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Navigating Context and Perception: A Qualitative Study on Instructional Coaching

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NAVIGATING CONTEXT AND PERCEPTION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative case study explored the perceptions of instructional coaches in order to understand the ways in which context influenced their view of their roles and how they supported teacher growth. The theoretical and conceptual foundations for this study include a distributed perspective, a phenomenologically informed lens, and a pragmatic worldview. The sample consisted of 9 elementary instructional coach participants from different content areas and programs provided within the site. Semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and a review of the district's instructional coaching program documents were used, and thematic analysis led to four findings that encompassed the contextual conditions that challenged or propelled the work of the instructional coach. Conclusions from this study found that these contextual components are a great focal point for districts to consider when implementing a well-established instructional coaching program.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my grandparents Benigno and Maria del Carmen Reyna. Their uncompromising love, ever-enduring encouragement, and many sacrifices and life experiences provided the foundation and opened the door to such an extraordinary opportunity for me to achieve this accomplishment. The life stories they shared inspired me at an early age to understand the value of education and the power of being bilingual. Aqui y ahora Abuela, lo hice!

I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Maria del Carmen Ortega. You are my constant champion and have been instrumental in the many accomplishments I have had the opportunity to achieve academically and in life. Thank you for encouraging me to climb mountains and loving me unconditionally. I am here because you were by my side every step. To my dad, Rick Ortega, thank you for believing in me, supporting me, and cheering me on. I appreciate you more than you may ever know.

Finally, to my son Oliver, my reason, and my heart. This dissertation is dedicated to you, as you are a big part of this journey and added a deeper sense of purpose to my life. I now pass the torch on to you, my son. I know you will exceed and excel in the endeavors you set forth in the future. It is now my turn to encourage you to climb mountains and know I will be with you every step of the way. I love you beyond measure, forever, and always.

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I would also like to acknowledge the instructional coaches who participated in this study. Thank you for your time and support in this endeavor. It has been a privilege and honor to hear your stories. Your tireless commitment to positively influence teaching and learning is inspirational.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

You are a new teacher, sitting in a crowded school cafeteria, eager to get into the new empty classroom and fill it with new bordette, welcome signs, and flexible seating you made this summer in preparation for this new purpose that you now call, 2nd-grade bilingual education in room 115. You are greeted with information on John Hattie's (2009) Visible Learning and the influences and effect sizes related to student achievement. Amongst the traditional induction into district initiatives, processes, vision, and mission, "One thing is clear…" you hear them say, "it is not anyone single program that can accomplish this, it's the teacher." That eager teacher was me and I heard those very words, not once, but many times through the course of my career. They are a staple in discussions about accountability, school reform, and often in discussions on improving teacher performance and increasing student achievement. The beginning of a new school year is when new schoolteachers attend professional development sessions to acquaint themselves with teaching strategies, planning protocols, classroom management programs, and in some cases an opportunity to meet and work with an instructional coach.

A key lever in school reform has been the increasing use of instructional coaches (ICs) to serve as on-site, job-embedded, and individualized professional development aimed at improving teacher performance (Kurz et al., 2017; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Poglinco & Bach, 2004). Research on instructional coaching has increased over the past 5 years. Two major areas of focus in the literature have centered on instructional coaching as high-leverage professional

development (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Gallucci et.al., 2010; Kane & Rosenquist, 2018; Lemons & Toste, 2019; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009) and the improvement of literacy practices (Kraft et al., 2018; Lowenhaupt et al., 2014) However, research on instructional coaches' perceptions of their role and how those perceptions along with their work context influence how they execute their responsibilities has not been as prevalent as studies conducted on teachers' perceptions of instructional coaching (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010).

Background of the Problem

Recent research has shown how instructional coaches (ICs) have become an essential component of curriculum reform initiatives at both the state and federal levels in enhancing teacher performance (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Knight, 2009a; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). ICs serve as a catalyst for change in instructional delivery via job-embedded on the spot professional development with aims to build teacher capacity and contribute to the increase in student achievement. Despite the numerous benefits linked to instructional coaching, variations in the description of what instructional coaching is, as well as how instructional coaches define their role and the work they do, still exist (Matsumura et al., 2010). Some studies have shown that the roles and duties that coaches fulfill are often dependent upon various factors associated with the context in which they work (Killion, 2009; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). These roles and responsibilities are varied and malleable based on the present needs of the school or district in which they serve (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Ippolito, 2010). With such equivocalness associated within the roles and contexts in which instructional coaches operate, it becomes challenging to delineate their responsibilities and the efficaciousness of their work with teachers. Instructional coaches' potential to positively influence teacher performance is limited when an understanding of their function is obscure.

Due to the variability of instructional coach job descriptions, Bean et al. (2010) contend that coaches have varying views of their roles and how they should be implemented due to contextual factors. This in turn highlights that the same ambiguity of role and responsibility lies within the administrators who oversee their work leaving the execution of those functions to chance and variation. Similarly, Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) indicate that further research on the environments in which instructional coaches work and their influence on effectiveness is necessary in identifying key supports to guide coaches in maximizing their potential work with teachers. Jim Knight (2009a) emphasizes "…how we think about coaching significantly enhances or interferes with our success as a coach" (p.18). With that in mind, this study sought to deepen the body of research on instructional coaching by examining how context shapes their ability to influence teacher effectiveness.

In Texas, the State Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and the continuous updates to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are at the center of discussions of accountability, campus and district ratings, and school improvement. With this comes the need to identify additional forms of instructional support and capacity building for teachers in order to ultimately increase student performance. A study on the influence of instructional coaching and 7th-grade math STAAR conducted by Evans (2019) at a North Texas non-metropolitan school district found that Hispanic students who had a teacher undergoing instructional coaching had an increase of almost 20 percentage points as well as a 16 percentage points for White students. This highlights the impact onsite; job-embedded professional support can have on teaching practices and ultimately student outcomes.

Another study in a southeast Texas school district by Valdez (2019) on identifying instructional coaching activities that teachers found influential in changing their instructional

practices found that 57% of the 104 teachers surveyed received support from an IC at least once a week. The activity most frequently experienced by the teachers was co-planning and was considered a strength in instructional coaching at 86.5% with the ability to improve lesson delivery (Valdez, 2019). This evidence reiterates the need to delineate an IC's role in terms of their work alongside teachers as well as the frequency with which that happens (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019).

These two Texas studies recapitulate the research that has evidenced how instructional coaching has had a positive impact on building teacher capacity and enhancing instructional delivery. While the benefits of the work of instructional coaches have been a topic of research in many studies, the impact of an ICs' work environment on their ability to maximize this potential is limited. The importance of understanding what contextual factors influence the work and effectiveness of instructional coaches is essential not only for implementation and sustainability but also to maximize the potential return on investment.

Statement of the Problem

It is unknown how context and perceptions of role influence instructional coaches' responsibilities and self-efficacy on teacher performance within a medium-sized urban public school district in South Central Texas. The gap in the literature surrounding instructional coaches' context and its influence on effectiveness was identified in recent studies by Vandenburg and Stephens (2010) and Ulenski et al. (2019). The delineation of responsibilities and the efficaciousness of coaches' work with teachers due to their often multifaceted and varied job descriptions and expectations becomes challenging (Atteberry & Bryk, 2001; Bean et al., 2010; Ippolito, 2010).

The implication of this problem is important for researchers, administrators, and other educational stakeholders to consider with the rise of instructional coaching as a means for school improvement efforts, more specifically to improve teacher learning and ultimately increase student achievement (Kurz et al., 2017; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). As districts continue to employ or create opportunities for instructional coaches and instructional coaching programs, the plans for implementation, sustainability, and continued support for coaches become critical and necessary as contextual factors in education and in their work continue to evolve.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

Instructional coaching positions are often created with the intended purpose of improving teacher performance and bolstering student progress. At times plans for support and sustainability for those efforts are left on the back burner. These positions may also be eliminated, shifted, or altered from their original implementation due to budget constraints or lack of "significant return on investment" in a short span of time. The purpose of this study has two goals. The first goal was to better understand how the context within a school district's organizational culture and structure affects instructional coaches' work and perceptions of their role. The second goal was exploring how that same context influences how they engage in coaching activities to support teacher growth. Acknowledging that there are multi-layered factors that shape the work of instructional coaches and that this requires an understanding of the varied implementation at both the district and campus level is a step towards clarity of role and function. The intendment is to define the role of an instructional coach and identify what systems or structures are needed to provide them with the support and resources to leverage and extend their influence on teaching and learning. Toward these ends, this study is framed by the following questions: How does context influence instructional coaches' perceptions of how they

fulfill their roles and their ability to enhance teacher capacity? Addressing this question add to the body of literature that address the benefits of instructional coaching as well as an understanding of how varied contexts within the work of instructional coaches shape their evidence of impact. Raising awareness about the issues that surround instructional coaches and the intended outcomes of instructional coaching help district stakeholders understand the support needed for effective coaching practices and encourages them to change and/or modify current systems and structures to maximize instructional coaching potential.

Instructional coaching has been included in recent educational policies as a means of significantly impacting student learning through the enhancement of teacher instructional performance (USDOE, 2015). This has led many school districts (urban, suburban, and rural) to allocate time and funds to increase their human capital in this area. While the growing body of research continues to highlight instructional coaching as a key lever in school improvement and instructional reform efforts, little is known about the contextual factors of an instructional coach's work environment. There is also limited knowledge of how those factors impact their roles and responsibilities in those efforts. An examination of the context in which instructional coaches' work and its influence on strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers, provides direction to school districts and other educational entities that employ instructional coaches to consider how to plan for, implement, and provide continued support for instructional coaches to meet those intended goals.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the contextual conditions that influence instructional coaches' perceptions of their role in enhancing teaching and learning, a distributed perspective is needed. James P. Spillane and John B. Diamond (2007) state that a distributed perspective considers two facets

known as the leader plus aspect and the practice aspect. The leader plus aspect acknowledges that there is more than one main actor in a leadership and management practice forcing the examination of who performs what leadership and management functions (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The second facet, the practice aspect, targets the interdependence of leaders, followers, and situation (Spillane & Diamond, 2007).

Within this conceptual framework, Spillane and Diamond (2007) emphasize that when looking at an organization such as a school district or even a single campus, there is a "constellation" of leaders who influence aspects of teaching and learning through their interdependent interactions, such as that of the principal, instructional coach and teacher. These multiple leaders use their different expertise to affect change. One key detail in the trifecta of leaders, followers, and situation, Spillane and Diamond (2007) ascertain that leaders and followers are fluid and depend on interactions and situations to shift back and forth. However, it is important to note that while they may shift back and forth, they are not unidirectional. Instructional coaches are often included as part of the instructional leadership teams on the campuses they serve, leaders of district initiatives and experts in their contents and programs.

Looking at the third component of the practice aspect, the situation sits not as a stand-alone variable, but rather a "core constituting element" that may span tools and resources that the leaders and followers interact with (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). These aspects within the situation help shape practices and outcomes of leadership. These two aspects of the distributed perspective suit this inquiry around instructional coaches as leaders and influencers of teaching and learning via leadership around and direct messengers of district initiatives, curriculum, and instruction while balancing competing district and campus demands.

A phenomenological lens also allowed me to focus on the lived experience within this particular group. John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2018) define Phenomenology as describing the common meaning of the lived experience of all participants regarding a particular phenomenon. The interviews, focus group, and analysis of artifacts provided an inside view into the lived experiences of instructional coaches and the contextual factors that influence their practices, goals, and work with teachers.

This inquiry provides insight for school districts, campus administrators, and more importantly instructional coaches on additional support and considerations needed to ensure the efficaciousness of their work and more importantly how to continue to sustain the implementation of instructional coaching as high leverage professional development. As described by Creamer (2018), pragmatism allows the researcher to match the purposes of inquiry with choice methods to produce something that is both functional and useful. Greene and Hall (2010) state that some of the major tenets of pragmatism focus on being a problem-solving action-oriented inquiry process with a view that knowledge is constructed and functions through organism-environment interactions. This paradigm suits the inquiry because there is a concern for linking research to practice in instructional coaching. Green and Hall (2010) assert that in terms of a contribution to the study, the pragmatic inquirer seeks contributions that are workable solutions to the research problem. This paradigm further aligned with the purpose of the study, which sought to understand how the perceptions and context of the work of instructional coaches influence their effectiveness in executing their responsibilities.

While this study incorporates a conceptual framework and 2 world views, each piece provides a closer look at different aspects of the research question with the intent to provide a more well-rounded approach. To understand instructional coaching perceptions, we must

understand the different facets that mold them through the distributed perspective. These perceptions represent the experiences instructional coaches have with those components. Pragmaticism supports efforts in finding practical application of the data and findings that have been gathered.

Definition of Terms

Terms within this study address the various areas of instructional coaching, self-efficacy, professional development, and organizational culture in education. The following definitions of these terms are provided as reference.

Context – the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs: Environment, Setting (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) – An illness caused by a virus that can be passed from one person to another (CDC, 2020).

Instructional Coaches - ICs are individuals who develop and provide onsite job-embedded professional development in schools (Knight, 2007).

Instructional Coaching – is non-supervisory, content-based, and is utilized to support instructional support through the enhancement of teacher performance (Gallucci et al., (2010).

Professional Development – in district, school, or classroom support and activities, strategies, and skills that instructional coaches facilitate among groups or with individual teachers with the intended goal to increase teacher capacity (Poglinco & Bach, 2004).

Summary and Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides an overall introduction to the study. In this chapter I introduced the concept of instructional coaching and how instructional coaching has become pivotal in current educational reform as school districts grapple with accountability, ensuring high quality

instruction, and improving student outcomes. The statement of the problem, background of the research, the significance and the rationale of the study are detailed in this chapter. This qualitative case study explores the perceptions and experiences of instructional coaches to identify how contextual factors influence their roles and their opportunities to enhance teaching and learning. The conceptual framework I used for this study in relation to context is Spillane's (2006) distributed perspective.

Chapter II contains a review of the current literature on instructional coaching. I begin with the origins of instructional coaching to understand its intended purpose and move on to conceptualizing coaching to gain clarity of how instructional coaching has evolved from its initial conception. The chapter continues its review to understand how instructional coaching is defined followed by how it takes shape through role delineation and the responsibilities it encompasses. Included in the literature are the key players instructional coaches interact with to include principals and teachers. As the chapter closes, I examine the research on the different professional learning provided for instructional coaches and inquiry on how context impacts the work of coaching.

Chapter III of this dissertation details the qualitative case study research design and methodology of the study. In this chapter, I discuss the population, sample selection, sample protocols, and ethical considerations. A section on data collection and management includes the semi-structured interview and focus group protocols. I delineate discussion on trustworthiness and my limitations as an insider-outsider close this chapter.

In Chapter IV, I present the findings of this qualitative case study. I organized the findings around the research question and the corresponding four themes that emerged as

contextual conditions that impact instructional coaching roles and practices. The findings include:

- Instructional coaches to navigate perceived notions of their role and competing demands.
- Instructional coaches must cultivate and leverage trusting relationships to enact change.
- Instructional coaches rely on a well-established instructional coaching program for support and continued growth.
- Contextual conditions matter.

The themes emerged from participants' descriptions of experiences and understanding of instructional coaching in an elementary school campus. I close this chapter with a discussion on how a distributed perspective supports understanding how context in instructional coaching can tether coaching practices and opportunities.

In Chapter V, I discuss the findings in connection to the current literature in Chapter 2. I also provide implications for practice in improving instructional coaching programs, fostering positive cultures for instructional coaching, and providing purposeful and targeted professional and mentorship opportunities. This research provides insight and support for cultivating a positive culture for instructional coaching and the importance of having well-established systems and structures to support the vision, mission, and work of instructional coaches. By refining this at a systemic level, the potential of instructional coaching's positive impact on teaching and learning can flourish.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Instructional coaching is certainly one of the most unpredictable professions in education; each day bring surprises, new challenges, and successes." Jim Knight 2007

The literature review begins with the exploration and review of the historical and current research on instructional coaching and instructional coaches. To understand instructional coaching, we must first look at how it is defined and conceptualized. Using a distributed perspective, a closer look at the role and function of the instructional coach, and how those two components exist and evolve within the instructional coaches' environment will create a basis on which to begin to understand the lived experiences of instructional coaches and their perceptions. The distributive perspective posits that leadership is not centered on one heroic figure but on the many interactions of all involved stretching leadership practice beyond the scope of more formal roles (Spillane, 2006). It is important to understand the interactions and dynamics at play that may influence the work of instructional coaches which leads us to the tools, routines, and structures known as the "situation" portion of the practice aspect of distributed leadership (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Additionally, with ever-changing educational initiatives and reforms, it is imperative to identify literature that adds to the influence of this factor on instructional coaches' perceptions as they shift between leader and follower.

