveness of large-scale programs, there is a need to determine what barriers exist in large-scale coaching efforts (Blazar, 2020). Furthermore, there is a need for more qualitative research on coaching because it involves individual, complex contexts that can only be fully described and understood through open-ended exploration (Bachkirova et al., 2015). Coaching is based on relationships and is focused on hearing the voices of teachers and empowering them to make decisions for meaningful change in their practice (Bachkirova et al., 2015). Transcendental phenomenology aligns well with this stance because it focuses solely on the reality of the participants and the essence of their experiences. In the current study, the researcher seeks to describe coaches' experiences in a large-scale program, including those serving all grade levels and all contents, as well as their experiences with some effective coaching principles. In this way, the study adds to the current gaps in coaching literature.

Practical

School divisions are looking for ways to effectively increase teacher quality and implementation of professional learning (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017). This study benefits the participants and the larger school division by highlighting common themes in coaches' experiences in a large-scale program. As participating coaches reflect and describe their experiences with high-quality coaching features, they may discover and articulate new understandings about their own coaching. In addition, the results of this study may prompt division-wide coaching decisions that could influence all teachers, and therefore all students, in the division.

Research Questions

This study is focused on large-scale coaching programs and what might be contributing to a decrease in effectiveness. Using effective coaching principles from Knight's (2007) partnership philosophy for instructional coaching as a foundation, each research question below explores the lived experiences of coaches in a large-scale program. The partnership principles are interwoven in quality coaching (Knight, 2022). While only four partnership principles are named in the research questions below, more might be discussed during the data collection or analysis process.

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of full-time instructional coaches in an established, large-scale coaching program in a large public school district on the East Coast of the U.S.?

Sub-Question One

How do coaches in a large-scale model describe their experiences of relational equality with coached teachers?

Sub-Question Two

How do coaches describe their experiences using reflection in the process of coaching in a large-scale model?

Sub-Question Three

How do coaches describe their experiences of teacher praxis of professional development in a large-scale coaching model?

Sub-Question Four

What are the perceptions of reciprocity experienced by coaches in a large-scale model?

Definitions

1. *Adult learning theory* – Adult learning theory, otherwise known as andragogy, is a set of six principles that distinguish how adults as independent, self-directed individuals learn (Knowles et al., 2015).
2. *Coaching* – Coaching is personalized professional development based on an individual relationship where learning and improved practice are facilitated (Schachter et al., 2018).
3. *Equality* – Equality is the belief that the coach and teacher are equally important, and therefore, the ideas and thoughts are equally valid (Knight, 2007).
4. *Partnership philosophy* – The partnership philosophy is a set of seven principles that clarify the necessary relationship for effective instructional coaching (Knight, 2007).
5. *Praxis* – Praxis is the idea of applying learning to personal practice (Knight, 2007).
6. *Reciprocity* – Reciprocity is the expectation of coaches to learn as much from teachers as teachers learn from them (Knight, 2007).
7. *Reflection* – Reflection is the belief that learning is enhanced with thoughtful consideration of the past, present, and future (Knight, 2007).

Summary

There is much agreement in the literature that coaching is a widely used method of improving teacher implementation of professional learning (Kraft et al., 2018). The models of coaching and the ways coaching is carried out vary greatly, especially as the scale of the coaching program is increased (Schachter et al., 2018). Kraft et al. (2018) found through a large meta-analysis study that the larger the coaching program, the less effective it seems to be. This decline in effectiveness may be influenced by various factors unique to an extensive program.

The problem associated with the current qualitative study is that there has been no exploration of coaches' experiences in a large-scale, multi-content coaching program.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of barriers in established, large-scale instructional coaching programs for full-time instructional coaches at an East Coast Public School District in the United States. Using principles of adult learning theory as described by Knowles et al. (2015) and the partnership philosophy put forth by Knight (2007), this study was focused on the experiences of coaches in a large-scale program. In this study, the researcher sought to explore coaches' experiences regarding equality, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity in their coaching roles.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Teacher coaching has been developed over the last several decades as one of the most promising ways to change teacher practice and influence student achievement (Kraft & Blazar, 2018). Because coaching involves changing the knowledge and behavior of adults, this chapter begins with an overview of the theoretical framework behind coaching, beginning with adult learning theory, known as andragogy. An explanation of the partnership philosophy of Jim Knight (2007) is also offered as a foundational model of effective instructional coaching in education. A review of the related literature reveals why coaching and not traditional professional development is necessary for educational reform and the methods used in the most effective coaching models. Finally, a discussion of recent work in the field suggests that bringing coaching to scale negatively influences coaching effectiveness for teachers and students (Kraft et al., 2018). This review leads to a proposal of how the current study might address a gap in the literature surrounding large-scale coaching programs focused beyond early literacy.

Theoretical Framework

The theories guiding this study are adult learning theory (Knowles, 1979; Knowles et al., 2015) and the partnership philosophy, developed by Knight (2007). Adult learning theory suggests that adults learn differently from children due to their level of independence, self-directedness, and vast knowledge gained through lived experiences (Knowles et al., 2015). Adult instruction must make learning practical and necessary while respecting adult learners as having autonomy over their learning (Knowles et al., 2015). Similarly, the partnership philosophy purports that for instructional coaching to be effective, the coach and teacher must be partners in the process (Knight, 2007, 2022). Seven principles clarify the necessary partner relationship.

They are equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2007, 2022). According to Knight (2007), successful instructional coaching depends upon these principles. The principles that guide this study are equality, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity.

According to Knight (2007, 2022), equality means that the teacher and coach are equally important and valued. Adult learners want to be involved in decisions about their learning and have their experiences and expertise acknowledged (Knowles et al., 2015). Haneda et al. (2019) found that an effective coach positions the teacher as an active professional who can make sound decisions regarding classroom practices. Kho and Ismail (2021) pointed out that because they are often in the position of being observed, teachers might revert to an inferior position, viewing the coach as the expert and authority. This may be especially true with new or inexperienced teachers (Stoetzel & Shedrow, 2021). In an effective coaching relationship, however, neither the teacher nor the coach holds power over the other.

Though not a new concept in coaching theory, reflection is so vital to coaching that it must be included here. Reflection is a common trait in all coaching models (McLeod et al., 2017). Deep thinking occurs in reflection, and reflective teachers are free to accept or reject learning (Knight, 2007, 2022). Stoetzel and Shedrow (2021) distinguished reflection *on* practice from reflection *in* practice, which is more challenging as it requires spur-of-the-moment decisions and adjustments during instruction. Coaches can also benefit from structured reflection as they develop their skills, knowledge, and coaching dispositions (Haneda et al., 2019). Hunt (2019) described the collaborative reflection of coach and teacher as critical to each individual's growth.

According to Knight (2007, 2022), praxis is the application of learning to life. Adult learning theory calls this the orientation of learning, which can be a strong motivator (Knowles et

al., 2015). Praxis allows for immediate practice of the learning, which helps teachers clarify their understanding and receive immediate feedback (Garrett et al., 2019; Melvin & Vargas, 2021). The original goal of coaching was to improve the application of professional learning (Showers & Joyce, 1996), and it continues to be the goal of coaching today.

Finally, the principle of reciprocity states that coaches learn and develop just as much from the coaching interaction as teachers (Knight, 2007). The coach and teacher should learn together as a team (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017). Shared participation in coaching allows both the novice and the expert to learn from each other (Hunt, 2019). In their case study of an effective literacy coach, Pletcher et al. (2019) stated that the coach often situated herself as a fellow learner rather than an all-knowing expert. This co-learning builds rapport and trust, strengthening the coaching relationship (Green, 2024). Having a second person to listen and act as an audience for learning is highly beneficial (Knight, 2022). The learning achieved through this type of partnership coaching seems less likely through self-coaching alone (Knight, 2022).

The research questions guiding this study focus on the principles of equity, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity. As data is collected, special attention will be paid to themes that coincide with these principles and perhaps conflict. Coaches' experiences in a large-scale program will be reported to exemplify these theories and build on them with new perspectives.

Related Literature

To understand how coaches' experiences connect to the above theories, one must first understand what coaching is and why it is essential. A review of recent literature here shows how effective coaching increases teacher knowledge, improves instructional practice, and builds teacher capacity. The literature also speaks to various methods and procedures for coaching,

including a coaching cycle, the soft skills required, and the benefits and drawbacks of coaching through technology. Finally, this literature review considers issues of taking coaching to scale.

While coaching is a broad term used in many fields, including business and medicine, this study is focused on instructional coaching in education. Further, the review of literature here excludes studies dealing exclusively with mentoring, which is different from coaching (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017), and studies focused on higher education or pre-service teachers. The focus here is on instructional coaching for improving teachers and students in K-12 education.

The Need for Coaching

Teacher quality and self-efficacy impact student outcomes (Kho et al., 2019). Professional development (PD) is essential to increasing the education of teachers (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017). However, ordinary professional development is often less effective due to a lack of engagement and a disconnect from teachers' needs (Knight et al., 2018). Traditional PD is often imposed upon teachers (Hu & Tuten, 2021) or viewed by teachers as remediation (Bair, 2017). PD often takes the form of less effective workshops or lectures (Connor, 2017; Kho et al., 2019) that are a one-time attempt to address a topic (Dudek et al., 2018). The focus of traditional PD is usually on structures and routines, not on developing deep understanding (Hunt, 2019), and an expectation for teacher implementation is missing (Melvin & Vargas, 2021).

Effective professional development takes time and a focus on content, collaboration, and consistency (Knight et al., 2018). Alone, professional development is often forgotten or, at best, implemented inconsistently. Coaching can continuously support professional development for improved implementation of learning (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Carson et al., 2019; Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017).

Many coaching practices are based on Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development and sociocultural role in learning (Haneda et al., 2017; Husbye et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018). Rather than dismissing the identity and agency of teachers, the coach leads the teacher through authentic reflection and inquiry about their values, beliefs, and instructional practices (Renn et al., 2023). Vygotsky proposed that effective teaching is done with support at just the right level, which is not too easy or challenging (Parkay et al., 2014). Teaching is a collaborative process (Husbye et al., 2018), even though teachers are often isolated from each other throughout the day. While most teacher practice is done in isolation, instructional coaching provides peer support for real improvement (Turner & D'Eon, 2022). Together, the coach and teacher construct change (Renn et al., 2023).

Hu and van Veen (2020) found in their study of qualities of an effective coaching program that coaching provided teachers with dedicated time with a peer to reflect on instruction, which is something not often found in the everyday experience of teachers. Kho et al. (2019) described effective coaching as a process in which teachers and coaches work side-by-side, mutually agreeing on issues to be improved and learning goals. In addition, Elfarargy et al. (2022) found that instructional coaches can be instrumental to the success of teachers in professional learning communities (PLCs), specifically in creating and sustaining the environment for learning and building teacher capacity for high-quality instruction. Coaches can also support teachers who have made positive changes and are facing institutional barriers to full implementation or spreading successful practices to others (Renn et al., 2023).

Much like teaching models are based on the understanding of human behavior and learning (Parkay et al., 2014), coaching models are built upon knowledge of adult learning. Above all, adult learning theory centers around the need for learning to be relevant and

applicable. This is what Knowles et al. (2015) referred to as the adult's orientation to learning, what Knight (2007, 2022) referred to as praxis, or what Hu and Tuten (2021) referred to as transformative learning.

Coaching is personalized professional development based on an individual relationship where learning and improved practice are facilitated (Schachter et al., 2018). Coaching is not the same as mentoring, where a mentor is viewed as the expert to be followed (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017), so studies focused solely on mentoring have not been included here. Coaching, rather, pairs willing teachers with coaches for cycles of non-evaluative goal setting and feedback. Providing for choice and teacher buy-in is vital (Hu & van Veen, 2020; Hubel et al., 2020; Kraft et al., 2018; Knight, 2019b). Similarly, training coaches to effectively use a strengths-based (Lee et al., 2018), collaborative approach (McLeod et al., 2017) is essential as coaches learn and develop through the coaching process as well (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Husbye et al., 2018). Shelton et al. (2023) suggest that coaches and educational leaders must prepare for coaching implementation by first addressing their own PD. While coaching does not require the coach to be an expert in specific content, there are necessary coaching skills that should be mastered for coaching to be most effective.

Knight (2007) refers to the mutually beneficial nature of coaching as reciprocity. Friendly relationships with problem-solving on an as-needed basis do not provide long-term influence (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017). In the same way, a directive-driven approach to teacher improvement does not bring success (Knight, 2019b). Coaching allows for teacher autonomy as the teacher and coach work together toward meaningful goals (Knight, 2019b). These goals are often geared toward standards for student learning (Carson et al., 2019) as well as teacher development. This autonomy and choice lead to greater teacher motivation (Knight, 2019b).

Increasing Knowledge

Not all teachers have the necessary skills for quality instruction (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017), or at least they have not implemented those skills in the classroom. Some professionals may be content experts but might not have had instruction on effective teaching methods (Turner & D'Eon, 2022). Additionally, there has been an increase in the professional requirements of teachers (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017). For instance, teachers are regularly expected to implement content knowledge and solid literacy instruction, but now must also teach the use of technology and positive social-emotional learning, among other things. Whether experienced or not, teachers do not always know when they need help or may not feel comfortable asking for it (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017).

Teachers are often required to shift practice, which requires professional development that is effectively implemented. This shift can happen using coaching, as was shown in an in-depth case study by Lee et al. (2018). The case study was a detailed, qualitative addition to a larger randomized control trial where it was also shown that teacher learning changed effectively into practice only after coaching was applied (Lee et al., 2018).

In a qualitative study of 34 elementary school teachers and staff, Shernoff et al. (2017) found that a perceived benefit of working with a coach was having another person in the classroom to provide new perspectives. When shared by a trusted colleague, such new perspectives may open a teacher's mind to new ideas and initiate a shift in beliefs and practices. Jung (2019) found that a teacher who is able to improve instructional practice values the coaching relationship and applies that learning to additional classes and grade levels. Walsh et al. (2020) also found that teachers' perception of effective coaching was most positive when goals

were well-defined and professional learning somehow transformed the teachers' instructional practices.

In addition to providing necessary improvement, coaching can be effective when a change in teaching or leadership position might leave even experienced professionals doubting themselves (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017). Through a multi-case study analysis, Damore and Rieckhoff (2021) found that school administrators benefitted from coaching as they sought to improve their interactions with teachers. Mason et al. (2019) used a multiple baseline design study to determine that teachers could successfully coach paraeducators to enhance their classroom performance. Coaching is grounded in adult learning theory (Hu & Tuten, 2021) and can be beneficial in a variety of supportive professional relationships regardless of position or role (Rice et al., 2023).

Through coaching, new learning is built on current knowledge (Haneda et al., 2019; Wetzel et al., 2017). A skilled coach can recognize and engage an optimal level of challenge for a teacher, even a veteran teacher (Walsh et al., 2020), increasing the chance of the teacher putting new learning into practice in the classroom (Hu & van Veen, 2020). Initial professional development is amplified by continued support from the coach (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017).

Improving Practice

The goal of coaching is to improve instructional practice and provide proactive professional training (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017). Hui et al. (2020) conducted a year-long case study with four teachers and four experienced coaches focused on the coaching process, duration, and structure. Through thematic analysis, they found that coaching improved the application and implementation of professional development (Hui et al., 2020). Similarly, in

a multiple baseline design study, Knight et al. (2018) found that teachers implemented significant changes to their instructional practices after coaching.

