PERCEPTIONS AND MEANINGS CONSTRUCTED BY PARTICIPANTS IN A
FOUR-YEAR INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING PROJECT

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PERCEPTIONS AND MEANINGS CONSTRUCTED BY PARTICIPANTS IN A
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By

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This qualitative study was conducted in the Midwestern U.S. It explored the stories of 27 educators who participated in a four-year instructional coaching project in a large urban school district. Subjects shared their perceptions of and meanings they constructed as a result of their experiences in the coaching project through participation in a series of focus group discussions or by individual interviews. The subjects also put forward nearly 100 recommendations for the success of future coaching projects. The findings included 12 themes that emerged regarding (a) the meanings coaches constructed as a result of their experience in the Perry Coaching Project, (b) coaches’ definitions of a case of coaching success, (c) the importance of context on the projects’ success, and (d) coaches recommendations for the success of future coaching projects. The coaches’ recounted their experiences chronologically across the four-year implementation. In spite of the many challenges they faced across the years, the strong majority of coaches believed that their participation was worthwhile and meaningful, and that the potential of coaching to bring about change in teachers’ instructional practices was strong.
Dedication

To my husband, who sacrificed much so that I might finish my studies.

To my family, who instilled in me the love of learning and perseverance.

And, to my children who cheered me on every step of the way.
Acknowledgements

I express my sincere appreciation to the members of my dissertation committee who worked tirelessly and patiently to support me throughout every phase of this study. I extend my genuine gratitude to Dr. Carla Edlefson who has been my educational mentor for the past 14 years. I would not be the educator I am today without her steadfast guidance. I would also like to acknowledge the former coaches from the Perry Coaching Project for the wealth of knowledge and experiences they shared so openly with me.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

This dissertation is a report of a study exploring the experiences of instructional coaches who participated in a four-year school improvement project serving the poorest performing schools in a large mid-western school district. Chapter one provides an introduction to the study including descriptions of the background of the study, problem statement, professional significance, delimitation, and methodology utilized.

Background of the Study

The journey toward comprehensive and sustainable educational improvements in the United States has been long and arduous. Some might argue that the journey spans six decades beginning with legislative and educational responses to the launch of the Soviet Sputnik satellite in 1957. Others mark the journey’s start with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education) in 1983. Younger generations might consider the enactment of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) as the initiation date of the school reform movement in the United States. Regardless of the journey’s actual commencement date, and a few ground-breaking legislative actions aimed at increasing educational accountability during the ensuing years, the state of our system of education continues to be acknowledged as a national crisis (Stevens, Bernhardt, Burns, & Lombard, 2009). In fact, since the 1980s, school reform has figured prominently within the political platforms of most candidates for public office across all levels of government (Henig, 2009). Advocates of social justice (Garcia, 2005; Hatch, 1998; Johnson, 2002; Prince, 2004) contend that we have not traveled very far down the
road towards establishing an efficient and equally effective education system for all of our nation’s children.

**Problem Statement**

The problematic phenomenon I explored within this investigation was that in spite of perhaps a century of school improvement initiatives and legislation mandating reforms, not much has changed in the day-to-day instruction received by our nation’s children (Edmunds, 2005). Elmore (1995) illustrated this problem in his review of research that investigated the effectiveness of popular school restructuring projects on improving instructional practices. He observed that even when restructuring of instructional time was fully implemented to allow for more variety in instructional formats, teaching practices for the most part remained unchanged. Elmore portrayed day-to-day instruction as evidencing a continued reliance of teacher-centered approaches in which students passively engaged in learning routines.

How can we, as educational leaders and practitioners, expect to produce dramatically different student learning outcomes while still implementing what have proven to be ineffective instructional practices? A large body of knowledge exists regarding effective teaching practices; however, a large gap between that knowledge base and day-to-day teaching behaviors at the classroom level also exists (Dieker et al., 2009). This gap is a significant barrier to improving the educational outcomes experienced by American children. Traditional forms of teacher professional development have not led to transfer of new learning into daily classroom instruction. In fact, Bush (1984) found that as few as 10% of teachers who participated in professional development actually
attempted to implement the targeted teaching practice, and even fewer sustained use of the practice over time.

Coaching for the purpose of increasing the transfer of new learning from professional development activities into classroom application has been employed since the emergence of peer coaching in the early 1980s (Showers & Joyce, 1996). This approach involved teachers’ coaching and supporting each other while implementing new instructional practices. Coaching approaches that involve interactions between a teacher or a group of teachers and a non-teacher coach have been developed and implemented with increasing frequency during the past decade in an attempt to provide teacher professional development that successfully leads to improved classroom instruction (Borman & Feger, 2006; Knight & Cornett, 2008; Neufeld & Roper 2003). However, evaluating these programs to determine the impact of implementing instructional coaching has proved to be difficult. Additionally, research studies supporting a positive correlation between teachers’ participation in coaching and student achievement are few and far between. Most involved very small sample sizes, and relied on standardized achievement test scores or teacher self-report as measures of impact (Alseike, 1997; Edwards, 1993; Hull, Edwards, Rogers, & Swords, 1998; Knight, 2004; Kohler, Crilly, Shearer, & Good, 2001). Relying on these methods of assessing impact is not likely to isolate coaching participation as a single variable related to student achievement. From outward appearances, coaching projects appear potentially to involve the majority of characteristics found to be associated with effective teacher professional development more likely to lead to transfer of new knowledge and skills into classroom practices (Borman & Feger, 2006). However, my reading of the professional literature describing
methodological frameworks, training, and protocols for instructional coaching does not reveal systematic strategies for assessing the impact of participation on teaching practices or student performance.

I initially located research studies involving coaching for instructional improvement by performing keyword searches in the OhioLink Quick Search electronic database. This application performs searches across multiple databases simultaneously. I included Education Research Complete, Academic Research Complete, the Electronic Journal Center, ERIC, and LexisNexis Academic. Keywords utilized included instructional coaching, peer coaching, cognitive coaching, literacy coaching, and content coaching. This initial search identified more than 100 publications on the topic of coaching. An additional strategy employed to locate both descriptive and research-based articles on coaching was a review of the references contained within the first set of articles located. This method identified additional articles, books, book chapters, government reports, dissertation studies, and professional conference presentations. I discovered nearly 100 additional publications using this technique. Only 32 of approximately 200 publications reviewed described investigational studies involving coaching. Only two of these 32 coaching research studies described the perspectives or experiences of educators currently or previously engaged in the role of instructional coach (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2009; Stock & Duncan, 2010). Coaches’ perspectives, insights and recommendations regarding a coaching model, framework, processes, protocols, training, supports required, and potential assessment procedures could prove invaluable to program developers wishing to enhance or evaluate current instructional coaching models.
Professional Significance

I did not find that the professional literature describing methodological frameworks, training, and protocols for the wide variety of educational coaching models contained systematic strategies for assessing the impact of participation on teaching practices or student performance. Few published studies describe the perspectives or experiences of educators engaged in the role of instructional coach. Studies that have involved instructional coaches in any manner have done so primarily through survey research methods involving rating scales and minimal opportunities for open-ended response (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2009; Stock & Duncan, 2010). Additionally, none of the studies identified through the review of literature on coaching appeared to ask coaches for their recommendations for improving or evaluating the effectiveness of the coaching process. In fact, none of the studies reviewed asked coaches how they would describe a case of coaching success. The purpose of the study reported in this dissertation was to describe, in depth the experiences of instructional coaches who participated in the Perry Coaching Project (a pseudonym) during its four-year implementation, in an effort to add their voice, impressions, valuable insights, and recommendations to the on-going professional dialogue involving coaching for instructional improvement. The knowledge and insights gathered and described in this dissertation study could also be used in combination with the knowledge gained through the extensive review of literature to inform the development of new and possibly more effective coaching models and procedures in the future. Failure to involve coaches in this process previously has led to a significant gap in the coaching knowledge base.
Overview of Methodology

Research Questions

The study described in this dissertation involved two primary research questions:

RQ1 What are the meanings constructed by educators through their experiences as instructional coaches?

RQ2 Given the meanings constructed through the experience of instructional coaching, how do coaches describe a case of coaching success?

The following two sub-questions were added to question number two as a result of the initial data analysis and preliminary interpretation of emerging themes:

RQ2a From coaches’ perspectives, what role did context play in relation to coaching success?

RQ2b What recommendations do coaches offer in support of future coaching successes?

Research Methods

This study relied on qualitative research methods to explore the phenomenon of interest. An experimental or quasi-experimental research design was not an option because the coaching program implementation had ended. The use of a survey was rejected as it would require participants to translate the meaning they constructed from participation into ratings on a limited number of statements, thus prohibiting their ability to fully describe them from their point of view and a variety of contexts. Qualitative research methods seemed better able to provide a more comprehensive description of the instructional coaching experience from the participants’ perspectives. I considered the group of instructional coaches identified as a single case worthy of study because of the
large scope of the project (over 50 coaches and 70 schools), and its easily identifiable boundaries (only coaches employed by the project).

Qualitative data were collected through a series of focus group sessions and individual interviews during which participants responded to very broad questions that encouraged them to determine what they perceived as important to relay about their coaching experience. These sessions were audio-recorded for analysis purposes.

Following each session, the data were reviewed and categorized to permit coding. Analysis of the coded data led to identification of emerging themes used to review and adjust the study questions posed during subsequent focus group sessions and to inform the writing of the research report.

Additionally, in order to allow readers to reflect on the lived experiences of coaches involved in change processes, and to have enough information available so that they could build their understandings and construct their own meaning from it, the written report needed to offer a thick, literal, and richly detailed description. A phenomenological case study design was employed because “it is well-suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 26).

Phenomenological approaches are recommended when the researcher wants describe the shared lived-experiences of a specific group of individuals (Van Manen, 1990). Case study design was selected because the number of possible participants was limited to only participants in a specific coaching project. Yin (2003) defined a case study using two criteria, (a) an empirical study that explores a present-day phenomenon within its naturally occurring context, in which it is difficult to distinguish the boundaries between the phenomenon and context; and (b) relying on multiple types of data collection and
analysis procedures to reach a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest. This study met both definitions. A case study design was also recommended based on the complex factors that interact to impact the success of a school improvement project (Merriam, 1998).

Study participants were recruited from those employed within the Perry Coaching Project for at least two school years. Former coaches were contacted individually by phone, as the project officially came to a close in 2011. The number of former coaches employed by the project over a four-year period was approximately 53. The phone and e-mail contacts included a brief description of the study along with a request for an e-mail or postal address to which a more formal description could be sent. Willing participants were asked to attend a series of four focus group sessions. Twenty-seven former coaches and a former director of the Perry Coaching Project took part in this investigation.

Qualitative data were collected employing focus group discussion techniques along with individual interviewing strategies to gain an understanding of the context in which the process was implemented from the viewpoint of the participants. Focus group interviewing has been described as an essential component of the evaluation process related to the implementation of any new program in order to gather participant perceptions of the program’s outcomes and value (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 1990).

Many factors that influence the success or failure of school improvement efforts have been identified including the effectiveness of professional development programs, teachers’ response to change, leadership support and commitment to change, and the contexts found in individual schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Edmunds, 2005; Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Gathering participants’ perceptions regarding factors they
perceived as influencing the success or failure of the Perry Coaching Project was anticipated to allow a comparison between the literature and coaches’ lived experiences.

A more in-depth description of the methods employed during this research is included within chapter three. Topics covered within that chapter include a more detailed description of participants’ characteristics, specific procedures included in the research design, sampling procedures, trustworthiness, confirmability, transferability and specific data analysis procedures.

**Delimitation of the Study**

Creswell (2003) described the delimitation of a study as the process of setting boundaries for the investigation. As the researcher, I had to make decisions allowing me to narrow the study focus enough to be of manageable proportions while still contributing to the professional body of knowledge. During the delimitation process, a number of preliminary study questions were posed and considered. Those that were rejected included:

- How could cases of coaching success be measured in a quantitative manner?
- What impact does participation in instructional coaching have on teacher classroom practices?
- What impact does participation in instructional coaching have on student outcomes?

These questions were rejected due to time and technical constraints as well as the sheer number of school buildings, teachers and students served by the coaching project across its four-year implementation. Additionally, due to funding termination the coaching
project was no longer being implemented causing difficulty in accessing coaching sites, teachers coached, and student performance data necessary to assist in answering the research questions posed.

Limitations of the study based upon its design are included within the in-depth description of methodology located in chapter three of this dissertation.

**Researcher Positioning**

Positioning myself as the researcher was a significant reflective process completed prior to seeking study approval and recruiting participants. I included a summary of this process in an effort to provide the readers with additional context to use in constructing their own meanings from this research report.

I was employed by the Perry Coaching Project from January of 2007 through February of 2010. My job description and role within the project differed significantly from that of instructional coaches. Initially I was hired into a data coaching position. I was primarily responsible for assisting instructional coaches and at times staff at the various school sites with accessing and interpreting performance data and instructional resources. During year two I filled a similar role at only two middle schools. Prior to the start of year three my role within the project changed and I began providing professional development and support directly to all coaches through individual, small group, and large group sessions, and written interactions.

Although I was involved in the interview and selection process of new coaches during year three, I did not participate in the evaluation of instructional coaches. I believe that my colleagues viewed me as holding particular expertise related to accessing and utilizing data to support instructional change. I do not believe that they perceived my role
as supervisory or evaluative in nature. Many coaches expressed positive feelings about my change in role and several explained that this was due to my always-cheerful disposition and nonjudgmental support. Several coaches described me as “not scary” even though I worked with them using technology and data which frequently were perceived as scary.

I participated in one annual coaching project evaluation conducted by an independent consulting firm. This process involved completing an on-line rating scale. A few coaches participated in individual interviews with the consultants, but I was not asked do so. All participant input relative to the evaluation process was kept confidential. However, informal interactions with instructional coaches did at times lead to discussions in which coaches’ frustrations with a variety of project components were shared. Thus, having participated in the coaching project and serving in a somewhat parallel role with instructional coaches I hold my own perceptions of and constructed personal meanings related to the experience. The opening entries in my field journal addressed these personal perceptions and meanings. I wrote these entries so that I could revisit them prior to, during, and after focus group sessions and data analysis procedures as a method of guarding against researcher bias. Upon reviewing audiotapes of each focus group session I reflected in my field journal on whether any of my probes or follow-up questions could be perceived as prejudicing participant responses. I included focus group member checking at multiple points during the investigation to assist in my efforts to identify themes and conclusions that were consistently reflective of participant responses and not my own.
Regardless of my sincere attempts to keep my own perceptions related to the Perry Coaching Project (PCP) from impacting this study, my prior relationships with the project and its participants must be seen as a limitation by the reader. I built supportive collegial relationships with many participants in the coaching project. I respect their thoughts, ideas, feelings about, and perceptions related to the coaching experience. This respect was likely the basis for my desire to give these highly experienced education professionals a voice in the continuing instructional reform dialog. I believed they had critical information to share in this dialog but had never been asked to do so.

As a result of the limitation described in the previous paragraph it was imperative to include procedures designed to build readers’ confidence in the trustworthiness of the interpretive findings included within the research report. Merriam (1998) recommended six strategies aimed at establishing trustworthiness. These strategies included: (a) triangulation, (b) member checking, (c) peer examination, (d) surfacing the researcher’s biases, (e) long-term observation within the research site, and (f) participatory research designs. I employed four of the six strategies recommended by Merriam. I employed triangulation techniques to confirm emerging themes throughout and at the conclusion of the data collection phase. I relayed the data and my tentative findings to the coach participants and requested their feedback on the plausibility of my initial interpretations at the mid-point of and following final data collection. I also made an effort to surface my assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation within the dissertation study report. Merriam also recommended three strategies for enhancing the transferability within a qualitative investigation. These strategies included composing a rich, thick description, clarifying typicality of the case, and employing multi-site designs. I made a conscious
effort to compose a thick, rich description of the coaches’ contexts, experiences, insights, understandings, and recommendations in enough detail so that readers could decide how their own contexts compare with that of the research situation. Doing so allows the reader to determine how transferrable the study findings are to their own contexts. Although the data collection process was completed at one site, all the coach participants practiced in different schools. Each of those school sites possessed unique characteristics and circumstances.

**Definition of Key Terms**

The description of this investigation on the impact of participation in an instructional coaching project relies on vocabulary specific to teaching and learning. Developing a clear understanding of how this vocabulary is used within the dissertation may result in better conceptualization related to its content.

**Balanced literacy.** “Balanced literacy is a philosophical orientation that assumes that reading and writing achievement are developed through instruction and support in multiple environments in which teachers use various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and child control” (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengill, 2005, p. 272).

**Cognitive coaching.** As defined by Costa and Garmston (1994), Cognitive coaching is a nonjudgmental process built around a planning conference, observation, and a reflecting conference. Skilled cognitive coaches apply strategies to enhance another person’s perceptions, decisions, and intellectual functions. Changing these is a prerequisite to improving overt behaviors that in turn, enhance student learning (p. 2).
**Content coaching.** West (2009) stated, “The essence of content coaching is simple: to improve learning, teachers must focus on relevant, important, rich content” and “Content coaching is an iterative process centering on thoughtful lesson design, skilled enactment of lessons, reflective analysis of student learning, and use of that analysis to construct ensuing lessons.” Content coaches support this process through their interactions with teachers (p. 14).

**Context.** “Context in ethnography is the setting, situation, or environment that surrounds the cultural-sharing group being studied” (Creswell, 2008, p. 638).

**Effective teaching practices.** Effective teaching practices are described as those that have been studied and found to have a high probability of enhancing student achievement. Examples include the use of non-linguistic representations, cooperative learning, and generating and testing hypotheses (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

**Evidence or research-based teaching practices:** Evidence-based or research-based teaching practices are explained as specific teaching behaviors that have either correlational or causal evidence of their effectiveness resulting from systematic research (Thompson, Diamond, McWilliam, Snyder, & Snyder, 2005).

**Instructional coaching.** Instructional coaching was described as a process through which “instructional coaches employ a variety of professional development procedures to foster widespread, high-quality implementation of interventions. An instructional coach is an on-site professional developer who teaches educators how to use proven teaching methods” (Knight, 2004, p. 1).
Learning transfer. Learning transfer is described as the application of knowledge or skills from the context in which it was learned to a different but related context (Harris, Lowery-Moore, & Farrow, 2008).

Literacy coaching. “Literacy coaches support teachers in making instructional changes or decisions in order to improve student achievement in reading and writing” (Duessen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007, p. 5).

Peer coaching. Kohler et al. (1997) offered the following definition:

Peer coaching enables teachers to observe one another and exchange support, companionship, feedback and assistance in co-equal fashion. Unlike other methods of collaboration, peer coaching is specifically designed to foster teachers’ development and acclimation of new instructional practices in the classroom (p. 240).

Problem-solving coaching. Participants engage in collaborative problem solving to address issues or barriers to student progress. Coaches facilitate and take part in collaboration, provide professional development, learn from participants, and support professional learning focused on improving services to students.

Reflective practice coaching. Coaches implementing this approach support teachers in developing metacognitive skills so that they become more conscious of decisions that guide their teaching practice. Building capacity to become more reflective and autonomous problem-solvers is emphasized in this approach (Denton & Hasbrouk, 2009).

Reform coaching. Neufeld and Roper (2003) described reform coaching as the application of any coaching model to support school-wide improvement or reform.
implementation. They also suggested that reform coaching is unique because it emphasizes building leadership capacity in both teachers and principals.

**Teacher efficacy.** As defined by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001), “A teacher’s efficacy belief is a judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (p. 783).

**Team-building coaching.** A coaching approach involving groups of teachers supporting each other in their efforts to implement innovative instructional practices following professional development introducing the new strategy (Showers, & Joyce, 1996).

**Technical coaching.** The establishment of a relationship between pairs of teachers, one of which has more highly developed technical skills serving as the coach. The coach’s role in technical coaching is to share teaching expertise in support of instructional reform initiatives adopted school-wide (Denton & Hasbrouk, 2009).

**Threat rigidity.** Rigid defensiveness and psychological myopia, is a natural response to a perceived threat (Olsen & Sexton, 2009).

**Transformative andragogy.** As defined by Brown (2006), transformative andragogy is “a learning experience that can be stimulated by people, events, or changes in contexts that challenge the learner’s basic assumptions of the world” (p. 706).

**Under-resourced learners.** “Under-resourced is a way to talk about students who don’t have access to a number of resources necessary for school success” (Payne, 2008, p. ix). Payne identified these critical resources as (a) financial, (b) language, (c)
emotional, (d) mental, (e) spiritual, (f) physical, (g) support systems, (h) relationships/role models, and (i) knowledge of hidden rules.
CHAPTER II

Introduction

The following review of scholarly educational literature synthesizes the results of several decades of research related to improving the effectiveness of instruction in American schools. In an effort to provide internal structure, as well as a clear focus on topics particularly relevant to coaching, chapter two is mainly organized around seven major concepts including (a) the foundational literature supporting the development of coaching, (b) the evolution of coaching, (c) types of coaching models, (d) common coaching models, (e) coaching research, (f) gaps in the coaching literature, and (g) recommendations in the literature for future research. Discussion of these specific topics follows a brief review of the procedures I employed to locate the relevant literature.

Locating the Relevant Literature.

The publications surveyed in my preparation of this chapter were located primarily through searches of the following electronic databases: Academic Research Complete, Dissertation Abstracts, ERIC-EBSCOHost, Education Research Complete, and Lexis-Nexis Academic. Keywords and phrases employed in this process included coaching, cognitive coaching, content coaching, educator professional development, evidence-based teaching strategies, instructional coaching, instructional improvement, literacy coaching, research-based instructional practices, research to practice gap in education, school reform, student achievement, and teacher professional development.

Another strategy employed in locating relevant literature was to search coaching

A final approach used in locating helpful literature was the application of backwards searching. Frequently the research articles, reports or books I reviewed contained references not identified through the electronic database searches. These additional sources were subsequently located by an electronic journal title or library catalog searches. Articles and other materials unavailable electronically, due to publication dates, were located using title and author searches employing a variety of search engines. Approximately 200 relevant publications were located using the methods described above. Only 32 of these were research articles describing studies involving coaching for instructional improvement.

**Foundational Literature Supporting the Development of Coaching**

Coaching for the purpose of instructional improvement is still a relatively new topic in the professional education literature as it spans only a few decades. The following summary of literature related to teacher professional development and school reform is rather broad and at first glance may seem superfluous. However, I was
convinced through my review of coaching publications that providing a thorough summary of the foundational literature on professional development and school reform would facilitate readers’ understanding of the impetus for the development of instructional coaching along with the complex context within which coaching occurs. The following statement by Borman and Feger (2006) helped convince me that a broad scope was worth the effort, “The research on teaching and learning, teacher collaboration, teacher career trajectory, and high quality professional development all shed powerful light on particular aspects of instructional coaching” (p.2).