Knight (2009a) reiterates how coaching has become a main element for professional development as school districts scramble to meet the demands for academic success and high-

quality teachers. The literature review provides research around the conceptualization of coaching in education, a focus on how instructional coaching is defined, the roles and responsibilities that instructional coaches embody and how those functions are developed. Literature with a focus on the relationships instructional coaches form with administration and educators is also included as it is relevant in examining how coaches navigate the space between teachers, administrators, and district expectations which form part of the organizational culture and context of a coaches' work.

Review of the Literature

Origins of Instructional Coaching

The historical underpinnings of instructional coaching can be traced back 40 years to the work of Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers in the 1980s around peer coaching. The work began with their study on implementing weekly seminars for teachers to facilitate best practices and implementation (Showers & Joyce, 1996). What they noticed was that implementation of the practices increased rapidly due to the coaching of not only the experts but by participants as well. Hence, studies conducted by Showers in 1982 and 1984 revealed that coaching following training produced greater results than training alone. This increase in teacher performance led to increased student progress and achievement (Joyce & Showers, 1983).

The 1990s focus on literacy instruction brought the role of the instructional coach into the spotlight (Bryk et al., 2016). This was followed by legislation that began in 2001 with the No Child Left Behind Act of (NCLB) 2001, which required school districts that were not meeting yearly progress to develop and implement school improvement plans focused on closing the achievement gap. This increased accountability from the government compelled districts to look beyond traditional forms of professional development for teachers, realizing that the "sit and get"

training sessions were not sufficient in improving teacher performance. Instructional coaches were seen as a viable solution that could support and sustain the implementation of district initiatives and enhance teacher performance.

Conceptualizing Instructional Coaching in Education

Literature in education is vociferous in acknowledging that coaching has become a universal staple in school districts across the United States to serve as school improvement initiatives with a focus on job-embedded professional development. (Gallucci et al., 2010; Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Kurz, et al., 2017; Miller & Stewart, 2013; Saphier & West, 2009; Wouflin & Rigby, 2017). The goal of coaching in its many forms is to build teacher capacity through one on one and team approaches. Yet, clarity surrounding how those approaches and results are deliberately executed needs further study especially when they transect with multiple stakeholders (Kurz et. al., 2017). Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) contend that there is little known about the enactment and intended outcomes of coaching due to a lack of investigation into the "competing conceptualizations of coaching as a mechanism for change (p. 181)."

In looking at the current literature a question lingers, what is the conceptualization of coaching with regard to instruction and more specifically, in terms of serving as job-embedded professional development for teacher instructional improvement? Matsumura, Garnier, Correnti, and Resnick (2010) conclude that the work of instructional coaches spans the range of content and grade levels within any educational institution and that one standard definition of instructional coaching would not suffice. Gallucci et al. (2010), Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, and Schock (2009), and Range, Pijanowski, Duncan, Scherz, and Hvidston (2014) reiterate just how manifold and diverse the role of an instructional coach is from district to district and even from campus to campus. The span and function of each of their roles add to the notion that a concrete

definition of instructional coaching has not been standardized and instead remains pliable based on the context, culture, and leadership in the districts and schools they serve (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). Yet, the research has shown that the challenge of coaching in education is in part due to the absence of an unambiguous definition of not only the role, but the work and capacity needed to fulfill the various functions mentioned (Aguilar, 2013; Gallucci et al., 2010; Miller & Stuart, 2013; Stevens, 2011).

Defining Instructional Coaching

Elena Aguilar (2013) argues that having a definition of coaching allows for clarity of not only their role but also of what their work entails if they will be the instruments of transformation or a catalyst for change as mentioned by Killion (2009). Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) contend that instructional coaching has moved from the Joyce and Showers (1981) interpretation of supporting the needs of individual teachers to a "lever for systemic or individual reform" as the mechanism for transformation. Gallucci et al. (2010) go on to define instructional coaching "as non-supervisory role… {that} is content-based and intended to support teachers in meeting the aims of school or district based instructional reform" (p. 922). Jim Knight's (2007) description of instructional coaching begins with the term "full-time professional developers" that provide teachers with best practices to assist them in goal attainment through a partnership philosophy (p. 12-13). The consistent verbiage that emerges within the realm of instructional coaching research is job-embedded site-based professional development, instructional goal setting, and change agent.

Instructional Coaching Roles

While the literature indicates that there are many proponents of instructional coaching, one of the main challenges that instructional coaching faces is a clear and succinct job

description. A solid job description should include an explicit delineation of the specific duties, instructional coaching practices, and expectations they must embody and engage in. However, what is found in the research is that they are tasked with maneuvering a multitude of roles that encompass all things curriculum, assessment, and instruction.

Spillane (2006) considered four questions when reviewing literature about leadership from the distributed perspective. The questions are as follows (Spillane, 2006, p. 31):

- Who takes responsibility for leadership work?
- How are those responsibilities arranged?
- How do these arrangements come to pass?
- How do individuals get constructed as influential leaders?

These are questions that can also be pondered within the realm of instructional coaching as well. The role of an instructional coach can vary within the same district and at times within a single campus. As the literature has clearly stated, the roles and responsibilities of coaches are varied and malleable based on the present needs of the school or district within which they serve (Atteberry & Bryk, 201; Ippolito, 2010; Wilder, 2014). Killion (2009) outlines ten roles that coaches can encapsulate as they work on supporting teachers, teams of teachers, and entire school districts. These roles are listed to identify and bring awareness to the various activities and functions coaches can be engaged in at any given time as they interact with teachers and other school and district personnel. Following are Killion's (2009) potential roles that coaches may serve at any given time based on teacher and campus needs.

- Data Coach
- Learning Facilitator
- Mentor

- Curriculum Specialist
- Instructional Specialist
- Learner
- Classroom Supporter
- Resource Provider
- School Leader
- Catalyst for Change

As a sort of menu of services, coaches are encouraged to review the roles and identify which ones would allow them to have the greatest influence on teacher and student progress. Killion (2009) warns that at times coaches may expand their work into various areas that often attenuate the intended effects on school reform initiatives and even more so at the individual teacher level.

Toll (2009) expresses that these roles are already realized by other key players within schools and districts. Furthermore, coaches can morph into these various roles, and they may not have the depth of capacity to fully serve in these areas and can be met with a variety of challenges in terms of content and pedagogy along with disrupting the delicate balance between being a coach or an administrator (Hall & Simeral, 2008; Killion, 2009; Toll, 2009). In order for instructional coaching to create high-yield impacts, educational institutions must create the ideal conditions for effective implementation, which includes a clear and concise understanding of the role of instructional coaches (Knight, 2015).

Instructional Coach Responsibilities

As is evident within the ten roles described by Killion (2009), the context within which the instructional coaches work impacts both their responsibilities and daily schedules. The need

to utilize instructional coaches beyond the one-on-one job-embedded professional development model and more as an agent of district initiative dissemination is prevalent in the research and within the educational institutions where the work is done. Instructional coaches at times work with individual teachers or teams of teachers to facilitate learning, implement initiatives, and build capacity (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Miller & Stuart, 2013; Poglinco & Back, 2004). According to Heineke (2013), their responsibilities can range from "completing administrative tasks, determining students' reading interferences, testing students, analyzing test data, teaching students (intervention), and serving as a teacher resource, and instructional coaching" (p. 416). Coaches often also take on non-instructional responsibilities that fall along an operational role such as bus duty, sorting materials, and even stepping in as a substitute (Wouflin, 2007, p. 5).

The focus of Gibbons and Cobbs' (2017) study was to add to research surrounding mathematics and science coaching and it provides a glimpse into productive coaching actions that have the potential to influence teacher capacity. Gibbons and Cobb (2017) argue that this research requires further examination to create a deeper understanding of the various activities mentioned in the literature and to discover which are the most profitable as well as how coaches can go about making such decisions on which key pieces of the work to focus on. Those decisions require the coach to interact not only with the teacher, but also intermingled in the work with the district and campus initiatives and how to balance the needs of all three. The juggling of the variables that impact instructional coaching is often provided in isolation within the literature and leaving the intersection of them for future research (Gallucci et al., 2010; Neumerski, 2012; Range et al., 2014; Saphier & West, 2009).

Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo, and Hargreaves (2015) ascertain that to truly leverage change it is pertinent to "use the group to change the group" (p. 6). They also indicate that there must be an investment in "…purposeful group learning and development" to increase the professional capital of teachers (Fullan et al., 2015, p. 6). Hirsh and Killion (2009) assert "…trusting and productive relationships make it possible for the unknown to be shared for the good of the team" (p. 466). Hallinger and Heck's (2010) study identified that collaborative leadership provides an indirect opportunity to impact school reform through capacity building. However, as Peterson et al. (2009) state, there is diminutive empirical data surrounding what takes place during coaching interactions that influence schoolwide improvement.

However, Neumerski (2012) indicates that in terms of instructional leadership, literature has provided information regarding the roles of principals, teachers, and coaches in a compartmentalized fashion. She reiterates that by doing so, research has failed to showcase the shared responsibilities for instructional improvement (Neumerski, 2012, p. 312). For instructional leadership to make headway in terms of school improvement and to build overall capacity within a campus or district, it truly is a team effort among the administrators, teachers, and coaches. Yet, the literature does not specify the types of interactions that take place in the day-to-day workings between the teachers, administrators, and coaches that lead to these positive outcomes. Rather it tends to focus on how one part of the instructional leadership team can or should support the other and the challenges they may face in doing so (Neumerski, 2012, p. 325). In addition, how instructional coaches perceive their roles and responsibilities is not solely based on their own perceptions, but also on the perspectives and expectations set forth by the district, administration, and teachers they work with which provides even greater incentive for understanding how the daily context on their work is influenced (Sailors & Shanklin, 2010). It is

within this research we can see the practice aspect of the distributed perspective where the three key components intersect of actors, artifacts, and situation (Spillane & Diamond, 2004).

The Instructional Coach and The Principal

The work of both the instructional coach and building administrator have several commonalities. As illustrated in Table 1, both parties work very closely with teachers to build relationships, expand, and enhance teacher capacity, and strengthen the culture and climate for the good of district and campus reform (Hall & Simeral, 2008). The interconnectedness of their work provides more than enough reason for research to be heavily involved in how the interactions among these individuals create opportunities for continued success and progress or lack thereof. Serving as the primary catalysts on campuses for the improvement of teaching and learning and having a clear understanding of the work principals and coaches do together is critical (Saphier & West, 2009).

The success of the instructional coach is very dependent upon not only the principal's view of coaching, but also how instructional leadership is supported and shared (Killion, 2009). This also goes back to Spillane's (2006) description of The Leader Plus Aspect where anyone's leadership routine can entail a variety of leadership functions. Walpole and Blamey's (2008) research focused on literacy coach roles and the duality that they encompass. In their study, they found that the participants who were principals in their studies had two different perceptions of what the literacy coaches' role entailed. One perception was that of a literacy coach as a mentor. The principals who saw their coach in this fashion acknowledged that the coach was more of a master teacher with no evaluative duties that focused on creating trust-filled relationships with those that they served (Walpole & Blamey, 2008). Zuspan (2013) reiterates the importance of confidentiality in teacher trust by indicating the importance of setting parameters around what

individual teacher information could and should not be shared. The other portion of the principals thought of their coaches as directors of the entire literacy program on a school-wide level with a focus on the central vision of working with principals as informants on the status of instruction (Walpole & Blamey, 2008).

Range et al. (2014) posed the question of how the perceptions held by principals influenced the support based on curricular area and school assignments. They found this further recognized how critical of an influence the level of relationships between coaches and principals have on coaches' role perception and enactment of responsibilities. Yet, research on the steps coaches can take to influence or alter those relationships with principals is not as evident as the types of relationships that can exist. Walpole et al., (2010) echo the need for additional empirical studies around the collaboration of coaches and principals regarding how their interactions support teacher and student learning and progress. Navigating the leadership styles, context, and discourse in the daily interactions with principals needs further exploration in order to engage instructional coaches with effective professional development that will provide them with the tools needed to not only positively impact school reform, but to become proactive in their roles and responsibilities.

Table 1

Primary Characteristics of the Instructional Coach and Building Administrator

Instructional Coach	Building Administrator
Common responsibilities	
Develops relationships	
Observes teachers	
Analyzes assessments	
Provides resources	
Mentors/challenges teachers	
Strengthens the community of learners	
Distinct responsibilities	
Peer	Superior
Not an administrator	Is an administrator
Provides constructive feedback	Provides summative feedback
Models lessons	Evaluates lessons
Overlapping responsibilities	
Servant leadership	Visible leadership
Collaborative goal setting	Directive goal setting
Provides professional development	Coordinates professional development
Counsels teachers	Directs teachers
Motivation	Inspiration

Note. Adapted from *Building Teacher Capacity for Success*, by P. Hall and A. Simeral, 2008, p. 22. Copyright 2008 by ASCD.

The Instructional Coach and the Teacher

Relationship building and having a grasp on emotional intelligence are two components that instructional coaches must be skilled in (Aguilar, 2013; Hall & Simeral, 2008; Knight, 2009b; Neumerski, 2012; Range et al., 2014; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). Knight (2009b) emphasizes that teachers' craft is of a personal nature that requires the utmost respect when it comes to the coaching approach. To discuss a teacher's pedagogy is at times like speaking about their life choices. Aguilar (2013) reiterates this reality by quoting Rafael Echevarria and Julio Olalla (1993) "…without trust there is no coaching" in her chapter on beginning a coaching relationship (p .75). Hall and Simeral (2008) describe the sensitive nature of relationships with teachers stating that solid construction requires not only trust, but respect and understanding too

(p. 23). Miller and Stewart (2013) add that apprehension with change is one of the paramount challenges coaches face when they begin their work with teachers and mention looking at instructional coaching through the lens of teamwork can circumvent many issues (p. 292). Yet, the specific steps or interactions needed to bring this approach to fruition are not clearly delineated, but a community coaching cohort model is described which begins with some reflective exercises. Just as teachers have curriculum guidance documents and teacher editions with scripted questions and examples, instructional coaches may also benefit from guidance in working alongside educators towards a common goal. Lack of clarity on how to proceed and evolve in the coaching process can contribute to an unclear understanding of the work of instructional coaches.

Sailors and Shanklin (2010) found that coaches were valued most and formed meaningful relationships based on the amount of contact time spent working with teachers. Ippolito's (2010) study focused on two types of relationships coaches held with teachers. The descriptors used for the relationships formed between coaches and teachers were termed "…responsive (coaching for teacher self-reflection) and directive (coaching for implementation of particular practices) (Ippolito, 2010, p, 164)." In many cases, instructional coaches move between both relationships and leverage one to open doors in the other. This also links the various roles instructional coaches encompass in any given day to address both circumstances. Heineke's (2013) study on coaching discourse found that while the teachers and coaches spoke of their relationships in positive terms, they also countered with the difficulty in establishing relationships that were meaningful. One common thread in coach and teacher relationships centers on how the coaches' role is structured by the work and by the administration (Hall & Simeral, 2008; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Neumerski, 2012; Range et. al., 2014).

The literature surrounding coaching interactions with teachers revolves primarily around building relationships. The varied roles coaches assume in their work with teachers, how to provide professional development utilizing adult learning theory, and a few empirical studies identifying if the coach influenced both teacher and student progress toward academic success (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Hall & Simeral, 2008; Heineke, 2013; Ippolito, 2010; Knight, 2009a; Miller & Stewart, 2013; Neumerski, 2012; Sailors & Shanklin, 2010). On the account of having limited research on the actual interactions that take place during coaching activities and on those off-the-cusp meetings, professional development for coaching and coaching conversations is contingent upon theory and frameworks provided by what Gibbons and Cobb (2017) refer to as "talented and experienced practitioners" (p. 2).

Building Instructional Coaching Capacity

The level of capacity for instructional coaches varies in terms of pedagogy, content, and even coaching itself. With instructional coaching serving as a vehicle for school reform, often the instructional coaches come straight from the classroom with the criteria for their promotion anchored in great teaching practices or "seasoned" careers in teaching (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Poglinco & Bach, 2004). Professional development is a key piece in the instructional coaches' repertoire of responsibilities and activities (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017), but literature in the professional development for the preparation of coaching is not as prevalent. Studies centered on how professional development is provided to instructional coaches, what that professional development entails, and how that professional development prepares coaches for the daily inner workings of schools and school relationships with administration and educators are not as evident in literature reviews and searches.