Lee et al. (2018) conducted an in-depth case study illustrating how coaching transformed teacher learning into practice and built teacher self-efficacy. Haneda et al. (2017) found through an in-depth case study that coaching helped teachers adjust to new curricula or directives, fostering a sense of ownership and relevance. Additionally, student engagement has been shown to increase after coaching (Knight et al., 2018), though other studies have shown minimal impact on student outcomes (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2015).

It is difficult to directly connect teacher development, especially traditional PD, to student achievement (Knight et al., 2018; Kraft & Blazar, 2018). In the case of coaching, though, studies have found that increases in the quality of teacher instructional practices correlate with positive changes in student achievement (Knight et al., 2018; Kraft & Blazar, 2018; Lee et al., 2018; Weiser et al., 2019). Correnti et al. (2021) conducted a study on Online Content-Focused Coaching and found that positive teacher and student improvement is twice as large as the average effect for small coaching programs. In their meta-analysis of 60 studies from the US and other developed countries where the impact of coaching on teacher instruction and student achievement was studied, Kraft and Blazar (2018) found that coaching improved teacher instruction by 0.49 standard deviations and improved student achievement by 0.18 standard deviations.

Unfortunately, no studies link specific coaching methods or features to increases in student achievement. In other words, coaching can improve teacher practice and student achievement, but the exact coaching methods, dosage, or features that bring the most change are still a mystery (Blazar & Kraft, 2015). The most effective methods may also vary based on the

participants, purpose, and context of the coaching relationship (Garrett et al., 2019; Hu & van Veen, 2020).

Teachers are problem-solvers who often rely on trial and error to make improvements (Toll, 2017). The problem with this approach is that even educated guessing can take a significant amount of time to land on a method that improves student learning (Toll, 2017). Without coaching available, teachers may search for alternative support from webinars, books, and various professional development training that may or may not address the teacher's specific issue (Abbott et al., 2024).

A good coaching model should begin with an identified problem preventing effective instruction (Toll, 2017). Coaching then supports a teacher in connecting knowledge with practice (Husbye et al., 2018). The process begins with a change in understanding, constructed collaboratively between the teacher and coach, followed by a change in behavior (Lee et al., 2018; van der Linden et al., 2019).

Building Capacity

The goal of coaching is not to have teachers relying on a coach indefinitely but rather to build the capacity of teachers so that they can coach themselves strategically through deeper learning and improved instruction throughout their careers (Hu & Tuten, 2021; van der Linden & McKenney, 2020). Effective coaching increases capacity and contributes to teachers' abilities and the improvement of skills (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017; Warnock et al., 2022). Coaching begins with the coach leading the process until the teacher feels comfortable taking charge (Wetzel et al., 2017). This coincides with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which empowers teachers and coaches to improve together what cannot be done alone (Hui et al., 2020).

Good coaching is not about the coach being the expert but clarifying the values and strengths of others and building upon them (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017; McLeod et al., 2017). Coaches guide teachers through cycles of reflection, goal-setting, and purposeful planning. While a novice teacher may need a coach to simply provide information or resources, the approach is not sustainable nor beneficial to the long-term development of the teacher (Hu & Tuten, 2021). Costa and Garmston (2017) distinguished this type of approach as consulting, not coaching. Instead, models of coaching where coaches position themselves as trusted peers who are learning alongside teachers build teacher capacity over time (Hu & Tuten, 2021).

Coaching Methods and Procedures

Many of the components of the partnership philosophy are drawn from those of adult learning theory (Stoetzel & Shedrow, 2021), and there is much overlap between the two. In coaching research, the principles of choice, voice, and dialogue are common (Haneda et al., 2017; Knight, 2019b). Other researchers have also described the importance of these principles. McLeod et al. (2017) found that coaching was most effective when focused on the strengths and needs of teachers. Similarly, Schachter et al. (2018) suggested that coaching time be aligned with teacher needs. Haneda et al. (2017) recommended that specific types of dialogue be used strategically to promote teacher ownership and agency. Teachers as adult learners must be included in the learning process as partners, making decisions on how new learning fits into their existing experiences and knowledge to apply their learning to solve real-world problems. Because coaching is, at its core, a way of teaching (Blazar, 2020), the principles of both adult learning theory and the partnership philosophy should be present in an effective coaching program, though perhaps in varying degrees or through various methods. Therefore, these principles serve as the foundation for understanding quality coaching practices.

In an ideal situation, teachers volunteer for coaching once they get to a level of readiness for new learning (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017). This readiness to learn happens when teachers gain a sense of independence and the ability to face challenging issues (Knowles et al., 2015). Hu and van Veen (2020) found that the PD culture of the school may influence this readiness to learn. Whether a school is motivated to improve teaching internally rather than display improved test scores externally, how observation and coaching data are used and reported, and the permissibility of teachers to both volunteer for coaching and remove themselves from coaching can all influence the success of a coaching partnership (Hu & van Veen, 2020). In other words, teachers need to be able to trust that the coaching is confidential and aimed solely at facilitating the teachers' thinking and application of new learning. Hui et al. (2020) suggested clarifying the roles of both coach and teacher and explaining the coaching process to teachers before they agree to participate.

School divisions may determine an approach to coaching to produce the most significant possible gains for teacher development. Approaches and practices may vary depending on the context of the school system (Hannan & Russell, 2020). Some educational divisions may hire specifically trained coaches to fill a formal coaching role, while others might use coaching as a strategy one teacher can use to support a peer (Rice et al., 2023).

Similarly, some educational divisions may use coaching exclusively to raise the achievement of low-performing schools, while others take a more equal-opportunity approach. Using statewide data from Tennessee, Hunter & Redding (2023) found that the only coaching programs in the state were in low-performing schools but that coaches were working with high-performing teachers. It was unclear whether these teachers were high-performing because of the coaching program (Hunter & Redding, 2023). Hui et al. (2020) stated that instructional coaching

across Malaysia was targeted at teachers in underperforming schools in 2017. By 2019, the focus had pivoted, and instructional coaching was provided to teachers in leadership positions within their schools (Hui et al., 2020). This shift in approach is necessary as teachers develop, but educational leaders must clarify teachers' understanding of the changes so that any stigma associated with the early coaching model is avoided as the practice changes (Woulfin & Spitzer, 2023).

There is agreement in the literature that coaching is good and impacts student learning positively, but there are a variety of approaches to its implementation (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017; Husbye et al., 2018; Nugent, 2023). The approach to coaching may vary based on the measurable goal collaboratively constructed by the teacher and coach (Knight et al., 2015). Therefore, a coach may use different techniques throughout the coaching process (Husbye et al., 2018).

Woulfin (2018) found that variations in coaching methods and priorities happened even within the same school division where coaches were given similar messaging about the intended focus of PD. Schachter et al. (2018) found that coaching effectiveness is difficult to determine, especially when coaching is only sometimes focused on specific professional development or the coaches cover professional development unevenly. Such variation may be attributed to the individualized nature of coaching. Indeed, even the defined role of a coach varies depending on the context of the educational institution (Hannan & Russell, 2020). Kho et al. (2019) described the guidelines of an official coaching program as including a split of the coaches' time among coaching activities, providing training, developing reports, and other administrative work. Still, it could also be that inexperienced coaches focus first on the easiest fixes, which may not be the areas of greatest need (Schachter et al., 2018).

The quality of coaching matters (Knight et al., 2015), and developing quality coaches is an investment (Breslow, 2017). Coaches must be trained appropriately to deliver the most effective and efficient support possible. They must have a thorough understanding of effective instructional strategies and be able to facilitate a teacher's implementation of such practices (Turner & D'Eon, 2022). While conversations and goals set during coaching sessions are unique to the individual teacher, there are topics like increasing student engagement or improving vocabulary instruction that seem more common for which coaches can prepare (Renn et al., 2023).

As a coaching model is scaled up, say for an entire school district, the variance of implementation and effectiveness increases (Kraft et al., 2018). Sometimes, coaching practice may not always match the intended vision (Hui et al., 2020). Appropriate training of coaches and the structures used is vital for coaching success (Knight et al., 2018) and must include both explicit instruction in adult learning and continued support for the implementation of adult learning practices (McLeod et al., 2019). Although most coaches have teaching experience, they may not have the knowledge or experience to conduct organizational reform or even lead PD (Kho et al., 2019). Because so much of the coaching relationship depends on the individuals participating, it is also essential to assess the values and assumptions a potential coach may have about teaching and learning (Haneda et al., 2019).

According to Robertson et al. (2020), there are other aspects of coaching that the research suggests matter in terms of coaching efficacy. The amount of time spent in coaching sessions and the frequency of those sessions make a difference (Hu & van Veen, 2020), although there is no evidence as to how much exactly is required to achieve positive results (Robertson et al., 2020). Nugent et al. (2023) explained that the length of coaching time can be adapted to the needs of the

teacher being coached. Those teachers who needed more support were afforded more coaching time (Nugent et al., 2023).

However, it is not so much the amount of time; the types of activities within a coaching session matter (Nugent et al., 2023). Successful coaching tends to include co-planning, reflection on the lesson, and various forms of in-classroom support (Robertson et al., 2020). However, a regular coaching relationship using these methods does not guarantee improved teacher practice or a positive influence on student learning (Robertson et al., 2020).

A good coaching model should be well-planned, start with teacher interest, and use data appropriately (Toll, 2017) to focus on student learning (Knight et al., 2015). From the coach's point of view, a coaching mindset focuses on active listening, posing open-ended questions, and allowing the teacher a safe place to contemplate (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017; Nugent et al., 2023). The coach may assess the development level and experience of the teacher, and together with the teacher, they identify areas for improvement (Hui et al., 2020). While consulting might be necessary for novice teachers who may not have the resources or experience to draw upon, coaching allows teachers to direct their thinking, guided by the coach's moves (Pletcher et al., 2019).

Kho et al. (2019) found that in their study of ten experienced instructional coaches, the coaches shifted between three main roles—implementer, advocate, and educator—depending on the context of the coaching session. As implementers, coaches completed coaching cycles focused on content standards with the teachers, fulfilling their officially defined role. As advocates, they supported teachers' pedagogical knowledge and practices in friendly, non-threatening ways. As educators, coaches directly share knowledge and act as a resource to teachers (Kho et al., 2019). This educator role equates to a consultant, providing answers rather

than acting as a guide. If coaches choose this role as part of their coaching methods, it is essential that they continue to build their knowledge base and stay on top of the latest information available rather than continuously relying on their former teaching experiences (Kho et al., 2019).

There is agreement in the literature that a strengths-based approach to coaching is most effective (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017; Knight et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2018; Wetzel et al., 2017). As new learning builds upon existing knowledge, new practice should build upon what a teacher already does well. In a coaching relationship, teachers often perceive themselves as subordinate to the coach as they compare their practices with the ideal and look to improve (Kho et al., 2019). Coaching can focus on content but is usually more focused on student learning and teaching practice (Wetzel et al., 2017). Renn et al. (2023) described how coaching may focus on changing the content teachers cover but is more often used as a process to change the way teachers apply the content through instructional strategies. In other words, coaching is not concerned as much with the *what* of teaching but rather the *why* and the *how*.

Coaching Cycle

It is widely agreed upon that the coaching process is a cycle with at least three stages: a) the pre-observation conference, b) the observation of a lesson within the classroom, and c) a post-observation conference, though some formats call for additional procedures (Carson et al., 2019; Haneda et al., 2017; Hu & van Veen, 2020; Hui et al., 2020; Kho & Ismail, 2021; Knight et al., 2015, 2018; Nugent et al., 2023; Wetzel et al., 2017). While many teachers feel uncomfortable being observed (Carson et al., 2019; Husbye et al., 2018), observation is necessary to assess current practices and implement new learning (McLeod et al., 2017). Coaches can assuage the discomfort of observation by reminding teachers that their role as a

coach is nonevaluative and purely supportive in nature (Hu & van Veen, 2020; Knight, 2019b). Even administrators who coach their teachers for instructional improvement can ease this tension by keeping the teacher, the teacher's reflection, and the teacher's goals at the center (Kho et al., 2019; Stark et al., 2017).

Sometimes administrators must serve as both a coach supporting teacher development and an evaluator of teacher performance. Stark et al. (2017) explained that school leaders are positioned to do both but must be supported to do so. When developing a teacher through coaching, the focus must be on teacher improvement through reflection and choice, trust, and a strengths-based approach (Stark et al., 2017). Nugent et al. (2023) found in their study of 53 teachers taking part in virtual coaching that the amount of reflection provided to teachers increased as time went on while the amount of direct feedback from the coach decreased. These adjustments suggested that prolonged coaching increased teacher capacity, which would be vital for long-term teacher improvement (Nugent et al., 2023). Hu and Tuten (2021) also discussed the importance of an inquiry approach and the administration's support to allow for self-directed teacher growth.

Teachers often use video recording for documentation and reflection because it brings teachers back to the actual events in the classroom (Wetzel et al., 2017) presented from a different perspective. Carson et al. (2019) found that video provided an objective picture of teacher-student interactions that teachers might not have initially remembered or noticed, and a video recording allowed teachers to pause and deeply study the events. Furthermore, Stoetzel and Shedrow (2021) stated that teachers could gain more from reviewing recordings with more experienced peers than doing so alone, significantly when coaches strategically limit the focus of analysis.

Video recordings or student work also act as an indifferent third point for non-judgmental discussion and feedback (Husbye et al., 2018; Knight, 2019b) that defines the coaching role (Wetzel et al., 2017). Student achievement data can also serve this function, making suggestions for improvement less subjective and decreasing the chance of teachers becoming defensive. It is also essential to clarify the coach's role ahead of time (Woulfin, 2018) so that involved teachers and administrators alike understand the expectations and opportunities of working with a coach (Miller et al., 2019; Woodward & Thoma, 2021).

Although the stages of the coaching cycle are varied and flexible, Wetzel et al. (2017) found that additional time between the observation and post-conference allowed for individual reflection and more effective dialogue during the post-conference. If possible, the coaching cycle should not be completed in one day. In their mixed-methods study of 66 elementary teachers, Abbott et al. (2024) described the influential coaching practices that increased knowledge and confidence in writing instruction. These practices included consistent feedback and guidance through all stages of the coaching cycle, collaboration through check-ins and updates, and sharing instructional strategies and resources (Abbott et al., 2024). Haneda et al. (2017) described the teacher’s mindset during the coaching cycle as starting with skepticism, moving in small steps toward hypothetical use of new learning and strategies, and finally, repeated use and reflection on new practices. Change takes time, and an effective coach allows teachers time to plan, practice, and adapt new teaching strategies.

Conversely, time during a coaching session must be used effectively. Hui et al. (2020) found that time within the coaching process was not always used purposefully or efficiently, resulting in less effective coaching. This may be due to requests for unrelated support or sideline conversations. Regardless, time must be provided for open communication and adequate

reflection (Husbye et al., 2018). Reflection allows teachers to look closely at their instruction and notice patterns (Wetzel et al., 2017). Improving self-awareness from reflection can be vital to building self-efficacy (Brinkmann et al., 2021). This type of reflection might happen directly after the lesson, after a review of a recorded lesson, or both (Husbye et al., 2018). In addition, coaches must take time for self-reflection on their coaching practices to improve their craft (Bates & Morgan, 2018).