**Gap Between Research and Practice in Education**

The gap between research and practice in education has been a recognized problem for many years. National funding and growing public support for improving the quality of education and equality of access appeared in the mid-1950s. However, systematic studies investigating the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies and methodologies did not begin in earnest until the 1960s (Guskey, 1990). Once the knowledge base relating to effective teaching practices began to grow and efforts to disseminate this new knowledge were undertaken, the lack of transfer of new knowledge and skills into teachers’ classrooms became apparent. Although the knowledge base was steadily growing during the 1970s, educational researchers realized that instruction was not changing at the classroom level (Showers & Joyce, 1987). This led to research studies conducted during the late 1970s that sought to determine the effectiveness of staff development programs in promoting the use of innovative strategies in the classroom. According to Joyce and Showers (1982) multiple studies revealed the depth of the gap between teacher exposure to new techniques and actual classroom implementation of
them. These studies consistently revealed that only 10% of teachers were likely to implement the instructional practices to which they had been exposed upon returning to their classrooms. Of the small percentage that did experiment with implementation in their classrooms, nearly all stopped using them within a short period of time (Joyce & Showers, 1982). As a result of this obvious problem, educational researchers began pondering the reasons why the gap existed and investigating methods of decreasing its size. Coaching as a form of teacher professional development is aimed at bridging the gap between research and practice in education (Knight, 2009).

**Instructional Innovation-related Research**

Berman and McLaughlin (1976) are considered the pioneers of large-scale research studies on implementing educational innovations. They conducted an investigation referred to as the Rand Change Study in an attempt to identify factors that influence teachers’ willingness to implement new teaching practices. The time period in which this study was conducted is evidence of the immature developmental stage of the teaching profession. This study relied on survey research, with questions aimed at gathering teacher perceptions about recently adopted instructional innovations. Some unexpected, but important research findings were reported including:

- The amount of money or other resources invested in support of implementing the innovation had minimal influence on its successful implementation.
- When teachers perceived that the new practice improved their effectiveness in teaching lower performing students they were more likely to sustain its use over time.
The scope of the novel teaching practice must be carefully balanced (not too broad and not too rigid) in order to positively impact its level of implementation.

Commitment of leadership at the district level from the earliest stages of the innovation project and continuing over time impacts sustainability of new practices.

Regardless of some issues with methodological rigor in the Rand Change Study, the researchers were successful in establishing that serious investigations related to the implementation of innovative instructional practices could be conducted (Gersten et al. 2000).

Additional research conducted in the emerging efforts to identify the factors that influence the sustained implementation of evidence-based teaching practices were titled the Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement studies (Crandall, 1983; Huberman & Miles, 1984; Loucks, 1983). This series of both qualitative and quantitative investigations, conducted in cooperation with the National Diffusion Network, explored a wide variety of innovation implementation projects tied to the introduction of specific research-validated instructional strategies. The Huberman and Miles (1984) study findings are considered particularly powerful because of the number of sites across different regions of the country, the significant length of time the innovation projects were in place (3 to 4 years) and, the absence of guidance from state departments of education (Gersten et al., 2000). Most of the research sites had introduced validated instructional practices involving reading instruction. Significant findings from their series of studies concluded that the sustained implementation of validated teaching methods could be positively influenced using vastly different approaches. Surprisingly, some of
the projects with high levels of sustained use were implemented through administrative mandates, but other successful projects were driven by a group of highly committed educators at the school site. Although both initiation approaches were found to be capable of supporting sustained use of the targeted strategies, the ones driven by local building staff led to better results (Huberman & Miles, 1984). This particular finding has implications for any innovation project. As noted by subsequent researchers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1988; Fullan, 1991; Gersten, 1990), instructional improvement projects relying on a top-down initiation approach are particularly susceptible to waning support issues created by administrative turnover and external policy pressures. It is important to note that regardless of the initiation approach, teachers who were able to master and integrate the target strategies into their day-to-day classroom instruction received high levels of classroom-based technical support during the first year or two.

Research conducted in the years following the work of Huberman and Miles (1984) resulted in similar findings related to the sustainability of evidence-based teaching practices. In a study conducted in 1989, Kinder, Gersten, and Kelly investigated teachers’ continued use of specific strategies involved in direct instruction a number of years after their schools adopted new curriculum materials. They found that even when there was no longer external pressure to use evidence-based strategies including teaching to specific objectives, explicit instruction of reading strategies, frequent immediate feedback, and consistent cumulative review, teachers who had mastered these strategies during the initial project reported continuing up to a decade later (Kinder et al., 1989).
Research conducted beginning in the 1970s uncovered a myriad of factors found to influence the implementation of evidence-based instructional practices. I have organized these influencing factors into four general categories (a) teaching as a profession, (b) the effectiveness of teacher professional development, (d) individual teacher attributes, and (e) individual school factors. Literature and research conducted evidencing these factors are described throughout the remainder of this section.

**Influences on Change Related to Teaching as a Profession**

Carnine (1999) conjectured that one cause of the research to practice gap revealed in the 1970s is that education is an immature profession. He explained that most of the decisions made and actions taken in education are characteristics generally found in an immature profession. Carnine referred to three such characteristics including:

1. Professional expertise relies only on the subjective opinions of individual practitioners.

2. The individual professional bases trust upon personal contact or relationships rather than objective evidence of effectiveness.

3. Autonomy resulting from the reliance on unproven expertise and trust works as a barrier to the implementation of more standardized procedures based on research outcomes.

Mature professions are described as relying more on scientific evidence when making decisions. In contrast to the immature profession, the following characteristics are demonstrated: (a) opinions, judgments, and decisions are informed by empirical data available to a wide audience; (b) a higher value is placed on the objectivity of information rather than personal trust in the information provider and, (c) some level of
professional autonomy or freedom is relinquished in order to embrace more standardized procedures informed by scientific evidence (Carnine, 1999). Carnine suggested that as of the late 1990s, the profession of education was just starting to embrace some of the characteristics allowing it to evolve into a mature profession.

Succumbing to the latest instructional fads is another characteristic that evidences the immaturity of the teaching profession. The commonness of faddism continues to serve as a barrier to implementing instructional reform (Gersten, Chard, & Baker, 2000; Kauffman, 1993). Stanovich (1993) explains that the pervasiveness of educational fads is connected to teachers’ personalized and subjective views about knowledge acquisition. When teachers hold the belief that knowledge is held within specific individuals who then pass it on to others, it is difficult for them to conceive of how research findings from a study in another context could possibly be generalized for application in their own classroom.

**Influences on Change Related to Effectiveness of Teacher Professional Development**

The effectiveness of teacher professional development came under close scrutiny during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Once the research to practice gap was exposed in the professional literature, educational researchers began exploring why this problem with transfer was occurring. Initially teachers’ lack of motivation and effort, along with poor attitudes, was thought to be the major contributors to these failures. However, during the later 1980s, a number of researchers began to consider the possibility that the design and methods of staff development might be a more critical influence (Showers & Joyce, 1996). More recent authors have emphasized the key role of professional development in addressing the gap between research evidencing effective teaching
practices and implementation of those practices within our nation’s classrooms (Birman, Desimone, Porter & Garet, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Guskey & Yoon, 2009).

Traditional frameworks for professional development were based upon a number of faulty assumptions. Researchers and school leaders responsible for designing the inservice training offered prior to implementing new teaching practices did so under the assumption that teachers would attend a training session, learn the targeted strategy, and return to their classrooms prepared to implement them effectively (Birman et al., 2000; Showers, & Joyce, 1996). The multiple studies reviewed by Joyce and Showers (1980) in constructing their hypotheses on how to improve the typical transfer rate through the redesign of professional development programs clearly communicated the serious flaw in that assumption. A synthesis of the available research led them to state that “modeling, practice under simulated conditions, and practice in the classroom, combined with feedback is the most productive training design” (p. 384).

A number of more recent studies related to the effectiveness of professional development opportunities provided to teachers have been completed. In a 2009 report published by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) and authored by Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos, the lack of rigorous studies designed to identify causal relationships between professional development characteristics and their effectiveness was strongly emphasized. However, the authors explained that the small number of methodologically sound studies conducted to date have demonstrated that professional learning opportunities, if well-designed, have the
potential to positively impact teaching practices and subsequent student learning outcomes.

**Time and duration impact effectiveness.** Traditional forms of teacher professional development have long been criticized for failing to offer the specific content focus, meaningful and relevant activities, and time necessary to impact the much-needed changes in day-to-day classroom teaching practices (Birman et al., 2000; Guskey, & Yoon, 2009; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998). A recent meta-analysis was completed reviewing the evidence on how professional development affects student learning outcomes (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). One of the findings presented in the meta-analysis report evidenced the importance of time and duration of the professional development program on its outcomes for both teachers and students. The researchers found that professional development opportunities ranging from six to 12 months in length and offering between 30 and 100 contact hours demonstrated a significant and positive effect on student academic growth. Programs lasting at least one year and averaging 49 contact hours were found to provide gains of 21 percentile points in student achievement. In contrast to longer programs, no statistically significant academic achievement gains resulted from those offering between five and 14 contact hours. Additional evidence of the importance of time engaged in professional development was provided as the result of several evaluations of year-long programs relating to the implementation of inquiry-based instruction in science (Banilower, 2002; Corcoran, McVay, & Riordan, 2003; Supovitz & Turner, 2000). Results of these studies indicated that professional development programs providing a minimum of 80 contact hours significantly increased the likelihood that teacher participants would implement
new teaching practices when compared to teachers who received fewer contact hours. These studies also concluded that the more hours of professional development teachers participated in, the larger the academic achievement gains students experienced the following year.

Several researchers and authors have hypothesized about the reasons that time and duration appear to be so critical to effective professional development. A primary explanation offered was that increasing the duration of teacher learning programs also increases the likelihood that they will involve modeling, active learning, collegial collaboration, multiple opportunities for practicing new practices, constructive feedback and, follow-up support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Guskey, & Yoon, 2009; Garet, Birman, Porter, Desimone, & Herman, 1999). A secondary explanation for the impact of time spent in professional development was offered based upon the results of a national survey of teachers. When asked about their perceptions of effective learning opportunities, the majority of teachers surveyed reported that they viewed programs sustained over time as more effective than those of limited duration (Garet et al., 1999). As with the primary explanation, teachers’ perceptions about the effectiveness of professional development sustained over time was attributed mainly to the added components increased contact hours permits. The authors postulated that the teachers’ preference was more related to structure and content than actual hours spent engaged in professional development activities. These findings regarding time and duration of professional development opportunities should be a crucial consideration for educational leaders when planning professional development programs in the midst of current stringent accountability contexts.
Content of professional development impacts effectiveness. Research conducted in the late 1990s provided some initial insight on the importance of the content included in professional development (Cohen & Hill, 1998; Kennedy, 1998). Teachers consistently reported that in-service learning opportunities in which general instructional strategies were presented, but specific content was not emphasized, were seen as unhelpful. A subsequent survey conducted with 1,000 teacher respondents, along with data gathered from 10 exploratory case studies led researchers to conclude that teacher reports of having increased knowledge and skills were directly related to the extent of the programs’ focus on subject-specific content (Birman et al., 2000). The authors went on to point out the logic supporting such a strong subject area focus, arguing that due to expectations that educators will teach to new standards, they must be provided with learning opportunities leading to in-depth understandings of any new content and of how students are best supported in learning the required concepts.

More recent investigations have also addressed the critical nature of professional development content. One synthesis of research that investigated what models, components, frameworks, or characteristics are necessary to the design of effective professional development programs was conducted in 2009 by Guskey and Yoon. The authors were careful to emphasize that context plays a significant role in the success or failure of professional development efforts, however, their analysis did lead to several generalized understandings. They described the content of professional development programs as a long-debated issue, but relied on the result of the meta-analysis conducted by Yoon et al. (2007) to address the importance of content. The meta-analysis identified a number of common characteristics across nine well-designed studies of professional
development programs demonstrating strong positive impacts on teaching practices and student learning outcomes. Yoon et al. reported that across all nine studies, the effective professional development programs contained either a clear focus on specific content area knowledge, or on specific teaching practices related to how students learn that subject matter. This meta-analysis served to confirm previous research findings regarding the importance of content.

Following their synthesis of research regarding the status of professional learning in education, Darling-Hammond et al., (2009) recommended that professional development programs should have an unambiguous emphasis on student learning and specific content pedagogy. Additionally, their research findings concluded that professional development programs focusing on abstract concepts or generalized instructional strategies presented without consideration for context are ineffective in changing teaching practices at the classroom level.

**Form and structure impact effectiveness.** Time, duration and content are not the only factors influencing the effectiveness of professional learning opportunities for teachers. Form and structure have also been found to influence the impact of these programs on the implementation of new teaching practices. Three structural components of professional development programs, as well as three related core features were identified through a mixed methods study of teachers participating in Eisenhower Grant programs focused on teaching practices in math and science (Garet et al., 2001). Structural components identified by these researchers included the form of the learning activities, duration of the learning activities, and the type of participation required. Form was described as involving either reform-based activities or traditional workshops and
conferences. Included in the reform-based activities were those that involved collegial study groups, teacher networking, problem-solving task forces, action research projects, and the creation of teacher resource centers. Duration was described as the number of contact hours spent engaged in learning activities and the time span across which these activities were spread. Participation was referred to as the intended audience involved in the program, whether that be grade level, content area, or other teams from the same building participating collectively, or teachers from a number of schools who participate individually. Core features identified as a result of the study included the following characteristics: a subject area content focus, opportunities for active learning, and coherence with broader school improvement goals or professional development efforts.

Interestingly, the findings reported by Garet et al. (2001) exposed long held negative perceptions about traditional forms of professional development as misguided. When comparing traditional program forms comprised of workshops or institutes with reform-based professional learning activities, they found that duration and participation were more influential components than form. The negative features of one-shot workshops and the infrequent summer institute have been emphasized even in more recent literature (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Knapp, 2003; Supovitz, Mayer & Kahle, 2000). The Garet et al. study revealed that when traditional forms of professional learning provided additional time and duration, they contained core features similar to the reform oriented programs and were equally as effective. These investigators reasoned that reform oriented professional development activities were more effective because they provided a subject-specific focus, were longer in duration, offered active learning opportunities, and evidenced coherent connections to broader school
improvement goals and previous development activities. Thus, Garet et al. concluded that structural components of professional development programs, such as reform-based activities, traditional workshops, or conferences, influence the core features and processes incorporated into the design. These core features included collegial study groups, teacher networking, and action research projects, along with significant time and duration. In turn, these core features significantly impact the effectiveness of participation in leading to increased content knowledge, familiarity with evidence-based teaching practices, and the implementation of these practices in day-to-day classroom instruction.

Guskey and Yoon (2009) reported a similar conclusion in their synthesis of professional development research. These authors were careful to point out that even though one-day workshops and summer institutes have been consistently criticized as ineffective structures for professional development within the literature, it’s not the structure that makes them ineffective. In fact, when workshops or institutes presented evidence-based teaching practices paired with active learning activities, and the flexibility to adjust highlighted practices according to teachers’ classroom contexts, Guskey and Yoon found them to be highly effective. Therefore, these researchers explained that the effectiveness of the professional learning experience depends more heavily on the content presented, activities engaged in during the session, and follow-up opportunities for collaborative discussion and collegial support in subsequent weeks and months.

Another structural feature that influences the effectiveness of professional development efforts was identified by Garet et al. (2001) as participation type. These
Researchers discovered that when teams or groups of teachers participated in professional development programs collectively, more opportunities for active learning were expected. Participant teams were also able to engage in immediate discussion of content and concepts presented. Collective participation in professional learning activities was also found to positively impact the professional culture of a building. Some researchers have reasoned that this is due to the development of common understandings related to shared curriculum, instructional goals, practices, problems identified, and possible solutions collaboratively explored (Ball, 1996; Newman & Associates, 1996).

**Coherence and context impact effectiveness.** The criticality of coherence and context in relation to professional development programs has been addressed by a number of educational researchers and theorists. Evidence suggests that professional development is more effective when it is embedded within the context of a broader school improvement plan (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Supovitz et al., 2000). Several researchers came to similar conclusions about why this is true. When teachers perceive that there is no logical connection between the content of professional learning programs and what they are expected to accomplish on a daily basis in the classroom, they are likely to consider the program a waste of time (Birman et al., 2000; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Garet et al., 1999). Based on findings from a national survey of math and science educators, Garet et al. (2001) concluded that teachers rate professional development as more valuable when it clearly takes into account characteristics of local contexts including factors such as available resources, curriculum pacing guidelines, and systems for accountability. If the content and context of professional development
programs are not viewed as a coherent part of a whole, or teachers are exposed to
evidence-based practices they perceive as impossible to implement based on their school
context, they are unlikely to attempt implementing them (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).
These authors also describe a similar result if teachers perceive that they will not be
provided with on-going support while implementing the new strategies, or that
administrators will not hold them accountable for implementation and reinforce their
efforts.

**Paucity of reliable evidence.** The professional literature and research related to
the effectiveness of professional development programs on changing teacher classroom
practices is replete with criticisms of the paucity of reliable evidence gathered and
published to date (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Much of the
evidence available has relied on teacher self-report through survey responses to
determine teachers’ transfer of learning from the professional development setting into
classroom practice. Although this data collection methodology leads to valuable
information, Pianta and Hamre (2009) contend that data collected in this manner is
always filtered through the less-than-objective perceptions of study participants. These
researchers go on to suggest that the use of standardized classroom observation
instruments, demonstrating acceptable levels of validity and reliability, to measure
teachers’ transfer of practices learned in professional development to their classrooms
would provide more valuable evidence regarding program effectiveness.

Guskey and Yoon (2009) emphasized the difficulty in measuring the direct effect
of professional development programs on student performance. They purported that more
rigorous studies of professional development programs need to be conducted, with
particular attention given to programs designed to change teaching practices, and student learning outcomes. They suggested that these studies be conducted by both teachers within their own schools and classrooms employing an action research approach, as well as by educational researchers. Additionally, Guskey and Yoon urged professional development designers and implementers to select targeted teaching practices based on evidence of effectiveness, to develop goals related to professional development outcomes, and to identify strategic methods of measuring the outcomes relative to goals. For example, if the goal of the professional development program is the implementation of specific teaching practices within the classroom, the school should assess the frequency and fidelity of practice implementation in an objective manner. If the research-based practice is being effectively implemented, an increase in student performance following implementation would provide stronger evidence of a link between participation in professional development and improved student outcomes. Guskey and Yoon also emphasized the importance of conducting this type of investigation at the local pilot-project level to determine if the professional development program and targeted practices are effective within the individual school context. These authors challenged researchers at the national level to utilize rigorous research approaches including matched treatment and control groups with random assignment, along with pre-treatment/post-treatment assessment methods, to study the impact of teachers’ professional development participation on student learning outcomes. Studies such as those recommended by Guskey and Yoon have also been reported as critically important and strongly recommended by other experts in the field of professional development and instructional improvement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Pianta & Hamre, 2009).
Summary of the effectiveness of professional development. The preceding review of the teacher professional development literature provided evidence of several features that are critical to its effectiveness in leading to change in teaching practices. Sufficient time must be provided for not only introductory training sessions, but also over a significant period of time in order to provide continuing support and technical assistance with the transfer of new practices from the learning environment into the classroom. The content of the professional development program is also critical. Teachers report that subject area instructional strategies are the most beneficial content, but must be presented in a manner that takes individual school and teacher contexts into account. The form and structure of the professional development program is also of paramount importance. Learning activities that involve teacher dialog and actual hands-on experiences within the professional development session increase the likelihood of instructional change at the classroom level. Additionally, the structure needs to extend beyond a one-day event or short-term intensive summer institute. Long-term support may be needed to build teachers’ mastery of new techniques so that they will be maintained and become integrated into the teacher’s day-to-day instructional repertoire. Finally, coherence and context make a difference in teachers’ transfer of new skills into daily teaching practice. They must be able to make cognitive connections between the instructional changes being recommended or required. Teachers must also be given the flexibility to adjust new practices enough to be useful within their own classroom contexts. Instructional leaders can increase the likelihood of teachers’ implementation and sustained use of evidence-based instructional practices if they design professional development with the preceding features in mind.
Influences on Change Related to Individual Teacher Attributes

Impact of teachers’ personal beliefs on change. Adjustments or alterations of teachers’ motivations or beliefs more often follow the implementation of new practices rather than preceding implementation (Guskey, 1986; Smylie, 1988). A study conducted by Guskey in 1985 investigated the impact of a professional development program introducing instructional improvement practices on teachers’ efficacy beliefs. The findings indicated that prior to implementing new techniques presented in the professional development program, teachers were more likely to attribute their instructional effectiveness to personality traits rather than teaching behaviors. Following teachers’ learning about and implementation of new teaching practices, they were more likely to emphasize their teaching behaviors as the reason for student learning outcomes. Guskey’s findings have important implications for supporting the implementation of new teaching practices. He explained that teachers who attribute their effectiveness to personality rather than teaching practices are more likely to view change projects in a pessimistic manner. Guskey suggested that such pessimistic views increase teachers’ reluctance to try out new practices. Teachers holding this perspective are also likely to feel that they would need extensive help and guidance in order to successfully employ innovative instructional practices within their own classrooms.

Numerous studies regarding within-teacher characteristics have been conducted, nevertheless, very few have identified consistent relationships between those teacher characteristics and student learning outcomes. However, a teacher’s sense of efficacy is clearly an exception to those general findings (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Researchers have investigated the educational correlates to a teacher’s sense of efficacy for more than two
decades. Tschannen-Moran defined teacher efficacy as follows, “A teacher’s efficacy belief is a judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (p. 783). The earliest study involving the construct of teacher efficacy was conducted by the RAND Corporation in the late 1970s. An investigation conducted by McLaughlin and Marsh in 1978 (as cited in Guskey, 2001) attempted to evaluate whether teachers believed that they could impact student learning through their teaching behaviors. The RAND study identified teacher efficacy as a powerful attribute related to student learning. The results of this investigation, along with those of at least five other studies of teacher efficacy conducted in the 1970s, supported the understanding that teacher efficacy was strongly and consistently related to student achievement gains.

Social cognitive theory, set forth by Bandura (1977), provided the foundational concepts for the majority of studies conducted on self-efficacy during the past two decades. Bandura (2001) defined efficacy as, “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). He conjectured that self-efficacy beliefs are critical mediators for both behavior and behavioral change. Research completed during the 1980s and 1990s served to confirm the accuracy of Bandura’s thinking, as many investigations reported that teacher efficacy beliefs had powerful effects on teacher behaviors. Teachers who possessed higher levels of efficacy were found to be more persistent and resourceful when facing difficulties during instruction (Bandura, 1997; Guskey, 1988). Efficacious teachers were also found to engage in more effective planning for and organization of instruction. They were also able to implement innovations to meet student needs better than those with lower levels
of efficacy (Guskey, 1988; Johnson, 2010). Additionally, the attributes of optimism, confidence, enthusiasm for teaching, and the commitment to continue teaching were found to be stronger for teachers reporting higher levels of efficacy (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986). Teachers with higher efficacy were also discovered to use more positive classroom management strategies, work longer with struggling students prior to referring for special education evaluation, and to respond to students less critically following incorrect responses (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Johnson, 2010). In addition to its influence on teacher behaviors, a teacher’s sense of efficacy has also been related to essential student outcomes including higher levels of academic achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ross, 1992), higher levels of motivation towards learning (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989), and students’ personal sense of efficacy (Johnson, 2010).