Woulfin's (2017) study on coaching professional development through the framework of situated cognition begins to scratch the surface of capacity-building needs for instructional coaches. In this study, Woulfin's (2017) findings suggest that there is still much to be learned and provided to coaches with regard to their "multifaceted…roles" and how those roles influence teacher development and reform. Woulfin (2017) mentions that this study did not measure how the professional development impacted coach learning outcomes, therefore, leaving opportunities for future research to continue examinations of coaching professional development and its effect on coaching capacity. Gibbons and Cobb's (2017) most current research further reiterates that there is a limited "body of research on effective coaching activities and practices" (p. 2). In identifying the criteria needed to meet the requirements for instructional coaches, Walpole and Blamey (2008) reveal that few individuals who are instructional coaches meet all of the standards necessary, which would require them to engage in reflective practices in order to identify their professional learning path. The gaps in the literature resound the need for research on how to prepare coaches for their roles, responsibilities, and the navigation of how to respond to the various interactions that can influence their intended outcomes with teachers and ultimately students.

Instructional Coaching in Context

Aside from a need for a more succinct job description, a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and a grasp on the types of relationships and functions with both instructional leaders and educators, instructional coaches must now also navigate a varied work environment. A study by Woulfin (2020) on instructional coaching found that of three educational systems she researched, two charter management organizations (CMOs) and one public school districts (PSDs), CMOs tended to have a more solid delineation of the

expectations, roles, and responsibilities of instructional coaches whereas PSDs did not. The context in which instructional coaches worked at the CMOs was found to have not only expected responsibilities for instructional coaching, but also expectations for the culture of coaching and everyone's involvement from teachers to administrators (Woulfin, 2020). When looking at primary coaching activities, the two CMOs included observation, modeling, and feedback on instruction which the research indicates are key responsibilities as well as high-leverage interactions between instructional coaches and teachers. The PSD's primary activities included mentoring teachers and facilitating data meetings which are part of the many roles of instructional coaches, but do not necessarily increase teacher performance and student achievement (Woulfin, 2020). The varied cultures between the CMOs and the PSDs in this study highlight how context can play a key role in the instructional coaches' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities as well as how they influence the efforts to build teacher capacity.

Hannan and Russell's (2020) coaching in context study that looked at several factors that shape coaching practice, found that different factors in different combinations can influence coaching and that it becomes a context-specific phenomenon. They noted that layered interactions among contextual factors require taking a systems view of instructional coaching in order to fully understand and identify the factors that bolster or impede coaching. With variations of these contextual factors influencing in different forms, they did acknowledge that there are some components that shape coaching despite the disparity such as the need for collaboration and access to social capital due to the cooperative nature of their role (Hannan & Russell, 2020).

The 2021 study by Moorhouse, Lee, and Herd on Advisory Teachers (ATs) that provided school-based professional support (SBPS) to teachers during the COVID school closures in Hong Kong, found that the implementation had continued success because of clarity in role

expectations, teamwork, and continued relationships. The AT's efforts to remain consistent even though they shifted to virtual means of communication and contact with teachers ascertain the need for targeted focus, time allotments, and continued support from their administrators. This study reiterates research that emphasizes that instructional coaches and those they serve must have a clear understanding of the role and function of the IC. It affirms the need for ICs to have the time to build relationships and opportunities to work consistently with teachers to have a positive impact on teaching and learning. All of which are contextual conditions that increase or constrain potential coaching impact.

Conclusions

Coaching is no longer something novel, yet within it there are several facets that have yet to be deconstructed. As the stakes rise with state accountability assessments such as the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and the current state of educational reform efforts, one thing is clear, there is a continued need for instructional coaching in the realm of education. Empirical research acknowledges and makes known that instructional coaching benefits teachers in a variety of ways. As accountability systems continue to increase the stakes for exemplary distinctions for public schools and they grapple with the battle of school choice and charter schools for enrollment and funding, instructional coaching shines like a lighthouse at sea.

What has been found in the literature is that the coach has not been consistently used in these intended efforts and with this comes the obstacle. The role and job descriptions of instructional coaches lack clear delineation or in most cases alignment with enacting and executing those particular roles (Bean et al., 2010; Chval et al., 2010; Coburn & Wouflin, 2012; Woulfin, 2017). Understanding how context impacts the instructional coaches' perceptions of

their role and function can provide insight for school districts in creating a plan for both implementation, clear role delineation, and sustainability of the instructional coaches' efforts in building teacher capacity.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The problem this study addresses is the need for organizational system support needed for the functionality of instructional coaching programs. Often instructional coaching positions are created in efforts to hire high-quality teachers as a remedy to enhance and support instructional effectiveness. However, plans for implementation, sustainability, continued support, and professional development for instructional coaches are often either absent or inadequate since the sole focus is on current district initiatives.

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of instructional coaches and how the context in which they perform their duties influences their perceptions of their role in building teacher capacity. To accomplish this purpose, the following research question has been posed:

> How does context influence instructional coaches' perceptions of how they fulfill their roles and their ability to enhance teacher capacity?

In this chapter, I start with a presentation of the methodology for this study, including a discussion of its philosophical foundations. This is followed by a description of the research design within my selected methodological approach that will be utilized in this study. Next, I detail the specific research methods used in this study. The description includes information about the setting, sample, data collection including instrumentation and procedure, and data

analysis including trustworthiness and the role of the researcher. I conclude with a chapter summary.

Design of the Study

The use of qualitative methods in this study provided an opportunity to garner a richer and deeper examination of lived experiences and perceptions of instructional coaches and the influence of their work context. Qualitative methods allow for the exploration of the inner experiences of the participants which allows for a holistic and comprehensive approach to the study of a phenomenon (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). This provides the researcher with the opportunity to connect with the participants and view the experiences through their eyes and voice. There are five different types of qualitative research outlined in the work of Creswell and Creswell (2018) including ethnography, narrative research, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies. A descriptive qualitative design with a case study approach through a phenomenological lens is utilized to answer the research question on how the context in which instructional coaches perform their duties influences their perceptions of their ability in building teacher capacity and fulfilling their role.

This study's case study approach was bounded by a single district's instructional coaches' lived experience. Multiple instructional coaches were studied to glean a more holistic view of the contextual factors instructional coaches perceive as impacting their lived experiences and in enhancing teacher pedagogy. For this study, multiple members of this district's instructional coaching team such as specialists in the areas of literacy, writing, math acceleration, science, and bilingual education that exclusively serve elementary grades kindergarten through fifth in the large urban south-central Texas district. Robert K. Yin (2009) indicates that variation, such as the different areas in which instructional coaches function, will allow me to see if the

instructional coaches lived experiences differ based on specific contexts related to their content or program.

Creswell and Poth (2018) define a phenomenological study as one that looks to describe a common meaning of the lived experiences of a phenomenon for several individuals. In this study, the phenomenon is being an elementary instructional coach in a large urban district in South Central Texas. It is on this basis that I decided to use a phenomenological lens for this qualitative study with the goal of deconstructing the lived experiences of instructional coaches as they navigate various contextual factors. The importance for this type of lens is that it allowed me to create a composite understanding of what it means to instructionally coach at the selected district. It also provided insight for potential considerations to refine the instructional program in order to maximize coaching potential and effectiveness.

Research Methods

In this section, I describe the specific research methods that I utilized to apply case study procedures. Specifically, I will discuss the context, sample, data collection, data analysis, and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness.

Setting, Context, and Sample

This qualitative study took place in the context of a South-Central Texas urban school district where I, the principal investigator, serve as a director at the district level. The site for this study was selected purposefully for its accessibility. I am also new to the district, the role, and have not had any former contact with the potential participants or knowledge of their prior perceptions of instructional coaching. The district is in a South-Central Texas city.

Another important factor associated with the context in which the ICs work is the type of on-going professional support that has been provided as part of their onboarding and continued

capacity building that is expected to be implemented. The coaches have been a part of the Solution Tree training that center on the *Learning By Doing: A handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* Framework by Richard Dufour, Rebecca Dufour, Robert Eaker, Thomas W. Many, and Mike Mattos (2016). They have also been trained on leading learning with consultant and instructional coaching researcher Joellen Killion. This contextual information is necessary when data collection, analysis, and interpretation commence regarding contextual factors that may influence not only the context of the work but their perceptions of instructional coaching as well.

Population and Sample Selection

Instructional coaches were the focus of this study centered on context and its influence on their work. The participants consisted of district and campus instructional coach participants that met the following criteria: 1) are certified teachers, 2) have a minimum of two years working for the district in a coaching capacity 3) instructional coaches can be single site-based, or work across multiple campuses and grade levels, and 4) service Title I elementary campuses. The number of participants was dependent upon those who choose to participate. At the time of this study, the district had a total of 75 instructional coaches that serviced the elementary campuses in various content areas such as literacy, writing, reading academies, science, math, and bilingual. These instructional coaches are not only split via content or program, but service both Title I and Non-Title elementary campuses.

Participant Safeguards

Approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) was obtained prior to the research commencing. The purpose of the IRB approval is to ensure certain safeguards for all participants involved to include the protection of their privacy and well-being. Permission was obtained from

the superintendent of schools to conduct the research. Instructional coach participation was on a voluntary basis and signed consent was requested, which allowed the principal researcher to use the data gathered from this study (Appendix A). Participants were not referred to by name nor was the location of their current position be made identifiable. All information was stored utilizing a code instead of identifiers.

Ethical Considerations

As the researcher in this study, I take into account not only my experiences as an instructional coach, but my interaction and contributions to the coach trainings, handbook, and interactions with the elementary instructional coaches in this study. I share in this section how both past and present experiences and interactions have shaped my view on this phenomenon being studied. While the instructional coaches belong to the campuses they serve, it is my department that shapes their learning on what instructional coaching and instructional coaching practices consist of. I do not evaluate any instructional coaches nor am I a part of their evaluations indirectly. I do, however, provide support as needed and as requested in the area of coaching. I also know them by name and interact with them on visits to campuses, in training, and other district functions.

It became imperative that I remained cognizant of my positionality, views, and of my own impact within this process as it may play into "power relations" as mentioned by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). I reassured them of the confidentiality agreement and concealment of their names and the names of the campuses they serve throughout this paper to protect their identity.

Sample Procedures

Purposeful sampling was utilized in the selection of participants for the semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and collection of participant observations. Purposeful sampling allows

the researcher to select information rich cases that will provide a description of the phenomenon to be studied as stated by Nick Emmel (2013). Emmel (2013) defines purposeful sampling using the work of Michael Quinn Patton (2002). For this study purposeful sampling takes the shape of typical sampling as described by Patton (2002). The sample is typical to illustrate and provide a description of the phenomenon being studied (Emmel, 2013). The typical sample was recruited via email. A demographic data questionnaire was emailed to all elementary instructional coaches who have signed an informed consent for participation within the district. Demographic questions included information about their years of experience, their current content position, and the setting within which they practice (elementary, middle school, high school, or multiple settings).

Once the demographic questionnaire results were gathered, a sample of 9 participants representing each of the different coaching positions (i.e., literacy, reading academies, writing, math acceleration, science, and bilingual) were selected to interview and of those nine, 3 became part of the focus group. According to Creswell (2013) purposeful sampling is one in which the researcher "intentionally selects individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (p. 206). The participants considered for a follow-up semi-structured interviewed were the respondents that indicated that they currently hold a teaching certificate and a position in which they provide instructional coaching for teachers in an elementary school campus for the past three years in the selected site. Participants were asked to provide their first name, phone number and an email at the end of the questionnaire. Those selected for the follow-up interview were contacted via email and/or telephone to schedule the interview. A reminder that participation in the study's interview and focus group requires video and or audio tape recording

mentioned in their signed informed consent was reiterated as well as the participant's right to leave the study at any time.

Participants

A questionnaire was sent out to all elementary instructional coaches with an email to explain the study. The purpose of the questionnaire was to capture potential participant demographic information to identify if they met the criteria needed for this study. The questionnaire was sent through Qualtrics and administered to all who volunteered to participate and signed the first consent form. The return rate on the questionnaire was 1.5%. Some individuals did not complete it due to the opening statement about the qualification of the study and notified me. The instructional coaches were given a week to complete the questionnaire. Once the questionnaires were completed, I was able to review and identify the 9 instructional coaches that met the criteria for this study. The other volunteers were eliminated based on not meeting the years of coaching experience at the district site. I provide the content of specialization, number of years as an elementary instructional coach and the level of service in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Specialization	Years of instructional coaching experience		Service level	
	2-3 years	4 or more years	Campus	District
Literacy		X	X	
		X	X	
Math		X		X
		X	X	
Early Childhood		X		X
Science	X		X	
	X		X	
Bilingual		X	X	
Other*		X	X	

* Works with all contents for particular grade levels at the campus.

As seen in Table 2, seven of the nine instructional coaches have four or more years of coaching experience in this district. Two of the nine participants are district-level instructional coaches and serve on a bigger scale. Six of the nine instructional coaches support one of the core content areas which include literacy, math, and science. Two of the nine participants serve teachers who work with programmatic student populations such as bilingual education and early childhood. One instructional coach supports teachers in multiple grade levels and content areas with a specialization under other.

Instructional Coach Profile

The utilization of instructional coaches in this district has evolved and continued to change over the course of the past 5 years. Currently, elementary instructional coaches are hired and evaluated by the principals at Title I campuses. Once hired, the principal or instructional team decides how the position best fits the current needs of the campus. Some instructional coaches pertain to certain grade levels in all contents, some are content specific, and others may service particular programs like early childhood, dual language and bilingual programs.

During this study, elementary instructional coaches received one monthly training day. The day consists of an am session dedicated to the role of instructional coaches, district initiatives, and general curriculum and instruction training. The afternoon or PM session is broken up by content and program (i.e., bilingual education) and focuses on providing skills and strategies as well as specific curriculum updates and assessment pieces. The professional learning is provided by department executive directors, directors, assistant directors, coordinators, and other specialists. Content specialists serve as a content specific support that works both on curriculum documents, professional learning, and supporting instructional coaches and teachers. Additional professional development is provided via the districts professional learning department which offers a variety of training in district and by education consultant groups.

All the participants worked in the district as instructional coaches at the elementary level including grades from Pre-kindergarten to fifth at the time of the study. I gave each of the participants a randomly created pseudonym to replace any participant identifiers to maintain anonymity. A short introduction on each of the participants is provided below.

Natalie is a math instructional coach. She supports teachers at a Title 1 elementary campus. She has been an instructional coach for a little over ten years. Prior to her role at the elementary campus, Natalie also supported teachers at the secondary level.

Olivia is an early childhood instructional coach who serves at the district level. Support for early childhood in this role has multiple compliance pieces required by the state. Working in early childhood, Oliva predominantly supports prekindergarten teachers through coaching and professional development.

Penelope is a literacy coach. She serves an elementary title one campus. She was also an instructional coach at a different district where the role was part teacher and part instructional coach. This will be her third year as an instructional coach at this current site and ten years in education as a whole.

Lila is also a literacy coach who supports teachers at a Title 1 elementary campus. She has over 21 years' experience in education. Nine of those years are in an instructional coaching capacity. She has had experience working at a dual language campus and a non-dual language campus.

Frances is a math specialist with four or more years of experience as an IC. She serves at the district level and provides coaching support to instructional coaches as well as teachers in this capacity. Part of her role is to provide professional learning opportunities for instructional coaches at the district instructional coach meeting days. Prior to being at the district level, Frances served at the campus level as an instructional coach.

Maria is one of the two coaches who has two to three years of experience in instructional coaching. She currently serves at an elementary Title I campus. She supports teachers in all grade levels and across all contents. Prior to this study, she supported teachers in grades 3rd through 5th and in one content area.

Lucy is an elementary bilingual coach that serves a Title I dual language campus. With her specialization in bilingual education she often has to assist with admission review and dismissal (ARD) meetings and other programmatic documentation for bilingual students. She works predominantly with bilingual or dual language teachers in all content areas and grade levels. She has over four years of instructional coaching experience.

Julia is an elementary science coach at a Title I campus. She has three years of experience in the instructional coaching capacity at the time of this study. She supports teachers at all grade levels on her campus. Julia often provides support in reading and math as needed by her campus.

Jane has over four years of instructional coaching experience and currently serves at a Title 1 elementary campus. She currently supports grade levels and not a particular content area. Jane had the opportunity to be mentored by a district specialist on her coaching practices.

Data Collection and Management

This section will provide details about the procedures, instrumentation, and management strategies the researcher will utilize to conduct this study. Both the collection and management of the data are essential in ensuring that there is trustworthiness

Upon receiving approval from the University Institutional Review Board and the dissertation committee, data collection commenced. This study used a combination of a questionnaire, a focus group, semi-structured interviews, analytic memos, and a collection of artifacts to collect data. To gather qualitative data about the perceptions of their role and efficacy beliefs about their current coaching practices, the ICs participated in interviews and a focus group discussion. Artifacts were collected to include the IC job description, the IC handbook, and the district IC meeting agendas and presentation slide decks to triangulate the data. Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe (2008) state that in order to reduce misinterpretation and to achieve triangulation, multiple methods of data collection are obtained to create an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Semi-Structured Interviews Protocol

Interviews help elicit context-rich personal accounts and perceptions from participants which can facilitate the description of complex interactions and lived experiences (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2018). Since this study is centered on how context influences IC's perceptions, an interview protocol allowed the researcher to hear about the IC's lived experiences from their own perspectives. It also provided an opportunity for the researcher to seek clarification and probe for additional information to construct an authentic description. To conduct the individual interviews, a semi-structured interview schedule consisting of broad open questions was utilized (Appendix B). The researcher was able to ask each participant the same questions leaving flexibility to cater to individual experiences. The schedule was used to capture the participants' experiences in the role of an instructional coach, their perceptions of their functions, and their work environment.