In instances when teachers become stuck in their thinking, coaches should know some high-yield strategies to share. Coaches must explain and model the new strategies precisely to ensure understanding (Knight et al., 2015). Glover et al. (2023) also found through a study of 16 instructional coaches that coaches providing time during coaching for teacher practice of new learning and skills correlated with greater implementation of new teacher learning and greater student achievement in both reading and math.

For those who can, co-teaching can be a valuable method of coaching support, especially for in-the-moment issues around classroom management, questioning techniques, and lesson pacing (Stoetzel & Shedrow, 2021). No matter when they are shared, coaching strategies should be purposeful and impactful (Schachter et al., 2018) and focused on specific lesson planning (Witherspoon et al., 2021). Finally, each coaching cycle ends with an action plan for the next cycle (Wetzel et al., 2017) or a decision to end coaching (Knight et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2018). The determination to continue or not should be a collaborative decision based on the teacher's needs.

A common practice in coaching is using conversation structures or protocols (Lofthouse, 2019). This is not to say that effective coaching should follow a script or a one-size-fits-all approach. However, especially for novice coaches or administrators new to the use of coaching

for teacher development, language prompts may be helpful, particularly at the beginning (Stark et al., 2017). Lee et al. (2022) observed sustained improvement in teacher knowledge and attitude in a repeated measures study of 26 elementary teachers who received coaching from either a peer elementary coach or a high school coach, using a specific coaching protocol, regardless of the coach's grade level. A quality coaching protocol can add a layer of support for teacher improvement (Lee et al., 2022). As the teacher and coach develop their relationship over time, the coaching approach may rely less and less on the prompts of the coach and more on the teacher's self-reflection (Nugent et al., 2023; Stark et al., 2017). A structured, formal relationship might also happen between a coach and multiple teachers in a PLC (Elfarargy et al., 2022). Renn et al. (2023) found that teachers who had experienced successful development through coaching wanted to share their learning with their team members or PLCs. Shelton et al. (2023) found that teachers given a choice in coaching structures selected PLCs as the most positive.

Soft Skills

To be effective, a coach must provide a safe, open environment for communication and learning (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Coaches do this through soft skills such as listening, establishing trust, and structuring constructive conversations (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Coaching is collaborative (Wetzel et al., 2017), which means coaches must work well with others, regardless of personality or style differences. Coaches must also be ready to work with teachers who might feel vulnerable or defensive (Finkelstein, 2019). After all, it is challenging to tell teachers they need to change without making them feel inadequate (Rice et al., 2023). Considering the increased pressures and demands on teachers, quality coaching may include trauma-informed support and a general focus on teachers' well-being (Brown, 2021).

Kho et al. (2019) found in a sample of ten effective instructional coaches that valued coaching qualities included being understanding, appreciative, flexible, and patient. Kurz et al. (2022) found that a sample of 27 full-time coaches showed a correlation between certain workstyle attributes and the implementation of high-quality coaching behaviors. Specifically, coaches who showed more effort, initiative, concern for others, self-control, and adaptability were better coaches (Kurz et al., 2022).

Open communication practice is also critical (Husbye et al., 2018). Haneda et al. (2017), in their case study of the interactions between a kindergarten teacher and her coach, described the importance of collaborative inquiry, respectful relationships, and open communication, especially strategically-used dialogue, to promote teacher ownership and agency. A coach who shows the teacher respect implies confidence and confidentiality (Kho et al., 2019).

Good communication is achieved both verbally and nonverbally. According to Knight (2022), coaches must question effectively, listen attentively, and show teachers that they care and are trustworthy. Effective questions focus on the teacher and their goals for improvement (Knight, 2022). This outcome focus helps generate ideas and moves the conversation forward as teachers gain clarity and determine possible options (Knight, 2022). Good coaches do not lead teachers to a pre-determined realization but rather probe for understanding, facilitating a journey of thought.

Effective communication also entails attentive listening. Coaches must focus on understanding not only what the teacher is saying aloud but also what they are communicating through nonverbals (Knight, 2022). The coach must put aside internal distractors like assumptions, predictions, and irrelevant questions (Knight, 2022), as well as autobiographical connections, questions for the sake of personal curiosity, and solutions (Costa & Garmston,

2017). Like the questioning approach, the goal of listening is to understand, not reply (Knight, 2022).

Good coaches build relationships intentionally and must have the skills to do so (Breslow, 2017). McLeod et al. (2019) conducted a mixed-methods study of 49 coaches, 947 teachers, and 189 administrators in a state-funded pre-K program and found that being able to build trusting relationships and having open communication are skills fundamental to effective coaching. Such skills promote a safe environment where teachers can try new things, reflect purposefully on their practice, and effectively receive feedback (McLeod et al., 2019; Nugent et al., 2023). Emotional safety provides the optimal state of low stress even as teachers work with highly challenging thinking (Dolcemascolo & Hayes, 2018). While this emotional and relational work of instructional coaching and the toll it may take on coaches is not always recognized, it is necessary to support teachers effectively (Rice et al., 2023). High-quality coaches can gauge the level of teacher comfort and readiness for change and adapt their coaching strategies accordingly (Kho et al., 2019).

Coaching via Technology

Over the last ten years, there has been an increase in technology resources in schools (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017), but those resources are not always provided equally. Even virtually, teachers in low-income areas may not have adequate access to regular coaching. Technological online coaching requirements include cameras, microphones, computers, cloud-based software, appropriate bandwidth, secure data storage, and privacy protocols (van der Linden et al., 2019). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, more teachers and schools have implemented adequate technology for teachers to communicate with coaches virtually, but quality coaching also includes classroom observation.

Multiple researchers have found that teachers often find being watched uncomfortable, but the value of the feedback from observation is worth the process (Carson et al., 2019; Husbye et al., 2018). In their case study of four sets of cooperating and preservice teachers, Wetzel et al. (2017) found that recording in the actual classroom was more effectively done by the coach because there was often more happening than what showed on the camera, and a second person could focus with intention. Despite this, Weiser et al. (2019), in their quasi-experimental study of 44 teachers of students with reading disabilities, found that most teachers, 93% of teachers in their study preferred to video themselves when possible.

Drawbacks. Because of the prolonged timeline and necessary access to experienced coaches, coaching can cost more than traditional professional development (Knight et al., 2018). In addition, some experts feel that while most teachers voluntarily develop technological skills and are comfortable using computer tech, electronic communication cannot fully replace face-to-face relationships (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017). A study by Carson et al. (2019) found that challenges with online coaching included being unable to co-teach, developing relationships, seeing, and hearing students through video recordings, and a lack of opportunity for real-time feedback during observed lessons. In a study done by Knight et al. (2018), video was used for documentation and discussion, but coaching was done in person.

The type of communication used makes a difference in coaching relationships. Communication may be done via email, but real-time chats via phone or video calls allow for more apparent emotion, immediate conversation, and stronger bonds (Sull, 2019). At the same time, one must acknowledge that increasing technology does not ensure learning or improved practice (van der Linden et al., 2019). Because technology is the primary avenue for instruction in a distance learning environment, it would benefit teachers to have access to technology

facilitators who are well-versed in the technical specifications and functional applications of technology for instruction (van der Linden et al., 2019).

Benefits. Teachers in rural areas may not have access to coaches, and technology bridges that gap (Carson et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018). Better access to technology can lead to more opportunities for coaching, which can influence more teachers and, subsequently, more students (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017; Myers & Washburn, 2022). E-Coaching allows teachers to meet with knowledgeable coaches, regardless of location (van der Linden et al., 2019). Through e-coaching, there may be an opportunity for a combination of synchronous and asynchronous work (Carson et al., 2019). Teachers and coaches can easily share materials and work when it is convenient or even work simultaneously on lesson plans and reflective annotations (Lee et al., 2018). Schachter et al. (2018) found that 22% of traditional coaches' time was spent on administrative tasks such as scheduling appointments, an area that might well be improved in an online environment.

Effective coaching procedures might already be developed and commonly practiced, and e-coaching is a way to make that process mobile and accessible to all (van der Linden et al., 2019). In their study of online coaching, Lee et al. (2018) saw an increase in long-term teacher confidence and improved student outcomes over time after e-coaching, though one wonders about the direct correlation to coaching. In their quasi-experimental study involving over 25 schools and over 450 students, Weiser et al. (2019) found that all coaching methods positively influenced student learning, but e-coaching was most effective compared to on-site or on-demand coaching. It should be noted that this study had no control group and tested only literacy skills in students with disabilities.

In another study of in-person coaching versus live e-coaching conducted by Vernon-Feagans et al. (2015), student outcomes were equal, but teacher efficacy and the fidelity of implementing the required professional development was higher with the group receiving live coaching via webcam. E-coaching can be practical, convenient, interactive, and sustainable (Lee et al., 2018). Also, because no travel time is involved, e-coaching is more efficient and can be much cheaper than in-person coaching (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2015; Weiser et al., 2019). Unfortunately, even post-pandemic educational leaders are hesitant to rely on virtual PD and coaching despite its highly personalized nature (Myers & Washburn, 2022).

Taking Coaching to Scale

There is agreement in the current literature that coaching is effective (Blazar, 2020; Bradshaw et al., 2018; Connor, 2017; Correnti et al., 2021; Kraft & Blazar, 2018). Coaching has been shown to positively impact teacher practices and student achievement (Kraft et al., 2018). However, there is a difference between coaching on a small scale and coaching on a large scale. According to Kraft and Blazar (2018), who conducted a meta-analysis of coaching studies and their levels of effectiveness, coaching loses effectiveness when taken to scale. In their meta-analysis, Garrett et al. (2019) found that smaller benefits were shown in studies that included more than 100 teachers in a coaching program. The more teachers are involved, the more coaching effectiveness declines (Kraft & Blazar, 2018). Large-scale coaching can still produce positive effects, but on average, at about half the levels of small-scale efforts (Blazar, 2020). Piasta et al. (2020) conducted a large-scale, randomized, controlled study where coaching had a negligible impact on teacher instruction and no effect on student outcomes.

McLeod et al. (2019) found that the impact of large-scale coaching may be affected by coaches carrying large caseloads across large areas, reducing the time available for each

coaching interaction. Similarly, Hui et al. (2020) found that coaches assigned from a high level who were supporting multiple schools were not able to complete coaching cycles as quickly as coaches working in only one or two schools. To complete coaching cycles at a pre-determined rate, coaches with large caseloads might feel pressured to reduce the time spent with individual teachers, skim over what might otherwise be a deep conversational topic, or omit portions of the coaching cycle altogether (Hui et al., 2020). Large caseloads may also force coaches to work with groups of teachers in PLCs rather than individually (Shelton et al., 2023)

A large-scale coaching program requires a group of quality coaches who can meet the diverse needs of a large division (Kraft et al., 2018). There must be enough qualified coaches and funding to support them and continue their professional learning (Kraft & Blazar, 2018). School districts must ensure that coaches are trained in any specific reform initiatives (Woulfin, 2018) as well as coaching skills, including planning a coaching cycle, developing teacher interventions, building rapport, eliciting teacher reflection, and setting collective goals for improvement (Hui et al., 2020). Coach development should include not only what strategies to use with teachers but also when to use them (Nugent et al., 2023). Hannah & Russell (2020) explained that quality coaches in both small- and large-scale contexts valued peer collaboration and professional development opportunities to support and develop their coaching practices.

Teacher buy-in may also influence coaching success (Kraft & Blazar, 2018; Kraft et al., 2018). de Haan et al. (2020) found that a coached person's willingness to be coached may contribute more to the effectiveness of coaching than the specific techniques the coach uses. In a larger division, efforts for program implementation and coaching are often pushed down to the teachers from the division level with little regard for teacher buy-in. When coaches are stretched between priorities and teachers disregard coaching, the chance for professional learning and

organizational improvement is lost (Woulfin, 2020). When coaching is imposed, teachers can lose trust or feel exposed and vulnerable (Lofthouse, 2019). Teachers who are asked to participate in coaching may equate such a request with admittance of ineffectiveness and offer resistance (Finkelstein, 2019). Blaushild et al. (2024) suggest that coaching must include a focus on teacher wellbeing, which is best when it is flexible and can be adapted to provide personalized support for teachers.

To increase teacher buy-in for coaching, the goals for learning must be student-focused and matter to the teacher (Knight et al., 2015). People are not motivated by the goals of others in a one-size-fits-all approach (Knight, 2019b). A teacher's questions must be valued (Bates & Morgan, 2018), and a valuable dialogue must be entered to bring authentic learning and change (Lofthouse, 2019). Coaching conversations must begin with the coach understanding the teacher's perspectives so that work might begin toward collaboratively agreed-upon goals (Hui et al., 2020). Collaborative language, i.e., using "we" when planning, can increase rapport, trust, and a feeling of connectedness between teacher and coach (Nugent et al., 2023). This is especially important as coaches challenge persistent teacher values of privacy and individuality (Woulfin, 2020).

Because coaching is tailored to the unique situation of the teacher, coaching may look different depending on the context of the district and school environments (Hannan & Russell, 2020). Coaches in large districts may have competing interests between focusing on teacher practice and focusing on more comprehensive organizational policies (Blazar, 2020; Woulfin, 2018). Competing educational contexts might include school-level expectations, district-level reform initiatives, and prevalent recommended methods of instruction (Hunt, 2019).

The caseload of a coach also makes a difference (Hannan & Russell, 2020; McLeod et al., 2019). Coaches may wish to improve an individual teacher's practice, but they are expected to influence many teachers and must split their time and energy accordingly. Large-scale coaching programs are also likely to be more standardized, which decreases a coach's flexibility in tailoring instruction for teachers (Kraft & Blazar, 2018). Hannan & Russell (2020) described a greater sense of autonomy felt by coaches in rural or school-based contexts rather than in a large district-level capacity. It should also be mentioned that districts with large programs might focus on state assessment data to gauge coaching effectiveness rather than more precise measures aligned to teacher goals or desired professional learning (Correnti et al., 2021).

Large-scale coaching programs must be intentionally designed and supported by school divisions and the teachers therein (Woulfin et al., 2023). Solidifying definitions of roles, setting clear goals, and utilizing commonly understood protocols and activities increase the likelihood that coaching becomes institutionalized and permanent (Woulfin, 2020). When coaching becomes ingrained in the culture of a school division, teachers perceive it as normal and even desirable (Woulfin, 2020).

Taking coaching to scale may mean developing coaches from expert teachers within the school division (Kraft & Blazar, 2017). Such an effort requires tremendous investment but could pay off in the expertise such coaches would have in the division's unique nature. According to Horner et al. (2019), large-scale implementation is more likely to be successful if the first, smaller-scale effort is successful. In other words, school divisions must start small, keep what works, change what doesn't work, and expand from there. Another suggestion is to start with those teachers and schools who are most willing to participate in targeted coaching rather than expanding the program in a blanket fashion (Kraft et al., 2018). In any case, it has yet to be seen

whether a large-scale coaching program can retain the effectiveness found in smaller coaching efforts (Kraft & Blazar, 2018).