Bandura (1997) postulated that people develop beliefs about their own efficacy by drawing from four sources of knowledge including, (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) physiological arousal. Mastery experiences were depicted as possessing the most powerful influence on the development of efficacy beliefs. Prior to the 1990s, conceptualizations of teacher efficacy beliefs and ultimately teaching behaviors tended to ignore the sources of efficacy information explained by Bandura (Henson, 2002). The sense of efficacy appears to be heightened following a successful instructional experience that the teacher perceives as attributable to his or her own abilities, skills, or efforts under the teacher’s control. Conversely, if the teacher attributes a successful instructional experience to fate, luck, or the intervention of others,
his or her sense of efficacy will be diminished (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

The knowledge base and new understandings regarding the impact of teacher efficacy beliefs on teacher behaviors and student outcomes has tremendous potential to inform the decisions of educational leaders who wish to implement change initiatives within their buildings (Guskey, 1988). Due to the relationship between higher levels of teacher efficacy beliefs and their willingness to seek out and try innovative instructional practices reported in the literature, it seems logical that teacher training programs and teacher professional development programs should provide learning opportunities that have the greatest potential to heighten efficacy beliefs (Johnson, 2010). Unfortunately, traditional teacher preparation and in-service teacher professional development models have typically relied on verbal persuasion in the form of lectures, but have not provided opportunities for either vicarious experiences through modeling and observation or mastery experiences through active learning and feedback (Garet et al., 1999). Therefore, if Bandura’s theory of efficacy development is applied, it is unlikely that typical models of educator preparation or teacher professional development will lead to significant increases in teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs. Educational leaders must develop and apply these important understandings regarding the within-teacher perceptions of their teaching efficacy if they hope to support the implementation of evidence-based instructional practices. Both teacher educators and educational leaders must also recognize the integral role they can play in enhancing teacher efficacy beliefs (Johnson, 2010).

Recognition of the significance of research findings relating to teacher efficacy beliefs provided by studies completed in the 1980s led to a flurry of subsequent
investigations of programs designed to enhance teachers’ sense of efficacy. Two studies conducted in 1990 concluded that teachers’ efficacy beliefs were more easily influenced during their teacher preparation experience (Housego, 1992; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990). Additional studies pointed out the difficulty of influencing the efficacy beliefs of experienced teachers (Henson, 2002; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Henson reasoned that the resistance of experienced teachers’ efficacy beliefs to change attempts is due to the nature of its development. Personal teacher efficacy is an internal belief that becomes more stable over time and across experiences. He also postulated that in order to influence experienced teachers’ sense of efficacy, professional development would require their participation in longer-term learning programs requiring critical reflection on personal teaching practices. Additionally, Henson believed the professional learning program would need to support experienced teachers while they engaged in active efforts to improve their instruction.

Recent research conducted involving attempts to increase teachers’ efficacy perceptions have led to encouraging results. Ross, Bruce, Hogaboam and Gray (2006) designed and implemented a model of teacher change relying on teachers’ sense of efficacy as the critical mediator between experiences and the implementation of new teaching practices. Within the teacher change model, Ross et al. described a four step process including the following experiences and responses:

1. Dissatisfaction with current instructional outcomes leads to a teacher’s perception of the need for change in current teaching practices.

2. Exposure to evidence-based teaching practices provides dissatisfied teachers with the means to change.
3. Implementing evidence-based teaching practices over time builds the teacher’s capacity to employ these practices.

4. Employing evidence-based instructional practices leads to improved instructional outcomes.

This process can be further enhanced if the teacher engages in reflective dialogue regarding implementation of new practices with a respected colleague. This teacher change model successfully impacted teacher efficacy beliefs by providing ongoing mastery experiences involving the implementation of evidence-based instructional practices (Bruce & Ross, 2008).

**Impact of teacher career stages on change.** Beliefs about educational change have also been found to be influenced by teachers’ career stages. In a study involving 50 Canadian teachers, Hargreaves (2005) identified consistent patterns of response to mandatory instructional changes linked to career stages. When comparing these groups, Hargreaves found that teachers in the early stages of their teaching career were likely to have high levels of energy, enthusiasm, and intensity that are necessary to implement significant change. Early-career teachers were also found to demonstrate the most flexibility and adaptability in responding to change requirements, which he considered a helpful response. On the other hand, Hargreaves noted that early-career teachers were also the most sensitive to contextual issues relating to job security and career uncertainty. He suggested that both of these characteristics could negatively impact teachers’ responses to change initiatives. An additional concern Hargreaves set forth regarding early-career teachers’ response to change was that high levels of enthusiasm, energy, and intensity can contribute to burn out, causing many to leave the profession. He found late-
Career teachers to display less energy, more emotional distance, and a sense of relaxation or relief within their perceptions of the profession. In terms of late-career teachers’ responses to change, resistance to and resilience in the face of mandated instructional changes were evidenced. Hargreaves explained that these perspectives towards change had much to do with what he called “repetitive change syndrome” due to experiencing many years of failed change initiatives (2005, p. 978). Late-career teachers were also the least sensitive to contextual issues as they were close to retirement and nearly incapable of losing their jobs. Mid-career teachers were described as having less energy and drive than early-career teachers, but still enough to become invested in change efforts. Their level of professional confidence was reported to positively impact their change efforts, following some initial hesitation to leave their comfort zone. Hargreaves described mid-career teachers as more relaxed and confident in their response to and ability to cope with change.

School leaders preparing to initiate significant instructional improvement initiatives can benefit from understanding how teachers’ beliefs about and responses to change can be impacted by their sense of efficacy (Guskey, 1985), as well as their career stage (Hargreaves, 2005; Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Although the types of responses and beliefs described in the studies summarized above were not observed across all cases, they should be considered in the development of change implementation plans as they make a case for offering differentiated learning opportunities and levels of support (Olsen & Sexton, 2009).

**Variety of individual teacher responses to change.** Evidence suggests that when teachers are introduced to innovative instructional practices, even when those
practices are research-based, individual teachers demonstrate responses across a wide continuum. Based on a variety of within-teacher factors, teachers may respond to new strategies from total rejection on one end of the response continuum, all the way to total accommodation on the opposing end, or at any point along this continuum (Coburn, 2001). A recent study conducted by Fabry (2010) explored the impact of professional development that focused on effective teacher characteristics as a preface to the introduction of evidence-based teaching practices. Fabry found that providing teachers with time to reflect on their own teacher characteristics, in comparison to those of effective teachers, served as a springboard to making changes once the evidence-based practices were introduced. These findings may be of critical importance to educational leaders designing professional development programs intended to support the transfer of evidence-based teaching practices from the training environment into classroom practices. The researcher addressed a number of the characteristics of high quality professional development relating to subject or content area focus, contact hours and duration, opportunities for active learning, modeling of new teaching practices, follow-up support during implementation, and opportunities for collegial dialogue and collaborative hands-on work. Some unique components incorporated within the learning format were directly related to individual teacher characteristics. Based primarily on Stronge’s (2002) qualities of effective teachers, Fabry developed an informal rating scale addressing 37 teacher characteristics. The scale organized these characteristics into five broad categories including the (a) teacher as a person, (b) organization for instruction, (c) implementation of instruction, (d) management and organizational skills, and (e) monitoring student progress. Program participants completed the rating scale and used
the results to reflect on their own teacher characteristics, after which they developed an effective teacher plan.

Participants reported that having opportunities to reflect on their beliefs, attitudes, and feelings related to teaching in general, followed by similar considerations related to specific instructional practices, was a powerful component of the program. Most of these teachers described this feature of the professional development program as novel to them, yet critical to their decision to implement instructional changes.

**Influences on Change Related to Individual School Factors**

**Influence of leadership factors on change.** A number of leadership factors combine to influence the success or failure of school improvement projects. Similar to the research to practice gap seen between evidence-based instructional practices and their utilization in classrooms, the knowledge base regarding school change has grown dramatically since the 1980s, with only limited evidence of application in leadership practice (Evans, 1996). Organizational and educational leadership experts including Fullan (1991), Schlechty (1992), Senge (1990), and Sergiovanni (1992), all emphasized the criticality of leadership beliefs and behaviors in facilitating successful and lasting institutional change. Unfortunately their wisdom has not significantly impacted the manner in which many educational leaders approach change initiatives (Evans, 1996). Reliance on a rational structural approach continues to prove ineffective, but popular. This approach is characterized by traditional, top-down planning and initiation of change projects in which information is disseminated and then followed by the application of pressure to implement the targeted innovative practice. Over time, researchers investigating organizational change have determined that pressure applied to implement
change, without the provision of supports to do so, leads to resistance and alienation of the implementers. Conversely, ample support for change implementation without the appropriate application of pressure to sustain new practices causes focus to wane and innovations to be forgotten over time (Fullan, 1991; Schlechty, 1992). A balance between pressure applied and supports provided is necessary. When a targeted practice does not take hold, leaders frequently institute mandates, policies, and consequences related to the practice.

Evans (1996) explained that context, human psychology, and processes related to change are generally left unaddressed in a rational structural approach to change. Evans went on to describe a strategic-systemic framework for change that in contrast to the traditional rational structural model, emphasizes the real-life contexts experienced in educational settings and the psychological processes associated with implementing change. Blaming teachers’ negative attitudes toward or resistance to changing their instructional practices is common when attempts at instituting significant changes have failed. However, the application of a strategic-systemic approach to implementing change focuses on teachers as the key to improving education, not as obstacles to the process (Evans, 1996; Noguera, 2004). Evans emphasized the importance of this concept within the following statement:

Rooted in the most profound depths of the human psyche, our ambivalence – especially our resistance – needs to be seen as part of the solution, not just part of the problem; it demands the attention and respect of all who seek innovation” (p. 38).
In a similarly profound statement, Fullan said, “No innovation can succeed unless it attends to the realities of people and place” (1991, p. 91). These concepts continue to provide critical messages to educational leaders struggling to facilitate school improvement through changing the behavior of others.

Assor, Kaplan, Feinberg, and Tal (2009) conducted two studies in which they investigated the types of supports teachers require in order to internalize new instructional practices. As a result they offered a number of insights relevant to leading change projects. Assor et al. explained that one reason change projects frequently fail is that ample attention is generally not given to the complexity of the internalization process.

The researchers developed a formal learning and implementation structure to promote teacher internalization of new ideas and practices. The developers took into account a wide range of supports for teachers involved in change implementation including the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, along with opportunities to voice their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. Additionally, Assor et al. argued that most of these psychological needs are threatened at some point during the change process, even when teachers are in favor of the innovations. As a result teachers’ may feel a loss of autonomy in designing instruction, less competent in the delivery of instruction, and less related to other teachers. Their design encompassed the following three components: (a) small teacher groups that met weekly to support implementation, collegial discussion, and continued learning relevant to the targeted practice; (b) principal efforts to provide sustained support for and reinforcement of teachers’ implementation efforts, and (c) meetings held every two to three weeks involving the principal, small
group facilitators, and any external change agents to discuss implementation progress. After two years of program implementation teachers reported that they held deep understandings related to the innovative practices. Participants also expressed their appreciation of support found within the small learning groups. Additionally, as a result of learning about and directly addressing their own psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and understanding, teachers explained that they were also better able to support those needs for students. The importance of consistent and explicit support from principals throughout the process was relayed across both schools. The researchers attributed sustained implementation success at least partially due to teachers’ internalization of new practices. Principals could use these findings to assist their development of a change implementation plan that is more likely to lead to teachers’ internalization and promoting long-term, sustained use of new practices.

Time and the funding to provide sufficient supports are vital resources school administrators must consider when planning to initiate change in teaching practices. Either of these components can serve to support or sabotage change efforts (Edmunds, 2005). The significant time commitment required to successfully implement new instructional practices appears as a consistent theme across recent research conducted on educational change. In a two-year ethnographic case study on the implementation of inquiry-based science instruction, Zembylas and Barker (2007) identified time as a critical theme. In addition to the time required to provide initial professional development on inquiry-based science instruction, they also found that teachers needed to be provided with time for collegial dialogue, planning, decision-making, focused coaching in the classroom, and practicing new skills. Time devoted to these activities led to the
development of trusting collegial relationships, offering opportunities for social and emotional support throughout the change process, as well as, a space for conflictual feelings to be aired and resolved. During these interactions, teachers shared successes, failures, frustrations, concerns and struggles related to the change initiative. Both the time and space provided for these activities were described by teachers as important in allowing them to adjust to or cope with the required change, regardless of their level of support for the initiative.

The significant influence of time on the success or failure of school change projects was also identified in the findings of a recent qualitative study conducted by Olsen and Sexton (2009). These researchers investigated six teachers’ responses to a change initiative implemented at a reform high school in California across a one year period using threat rigidity as an analytical frame. Olsen and Sexton explained that when an organization experiences pressure to change from multiple sources, the legitimacy of the institution and the professional activities conducted within it are threatened. A natural response to this type of perceived threat is rigid defensiveness and psychological myopia, identified in organizational development and sociological fields as threat rigidity. Within their study Olsen and Sexton found that threat rigidity led to a number of administrative responses that negatively influenced the school’s ability to successfully implement targeted changes. Administrator responses described in the study appeared to reflect an autocratic coercive leadership style (Pierce & Newstrom, 2003). Leaders employing the use of coercive power to implement change frequently engage in behaviors similar to those evidenced in the Olsen and Sexton study including, restricting the flow of critical information, tight control of the decision-making process, emphasis on accountability for
simplified, and generalized instructional and assessment practices, accompanied by the 
application of pressure to comply with authoritative demands.

Teachers’ responses to the changes implemented in the Olsen and Sexton (2009) 
study can be easily aligned with, or even predicted through an understanding of typical 
adult responses to change described by Evans (1996). Evans explained that response to 
change is dependent on the individual experiencing it. Adults construct individual 
meanings of change based on their personal perspective and context. Evans indicated that 
regardless of the meanings individuals construct throughout the change process they 
frequently experience feelings of loss, confusion, and perceived incompetence. Evans 
suggested that individuals may experience any or all of these feelings which are likely 
sources of stress and conflict. Teachers’ responses in the Olsen and Sexton study clearly 
exemplified Evans’s conclusions. The teachers reported high levels of social, emotional, 
and psychological stress, as well as feelings of resentment, engagement in defensive 
behaviors, and collegial conflict. Additionally, participants expressed an increased desire 
to isolate themselves and their practices behind their classroom doors, thus avoiding 
opportunities for collegial collaboration, dialogue, or support. The researchers determined 
that all of these inter-related responses created a hostile work environment for everyone 
involved. Other factors that limited the success of the change project encompassed the 
specific practices targeted for change, the manner in which the project was initiated, the 
building climate, and individual career perspectives of teachers in the building.

Olsen and Sexton (2009) concluded that school leaders considering initiating a 
significant change project should be prepare for and directly address threat rigidity 
responses. They made recommendations for doing so using a combination of their
research findings as well as recommendations offered within previous studies of successfully implemented change projects. The majority of recommendations involved considerable commitments of time. Olsen and Sexton also stressed the importance of initiating only one change at a time, being sure to sequence subsequent changes in an integrated manner, explicitly highlighting the connections between them. These researchers also emphasized the need to consider school-specific contexts, along with allocating the time necessary to engage all stakeholders in differentiated dialogue surrounding the proposed changes. In addition, Olsen and Sexton recommended the involvement of teachers during the development phase of the change project, as this involvement leads naturally and perhaps more smoothly into change implementation. These researchers urged the strategic use of both on-site and off-site professional learning activities in order to more fully address differentiated teacher needs relative to the changes required. Olsen and Sexton’s final recommendation focused on the criticality of providing teachers with ample time to collaboratively plan for, try out, and gain mastery in employing new instructional practices, along with providing frequent opportunities to reflect on the implementation process with colleagues.

The recommendations related to time offered by Zembylas and Barker (2007) and Olsen and Sexton (2009) are not particularly new. Previous studies and authors have proffered similar suggestions. Within his review of the relevant research and literature related to the implementation of school reform projects, Edmunds (2005) identified 16 factors that contribute to failed attempts. Some of the factors related to the nature of the reform, for example, focusing on structural as opposed to instructional changes or implementing changes without analyzing data prior to, during, and following
implementation. Edmunds also described a number of school-level factors that can result in the failure of change projects. The first factor identified was a failure to garner support for the change due to the exclusion of stakeholders during the project development process. A second factor Edmunds described as inhibiting success was a lack of critical understanding and skills required to implement change, paired with inadequate time, resources, and on-going support required to build such capacity. Edmunds echoed Olsen and Sextons’ (2009) recommendation to implement changes incrementally, while also explaining that implementing change in this manner could help prevent teacher burnout and turnover. In fact, Olsen and Sexton’s recommendations for successfully implementing change initiatives could be employed to address the majority of stumbling blocks identified within Edmunds’ study.

Duke (2006), following a review of case study investigations completed on 15 elementary school turn-around efforts across Texas and Virginia, offered a number of conclusions that should interest school leaders facing change initiatives. In order to support a successful turn-around effort moving schools from low-performing to high-performing categories, numerous changes were required for the purpose of eliminating barriers to change, the development of school conditions and climate supporting effective teaching and learning, as well as a re-focusing of change towards improving classroom instruction. Duke identified eight categories around which changes could be organized. These categories included changes in the following

- leadership practices,
- policies,
- curricular programs,
• organizational procedures,
• personnel,
• instructional practices,
• levels of community and parental involvement, and
• school facilities.

Duke explained that the schools in which the turn-around in performance levels was maintained over two years shared a number of essential characteristics. Schools in the study were found to hold a shared mission, attainable goals, and common beliefs about learning, along with a continuing commitment to participatory leadership, collegial collaboration, data-informed decision-making processes, and a sense of collective responsibility for student learning outcomes. Schools that were able to maintain improvements demonstrated a clear emphasis on literacy infused across all content areas, and implemented well-designed interventions for struggling students. These schools also engaged in the open sharing of data, collaborative dialogue, and collaboratively planning for instruction, as well as designing appropriate interventions and progress monitoring. On-going professional development emphasizing individualized student and teacher needs was also evidenced in the elementary schools Duke studied.

The fundamental influence of administrators on the success or failure of change efforts was also highlighted by Borko, Wolf, Simone, and Uchiyama (2003) in their case study research involving schools perceived as successful in implementing mandated reforms in Washington State. These researchers identified a number of factors influencing a school’s capacity to implement change. These factors included principal leadership, a sense of professional community, coherence of and technical assistance
provided for the programs implemented, teacher capacity to implement new practices, and learning opportunities provided in support of developing that capacity.

Borko et al., (2003) reasoned that leadership had a major impact because leadership behaviors also influenced the remaining factors by providing time for and facilitation of professional community development, assuring program coherence, providing technical resources, and offering on-going supports and opportunities for building teacher content area knowledge and skills. Borko et al. also provided support for previous research findings related to specific leadership behaviors that are linked with a school’s capacity to implement fundamental change efforts (Duke, 2006; Edmunds, 2005; Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Similar to the previously cited researchers, Borko et al. identified the importance of developing shared goals, valuing collegial collaboration, acknowledging collective responsibility for learning outcomes, the strategic use of resources to provide time, training and technical assistance to teachers, as well as utilizing distributed leadership models as essential leadership behaviors supporting successful change.

In addition to supporting previous research findings, Borko et al. (2003) identified the rigid time constraints on professional development which were not under the leaders’ direct control as a limiting factor experienced across schools involved in this study. These researchers also addressed the issue of implementation time span and its relationship to successful and sustained changes. They explained that teachers require an extensive period of time implementing new practices in order to see how it can be integrated into their current repertoire of teaching skills, to build mastery, determine student outcomes, revise based on data, and repeat this cycle as needed. These researchers explained that
many change initiatives are given a year or possibly two in order to demonstrate measurable differences in student outcomes prior to being labeled as ineffective and discarded. In reality, the innovative practices may simply be gaining momentum. The urge to move on to different change initiatives or to implement multiple school improvement initiatives at one time is supported by the evolution of new funding streams targeted toward specific innovations (Mac Iver & Legters, 2005). As noted by Fullan (2005), the implementation of multiple change initiatives at one time can lead to severe fragmentation of focus, a chief enemy of successful reform.

As stated earlier, the preceding recommendations intended for consideration by administrators responsible for leading change projects are not unique to these specific studies. School reform experts, theorists, and researchers have identified similar factors or influences related to successful change implementation projects over many years. Adams and Copland (2007) pointed out three conditions necessary to sustain innovation over time. One such condition is shared goals for implementation and clear understandings of the targeted practices. Secondly, administrators need to possess the authority or autonomy to allocate resources necessary to support the targeted change. A third school-level condition essential to sustaining innovative practices is teachers’ deep understanding of the need for and strong commitment to targeted change. Principals are an essential factor in developing and actively supporting these conditions necessary to sustain new practices over time.

Although the studies producing much of the knowledge about implementing and sustaining evidence-based teaching practices over time have come from descriptive studies involving small populations, qualitative case studies, and research designs that
limit generalizability, the results are still important. The sheer number of studies reporting similar findings, across multiple locations and contexts, and across many years builds confidence in those findings (Edmunds, 2005). Principals who pay attention to such findings and match them to their individual school needs and contexts are more likely to facilitate implementation of evidence-based teaching practices in a successful and supportive manner (Elias, Zins, & Graczyk, 2003).

**Influence of climate and culture on change.** Teaching has existed and evolved as a profession practiced in isolation. This long history of isolation has promoted a strong sense of individualism and continuing demands for academic freedom. Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) indicated that these professional norms favoring isolation and privacy have become cultural norms within most school contexts. They went on to explain that these norms have served as barriers to developing a tradition of collegial collaboration within the profession.

The benefits of teacher collaboration have been well documented (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996), but actual teacher engagement in collaboration is rarely observed (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Benefits accessed through teacher collaboration include increased success in identifying and solving problems of practice, as well as more consistency of instruction across multiple classrooms. Teachers engaged in frequent collaboration have also evidenced more willingness to try out novel teaching practices (Louis et al., 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

One large-scale longitudinal study conducted by Newman and Wehlage (1997) reported that schools in which teachers participated in a professional learning community promoting frequent collaboration had reduced student drop-out rates and increased
achievement scores in mathematics, science, reading and history over time. These authors described the school cultures as emitting a collective sense of instructional purpose and shared responsibility for student learning outcomes. A narrowing of the achievement gap between lower and middle income students in science and math was also achieved in these buildings over a five-year period. Subsequent large-scale studies have evidenced a number of ways in which collaborative learning can allow teachers to develop deeper content knowledge and skills, and also to positively impact instruction (Calkins, Belifore, Guenther, & Lash, 2007; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Supovitz & Christman, 2003). These are very impressive benefits that appear to have been widely ignored at the school level.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) stated that the easiest method of breaking down the professional isolation barrier is teachers observing in each other’s classrooms and then engaging in reflective dialogue. According to the same researchers, their analysis of data from the National Staff Development Council survey conducted in 2008 identified that only 40% of teacher respondents reported having an opportunity to observe in other teachers’ classrooms or to engage in reflective feedback. The most recent Federal Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) following the 2003-2004 school year reported that 63% of teacher respondents reported participating in peer observations and feedback. On the same survey, only 17% of teachers reported engaging in a great deal of collaboration with other teachers, and only 14% indicated that they made concerted efforts to coordinate with other teachers regarding course content or pacing. These findings help affirm the
conclusion that evidence of the benefits resulting from teacher collaboration have not led to wide-spread implementation of teacher collaboration in the United States.