Interviews were conducted with the instructional coaches that consented to participation in the study. The interviews took no more than an hour but were dependent on the IC's response and detail to the interview questions. Interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom in consideration of the participants' schedule and availability. Participants chose an identification number to ensure their anonymity. Recordings were stored in a password-protected zoom account which were then destroyed once synced with the Otter.ai platform. Once interviews were completed, they were transcribed and coded based on patterns or themes that emerged.

Focus Group

The purpose of the focus group is to gain deep insight into the instructional coaches' perceptions of their roles, functions, and work context experiences. The opportunity to engage in open discussion led to important details that may be missed in questionnaires and interviews.

The group interaction dynamic can also add valuable data about challenges that may differ among each individual coach, their content, and context. It can also help further understand the themes and patterns that may emerge from the semi-structured interview.

The open-ended questions for the focus group protocol, which can be found in Appendix C, were modified from a study by Valles (2017) on instructional coaching and identity. The purpose behind the selection of this protocol was that this study sought to understand how instructional coaches' perceptions of their roles and the environment in which they carry out those functions influence their functionality. Since each of the instructional coaches have their own title and job description, garnering information on how coaches view themselves, their work, and their perception of how their roles are viewed by others provided insight on the varying contexts in which they enact their coaching roles. Furthermore, it also highlighted how these contexts shape or mold the way in which similar tasks are executed for the same intended outcomes of teacher performance. It was important to add a question regarding the influence of the pandemic since this item may have impacted or altered the environment of all district stakeholders and how each works alongside one another.

The focus group met once after participants were identified and interviewed via ZOOM platform to discuss and share their current coaching work, coaching wins, and problems of practice or challenges they have faced. The participants were given a password-protected link to access the meeting and platform. The focus group meeting was video recorded for coding review and transcription. To preserve anonymity, I renamed the participants using a code in place of an actual identifier. In the transcription, the participants will only be referred to by the code chosen. The reason behind utilizing an online platform versus a face-to-face meeting for the focus group is to take into consideration the participant's schedules and availability. All meeting recordings

and transcriptions were stored in a password-protected folder in the researcher's OneDrive. To address and ensure confidentiality, an identifier of a combination of letters and a number were used to distinguish the research participants and maintain anonymity within the password-protected folder. A pseudonym was then randomly chosen also to maintain anonymity within this study's discussion and descriptions.

Artifacts

To learn about and understand the implementation of the district's instructional coaching program, I collected copies of instructional coach job descriptions, district-held instructional coaching meeting agendas, presentation slide decks, hand-outs, and other communication pertaining to instructional coaches, their meetings, and trainings. These documents were then examined and linked to both the research question and the interview and focus group protocols for the triangulation of the data. Below in Table 3 is an outline of the monthly training provided to instructional coaches. The professional learning provided centered on three components. The taking action component was at the start of the meeting and focused on the sharing and discussion of the prior month's learning and application. That was to be followed with a deeper dive into one of the ten roles described by Joellen Killion (2009). The final component of the morning portion of the meeting focused on providing instructional coaches with resources they could immediately go and apply.

Table 3

Overview of Monthly District Instructional Coaching Meetings

Month	Taking action	Role	Building your coaching toolbox
August	None; 1st meeting of the year	Determine your essential responsibility - Killion Instructional specialist roles and responsibilities as standards –	Reflect on next steps to support teachers ⇒ build learning progression
September	Implement today's essential standard in the next month and be prepared to share your outcomes	Focus: The role of the curriculum specialist Unpack it like a standard and discuss the next steps & resources to support the work with teachers	Building trust and relationships What is trust?
October	Reflection on the coaching tool used with teachers	The role of an instructional specialist Examine and reflect on each of the roles of an IC as a team and choose one to focus on. Does this one align well with your curriculum specialist role identified at the last meeting? What makes you say that? unpack the team's identified IC role	Coaching dialogue Role playing using Killion's protocol/question bookmark or Sweeney
November	Share what tools you have tried to incorporate in your IC practice	Role of classroom support and advocate (co-teaching, co-planning, modeling instruction) What's on your plate activity with administrators.	Problems of practice and coaching focus Partnership agreements

Table 3, cont.

Month	Taking action	Role	Building your coaching toolbox
February	Instructional playbook – what are your go-to strategies for supporting instruction?	Role of the data coach • Balanced Assessment • Timely data • Formative supporting summative.	What is an effective response? By student by standard
March	Ideas for formative assessments – not just an exit ticket Tangible, Informal, nonverbal Lead4ward strategies	Co-planning & co-teaching • PLC questions with data and planning • Using your data for scaffolding • Modeling instruction	Teaching in the fast lane – success starters Rockin' review
April	Data based scaffolding artifact	Role of the learning facilitator Coaching during STAAR review – don't panic trust the process Pushing in and coaching up – advocating for best practices.	Rockin' coaching review Implementing by pushing in, not pulling out, coaching up & advocating for best investment practices for *all* teachers Strategies to use within the structures In what classroom structure would this strategy work?

Data Analysis Strategies

Transcription and Coding

Since qualitative data requires the review of data from the perspective of the researcher, a multilevel-step process is necessary. First, data from the interviews and focus group were transcribed verbatim, read multiple times, and compared to the respective recordings to ensure transcript reliability. Using Creswell's (2003) six-step process for analyzing qualitative data I

began with step in gathering and organizing the data which included interview and focus group transcripts, an instructional coach job description, and an instructional coaching handbook.

The second step involved reading through all the transcribed transcripts to get a general sense of the information to reflect on its overall meaning. As I read, I recorded notes in the margins to refer to throughout additional readings. I also place the questions and respective responses into a spreadsheet to get an initial arial view of the data collected. The third step in the process is where I began with open coding by bringing meaning to chunks via keywords or ideas. These ideas and keywords were then reduced to more tangible codes with meaning. I utilized *dedoose*, a cross-platform app for analyzing qualitative text to help organize the chunks. The word cloud image below in Figure 1 illustrates the forty-three codes generated during the first cycle of data analysis. In the fourth step of this process, I moved towards reexamining those chunks and how they linked to the descriptions of the experiences shared by the participants.

I began to construct the narrative passages to convey how the descriptions and themes would be represented as part of my process for step five of Creswell's (2003) six-step process. For the final step in this qualitative data analysis, was making meaning of the data in parts and in the sum of those parts as represented by the participants' responses and artifact connections. This construction included not only comparison findings from the data and the literature but also my own personal interpretation and individual understanding.

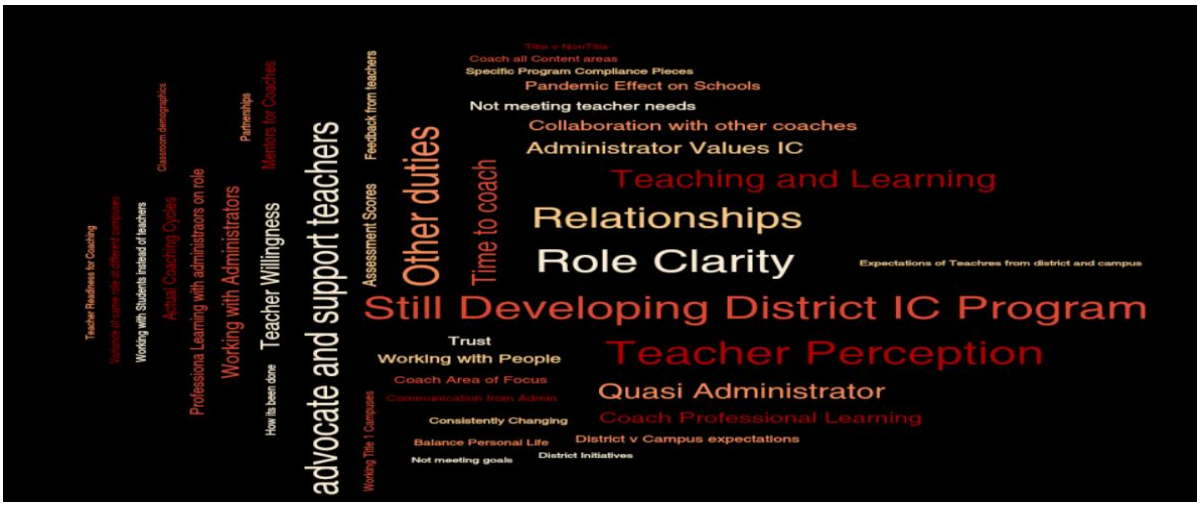

Figure 1. *First-Cycle Coding*

Throughout the process of transcription and coding, I wrote analytical memos to document reflection and thought process behind choosing and using specific coding methods as well as assigning specific codes. Saldaña (2016) indicates that qualitative research requires particular attention to reflection and language as patterns and meanings of the experience begin to emerge. Analytic memos also serve as a space to document links, connections, and themes as well as potential concepts and categories. This reflective writing contributes to the quality of analysis. Memo writing took place to link the coding and interpretation of the data which documented emerging ideas, insight, and understanding (Leavy, 2017).

For the second cycle of coding, the interview and focus group data underwent focused coding to categorize codes into thematic or conceptual similarity. Axial coding was then used to provide opportunities to explicate the contexts, interactions, and consequences of the above-mentioned which suited this research as it is focused on the context of instructional coaches' work which includes actions and interactions.

To investigate instructional coaches' perceptions of their roles, I analyzed data collected from the semi-structured interview questions 1, 2, and 7 as well as focus group questions 1 and 2.

These questions allowed the participants to tell us about how they perceive their role, their ability to influence their work and provide additional insight into their experiences as instructional coaches. Allowing the coaches to speak about what instructional coaching means to them as well as describe what it looks and sounds like, provided me with the lens through which the instructional coach views their role and function, hence, giving meaning to their perception of what being an instructional coach entail.

Contextual factors and their influence on the responsibilities of instructional coaches are addressed via semi-structured interview questions 3 and 6 as well as focus group question 6. Semi-structured interview question 3 asked about their experience as instructional coaches which linked to the environment in which they execute those functions. Question 6 provided an opportunity to dig into their perceived ability to lead with additional prompting questions around factors that may hinder their work as well as why they believe those factors exist. This question also sought to identify which areas of their work may be impacted by the factors they mention. Focus group question 6 was necessary for exploring how those factors mentioned have altered or influenced their work environment thereby impacting their work with teachers.

I considered semi-structured interview question 4 and artifacts collected from instructional coaching activities such as professional development, to add to the information gathered on the instructional coaches' work environment and execution of responsibilities. This data lent itself to the exploration and examination of how they fulfill their responsibilities as instructional coaches within these contexts. Understanding the district messaging around the role and function of instructional coaches illustrated additional details on the environment in which the coach facilitates their work.

Trustworthiness

In the qualitative components of the research, the researcher needs to ensure trustworthiness of their findings. To accomplish this, I employed detailed descriptions, peer review of interview protocols, analytic memos, and triangulation of data to help improve the trustworthiness of the study as discussed by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

In terms of trustworthiness, being a district central elementary director working alongside the participants includes a potential for bias in my perceptions of interviews and focus group discussion. Peer review (dissertation committee) of the interview and focus group was used to ensure alignment to the research question. Triangulation of the data occurred through comparing information across the interviews, focus group, and artifacts to counteract any potential bias and draw more concrete conclusions.

Limitations of the Design

Potential limitations in the study may exist. The first is that the district highlighted in the study my place of employment. This poses some potential limitation in that participants might have been cautious in their responses to varying degrees at various points in the study. For example, when participants were asked to describe their work environment or when responding to how they perceive administrators view instructional coaching. According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009), being an insider can also provide a deeper understanding of the context. In this study, my insider-outsider stance provided both strengths and limitations. To fully understand how we are different from the group within our research, we must first understand and note how we are the same since the human experience is complex and multilayered (Dwyer & Buckles, 2009). Dwyer & Buckle (2009) ascertain that as qualitative researchers we are not completely separate from our participants because their experiences and stories are carried with us as we

transcribe interviews, explore their voices through the words they use, and in turn our analysis of this affects our personhood.

However, I did ensure that I was removed from directly evaluating the instructional coaches during the duration of the study. The varying levels of experience, skills, and motivation of the instructional coaches could also be a limitation to the study when looking at their lived experiences and perceptions. In addition, the current pandemic may have influenced semi-structured interviews and focus group session conversations of the instructional coaches. This study may not be generalizable beyond the scope of the sample and district represented but may provide connections or additional information regarding potential processes or systems needed to implement effective instructional coaching frameworks and professional development needed to prepare instructional coaches for an ever-evolving work environment.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the process and methods that were used to analyze the instructional coaches' perceptions about their role and functions as well as their efficaciousness in enhancing teacher performance with regard to their work environment that encompasses organizational culture and climate around coaching. In this qualitative study with a case study approach and phenomenological lens, a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and artifacts were collected around the work of instructional coaches and their perceptions. Data were analyzed for themes and patterns that emerged in relation to the questions posed. Analytic memos were utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of this research. Also included are the participant safeguards that were in place during data collection and analysis.

This chapter provides the protocols that were used for the interviews and focus groups provided to the participating instructional coaches. The chapter ends with disclosure of the

researcher's role in the study as well as the potential limitations that may exist. In chapter 4, a discussion on the data and findings are displayed by theme. Chapter 5 further analyzes the data in relation to the literature on coaching in Chapter 2 as well as present implications and recommendations for future practice and research.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and discuss emergent themes and findings related to the research question. In this qualitative case study, I explored the perceptions of instructional coaches, and their descriptions of how various factors increase or constrain opportunities to engage in coaching practices.

I used the research question to guide the collection and organization of data during analysis. I drew from three sources, individual semi-structured interviews, one focus group discussion, and a review of artifacts from district instructional coaching meetings. The artifacts included meeting agendas and slide decks from the morning portion that focuses on building instructional coach capacity. The semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion described multiple contextual influences that can create hurdles in their efforts to engage in building teacher skill sets. Examples of these contextual conditions include competing demands, administrator support, teacher perceptions, and the articulation of and support of the role of IC.

The findings of this study are provided in this chapter and are organized around the research questions. The order of the findings is not based on frequency or quantity. Figure 2 is provided to show how themes that emerged from the data analysis frame interconnectedness of the findings which are elaborated on in this chapter. The instructional coaches' perceptions of role, purpose, and ability to build teacher capacity are examined through the narrative

descriptions and quotes that convey their experiences. The instructional coaches' actual responses are used to provide accurate descriptions to capture the essence of those experiences.

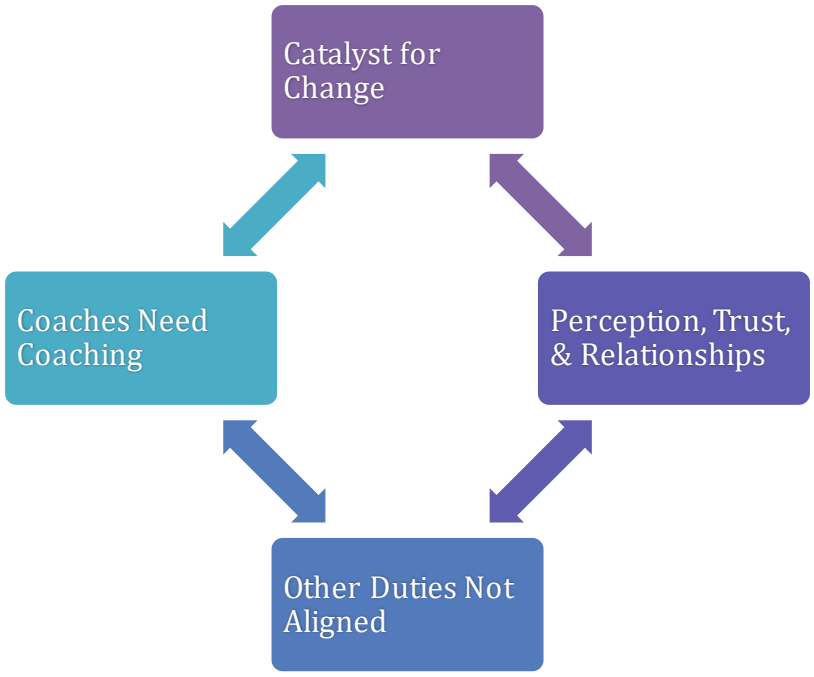

Figure 2. *Recurring Themes*

Context and Instructional Coaching

Originally instructional coaching was conceptualized as "peer coaching" where teachers collaborated with one another with the targeted purpose of developing new skills to then transfer into practice through observation and feedback (Joyce & Showers, 1982). It then evolved in efforts to move beyond the sit-and-get format of professional development to now include implementation supports, collective ownership, and collaboration with peers with nonevaluative feedback (Showers & Joyce, 1996). When asked the question of what instructional coaching means, all the instructional coaches in this study leaned towards these early interpretations. The consistent description in their responses included the terms to improve teacher craft, provide support, grow teachers, and work collaboratively with teachers (Aguilar, 2013; Killion & Harrison, 2017; Knight, 2018).