There is evidence that coaching is an effective way to translate professional learning into improved teacher practice and student achievement (Bradshaw et al., 2018; Connor, 2017; Correnti et al., 2021; Kraft & Blazar, 2018; Woulfin, 2020). Based on this, coaching use has dramatically increased throughout educational institutions, even without evidence that links specific coaching features or methods to improved results (Bachkirova et al., 2015; Glover et al., 2023; Kurz et al., 2020). Coaching continues to take many forms, including independent coaching, internal coaching, and coaching that is integrated into traditional PD and offered to school leaders and teachers (Lofthouse, 2019). Most research on coaching effectiveness has been done up until now in the field of early literacy (Blazar & Kraft, 2015). Moreover, current research points to an issue with large-scale coaching programs: they seem substantially less effective than smaller programs (Blazar, 2020). There is a gap in the literature regarding large-scale coaching programs that address multiple contents, especially outside of literacy and coaches' experiences within those programs. More must be known about what is happening in large-scale coaching programs, particularly those working across contents, and what barriers might exist to improving teacher instruction and student achievement (Blazar, 2020).

Summary

Coaching requires teachers to become learners, focusing on improving their practice. According to Knowles' adult learning theory, teachers need a certain level of independence and self-directedness in their professional learning (Knowles et al., 2015). Knight's partnership philosophy specifies the essential principles of a quality coaching relationship, including equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2007, 2022).

Effective coaching is necessary because traditional PD is ineffective in changing teacher practices or influencing student success (Kraft & Blazar, 2018). Coaching is not mentoring. While coaching and mentoring both provide connection and personalized feedback (Sull, 2019), mentoring offers a novice teacher an expert example to follow (Kovalchuck & Vorotnykova, 2017). Coaches position themselves as fellow learners (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017; Bates & Morgan, 2018; Husbye et al., 2018) with a specific focus on interaction (Toll, 2017).

Coaching may be implemented in various ways, but coaching must be flexible to build relationships and address teachers' individual needs (Schachter et al., 2018). For the greatest effectiveness, coaching relationships should be consistent and supported by regular visits (Hui et al., 2020), whether in person or online. While coaching is effective in changing teacher practice and influencing student outcomes, taking coaching to scale is problematic as returns diminish the larger the program grows (Kraft & Blazar, 2018). There is a gap in the literature regarding large-scale coaching programs that address multiple contents. Coaching programs must be intentionally designed and supported so that the impact of such an effective method of educational improvement can be leveraged across grade levels, contents, and any school division.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of barriers in established, large-scale instructional coaching programs for full-time instructional coaches at an East Coast Public School District in the United States. While coaching improves teacher practice (Hui et al., 2020), coaching seems to lose effectiveness when brought to scale (Kraft et al., 2018). There is a gap in current research regarding large-scale coaching programs used across contents (Kraft & Blazar, 2017). This chapter outlines the transcendental phenomenological research design and the research questions that guided the study. The setting, participants, and the researcher's position on the study are described. The chapter continues with an explanation of procedures for data collection and analysis of personal interviews, journal writing, and a focus group; the procedures followed for verifying trustworthiness; and a chapter summary.

Research Design

Qualitative studies allow for the exploration of themes and meaning while empowering participants to share their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is an appropriate approach for studying participants in a natural setting, collecting multiple forms of data, discovering new perspectives, and creating a holistic picture of a problem where the variables are not easily measured (Creswell & Poth, 2018). On the other hand, a quantitative study would have been inappropriate due to its goal of discovering a singular truth through measurement and collecting numerical data (McMillan, 2022). This study on large-scale instructional coaching was best addressed with a qualitative approach because it was an exploration of the experiences and voices of coaches in a large-scale program. These experiences are important and might clarify

the complex problem of coaching effectiveness in an otherwise unstudied context.

Phenomenology is a type of research approach that seeks to describe the lived experiences of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021). The purpose is to determine the meaning or essence of the experience or phenomenon for the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Other types of qualitative research would have been less appropriate for exploring the essence of large-scale coaching. For instance, ethnography focuses on the culture of a group (McMillan, 2022; Peoples, 2021), and a case study focuses on the lived experiences of a select participant rather than the themes found across participants to uncover the essence of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). Grounded theory studies are used to generate a theory based on participant data (McMillan, 2022), which was not the focus here. The goal of this study was not to analyze or explain the phenomenon or the participants' experiences with it but rather to describe it in detail so that the experiences and phenomenon could be better understood by others (van Manen, 2016).

The tenets of transcendental phenomenology, or empirical phenomenology, began with Husserl, who was influenced by Descartes, at the turn of the 20th century (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) further developed and clarified the theory and procedures for its use in research. The transcendental approach requires the researcher to count all participant experiences as valid because the subject of study is not the reality or opinions of the researcher but the perceived reality of the participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher needs to set aside common understandings of phenomena, what Husserl and Moustakas (1994) called epoché, and remove themselves from the focus of the study, what Moustakas (1994) called intersubjectivity so that they can discover the experiences of participants in a nonjudgmental, naive manner (Creswell &

Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994), setting aside personal beliefs and attitudes that might stand in the way of discovery (van Manen, 2016). This meaning is to be derived directly from experiences, not from the researcher's presuppositions or assumptions (Moustakas, 1994).

In comparison, hermeneutic phenomenology states that a researcher is always part of the participants' world and cannot be removed or set aside, as Heidegger called Dasein (Peoples, 2021). Hermeneutic research methods include interpreting an understanding of the phenomenon through the lenses of one's own biases and revising that understanding in a cyclical process as new information is discovered (Peoples, 2021). Hermeneutic phenomenology was not used in this study because the focus was on the descriptive experiences of the participants alone.

The use of transcendental-phenomenological reduction, which involves perceiving the phenomenon freshly as if for the first time, allows the researcher to create a textural description of its essence (Moustakas, 1994). The use of imaginative variation, a way of allowing for infinite possibilities, aids the researcher in creating a structural description of what the phenomenon might mean in the current context (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then combines these descriptions into a synthesis of the phenomenon's essence, a detailed description of the participants' experiences, and what those experiences mean in the greater context (Moustakas, 1994).

The transcendental approach was appropriate for this study because the goal was to explore the possible barriers coaches might perceive or experience as a phenomenon of coaching in a large program across multiple content areas. A transcendental phenomenological approach follows a systematic method of setting aside preconceptions, so the researcher is entirely open to hearing the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). I used this epoché approach, especially during the data analysis procedures where the focus was on giving voice to the experiences of the

participants and the meaning of those experiences.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of full-time instructional coaches in an established, large-scale coaching program in a large public school district on the East Coast of the U.S.?

Sub-Question One

How do coaches in a large-scale model describe their experiences of relational equality with coached teachers?

Sub-Question Two

How do coaches describe their experiences of using reflection in the process of coaching in a large-scale model?

Sub-Question Three

How do coaches describe their experiences of teacher praxis of professional development in a large-scale coaching model?

Sub-Question Four

What are the perceptions of reciprocity experienced by coaches in a large-scale model?

Setting and Participants

The setting and participants for this study were selected for the purpose of the site, and participants are connected to an established, large-scale coaching program. In this way, the research questions above could be explored.

Setting

The setting for the study was River Ridge Public Schools (RRPS), a large public school

district on the East Coast of the U.S. where coaching is prevalent. The school district serves around 83,000 students in 98 schools (RRPS, 2022). Out of over 12,000 employees, 137 are full-time instructional coaches/facilitators with coaching duties - 47 in specialized roles through the special education department and 90 school- and division-based instructional facilitators and coaches (RRPS, 2022). The setting was chosen because the district has a large, established coaching program across multiple subject areas and a strong focus on making coaching part of the district and school culture. The district regularly offers coaching training for coaches, school leadership, and teachers. This setting allowed me to address the research questions with instructional coaches who have experienced coaching in an established large-scale program.

Participants

The intent was to select a total of 14 participants from a pool of approximately 130 full-time instructional coaches. While Guest et al. (2006) recommended approximately six to 12 participants in qualitative research, the goal must always be to achieve a high quality of thematic saturation. Maximum variation sampling is a method used to thoroughly explore the experiences and saturate the themes found in those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A total of 14 participants would allow for six school-based instructional facilitators (two at elementary, two middle, and two high), six division-based instructional facilitators (two at elementary, two middle, and two high), one division-based instructional facilitator in the special education department, and one instructional coach from the mentoring and coaching office. In addition, participants must have served in their coaching role for at least one year. This purposeful sampling of participants across all levels and positions would allow for multiple perspectives and the possibility of additional themes in data analysis (Campbell et al., 2020). The researcher would be assured that an ample number of participants are included when no new themes appear

in data analysis (Guest et al., 2006).

Recruitment Plan

All full-time instructional coaches in the district were invited to participate. An emailed invitation (see Appendix A) provided basic information about the study, the expectations of participants, and instructions on volunteering for the study. Potential participants completed a Google Form screener (see Appendix B) linked to the invitation, stating their willingness to participate, and providing basic qualifying information. The recruitment plan allowed for demographic information to be used if an excess of potential participants for each category had volunteered.

Researcher Positionality

My roles as a reading specialist, instructional facilitator, and principal ignited a passion for coaching as a tool for instructional improvement. Philosophies contain assumptions about reality, knowledge, and how one discovers or constructs knowledge (Aliyu et al., 2015). These beliefs form a worldview, or paradigm, that shapes research and consequently must be clarified (Aliyu et al., 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Within a paradigm are principles that define the researcher's worldview and, therefore, the researcher's interpretation of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). These principles include methodology, ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework ascribed to this study is social constructivism. Reality depends on the people involved and the context in which they find themselves (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The aim of this study is to understand the world of instructional coaches in RRPS. It was predicted that there would be a variety of views from the participants, and for the experiences of those participants to be understood, their views alone had to be considered (Creswell & Poth,

2018). The meaning gained about coaching in a large-scale program came through interaction with the coaches who experienced it.

Philosophical Assumptions

The researcher's philosophical assumptions guide the study's direction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and can bias a researcher's data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ontology answers the question of how one defines reality and truth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Epistemology answers the question of what can be known and how (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Axiology answers the question of what is valuable and ethical (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and how the researcher can go about that discovery ethically (Aliyu et al., 2015). My ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions are described below.

Ontological Assumption

As a Christian, I hold a belief that truth is absolute and unchanging because it comes only from God. However, it is also believed that the concept of reality is different from truth. Reality is connected to perspective and, as such, can be present in different ways for different people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, multiple participants were asked to share their realities - their experiences - in various ways. Some had similar views of their experiences with large-scale coaching, while others experienced that same phenomenon differently. Collecting data through various methods ensured a more thorough understanding of each participant's reality.

Epistemological Assumption

Qualitative research is, in its nature, subjective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I hold the epistemological assumption that a person's experience is knowledge worth learning. For that reason, getting as connected as possible to the experiences of the participating coaches is beneficial. It was desired that participants work within a natural setting and that extended periods

be spent with them as interviews and other data collection were conducted. The methodology was inductive and able to change as more was learned about the participants and their experiences.

Axiological Assumption

In this study, I used Moustakas' process of epoché (Moustakas, 1994) to separate my own experiences with large-scale coaching from the study. As a former teacher and reading specialist with nearly 20 years of experience in education at all levels, I also worked in RRPS as an instructional facilitator in the Division of English Learners. The work of other instructional coaches and facilitators in the school district was valued and respected with an openness to understand their coaching experiences, good or bad. It was understood that the realities of teachers and coaches can differ tremendously based on grade level, school assignment, caseload, and more.

Because of the researcher's familiarity with and former position in the River Ridge coaching program, an assumption could be made that preexisting rapport was advantageous. Establishing rapport supports open communication and better qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher also holds a biblical worldview that urges treating other people with respect and compassion approaches that directly influenced the work of this study.

Researcher's Role

I do not have personal relationships with any of the prospective participants nor a position of authority over any of them. Though I am familiar with the training of coaches and the general coaching program of the school district, my former position was outside those included in this study. I worked as the only instructional facilitator serving teachers of English learners at the secondary level. In contrast, the coaches included in this study were focused on supporting

specific schools, teachers of certain contents, teachers of students in special education, or teachers who require improvement to maintain employment. The role of the researcher when considering the transcendental phenomenological design is as the human instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that only a human can grasp, evaluate, and adjust to the multitude of possible realities that might be encountered during data collection. In this study, I acted as the human instrument, an outsider making meaning from the participants' experiences and examining them with fresh eyes. Utilizing epoché to set aside my own experiences and biases, following procedures set forth by Moustakas (1994), freed the study of preconceptions and personal, similar experiences.

Procedures

In this section, the steps used to conduct the study are outlined reasonably enough to replicate the study from these descriptions. This explanation includes necessary site permissions, information about securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, soliciting participants, the data collection and analysis plans by data source, and an explanation of how the study achieves triangulation.

The study first gained approval from the appropriate IRB and RRPS. Once approved, all eligible potential participants, specifically all full-time instructional facilitators and coaches in RRPS, were invited via email to participate (see Appendix D. Potential participants were screened for qualifying criteria (see Appendix E) and categorized by position: school-based instructional facilitators at each school level, division-based instructional facilitators at each school level, specialized instructional facilitators in the special education department, and instructional coaches in the mentoring and coaching office. If an excess of participants had volunteered, they would have been selected based on demographic information (see Appendix

H) for maximum variation to fill the 14 spots. Each participant was provided with Informed Consent (see Appendix G).

Personal interviews with each of the 14 participants were conducted via recorded Google Meet calls. After each interview, each participant was asked to complete a journal entry in the following weeks immediately following a regular coaching session with a teacher. Participants were provided with a list of prompts for the journal entry (see Appendix I) and asked that the participant submit the writing via email to me as data. After most data had been collected and analysis had begun, participants were invited to participate in a focus group. The focus group discussion was conducted via Google Meet for the convenience of the participants. Interview and focus group questions were reviewed to ensure clarity. Interviews and the focus group meeting were recorded within the Google Meet platform, and the researcher created and maintained personal notes and memos.

Data Collection Plan

For the participants' experiences to be adequately described, clear and consistent communication must be established (Moustakas, 1994). I planned to build rapport with participants so they feel comfortable sharing all aspects of their experiences and their personal feelings connected to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Data for this study was collected via three methods, starting with personal interviews with each participant. All interviews were recorded for video and audio through the Google Meet platform. At the end of each interview, participants were invited to complete a journal writing in the following weeks immediately following a regular coaching session with a teacher. Participants were instructed to return the journal entry to the researcher via email. Finally, participants were invited to participate in a

focus group where preliminary themes and extraordinary experiences were to be discussed. The focus group discussion was recorded via Google Meet for ease of transcription and data analysis.

Individual Interviews

With all qualitative research, interviews should be a major source of collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews should be open-ended and conversational in nature so that misconceptions can be cleared along the way (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews with broad, open-ended questions are vital to phenomenological research, allowing participants to share their experiences deeply (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In this study, personal interviews with each participant were the first data collected. Interviews were appropriate in this study as the voices of instructional coaches who have experienced coaching in a large-scale program were most important. Interviews were conducted with each participant at a time and place of their convenience, preferably in a location that provides privacy for confidentiality's sake.

It was preferred that all interviews take place in person, but live videoconferencing was required due to physical logistics. Because telephone or voice-only interviews impede the building of rapport and reading of nonverbal cues (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), they were only to be used if no other alternative method was possible. Interviews were recorded for video and audio so that the sights and sounds might be revisited for data analysis. Notes were also taken during each interview. Each interview was expected to take approximately 45 minutes to complete, though the length would vary due to the informal and open-ended nature of the interview (Moustakas, 1994). Interview questions covered all four research questions, general background information, and the participants' general experiences with coaching.