**Influence of structures and scheduling on change.** Organizational structures and scheduling frameworks also influence the likelihood of teacher implementation and sustained use of evidence-based instructional practices. The most recent Schools and Staffing Survey (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004) results indicated that while most teachers received a day or two of professional development on various topics throughout the previous school year (80%), only 18% participated in two full days on one topic. This finding seems to indicate that most teacher professional development opportunities in the nation’s schools do not meet the threshold of at least 30 contact hours needed to impact student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Using the same survey data, Darling-Hammond et al. concluded that American schools tend to provide few structural supports related to professional development including released time, stipends for attending professional development outside on contract hours, time set aside for professional learning activities during the contact year, or time set aside for collegial dialogue and follow-up subsequent to professional development participation. These authors also stated that the job-embedded structures and supports necessary to implement and sustain change in teaching practices were currently not available in most school settings. Additionally, they noted that continued low usefulness ratings reported by teachers were strong evidence of insufficient infrastructure for professional development in most school districts.

In summary, the preceding review of literature regarding the influence of organizational contexts highlighted several key ideas. The criticality of leadership
behaviors cannot be over-emphasized in relation to the successful implementation and sustainability of instructional change over time. In fact, leadership behaviors may have the most influence on success or failure of change initiatives because all the other influencing factors are impacted by these behaviors. For example, school climate, culture, structures, and scheduling influence the likelihood of successful change efforts, and each of those is inextricably connected to specific leadership behaviors such as participatory decision-making processes and the provision of ample time and supports required to build teacher capacity to implement changes in their teaching practices. Instructional leaders must reflect on their own practice in order to engage in the most effective leadership behaviors for bringing about lasting change.

**Summary of the Foundational Research Supporting the Development of Coaching**

The literature and research reviewed in an attempt to discover the knowledge and understandings that in all likelihood supported the development of coaching in educational settings encompassed a number of topics related to implementing and sustaining instructional improvement. A myriad of influences that acted as mediators to the success or failure of instructional improvement initiatives were identified throughout the literature. Tables 1 and 2 (see Appendix C) provide a complete summary of these influences. Factors reported as positively influencing success included the sustained commitment of district and building level administrators, particularly the provision of sufficient time and classroom-based technical support to master and integrate new teaching practices. A deep understanding of the need for change held by all staff members, along with school conditions and a climate that supports effective teaching and learning were also set forth as factors that positively influence successful change.
initiatives. Teachers’ engagement in collegial dialogue, collaborative instructional planning, shared problem-solving and decision-making, along with focused coaching in the classroom were also identified as positive mediators of targeted change.

The barriers to successful change initiatives most frequently set forth included the ineffectiveness of traditional forms of teacher professional development, immaturity of the teaching profession, individual teacher characteristics, and individual school factors and conditions. Professional development programs offering fewer than 14 contact hours, and those that present content involving generalized rather than subject specific instructional strategies were reported to be ineffective in changing teachers’ day-to-day classroom practices. A lack of technical support during the initial implementation of innovative practices following professional development sessions was identified as another barrier to successful implementation of targeted instructional strategies. The immaturity of the profession of teaching was cited as a negative influence on change due to the propensity towards faddism and the implementation of multiple unrelated change initiatives at once, or discontinued initiatives within only a year or two. Individual teacher characteristics exemplified as barriers to change included early and late teacher career stages, low levels of teacher efficacy beliefs, and experiences with a cycle of failed change initiatives. Individual school conditions such as a professional culture of isolation, the failure of leaders to involve teachers in decision-making and planning of the change initiative, or failure to build school-wide support for the change project were also commonly portrayed as barriers to successful change.
The Evolution of Coaching

Coaching teachers for the purpose of improving classroom instruction began to emerge as a topic in professional education literature in the late 1980s and reached its peek in terms of volume between 2001 and 2004. The following summary of literature related to coaching describes an evolutionary process from theoretical foundations to common coaching models followed by attempts to validate the effectiveness of coaching through empirical research. This summary relies on a similar evolutionary framework for its organization.

Practical Foundations of Coaching

A number of explanations are provided in the literature regarding the emergence of coaching models aimed at educational improvement. Denton and Hasbrouk (2009) set forth a list of legislative acts providing impetus for the emergence of coaching. In 1999 the Reading Excellence Act (REA) was enacted to provide grant funding to states in an effort to assist impoverished schools in improving reading instruction and achievement. While most schools utilized the funds for tutoring struggling students, many also used the money to provide professional development on reading instruction. In addition, some schools began to hire reading coaches to provide support directly to teachers as well as supplementary instruction to students. The goals of this act were to ensure that all students were taught to read by the end of third grade, to encourage early intervention to prevent inappropriate referrals for special education evaluation, and to increase teachers’ knowledge and use of research-based instructional techniques in reading.
A second law identified by Denton and Hasbrouk (2009) was the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This legislation contained a number of goals related to reading instruction. Additional grant funding was authorized above and beyond Title I to initiate a program called Reading First. Money offered through Reading First was earmarked for developing increased capacity of current reading teachers to employ effective instructional practices. It also targeted schools experiencing high rates of poverty and low rates of student performance in reading. Not only could districts opt to apply Reading First dollars to hire reading coaches, doing so was recommended within the law as a viable and potentially effective component of professional development. As a result thousands of reading coaches were hired across the country to provide services within elementary schools.

A final piece of federal legislation discussed in Denton and Hasbrouk (2009) was the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA). This act mandated that schools develop and implement Response to Intervention (RtI) procedures prior to evaluating students for special education placement. Particular emphasis was placed on the use of RtI procedures with students suspected of experiencing a learning disability in reading, math, or written language. RtI models of intervening with struggling students were required to be structured such that the first level of intervention is always high quality classroom instruction provided by a highly qualified teacher within each content area. Implementation of research-based techniques was also part of this mandate. Additionally, in order to detect learning problems as early as possible, all students would be screened using a curriculum-based assessment to determine adequate progress throughout the school year. Students
unresponsive to classroom interventions would receive intensive supplemental instruction during which their progress would be carefully monitored. Data from monitoring students’ progress would then be used to inform evaluation procedures for special education identification. Given that high quality classroom instruction was emphasized as the first level of intervention some schools opted to use a portion of their federal funding to provide instructional improvement coaching to teachers. Legislation that increased school districts’ accountability for adequate yearly academic progress for all students and added new funding for intervention mandates did not lead to significant improvement in academic achievement as intended (Dieker et al., 2009; Edmunds, 2005; United States Department of Education, 2010).

Legislative mandates were not the only impetus for the development of coaching models. The professional literature in education offers a variety of additional explanations for the increasing popularity of coaching as a form of professional development during the past several decades. One of these is educators’ dissatisfaction with traditional, disconnected, one-shot workshop formats (Denton & Hasbrouk, 2009). As early as 1985 researchers contended that teachers rarely exited a workshop on innovative techniques with clear understanding of how to implement the techniques and often held a strong sense of skepticism about the viability of these techniques if applied to their students (Borman, & Feger, 2006; Denton, & Hasbrouk, 2009; Guskey, 1985). A related dilemma regarding traditional teacher development efforts to improve instruction has been their failure to impact day-to-day teaching practices (Borman, & Feger, 2006; Showers & Joyce, 1987). This predicament has been portrayed as a long-standing critical disconnection between the research base in education and actual teacher practices in
classrooms (Dieker et al., 2009; Hargreaves, 2005; Knight, 2004, 2009; Olsen, & Sexton, 2009). Characteristics of effective professional development programs that are more likely to bridge the research-to-practice gap as well as to increase student academic achievement have also come to light in recent years (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2006; Yoon, et al., 2007). Coaching frameworks, in general appear to include a majority of those characteristics (Borman, & Feger, 2006) and developers frequently emphasize the potential of their coaching models to mitigate the negative components of traditional teacher development approaches (Costa, & Garmston, 1994; Denton, & Hasbrouk, 2009; Knight, & Cornett, 2008; Neufeld, & Roper, 2003). Components most often identified as strengths of coaching models when compared with previous efforts to improve instruction include an emphasis on taking place within job-embedded contexts, providing ongoing non-evaluative support for implementing research-based practices, and encouraging increased professional collaboration (Borman, & Feger, 2006; Denton, & Hasbrouk, 2009).

**Theoretical Foundations of Coaching**

A strong theoretical base provides the foundation upon which coaching models were built. Theories appropriated from a broad number of fields are woven throughout the professional literature on coaching. Knight’s (2004) partnership approach to instructional coaching was reported to rely on theories offered within at least five fields of study including organizational development, leadership, adult education, cultural anthropology, and epistemology. Other developers depicted the application of theories from the fields of developmental and behavioral psychology and sociology in addition to those relayed by Knight (Assor et al., 2009; Gallucci, Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright,
Coaching model developers consistently cited some type of change theory as foundational to their approaches (Ross et al., 2006). Guskey’s (1985) *theory of teacher change* was most frequently included in the coaching literature. His theory offered an alternative to typical teacher change models. Guskey asserted that the traditional sequencing in most teacher change models was inaccurate. Guskey proposed an alternative sequence of steps in the teacher change process. His model began with teachers’ exposure to new instructional techniques or programs after which they might or might not implement or sustain the practice. Guskey explained that teachers’ efforts to implement and sustain new practices are based upon gaining their own evidence of its impact on student learning outcomes. He suggested that if teachers were provided with on-going support with this step in the sequence they would be more likely to change their beliefs or attitudes towards the innovation and over an extended period of time targeted techniques would be integrated into teachers’ instructional repertoire at an unconscious level.

Guskey applied what is referred to as the *James-Lange theory* developed in the late 1800s that explained the relationship between emotional experiences and actions. Previous theories about this relationship were predicated on the idea that individuals feel an emotion and then act upon those feelings experienced within a given situation. In contrast, researchers William James and Carl Lange offered separate but similar theories contending that when presented with a stressful situation, individuals act first and
experience their emotional response following action. James illustrated his theory as follows, a person walking in the woods who encounters a bear runs first and feels frightened as a result of the experience (as cited in Guskey, 1985). When explaining his theory of teacher change Guskey purported that teachers’ initially try out new instructional practices and form judgments about their impact prior to developing clear feelings and attitudes about them. He advised that teachers need a number of supports to move from implementation to integration of new instructional practices. These supports included guidance in adapting techniques to their students’ needs, personal hands-on assistance in classrooms, technical feedback, assistance in determining effects, and opportunities to discuss their experiences with colleagues. Guskey recommended coaching as a method of providing these supports.

Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural learning theory is also prominent in coaching literature. His developmental theory was built upon the idea that individual thinking is mediated through social interactions with others. Thus, opportunities to interact with others while reflecting on perceptions and beliefs is critically important when trying to impact change in individual beliefs (Gallucci et al., 2010). Vygotsky also believed that collective cultural change could be positively influenced by an individual’s cognitive development. Recently, Harris, Lowery-Moore, and Farrow (2008) borrowed from Vygotskian theory when they investigated coaches’ professional development within a reform context. These researchers established a model illustrating a number of phases in coaches’ learning and impact on the school community. These authors identified four distinguishable phases including (a) a coach’s appropriation of a new idea or concept, (b) transformation of a new concept or idea relative to the coach’s individual context, (c)
public discussion or actions engaged in by the coach in support of the new idea or concept, and (d) the evolution of a coach’s public actions into common conventions within the school culture.

Cognitive coaching, developed by Costa and Garmston in 1994, appropriated not only Vygotskian theory but also the work of other theorists. These theorists included Carl Jung, Albert Bandura, and Abraham Maslow just to name a few. In their development of cognitive coaching Costa and Garmston synthesized the concepts from multiple theorists to generate a model for understanding teachers’ internal motivations they referred to as the five states of mind encompassing efficacy, consciousness, craftsmanship, flexibility, and interdependence. Cognitive coaches consciously conduct their work with teachers within the states-of-mind framework. The intended outcome of cognitive coaching participation is the development teachers’ self-directedness and cognitive skills enabling them to reach high performance levels both individually and as part of a learning community (Costa, & Garmston, 1994).

*Self-determination theory* was also revealed in the literature as potentially informative to the construction of coaching models (Borman, & Feger, 2006). Developed in 2000 by Ryan and Deci, self-determination theory was described as “an approach to human motivation and personality that uses traditional empirical methods while employing an organismic metatheory that highlights the importance of humans’ evolved inner resources for personality development and behavioral self-regulation” (p. 68). Within their theory Ryan and Deci explain that teachers have basic psychological needs for perceiving themselves as competent, for a sense of relatedness to colleagues and as part of the school community, along with the need for autonomy. They suggested that if
these basic needs go unmet teachers are not likely to develop self-motivation leading to integration and internalization of new values and behaviors. These researchers expressed the criticality of providing support to individuals throughout this potentially lengthy process.

More recently Harris, Lowery-Moore, and Farrow (2008) constructed their *transformative learning theory* as a model for developing teacher leadership skills crucial to improving the transfer of skills from one setting to another and similarly from one person to an entire school community. They described their theory as an extension of transfer of learning theory developed through the contributions of a variety of researchers including Perkins and Salomon (1992), Marini and Genereux (1995) Caffarella (2002), and Barnett (2005). *Learning transfer* is described as the application of knowledge or skills from the context in which it was learned to a different but related context (Harris, Lowery-Moore, & Farrow, 2008). A number of conditions that impact the occurrence or hindrance of learning transfer were identified by Marini and Genereux. These conditions included factors related to the specific task, the teacher as a learner, and the social context within the organization.

Common coaching models generally address at least some of these conditions within their conceptual frameworks and recommended coach competencies. Factors related to task involve perceptions of its meaning and benefit by teachers being asked to engage in it, as well as allowing multiple opportunities to practice the task prior to independent implementation. Characteristics related to the teacher involve individual beliefs and attitudes towards change along with some familiarity with change processes. These characteristics may be promoted through facilitated individual and collegial
reflection. Mediating features of the social and organizational context that have influence on transfer of learning involve both the level of collaboration that is typical within the workplace and external political or economic factors.

In addition to transfer of learning theory, transformational learning theory incorporates the concept of transformative andragogy defined by Brown as “a learning experience that can be stimulated by people, events, or changes in contexts that challenge the learner’s basic assumptions of the world” (2006, p. 706). By combining both the elements of transfer of learning theory and transformative andragogy Harris, et al. constructed a model they titled transfer to transform. This model recommends strategies organized around the conditions influencing transfer of learning including task, learner, and supervisor attributes. They created this model for use in developing university teacher preparation programs focused on increasing the frequency of learning transfer from college to professional practice. Harris et al. emphasized the importance of developing the leadership skills of pre-service teachers that will enable them to transform beliefs, teaching practices, and student outcomes within their future school contexts.

Summary of the Evolution of Coaching

The literature uncovered regarding the development of coaching offered a number of explanations for its emergence. The enactment of several legislative acts that recommended and provided funding for coaching initiatives aimed at building teachers’ capacity to employ effective instructional practices was critical to the development of initial coaching programs. Educator dissatisfaction with traditional models of professional development, along with the well-documented failure of such models to promote transfer of learning into classroom teaching practices were also described in the
literature as foundational to the development of coaching models. As a result of research that set forth the characteristics comprising effective professional development, coaching model developers attempted to include as many of these characteristics as possible in an attempt to boost their efficacy in improving instruction.

Practical needs and funding availability provided much of the impetus for the evolution of coaching. Coaching model developers capitalized on that impetus borrowing a variety of theoretical concepts as the foundations upon which they built their coaching frameworks. Several theories described by developers included Guskey’s (1985) theory of teacher change, Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural learning theory, Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory, and the transformative learning theory conceptualized by Harris, Lowery-Moore, and Farrow (2008). Through the combination of response to practical needs, the understandings set forth regarding the characteristics of high quality professional development, and the application of a variety of social and cognitive theories related to change, coaching models aimed at improving instruction and student achievement grew in numbers and types.

Types of Coaching Models

A multitude of distinct models appear in the professional coaching literature, along with some that can be described as a blending of other models. Coaching has sometimes been categorized as either directive or reflective based on the model’s approach to coaching interactions. More directive approaches tend to emphasize the fidelity with which teachers are implementing programs or strategies adopted school-wide to improve instruction and student learning outcomes. In more reflective approaches
coaches involve teachers in determining the focus of coaching interactions based on the individuals’ perceptions of need (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007).

A more detailed typology was offered by Denton and Hasbrouk (2009) in which coaching models were organized around distinct definitions, purposes, roles, procedures, and coaching activities. Five types of coaching applications were identified including, (a) technical, (b) problem-solving, (c) reflective practice, (d) team-building, and (e) reform. 

**Technical coaching** was described as involving the establishment of a relationship between pairs of teachers, one of which has more highly developed technical skills serving as the coach. The coach’s role in technical coaching is to share teaching expertise in support of instructional reform initiatives adopted school-wide. **Problem-solving coaching** was characterized by the formation of collaborative relationships between individuals in an effort to improve student outcomes. Participants engage in collaborative problem solving to address issues or barriers to student progress. Coaches facilitate and take part in collaboration, provide professional development, learn from participants, and support professional learning focused on improving services to students. **Reflective practice coaching** was a third approach outlined in Denton and Hasbrouk’s typology. Coaches implementing this approach support teachers in developing metacognitive skills so that they become more conscious of decisions that guide their teaching practice. Building capacity to become more reflective and autonomous problem-solvers is emphasized in this approach. **Team-building coaching** was described as an approach involving groups of teachers supporting each other in their efforts to implement innovative instructional practices following professional development introducing the new strategy. Effective team-building coaching relies on school-wide implementation of
coaching, along with a shared commitment to improve instruction and ultimately student learning (Showers, & Joyce, 1996). Reform coaching, the final approach in this typology, involves building capacity in both teachers and building administrators to engage in collaborative decision-making relative to district level reform effort. Reform coaches assist in identifying specific learning needs of students and facilitate collegial identification, selection and implementation of strategies selected to meet school-wide improvement goals. A unique aspect of this approach is coaching support provided to principals in support of their growth as instructional leaders. Shared responsibility for instructional improvement and improved academic performance is emphasized school-wide.

Denton and Hasbrouk’s (2009) coaching typology provides a helpful structure that could be utilized when thinking or writing about coaching models. I applied this structure in the following section describing common coaching models specific to each type of approach.

**Common Coaching Models**

**Peer Coaching**

Peer coaching was considered by Denton and Hasbrouk (2009) to rely on a team-building approach. Showers and Joyce (1996) initially developed this coaching model during the early 1980s as a method of increasing transfer of new knowledge or skills gained through professional development sessions into active classroom instructional practices. These developers viewed peer coaching as only one component of larger school initiatives operating within a professional development context. They delineated the following components necessary to implement a successful peer coaching model, (a)
20 to 30 hours of exposure to the theory and rationale underlying the target teaching practice, (b) 15 to 20 opportunities to observe expert demonstrations modeling the target practice, (c) 15 to 20 opportunities to practice the target strategy with each other or small groups of students outside of the classroom and, (d) opportunities to coach one another, providing support and constructive feedback during initial classroom implementation and integration of the new practice into their own teaching repertoire (Joyce & Showers, 1982).

In order for effective transfer of new instructional practices into daily classroom use to occur, Joyce and Showers (1982) recommended applying specific techniques prior to the initiation of coaching procedures. Collegial discussions about possible barriers to transfer as well as possible solutions should occur during professional development sessions. Teachers should be encouraged to become as proficient as possible implementing targeted strategies during the training phase and prior to use in their classrooms. Additionally, teachers must develop clear understandings of the target strategy, how and when it should be employed as well as strategies for adapting it to their curriculum, classroom and students. They also suggested that coaching teams comprised of four to six teachers be formed during initial professional development sessions so that they can begin holding reflective discussions related to the session’s content and to begin practicing target strategies together. A final pre-coaching recommendation is the development of a collaborative professional environment where all teachers believe that they can support each other through the coaching process.

The critical function of peer coaching is to support teachers in acquiring and integrating new instructional techniques into automatic ones. Joyce and Showers (1982)
set forth a number of core coaching functions purported to aid in this process. Providing companionship in the form of mutual reflection, sharing successes as well as frustrations, informal problem solving and, reassurance throughout multiple phases of new strategy implementation encompass one core function. A second is to offer constructive feedback regarding technical aspects of new strategy implementation. Feedback is provided regarding implementation of the target practice so that the focus of coaching remains on implementing and refining new skills along with problem-solving concerns. This element of the peer coaching process is also beneficial to the partner giving the feedback as they have multiple opportunities to observe targeted techniques across different teachers and content. A third function of peer coaching is for coaching partners to analyze the effectiveness of the target teaching strategy to impact student learning once it’s implemented well. Frequently students are as unfamiliar with how to respond to new teaching practices as the teachers are in implementing them. Another coaching function is to provide partners with support in identifying student needs and providing appropriate explanation of how they are expected to respond and participate within this new format. Partners also offer each other support in adapting targeted teaching strategies to their particular students and the content involved. A final function described by Joyce and Showers is to offer encouragement to each other particularly throughout the early stages of implementation. Discussions regarding frustrations or problems encountered reduce teachers’ sense of isolation and willingness to persevere when issues arise.

After more than a decade following the development of and research on their peer coaching model, Showers and Joyce (1996) revised one of the coaching functions. They determined through research that the constructive feedback function caused coaching
partners anxiety and sometimes led to ineffective or unauthentic engagement in the process. As a result they modified the post-observation conference by omitting both written and verbal feedback about the teacher’s instruction. Thereafter, post conferences involved brief conversations during which the observing partner summarizes what both partners learned by engaging in the process. The purpose of conducting the classroom observations shifted to helping the observer rather than the partner being observed. Thus, most of the collaborative focus was transferred to the planning stage prior to instruction. These researchers discovered that the results of this modification in the process did not negatively impact the results of coaching on teachers’ transfer of new practices into their day-to-day instruction.

The focus and processes recommended in peer-coaching models may be quite different, nevertheless, they all appear to share a few overarching concepts. The primary purpose of all peer coaching approaches is to increase knowledge of and skills necessary to improve instruction and student outcomes. Across the variety of models this approach to professional development clearly involves the collaboration of professionals in support of one another’s efforts to improve their individual teaching practices within a job-embedded context (Robbins, 1991).