Instructional coaches understood that instructional coaching involved partnering with teachers, setting goals, and sharing expertise and guidance in teaching and learning. They felt very strongly about coaching cycles being non-evaluative. Despite this understanding of instructional coaching, the instructional coaches mentioned several competing contextual factors that influenced how they carried out this work in both the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. I will cover these findings in the sections that follow.

Finding 1: Instructional Coaches Navigate Perceived Notions of Their Roles and Competing Demands

Instructional coaching embodies many roles and functions at both the district and campus levels (Killion, 2009). The expectation to attend to an assortment of responsibilities and duties is ever present within instructional coach job descriptions to include all other duties as assigned. It was evident in the study that instructional coaches worked beyond the scope of their job descriptions, often taking on roles that may already be provided by other staff members. Penelope describes such duties and ends with a fitting educational buzzword.

> We always made the joke on our campus that wherever there is a hole, we were put there. Whether it's a teacher missing, handling 5th- graduation, parents coming in, helping with attendance, bingo, pull small groups all day…its because we don't have a class attached to us…And you would try to squeeze any kind of coaching you could in between…what's fidelity?

The question on fidelity at the end of Penelope's statement links to inconsistent implementation of instructional coaching which poses a challenge to the intended work of affecting change in teaching and learning. At one point, she was a substitute teacher due to the teacher being out on FMLA.

Time to coach. Penelope's reference to filling any hole on the campus she serves makes reference to how the coaches' schedules become more limited to actual coaching tasks. Participants emphasized that while they knew that being in classrooms and working alongside teachers was the best use of not only their time, but their expertise, they were often utilized in depending on what their administrator saw fit. Lucy emphasizes her struggle and the stress that was caused by meeting those "other duties".

> I feel like my hands were tied. Like, even and I think that's what stressed me the most this year. Because I just felt like, even though I try my best, and I try to, you know, try to make time here and there. It just wasn't enough. Like I felt like sometimes I said it really was just worthless, because it was probably just giving them 15 minutes. And I mean, what could you really do in 15 or 10 minutes? You know, I didn't feel like I actually didn't get to work with my teachers the way I would have loved to work with them.

Maria, however, had a different experience this year in terms of role clarity at her campus. She describes how her administrator set the tone for the work the coach and teacher are expected to engage in.

> Well, I'll start first with this school. I know that at the beginning of the year, when we have like faculty meetings, or when we have like, you know, just meetings with it with the grade levels and stuff about expectations, like we even did this last year, we had = a meeting talking about expectations for next year. So during those meetings, it was explicitly presented to the staff that we are going to have coaching cycles as your coaches are going to be doing this. So it was very explicitly stated to the staff, what our roles were going to be in our expectations.

The disparity of the coaching role across the district was viewed as an effect of an unclear and cohesive message from the district to campus-based leaders. Jane reiterates this sentiment in the focus group discussion:

> I think the role itself entails a lot of other roles. However, I think that with all of those roles as different coaches, a data coach, a curriculum coach, what's, for me, what I think is the biggest role of a coach is to do coaching cycles to be in the classroom with teachers, hand in hand, doing those cycles. And that isn't always necessarily modeling, there's all these different strategies that are available and to give teachers voice and choice and that is great. But we are going to see the most growth and most impact of our work if we are in the classrooms. And so taking off all those other roles that may be more clerical paperwork, or all the other duties as assigned, takes away from us being able to do our what would be our most impactful role of being in the classrooms and truly being in the classrooms as a coach for those teachers, not necessarily as an interventionist, a teacher's aide, a Copy Maker, a station maker, a behavior management specialist. And, yes, and so taking that away, and truly having the teachers understand our role, the principals understand our role, the coaches understand the role will lead, we will see the fruits of our labor.

When responding to focus group question 2 on the role of the instructional coach and what that should entail, the following participant begins by emphasizing the need to engage in coaching cycles and work alongside the teacher. Lila goes on to state that while that would be the optimal work to engage in, the disparity lies in the competing responsibilities that are placed on coaches. These additional duties that take precedence over coaching cycles are one of the many factors that blur the instructional coach's role. It can also have significant impacts on developing

relationships. Lila describes an opportunity that is missed in forging a solid trusting relationship due to additional duties.

> But it is so hard when you build a relationship with a teacher, you do the beauty, the beautiful part of like scheduling, you know, having the pre-coaching cycle conference and picking the student goal, and then you start going in there, and then it's like, oh, tomorrow, I need you to do this, instead, tomorrow, I need you to do this instead. And then you get to be the person who goes to the teacher and says, I'm no longer gonna be in your room tomorrow, we'll try again on Thursday. And you can immediately see it in their face, it's like, okay, so you're not, you're not going to fulfill your end.

Jane agrees with Lila and deems this break in trust a loss of credibility even when instructional coaches try to find pockets of time in between those other duties.

Administrators and coaching. Throughout the study, the participants mentioned how the perceptions of as well as the support provided by their respective administrators opened or closed opportunities to engage in authentic instructional coaching practices with teachers. How an administrator communicated or failed to communicate the role of the coach on campus had a direct impact on teacher perceptions and expectations of how the coach is to function. This presented itself as being asked to become true partners in learning or simply an extra set of hands to make copies or pull below-level students for additional support. Jane points out the impact of administrator supports on the work of coaches.

> It's just a matter of if we are allowed to do that by our admin. I have had different principals in this role and one was very much really, your main job is all other duties as assigned. The one I have now, I still have other duties, but it is scaled way back compared to the past and my plate is filled with coaching.

Penelope's description of her administrator

> So I've been lucky that my administration really does understand the role of coaching, both of them have, and they know what we're there for and what we're not there for. So I think that's good. And I, I believe that they're that way, because they understand, like I said, the long-term investment of a coach. But there have been administrators that either with the meetings or other coaches have confided in me that they're just small groups, small groups, and it doesn't matter what the rule says, I this is what I need you for. So I think it just depends on their perception of a coach and if they're worth the time and effort and value.

I found that 6 out of the 9 participants described that their administrators more often than not utilized them beyond the scope of their duties. There seemed to be a big disconnect between what instructional coaches perceived their work entailed and what they were being tasked with. The effect of this led to the difficulties that ICs mention when trying to engage in coaching cycles or other coaching activities with teachers. Natalie describes wanting to have the trust and support of her administrator to do her job.

> My, what I want is I would want the, the trust of the principal, you know, or to Oh, for her to trust me that the decisions that I'm trying to make in the classrooms are the right ones for the teachers because I can always do everything the district is training me for, and trying all these things. But if I don't have that support from my principal, it's never gonna happen.

She makes a compelling point that is interwoven in the responses of the rest of the participants. Frances provides a different insight on the impact of administrators' view of coaching. She showcases that part of the issue may stem from administrators not having a positive experience

or the lack of any experience working with a coach and therefore not understanding the return on investment it could potentially have.

> I think that a lot of times the two principals have the same idea, like it's gonna be small groups all day, that's what they do. I've even heard one particular administrator say, coaching doesn't work? Well, probably because he had never experienced it in the way that coaching does work, you know, he, he didn't know how to use his coaches, maybe he never experienced a positive outcome from it. So you've got to kind of prove, give the proof, you know, and you've got to kind of try it. I can remember going in and having to prove who I was, and my ideas and everything to the administration saying, Once you see who I am, you know, you tell me, I'll work within your parameters as much as I can.

This perspective brings to light other systemic issues that perhaps linger on a much higher-level pertaining to the instructional framework provided by the district or lack thereof. Even more telling, is the instructional coach having to advocate for herself and prove her value a reflection that Penelope also referenced in her response. These responses highlight the varied contexts each instructional coach must navigate in their perceived roles.

When asked why they think this is so, Lucy makes clear the impact of state assessments and other measures of academic progress on how administrators decide to utilize their coaches. Frances and Olivia bring to light the need for clarity on the role and purpose of instructional coaches for administrators who maybe have not had the opportunity to work with an IC or have worked with an IC in a variety of different contexts and capacities.

It is evident that there is variability in how administrators view coaching positions. This adds another layer to how interconnected contextual conditions are and how they shape coaching practice and its influence on teaching and learning. Exploring these factors and how instructional

coaching is nested within the context in which it takes place can lead to insight on how to create surrounding systems that maximize instructional coaching potential.

Finding 2: Instructional Coaches Must Cultivate and Leverage Trusting Relationships to Enact Change

It was clear through analysis of the data that instructional coaches must build trusting relationships before they can engage in actual coaching activities with teachers. All participants indicated that opportunities to build relationships were centered on trust. Participants of the study described how perceptions from both teachers and administrators play a big role in the opportunities they have or lack in building relationships and influencing change.

Doing something wrong. Building a trusting relationship was often impeded by the teachers' own self-perceptions on instructional proficiency. Through this study, participants gave voice to the influence of potential teacher self-perception and instructional coaching. Several of the responses in the interviews identified the teachers' fear of not being proficient as a reason for being coached. This perception then perpetuates a negative connotation on partnering with instructional coaches and in building trust. Olivia mentions the example of how Michael Jordan had a coach even though he was known for being a great basketball player to provide the context that everyone should have a coach. She goes on to mention that on the campuses she serves it isn't viewed that way.

> I think they view the role not really like that everyone needs a coach, and that everyone could use a coach, but more like they see us go into a room sometimes and are like "Oh, I wonder what they did?" Like what did they do wrong that they have to have a coach come out.

Natalie reiterates this perception of falling in a negative light for going into the classroom.

> At some point there has been like this negativity towards instructional coaches, right because you are seen as, as this person that's coming in the "All Knowing" and you know, "you're here to fix me or whatever" …teachers feel like you tattletale on what they're doing wrong in the classroom.

Statements like Natalie's resound throughout the interview and focus group. The coach as the mender of bad instructional practices is a perception that many of the participants struggle to eliminate.

From the focus group discussion, Jane describes an experience coming on as an instructional coach at a new campus where a negative culture around coaching had been set. This campus coaching culture did not put building trust at the forefront and coaching was instead directive in nature.

> When I came on and I was immediately told from when I started, you are going to push into this teacher's classroom, this teacher's classroom, this teacher's classroom again, because that was already what it was like on the campus. If I mean, they wanted to have their doors locked and closed and walls were up, and they already before even getting to know me at all, as a person were already like, ah, like coaches are not good. Because, honestly, they were embarrassed because it's like, wow, like everyone on my team, everyone knows on my campus that you're walking into my room, because someone doesn't think I'm doing my job.

Having this kind of tone set on coaching creates a more punitive view rather than embedded support based on a growth mindset. Jane also mentions that having the teacher's trust impacts the amount of influence an instructional coach can have on a campus. She goes on to mention that it becomes imperative to hold on to that trust throughout the year to make a big difference.

Natalie describes an experience that negatively impacted her relationship with a teacher.

> I remember one day that she was absent that this teacher was absent. And my principal told me, okay, Natalie, I need you to get into that classroom. And I need you to create groups, groups, like pods, pods of three, or pods of four, turn the desks, and go ahead and start doing that. And I'm like, okay, like, my principal, right? You do is you're told. So I went in there, she was absent. And I turned the desks, and I made little groups of threes or fours. And clueless, like, had no issue. I had no issues. I mean, I, I did have an issue. I kind of thought about it. I'm like, well, she's absent, but Okay, I'll go ahead and do it. Well, while the next day, was a very challenging day for me, she came, she marched right into my room, and she got up in my face, she pointed her finger at me. And she told me a lot of things. And she said, How dare you come into my classroom when I'm not here and move … My things around? Who do you think you are, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera? Like, this is not the way that you're supposed to do things, and this and that, and this and that. And, I mean, all I could do was apologize. She was absolutely right.

Personal accounts like Natalie's are common in the sense that at times instructional coaches get tasked with enforcing change rather than working collaboratively alongside teachers in those efforts. As seen in Natalie's internal struggle, these types of experiences between teachers and coaches serve only to create contextual conditions that impede not only instructional coaches work with teachers, but also impede the coaches' perceptions of their role as well.

Quasi Administrator. The participants mentioned that a challenge they face is being viewed as an extension of administration. This poses a challenge in creating a positive narrative of instructional coaching and in building trust with teachers. Olivia ascertains that it may go back

to expectations about the role "Because I think that sometimes the expectation is, is that we're going to go kind of spy on what's going on in the classroom and report back to an administrator to give them ammunition."

Focus group question 6 poses the question of how their role has impacted relationships with teachers. Two out of the three participants mentioned being told whom you have to work with and more importantly, the teacher not being aware of this directive from the administrator takes a toll on relationships with teachers. Natalie describes the competing expectations between the campus administrator and the message on coaching from the district level. "Well just being told you're gonna work with this teacher and you walk in the room and the teacher doesn't know. So, you're like surprise, I'm here and I'm working with you. That's an awkward conversation."

These responses reiterate the narrative that the instructional coach is viewed as an extension of administration and in connection with evaluation in some indirect way. This perception then perpetuates the negative association of coaches and inhibits the opportunity for positive connections and purposeful work. We also see the delicate space instructional coaches navigate between teachers and administrators as well as campus and district expectations. These echo the intricacy of coaching work and the numerous contextual conditions that can champion or challenge it.

Part of this challenge is due to the work instructional coaches engage with in terms of campus and district messaging, initiatives, and their inclusion in leadership teams on campuses. Teachers also see instructional coaches focusing on student achievement as they are often facilitating data digs or disseminating data from assessments and making action plans in professional learning communities. Such is the case of Oliva who coaches under a specific program that requires documentation and compliance. As much as she tries to create

opportunities to build a trusting relationship, there are times such as the one below where she has no option, but reach out.

> And then the number one of the number one rules of coaching is you're supposed to build this relationship that is truly a safe place. But if I've reached out to a teacher five times trying to get them on the schedule where I can come observe and we can start I don't have any other choice but to try to coordinate something with the administrator because I can't force them to do this. And so that has made it that's made it difficult.

The instructional coaches in this study made establishing trusting relationships very prominent and at the forefront of beginning any coaching practices. This is aligned to the literature on instructional coaching which emphasizes the need for collaboration and partnership between teacher and coach (Aguilar, 2013; Bean, et al., 2010, Neumerski, 2012; Reddy, et al., 2019; Toll, 2009). Instructional coaches discussed the time and commitment it took to build relationships. They spoke of providing support through light coaching such as making copies and looking for and providing resources. Without the opportunity to build these relationships, instructional coaches may be faced with negative perceptions that maintain the "quasi administrator" perspective of coaching and coaching practices. The participants in this study perceived many of the contextual factors that supported or constrained their opportunities to enact change via coaching and coaching cycles had to do with the perceptions of their role from teachers and administrators.

Leaders of change. As mentioned previously on responses surrounding what instructional coaching means, all the research participants indicated that it involved guiding and leading teachers towards better instructional practices. Question 6 in the semi-structured interview asks instructional coaches if they view themselves as a leader on the campus they

serve. Out of the 9 instructional coaches, only one did not view themselves as a leader due to the constraints of the program from which they coach. Of the 8 that said they did view themselves as leaders, Julia stated "Yes, but not as much as I would like", she further went on to explain that it was due more in part because her content specialization is not reading or math.

Of those that said yes, Jane's response below reiterated the importance of administrator support and belief as well as trusting relationships and credibility as important factors in becoming a leader.

> I do view myself as a leader, one, because we have a leadership team that my principal has formed where, you know, all the coaches and admin get together every week, and we have leadership meetings where we are sharing ideas and brainstorming, asking questions, but I also find myself a leader, because I have I've, I have people who are seeking me out for, for advice or for leadership. So beyond just the title that's been given to me, I think over time, with results that teachers have seen, they have been able to say, okay, that's someone who I can go to, and someone I can count on to be a leader.

Penelope's response brings back the unique position of an instructional coach and how perceptions and other contextual factors mold that instructional leader piece.

> Yes, I do see myself as a leader, I get it's a hard place to be in because you don't want to really be viewed as administration. But you're not at the teacher's level. So, it's a weird floating cloud. But as far as just leadership, I hope I am. They know they can come to me with questions, and they know that I'll help them problem solve it, and there's no judgment on it. And that's kind of how I hope they view me.