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we had just met. CRQ
2. How did you get to where you are today as an instructional coach? CRQ
3. Please describe your philosophy of coaching. CRQ
4. How do you view your relationship with a teacher you are coaching? CRQ
5. What are your experiences with equality in your coaching? SQ1
6. Talk to me about your experiences with reflection in your coaching. SQ2
7. What experiences have you had helping move teachers forward? SQ3
8. What experiences have you had with helping teachers put learning into practice? SQ3
9. What benefits have you experienced from the coaching relationships you have? SQ4
10. What have been your biggest challenges and biggest successes in coaching? CRQ
11. How has the large scale of River Ridge's coaching program affected you and your coaching? CRQ
12. What advice would you give to a new instructional coach in a position similar to yours? CRQ
13. What else about coaching in a large-scale program is important for me to know? CRQ

Questions one through three are background introductory questions designed to introduce the participant and put the participant at ease. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest using these types of questions to help the participant feel confident and to build a relationship of trust between the researcher and the participant. Question three deals with the participant's beliefs about coaching and perhaps the specific model of coaching used regularly by the coach. Because coaching models and methods vary greatly (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017), the participant's definition of coaching should be clarified.

Knight (2007) suggested that effective coaching is dependent upon seven principles. The research questions in this study focus on four of the seven: equality, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity. Questions four and five target the idea of equality in the coaching relationship. Question six deals with the principle of reflection. Questions seven and eight target the principle of praxis, and question nine is the principle of reciprocity. Questions 10 through 12 address the participant's view of effectiveness and practice specific to a large-scale coaching program. Question 13 is a final one-shot question that allows the participant to add any thoughts that were not covered in the prior questions.

Journal Prompts

After the interview, participants were asked to voluntarily complete a written journal entry immediately following a coaching session. The journal entry included a general reflection on the coaching practice as well as prompts regarding the participant's thoughts on the principles of equality, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity in their coaching. These first-person accounts would add to a more thorough understanding (Moustakas, 1994) of the large-scale coaching experiences of the participants. Written directions for the journal entry were provided, including definitions for the four principles (see Appendix I). The journal writing was meant for participants to reflect on the experience of coaching and the coaching principles while the experience was still fresh in their minds. This immediacy enhances the validity of the data (Moustakas, 1994). The journal entry also allowed the participants to freely share their own words through a different medium.

Table 2

Journal Questions

1. Please reflect in writing on your coaching practice today. CRQ

2. What were your experiences with equality (balance of power, value, and importance) in your coaching today? SQ1
3. What were your experiences with reflection in your coaching today? SQ2
4. What were your experiences with praxis (teachers putting learning into practice) in your coaching today? SQ3
5. What were your experiences with reciprocity (getting as much out of the relationship as the teacher does) in your coaching today? SQ4

Question one allows participants to freely reflect on their coaching perceptions and experiences, which correlates directly to the central research question. Questions two through five correlates to each of the sub-questions sequentially. These questions encourage participants to focus their responses on each chosen principle, ensuring a more thorough journal artifact.

Focus Group

To confirm and expand on identified themes found in the interviews and journal entries, a focus group of willing participants was moderated at the end of the data collection process (Patton, 2015). While all participants were invited to volunteer for the focus group, the group was kept small to allow all individuals to participate fully and all voices to be heard (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The focus group allowed for questions about preliminary themes emerging from the earlier data and unique thoughts or experiences shared by participants in interviews or journal entries. The format of this focus group was kept conversational to create a comfortable climate where participants could share their thoughts and experiences honestly (Moustakas, 1994).

According to Krueger and Casey (2015), focus groups are appropriate when the researcher wants to elicit group perspectives or needs the group to further clarify or explain data collected earlier. Researchers using focus groups should put participants at ease to feel

comfortable enough to freely speak about their feelings and experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The focus group for this study met at a time and in a convenient location for the participants, and efforts were taken to create as private a setting as possible, though the participants were reminded of the non-confidential aspect of the focus group. The focus group was recorded for audio and video, and notes were taken during and after the discussion.

Table 3

Focus Group Questions

1. Let's begin by introducing ourselves. Please state your name, where you coach, and your favorite hobby outside of work.
2. What is the first thing you think of when I say "coaching?" CRQ
3. What are the essential qualities of a coach in a large-scale program? CRQ
4. How does the importance of equality in coaching match up with your coaching experiences? SQ1
5. How does the importance of reflection in coaching match up with your coaching experiences? SQ2
6. How does the importance of praxis in coaching match your coaching experiences? (Praxis is putting learning into practice.) SQ3
7. How does the importance of reciprocity match up with your coaching experiences? (Reciprocity is expecting to gain just as much from the interaction that your coached teachers do.) SQ4
8. How might coaching in River Ridge Public Schools be different from coaching in a smaller school division? CRQ
9. What else about coaching in a large-scale program should I know? CRQ

Question one is an opening question that asks participants to spend a short amount of time stating facts about themselves. Such questions are easy to answer and allow everyone to speak, increasing the likelihood that every participant will engage in subsequent discussions (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Question two asks participants for a personal perspective on coaching. This allows participants to build rapport around a non-threatening question and practice respectful discussion norms as they build upon each other's thoughts. It is crucial to begin with an introductory question that allows participants to describe their experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Question three is a transition question that begins to steer the conversation toward the heart of the research (Krueger & Casey, 2015). This question invites participants to share their ideas about effective coaching openly as they increase their rapport with each other and discover alternate and valid perspectives.

Questions four through seven deal directly with the four coaching principles selected from Knight's (2007) Partnership Principles. These key questions relate directly to the studied research questions (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The questions are worded so that participants are free to discuss any of their experiences with the principles. Because questions ask for personal experiences, participants can give insight without feeling there is a correct answer to the question. Question eight asks participants to think of their coaching in light of the size of the coaching program, a key component of this study. Question nine is an ending question (Krueger & Casey, 2015) that allows for any additional discussion on previously covered or unspoken topics.

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) described the importance of horizonalizing data so that every piece would be treated as equally valuable. The data for this study, collected from participants in the

form of individual interviews, journal entries, and a focus group, were analyzed by horizonalizing and honoring the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Each piece of data was analyzed separately and then as a piece of the whole description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

After completing at least half of the participant interviews, a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological analysis provided by Moustakas (1994) was used. The process began with full transcripts of each interview being highlighted for significant statements of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). A list of all nonrepetitive statements was then created, and memos were used to identify and organize statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994). This process was repeated until all interviews were complete and all themes had been identified. A textural description of the experience was constructed from the transcribed interviews' identified themes, memos, and meaningful statements (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation, which allows for the multiple contexts of the data and many possible meanings, was used to create a structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, a synthesized textural-structural description of the essence of the experience was constructed using the previously written descriptions, memos, and original interview data (Moustakas, 1994).

Journal Entry Data Analysis Plan

Journal entries were analyzed using a similar approach as the one used for the personal interviews. A modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological data analysis was followed to record significant statements, list nonrepetitive meaning units, cluster units into themes, and synthesize these into a textural description of the experience (Moustakas,

1994). Imaginative variation was then used to create a structural description of the coaching experience before synthesizing all journal data, memos, and themes into a textural-structural description of the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Focus group responses were analyzed using a similar approach to those used for the personal interviews and journal entries. The focus group discussion was transcribed, and significant units were highlighted (Moustakas, 1994). The modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological data analysis was followed to record significant statements, list nonrepetitive meaning units, cluster units into themes, and synthesize these into a textural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation was then used to create a structural description of the coaching experience before a synthesized textural-structural description of the essence of the experience was constructed using the descriptions, memos, and original focus group data (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Synthesis

The data from interviews, journal writing, and the focus group were then synthesized into a cohesive, overarching description of the phenomenon as experienced by the group of participants (Moustakas, 1994). Each piece of data was treated as equally valuable, utilizing what Moustakas (1994) called horizontalizing. Transcripts from all interviews, journal entries, the focus group, and all memos created by the researcher and the themes established from them were reviewed. At that point, some data was transformed so that the value of the participants' words was made clear about the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2012). Moustakas (1994) calls this a textural description. Using imaginative variation, a structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994) was written, which was then used to clarify the research data (Giorgi, 2012). The

researcher bracketed these descriptions, which Moustakas (1994) called phenomenological reduction, solely relying on the participants' voices to guide the analysis.

Data and descriptions of the data were verified with the participants, allowing them to review, confirm, or change the data as desired to accurately reflect their perceptions of the experienced phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the descriptions were integrated into a composite of the phenomenon's essence for the group of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) that reflected the essence of coaching in a large-scale program. Such data analysis procedures, paired with the setting aside of the researcher's beliefs and presuppositions, allow others to understand not only the participants' experiences but also the meaning of those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Once a composite description was constructed, the researcher debriefed with an expert in the field to verify the findings.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research, though determined through different methods, is no less important than that of quantitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study is deemed trustworthy through specific methods that enhance the research's credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Both the data collection and analysis were carefully planned and executed for maximum value.

Credibility

Credibility is the confidence one has that the research findings truthfully reflect the participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established through data triangulation, participant audits of the data analysis, prolonged engagement in the field, and expert debriefing. Findings were triangulated through interviews, journal writing, and focus

group data collection methods. Moustakas (1994) suggested that participants be invited to review, clarify, or confirm data to align with their perceptions of the experience.

In this study, willing participants were presented with the transcripts of their interviews or focus group discussions and descriptions of their experiences to verify an accurate reflection. The analysis could have been altered as necessary based on the feedback given. Prolonged engagement in the field was used to ensure the saturation of themes in both the interviews and focus groups. After a synthesized description of the experience was constructed, an expert in the field was consulted to verify the accuracy of the data analysis.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability to apply the findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Detailed descriptions of the setting and context of the study were provided so that readers might determine similarities to other situations. Thick descriptions of the participants' experiences were also provided. In this way, appropriate transferability of understanding from them was ensured.

Dependability

Dependability is the confidence one has in the consistency and repeatability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The dependability of this study was ensured through clear, rich descriptions of the procedures so that other researchers, even at the novice level, might be able to replicate it. Furthermore, the dissertation committee conducted an inquiry audit through a thorough review of the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the notion that the findings are free from researcher bias and shaped solely by the participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability of the

study was ensured through an audit trail, triangulation of data collection methods, a reflexive journal, and member checks. An audit trail is a document that tracks all decisions about the data, making the process transparent (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All procedures, data collection, and analyses were well-documented through recordings, transcripts, notes, and memos. The previously described triangulation of data collection methods was used to provide thick data, and participants were invited to do member checks on the transcribed data as well as the identified themes and research findings. The researcher kept a reflexive journal to verify the procedures, analyses, and conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), in any study, the welfare of the participants must be of the utmost concern. Creswell and Poth (2018) categorize ethical concerns into three categories: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. The considerations and protections for this study's participants are described below.

Permissions

The author of this study addressed respect for persons by first obtaining approval for the study from the IRB of Liberty University (see Appendix A). Permission was also gained from RRPS (see Appendix C) using the prepared request form (see Appendix B). The researcher also protected participants' privacy by replacing all names with pseudonyms, including the school division, schools, participants, and any other individuals discussed by participants. All participants were given an informed consent form (see Appendix G) and advised of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. Focus group participants were notified of the non-confidential nature of their participation and discussions in the focus group with other group members.

Other Participant Protections

Concern for welfare was attended to through assessing and protecting participants from unnecessary risk (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As included in the consent form (see Appendix G), this study had no inherent risk associated with it. Justice was also present through fair and equitable treatment of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All eligible participants were recruited similarly and had an equal chance to participate in the study. In the event of an excess of eligible participants, demographic information would have been used to provide maximum variation in the sample. All data containing personally identifiable information was stored securely (Creswell & Poth, 2018) on a password-protected cloud. The researcher will keep all data for three years after the study is complete before being destroyed.

Finally, it was ensured that there was no power imbalance among the participants present. No vulnerable populations were involved in the study. True and honest accounts of participants' descriptions were disclosed and checked by participant verification and audit trails for the validity of data and data analysis.

Summary

This study was focused on instructional coaches' experiences in a large-scale program. The methods of this study included an intentional selection of participants who were full-time instructional coaches in a large-scale coaching program. Participants were invited to complete one-on-one interviews and journal entries. Participants were able to volunteer for a single focus group, and some were involved in member audits of the data analysis. The data collection methods were triangulated by comparing interview transcripts, journal writings, and focus group transcripts. Data analysis was verified through member checks and a clear and thorough audit trail. The researcher's experiences and biases were set aside through epoché (Moustaks, 1994) so

that an accurate description of the experiences of coaches in a large-scale program was provided through a transcendental phenomenological approach. All data was and will be kept secure and confidential to protect the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of barriers in established, large-scale instructional coaching programs for full-time instructional coaches at an East Coast Public School District in the United States. This chapter includes detailed descriptions of the participants, themes that emerged from the data, outlier data, and the answers to each research question as determined from the data. The study findings are presented here as valid representations of the coaching experiences of the participants within a large-scale coaching program.

Participants

After contacting the 149 instructional facilitators and coaches currently employed at RRPS, only one immediately responded. I repeated the request for participants to the group while also implementing a snowball method with the first participant. Eventually, 10 participants comprised of instructional facilitators and coaches at both the division and school levels serving teachers at the district's elementary, middle, and high schools were gathered. Information about the participants is listed in Table 4. Every participant took part in a one-on-one interview. Five of the ten completed a journal entry immediately after a coaching session with a teacher, and two participants took part in an optional focus group. A description of the participants involved is noted below.

Table 4

Participants

Participant	Role	Years of Experience in Education	Years in Current Role
Christina	DIF (EL) - MS/HS	12	2

Josie	SBIF - ES	10	3
Shannon	DIF - HS	13	3
Brenda	DIF - HS	19	2
Rachel	Div. Coach (EL)	19	6
Janice	Div. Coach - ES	20	7
Steven	DIF (Eng/Read) - HS	34	2
Andrea	DIF (Eng/Read) - MS	16	4
Kathryn	DIF (EL) - K-12	17	2
Sandra	SBIF - MS	23	4

Note. DIF stands for Division Instructional Facilitator. SBIF stands for School-Based Instructional Facilitator.

Christina

Christina is a Division Instructional Facilitator (DIF) in the Division of English Learners, working to support teachers of English Learners (ELs). Her role is set so that she would support all EL teachers at the middle school level. However, a vacancy in the high school role has meant that she is now supporting EL teachers at both the middle and high school levels. Covering both roles equates to a caseload of 17 schools with over 60 teachers. Christina had 10 years of teaching experience before becoming an instructional facilitator and holds degrees in secondary math and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This is Christina's second year in her role.

Josie

Josie is a School-Based Instructional Facilitator (SBIF) working in one of the division's Title I elementary schools. She is open to supporting any and all of the 55 teachers at her one school and has established herself at the school as a trusted leader. Josie had seven years of teaching experience before becoming an instructional facilitator. She decided to change roles

after some frustrating experiences led her to believe she could do the job better. This is her third year in her coaching role.

Shannon

Shannon is a Division Instructional Facilitator (DIF) in the Division of Professional Learning. She works at the high school level and has four schools assigned to her. Shannon served as a mentor for several years, which started her passion for coaching. She credits a positive relationship with a prior instructional facilitator as the push she needed to move to being an instructional facilitator herself. Shannon had ten years of teaching experience before becoming an instructional facilitator; this is her third year in her role.

Brenda

Brenda is also a Division Instructional Facilitator (DIF) in the Division of Professional Learning. She also works at the high school level, but has only one school assigned to her. This is a unique situation and is due to the fact that the high school is the only Title I high school in the district and has a high level of support need. Brenda had 17 years of experience as a classroom teacher and reading specialist before becoming an instructional facilitator. She has her doctorate and describes herself as a lifelong learner. This is her second year in her coaching role.