**Cognitive coaching**

Cognitive coaching has been pointed out as one of the best examples of a reflective approach (Denton, & Hasbrouk, 2009). This model was constructed primarily by Costa and Garmston during the early 1990s and continues to be implemented within schools across the country today. Cognitive coaching can be compared to a typical clinical supervision model in which a supervisor evaluates an employee using a three-step
process including a pre-conference, observation, and post-observation conference. However, in contrast cognitive coaches do not evaluate teachers but instead facilitate the teacher’s own evaluation of personal instructional practices and student learning outcomes (Garmston et al., 1993). Similar to clinical supervision, this approach shares a primary goal of stimulating positive change in a teacher’s capacity to provide effective classroom instruction, thus improving student achievement. In contrast to clinical supervision, cognitive coaching is strictly a non-judgmental process. The Center for Cognitive Coaching website offers the following description:

Cognitive coaching is a peer coaching model that capitalizes upon and enhances cognitive processes. It is a set of strategies, a way of thinking and a way of working that invites the self and others to shape and reshape their thinking and problem solving capabilities (p.1).

Strategies employed by cognitive coaches were developed by Costa and Garmston (1994) to help teachers develop capacity to engage in reflective practice. Coaches provide confidential support encouraging teachers to explore new ways to think about teaching, learning and instructional decision-making. During pre-conferencing cognitive coaches address topics related to the teacher’s planned learning objectives, how objective attainment will be determined, and the teacher’s plan for leading students to meet lesson objectives. They do so through posing a set of open-ended questions. Teachers are also asked to identify specific facets of instruction on which they want the coach to collect data during the observation. Coaches conduct observations employing an agreed upon informal data collection instrument that includes all pre-conference topics as well as additional data requested by the teacher. A critical difference between clinical
supervision and cognitive coaching post-conferences is that instead of offering constructive criticism the coach simply provides observation data followed by probes, paraphrasing, and ample thinking time prior to the teacher’s response. This conference format was designed to facilitate teachers’ reflection and self-analysis related to the instruction that was observed (Garmston et al, 1993).

**Literacy Coaching**

Literacy coaching is one form of technical coaching delineated in Denton and Hasbrouk’s (2009) coaching typology. This approach to coaching differs significantly from other models as no common definition, specific duties, or procedures involved have been published (Knight, 2009). A literacy coach is loosely described as an individual who works with teachers in schools in an effort to improve students’ literacy. Toll (2009) defined literacy coaching as “a category of instructional coaching that focuses on literacy and related aspects of teaching and learning; various programs of literacy coaching implement a variety of coaching models” (p.57). Two well-known programs that include literacy coaching as a component are America’s Choice Schools and Reading First.

The America’s Choice school design was developed by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) in the late 1990s as a standards-based model of school reform (Poglicino et al., 2003). America’s Choice schools were required to construct standards aligned with assessments. They were asked to provide samples of student work that met these standards. Participant schools were also required to provide standards-based instruction within literacy and math blocks to every student daily. Significantly altered instructional techniques and formats were to be implemented school-wide. On-going formative assessments were to be administered for the purpose of
monitoring student progress towards standards mastery and also to identify any need to adjust instruction. Sustained, job-embedded professional development opportunities were to be facilitated by at least one full-time literacy coach. Emphasis of coaching was placed on increasing teachers’ knowledge and skills in implementing the America’s Choice approach, analysis of student progress, and how to individualize instruction to meet specific student needs.

Poglicino and her colleagues (2003) provided an in-depth description of the America’s Choice schools’ coaching model within their program evaluation report. They relayed that both literacy coaches and principals received separate but complimentary introductory training prior to implementation. Coaches participated in additional training sessions encompassing multiple days throughout the year. Coaches were also organized by regional clusters and met regularly with NCEE staff members who provided support and oversight.

Literacy coaches held primary responsibility for training teachers to implement the Readers and Writers Workshop program mandated in America’s Choice schools. They were required to do so using a three-stage process. During phase one coaches set up model classrooms in which they modeled and honed their own skills in implementing the workshop approach for approximately six weeks. Throughout this phase the regular teacher observed the coach and gradually implemented the program independently. The second phase involved demonstration of workshop implementation within a different class at the same grade level while the remaining teachers engaged in observations for approximately three weeks. During this phase coaches also facilitated small group reflection meetings, study groups, and school-wide professional development related to
program implementation. Phase three coaching activities also focused on supporting
teachers in analyzing formative assessment data and assisting them in adjusting or
refining instructional techniques as needed. This model required coaches to possess
expert knowledge of the America’s Choice school reform design along with highly
developed instructional skills in literacy. Thus, it was clearly designed as a technical
coaching approach (Poglicino et al., 2003).

Literacy coaching in Reading First schools, another example of technical
coaching, operated within widely divergent frameworks across different states and
districts. Reading First, an outgrowth of funding designated in the No Child Left Behind
Act of 2001 (NCLB) provided federal grant dollars to states for use in developing
programs focused on increasing reading achievement in grades one through three within
low performing schools across the country (Deussen et al., 2007). Reading First schools
were required to use funds to implement research-based core reading programs, and
regularly scheduled standardized reading assessments and to intervene early when
students were failing to meet grade-level standards. Schools receiving this funding were
also mandated to hire literacy coaches tasked with providing teacher professional
development focused on reading instruction. Subsequently, more than 5,000 literacy
coaches were hired and deployed in Reading First grantee schools (Moss et al., 2006).
Neither frameworks, guidelines related to hiring, nor expectations for appropriate
coaching roles were provided from the federal level. Literacy coaches in different states
received highly divergent guidance and levels of support from state level project
managers.
Deussen and colleagues (2007) identified five different coaching categories found during analysis of their Regional Education Laboratory study investigating Reading First programs in five states. These categories included individual teacher oriented, small group oriented, student oriented, and data-oriented approaches. Literacy coaches were engaged in vastly different activities within their schools spending various percentages of their workday to do so. A majority of Reading First coaches across the five states spent only 28 percent of their work hours interacting directly with teachers, which was lower than any of the states’ expectations. Common activities filling the remaining time were data organization and analysis, clerical tasks, administration of assessments, meeting attendance, and providing reading intervention to small groups of students. Overall, the researchers found that across all five states Reading First coaches engaged in activities related to school improvement more often than providing support, modeling, offering small group or individual professional development sessions, providing assistance with lesson planning, or in conducting classroom observations.

Many of the difficulties and frustrations relayed by literacy coaches during the Reading First evaluation were related to the lack of state, federal, or district guidance. Literacy coaches expressed the need for more guidance in defining the role of the coach and the need for explicit expectations for engaging in specific coaching activities. Literacy coaches also indicated that possessing limited or no training in coaching or leadership, along with limited experience in working directly with teachers or leading change initiatives limited their effectiveness (Deussen et al., 2007). One underlying cause that contributed to these issues was an extremely short timeline between federal funding for and the announcement of Reading First grant opportunities. This situation left state
project coordinators with very limited time to construct coaching frameworks, to design training and provide technical guidance prior to coaching implementation in schools. A second contributing factor related to the relative newness of coaching models in general and specifically those implemented for the purpose of school-reform. The knowledge and research base on coaching was still developing during this time period and as a result the majority of professional literature focused on theory and model construction rather than guidance pertaining to coaching roles and best practices (Deussen et al., 2007).

**Content Coaching**

Content coaching is primarily a technical coaching approach with some reflective elements interwoven in the process. According to West (2009) “content coaching is an iterative process centering on thoughtful lesson design, skilled enactment of lessons, reflective analysis of student learning, and use of that analysis in ensuing lessons” (p. 115). Although similar to other coaching models in some respects, content coaching relies on a somewhat different theoretical base. West relayed that although theories related to systems change and the professionalization of teaching informed her model, it was primarily constructed upon principles of learning described by Resnick in 1995, combined with Resnick and Hall’s incremental theory of intelligence published in 2000. This theory posits that intelligence is not ability-based and it can be developed through sustained effort through the application of metacognitive skills. Thus, through participation in an effort-based coaching process teachers can increase their understanding of themselves as teachers and learners in order to increase their instructional effectiveness.
Content coaches base their practice on four basic principles, the first being that humans learn through participating in meaningful dialogue. Based on this principle content coaches facilitate conversation around core instructional issues seeking to stimulate reflection, problem solving, wondering, analysis, and to build teacher’s understanding of content. A second principle relates to teachers’ capacity to analyze and self-regulate their own professional learning. Another principle that guides the work of content coaches is the notion that through dialogue with other teachers along with conscious efforts to publicly support continuous collegial learning, the profession could evolve from one of isolation to an environment engaged in collaborative learning (West, 2009). The final underlying principle is that similar to children, adults learn best through hands-on experiences. Content coaches teach new instructional strategies related to a specific content area. They share their deep content knowledge and instructional expertise through modeling, co-teaching, observation, and reflective conferencing.

Content coach interactions with teachers are organized around a pre-conference, an observation of instruction, and a post-conference. The pre-conference planning meeting was emphasized by West (2009) as the most important component in the coaching process because it plays such an important role in a teacher’s transfer of learning into practice. Lesson goals, concepts to be covered, lesson design, student prior knowledge, questions to ask, student discussion topics, anticipated student difficulties, and methods of assessing goal attainment were offered as common issues discussed during pre-conferencing. Coaches rely on this dialogue to determine elements of focus during the classroom observation. In contrast to other coaching models, the post-conference in this model does not rely on the use of open-ended questioning to stimulate
teacher reflection. Instead the content coach and teacher spend time analyzing student work, student dialogue, and evidence of student learning. Also contrary to other models, content coaches do provide specific feedback on the lesson observed. This component often leads to identification of a focus for subsequent lessons as well as discussion about new techniques to be explored.

Content coaching is depicted as an evolving practice that focuses not only on the conceptual content delivered, but also other issues that may enhance or impede student learning outcomes. Content coaching processes were designed to provide experiences leading to change in teacher beliefs and ultimately to the adoption of improved instructional practices (West, 2009).

**Instructional Coaching**

According to the Denton and Hasbrouk (2009) typology of coaching models, instructional coaching models possess some features from both the reflective and technical approaches. The most frequently mentioned instructional coaching model was designed by Knight and others at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning during the late 1990s (Knight, 2007). Their research initially investigated methods through which professional developers could have more success in supporting teacher classroom implementation of research-based instructional behaviors. Early names for this approach included learning consulting and collaborative instruction, and eventually became known as instructional coaching. As of 2009 this approach to coaching for the purpose of instructional improvement was being implemented in at least 30 states (Knight, 2009). This model relies on a partnership approach in which coaches
“provide intensive, differentiated support to teachers so that they are able to implement proven practices” (Knight, 2007, p. 12).

Instructional coaching relies on seven foundational principles that guide interactions with teachers including, equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity. Knight (2009) explained that instructional coaching assumes that relationships developed between coaches and teachers are built on mutual respect and equality. Through these relationships collaborative decisions are made guiding the focus of their work together. Instructional coaching was not designed to support implementation of school-wide reform initiatives involving specific instructional models or techniques, nor is it an attempt to persuade teachers to adopt only strategies prescribed by coaches. Teachers participating in instructional coaching are consistently encouraged to express their own beliefs and feelings about teaching, learning, and the content they teach. Coaching interactions include authentic dialogue through which coaches employ well-developed listening skills in an effort to truly understand the teacher’s perspectives. They also must engage in dialogue with the notion that both partners are able to learn from each other. Teachers are also encouraged to reflect on the coach’s ideas and suggestions after being exposed to adequate information for them to determine whether they will accept or reject them. Those strategies collaboratively selected for classroom application are modeled by the coach with the teacher’s classroom, then practiced and refined throughout the remainder of the process.

A final principle of instructional coaching is that of reciprocity of learning. This means that both partners are learning from the coaching process. Both of them also improve their skills and understandings related to teaching and learning.
Knight (2009) offered a framework for coaching practice that laid out a sequence of instructional processes that should be addressed within coaching interactions. Classroom management is identified as the logical starting point because without the right learning environment coaches are unable to model new instructional techniques and teachers are unable to practice these techniques. Once any student management issues are addressed, the next step is assessing the teacher’s mastery of content knowledge to determine whether it’s strong enough to plan and deliver effective instruction. If the teacher requires support in developing content knowledge, instructional coaches frequently provide resources supportive of doing so. Once the first three components are addressed, the coaching focus turns to assessment of student learning through formative measures. Coaching partners review results of these procedures and use them in planning ensuing lessons, adjusting strategies, or planning interventions. Knight also identified specific activities necessary to the coaching process. These include enrolling participants using individual teacher interviews, conducting small or large group introductory presentations, engaging in informal interactions with teachers, or by principal referral. After building a relationship and gaining a teacher’s commitment to participate, the coach’s work centers around the following sequence of activities:

1. Possible new teaching practices are explained.
2. Selected practices are modeled prior to the teacher’s implementation.
3. A collaborative debriefing session is held following the model lesson.
4. The teacher’s implementation of the strategy is collaboratively planned.
5. The coach completes an observation of the teacher’s use of the strategy.
6. A collaborative debriefing session is held following the observation.
Outcomes of the debriefing session are applied to planning for targeted teaching strategies to be focused on in subsequent lessons as well as the refinement of newly implemented practices. Instructional coaches are encouraged to keep a reflective journal throughout the coaching process.

Compared to other models of coaching described in the relevant literature, instructional coaching as designed by Knight and his colleagues at the Center for Research on learning provides far more structure and guidance than most. A common criticism aimed at educational coaching in general is that models frequently describe approaches from theoretical and research perspective but fail to offer coaches and other school leaders with information and training related to actual coaching practices (Knight, & Cornett, 2008). Developers of cognitive and instructional coaching continue to offer on-going, large scale and small group training conferences geared toward a variety of coach skill levels.

**Reform Coaching**

One model of reform coaching described in the relevant professional literature was *change coaching*. Neufeld and Roper (2003) defined this type of coaching as follows: “coaching is school-based professional development designed in light of the district’s reform agenda and guided by the goal of meeting schools’ specific instructional needs” (p. 4). Within this particular model change coaches provide leadership and support for instructional reform by engaging principals and teachers in a variety of possible activities. One mode of support employed in this effort is to help build teacher and principal capacity to analyze the resources available to implement reforms including issues of personnel, funding, and time.
Reform coaching as operationalized through a change coaching model is a somewhat unique approach as it contains a strong focus on leadership development not found in other types of models. Change coaches work directly with principals, encouraging them to grow as instructional and reform leaders. They also aim to help build similar leadership capacity in teachers. Although Neufeld and Roper (2003) acknowledged that some leaders may not require this type of support, their considerable experience in working with administrators led them to project that a majority of them will need assistance and support to create a culture of learning in their schools.

Change coaching activities may also involve facilitating increased principal knowledge of curriculum content and instructional strategies that can be applied in their efforts to hold teachers accountable for effectively implementing research-based programs or techniques that they have been trained to use. Principals may also need to develop skills in facilitating teacher collaboration and forming school-wide commitments to reform instruction.

Coaches practicing within this model understand, communicate, and reinforce the necessity of recruiting influential teachers to fill instructional leadership roles. They know that if teacher-leaders are not part of the reform process successful school-wide change is unlikely. Change coaches also may facilitate the development of capacity for shared decision-making across the school community by mobilizing action groups, organizing collaborative strategic planning efforts, and identifying methods of building school-wide support for reform initiatives. These coaches are also cognizant of their role in modeling leadership skills, conflict resolution strategies, meeting facilitation skills, authentic listening, and team-building techniques.
Teachers often need coaching support in learning how to communicate and share decision-making responsibilities effectively with principals as these are usually new for everyone involved. Providing assistance in creating a building schedule that allows time for teacher collaborative planning is another common change coaching activity.

Principals may also need coaching support in scheduling and prioritizing their own time so that classroom observations, timely feedback and meaningful discussions about teaching and learning can occur regularly. Interactions between coaches and principals may also relate to specific observation and analysis procedures needed to evaluate how effectively teachers are implementing targeted reform strategies, along with how students are responding to them.

The change coaching model, as outlined by Neufeld and Roper (2003) does not provide a script to follow or a concrete set of coaching procedures. These developers explain that the context in which coaching occurs and the school’s point in the reform process necessitate what activities coaches should engage in and the sequence followed. It is critical that coaches are able to judge at what point to push principals and teachers harder or when to refocus them on the district’s reform agenda. They must also have a sense of how to balance more directive actions to move reform efforts forward, and shared decision-making about how to proceed. According to Neufeld and Roper, the end goal of change coaching is the school’s integration of reform strategies into instructional and procedural norms.

Following a review of coaching literature Knight (2009) identified a number of similar themes across widely divergent coaching models. These themes included, (a) sincere respect for teaching as a profession, (b) an emphasis on listening and dialogical
reflection, (c) partnership relationships, and (d) the criticality of student learning. Similar coaching competencies have also been identified across coaching models. These skills fall into three general categories, instructional expertise, communication ability and interpersonal skills (Borman, & Feger, 2006). Enmeshed in these categories are specific skills that might not immediately come to mind such as training and skills in group facilitation, knowledge of district policy, professional judgment and a good sense of humor (Dole, 2004; Knight, 2004). There were also consistent concerns about coaching implementation described across models.

**Summary of Common Coaching Types and Models**

Many types of coaching were exemplified within the professional literature on coaching. They were organized into five specific categories based on definitions, purposes, roles, and coaching activities in a typology offered by Denton and Hasbrouk in 2009. These types included, technical, problem-solving, reflective practice, team building, and reform coaching. I uncovered six specific coaching models that were most frequently described within the professional literature reviewed. The earliest formal model identified was peer coaching in the early 1980s, followed by the emergence of cognitive coaching, literacy coaching, content coaching, instructional coaching, and reform coaching throughout the ensuing years.

A consistent theme emerged during and throughout my exploration of the wide variety of coaching types and models. Regardless of type or model, there was little consistency, even within models, in what coaching looked like or how it was implemented from project to project across the country. Specific coaching strategies and procedures were only tangentially described across the vast majority of publications.
Approximately half of the models identified are considered to be intellectual property of the developers and thus only limited details regarding coaching strategies and procedures are published for public consumption. The lack of clarity regarding model components, as well as proprietary concerns were acknowledged in the literature as factors limiting attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of specific models across multiple settings and implementations.

**Coaching Research**

Readers are cautioned that when considering the findings of most of the research reviewed they should also keep in mind the vastly exploratory nature of these investigations, along with a serious lack of scientific rigor employed. The utilization of randomization techniques, treatment and control groups, pre-test post-test design along with validated measurement instruments was determined to be sparse across the majority of studies. Additionally, an over-reliance on teacher self-report as opposed to more objective forms of data collection also weakened the certainty of the conclusions offered. Another barrier I encountered when gathering the research articles was that a large number of them were unpublished dissertations. Although I was able to locate abstracts for them, it was much more difficult to gain access to the full text of the dissertation. Thus, I had to rely solely on the information available within the text of the abstract. The amount of descriptive information contained in the abstracts varied widely. As a result, the amount of information included about each study varies throughout this portion of the review of literature.

As a result of reviewing research publications related to coaching as a form of professional development I discovered that the body of relevant research was very
limited. Borman and Feger (2006) addressed the state of research on coaching by the mid 2000’s. They noted that the research conducted up to that point was largely of a qualitative descriptive nature involving qualitative methods to identify definitions, roles, activities and perceptions of specific coaching models. These authors explained that due to the newness of coaching approaches, answering questions about the models was a logical phase in the emergence of coaching research. Borman and Feger also uncovered a small number of coaching efficacy studies conducted by 2006. They explained that the generalizability of the results of these studies was severely limited because the investigations involved a variety of coaching models. The majority of the studies they identified were reviews of research or descriptive accounts regarding individual components of a coaching model. They only located forty studies conducted in United States educational settings and the studies found involved a wide variety school contexts.

Similar to Borman and Feger, Knight (2009) reasoned that because the majority of coaching models were recently developed and remained in the theory to practice stage of research, investigations evaluating effectiveness were just beginning to emerge. Although the research base is small regarding the impact of coaching on classroom instruction and particularly the impact on student learning, a few efforts have been undertaken to conduct more rigorous study of the phenomenon.

**Peer Coaching Research**

Joyce and Showers (1996) conducted much of the early research on the efficacy of peer coaching in supporting transfer of new knowledge or skills from the professional development setting into teachers’ classroom practices. They also attempted to measure student learning outcome differences for teachers who participated in peer coaching
following professional development sessions introducing a new teaching strategy compared to those teachers that received only the professional development component. Joyce and Showers (1982) compared student scores on both recall and essay tests of 256 students across 17 different teachers randomly assigned to coaching or non-coaching control groups. Through standardized classroom observations the researchers used a rubric to categorize teachers’ implementation of the target strategy by implementation frequency and quality. Their results reported that teachers who participated in peer coaching implemented the target strategy more frequently and effectively than teachers who only participated in the professional development component. Joyce and Showers also found that students taught by the coached teachers out-performed those taught by non-coached teachers on recall tests. However, there was not a significant difference in student performance on essay tests. The researchers posited that students’ competencies in written language may have been a mediating factor related to essay test performance but went on to recommend additional confirmatory research on that possibility.

Conclusions drawn by Joyce and Showers were that coaching may be a prerequisite in supporting high rates of transfer of new knowledge and skills into teachers’ daily instructional practices.

Showers (1985) conducted a follow-up study involving peer coaching that investigated whether teachers’ partial coaching participation had an impact on student learning when compared with the performance of students taught by teachers participating in a full peer coaching program or not receiving any coaching following professional development in which a new instructional strategy was taught. This study involved 21 teachers randomly assigned to coaching, partial coaching, or non-coaching
treatment groups. A recall test was administered to 138 students taught by teachers across the three treatment groups. Results reported by Showers indicated that subjects in both treatment groups that received coaching were more likely to transfer newly learned techniques into classroom instruction. Students taught by teachers who participated in the full peer-coaching program had significantly higher scores on the concept attainment measure than either those of partially coached or non-coached teachers.

Knight (2009) described a five year longitudinal study conducted by Bush published in the proceedings of and presented at three state education conferences in 1984. Bush’s investigation sought to determine whether participation in peer coaching as a method of staff development increased teachers’ implementation of novel teaching practices in their classrooms. Subjects in this study taught in 80 schools across 20 districts in California. Bush found that when teachers participated in a traditional professional development session that exposed them to a new instructional technique only 10 percent of them attempted it in their classrooms. Three coaching components including modeling, guided practice, and feedback were added sequentially following an introductory professional development session. Each component alone added increased rates of teacher implementation of the new technique by two to three percent for a 16 to 19 percent increase overall. More significantly, when all three peer coaching components were provided following professional development approximately 95 percent of teachers in the study implemented the new practice in their classrooms.