In the semi-structured interview, Question 7 asks them to rate their confidence in influencing teachers to change their practices on a scale from 1-10 with 10 being the most

confident. None of the instructional coaches rated themselves below a 7. Two ICs rated themselves a 10, one a 9, three 8, one an 8.5 and two sevens. Maria indicated that the numbers could fluctuate depending on the teachers and the campus support in their work.

> I want to say it's going to be like an eight. I really do believe that once just like any kid, once they know the why. Right? Once they know. And they see and their score starts going up, and they start understanding the deepness of it, not just oh, my scores are low. So someone's going to observe me, once they really understand the role and the non-judgmental, and we're both here for the students. I think they'll see the benefits of it and how they'll have to work not as hard for better results. And the benefit for them as well, because we all need some benefit for ourselves. It can't just be extra it needs to be an interesting benefit. Once that then I think they will hold on to it and change.

Jane also emphasizes that engaging in actual coaching cycles and coaching practices enables her to truly be a leader of change.

> I would say eight and a half. I don't want to sound overconfident. However, the reason why I feel like I can rate myself closer to a 10 is because when I'm doing these coaching cycles, I haven't just done a coaching cycle and then never gone into that teacher's classroom again, throughout the year. I'm still someone even if we're not in a formal coaching cycle. I'm still present in their planning and PLC as a PLC member, I'm still present in their classroom, I still am able to go in and see, Are they continuing to do the strategies that they tried and learned, even when I'm not right there to watch? And so, because I've been able to have evidence of that in the school year and been able to go in classrooms and see oh, wow, that teacher is still doing that. I feel like that's made me more confident and reading myself closer to a 10.

Information, communication, and influence. Focus group question 1 dives straight into asking what influences they have at their schools. Lila's perspective provides insight into how instructional coaches also shape how teachers and administrators respond to district messages, initiatives, and instructional programs.

> I would say as a coach, I have a pretty big influence with the teachers I have directly work with. You know, I am a lot of times the messenger of information from the district with best practices or any new resources going out, I am the person who is the direct person going straight to my teachers and giving them all that new information and also when there may be a conflict, or something arises or maybe a question or a challenge. Also, the way we react to that and the way we answer questions is a huge influence on our teachers as well they can have a negative mindset of something and our mindset and the way we you know, just kind of our attitude on how we handle that really influences them as well and can really change a negative one of their negative mindsets or a challenge they're having into a positive so I would say that no, we I do on my campus for like I have a big influence just with the direct every day even conversations with my teachers.

When the participants in the focus group were asked to speak about the influences they want to have, their responses went back to the theme of trusting relationships, more so the trust of their administrator to do the work of enhancing teaching and learning. Jane emphasized wanting to be able to impact students via teachers on a much bigger scale. All agreed that their time and efforts were needed in the classroom alongside teachers working on instructional strategies and best practices. In order to accomplish they must have the time to develop trusting relationships.

> And I was just gonna say, you know, just overall, I think as a coach, all of us want to have a positive impact on our teachers, which in turn will have a positive impact on our kids. And so there's lots of factors involved in being able to have that impact. But I think that every coach has that goal in mind is that, you know, we're wanting to make a positive influence every single day that we're here and we know that we can do that by being in classrooms and by us having trust from admin and trust from teachers that will allow us to do our best work.

Finding 3: Instructional Coaches Rely on a Well-Established Instructional Coaching Program for Support and Continued Growth

Most of the participants indicated that the district's instructional coaching program has evolved for the better during the year this study took place. Some of the experiences of the coaches who have been in the position for four or more years indicated the program has seen its fair share of models and book studies on instructional coaching and at other times they have been left to their own learning. Natalie's account of her experience with the varied frameworks and resources provides a glimpse into a potential contextual condition that creates uncertainty or ambiguity for the role of the instructional coach.

> How would I describe it? Okay, so for this district, we have been through a few models of few authors, I guess you could say like, and I can't even remember them right now,…Okay, so for a while, it was there was no clear direction, you know, for a while and I've been doing this here for a little over 10 years. A little over 10 years. And so for the first few years, it there was no direction. Then we started to learn about like, the, the role as a coach, right. And we started with that gentleman's work. And then we moved into somebody else's and then we learned about and I can't remember the names of a

third person and then we had …It was Joellen. Right and now this year, we haven't had like a full you know like book study on, on coaching with, you know, that author coming in and talking to us. And so it's been very scattered, I feel like and it kind of feels like Okay, well, here's another one, you know that let's see what, what this one has to offer. And you learn what you can obviously, right?

Julia describes her experiences with the instructional coaching program and the shifts that have happened within the last couple of years.

I think, when I first started, they had us doing like a new coach program. And so we had monthly meetings, you know, teaching us how to be a coach and we did a book study. And then I feel like after that they kind of left us alone for a while. So it was a lot of a learning curve. This year, I think it's improved a lot. They've had more specific targeted meetings. I wish we would have had some of the things that we're doing now last year. Though, I think they've definitely seen some improvement that needs to be happening and they're working on it.

Penelope on the other hand, brings the perspective of joining instructional coaching mid-shift in model or framework and having to navigate perception and expectations within the new model. Reaffirming that the current framework is moving in the right direction, she states, that creating alignment between the role and work of the coach provides clarity and purpose.

I think it's still a developing program. From what I understand, it used to be more of a role where teachers were used to seeing us pull small groups. And that's kind of where I came in, in the shift. So it's been hard to do what districts asks us to do, but at the same time, make teachers happy, because they expect a different thing than the district does. What I'm really excited about with this district is how they're kind of aligning us again,

like with the new job descriptions with everything, and so the teachers are starting to understand what we're there for. So I'm not the bad guy that doesn't pull the group's. So that's exciting to me because it lets me really do my job.

The variation within the instructional coaches' experiences not only on their campuses but within the district's instructional program emphasizes the need for an explicitly articulated coaching model that provides clear direction and guidance and is collectively supported.

Professional learning needs. Part of a well-established instructional coaching program needs not only a well-thought-out framework, but the sustainability of the program requires access to support, continued learning, resources, and opportunities for mentorship. All the instructional coaches mentioned that support in terms of professional learning was provided at least once a month. A review of the district instructional documents indicated that the morning portion of the monthly meeting focused on district initiatives with curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Interwoven in those essential pieces were instructional coaching moves, unpacking of Killion's (2009) roles, and problems of practice. The afternoon sessions had instructional coaches break out by content and program areas of focus. In those sessions, instructional coaches learned how to utilize the district's curriculum guiding documents with teachers, research-based instructional strategies, and were informed about any updates from the region or state level.

Lila describes that as part professional development provided at the district instructional coaching meeting would include opportunities to collaborate and network with peers. She emphasizes the uniqueness of being in a coaching role and needing the space to talk shop.

You know, when our coaches' meetings, one of the things that I've said that I would love is for us just to have time to collaborate as a team of coaches, because we're all in this unique position. And for some schools, they don't have a lot of coaches. And so just to

> compare, we can learn so much from each other, oh, this is how I do this. This is how I do that. I didn't know until recently, like my schedule was created by my principal. She dictated the schedule, and so I didn't think anything of it. And then another coach was like, you, you don't make your schedule. And I was like, No, so it can be so very different campus to campus, how you're used.

When asked what kinds of professional development they felt would support their work, instructional coaches mentioned opportunities to collaborate with other coaches on problems of practice, a book study on instructional coaching, strategies for working with reluctant teachers, explicit pieces on coaching cycles and coaching conversations to name a few. Jane reinforces the purpose of the role she signed up for, which indicates that everyone deserves to be coached.

> So if every coach had a coach that was able to say, you know, I'm going to check in with you, I'm going to come watch you, I can try, I can try coaching moves with you, or I can model for you, I think that that's going to be the best professional development for instructional coaches, whether it's a brand new coach, or someone who has been doing it for 10 years, getting that individualized is going to make the biggest difference.

The handbook. When asked about the instructional coaching program or a standard messaging about instructional coaching, participants mentioned a handbook. The handbook for instructional coaching was provided to both coaches and their respective principal at one of the district's monthly coaching meetings. The meeting included an overview of the handbook followed by a "What's on your plate?" activity to help facilitate conversations around where coaching roles and best use of time. Frances ascertains that a handbook is a start but requires additional actions to support the work of the instructional coach.

> I don't think they really read it. I think they may go back to it if they want to do something they have to prove Oh, can I do that with them? Like it's part of their duties that are listed here. So, I don't think it's the greatest support. I mean, it is something to fall back on. But I think there could be more. I think there could be some snippet that could be there for anybody to see like this is what a coach does is or even visuals. I think people are more stimulated to understand better like a snippet of a video of a coach working in a room like what does that look like? Or a coach sitting side by side with a teacher planning or so you know, little snippets like that because I find that people understand it better when they can see what it looks like how does this work.

Olivia reiterates this sentiment that the "binders" provide description of the role, but questions just how far that information is communicated. She goes on to talk about the transfer of information from the district to the campus.

> I don't know that there is a training, I feel like that's where the district is headed, because we have those binders. That explained the role of an instructional coach, and they've been given to administrators. But honestly, I don't know, like, were they given to both principal and assistant principal? You know what I mean, like? Because I will say that there's there seems to be kind of a lack of communication when it goes back to the campuses from the district.

I found an inconsistent pattern surrounding communication of the instructional coaches role, how they can be utilized, and how they support teachers even within the district's instructional coaching program. The inconsistency in turn creates additional challenges for instructional coaches when they try to implement all that they have learned at their trainings. Lila reinforces the point of communication, but she does so by linking it indirectly to value.

> We have a handbook, I don't know, I think it's left up to each administrator to train their campus. And again, that might vary a lot from campus to campus, because at the campus where I was a coach, before we came up with our own presentation, showed it to the principal and she was like, yes or no…But I think, and I, and there are presentations given, I assume I don't really know too much about it, because I don't attend principal's meetings, when I'm sure there are some kinds of presentations, but it's a buried in so many other things that they information that they received.

She provides an underlying premise with regard to how instructional coaching is perceived among all other items. This brings us back to the discussion surrounding perception and experience with coaching or the lack thereof.

Finding 4: Contextual Conditions Matter

Merriam-Webster define context as the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs. As we have seen in these responses, instructional coaches maneuver a multitude of contextual factors from teacher and administrator perceptions, campus and district expectations, to performing duties outside the scope of their intended job description. The participants of the study must juggle competing demands and somehow balance the various needs of teachers, administrators, and district leaders.

When asked about their experiences as instructional coaches, the responses varied due to the contextual conditions that emerged as themes in this discussion. Natalie shared how she was once asked by her administrator to rearrange a teacher's seating arrangement without their knowledge and how that relationship was severed, and the trust was lost. She went on to explain that she felt deeply torn to complete the task requested of her because she knew how she would feel if she was in the teacher's shoes. Olivia shared that while she truly believes and wants to

embody the work of an instructional coach, the programmatic and compliance pieces of her program shift how teachers may perceive her support. Jane shared that her first year coaching in the district was the most difficult because of how the role was viewed, but has no evolved with additional training and messaging from the district. The trend seen in the responses across the various questions go back to the clarity of the role, the building of trusting relationships, and advocacy for their work from campus and district level leaders.

To gain insight on how the instructional coaches perceive all these conditions, they were asked to describe their work environment using their words. Twenty-seven adjectives were given, some of which were repeated more than once as seen in Table 4 below. The adjectives were then categorized based on the descriptions provided by the IC regarding the question as well as their responses throughout the interview. The categories are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

What Three Words Describe Your Current Working Environment?

Participant	Categories
Natalie	Joyful, difficult, unclear
Olivia	Shifting, satisfying, overwhelming
Penelope	Evolving, resilient, defeated
Lila	Semi-receptive, misunderstood, unclear
Frances	Varied, challenging, enjoyable
Maria	Craziness, pivot, relationships
Lucy	Overwhelming, stressful, failed
Julia	Favoritism, defeated, overwhelmed
Jane	Productive, teamwork, challenging

Table 5

Adjectives in Context

Instructional coaching program	Navigating district and campus roles and expectations	Doing the right work
Evolving	Overwhelming	Enjoyable
Pivot	Stressful	Joyful
Shifting	Difficult	Satisfying
Unclear	Craziness	Productive
Misunderstood	Challenging	Teamwork
Varied	Favoritism	
Resilient	Failed	
	Defeated	

These adjectives encompass the instructional coaches' experiences within the district's instructional coaching program, interactions with both teachers and administrators, and their own internal struggles as the strive to meet the role and purpose they signed up for as seen in Table 5. The variation in contextual influences and portrayals as well as the IC's perceptions can be seen in the responses below. When discussing the district's instructional coaching program, the participants expressed a lack of clarity on a specific adopted model, the shifting nature of the types of professional learning they were provided. However, the program has continued to exist and evolve through the years.

In terms of their role, the consistent message of trying to balance authentic coaching activities with other duties leaves participants feel defeated, overwhelmed, and stressed. The work around building relationships was challenging and at times difficult due to the competing demands placed on them by administrators. However, when the participants were able to engage with teachers in co-planning, co-teaching, and coaching cycles, they felt productive and satisfied. Opportunities to collaborate with their peers created a culture of teamwork which made the context of such work enjoyable.

Table 6

Perceptions on Adjectives

Participant	Message
Lila	"…semi receptive. I think because there's it's not clear from above that, what my role is that I'm left to sometimes have those conversations, and that doesn't always go well. Because teachers, we get a lot of teachers are frustrated when we're supposed to come and do, you know, pull kids, and we don't, we don't ever do that, because we're doing our nails. That's happening because I'm in another class, or I've been, I need to make a benchmark, because we've decided we're going to have a benchmark, and we don't have one. I mean, it's things like that. So for the most part, receptive, but also, you know, some people think that we have lots of downtime, that we're not doing anything, we make jokes about eating bonbons…"
Frances	"My current working environment, I would say varied. Because I work on curriculum I work on I do presentations, PD, and I work directly with teachers. So my schedule is not the same every day, I'm not in meetings all day. Right. I would say also challenging, because there's always a challenge to something, you know, whether it's a specific challenge, because I'm challenged by what these teachers are asking, or what they want to do, and we can't find a solution, or they're struggling with their students learning something. But also challenging and in terms of like learning new programming to learn all about, or they call it technology enhanced items on Star and how to create those. So that's another whole challenge."
Lucy	"Because I just felt like, even though I try my best, and I try to, you know, try to make time here and there. It just, it wasn't enough. Like I felt like sometimes I said it really was just worthless, because it was probably just giving them 15 minutes."

In Table 6, Lila discusses the struggles with teachers' perceptions of their workload and the in-the-moment decisions that disrupt opportunities to be in classrooms and work alongside teachers. Frances talks about the variance in the work, the challenge and almost unpredictability of the day, and the need to be up to date with programs and strategies to support teachers. Lucy, on the other hand, feels a sense of failure at not being readily available to meet with teachers and consistently support them due to being pulled in multiple directions and duties. Again, the narrative of a varied scope of work that lies outside of the job description of an instructional

coach paired with the conflicting demands from administrators is evident and in alignment with the literature on challenges instructional coaches navigate.

A Distributed Perspective on Instructional Coaching

This study began with the intent to understand and give instructional coaches an opportunity to voice the contextual conditions that frame and sculpt their work and their ability to enact change by developing teacher capacity. Through this study, I have realized that there are social, technical, and organizational contextual conditions that shape the fundamental elements of coaching practice and that these factors are continuously interacting and intersecting. Utilizing a distributed perspective on the purpose of instructional coaching as a framework for exploring instructional coaching practices allows us to zoom in on the interactions of the instructional coaches, those they support, and the context within which these interactions intersect. This distributive lens connects the individual, interactions with others, and the environment as they collaboratively work to complete complex tasks (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Viewing instructional coaching programs through the distributed leadership framework enables instructional leaders to reflect on and analyze their practices which could include the purposeful planning and implementation of an effective and sustainable instructional coaching program (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

The four emergent contextual themes influencing the instructional coaches' work in this study included coaches as change agents, perception's influence on trusting relationships, competing campus and district expectations, and. These four contextual conditions serve as the situation within which instructional coaching practice is undertaken. Hannan and Russell (2020) concluded in their study that contextual factors that reinforce or challenge strong coaching practices are context-specific phenomena. The alignment to the distributed perspective can is

evident in that the trifecta of the Practice Aspect of this lens stresses how the situation, or context, is just acted upon, but rather is a culmination of actions, artifacts, and interactions for all involved (Spillane, 2006). As such, these factors should be addressed within the particular spaces in which they occur.

Summary

This study investigated the perceptions of nine elementary instructional coaches from a public school district in Texas. All the participants had at least two years of instructional coaching experience at the research site. Their areas of expertise varied by content, grade level, or program. Through a semi-structured interview and focus group discussion, seven were asked to determine how instructional coaches' perceptions of their roles and abilities were shaped by the context of their work. A review of district instructional coach meeting agendas and slide decks were used to gain additional insight into the professional learning provided to instructional coaches. From the analysis of this qualitative data four themes surfaced in response to the research question.