Rachel

Rachel is a Division Coach for EL in the Office of Mentoring and Coaching. She works with secondary novice EL teachers and those who are on official plans of improvement as a condition of employment. When she was a new teacher, she was not given a coach. She found that others had a deficit mindset of her abilities, which drove her to want to do better for other new teachers. Rachel had 13 years of teaching experience before becoming a coach to make a

bigger impact beyond one classroom or school. Her current caseload includes 41 teachers at 14 different schools. This is her sixth year in her coaching role.

Janice

Janice is a Division Coach in the Office of Mentoring and Coaching. She works with elementary novice teachers and those who are on official plans of improvement as a condition of employment. She is currently working with 43 teachers across 20 elementary schools. She had years of experience not only as a classroom teacher but also as a cooperating teacher for practicum students and teacher candidates, and she was a mentor. When she moved to RRPS, she was not assigned a mentor and became determined to support others the way she would have wanted to have been supported. This is her seventh year in her coaching role.

Steven

Steven is a Division Instructional Facilitator in the Office of Secondary Reading and English. He works with high school English teachers at all of the district's 20 high schools. Steven had 32 years of experience in education prior to this role, and he holds his Ph.D. in the education field. He has served as a teacher, building administrator, college professor, high school department chair, and supervisor for student teachers. He is well aware that his level of education and years of experience set him apart from others in similar jobs or doing similar work. This is Steven's second year in his instructional facilitator role.

Andrea

Andrea is also a Division Instructional Facilitator in the Office of Secondary Reading and English. She works with middle school English teachers at all of the district's 17 middle schools, which equates to a caseload of around 200 teachers. Andrea was a career switcher, moving to education after working in the corporate world. She had 12 years of teaching experience before

becoming an instructional facilitator. It was a natural move for her as she was already acting as a literacy coach to support curriculum implementation alongside her teaching duties. This is Andrea's fourth year as an instructional facilitator.

Kathryn

Kathryn is a Division Instructional Facilitator in the Division of English Learners. She works with teachers across all levels, K-12, at any of the 100 schools in the district, and she is especially focused on supporting teachers who work with ELs. Kathryn had 15 years of teaching experience as a general education teacher in a high-EL population school and then as a part of the inaugural staff at the district's alternative high school. She wants to share her instructional knowledge and make an impact across the district. This is her second year in her instructional facilitator role.

Sandra

Sandra is a School-Based Instructional Facilitator working in the district's only Title I middle school. She had 19 years of experience in teaching and coaching before coming to her current role. Sandra was a math coach in both public education and various math curriculum support programs. Her coaching skillset was expanded through her variety of experiences. This is Sandra's fourth year in her instructional facilitator role at RRPS.

Results

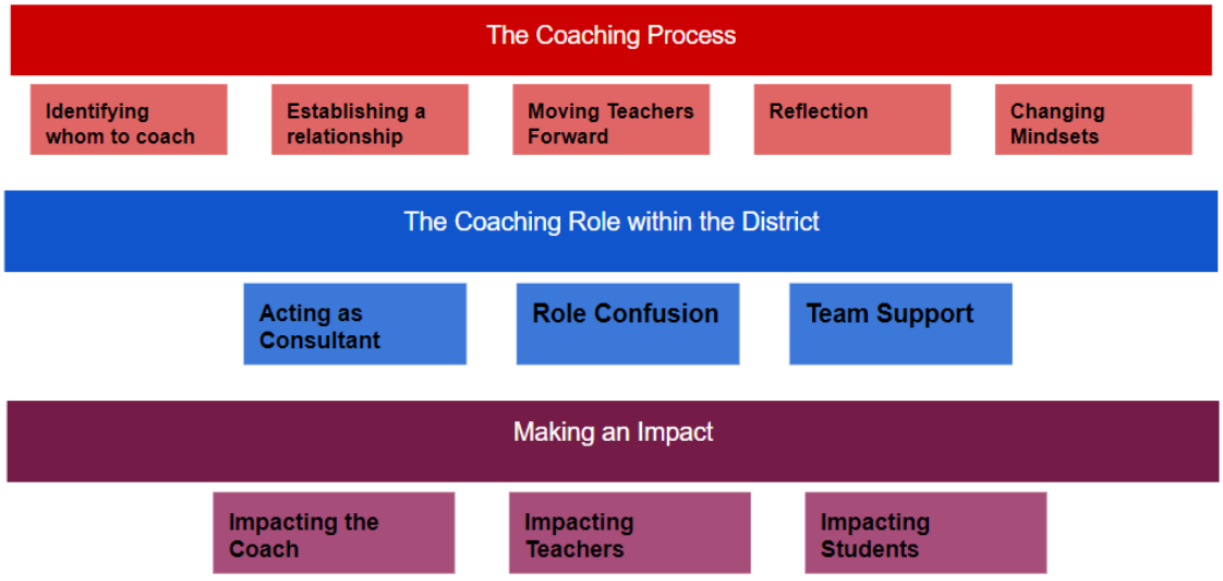
The purpose of this section is to further clarify the process the researcher followed in analyzing interviews, journal entries, and the focus group discussion. The following explains how the researcher applied the analysis steps previously described. The analysis process for each data type is described in detail.

Individual Interview Results

Each participant was interviewed individually about their experiences with coaching in RRPS. The transcribed interviews were analyzed according to the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method described by Moustakas (1994), and significant statements were highlighted and organized into themes. An example of initial theme emergence is provided in Figure 1. A textural description was constructed for each interview, followed by a structural description using imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). These were then synthesized into a textural-structural description. This process was repeated for all interviews. The description, researcher memos, and interview data were then used to confirm themes for the individual interview data.

Figure 1

Emergent Interview Themes



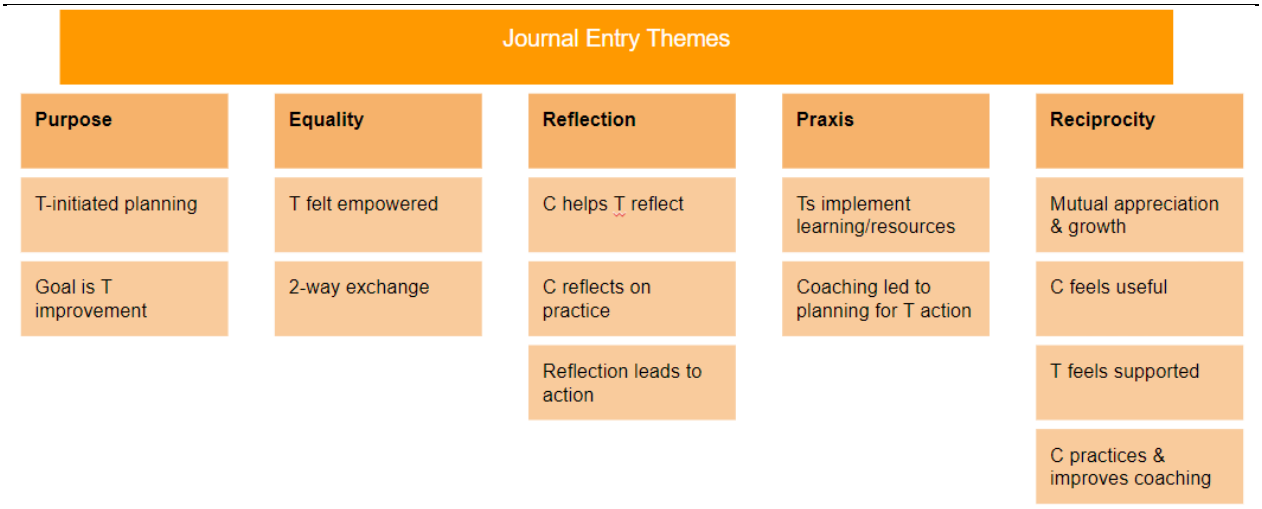
The interview data was robust and varied. However, the meaningful data units could be organized into three themes: the coaching process, the coaching role within the district, and making an impact. Each theme was saturated, and no new themes emerged during the final few interviews.

Journal Entry Results

Each participant was asked to complete a journal entry soon after conducting a coaching session. Five of the 10 participants completed and submitted their journals. Each journal entry included five prompts/questions. The written journal entries were analyzed using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method described by Moustakas (1994), and significant statements were highlighted and organized into themes. An example of initial theme emergence is provided in Figure 2. A textural description was constructed for each interview, followed by a structural description using imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). These were then synthesized into a textural-structural description. This process was repeated for all journal entries. The description, researcher memos, and interview data were then used to confirm themes for the individual interview data.

Figure 2

Emergent Journal Themes



Note. "T" refers to teacher; "C" refers to coach.

While each participant had a unique coaching experience, some common themes arose from the data provided in the coaches' journal entries. The themes that emerged from the journal

entries were: purpose, equality, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity. These themes aligned with the journal prompt questions, and the participant explanations provided further insight and clarification.

Focus Group Results

Every participant was invited to participate in a focus group discussion. Three participants agreed to join, but only two showed up on the day in question. The researcher moderated the discussion, encouraging participants to talk to each other and build off each other's points rather than taking turns answering each question separately. Nine questions were posed to the group.

The focus group discussion was transcribed, and significant units were highlighted and clustered into themes. An example of initial theme emergence is provided in Figure 3. A textural description was constructed for the focus group discussion, followed by a structural description using imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). These were then synthesized into a textural-structural description. The description, researcher memos, and interview data were then used to confirm themes for the focus group data.

Figure 3

Emergent Focus Group Themes

Focus Group Themes							
C in Action - Ideal vs Reality	**Essential Qualities**	**Equality**	**Reflection**	**Praxis**	**Reciprocity**	**Large Program**	**Improvements**
T goals, finite options, district goals	Common training	Differing perceptions of equality and purpose	Vital to conversation structure	Process is difficult	Learning/Growth	Lack of consistency	Large caseloads
Group CLTs, co-teaching pairs, 1:1	Common understanding of role	Coach, Teacher, Admin	Vital to learning	Vulnerability	T learns in moment, C learns between sessions	Many to communicate with	Many underserved
Full cycles, touch points	Open communication		Vital to relationship	Modeling w/gradual release		Many to lean on, divide the work	Understanding the role
	Flexibility in approach			Ready-to-Use Resources		Common goal	

Note. "T" refers to teacher; "C" refers to coach.

In comparison to the individual interviews and journal entries, the focus group provided more parallel themes of equal importance. The themes that emerged from the focus group were: coaching in action – ideal vs. reality, essential qualities of a coach, equality, reflection, praxis, reciprocity, the large program, and improvements needed. These themes were especially valuable to the overall data analysis because of the conversational nature of the focus group, where participants were able to add on to each other's thoughts and clarify their messages.

Themes

Based on the data from all sources, the researcher was able to synthesize and identify six themes within two categories. The emergent themes identified early in the data analysis process are listed above. These early themes were analyzed further with participant quotes, researcher memos, and textural-structural descriptions to arrive at six main themes organized into two categories: the coaching process in a large division and the coaching role in a large division. Table 5 displays these categories, and the themes associated with them: the coaching process is varied, reflection is vital, coaching relationships take effort to establish, there are differing

perceptions of the coach's role, there is an agreed-upon purpose for coaching, and there are many benefits of coaching.

Table 5

Categories and Themes

Category	Theme
The Coaching Process in a Large Division	The coaching process is varied.
	Reflection is vital.
	Coaching relationships take effort to establish.
The Coaching Role in a Large Division	There are differing perceptions of the coach's role.
	There is an agreed-upon purpose for coaching.
	There are many benefits of coaching.

The first three themes relate to the coaching process. These themes arose when exploring the experiences and perceptions of the instructional coach and teacher interaction. The remaining themes relate in a broader sense to the coach's role as perceived by the coach.

The Coaching Process Is Varied

Coaches work with teachers at their school(s) or across the division. Six participants spoke about determining whom to coach and prioritizing their support. Brenda explained in her interview that "it feels a little bit like triage." Shannon suggested that coaches need to "find teachers who want to grow, who want to work on their practice, who recognize that working on their practice as an educator is even a thing." In RRPS, some coaches work with teachers one-on-one, and others work mainly with CLTs. Some rely on data collection as a foundation for coaching conversations while others utilize classroom observations or follow up after

professional development sessions. Some coaches complete full coaching cycles, while others help teachers plan for action and then have to walk away, maybe getting back in time to reflect on how the new approach went. Many coaches are stretched thinly across large caseloads of teachers while others are stretched beyond their coaching roles into other tasks and positions, and sometimes both.

Adhering to a Process

The RRPS coaches are offered similar training and follow a similar process when providing formal coaching. Kathryn reflected in her interview, "When I first got into this position, I was like, 'Let me tell you what I've done and tried,' and tried to kind of showcase that, and that was not the right approach." The formal coaching process includes observation, open-ended questioning to promote reflection, mediating thinking, and building the capacity of teachers so that coaching is no longer necessary. Rachel wrote in her journal entry, "I see my role as facilitating their thinking and providing them time to reflect." However, like many coaches, Rachel manages a large caseload of teachers. She shared in her interview, "Most of the time, I do a classroom visit, and we do a reflection after, and then I'm going to come back probably like a month to six weeks later, which is not ideal." In contrast, Brenda, who works at just one school, explained:

> When we looked at the cycle, we realized that most of the time, people were getting through just the first stages of the cycle and then walking away and going into another school… I'm in a good position in my building to be able to go through the full cycle with people. I think that that really supports teachers to fully build their capacity and not just get them thinking.

With a focus on adult learning, coaches prioritize having teachers identify their own goals. Six participants mentioned offering options and choices to teachers. In the focus group discussion, Rachel reflected that giving more choice has "been a change in really thinking about what their needs are and seeing them as that equal and that they're able to identify what those needs are."

Adjusting as Necessary

While a formal coaching cycle is beneficial, many coaches find that they have to adjust to provide support to teachers. This support includes supporting PD implementation, working with groups rather than individual teachers, and providing resources and ideas to those who are in urgent need or are otherwise stuck. Christina works with mainly groups of teachers focusing on PD or curriculum implementation. In her interview, she remarked, "I see myself as just available to them on whatever level they need at the time."

In RRPS, the coaches are trained in the difference between coaching and consulting. Steven said in his interview that when he was trained as a coach in the district, he "was struck by the not telling them (teachers) what to do." He continued:

> I feel like I try to balance those things because you have someone who is really lost, and you're just asking probing questions and trying to get them to figure it out on their own… they may not really have the tools to do that.

Coaches also feel the pressure of splitting their time among so many teachers with immediate needs. Christina mentioned this urgency and desire for resources several times in her interview and the focus group. However, in her interview, Janice reflected on this practice in her time as a mentor, saying:

> We didn't have much time to sit and plan together, so I would just give them stuff and explain to them why I did it, but I felt like that was really hard because I was not increasing their efficacy, just putting Band-Aids on it.

Rachel clarified in her interview that when she works with career-switchers who might lack the general knowledge of other teachers, she tries to start with facilitating their thinking, but some "do need more consultation and to be told, 'This is what you do.'" Josie also explained in her journal entry that she "went into consulting mode" when a teacher seemed stuck but "should have asked for permission" before trying to solve the teacher's problem.