Two unpublished dissertation studies involving peer coaching were also described by Knight (2009). When describing both studies I had to rely on the information culled from the dissertation abstracts along with the descriptions offered by Knight. One
investigation conducted by Baker in 1983 was a six-month follow-up of the study subjects from Joyce and Showers 1982 study. Baker sought to determine if teachers sustained implementation of targeted instructional strategies introduced during the previous study. Baker concluded that the teachers who participated in peer coaching demonstrated higher rates of implementation six months after peer coaching ended, while none of the non-coached peers were observed implementing the strategy at all. When asked, the non-coached peers reported that either they had not attempted to implement the strategy or delayed their attempts too long to effectively implement it. A second dissertation study involving peer coaching described by Knight was conducted by Truesdale a decade later in 2003. The purpose of this investigation was to examine teachers’ transfer of newly learned instructional strategies into their own classrooms following a professional development session designed to expose them to an innovative technique. All teachers from two schools attended the professional development session. Subjects included 15 teachers across both schools. Ten teachers from one of the schools volunteered to participate in a peer coaching project across a 15 week period. An additional five teachers were randomly selected as subjects from the second school in which peer coaching was not implemented, following the professional development session. Truesdale reported that participation in peer coaching increased the rate of transfer of new learning following traditional professional development sessions to classroom implementation over a 15 week period of time. The randomly assigned control group teachers never implemented, lost the new skills, or discontinued implementation during the study period.
Kohler, Crilly, Shearer, and Good (2001) investigated the impact of peer coaching participation on initial and sustained implementation of an innovative instructional format along with direct instruction. They employed a multiple baseline design in this study. Highly experienced teachers received training in the integrated use of a cooperative learning and direct instruction approach. After the professional development session teachers’ implementation of the target strategies remained low. However, implementation of the target strategies increased dramatically during the peer coaching condition and was maintained once coaching was discontinued. Kohler and colleagues concluded that the implementation, refinement, and maintenance of novel instructional formats and strategies could be measured through daily observations. The focus of coaching interactions can also be formally measured. They also concluded that implementation, refinement, and maintenance are more likely to occur during periods of focused and structured collaboration than independently. Finally, the researchers reported that collaborating through peer coaching can increase acclimation and maintenance of new teacher practices over time.

**Cognitive Coaching Research**

The research studies reviewed related to cognitive coaching were in large part unpublished doctoral dissertations (Alseike, 1997; Edwards, 1993; Mackie, 1998; Slinger, 2004). As a result I had to compose my descriptions of them from the information provided in the dissertation abstract. Some of these abstracts provided more specific information about the design, methods and specific results. Thus, I have described some of them more fully than others.
Edwards published a synthesis of the research related to cognitive coaching in 2008. As a result of that synthesis, Edwards described nine outcomes of cognitive coaching that were evidenced in the research studies reviewed. Participation in cognitive coaching aimed at professional growth leads to increases in the following: (a) student test scores, (b) teacher efficacy perceptions, (c) teachers’ reflective thinking abilities, (d) teachers’ career satisfaction, (e) supportive professional climate in schools, (f) collaboration between teachers, (g) professional support provided to teachers, (h) personal benefits, and (i) benefits to individuals outside of education-related professions.

A sampling of the studies from which Edwards culled these outcomes of cognitive coaching is provided in the following paragraphs. Results across studies of cognitive coaching implementation on student achievement were somewhat mixed across those investigated.

**Impact of cognitive coaching on student achievement.** One study conducted in 1998 by Hull, Edwards, Rogers, and Swords (as cited in Edwards, 2008) investigated the impact of participation in cognitive coaching on student learning outcomes. They examined student achievement scores on a standardized assessment of math and written language across three years. One group of subjects was comprised of teachers who volunteered to participate in cognitive coaching training. They also received professional development on non-verbal classroom management strategies. These participants served as the treatment group. A matched group of teachers not trained in either cognitive coaching or non-verbal classroom management strategies served as a control group. While the results revealed more student growth on the standardized test for students
taught by teachers who participated in cognitive coaching, the differences between them were not statistically significant.

In contrast to the findings discovered by Hull and colleagues (1998), Rennick (2002) reported a significant impact of cognitive coaching on student achievement. This investigation relied on a quasi-experimental design exploring three conditions. The design did not include the randomization elements required in an experimental design. Seventy-three teachers were selected as subjects for the study. One group of 12 volunteer kindergarten teachers participated in a traditional format professional development program on the balanced literacy approach to reading instruction across a two week period. A second group of 21 volunteer kindergarten teacher subjects participated in a professional development program centered around the elements in the balanced literacy approach while also receiving cognitive coaching. Rennick administered a set of standardized assessments measuring student reading and writing achievement. Students taught by teachers in the cognitive coaching group demonstrated statistically significant increases in student literacy achievement. Those taught by teachers who participated in the two-week traditional format training on balanced literacy and teachers not receiving either coaching or training did not demonstrate significant growth.

The impact of cognitive coaching on student literacy achievement was investigated by Slinger (2004) in a dissertation study conducted using a mixed methods approach. A group of five first grade teachers who volunteered to participate in cognitive coaching served as the treatment group. A five subject control group was also identified. Although the students of teachers who participated in cognitive coaching demonstrated typical levels of growth in literacy achievement, when compared with performance data
from the control group no statistically significantly different rates in growth were found. Themes identified from qualitative data analysis described positive teacher outcomes resulting from cognitive coaching. Teachers reported a shift away from a focus on procedural teaching components, such as taking attendance, collecting and reviewing homework, presenting a new lesson taken directly from the textbook teaching manual, and assigning seatwork. They explained that cognitive coaching encouraged them to become more focused on instructional processes, such as (a) the selection of specific teaching strategies based on content and student needs, (b) determining how and when they will assess student understanding of the instruction, and (c) planning what they will do if students are not grasping the new concepts being taught. The treatment group teachers indicated that they now engaged in more explicit communication with students during instruction and they expressed positive perceptions about the professional development experienced through cognitive coaching.

**Impact of cognitive coaching on teachers.** Edward’s (2008) synthesis of research involving cognitive coaching revealed several positive teacher outcomes attributed to their participation in coaching. Edwards summarized the results of several studies that provided evidence of positive teacher outcomes attributed to cognitive coaching including increases in levels of career satisfaction (Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Newton, 1995). Additionally, Edwards cited two studies in which teachers reported that when compared with traditional supervision models participation in a cognitive coaching model of supervision was significantly more positive (Edwards, 1993; Mackie, 1998).
Edwards (2008) went on to describe a study conducted by Moche in 2001 that sought to measure the impact of three different professional development models on teachers’ reflective thinking capacity. Thirty-one teachers were spread across three groups. One group of eleven teachers participated in both a traditional form of professional development and cognitive coaching. A second group of 10 subjects participated in traditional professional development paired with informal opportunities to discuss what they learned. The third group containing 11 teachers received traditional professional development along with a traditional supervision model. Moche administered a standardized measure of teachers’ reflective thinking practices prior to and following participation in each professional development model. Data analysis indicated that teachers who received cognitive coaching following traditional professional development demonstrated significantly higher growth in reflective skills than teachers exposed to traditional professional development plus discussion, or traditional supervision alone. Moche concluded that participation in cognitive coaching led to an increase in teachers’ reflective thinking abilities. Other studies cited confirmed this conclusion (Alseike, 1997; Edwards & Newton, 1995; Slinger, 2004). However, when Edwards (1993) conducted a similar study involving the impact of cognitive coaching on first-year teachers’ development of reflective skills no statistically significant difference was found when compared with a control group of teachers who did not receive cognitive coaching.

**Literacy Coaching Research**

Several authors agreed that a number of methodological complexities exist limiting researchers’ investigation of the impact of differing literacy coaching models
(Duessen et al., 2007; Knight, 2009; Poglicino et al., 2003). Research foundations most frequently offered in support of literacy coaching are those from other coaching models including cognitive and instructional coaching (Knight, 2009). Investigations related to literacy coaching prior to 2009 were mainly aimed at defining the approach, identifying coaching activities, roles, and other descriptive efforts. Beginning in 2009 studies related to literacy coaching began to use more rigorous research designs aimed at determining relationships between coaching and measurable changes in instruction, as well as impact on student achievement. The following paragraphs describe literacy coaching research conducted through early 2011.

Symonds (2003) conducted a study during the 2001-2002 school year that examined the benefits of implementing a literacy coaching model within three schools in the San Francisco Bay area. A multiple qualitative case study design was employed in Symonds’ investigation. Data were collected using observations, interviews and focus groups throughout the 2001-2002 school year. Symonds identified multiple benefits across five categories including: (a) development of a collaborative school culture, (b) increased teacher receptiveness to changes in instruction, (c) an increased focus on equity of instruction, (d) improved communication between teachers and district leaders, and (f) increased leadership capacity in teachers and administrators.

The Learning Network (2006) conducted an investigation in Battle Creek Michigan examining the impact and effectiveness of teacher leaders coaching peers on student reading performance over time. Research design issues such as the lack of any randomization or a control group feature reduced the certainty of the Learning Network results. They reported that following peer literacy coaching the percentage of fourth
grade students scoring in both meeting and exceeding standards categories increased from 29% in 1999 to 86% in 2004.

A Reading First impact study conducted by Gamse, Kemple, and Jacobs in 2008 sought to investigate the impact of literacy coaching in Reading First grantee schools. Their research methodology relied on a quasi-experimental regression discontinuity design based on the schools’ reported allocation of grant funding dollars across the categories of curriculum materials, coaching and program development, as well as diagnosis and prevention of reading attainment difficulties. Teachers’ instructional practices in reading were observed for specific components of effective literacy instruction. Gamse and colleagues reported significant increases in the frequency of explicit instruction, students’ time spent reading and engagement in high quality student practice at various grade levels in Reading First schools.

Peterson, Taylor, Burnham and Schock published a research report in 2009 describing an investigation regarding literacy coaching in 24 schools that participated in the Minnesota Reading First Professional Development Program. Each school had two literacy coaches. Results from the completion of school effectiveness and reform effort rating scales, along with above average student growth in reading comprehension scores compared to other Reading First schools were used to identify four schools thought to exemplify successful implementation of the state professional development program.

Peterson and colleagues (2009) identified four patterns that emerged relative to coach-teacher interactions in these schools. Observation data collection protocols were consistently used to guide coaching conversations. Secondly, data collected from specific lessons was used to focus on critical elements of effective reading instruction. A third
pattern identified was that coaches posed questions to stimulate discussion. A final conversational pattern was the coaches’ efforts to assist teachers’ understanding of the connections between the content of professional development sessions and their classroom practices. These researchers explained that while they were unable to state that coaching interactions caused the above average gains in student reading scores, they were able to report that teachers did make changes in reading instruction as measured during classroom observations.

The most rigorous research design across all the literacy studies reviewed was employed by Neuman and Cunningham in a study published in 2009. This study examined the impact of professional development and coaching on the early literacy instructional practices used within early childhood settings. Nearly 300 study sites including 177 center-based and 144 home-based, across four cities in Michigan were involved. These sites were randomly assigned to one of three conditions including (a) participation in a 3 credit course in early language and literacy, (b) participation in the 3 credit course with weekly coaching sessions across a one year period, or (c) to a control group not engaging in coursework or participating in coaching. Results reported that teachers engaged in the 15 week literacy course along with weekly coaching sessions performed statistically significantly higher on a standardized quality of instruction measure than the other two groups. No meaningful differences were reported between the quality of instruction for the other two groups.

A more recent exploration of the relationship between literacy coaching and reading achievement in grades K-1 was conducted by Elish-Piper and L’Allier in 2010. Participants in the study included 26 teachers serving 699 kindergarten and first grade
students. Types of coaching activities and the frequency with which they occurred were measured. A comparison was made between the students’ fall and spring scores on a standardized assessment of early literacy. On average all K-1 students in the study demonstrated statistically significant gains across all subtests of a standardized early literacy measure. Specific coaching activities such as observation, conferencing, and modeling did not account for a significant portion of student gain scores. However, a significant positive relationship between the number of hours coaches spent observing a teacher’s instruction and student gain scores was discovered. Additionally, the students of teachers who were supported by coaches reporting the highest number of coach-teacher interactions showed the highest gains in reading achievement. Conversely, students of teachers receiving coaching support reporting the fewest number of teacher-coach interactions had the lowest gain scores.

Elish-Piper and L’Allier (2010) offered several recommendations based upon their findings. They suggested that coaches take a targeted approach to supporting improved reading instruction by considering multiple performance data alongside classroom observational data to narrow down specific teachers and specific aspects of instruction on which to focus. A second recommendation was that leaders with responsibility for supervising or scheduling coaching hours should consider whether ample time has been allotted for classroom observations. They explained that this was important because in developing the models through multiple regression analysis they found that the classroom observation variable was a significant predictor of reading achievement gains. Third, because coaches who spent the largest number of hours working directly with teachers were associated with the greatest student gain scores,
these researchers recommended that literacy coaches should be encouraged to spend the large majority of their time engaged in observational processes.

**Instructional Coaching Research**

Instructional coaching research, similar to the research on other coaching models, is limited. Most studies conducted were descriptive in nature and relied on case studies, observations, interviews, and surveys that sought to explain the coaching treatment as opposed to determining its effectiveness. Although a small set of efficacy studies existed prior to 2008, their conclusions possessed limited generalizability to instruction (Borman & Feger, 2006). Investigations related to the impact of instructional coaching on changes in teacher practice and on student learning outcomes appeared in the literature beginning in 2008 and continued through early 2011. A summary of instructional coaching research appears in the following paragraphs.

Knight (2009) described a study he conducted in 1998 that was designed to examine teacher impact of participating in a traditional professional development program as compared to using a coaching partnership approach. Seventy-three teachers received training in the implementation of two reading strategies, self-questioning and visualization. Knight employed a counterbalanced research design in which half of the subjects learned one reading strategy through a traditional professional development approach and the other strategy through the coaching partnership approach. Following the training experiences a researcher-developed Likert-type rating scale was administered. This informal rating scale was constructed to measure teachers’ perceptions related to both training approaches. Teachers’ acquisition of the knowledge and concepts covered during training sessions was also measured through a researcher developed assessment.
Knight reported statistically significantly differences between teachers’ perceptions related to each approach. Teachers perceived higher rates of personal engagement in learning and enjoyment during the coaching partnership approach and reported that they were more likely to implement the reading strategy in their classrooms. Knight also reported that participation in the partnership approach session led to teachers’ increased ability to recall the information learned during the professional development session.

Rivera, Burley and Sass (2004) conducted a mixed methods investigation on an instructional coaching program involving 15 schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District. These schools were selected because the researchers judged them to be examples of successful school-based professional development programs involving instructional coaching. These researchers reported six conclusions. They found that teachers who participated in ongoing coaching and also engaged in frequent planning and reflective sessions with a coach were much more likely to demonstrate changes in instructional practices. Secondly, when coach role confusion existed this conflict negatively influenced the quality of coaching practices. The assignment of duties unrelated to coaching was an additional negative influence as it reduced the amount of time available for direct teacher-coach interactions. School sites that already demonstrated higher levels of collaboration were found more likely to focus professional development efforts on direct classroom support and direct teacher-coach interactions. Higher frequencies of coach observations, model lessons and feedback sessions increased the likelihood of sustained teacher implementation of research-based instructional practices in their classrooms. A final conclusion stated that more frequent teacher-coach dialogue specific to teaching processes had a strong positive impact on teachers’ change in instruction.
During the developmental phase of his instructional coaching model, Knight (2004) conducted a series of three unpublished research studies within five middle schools in Anne Arundel County, Maryland and in six middle schools and three high schools in Topeka, Kansas. Knight’s partnership approach to coaching was utilized in the study school sites to provide professional development and support in implementing school-wide instructional reform and intervention projects over a three year period. Although measurement procedures were not clearly described, Knight reported that “well constructed programs consistently generated implementation rates of at least 85% with schools frequently getting 100% of teachers to teach several interventions” (2004, p. 2). He also indicated that similar implementation rates persisted over the three-year study period for the four original schools in Topeka, Kansas.

A second investigation conducted as part of the series involved the same schools (Knight, 2004). New strategy implementation rates were examined six weeks into the school year after teachers attended a summer institute and received coaching upon their return to work. Once again, it was unclear how the data were collected but Knight explained that of the 82 teachers contacted in Topeka, 85% reported implementing at least one instructional practice learned during the summer workshop. Teachers in Maryland reported that more than 90% were implementing at least one new instructional practice by the sixth week of school. The number of Maryland teachers contacted was not indicated. Knight explained that cases in which implementation rates of new teaching techniques was low could be attributed to either a lack of administrator support for coaching or failure to hire highly qualified instructional coaches. One highly emphasized
component of the partnership approach to coaching developed by Knight was coach modeling of targeted instructional practices within teachers’ classrooms.

A third study in the series sought to determine teachers’ perceptions of the value of the coach modeling component (Knight, 2004). Utilizing the same school sites, 107 teachers, 93 middle school and 14 high school level, who reported observing a coach model in their classroom during the past year were surveyed employing a researcher-developed seven point Likert-type rating scale. The survey results indicated that teachers strongly agreed that watching the coach model the targeted strategy made it easier to implement and also increased their fidelity in implementation. Teachers strongly agreed that observing coaches modeling allowed them to be confident in their ability to implement the strategy as well as providing an opportunity to observe coach teaching practices unrelated to the target strategy modeled. A final survey result was that teachers disagreed that the coach observed had enough content expertise to model all elements of instruction necessary to teach their entire curriculum.

Knight and Cornett (2008) published a research report on their instructional coaching website that described an investigation in which they sought to examine the extent to which participation in coaching influenced teachers’ rate, quality, and maintenance of implementation of new teaching practices. Their study relied on a mixed methods design including simple between-subject comparisons. Fifty-one middle and high school level teachers from six urban schools were recruited for study participation. All subjects participated in a 1.5 hour professional development session that exposed them to an instructional unit organizer strategy. Following the training subjects were randomly assigned within each school building to either participate in coaching or not to
participate. Each school site had one instructional coach. Following one unit of instruction, instructional coaching was terminated, and after a short delay 39 semi-structured teacher interviews were completed. Twenty-two of the teachers interviewed had participated in coaching and 17 had not.

Knight and Cornett (2008) found that coached teachers implemented the unit organizer strategies within 91.5% of observations compared to implementation within 36.2% of non-coached teacher observations. Additionally they indicated that when implemented the quality of unit organizer strategies was low across non-coached teacher observations. Knight and Cornett concluded that teachers who participated in instructional coaching following introductory training are more likely to implement a newly learned teaching practice and with higher quality than non-coached teachers. Subjects who were coached reported that they were much more likely to use the new practice within future instructional units. Knight and Cornett stressed the importance of combining research-proven strategies with instructional coaching to increase the likelihood of improved student learning outcomes. They also concluded that when an expectation for instructional change is set teachers require additional support beyond traditional training formats to increase the integration of changes into teachers’ day-to-day instruction.

A recent publication by Teemant, Wink and Tyra (2011) offered a description of a new instructional coaching approach designed to increase teachers’ implementation of a five-standards instructional model for effective instruction involving diverse learners. Their coaching model included cycles of pre-observation planning, classroom
observation and post-observation conferencing. Study participants included 21 teachers from two elementary schools, as well as three instructional coaches.

Statistically significant teacher growth in the use of the five standards across seven coaching cycles was reported (Teement et al., 2011). The researchers also identified a linear trend in teacher growth demonstrating consistent improvement over time. Their findings also demonstrated that teachers’ participation in target-based coaching had a statistically significant effect on closing the gap between low implementation teachers and higher implementation teachers from baseline through seven coaching cycles. Teemant and colleagues concluded that their evaluation results provided confirmation of previous study results regarding the efficacy of instructional coaching to change teachers’ instructional practices. They also concluded that the results explained the importance of combining coaching procedures with concrete research-based and measurable performance standards. A final conclusion emphasized was the importance of providing teachers’ with differentiated professional development supports based on identified needs.

Another very recent study conducted by Kretlow, Wood and Cooke (2011) sought to determine the effects of instructional coaching following traditional professional development on the application of accurate group instructional techniques in math. The investigation subjects included three kindergarten teachers from a Title I school. Three elements including a teacher antecedent, group unison responding, and use of error correction procedures or specific praise made up an accurate instructional delivery. The study relied on a multiple baseline across subjects design. Following 10 days of baseline data collection accomplished through audio-recordings of daily math instruction the
teachers attended a three hour training on the target instructional techniques. Data were collected using the same method following the training session and again following participation in coaching. Coaching cycles included a planning conference, side-by-side coaching in the classroom, followed by a feedback session. Results of the investigation indicated that all three subjects demonstrated increased accuracy in the delivery of math instruction following the initial training session. Additional growth was also seen following the introduction of the coaching procedures.

A third very recent longitudinal study reviewed examined the impact of instructional coaching on student achievement in math. Campbell and Malkus (2011) conducted the study within five school districts in Virginia. Triples of schools with comparable demographics and longitudinal performance on state achievement tests were identified. Each school within a triplet was randomly assigned to either receive a coach from cohort one in years one through three, a coach from cohort two in years two and three, or no coaching control group status. Coaches participated in five graduate level courses in math content, along with one course in leadership and coaching prior to school placement. Teacher classroom data were collected from 1,593 teachers in grades K-5 across 36 schools over 3 years. Results of the study indicated that students taught in the math coaching schools demonstrated significantly higher scores on the math portion of the state achievement tests in grades three through five when compared with students in control group schools. An even stronger positive impact was reported for grades four and five than for grade three. The effect was not significant following year one for any grade level. Additionally, the frequency and duration data collected regarding coaching
activities indicated that many coaches were assigned extraneous duties that took away from the amount of time available for coaching interactions.

**Summary of Coaching Research**

The preceding review of literature related to research on coaching as a form of job-embedded professional development identified a small number of very tentative generalizations asserted by the researchers involved. Table 2 (see Appendix C) summarizes the researchers’ conclusions reported in studies specific to coaching. A summary of the most frequently reported conclusions is offered within the following paragraphs.

Participation in coaching appears to impact teachers’ perceptions and beliefs. For example, when teachers engaged in on-going cognitive coaching their sense of career satisfaction increased over time (Edwards, Green, Lyons, et al., 1998; Edwards, & Newton, 1995; Hull et al., 1998). However, quantitative data analysis that examined the possible impact of multiple variables on teachers’ improved attitudes was not performed. Thus, it remains unknown if participating in coaching was the main factor that influenced attitudinal change.

A second conclusion discovered in the review was that participation in coaching positively impacts teachers’ efficacy beliefs (Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards, & Newton, 1995). However, criticisms related to the construct validity of the efficacy measures administered throughout these studies may weaken the strength of this conclusion.

The most critical conclusion identified within this review was related the impact of coaching participation on teachers’ classroom practices. A number of researchers reported that teachers who participated in coaching following a traditional professional
development session were more likely to implement new strategies within their classrooms (Bush, 1984; Joyce, & Showers, 1982; Knight, & Cornett, 2008; Neumann, & Cunningham, 2009; Showers & Joyce, 1987). Although methodological weaknesses also plagued the majority of these studies, the impressive number of similar findings along with recent efforts to rely on more rigorous research designs, lend more credence to this final conclusion.

Recently some evidence of a positive relationship between coaching and student achievement has begun to appear in the professional literature (Campbell, & Malkus, 2011; Elish-Piper, & L’Allier, 2010). However, because so few studies have been conducted and published to date confidence in the results is still low. The two studies reviewed exploring this relationship involved different types and models of coaching. Even though they relied on more rigorous research designs than most previous coaching investigations the results are not truly comparable. Thus, it is not possible for researchers to draw any solid conclusions about the relationship between coaching and student achievement at this time.