How does context influence instructional coaches' perceptions of how they fulfill their roles and their ability to enhance teacher capacity? Instructional coaches described the purpose of their work as working collaboratively alongside teachers as partners in enacting change that ultimately enhances teaching and learning. They shared that while they fully understood the importance of engaging in instructional coaching practices such as professional development and coaching cycles with teachers, these endeavors are often disrupted due to competing campus demands and other duties as assigned. They also mentioned how these disruptions in their work can create challenges when trying to build trusting relationships with teachers that can later be leveraged to enact instructional change. This happens even more so when their role is not clearly

articulated or is miscommunicated by assuming that they take on "quasi administrator" duties. For the instructional coaches in this study that were able to engage in the work of instructional coaching, the contextual factors that propelled this work included a clear understanding and articulation of the work of coaches, support from campus administrators and leadership at the district level, and adherence to the practices and learning through the district instructional coaching program.

In Chapter V, the findings will be discussed in relation to the literature on instructional coaching and the framework for this study. In addition, there will be a discussion of implications for practice and potential areas of focus for future research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Instructional coaching practices are intended as a research-based model of on-site hands-on job-embedded professional development that is intended to enhance teaching and learning by building teacher capacity (Gibbons et al., 2019; Guskey, 2003; Killion & Harrison, 2017; Knight, 2018; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Robertson et al., 2009). School districts across the United States have employed and utilized instructional coaches in efforts to enhance academic instruction via effective classroom teaching with the hope that student achievement will increase. The dilemma that exists is how school districts and their individual campuses outline and shape the role and the work of the instructional coach (Gallucci et al., 2010; Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Ippolito et al., 202, Kane & Rosenquist, 2019).

The purpose of this case study aimed to explore elementary instructional coaches' perceptions and descriptions of their role, work environment, and the conditions that impact their work. This study looked at data from one South-Central Texas school District with a focus on elementary instructional coaches. The focus of this qualitative case study was based on one overarching research question. *How does context influence instructional coaches' perceptions of how they fulfill their roles and their ability to enhance teacher capacity?* This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings as they connect to the literature. Additionally, the implications for practitioners and researchers are also discussed. I identify areas for future research about

understanding the contextual conditions that influence the effectiveness of instructional coaching programs and practices within school districts.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this case study highlight the four contextual conditions that must be considered when looking at instructional coach fulfillment of the role and expectations in improving teaching and learning. This includes perceived notions of coaching roles and competing demands, cultivating and leveraging trusting relationships, well-established instructional coaching programs, and the various contexts in which they work. Each of which influences the coaches' ability to enact change through authentic instructional coaching.

Instructional Coaches Navigate Perceived Notions of Their Roles and Competing Demands

Creating collaborative partnerships with teachers, engaging in coaching cycles, providing guidance on instructional strategies, coteaching, co-planning, and modeling to enact change describe the work instructional coaches feel encompasses the role they applied for. Participants were in agreement about what the role and the work should entail. They emphasized their hunger to engage in authentic coaching cycles with teachers and acknowledge the time in preparation and work that investment would take. More than half of the participants expressed concern about the many tasks that are unaligned with improving teacher capacity that they are often engaged in. Participants described having to serve as coordinators for programs like Response to Intervention (RTI), pull intervention small groups, cut cake at 5th grade graduations, or chaperone fieldtrips.

Gibbons and Cobb's (2017) study identified six coaching practices that support teacher growth when working with teachers to include engaging in the discipline, examining student work, analyzing classroom video, engaging in lesson study, co-teaching, and modeling. Participants in this study emphasized the importance of coaching cycles that include unpacking

content examining student products for data on next steps, and opportunities to engage in co-teaching or modeling which fall within those six identified practices. Kraft and Blazer (2017) noted that in their study of individualized instructional coaching to improve teacher craft, the coaches relied on a few key practices such as providing direct feedback for future lessons in 78% of their coaching sessions as well as partnered lesson planning at 52%. These practices are also relevant across the literature in coaching with links to potentially increasing teacher capacity (Aguilar, 2013; Bean et al., 2010; Hirsh & Killion, 2009; Huguet et al., 2014, Knight, 2019).

The time allotted to those efforts was a focus in a study by Kane and Rosenquist (2019) on the relationships between IC time us and district and school-level expectations using a construct called potentially productive activities (PPCAs) to describe coaching activities that are capable of enhancing teacher capacity from those that do not. Kan and Rosenquist (2019) found that accountability reduced coaches' overall time in PPCAs. This is a sentiment that some of the participants mentioned with regard to state assessments and district universal screeners. With presentations of the state of the district and leadership walks and talks around specific campus data, administrators may feel compelled to engage all hands-on deck to identify trends, and patterns, and create plans of action taking time away from the core work of coaches.

One interesting aspect of this study was that district-hired coaches had more opportunities to engage in PPCAs but struggled with developing relationships. The participants who support from the district level experienced working PPCAs, but it was in a more compliance-based setting which created hurdles in building those relationships. A sub finding to this study revealed that school-hired coaches duties snowballed due to an increase in trust. This portrait was painted from the participants' own descriptions "other duties as assigned" which showed them serving as program and testing coordinators.

Participants who did have opportunities to engage in such potentially productive coaching practices described how rewarding those experiences were and reaffirmed the need to spend most of their time and efforts in classrooms with teachers. More importantly, they discussed the importance of campus leadership support for the role and its communication to the staff as integral in facilitating those efforts. Administrators who valued the participants' work ensured that it remained the focal point or priority and not turn coaches into the first response to unforeseen circumstances.

Instructional Coaches Must Cultivate and Leverage Trusting Relationships to Enact Change

In the literature, relationships are found to be a key factor in instructional coaches' opportunities to engage in high-leverage coaching practices such as coaching cycles (Aguilar, 2013; Atteberry & Bryk, 2011, Ippolito, 2010; Knight, 2007). Participants' responses unanimously resounded with the need to build trusting relationships before engaging in heavy coaching practices or conversations. They stressed that without those trusting relationships, the opportunities to enact change become limited if not almost nonexistent. Lowenhaupt, McKinney, & Reeve's (2014) study on the role of relationships in the work of literacy coaches revealed how the teacher and instructional coach relationships are critical and allow them to engage in the work of instructional reform. They found that success in employing instructional coaches for this purpose depended on the coaches' ability to establish a receptive culture and navigate everyday interactions. In order to open the opportunity to develop trusting relationships, participants shared that they often would take on the role of resource provider, copy maker, and interventionist willingly. The participants acknowledged that these types of support may not meet the intended goal of coaching, but it created opportunities to interact and begin dialogue.

Lowenhaupt et al., (2014) also found that the literacy coaches in their study adapted their roles and took on additional duties in hope of building rapport.

Range et al.'s (2014) study revealed the critical influence the relationship between coach and principal can have on the coach's enactment of productive coaching practices. Relationships with principals can center around how coaches navigate leadership styles, daily interactions and discourse, and the parameters principals set on instructional coaches. Hall & Simeral's (2008) work emphasizes how the teacher's openness, enrollment in, and opportunities for growth are interconnected with the interactions and relationship of the principal and the instructional coach.

Instructional Coaches Rely on a Well-Established Instructional Coaching Program for Support and Continued Growth

In this study, participants reported the need for a well-established district instructional coaching program to support their role and continued growth. With the continued rise in accountability for school districts, the appeal and convenience of having an onsite instructional coach for job-embedded professional development has become the go-to in school improvement reforms. However, while it provides opportunities for immediate hands-on teacher professional development, solid instructional coaching programs need systems and structures that support those efforts. The findings around the instructional coaches' perceptions of the instructional coaching program in this study highlighted the consistent inconsistency of models, and frameworks utilized and emphasized the need for clear direction. Participants identified that the instructional program while shifting in the right direction, was not as well established in communicating the vision and mission for their work.

When asked about any standard messaging or training on the specifics of their role, participants quickly responded with the instructional coach's handbook that they had received

that year. While the handbook provided a written description of the different roles coaches may encompass, some of the participants felt that the handbook was just a first step in establishing clarity. Other participants were left to wonder if the handbook had been provided to all parties of their campus leadership teams. For some, they felt that at times the message dissipated at the end of instructional coaching meetings. Knowing this, a school district that is considering the implementation of a program for instructional coaching needs to consider all the many moving parts. A clear establishment of the need for instructional coaching, the selection of an appropriate instructional coaching model or models, common language, professional learning, and a systemic collective responsibility for the articulation of the program's purpose should be delineated.

When considering the implementation of an instructional coaching program, the systems and structures that make up the program should carry over to the campuses instructional coaches serve. Part of gaining teacher and administrator buy-in to maximize instructional coaching potential requires that the district create a collaborative culture that values the work of instructional coaches. This can be done by strategically developing a clear vision for the program and clearly articulating its purpose. Continuous and concise articulation of the vision for the instructional coaches' work and its connection to curriculum, instruction, and assessment through the district's program will facilitate clarity and decrease ambiguity at all levels of the system (Bean et al., 2010; Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Mangin, 2009; Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Robertson et al., 2020).

Selecting the proper instructional coaching framework based on the district's existing needs as well as trends from data can facilitate the types of training, resources, and support instructional coaches will need to carry out the work of the program. This allows for proactive and deliberate planning which can guide decisions on how coaches might target their efforts to

enhance teaching and learning. Coaching program structures that include planning, goal setting, modeling, observations, and other coaching practices facilitate how efforts are directed across the district, at each campus, with each teacher. These structures and systems can help the program maximize support districtwide leading to the development of a quality and efficacious instructional coaching program.

In terms of professional learning, participants shared the need for opportunities to engage in problems of practice and collaborate with peers who may experience the same hurdles in coaching. Rainville and Jones (2008) state that the practice of coaching is situated like all social practices and with that can morph and alter relational dynamics in varied contexts. The first finding in this study on literacy coaches and situated identities, discussed the navigation of competing demands and how that is centered on the current context the coach situated in. They conclude that professional learning that includes role-playing contextualized scenarios, analysis of audio transcripts and videos of coaching, and working through difficult conversations would give coaches the tools to help them maneuver contextual changes.

Contextual Conditions Matter

Hannan and Russell's (2020) study on exploring conditions that shape instructional coaching practices found that coaching practice interacted with context. Their study emphasized that examining instructional coaching, one could not extricate it from the context in which it occurred (Hannan & Russell, 2020). They argued that the pairing or grouping of contextual factors could influence coaching in a multitude of ways. This was evidenced by participants and the types of support they received and the kinds of additional duties they inherited from administrators. To fully understand the influence instructional coaches, have in instructional reform efforts it has become imperative to consider a nested-systems lens (Hanna & Russell,

2020). These contextual factors that affect coaches come from the campus as well as the district. Hannan & Russell (2020) make clear the need to look at all aspects of context within and around instructional coaching when considering evaluating for effectiveness or refinement.

Participants shared the struggle to act on the key learning and expectations presented by the district and the conflicting messages and tasks from campus instructional leaders. This in of itself becomes that system that influences the work in another system. In this case from the district level to the campus level and then into the classroom. Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) highlighted the importance of uniformity across district goals, coach professional development, and coaching practice. The lack of congruency in these contextual conditions can either bolster or hinder a coaches' efforts. From a distributed leadership lens, we can see the interdependency between the interactions of people and their interactions with aspects of the situation, in this case the space navigated between coach, principal, and district instructional program, model, or expectation.

Implications for Practice

With educational reform geared towards increasing academic achievement, the utilization of coaches has shifted from individual one on one efforts with teachers to now include more systemic aims to increase capacity at campus and district levels creating competing conceptualizations of instructional coaching (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). The intricacy of instructional coaching is evident in this study aimed at identifying how context impacts the role of the coach and their ability to enhance teacher capacity. The detailed findings and discussion on elementary instructional coaches' contextual influences lead to the following implications for practice in creating, implementing, or refining district level instructional programs.

Instructional Coaching Program: Beyond the Job Description and Handbook

Districts need to strategically plan the system and structures of the district's instructional coaching program to include a succinct and explicit instructional coaching framework and model that clearly defines instructional coaching at all levels of the organization. The first recommendation is to provide a clear and descriptive job description for instructional coaches that explicitly includes the role and responsibilities that are in alignment with the district's adopted instructional coaching framework and model and are regularly reviewed. This description should align to the district's instructional coaching program's mission and vision for teaching and learning.

In order for the instructional coach to have the best opportunity to engage in purposeful work that impact teaching and learning, the role and its purpose need to be well-established and consistently communicated at all levels of the organization (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011, Bean et al., 2009; Ippolito, 2010, Knight 2007). Having a simple job description and a section in a handbook does not ensure clarity, awareness, and understanding of what the work truly encompasses. It also does not provide instructional coaches with the common language needed to advocate for their roles and responsibilities. School districts must communicate the fundamental purpose of the instructional coach and be very explicit about where the coach can make the most impact and how that is achieved. This message should be shared with all instructional leaders and reshared at the campus level with all staff to ensure a succinct and concise universal message.

Delineation of productive authentic coaching activities should be provided to all instructional leaders. Regular review of those roles and activities should be a part of scheduled opportunities for instructional leaders and instructional coaches to come together and evaluate the district's program.

Fostering a Positive Culture for Coaching

Perception is shaped by a person's attitude, belief system, culture and so many other components. Knowing this, it becomes imperative for district and campus leadership to create a narrative that emphasizes the compelling purpose behind instructional coaching. Knowing the "why" behind partnering with instructional coaches can help shift a negative view of what that work might entail. To do so, it becomes important to provide teachers with opportunities to learn about the benefits of instructional coaching. In that same respect, it becomes critical for leadership to ensure the collaboration with instructional coaches is a safe space for learning and trying new strategies.

Fostering a positive culture also means that administrators respect the time and space of the instructional coach. They must work hard not to create a quasi-administrator perception. Instructional coaches must also work in this effort and maintain the partner in learning perception. Teachers must feel that they add value to the partnership as well. Following Jim Knight's (2011) *Partnership Approach* as a potential framework could be of value in this respect. Elena Aguilar's (2013) work on *The Art of Instructional Coaching* discusses developing trust and coaching relationships that could help facilitate the work on creating a positive coaching culture.

Coaches need Coaching and Purposeful Professional Learning Opportunities

The professional learning opportunities of coaches should consist of not only district initiatives, but also on how to continue growing as an instructional leader and coach. Instructional coaches should be provided extensive and hands-on training on the adopted coaching framework to include coaching practices and moves that support the building of trusting relationships, working with resistance, providing feedback, and coaching cycles. Since

coaches work with adults, reform efforts, and use the districts data and instructional model, professional learning opportunities should include:

- use of the various instructional documents and resources for planning
- utilization and analysis of the different types of data and data management systems that teachers administer and use.
- training around adult learning theory and the change process
- tiered topics to meet the varying needs of individual coaches.
- peer collaboration around problems of practice and mentorship

These topics are great considerations for onboarding new coaches. Providing a refresher on these topics throughout the year keeps the content at the forefront of their work. Peer collaboration should include opportunities to pair up with a mentor coach who can provide feedback and guidance on the instructional program goals. Mentorship opportunities for coaches can facilitate the narrative that everyone needs a coach and coaching provides opportunities for enhancing teaching and learning at all levels of the organization.

Limitations

I identified potential study limitations in previous chapters. One of the identified limitations was my position as a director in the department that provides professional learning to instructional coaches in the site district. While this could be viewed as a limitation, I was able to establish rapport with the participants as I am not directly or indirectly involved with their performance evaluations. However, my position could have created a sense of caution in how the instructional coaches chose to participate and respond to the questions provided.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study confirms the importance of investigating the contextual factors that influence instructional coaches' work in improving teacher craft and ultimately impacting student achievement. The nine participants provided descriptions of their experiences, perspectives, and opinions on instructional coaching and have enabled their perceptions on the intricate and interdependent nature of the contextual conditions within their realm. This type of work requires constant interactions between leaders and followers such as the space between coaches and teachers and coaches and administrators. It also involves coaching and interacting with the different roles, expectations, district initiatives, and resources. From a distributed perspective, the recommendations take into account how the leaders, followers, and situations are interdependent and impact practices in teaching and learning. From the pragmatic lens, I share the following recommendations for future research to facilitate knowledge on creating optimal conditions to increase the effective use of instructional coaches and their expertise.

Contextual Conditions Across Texas Regions

This research studied the descriptions of the experiences of nine elementary instructional coaches in one South-Central Texas school district and how they navigate the various contexts within which they work. Additional research on such experiences of coaches would be beneficial with a larger sample size and across a greater geographical scope of Texas. Texas is a large state with regions that exhibit various demographic make-up and diversity of cultures. A study on the differences and similarities of instructional coach contextual experiences based on region, school levels, size of programs, or other contexts of interest could add to the growing literature on instructional coaching (Bean et al., 2010; Hannan & Russell, 2020; Woulfin & Rigby, 2020).