Reflection Is Vital

When asked about what role reflection plays in their coaching, every participant spoke about reflection being vital to growth and change both for teachers and coaches trying to improve their practice. In her journal entry, Andrea explained:

> Reflection played a crucial role in our coaching session… This reflective dialogue allowed us to delve into the nuances of instructional practices, teaching strategies, and student engagement. By actively engaging in this reflective process, the teacher gained a deeper understanding of his teaching methods and was able to identify specific areas for growth. This reflective component not only enhanced the teacher's self-awareness but also guided our collaborative planning for future lessons.

Several participants spoke about teachers not having or taking the time to reflect regularly, and coaching provides that. In her interview, Sandra shared, "Reflection is a way to organize your thinking, what worked and what didn't work, and how to improve practice." When pressed for time, Sandra emphasized, "If I have to cut something, it's never the reflection. I always have that as sacred time."

Coaching Relationships Take Effort to Establish

All 10 participants mentioned the effort it takes to build trusting relationships for successful coaching. Steven stated in his interview that coaches need to "build relationships first" because "that's the foundation of everything else." Sandra explained in her interview that core beliefs and values play a part in developing relationships and that coaches need to "be a leaner. Get to know people. Understand what people value and believe, and wholeheartedly build relationships." In addition, participants emphasized the importance of valuing confidentiality, getting to know the school climate, being present and connected to the school, and honoring the teacher's expertise. Christina stated in her interview that if teachers do not know her well or are unsure of her role, "the teachers sometimes don't see me as a peer until I establish myself as one." Josie explained that one of her successful coaching experiences started with a reflective question "that sparked an idea." Janice shared that success spreads by word of mouth, and "it really helps accelerate that relationship with a new teacher when I'm vetted by somebody they like and trust." Coaches have to put in the effort to build trusting relationships before the work of coaching can begin.

There Are Differing Perceptions of the Coach

When asked to describe coaches' relationship with the teacher they are coaching, every participant stated something similar to a peer-to-peer partnership where coach and teacher work alongside each other. Coaches in RRPS are on teacher contracts with the same pay structure. However, several coaches clarified that this perception of the coach as an equal peer is not shared by all stakeholders, even amongst different types of coaches.

Deficit Mindset

One facet that several participants brought up is the idea that there is a deficit mindset underlying the coaching program. Rachel explained that the Mentoring and Coaching Office coaches work explicitly with first-year teachers and those on improvement plans. In the focus group, she shared:

> Everybody can grow… But my ones that are doing fine and aren't having major issues they maybe only see me three times a year, and the ones that need support see me at least every month. It's really not equitable.

Shannon also stated that "there's kind of this negative deficit mindset connected to the word instructional coach," even though "our division strategic plan has the word coaching right in it, not from a deficit model but from a perspective of all educators deserve to have an instructional coach to walk alongside of them."

Coach as Expert

Connected to this idea of coaches working only with those who need support is the perception that coaches have a certain level of expertise or knowledge that teachers don't have. Brenda shared in her interview that experience does bring expertise, and "there's a little bit of a different power structure because I've got informational power in a way." Christina stated that a challenge for her is "the mindset of teachers and administrators where they want me to have answers to solve the problems." Yet, as she supports teachers implementing curriculum programs, Christina realizes that she has some specific knowledge, but that doesn't make her an expert. Sandra shared:

> The program has this elitist label on it that we are experts and ranked higher than a teacher. Even though, in theory, we say that we want to be partners and build

relationships, there's a lens that instructional coaches or division instructional facilitators are seen as elitists. I think that is a really dangerous lens to have.

Voice to Others

Another sub-theme of the differing perceptions of the coach is the perception that the coach can be a voice between groups. Seven of the ten participants mentioned in their interviews that coaches navigate between teachers, schools, administrators, and the central office. Five participants spoke about connecting teachers to others at different schools. In the focus group, Christina shared, "They [teachers] see me as a connection to something bigger." In Kathryn's journal entry, she said she asked questions about "wishes for the master schedule for teachers to voice to their administrators, as well as concerns they feel I should address within central office." In these ways, coaches serve to connect people as resources and facilitate collaborative problem-solving.

Identity Confusion

In a large district like RRPS, there are coaches/instructional facilitators in several offices, all of which are focused on supporting teachers. Without proper communication and alignment, the support can confuse and frustrate teachers. Andrea explained that her school has an SBIF, a DIF, and an IFT, and then she overlays their work when they are working on English content, "but not all of them include me in that conversation, which then creates what feels like multiple asks." Kathryn shared that "figuring out who to go to when has been an asset because it does get very crowded, especially for classroom teachers."

Beyond figuring out who does what, Sandra described a perceived hierarchy of the coaching program, stating:

> I do feel like the division ones… are a little step above what school-based ones are only because they're getting a lot more from central office, and central office uses them more for different projects or leans on them for division-wide PD days.

In the focus group, Rachel and Christina agreed that many teachers "lump everybody in the admin building together," targeting frustration at top-down initiatives and decisions at the coaches.

There also seems to be confusion at the leadership level about the coaching role. Steven shared, "When the job was posted, and I asked about it, I was told that 80-90% of the job was going to be out in the schools. That was not the case." Brenda voiced:

> I feel like I am coaching in spite of the administration, not because of it. And I think if we were to ask our facilitators with multiple schools, they're in the same boat because our high school principals aren't particularly good at understanding the role or figuring out how to use it.

In addition, Shannon, Brenda, Rachel, and Janice all talked about the notion and agreed that supervisors at the central office are suggesting changing the titles of instructional facilitators to reflect more of a coaching focus. While some disagree that facilitators do the same type of coaching, everyone agrees that the program as a whole lacks alignment in the layers of support provided to teachers. Rachel described the current status of the program as "very siloed." Sandra expounded, "Separating ourselves…prevents the real work that could be happening with teachers and kids."

There Is an Agreed-Upon Purpose for Coaching

As much as coaches may experience a disconnect in their role, there is some overall agreement on the purpose of coaching and the reason for having such a large-reaching coaching

program. Nine of the ten participants mentioned student impact as the ultimate goal for instructional coaching. All ten participants spoke about coaching as a way to increase teacher knowledge and capacity as well as change teacher perceptions and mindsets. Moving teachers forward does not have to be only with those with a deficit. Shannon shared her personal experience with a teacher who was "an incredible teacher but truly an example of a desire for lifelong learning. She wants to continually grow and improve. And she's recognized that sometimes, in some things, you reach your own capacity without bringing someone else into the thinking."

From the perspective of eight participants, coaching builds a teacher's capacity to be able to grow and change. Steven explained that education is always changing, and it's important for teachers to "become an effective problem-solver" and not think, "Okay, now I am an effective teacher, and I can go on for the next 10, 20, 30 years and just continue doing this." Three of the participants brought up the idea that because coaching supports teacher growth and success, it increases teacher retention. In her interview, Josie explained, "At a school like ours, ultimately, we want to hire great people, and we also want to keep them because that's what's best for our kids."

There Are Many Benefits of Coaching

While coaches ultimately try to influence student learning with their efforts, the coaches in this study spoke more readily about the direct impacts of coaching on teachers and reciprocal benefits for the coaches. The benefits for teachers are both practical in their immediate impact and overarching in the way they make more deep and lasting changes. For the coaches, there are practical benefits, mutual learning opportunities, and a sense of satisfaction.

Benefits for Teachers

Four of the coaches mentioned the practical benefits teachers might get from coaching. In her interview, Andrea talked about supporting teachers' understanding of the curriculum and being able to model for a teacher who then more effectively taught a lesson to students. In her journal entry, Andrea wrote, "The conversation extended beyond theory to practical implementation, ensuring that the teacher left with clear strategies and approaches to apply in the classroom." Josie suggested in her interview that the PD the district offers is vast, giving teachers choices but little accountability for implementation. With coaching, Josie, and her team "can tailor stuff that's specific for our school, and we make them [teachers] make a commitment." In this way, PD is put into practice and made more meaningful.

Coaching can also influence teachers in a deeper sense. Five participants talked about coaching leading to increased teacher confidence. Three coaches mentioned that coaching leads to a change in mentality for teachers. Rachel remarked that in her coaching with international teachers new to the American system, she is trying "to find a way to support them and respect where they're coming from because they're looking at things from their cultural lens, but trying to get them to interrogate that cultural lens." Coaches ask teachers to rethink what might not be working, imagine what could work, and be willing to try something new.

Benefits for Coaches

There are several practical benefits of coaching for the coaches as well. Six participants mentioned collaboration with other coaches as a benefit of the work. This includes aligning coaching efforts to be more effective, utilizing the knowledge of other coaches, gaining a larger district-wide perspective, and simply sharing the load. Coaching teachers also help coaches in their other work. Andrea mentioned that coaching allows her to network and build relationships with teachers who might later help with curriculum development. Christina uses what she learns

from her coaching sessions to better plan PD for teachers. She wrote, “As I'm developing the updated co-teaching professional learning opportunity for next year, seeing these planning conversations between two co-teachers is invaluable.” Coaches also spoke about coaching, providing practice to improve coaching and presentation skills, and developing future coaches.

Seven of the participants mentioned mutual learning as a benefit of coaching. While teachers learn new skills and strategies to implement, coaches learn new knowledge and skills they can share with others. Sandra emphasized in her interview that “anytime we work together, there’s an opportunity for all of us to move forward.”

Seven participants also spoke about the benefit of the personal satisfaction they get from coaching. Coaches feel the reward of helping teachers improve, build their confidence, and sometimes keep their jobs, as well as making an indirect impact on students. Kathryn, a relatively new coach, mentioned in her interview that she misses seeing the immediate reward of teaching students, but “I am still making a positive change, and maybe these changes are even bigger changes than I could have ever made if I had just stayed in my own classroom.”

Outlier Data and Findings – Coach as Expert

In the data analysis, one outlier emerged—the coach as an expert. While most participants shared the value of equality between coach and teacher and the goal of accomplishing an equal partnership with their teachers, the two coaches shared slightly different perspectives. Kathryn shared in her interview:

> I would feel like the equality or match of respect is more there for me as a gen ed teacher when dealing with gen ed teachers, gen ed-facing, or CLT-facing training because I can lean on my own experiences and expertise. It is the coaching EL teachers, especially when they're using a program that I've only used a little bit myself, or they're talking

> about a newcomer course, which I have never personally taught a newcomer course, that I feel like that equality or that mutual respect or partnership is not always naturally as established than working in my own field and experience of expertise.

Similarly, Steven mentioned in his interview that his experience and expertise make a difference in his coaching. He stated plainly that he is much older than many of the other instructional coaches and that "I've been here long enough, and I've been involved in enough things that people know who I am." These statements of relying on personal expertise to be able to coach well and the perception that teachers might respect coaches who have similar experiences more are different from the rest of the participants' statements on building relationships with teachers based on trust and the ability to mediate thinking with questioning and dedicated reflection.

Research Question Responses

The research questions focused on the perceptions and experiences of instructional coaches in a large-scale coaching program in a large public school district on the East Coast of the U.S. The central research question prompted an overall idea of the perceptions and experiences of these coaches. The sub-questions addressed four of the effective coaching principles from Knight's (2007) partnership philosophy for instructional coaching and how these coaches experienced relational equality with coached teachers, reflection in the process of coaching, teacher praxis of professional development, and reciprocity in a large-scale model.

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of full-time instructional coaches in an established, large-scale coaching program in a large public school district on the East Coast of the U.S.? While the coaches in the large-scale program of RRPS are provided similar training, their experiences are varied depending on their particular role, their caseload, and the needs of

the teachers they serve. They experience some confusion and frustration at the lack of continuity across the division, but they are united in their purpose and the sense of fulfillment the work brings. Janice stated, “There’s a lot of support people in River Ridge, which is great, and with our caseloads, it’s impossible for us to be everything to everybody. But I feel like there’s not a clear-cut way that one person is supporting.” She went on to say:

> It just seems like it's so big; sometimes, the departments aren't always talking to each other. A couple of us are really making efforts to collaborate among departments because all of us have the goal of supporting teachers. So how can we work together to make that happen more efficiently and not make them feel like they have to find a needle in a haystack to find that person who's meant to support them?

The experiences seem to reflect the idea that large-scale coaching has unique challenges.

Sub-Question One

How do coaches in a large-scale model describe their experiences of relational equality with coached teachers? Coaches described their experiences as working toward a peer-to-peer relationship with teachers based on mutual trust and respect for the experiences and expertise of the other. Christina said, “Only after I’ve established that relationship are they (teachers) open to me just coming into the classroom as another teacher and seeing what their needs are and trying to talk them through it.”

Sub-Question Two

How do coaches describe their experiences using reflection in the process of coaching in a large-scale model? The coaches agreed overwhelmingly that reflection is vital to coaching, both for the teacher and for the coach. Reflection is what changes mindsets and moves people forward. Steven explained:

> My goal is not to come in and "fix" the particular thing that may be "wrong", but to help them build their own reflective, analytic skills so that three months from now, they're having a difficult class and they can, at the end of the day reflect and think, "OK, what's happening here?" and do some problem-solving around that. So, all of that takes self-awareness. It takes humility. It takes willingness to think deeply about a problem, a willingness to ask for help, and sometimes a willingness to ask for somebody to come in and to have another set of eyes to explain what's happening.

Sub-Question Three

How do coaches describe their experiences of teacher praxis of professional development in a large-scale coaching model? Coaches described the process of breaking down big ideas into small changes that the coach might support through co-planning, modeling, and gradually releasing the teacher to full implementation. Sandra explained:

> It has to be data-driven around the school goals, and there has to be a through-line between instructional walkthroughs to the goals set from that data, professional learning around that data and goals, and then the coaching has to align with all of that. So, it has to be a systematic approach that is aligned to a culture of learning and coaching.

This learning culture allows everyone to pursue improvement and take risks in a safe place where they can be supported.

Sub-Question Four

What are the perceptions of reciprocity experienced by coaches in a large-scale model? The coaches described their experiences of learning content and new strategies from teachers. Coaches also benefitted from improvement in their own coaching practice and the satisfaction of

supporting teachers, building a learning culture, and ultimately improving student instruction. Josie shared:

> But knowing that you've made an impact and helped people and that they stick around and they see the value, that's what's really important because you want kids to have great learning experiences, and sometimes interacting with coaches helps teachers get those ideas that maybe they wouldn't have had without having the conversations.

Summary

Coaching in a large-scale program is a complex endeavor. The coaches involved in this study shared that while they had similar training and understanding of what effective coaching is, the reality of coaching varied greatly. Coaches worked to establish positive relationships with teachers and provide the support teachers needed, sometimes through coaching and consulting. Whether coaches worked at a single school or across the division, high caseloads and a deficit mindset were concerns. Coaches believe that teachers and even administrators can benefit from coaching and deserve the opportunity to do so. Coaches expressed that the greatest benefit of coaching happens through reflection. Coaching promoted better praxis of professional development. The complexity of so many offices within the large school district, though, had the coaches longing for better alignment and clarity for the coaching role so that they could better serve others.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of barriers in established, large-scale instructional coaching programs for full-time instructional coaches at an East Coast Public School District in the United States. The data gathered from the participants indicated that while coaching is a complex process and can vary greatly depending on the coaching role and needs of teachers, there are common experiences that coaches in a large-scale program share. As a thorough discussion of the results, this chapter includes the following subsections: (a) implications for policy and practice, (b) theoretical and methodological implications, (c) limitations and delimitations, and (d) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The results of this study indicated that there are common experiences and themes that coaches in a large-scale program share. However, taking into consideration that even with many commonalities, there is also great variety and flexibility, it seems the essence of the coaching experience is that of a person being pulled in opposite directions. There are specific tensions that exist for the coach in River Ridge Public Schools.