**Gaps in the Coaching Literature**

Currently a number of gaps in the coaching literature are apparent. Although the number and scope of published studies has increased dramatically over the past decade, the vast majority have been exploratory in nature. One aspect of coaching that was not addressed in the literature was any cost-benefit comparisons. No attempts to compare differing coaching models or frameworks were uncovered. Comparisons of the effectiveness of specific coaching activities in garnering teachers’ change in practices have only recently begun to emerge. The most critical gap in the literature reviewed was
the scarcity of research exploring the relationship between coaching and student achievement.

**Recommendations in the Literature for Future Coaching Research**

Throughout the literature related to coaching for the purpose of instructional improvement the number of recommendations for future research on the topic far exceeded the number of conclusions offered. These recommendations can be grouped into several categories including research methodology, coaching models, efficacy of specific coaching activities, impact on student outcomes, and cost-effectiveness. The need to employ more rigorous research designs and methods was highlighted by many authors (Borman, & Feger, 2006; Campbell, & Malkus, 2011; Denton, & Hasbrouk, 2009; Knight, 2009; Teemant et al., 2011). More utilization of randomization techniques, treatment and control groups, large sample sizes, longitudinal durations, validated and reliable measurement instruments, and more complex statistical procedures were common suggestions within this category. The currently published research was described as too reliant on teacher or coach self-reports and non-validated measurement instrumentation (Kretlow, Wood, & Cooke, 2011; Knight, 2009).

A confounding element most frequently mentioned across publications was the difficulty of generalizing or replicating study results due to vague or limited descriptions about the specific coaching model or framework. A number of authors identified the need for more fully developed and clearly articulated models even within the same coaching type (Borman, & Feger, 2006; Denton, & Hasbrouk, 2009; Knight, & Cornett, 2008). A factor that led to this current limitation is that a number of the coaching models including Knight’s partnership approach and Costa and Garmston’s cognitive coaching are
copyrighted and require partnerships with developers in order to gain access to training, support and specific procedures. Thus, there is a financial disincentive to publish well-articulated descriptions.

Literacy coaching has the opposite problem as it does not rely on a specific model and was evidenced as differing across locations and even across coaches (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2009; Knight, 2009). A number of authors also recommended investigations that seek to isolate specific coaching activities responsible for promoting instructional changes or increased student achievement (Campbell, & Malkus, 2011; Elish-Piper, & L’Allier, 2010; Kohler et al., 1997). The majority of authors relayed the need to identify specific student outcomes related to being taught by a teacher who receives coaching support, accompanied by explicit descriptions of effective coaching practices. A final recommendation culled from the literature reviewed was the need to conduct cost-effectiveness investigations related to not only coaching in general but also comparing coaching models (Borman, & Feger, 2006).

**Summary of the Review of Literature**

This review of scholarly literature synthesized the results of several decades of research conducted and writing related to improving the effectiveness of instruction received by school children in the United States. Seven major elements were addressed including (a) the foundational literature supporting the development of coaching, (b) types of coaching models, (c) common coaching models, (d) coaching research, (e) gaps in the coaching literature, and (f) recommendations for future coaching research. Two of the major elements focused on research were (a) the foundational research supporting the development of coaching, and (b) the research conducted specific to coaching. Due to the
sheer volume of information gathered, I constructed several tables to assist in the synthesis process. Tables 16 and 17 (see Appendix A) summarize the research conclusions related to the factors that influence the success or failure of instructional change projects. These conclusions were discovered within the foundational literature supporting the development of coaching. They seemed to cluster around the topics of the effectiveness of professional development programs in supporting changes in teachers’ instructional practices, and the overall effectiveness of instructional improvement projects. Seventeen factors that positively influence, and fourteen factors that negatively influence the outcomes of instructional improvement efforts were identified. The review of coaching literature led to the identification of 32 conclusions drawn by the researchers. These conclusions are summarized within Table 18 (See Appendix A). They are organized in the table based on the coaching model that was being studied. The influencing factors most relevant to the development of coaching centered around seven research conclusions reported in the foundational literature. All seven factors are described in Table 1. In order to avoid repetitiveness I chose to construct the table using only the negative influences as opposed to the positive influences because they generally mirrored each other.

The relationships between the seven factors that negatively influence the outcomes of instructional change projects and the research conclusions that seem to support coaching as a possible intervention to reduce or eliminate them are delineated in Table 1. The fact that I was able to identify seven different negative influences that, based on the research conclusions, might be addressed through participation in coaching seemed meaningful. Perhaps the most critical among these was that participation in
coaching increases teachers’ transfer of new skills from professional development settings into their classroom practice. A minimum of nine different studies conducted across 26 years investigating five different coaching models led to this same conclusion. Regardless of the limited generalizability of many of the studies’ findings, the fact that the same conclusion was consistently reported across a significant number of investigations increases the credibility of this conclusion.

Table 1

Negative Influences on Instructional Change and Related Coaching Research Conclusions that Support Coaching as a Possible Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative influences on instructional change</th>
<th>Researcher(s) who identified the influence</th>
<th>Related coaching research conclusion</th>
<th>Researcher(s) drawing conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Edwards, Green, Lyons, Rogers, &amp; Swords (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Knight (2004)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Knight &amp; Cornett (2008)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, &amp; Schock, (2009)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Showers &amp; Joyce (1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huberman (1985)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teemant, Wink &amp; Tyra (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of on-going or follow-up support to master new instructional practices after initial professional development</td>
<td>Evans (1986)</td>
<td>Teachers who have frequent and on-going interactions with a coach are more likely to demonstrate changes in instructional practices and implement target practices with higher fidelity than non-coached teachers.</td>
<td>Kohler, Crilley, Shearer, &amp; Good (2001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative influence on instructional change</th>
<th>Researcher(s) who identified the influence</th>
<th>Related coaching research conclusion</th>
<th>Researcher(s) who reported the conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The possibility that participation in coaching could potentially resolve this single critical issue that has impeded implementation of research-based instructional practices for many decades may be incentive enough for school districts to initiate a coaching project. However, if increasing teachers’ implementation of targeted instructional strategies doesn’t provide enough incentive, there are six additional negative influences that coaching appears to combat as well.

The knowledge and understandings gained through engaging in this extensive review were foundational to the development of my rationale for conducting this dissertation study. A description on this rationale is included at the outset of Chapter III of this report.
CHAPTER III

Introduction

The primary purpose of this dissertation study was to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of instructional coaches employed in the Perry Coaching Project in an effort to add their voice, insights and recommendations to the professional dialogue informing future development, evaluation, and enhancement of similar projects. This chapter is divided into the following six sections: (a) rationale for the study, (b) design of the study, (c) researcher positioning, (d) population and sampling procedures, (e) data collection procedures, (f) data synthesis, and (g) trustworthiness and transferability.

Rationale for Conducting this Dissertation Study

As a result of the review of professional literature related to coaching in school settings I discovered that there was scant research aimed at exploring and building understandings of the lived-experiences of coaches. I searched the literature for investigations that included coaches’ perceptions regarding a wide variety of coaching topics, with particular efforts to locate representations of coaches’ impressions of the effectiveness of coaching in influencing teachers’ day-to-day instructional practices. I also attempted to uncover studies that portrayed coaches’ experiences and meanings they constructed about coaching as told from their point of view. Even though the perceptions of teachers who participated in coaching were recounted in a few studies (Knight, 2009; Showers & Joyce, 1985; Symonds, 2003), there was a paucity of investigations that
offered the perceptions of coaches. I sought to fill this void in the professional literature through this dissertation study.

**Design of the Study**

**Research Questions**

This dissertation study involved two primary research questions:

RQ1. What are the meanings constructed by educators through their experiences as instructional coaches?

RQ2. Given the meanings constructed by instructional coaches, how do coaches describe a case of coaching success?

At the mid-point of the data collection and analysis phase emerging themes were discussed with participants to gather their feedback on plausibility. Two themes emerged from the text of the participants’ narratives strongly and almost immediately. The first emerging theme was that contexts, the underlying district, project, and individual school conditions and situations, were perceived as significant barriers to coaches’ success. The second emerging theme was that the coach participants had multitudes of recommendations for addressing these barriers in future implementations. Thus, the initial data analysis and member checking activity led to the addition of the following two sub-questions related to the second research question:

RQ2a. From coaches’ perspectives, what role did context play in relation to coaching success?

RQ2b. What recommendations do coaches offer in support of future coaching successes?
Selection of the Research Approach

A number of research approaches were considered during the design phase of this study. Experimental designs were not an option because the coaching project implementation in which the study participants had taken part ended prior to the commencement of the investigation. Use of a survey was also rejected as it would have required coaches to translate the meanings they constructed from participation into rating scales on a limited number of statements, thus prohibiting their ability to fully impart those meanings from their point of view (Creswell, 2003, 2008). I selected a phenomenological case study approach to answer the research questions posed based primarily on the purpose of the investigation. Within the following sections I have explained my reasoning for employing each element in the investigational design.

Why qualitative? I decided to use a qualitative, as opposed to a quantitative approach, because the qualitative research paradigm is more concerned with exploring, developing understanding of, and gaining insights into the lived experiences of others (Van Manen, 1998). It is likely that I posed the research questions I did because I hold what Pole (2007) described as a qualitative world view. I believe that there are multiple realities experienced across individuals and contexts. Qualitative research methods seek to surface these multiple realities as perceived by people who have shared a common lived experience (Glesne, 2006).

Another reason I decided to conduct a qualitative study is that I hold the assumption that individual realities are constructed through social interactions, and that they are ever changing. Additionally, I consider the variables that influence the meanings different people construct from sharing an experience to be so complex and interwoven
that they cannot be easily isolated, studied, and understood in a purely quantitative manner. Glesne (2006) explained that these researcher-held assumptions lend themselves more naturally to qualitative, rather than quantitative, approaches to research.

A final reason I chose to employ a qualitative design was that the topic of my interest pertained to the field of education. Merriam (1998) stated that “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (p.1). Merriam’s assertion resonated with my desire to add to the knowledge base and practice of the phenomenon of coaching aimed at improving teachers’ instructional practices.

**Why phenomenological?** Van Manen (1998) offered the following definition “phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structure, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience” (p.10). Patton (2002) explained that “phenomenology is based on the assumption that there is an essence to shared experience. These essences are the meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced” (p.70). These concepts described by Van Manen, and also by Patton aided me in classifying this dissertation study as phenomenological in nature for the following reasons. The subjects in this study shared the common phenomenon, or experience of coaching teachers in chronically failing schools. The primary purpose of the study was to give voice to the coaches’ experiences and meanings they constructed through their participation in the coaching project. Given the assertions of both Van Manen and Patton, uncovering, interpreting, and writing about the meanings coaches constructed through their shared experiences would be considered as critical elements of phenomenology.
**Why case study?** I selected a case study as a strategy based on the ideas of both Merriam (1998, 2009), and Yin (1990). I found that Merriam’s (1998) definition of qualitative case study most closely aligned with the purpose of my investigation. Merriam stated “a qualitative case study is an intensive analysis, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii). Yin (1990) differentiated between a case study and a case history. He explained that both approaches attempt to reveal the complexity of a phenomenon in relations to the context in which it occurs. However, case studies are mainly concerned with present-day phenomenon and case histories most often describe events that occurred in the distant past. Even though coaching aimed at instructional improvement is certainly a contemporary phenomenon, the specific case explored in this study was a program that had already ended. Thus it did involve some elements of a historical case study (Merriam, 1998). In contrast to a typical case study in which the researcher seeks to narrate subjects’ lived experiences while the phenomenon is occurring, this study narrated the coaches recollections of how their common experience unfolded (Van Manen, 1990).

**Selection of Data Collection Procedures**

**Why interviewing?** Merriam (2009) asserted that conducting interviews, whether individual or in groups is a necessary data collection technique when the researcher is investigating past events that cannot be subsequently observed. Merriam also suggested that interviewing is useful when the researcher is interested in uncovering the perceptions and feelings of subjects in relation to the topic, contexts, and meanings constructed.
Based on Merriam’s recommendations, I determined that conducting interviews would be a major data collection method utilized in the study.

**Why focus group interviews?** Glense (2006) described a focus group interview as “facilitating a discussion on a particular topic among a selected set of people” (p. 102). Morgan (1997) suggested that it is appropriate to utilize focus group interviews when the researchers is confident that the proposed participants will be able to actively discuss the topic of interest and feel comfortable doing so. I was certain that the former coaches would feel comfortable and possibly excited about sharing their coaching experiences with me and with each other. I knew that many of them were well acquainted as a result of working as colleagues for at least two years, and some for as many as four years, because of my previous role in the coaching project. Additionally, due to my previous observations, I was aware of how often the majority of them engaged in both social and professional conversations.

Initially I selected focus group interviews as the primary data collection technique rather than individual interviews because holding the discussions in the social context of a group allows participants to not only respond, but also to listen to the perceptions of others. As a result of reflecting on the comments of others, participants are likely to make additional comments themselves leading to the collection of higher quality data (Patton, 2002). An additional reason that I chose to conduct focus group interviews was that the number of potential participants was more than 50. I determined that conducting that many individual interviews was not practical due to the significant amount of resources required compared to the timeline of the study.
Why individual participant interviews? I did not originally plan to collect data utilizing individual interviews; however, I decided to do so as a result of difficulties encountered in the participant recruiting process. During initial phone conversations and follow-up e-mail communications regarding the dates and times of the focus group sessions it became apparent that nearly half of the former coaches who agreed to participate in the study had scheduling conflicts. Therefore, I found it necessary also to conduct individual interviews so that I would have enough subjects to lend credibility to the study results.

Why documents? In addition to observation and interviews, documents are considered to be a valuable source of data in qualitative research (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003). I collected a number of documents that I thought would be useful in building my own understanding of how the coaching project began, how it was funded, the intended outcomes, the implementation process, and how the program was evaluated. I was able to uncover six such documents. A detailed description of the content of each document and how it was obtained is provided at a later point in this section.

Researcher Positioning

A primary purpose in conducting a phenomenological case study is to develop a deep understanding of how participants experience the phenomenon of interest and the meanings they construct as a result. In order to accomplish this as objectively as possible, the researcher must bracket prior judgments about the phenomenon in an effort to avoid allowing those beliefs to inhibit their current ability to observe and get a feeling for the phenomenon’s composite parts. Van Manen (1990) stated that, “bracketing describes the act of suspending one’s various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study
the essential structures of the world” (p.175). I attempted to do this by reflecting on and surfacing my own experiences, prejudices, and assumptions prior to embarking on this investigative journey.

Positioning myself as the researcher was a significant process completed prior to seeking study approvals or recruiting participants. Having been employed within the project for two years, albeit in a different role than the coach participants, I needed to identify my own experiences and perceptions about the project that might influence how I interpreted the data gathered from the participants. Additionally, my personal experiences in the project and my efforts to limit how these impacted the results is thoroughly described in an effort to provide the reader with additional context for use in making their own meaning from the research report.

During two of the four years the Perry Coaching Project operated I was employed to provide data coaching services and support to a number of schools and instructional coaches. I was hired in January of 2008 mid-way through the first year of project implementation. The job description, qualifications, and skills required for the data coach position were vastly different from those required of instructional coaches. A minimum of three years experience in building or central office level administration was required, along with extensive knowledge and practical skills related to accessing, analyzing and interpreting school performance data to guide school improvement processes. Mastery to expert level technology skills and the ability to train coaches with limited technological or data analysis skills was also required for the data coach position. Instructional coaches needed only a bachelor’s degree and a minimum of ten years experience teaching at the elementary or middle school level.
Once the first wave of instructional coaches were hired in October of 2007 they participated in eight full days of training related to the Perry Coaching Project framework and procedures, as well as exposure to common coaching activities and techniques. When I was hired in January of 2008 I was provided with the project training binder but did not receive any specific training or orientation to the program.

During my two-year tenure with the Perry Coaching Project I had many opportunities to interact with and support the instructional coaches. These interactions included the following activities:

- small and large group training sessions related to data access and use
- individual data training sessions with coaches at their school sites
- small group teacher data training sessions within coaching school sites
- phone and e-mail communication with coaches requesting support
- participation in monthly coaches’ meetings

Although I did not serve in a supervisory or evaluative role, I did participate in the interview and hiring process during year three. I developed close collegial relationships with many project coaches. As a result of the positive rapport built with the majority of coaches they frequently shared their frustrations or concerns about the project with me. Through these activities and frequent interactions with coaches I formed my own evaluative opinions about many aspects of the coaching project. In an effort to surface these perceptions and the meanings I constructed from them I reflected on and wrote about them in the first few pages of my field journal. I referred back to these entries while developing the focus group session topics and individual interview questions in an attempt to avoid unintended judgmental language or phrasing that might elicit responses
that aligned with my own perceptions. Prior to conducting each focus group session I reviewed these pages so that I could maintain the effort to keep my judgments removed from the conversations. I also pre-planned the follow-up probes to use during group and individual sessions and sought input from my dissertation committee members regarding objectivity. Following focus group sessions and individual interviews I listened to the audio-recordings and considered whether any of my responses or clarifying questions could be deemed prejudicial or leading coaches’ responses in any way. I recorded these self-evaluative thoughts and intentions for subsequent data collection sessions in my field notes. I referred back to these journal entries throughout the case report writing process in an effort to provide as much objectivity as possible. I also went back to the participants at the midpoint in the series and during the final session to obtain participant feedback regarding the themes I saw emerging within the data. They were quite helpful in confirming the majority of themes I perceived, as well as pointing out when there were clearly multiple points of view surrounding a theme.

My knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions about phenomena seemingly unrelated to this study were also identified and documented within field journal entries. These included my thinking on phenomena related to organizational leadership, professional development, program evaluation, change processes in education, teacher empowerment, social justice, and school improvement. I believed it was important to surface these beliefs and assumptions in an attempt to analyze how they might influence focus group and individual interview questions, the formation of data categories and coding, identification of emerging themes, and the content of the final research report.
The goal of the dissertation study was to build understandings of the meanings constructed from participants’ experiences related to a particular phenomenon. However, it is fair to say that my ultimate desire in building these phenomenological understandings was not merely to describe them but also to apply them within my practice as a school improvement consultant. In addition to the social justice lens through which I view children and the world I also believe that teachers and those who support them are rapidly becoming yet another marginalized group in our society. These underlying personal assumptions along with the personal understandings I constructed through my own participation in the Perry Coaching Project likely influenced my desire to conduct this dissertation study. I was guided by a strong desire to not only tell their story but also to preserve at least a small portion of the knowledge they gained as a result of their practice.

**Population and Sampling Procedures**

The population for this investigation was instructional coaches practicing in elementary and secondary school settings in the United States. The sampling frame or target population of this study was instructional coaches practicing in low performing elementary and secondary schools within one urban school district in the Midwest. This investigation was conducted following the conclusion of a four-year grant-funded school improvement project. Although coaches practiced across nearly 70 different schools, the study was not conducted within any of these sites.

Study subjects were recruited from those previously employed within the Perry Coaching Project for at least two school years. The project was terminated following the 2011 school year thus prohibiting a group presentation during a staff meeting or
scheduled professional development session. The number of coaches employed by the project over the four-year implementation was 63. The number of coaches who had also participated for at least two years was lower.

Study participants were recruited targeting 40 former coaches for whom the researcher already possessed contact information. The initial recruiting contact was made by telephone. Seven of the former coaches I attempted to contact did not respond in any manner, two of these had non-working numbers. Ten of the former coaches I was able to contact via telephone were unable or unwilling to participate in the investigation. This conversation included a brief description of the study along with a request for an e-mail or postal address to which a more in-depth description was sent. Each initial contact took approximately 30 to 40 minutes due to the natural desire of former colleagues to “catch up” socially. The written materials mailed to potential participants contained descriptions of the following elements: (a) purpose and scope of the study, (b) what participation in the study entails for subjects, (c) voluntary nature of participation and measures taken to protect confidentiality of the data collected, (d) ability of subjects to end their participation in the study at any point, and (e) benefits to subjects and the school resulting from participation in the study (see Appendix B).

Twenty-seven consenting participants were asked to participate in four of the series of 13 focus group sessions during August of 2011. I considered this sample of participants to be representative of the 63 coaches who were previously employed in the project because, similar to the larger group, they represented a variety of ethnicities, age groups, and number of years in education. Some of the participants were retired while others were not. Some had been classroom teachers and others had been administrators.
Elementary, middle and high school level teaching experiences were also represented. The volunteers were employed by the project for differing amounts of time and across different years. Additionally, I do not believe that those former coaches who volunteered to participate in the study had different relationships with me prior to the study than those who did not volunteer. I had not had any contact with any of the coaches, including those who did not volunteer, since I resigned from the project in January of 2010.

The coach participants were offered a ten-dollar stipend for each focus group or individual interview in which they participated. If subjects attended all four focus group sessions they received a bonus of ten dollars as well. The majority of participants refused any monetary compensation.

The sample size for the study was 28 subjects. Twenty-seven were former coaches and one was the former project director. Fourteen were females and six were males. Four were African-American and 24 were Caucasian. The average age of study participants was 59.78. The average number of years experience in education was 33.71, with 12 of them having 40 or more years in the field. Nineteen of the 28 subjects were already retired upon entering the Perry Coaching Project. The average number of years completed in the project was 3.14. All 28 participants were employed in the project for a minimum of two years.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Three major data collection techniques were employed during this investigation including (a) focus group interviews, (b) individual interviews, and (c) gathering relevant documents. A description of the procedures enacted during the application of these data collection techniques is included within the following paragraphs.
Focus Group Interview Procedures

Focus group interviews were held on five days across three weeks in August of 2011. Three two-hour sessions were conducted on each of four days, with one additional session on the fifth day. A total of 13 focus groups sessions were facilitated. Twelve subjects participated on Day One, 14 on Day Two, 16 on Day Three, 13 on Day Four, and three on Day Five of the focus group interviews. A total of 23 subjects participated in the focus group interviews, most of them attended one session on a least three different days. All of the sessions were conducted in a rented clubhouse within a condominium complex located in a northeast suburb of the city in which the coaching project was implemented.

The discussion topics and questions posed were different each day; however, they were the same across each session held throughout one day. Table 2 includes the general topics addressed for each of the first four days. The single session held on the fifth day focused mainly on the emerging themes discussed on the second day, along with the topics covered on Days Three and Four with the other participants. The discussion questions and follow-up probes are included in Appendix C. Each focus group interview was digitally audio-recorded for later transcription.
Table 2  
*Focus Group Interview Discussion Topics Days One Through Four*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Discussion Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Initiation to the Perry Coaching Project, school site-entry, coaching activities, definitions of success, and overall impressions Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Emerging themes feedback, coaching experiences, activities, definitions of success, and overall impressions Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Coaching experiences, activities, definitions of success, and overall impressions Years 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Coaching experiences, activities, definitions of success, and overall impressions Year 4, program ending, recommendations for future coaching models and implementations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Individual Participant Interview Procedures**

Twelve individual interviews were conducted during August and September of 2011. Eight were conducted via telephone and four were conducted face-to-face. The same condominium clubhouse was utilized for the in person interviews. Eleven of the participants in these interviews were former coaches in the Perry Coaching Project. One of the subjects was the former director of the coaching project. The discussion topics and questions posed during the individual interviews combined those employed across all five days of the focus group sessions. The typical length of these interviews was approximately 60 minutes, along with two that extended beyond 75 minutes. Both the telephone and face-to-face interviews were digitally audio-recorded for later transcription. Potential participants were made aware of the audio-recording procedures during the informed consent phase of subject recruitment.