Effective Instructional Coaching Programs

The participant's descriptions and discussion on maneuvering negative coaching narratives, assigned additional and unaligned duties, and balancing their own professional learning and growth garnered solid considerations for reevaluating what an effective school district's instructional coaching program should encompass. Participants had varied experiences with their district coaching program and expressed the need for a well-established and aligned mission, vision, model, and opportunities for continued growth. Future research on how school districts with effective Instructional Coaching Programs:

- frame instructional coaching,
- create a collective responsibility through vision and mission,
- select and implement coaching models, and
- provide onboarding and continued professional development on instructional coaching practices.

This type of research could continue to guide districts in creating the optimal system, structures, and contextual conditions to maximize instructional coaching as a lever for systemic and individual reform (Bean et al., 2010; Gallucci et al., 2010; Hannan & Russell, 2020; Lowenhaupt et al., 2014; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015, Woulfin, 2018; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017).

Instructional Coaching in Non-Title Versus Title Schools

Most of the instructional coaches in this study supported teachers in Title I campuses. Two Participants indicated that while Title schools have always had their issues, they felt that the years following the pandemic have exacerbated the challenges their schools face and there by increased their "other duties as assigned. The areas of mention were student educational gaps as well as gaps in academic and social skills. The sudden increase in teacher absence, resignation,

and turnover were also an area of concern expressed. Many areas of inquiry within this mention alone could provide additional insight into the contextual conditions that impact instructional coaching. The following are a few future areas of research to consider:

- What are the contextual conditions that impact opportunities for engaging in coaching practices from the lens of instructional coaches at non-title elementary schools?
- Is there a relationship between instructional coaching opportunities and a decrease in teacher turnover in non-title and title elementary schools?
- How does an increase in campus student discipline decrease instructional coaching opportunities with teachers?

Additional research in these areas could facilitate richer discussions in understanding the factors that challenge the work of the instructional coach. The data from this research could also inform the types of training, skillset, and leadership qualities needed to maximize the potential of the instructional coach and instructional coaching programs.

Summary

The research over the years has shown that instructional coaching has had a significant effect on teaching and learning in comparison to traditional professional development (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Killion, 2009; Knight, 2007; Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Woulfin, 2017). While being afforded the opportunity to have an instructional coach on campus, administrators need to understand that the return of investment only comes with following the instructional coaching framework and affording instructional coaches to spend time in classrooms with teachers. This qualitative case study examined how context influences elementary instructional coaches' perceptions of their roles and abilities to influence teaching and learning. A distributed

perspective was used to understand how leaders, followers, and situation all interact to shape the work and scope of instructional coaches.

The study used semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and the district's coaching documents to explore instructional coaches' perceptions regarding roles, responsibilities and the contextual conditions that shape their work in teaching and learning. In this qualitative case study, I have identified three contextual factors that can advance or constrain the work of the instructional coach. The data and the findings of this study are beneficial not only to instructional coaches, but to campus and district level leaders in developing or refining instructional coaching programs. I have included implications for practitioners on implementing instructional coaching programs, fostering a positive culture for coaching, and providing purposeful professional learning and access to coaches. In addition, potential research ideas that included expanding upon contextual coaching experiences in other Texas regions, in identifying key components of a school district's effective instructional coaching program and coaching in title 1 and non-title schools. Throughout this research, the influence of a multitude of contextual factors were evident in the participants' experiences as elementary instructional coaches. Understanding those factors and actions and interactions that contribute to their influence has been found significant. We have seen how in sports, championships, tournaments, and other avenues where coaching is evident, it is also essential. I dove into this research with the hope of seeking solutions to increase the potential of instructional coaching.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE PROTOCOL: INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Navigating Context and Perception: A Qualitative Study on Instructional Coaching

Consent Name: IC017

Principal Investigator: Christie Lizette Esparza Telephone: (956) 572-6581

Key points you should know

- I am inviting you to be in a research study I am conducting in fulfillment of requirements for a Doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. Your participation is voluntary. This means it is up to you and only you to decide if you want to be in the study. Even if you decide to join the study, you are free to leave at any time if you change your mind.
- Take your time and ask to have any words or information that you do not understand explained to you.
- I am doing this study because I want to learn if the context of working during a Covid-19 pandemic influences instructional coaches' perceptions of how they fulfill their roles and their ability to build teacher capacity.
- Why are you being asked to be in this study?

    - You are an instructional coach who has provided instructional coaching for the study site selected.
- What will you do if you agree to be in the study?
    - Complete a questionnaire regarding demographic information including years of teaching experience, years of instructional coaching experience, content area they feel most confident in, and years working as an instructional coach at the research site (i.e. district). This should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.
- Can you be harmed by being in this study?
    - Being in this study involves no greater risk than what you ordinarily encounter in daily life.
    - Risks to your personal privacy and confidentiality: Your participation in this research will be held strictly confidential and only a code number will be used to identify your stored data. However, because there will be a link between the code and your identity, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
    - If we learn something new and important while doing this study that would likely affect whether you would want to be in the study, we will contact you to let you know what we have learned.
- What are the costs of being in the study?
    - There is no financial cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the study.
- Will you get anything for being in this study?

    - It is possible that you will not benefit directly by participating in this study, although results will help educational professionals who are charged with providing professional development and support for instructional coaches.
- Could you be taken out of the study?
    - You could be removed from the study if you comprise the confidentiality of other participants in the study.

Can the information we collect be used for other studies?

Information that could identify you will be removed and the information you gave us may be used for future research by us or other researchers; we will not contact you to sign another consent form if we decide to do this.

What happens if I say no or change my mind?

- You can say you do not want to be in the study now or if you change your mind later, you can stop participating at any time.
- No one will treat your differently. You will not be penalized.

How will my privacy be protected?

- Your information will be stored with a code instead of identifiers (such as name, date of birth, email address, etc.).
- All data will be stored in a password protected folder in the researcher's OneDrive.
- Even though we will make efforts to keep your information private, we cannot guarantee confidently because it is always possible that someone could figure out a way to find out what you do on a computer.
- No published scientific reports will identify you directly.

Who to contact for research related questions

For questions about this study or to report any problems you experience as a result of being in this study contact Christie Lizette Esparza at 956-572-6581 or via email at christie.esparza01@utrgv.edu.

Who to contact regarding your rights as a participant

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protections (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at (956) 665-3598 or irb@utrgv.edu.

Signatures

By signing below, you indicate that you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and that the procedures involved have been described to your satisfaction. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own reference. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age. If you are under 18, please inform the researcher.

_____ ____/_____/_____

Participant's Signature **Date**

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW: INFORMED CONSENT

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Navigating Context and Perception: A Qualitative Study on Instructional Coaching

Consent Name: IC017

Principal Investigator: Christie Lizette Esparza Telephone: (956) 572-6581

Key points you should know

- I am inviting you to be in a research study I am conducting in fulfillment of requirements for a Doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. Your participation is voluntary. This means it is up to you and only you to decide if you want to be in the study. Even if you decide to join the study, you are free to leave at any time if you change your mind.
- Take your time and ask to have any words or information that you do not understand explained to you.
- I am doing this study because I want to learn if the context of working during a Covid-19 pandemic influences instructional coaches' perceptions of how they fulfill their roles and their ability to build teacher capacity.
- Why are you being asked to be in this study?

    - You are an instructional coach who has provided instructional coaching for the study site selected.
- What will you do if you agree to be in the study?
    - Participate in a one-on-one interview that should take no more than 30 to 45 minutes but is dependent on the response and elaboration of the participant.
    - Participation in this study requires videotaping if interview is conducted via zoom or audiotape if conducted in person, by signing this consent form you are giving us permission to make and use these recordings.
- Can you be harmed by being in this study?
    - Being in this study involves no greater risk than what you ordinarily encounter in daily life.
    - Risks to your personal privacy and confidentiality: Your participation in this research will be held strictly confidential and only a code number will be used to identify your stored data. However, because there will be a link between the code and your identity, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
    - If we learn something new and important while doing this study that would likely affect whether you would want to be in the study, we will contact you to let you know what we have learned.
- What are the costs of being in the study?
    - There is no financial cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the study.
- Will you get anything for being in this study?

    - It is possible that you will not benefit directly by participating in this study, although results will help educational professionals who are charged with providing professional development and support for instructional coaches.
- Could you be taken out of the study?
    - You could be removed from the study if you comprise the confidentiality of other participants in the study.

Can the information we collect be used for other studies?

Information that could identify you will be removed and the information you gave us may be used for future research by us or other researchers; we will not contact you to sign another consent form if we decide to do this.

What happens if I say no or change my mind?

- You can say you do not want to be in the study now or if you change your mind later, you can stop participating at any time.
- No one will treat your differently. You will not be penalized.

How will my privacy be protected?

- Your information will be stored with a code instead of identifiers (such as name, date of birth, email address, etc.).
- All data will be stored in a password protected folder in the researcher's OneDrive.
- Even though we will make efforts to keep your information private, we cannot guarantee confidently because it is always possible that someone could figure out a way to find out what you do on a computer.
- No published scientific reports will identify you directly.

Who to contact for research related questions

For questions about this study or to report any problems you experience as a result of being in this study contact Christie Lizette Esparza at 956-572-6581 or via email at christie.esparza01@utrgv.edu.

Who to contact regarding your rights as a participant

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protections (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at (956) 665-3598 or irb@utrgv.edu.

Signatures

By signing below, you indicate that you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and that the procedures involved have been described to your satisfaction. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own reference. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age. If you are under 18, please inform the researcher.

_____ ____/_____/_____

Participant's Signature **Date**

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP: INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Navigating Context and Perception: A Qualitative Study on Instructional Coaching

Consent Name: IC017

Principal Investigator: Christie Lizette Esparza Telephone: (956) 572-6581

Key points you should know

- I am inviting you to be in a research study I am conducting in fulfillment of requirements for a Doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. Your participation is voluntary. This means it is up to you and only you to decide if you want to be in the study. Even if you decide to join the study, you are free to leave at any time if you change your mind.
- Take your time and ask to have any words or information that you do not understand explained to you.
- I am doing this study because I want to learn if the context of working during a Covid-19 pandemic influences instructional coaches' perceptions of how they fulfill their roles and their ability to build teacher capacity.
- Why are you being asked to be in this study?

- You are an instructional coach who has provided instructional coaching for the study site selected.

- What will you do if you agree to be in the study?
    - Participate in two focus group discussions with other chosen instructional coaches centered on the roles, functions, and work context experiences that should take no more than 1 hour each. One focus group in late January and the second and final meeting in the later part of April.
    - Provide an opportunity for the researcher to observe or shadow the participant during an instructional coaching activity such as but no limited to planning, conducting or attending professional development, co-teaching, modeling, and creating curriculum content such guidance documents and resources. Information will be documented via jotting notes and then member checking to ensure clarity and understanding of what was observed.
    - Participation in this study requires videotaping if focus group is conducted via zoom or audiotape recording if conducted in person, by signing this consent form you are giving us permission to make and use these recordings.
- Can you be harmed by being in this study?
    - Being in this study involves no greater risk than what you ordinarily encounter in daily life.
    - Risks to your personal privacy and confidentiality: Your participation in this research will be held strictly confidential and only a code number will be used to identify your stored data. However, because there will be a link between the code and your identity, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

    - If we learn something new and important while doing this study that would likely affect whether you would want to be in the study, we will contact you to let you know what we have learned.
- What are the costs of being in the study?
    - There is no financial cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the study.
- Will you get anything for being in this study?
    - It is possible that you will not benefit directly by participating in this study, although results will help educational professionals who are charged with providing professional development and support for instructional coaches.
- Could you be taken out of the study?
    - You could be removed from the study if you comprise the confidentiality of other participants in the study.

Can the information we collect be used for other studies?

Information that could identify you will be removed and the information you gave us may be used for future research by us or other researchers; we will not contact you to sign another consent form if we decide to do this.

What happens if I say no or change my mind?

- You can say you do not want to be in the study now or if you change your mind later, you can stop participating at any time.
- No one will treat your differently. You will not be penalized.

How will my privacy be protected?

- Your information will be stored with a code instead of identifiers (such as name, date of birth, email address, etc.).
- All data will be stored in a password protected folder in the researcher's OneDrive.
- Even though we will make efforts to keep your information private, we cannot guarantee confidently because it is always possible that someone could figure out a way to find out what you do on a computer.
- No published scientific reports will identify you directly.

Who to contact for research related questions

For questions about this study or to report any problems you experience as a result of being in this study contact Christie Lizette Esparza at 956-572-6581 or via email at christie.esparza01@utrgv.edu.

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This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protections (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at (956) 665-3598 or irb@utrgv.edu.

Signatures

By signing below, you indicate that you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and that the procedures involved have been described to your satisfaction. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own reference. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age. If you are under 18, please inform the researcher.

_____ ____/_____/_____

Participant's Signature **Date**

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONING PROTOCOL

"Before we begin I would like to request your permission to record this session to ensure accuracy during transcription. I will also remind us both of to speak clearly for that same purpose. I would like to introduce myself. My name is Christie Esparza, and I will be conducting this interview. I am currently a doctoral student collecting data for my dissertation and research at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The purpose behind this interview is to understand your experience as an instructional coach, perceptions of role and functions, and your experiences within your work context. Such data will help inform my study around instructional coaching and instructional coaching programs.

In this type of an interview there are no right or wrong answers, and it is essential that you express yourself openly. The sole purpose of the information provided is to assist me in gaining a better understanding of your perceptions of the role and functions of an instructional coach in your district and how the context of your work influences your ability to meet those goals. Please note that these recordings will not be shared with anyone. Our interview should take no more than 30-45 minutes unless you have more information to share, and participation is completely voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you may choose to pass or not answer. I have already introduced myself, but I would like to get know a little more about you."

1. How would you describe instructional coaching?

2. What does instructional coaching mean to you?
3. What has been your experience as an instructional coach?
    a. What do you like the most about it? Least?
4. When you reflect on the instructional coaching program for this district, how would you describe it?
    a. What is your perception of the way teachers view the role of the instructional coach? Administrators? Why do you think that is?
    b. Is there a standard messaging or training about the role and function of instructional coaches?
    c. Does that messaging lead to supporting actions around instructional coaching and its purpose? Why or why not?
5. How much professional development do instructional coaches receive that is centered on the role and functions themselves?
    a. What kind and how often?
    b. What kind of professional development do you think is needed to support the work of instructional coaches in your district? How often?
6. Do you view yourself as a leader in on the campuses you serve?
    a. what are some factors if any, that may hinder your work as an instructional coach?
    b. Why do you think these factors exists?
    c. What are some areas that are impacted?
    d. What three words describe your current working environment?

7. On a scale from 1-10, how confident are you that teachers will change their teaching practices because of your coaching?

Do you have any questions for me now that we have come to the end of this phase of the research?

Again, I want to thank you for your time and participation in this portion of the my research. As always feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. I would just like to remind you that all information will remain confidential and will not identifiable via name or campus served.

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Adapted from Valles (2017)

1. What kind of influences do you have in your school? What kind of influence do you want to have?
2. What should the role of an instructional coach entail? Does your work match this description? Why or why not?
3. What do you spend the most amount of time on as an instructional coach? Does this align with your expectations?
4. What is your perception of the way administration views the role of an instructional coach?
5. How has your role impacted relationships with administration?
6. How has your role impacted relationships with teachers?
7. How has the pandemic impacted your role and function as an instructional coach?
    a. Benefits
    b. Challenges

KV

Kristina Valles <Kristina.Valles@asu.edu>
Mon 4/23/2018 10:28 AM
To: Christie Esparza

Hi Christie,

Yes, you may use them. Just cite the source in your references. Your study sounds exciting. Keep me posted. I'd love to hear about what you're finding.

Kristina

Kristina Valles, Ed.D.
Clinical Assistant Professor
Arizona State University | Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College
4701 W. Thunderbird Rd. I Glendale, AZ I 85306
Cell: 602.980.1685

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christie L. Esparza earned her Doctorate of Education in Curriculum and Instruction degree from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in July of 2023. She attended Baylor University where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts in December of 2003. She began her career as an elementary bilingual educator and received her certification in the year 2004. In 2009, she obtained a position as an instructional facilitator for her district and proceeded to continue her education. She then earned a master's degree in educational leadership from the University of Texas at Brownsville in May of 2010. In October of 2010, she became the district coordinator for federal programs and the migrant education program. Christie then began her doctoral studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. During that time, she also worked as an elementary principal, district literacy implementation specialist, district literacy coordinator and district coordinator for multilingual services. She now serves as the director of elementary curriculum and instruction. She can be reached at christie_esparza@yahoo.com.