First, there is a tension between ideal, formal coaching and the problem-solving focus of a consultant. Several participants spoke about being unable to complete a full coaching cycle or switching from coaching to consulting to offer resources or ideas. As stated earlier, it is widely agreed upon that the coaching process should include, at the minimum, a pre-observation conference, an observation, and a post-observation conference (Carson et al., 2019; Hu & van Veen, 2020; Kho & Ismail, 2021). However, the coaches in this study felt the urgent need for

teachers to have something immediate to put into practice. While some coaches value reflection in theory, several spoke of their own reflection in place of time given to teachers to reflect. It seems that the ideal coaching process where time is taken to move a teacher's thinking forward is often replaced by quick fixes to solve immediate problems.

Secondly, there is a tension between providing deep, continuous support for teachers who desire to grow and reaching a large number of teachers who desperately need help. Several participants talked about the program having a "deficit mindset" because the most help, and sometimes the only help, is given to those who struggle. The participant coaches here mentioned a desire to provide coaching to anyone with a desire to improve their practice. In reality, though, it seems there are too many struggling teachers who require support to achieve minimum success and not enough time for coaches to meet with everyone who could benefit, especially effective teachers who might otherwise have the opportunity to become outstanding.

Thirdly, there is a tension between providing specialized support from content and grade-level offices and offering a unified, systematic approach to coaching. The participants described the different roles of RRPS coaches, ranging from a school-based instructional facilitator at a single school to a division coach meeting with teachers across the entire district to content facilitators who serve many but keep a narrow focus on curriculum implementation. At the same time, all instructional facilitators and coaches are given training in the methods of Cognitive Coaching and Adaptive Schools so that they can speak a common language and provide a consistent approach to coaching.

Finally, there is a tension between coaches wanting to be flexible in their approach, offering whatever support a teacher might need, and wanting a clear definition and understanding of the coaching role in the district. Pairing the variety of roles and caseloads coaches take on in

RRPS with the various needs of teachers means that coaches can be asked to do any number of support tasks. It is no wonder that the coaches perceive teachers and administrators' confusion and frustration about utilizing a person in a role that has no firm definition. Yes, coaching is provided to support teacher planning and instruction. Whether that means creating and providing resources, ensuring the implementation of professional learning or curriculum, or allowing teachers to set their own goals and work toward them is anyone's guess. Most of the coaches in this study participate in all of the previously mentioned activities.

While it might be theoretically possible for a superintendent or supervisor to clarify the coaching role and tighten up what comes under the coach's purview, the current climate of the district prevents it. Focus on short or long-term goals (building dependency or capacity) the same way a teacher wants students to engage in inquiry, experimentation, and personalized learning.

Implications for Policy and Practice

With an understanding of the realities found in the large-scale coaching program of RRPS and the tensions pulling at the many instructional coaches working there, some implications for policy and practice are being suggested. The policy implications apply to the district administrators of RRPS and the stakeholders affected. The implications for practice apply to the district administrators, instructional coaches, teachers, and school administrators of RRPS. In addition, future researchers and instructional coaches may benefit from the suggested implications.

Implications for Policy

Policies in the RRPS district have allowed many offices, departments, and even schools to create coaching positions to support teachers, but little is done to define or align those roles. While it might be theoretically possible for a superintendent or supervisor to clarify the coaching

role and tighten up what comes under the coach's purview, the current climate of the district prevents it. A policy that limits the scope of coaching in tasks, caseloads, or both would need to be made. At the same time, a policy must exist that protects the coaching role from being misused as a staff counselor, lunchroom monitor, substitute teacher, or the like. If coaching is a priority, district policy must clearly define and support it.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings that the work coaches engage in is not always aligned with what ideal instructional coaching is, implications for practice include defining and aligning coaching methods. If it is necessary to have dedicated staff work with teachers to implement new curricula or understand district initiatives through professional development, the district might do well to have separate roles dedicated to those tasks that are titled differently. As it seems the district is clear on what effective coaching entails, it would be a logical step to make sure that any position taking part in coaching is titled appropriately so others might understand the prospect of working with them and that coaches in those positions are allowed to focus solely on coaching more thoroughly and effectively.

Another finding was that coaches perceive teachers' need, especially career-switchers, for immediate problem-solving and resource consultation rather than coaching. When teachers get stuck in their thinking or simply don't know what they don't know, coaching is not the solution. The district might examine this perceived need to determine if a change in support structure would be beneficial.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This study's empirical and theoretical implications are based on a transcendental phenomenological analysis of the experiences and perceptions of instructional coaches in a large-

scale coaching program. This study extends previous research by shedding light on the intricacies of large-scale coaching. This study also adds to current knowledge on adult learning theory and Knight's (2007) partnership philosophy.

Empirical Implications

This study extends previous research on instructional coaching, especially taking coaching to scale. Many studies on coaching have focused on early literacy (Kraft & Blazar, 2017), while this one had a broader scope. The participants in this study worked with teachers in all content areas across all grade levels. While there is agreement that coaching works to improve teacher practice (Kraft & Blazar, 2018; see also Bradshaw et al., 2018; Connor, 2017; Correnti et al., 2021; Garrett et al., 2019), little is known about the effectiveness of specific methods and features of coaching (Connor, 2017; de Haan & Nilsson, 2017). This study asked instructional coaches to share their experiences specific to four of Knight's (2007) partnership principles. The coaches involved in this study all valued the principles of equality, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity; however, reflection was the most utilized by all the coaches interviewed. Shannon commented, "With teachers, for sure, it's powerful, and I don't feel like it's something that they take a lot of time to do on their own. They wouldn't without the coach there to kind of force that thinking." Coaches felt that reflection was a valuable way to begin coaching conversations, build the coaching relationship, and improve their own coaching practice.

Confirming Blazar (2020), the coaches in this study also spoke to their experiences with variability and changing their coaching approach based on teacher needs and the time available. Because coaching looked different for each person, it is difficult to say what methods worked best across the board. This confirms Bachkirova et al. (2015), who stress the individuality of coaching because it involves focusing on the voices of teachers and the purpose of empowering

them to make decisions for their improvement. The coaches in this study verified the many ways coaches can be used in a district and the barriers that exist in trying to bring quality coaching to a large group of people.

Theoretical Implications

The two main theories that informed this study were Knight's (2007) partnership philosophy and adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 2015). The participants in this study confirmed that the four principles of the partnership philosophy that were included are valuable and necessary for effective coaching. However, there was much discussion on how equality is perceived by the coach but not necessarily by the teacher or the administration. It was often beneficial in practice for coaches to explicitly clarify their equal footing in the coaching relationship. This may be of interest to those further developing the partnership philosophy.

Several participants mentioned adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 2015) is rightly a cornerstone when working to instruct adults. Specifically, the coaches in the study assumed that teachers had a developed need to know, learners' self-concept, role of the learners' experiences, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation (Knowles et al., 2015). Issues arose, however, when coaches realized that teachers had low efficacy, which is intertwined with the learners' self-concept. These teachers needed direct consultation, where coaches simply provided resources and ideas rather than guide the teachers through self-direction. While independent learners may resent situations that force them back into a state of dependency (Knowles et al., 2015), the coaches described teachers as content to stay dependent on the coach for quick answers and problem-solving. The question for the coach then becomes how to increase a teacher's capacity and independence to direct their learning in the future.

Limitations and Delimitations

Understanding the limitations and delimitations of a study is crucial when determining the implications and possible transferability of the findings. Limitations are possible study shortcomings that are out of the researcher's control but are linked to the study's design (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Delimitations are purposeful boundaries set by the researcher to narrow the focus of the study. The choice of research methodology makes a difference in the design and process of research, and delimitations of the study can include these choices.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the non-diverse sample, the small sample size, and the absence of a full data set for analysis. The sample of participants was diverse in their ages and years of experience, but only one participant was male. The sample size was smaller than anticipated. Only ten participants representing five of the eight coaching roles in the district volunteered for the study. There were no coaches representing DIFs at the elementary level, no SBIFs at the high school level, and there were no coaches from the special education department. While all ten participants participated in one-on-one interviews, only five turned in a journal entry, and only two participated in the focus group discussion. One more participant had agreed to join the focus group but then did not show up. Additional participants from a greater variety of roles and a more complete data set may have altered the research findings by providing a deeper look into the experiences of instructional coaches in a large-scale program.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study include the decision to select coaches from specific roles within the district and to limit participants to those with at least a full year of experience in their role. More instructional facilitators who serve in the IFT (Instructional Facilitator for

Technology) role were available, but formal coaching training has only recently been made available to them. In the same way, coaches who were still in the first year of their role might not have reflected on their practice thoroughly in order to provide clear descriptions of their coaching experiences.

Another delimitation of the study is the transcendental phenomenological research design. The researcher chose to engage in the epoché process (Moustakas, 1994) and set aside any common experiences shared with the participants. The choice for a phenomenological approach also limited the ability of the researcher to provide solutions or answers over a focus on the essence of the participants' experiences (Kuchinke, 2023).

Recommendations for Future Research

In light of this study's findings, limitations, and delimitations, the researcher would recommend a quantitative approach with a similar pool of participants and setting. The study could focus on a better understanding of the time coaches spend on different tasks, especially traveling from school to school, preparing and presenting PD, meetings to align efforts, and any other efforts that are not direct coaching with teachers. Another possible future research project could be a similar study as this one but focused on the lived experiences of teachers who receive coaching and the perceived benefits. Such studies might better clarify the value of coaching and the realities of the role in a large-scale coaching program.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of barriers in established, large-scale instructional coaching programs for full-time instructional coaches at an East Coast Public School District in the United States. The theories that guided this study were Knowles’ adult learning theory and Knight’s partnership philosophy.

Data collected and analyzed included personal interviews, journal entries, and a focus group discussion. The themes that emerged from the synthesized data included the varied processes of coaching, the importance of reflection, the effort required to establish coaching relationships, the differing perceptions of the coaching role, the understood purpose of coaching, and the benefits coaching brings. The findings underscore the idea that coaches do value teachers as capable equals, but the current climate of education means that there are many teachers who lack pedagogy and efficacy and need consulting more than coaching, so coaches fill both roles. Understanding this can lead to clarity in the coaching role and an examination of the possible barriers that exist in bringing quality coaching to all.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 25, 2023

Kristen Skura
Sharon Michael-Chadwell

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1280 BRINGING EFFECTIVE COACHING TO SCALE: EXPERIENCES OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES IN A LARGE-SCALE COACHING PROGRAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Kristen Skura, Sharon Michael-Chadwell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Site Permission Request

March 23, 2023

River Ridge Public Schools

Greetings,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is *Bringing Effective Coaching to Scale: Experiences of Instructional Coaches in a Large-Scale Coaching Program*, and the purpose of my research is to understand the coaching experiences of full-time instructional coaches in an established, large-scale coaching program in a large public school district on the East Coast of the U.S.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your organization to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview and complete a journal entry. Additionally, some participants will be asked to participate in a focus group. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. Please contact me with any questions you might have. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Kristen Skura
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University
[redacted], River Ridge Public Schools

Appendix C

Site Permission Response

RE: [EXTERNAL] Research Request

[redacted]

To: Kristen Skura [redacted]

Cc: [redacted] +7 others

Wed 5/31/2023 1:37 PM

You replied on Thu 6/15/2023 9:01 AM

Kristen,

Your request to conduct the study "Bringing Effective Coaching to Scale: Experiences of Instructional Coaches in a Large-Scale Coaching Program" has been approved by the [redacted] Administrative Office. Please note that approval by the central office does not guarantee participation by [redacted] staff.

As a courtesy to [redacted] and the participants in your research, we ask that you provide a copy of your study and subsequent findings to the Research Office.

Let me know if you have any questions about the approval.

Good luck with your project.

Regards,

[redacted]

[redacted]

Research Office

[redacted]

Appendix D

Recruitment Email

Dear _____:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of instructional coaches in a large-scale program, especially regarding equality, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be full-time instructional coaches or facilitators in a large-scale coaching program with at least one year's experience in their coaching role. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a one-on-one, in-person, or virtual interview (one hour) and write a journal entry immediately following a coaching session (15 minutes). Participants may choose to participate in an in-person focus group discussion (one hour), and participants may be asked to verify their data through a process called member-checking, whereby I will ask you to determine the accuracy of the transcripts of the interview and/or focus group you participated in (one hour). Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please click here to complete a screening survey.

If you are selected as a participant, a consent document will be given to you at least one week before the initial interview. I will also provide a copy at the time of the interview if necessary. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you wish to participate, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the initial interview.

Sincerely,

Kristen Skura
Doctoral Candidate
[redacted]

Appendix E

Google Form Screening Tool

Name:

Email:

What is your current role in the school division?

Which category of instructional coach/facilitator reflects your role?

- School-based, elementary
- School-based, middle
- School-based, high
- Division-based, elementary
- Division-based, middle
- Division-based, high
- Division-based, special education
- Division-based, mentoring, and coaching office

Do you have at least one year of instructional coaching experience in your current role?

- Yes
- No

Appendix F

Recruitment Follow-Up Email

Hi, _____,

Thank you for completing the screening tool for my doctoral study. Based on the provided information, you qualify to participate! Attached to this email you will find the consent form with more information about the study. Please read it thoroughly and let me know what questions you might have. If you agree to the consent form, please sign it, and return it to me via email. We will then need to schedule a one-on-one interview within the next week or so. Please use this link to find a time that works for you.

Thank you so much for choosing to participate! I appreciate your time and look forward to discussing your coaching experiences soon.

Sincerely,

Kristen Skura

Appendix G

Consent

Title of the Project: Bringing Effective Coaching to Scale: Experiences of Instructional Coaches in a Large-Scale Coaching Program: A Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: Kristen Skura, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a full-time instructional coach or facilitator in a large-scale coaching program with at least one year's experience in your coaching role. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences of instructional coaches in a large-scale program, especially regarding equality, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity in your coaching work.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a one-on-one interview. This interview will take approximately one hour to complete and will be recorded for audio and video.
2. Complete a journal entry immediately following a coaching session. A prompt will be provided. This journal entry should take approximately 15 minutes to complete and will be collected as data.
3. Consider participating in a focus group discussion with 4-5 other participants. This focus group would take about an hour and would be recorded for audio and video.
4. Consider checking transcripts of your interview and/or focus group as well as identified themes and research findings. This optional member checking should take approximately one hour and serves to increase the confirmability of the study.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include providing insight into the experiences of instructional coaches in a large-scale coaching program.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected cloud and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected cloud for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or River Ridge Public Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Kristen Skura. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] and/or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sharon Michael-Chadwell, at [redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, [redacted], or email at [redacted]

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix H

Demographic Data Form

Name:

Years of coaching experience:

Years of experience in education:

Appendix I

Journal Entry Prompts

You are encouraged to write freely about your feelings and experiences before addressing the more specific prompts below. Please reflect in writing on your coaching practice today.

What were your experiences with equality (balance of power, value, and importance) in your coaching today?

What were your experiences with reflection in your coaching today?

What were your experiences with praxis (teachers putting learning into practice) in your coaching today?

What were your experiences with reciprocity (getting as much out of the relationship as the teacher does) in your coaching today?