I discovered that the individual interviews provided a different quality of data compared to the focus groups. Participants’ responses made during the individual format seemed to delve deeper into the discussion topic and elicited more specific details about
the individual experiences, school situations, personal stories of success, and offered perceptions different than those communicated in the focus group format. I decided to conduct three additional individual interviews with subjects who participated in focus group sessions who either did not contribute much, seemed uncomfortable, or offered perceptions that seemed divergent from the majority of other group members. This allowed me to complete some negative case analysis of data that did not appear to support the emerging themes. Negative case analysis and the results are discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Documents and Acquisition Procedures

Six relevant documents were discovered and obtained during the data collection phase of the study. These documents included the following:

- Document 1. Perry Coaching Project Grant Application
- Document 2. Evaluation of the Perry Coaching Project: End-of-Year Evaluation for Year II
- Document 3. Presentation handouts from the initial coach training in 2007
- Document 4. A list of school improvement coach responsibilities and prohibited activities given to coaches in December of 2008
- Document 5. A descriptive article written about the Perry Coaching Project written by one on the former coaches that was published in a regional professional journal
- Document 6. A Regional Educational Service Center Annual Report for 2009 in which the revenues and expenditures related to the Perry Coaching Project was published
I used these documents mainly to build my own understanding of the evolution of the project and the issues that the former coaches set forth as barriers to their coaching success. These barriers communicated by study participants included a troubled implementation process, lack of clarity about the role of coaches, changing expectations for coach responsibilities from year to year, and lack of transparency regarding decisions placing restrictions on activities in which coaches were permitted to engage.

**Concurrent Data Collection, Analysis, and Member-checking Procedures**

A five-phase process. As is generally recommended (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003), data analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the data collection period. This was a critical feature of the data analysis process because it permitted a continuous cycle of data collection, data analysis, and member-checking related to the emerging themes. Utilization of this iterative approach also allowed participants the opportunity to reflect and comment on experiences or perceptions that were brought up not only within their own focus group sessions, but also across other sessions as well. Figures 1 through 5 are flow charts that summarize what occurred in each phase of five data collection, analysis, and member-checking cycles.
Figure 1. Phase 1 Data Collection, Analysis, and Member-checking Activities

Focus Group Interviews
Data Day 1
- Discussion topics included project orientation, training, school site entry, year one activities, experiences, and definitions of coaching success
- All sessions digitally audio-recorded

Analysis of Data
Day 1
- Transcribed digital audio-recordings using HyperTRANSCRIBE
- Coded text by topical or chronological categories using HyperRESEARCH
- Ran reports containing all text within each category
- Coded category text by type or direction of response
- Ran frequency reports by type or direction of response
- Identified emerging themes based on frequency of common responses
- Identified divergent responses
- Added research questions based on emergent themes

Member-checking
Day 1 Data on Day 2
- Discussed emergent themes identified from Day 1 analysis
- Probed for member perceptions of confirmation or disagreement

Figure 2. Phase 2 Data Collection, Analysis, and Member-checking Activities

Focus Group Interviews
Data Day 2
- Member-checking on data and emergent themes from Day 1
- Discussion topics included project evolution, year two activities, experiences, and definitions of coaching success
- All sessions digitally audio-recorded

Analysis of Data
Day 2
- Transcribed digital audio-recordings using HyperTRANSCRIBE
- Coded text by topical or chronological categories using HyperRESEARCH
- Created new categories and codes as needed
- Combined categories and codes as needed
- Ran reports containing all text within each category
- Coded category text by type or direction of response
- Ran frequency reports by type or direction of response
- Identified emerging themes based on frequency of common responses
- Identified divergent responses

Member-checking
Day 2 Data on Day 3
- Discussed emergent themes identified from Day 2 analysis
- Probed for member perceptions of confirmation or disagreement
Figure 3. Phase 3 Data Collection, Analysis, and Member-checking Activities

Focus Group Interviews
Data Day 3
- Member-checking on data and emergent themes from Day 2
- Discussion topics included project evolution, year three and four activities, experiences, and definitions of coaching success
- All sessions digitally audio-recorded

Analysis of
Data
Day 3
- Transcribed digital audio-recordings using HyperTRANSCRIBE
- Created new categories and codes as needed
- Combined categories and codes as needed
- Printed text of transcriptions
- Coded text by category and by type or direction of response
- Recorded frequency of categorical responses by type or direction of response
- Identified emerging themes based on frequency of common responses
- Identified divergent responses

Member-checking
Day 3 Data on Day 4
- Discussed emergent themes identified from Day 3 analysis
- Probed for member perceptions of confirmation or disagreement

Figure 4. Phase 4 Data Collection, Analysis, and Member-checking Activities

Focus Group Interviews
Data Day 4
- Member-checking on data and emergent themes from Day 3
- Discussion topics included project evaluation, ending, and recommendations for future coaching models and projects
- All sessions digitally audio-recorded

Analysis of
Data
Day 4
- Transcribed digital audio-recordings using HyperTRANSCRIBE
- Created new categories and codes as needed
- Combined categories and codes as needed
- Printed the text of transcriptions
- Coded text by category and by type or direction of response
- Recorded frequency of categorical responses by type or direction of response
- Identified emerging themes based on frequency of common responses
- Identified divergent responses

Member-checking
Day 4 Data
- Described emergent themes identified from Day 4 analysis in an e-mail sent to 5 coach participants
- Asked for perceptions of confirmation or disagreement
Computer-assisted data analysis. HyperRESEARCH, Version 3.0 is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis application. Use of a case study database to store and organize all the major information needed to construct a case analysis was recommended by Patton (2002) and also by Yin (2003). This software package provided a systematic method of organizing the data collected so that specific data could be easily located and sorted during all five phases of analysis. Data were collected through 13 focus group sessions and 12 individual interviews. Each session and interview was digitally audio-recorded for transcription utilizing HyperTRANSCRIBE Version 1.5.3, an audio transcription software application designed to work seamlessly with HyperRESEARCH to upload transcription text files for organization and analysis. The transcription files represented more than 40 hours of audio-recordings.
The data analysis process occurred in a five phase cyclical manner throughout the duration of the data collection period. During each phase the transcripts were read to obtain a general sense of the material. Data were then coded by major categories, topics, and type of responses. As the database grew and was re-analyzed, categories underwent some shifting and reorganizing. During my attempts to combine categories and to re-name others following the second day feedback from coaches, I made an error that resulted in losing all the coding and categorization I had completed following the first two days. I decided at that point that simply printing out the transcriptions and sorting them by topic or category might work just as well as the program, without fear of losing any coding I had already completed.

**Categories and coding.** Initial categories were constructed based on the chronology of the coaches’ experiences and the topics of discussion planned for each focus group session or individual interview. Table 3 includes a list of initial categories for use in coding constructed prior to the onset of data collection. Table 4 lists the categories added during the analysis of Day 1 data, and Table 5 presents the categories added during the analysis of data from Days 2-5.
Table 3
*Initial Categories Set Prior to Data Collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial experiences in school site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching roles and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to effectiveness Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of success Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial impressions of the coaching model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial impressions of project leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial impressions of project partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial impressions about supports and resources for coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths observed in the buildings Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges observed in the buildings Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impressions of policies, procedures, record-keeping and reporting Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common coaching activities Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
*Categories Added During Analysis of Day 1 Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impressions of the importance of context (district, school, grant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clandestine coaching activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building the airplane while flying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anecdotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach interactions within the focus group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5
Categories Added During Analysis of Days 2-5 Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Re-interview process Years 2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Barriers to effectiveness Years 2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Definitions of success Years 2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evolving impressions of the coaching model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evolving coach roles and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evolving impressions of project leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evolving impressions of project partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impressions of supports and resources for coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impressions of policies, procedures, record-keeping and reporting Years 2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Common coaching activities Year 2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building relationships Years 2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effective coaching strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships Years 2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impressions of on-going professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coach evaluation process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Project evaluation process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attempts to measure coaching impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ending the project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During each phase in the five cycles of data collection, analysis, and member-checking, the texts of the transcriptions were read through at least twice in order to get a general sense of the contents. The next procedure I employed was to code the text by the categories included in Tables 3-5. After the texts were coded by major category, I sorted the texts by those categories and assigned sub-category codes if necessary. For example, the initial category named weaknesses observed in the buildings Year 1 contained a large volume of text. In order to provide internal structure to that text I needed to break it down into the following sub-categories (a) planning instruction, (b) collaboration, (c) dependence on common curriculum materials, (d) lack of instructional leadership, (e) lack of reflection on practice, (f) time constraints on professional development, (g) within teacher attributes, and (h) culture and climate. Once the texts were coded and organized by categories and sub-categories, I read through them again and applied codes that indicated the type of response given. Table 6 represents these codes.
Table 6
Codes Used to Identify Types of Responses within Categories and Sub-categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Type of Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>Positive impression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Negative impression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Neutral impression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DI</td>
<td>Divergent impression (negative case)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>Extreme impression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the assignment of response type codes, I determined the frequency of each type of response and highlighted interesting examples of each type. Engaging in this type of text analysis allowed me to identify the most common types of response, as well as responses that were divergent or extreme. I reflected on the general sense of the data I gained through multiple readings and the results of the text analysis to identify possible emerging themes during each cycle of data collection, analysis and member-checking.

**Initial Emergent Themes**

Fifteen themes that appeared to emerge from the analysis of the Day 1 data are presented in the following paragraphs.

**Recruitment and interview process.** Recruitment through networking was experienced by the majority of coaches. The interview process was experienced differently depending on the implementation year, what point in the year the coach was hired, and who conducted the interview. Coaches’ perceptions varied significantly in type (positive, negative, neutral).

**Initial coach training.** Initial training experiences were also perceived very differently across coaches. Initial perceptions tended to be positive. However, coaches’ perceptions tended to be more negative if they were trained mid-year, or if they had
previous experience with other coaching models. Many explained that they “didn’t know what they didn’t know.” Perceptions were more negative when considered retrospectively. Negative case examples related to this theme were identified.

**Impressions of the model.** Initial impressions of the coaching model were mostly positive, although the lack of clarity was frequently noted. There were a number of negative cases related to this theme, particularly for participants with prior coaching experience.

**Impressions of project leadership.** Initial impressions of the project leadership were characterized by expressions of great fondness towards the project director. Many participants indicated that they were aware of tension between the director and coordinator during the interview and continuing into Year 2. Perceptions of the coach coordinator were often negative, but accompanied by empathy as well. Divergent perceptions were also present.

**Impressions of project partners.** Perceptions of the project partners (school district, corporation, and university) were characterized by confusion regarding roles and questions about partner motivation for participation.

**School site entry.** School site entry experiences varied greatly depending on the school, year of implementation, prior experiences with coaching, and particularly with the principal’s perceptions of the project. “It’s all about the principal” was a common perception. The majority of coaches’ perceptions of their site entry experiences were negative. Negative case examples were identified related to school site entry experiences.

**Importance of context.** The district and specific school circumstances were perceived as having tremendous influence on coaches’ potential for effectiveness.
throughout the implementation. Strong negative perceptions and feelings regarding this issue were held and expressed by every Day 1 focus group participant.

**Importance of relationships.** The critical importance of building relationships within school sites was expressed or confirmed by all Day 1 focus group participants. The majority reported that it took most of Year 1 to develop trust and working relationships with teachers. Great frustration was expressed regarding the need to start over with this process when the coach was transferred from one site to another.

**Policies and procedures.** Project policies and procedures were perceived as quite lax during Year 1. The direction given was that they needed to get into the site and build relationships quickly so that the work could begin. “Do whatever is needed to get your foot inside those classrooms” was the message they received. Frustration was noted when more structure and direction was provided by leaders as time went on. Coaches developed their own roles based on perceived school needs and principal requests. Negative case examples were identified related to perceptions of project policies and procedures.

**Relationships between coaches.** Strong supportive relationships developed between many coaches who entered during the first and second wave when the number of coaches remained below 25. The development of coach relationships with other coaches was more difficult for mid-year hires and those who came to the project once the number of coaches was higher. Many attributed their early coaching successes to shared ideas and resources, and the support of other coaches. Negative case examples were identified related to coaches’ relationships with each other.
Clandestine coaching activities. One of the focus group participants used the term clandestine coaching activities to describe activities that were prohibited by coaching project policy. The term was communicated across groups during the review of themes on Day 2. The term was rapidly adopted and used throughout the remainder of the focus group sessions. Engagement in prohibited activities was reported across the majority of coaches. Some guilty feelings regarding non-compliance with rules were common but these feelings didn’t stop coaches from providing services they thought were necessary to building and maintaining relationships. Negative case examples were identified related to this theme.

Cases of coaching success. Coaches identified cases of coaching success during Year 1 as when teachers permitted them to observe in their classrooms, or when a teacher sought them out for resources and ideas. Great success was perceived in Year 1 if a teacher tried something a coach suggested. Several coaches perceived that they did not experience any success during Year 1. I considered these perceptions as negative case examples.

Barriers to coaching success. Barriers to coaching success in Year 1 included the manner in which the project was implemented, role confusion, individual school circumstances, mixed messages about appropriate coaching activities, individual coach weaknesses related to accessing, analyzing, and discussing performance data, and lack of exposure to research-based instructional strategies.

Concurrent program development and implementation. “Building the airplane while flying” was an idiom used by a strong majority of coaches to describe their Year 1 experiences. Coaches reported that this phrase was also used frequently by program
developers and project leaders. Many perceived this approach as negative, but went on to also express understanding that the speed with which the project was put together caused this situation.

**Coach recommendations.** Recommendations for the improvement of initial training, model development, project implementation, coaching roles and activities, and removing barriers to success were numerous and offered without researcher probing. A pervasive feeling that their recommendations would work seemed to exist. Feelings of frustration that their suggestions and recommendations weren’t requested or taken seriously by any level of project leadership (with the exception of the project director) were commonly expressed.

The fifteen emerging themes identified as a result of the analysis of Day 1 data were presented to focus group participants at the beginning of each Day 2 session. I requested participant confirmation, clarification, criticism, and additional examples supporting or disputing the themes. Coach participants engaged each other in lively conversation regarding the proposed themes. Their conversations provided support for the themes along with many personal examples. None of the themes presented were rejected as a result of these member-checking procedures.

The data collection, analysis, and member-checking procedures described were conducted across four additional cycles. During each cycle new response categories and sub-categories were added and some were combined. The initial themes underwent some revisions and new ones were added as they emerged. Once the data collection, analysis, and member-checking activities were complete, the themes were revisited and evaluated for their criticality in building understanding of participants’ lived experiences. A few
themes that emerged during the first two focus group sessions did not carry through to later sessions. They were either absorbed into other themes or were relegated to the category of supporting details of the story being narrated as opposed to representing significant themes. Three themes were removed as a result. The remaining themes were utilized in answering the research questions posed in the study. Following the reduction of themes, the finalized list was sent to five of the coach participants via e-mail. They were asked to provide feedback on the finalized themes. All five responded and affirmed them.

**Data Synthesis**

A triangulation design analysis was undertaken in an effort to synthesize the qualitative data collected through focus group sessions, individual interviews and review of documents and artifacts (Creswell, 2008). In an effort to provide additional data on which to base triangulation, an interview with Dean Adams (a pseudonym), the former grant facilitator was conducted. The content of this interview provided critical background information necessary to understand the context into which coaches entered the project and struggled to clarify their role within school sites. The data gathered from this personal interview were of significant value during the synthesis process.

The six documents described in earlier in this chapter proved quite useful in providing context and other background information related to the Perry Coaching Project’s origins and the evolution of its model and procedures over time. This process not only facilitated synthesis but also provided one method of supporting the dependability and credibility of the conclusions drawn. Results of these efforts to synthesize data are described more fully in Chapter IV of this dissertation.
Trustworthiness and Transferability

A qualitative research study must focus on garnering the reader’s confidence in the investigator’s insights and conclusions as trustworthy and authentic (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (2000) emphasized this requirement by suggesting that readers might ask the following questions as they relate to a study’s findings. Are the findings “sufficiently authentic… that I may trust myself in acting on their implications? More to the point, would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct social policy or legislation based on them?” (p. 178). A qualitative researcher’s worldview and assumptions about reality provide the foundation from which the research questions are posed. These elements also influence the selection of methods employed to answer the research questions, as well as the vocabulary used when discussing validity and reliability. Although the concepts of reliability, internal and external validity and objectivity are discussed within written descriptions of quantitative investigations, they are discussed in qualitative research using alternate but corresponding terms including dependability, confirmability, transferability and credibility (Merriam, 2009).

Merriam (1998) identified nine strategies to build the reader’s confidence in the trustworthiness of the author’s interpretive findings. Merriam’s six strategies include:

1. triangulation
2. member-checking
3. peer examination
4. surfacing the researcher’s biases
5. long-term observation within the research site
6. participatory research designs
7. thick, rich description
8. audit trail
9. negative case analysis

I utilized six of the nine strategies recommended by Merriam including (a) triangulation, (b) member-checking, (c) surfacing the researcher’s biases, (d) thick, rich description, (e) audit trail, and (f) negative case analysis. Long-term observation within the research sight was not possible because the coaching project had already ended.

Comparing data gathered from multiple sources and relying on a variety of collection methods is called triangulation. I utilized triangulation procedures to provide confirmatory support for the themes that emerged throughout the investigation.

A second strategy involved member-checking procedures. This strategy was employed at multiple points during the data collection period and also at the end. Study subjects were exposed to tentative interpretations and meanings I constructed in order to solicit their feedback evaluating plausibility.

I took time prior to embarking on the investigation to reflect on my personal beliefs, assumptions, and worldview and how these might influence my decision-making relative to all aspects of the study. I recorded these reflections in a field journal I kept throughout the study period. I reviewed these journal entries at least once during each cycle of data collection, analysis, and member-checking in an attempt to keep them and their possible impact at the forefront of my mind. Doing so reminded me of the necessity to set aside my biases when facilitating focus group discussions, forming questions and follow-up probes, conducting individual interviews, and creating categories, codes, interpreting data, and identifying themes. Additionally, I included a section earlier in this
chapter in which I described my biases, assumptions, and previous experience with the Perry Coaching Project so that readers can take them into consideration when making their own meaning from the investigation report.

In order to offer readers of the case study report with abundant and sufficient information on which they could base a comparison of their own situations or contexts with those in the study, I strived to write a thorough and detailed description with particular attention to the contexts within which the coaching project was implemented (Yin, 2003). Developing this type of thick, rich description was undertaken to aid readers in determining whether or not the findings reported could be transferrable to their own experiences or contexts (Merriam, 2009).

A seventh strategy employed for building the reader’s confidence involved keeping careful track of decisions made and procedures employed throughout the investigation (Yin, 2003). Merriam (2009) referred to the process as an audit trail. I did so by recording decisions made and procedures employed in my field journal. The field journal entries served as a logical audit trail. I included this information throughout the case study report in order to communicate my decisions and reasoning to the reader.

As a final confidence-building strategy, particular effort was expended to uncover specific examples or situations that did not support the emerging themes (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009). I attempted to identify possible reasons underlying the divergent perceptions and experiences. In addition, I included the negative case examples within the narrative portion of the dissertation report.
Summary

Once all phases of the data collection, analysis, and member-checking procedures were completed, I composed the written narrative contained in Chapter IV. This narrative describes the lived experiences of and the meanings constructed by participants in the Perry Coaching Project from their point of view. As a result of reflecting on and constructing the narrative I was able to answer the primary and secondary research questions. Finally, conclusions were drawn from the data analysis and were subsequently summarized within Chapter V of this dissertation.
CHAPTER IV

Results

As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this phenomenological case study was to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of instructional coaches employed in the Perry Coaching Project in an effort to give them a voice within the professional dialogue. This chapter narrates their shared story and is organized around a chronology of the project, answering the research questions throughout the chronology, and relaying emergent themes related to each research question. The following five sections provide internal structure to the content: (a) origins of the Perry Coaching Project, (b) meanings constructed by coaches, (c) defining coaching success, (d) the importance of context, and (e) coaches’ recommendations for future success. Researcher interpretation of the case study findings, as well as the relationships of the findings to the current research and literature relevant to instructional coaching appears in Chapter V. All of the study participants are identified by self-selected pseudonyms. Other individuals referred to within this narrative are identified by pseudonyms as well.

Origins of the Perry Coaching Project

Hiring a Leader

Dean Adams (a pseudonym), former Director of the Perry Coaching Project was recruited for this position by one of his graduate school professors in September of 2007. He had been employed as a teacher for more than 30 years within a suburban district bordering the Perry City School District and the school year was already under way. Former coaches described Adams using the following adjectives offered in reverential
tones such as “much-beloved,” “lovely,” “kind and empathetic,” “full of humor,” “protective,” and “the heart of the coaching project.” His story of recruitment and facilitation of the grant during the initial months sheds light on the context within which the project originated and developed.

As he was leaving class in late August Adams was approached by his professor about a possible administrative position. The professor, who was also the superintendent of the Regional Service Center (RSC), explained that he had recently agreed to administer a large school improvement grant awarded to the Perry City Schools. The intent of the project was to provide site-based support for improved academic performance using a teacher-mentoring-teacher approach. Adams explained that he had little familiarity with this type of program but he thought it sounded interesting. His professor assured him that this was a relatively new concept for everyone involved and said that since Adams knew everyone in the central region of the state he was the perfect person to fill the grant facilitator role.

A few weeks into September the professor phoned Adams to let him know that he had spoken to the district superintendent and there would not be a problem getting released from his current contract. Adams expressed his irritation that this was done without consulting him and that he didn’t know enough about the position to make such an important decision. The RSC superintendent asked him to come to the RSC the following day, a Friday, so that his every question could be answered. Adams explained that it seemed to him that every question he asked was answered with “we’ll take care of that,” or “we’ll figure it out as we go.” Adams felt that this was the first indication that the grant project had come about so quickly that many details had yet to be solidified.
Later he frequently referred to this issue saying, “We are building the airplane while flying it.”

**Chronology of Funding**

Federal grant money was allocated in 2007 for projects targeting the wide achievement gap between the academic achievement of students from large urban school districts compared to those from suburban and rural districts across the entire country. Requests for proposals and grant application materials were posted on the State Department of Education website in July of that year. Districts were notified of grant awards in early September with funds available for reimbursement in early October.

Adams explained that one of the assistant superintendents from the Perry City School District became aware of the request for proposals and decided to pursue the grant. He was well acquainted with two professors from a large university located within the school district. He asked them to partner with the district in preparing the grant application as well as in managing all aspects of the project if it was funded. A strong relationship already existed between the Perry City Schools and a nationally recognized insurance company located within the city. A cadre of full time insurance company employees was already assigned to support the district’s school improvement efforts focusing mainly on data. Several of them joined in the project development efforts. The application was submitted in August and approved in early September. The money allocated to the 55 Perry City Schools for the 2007-2008 school year needed to be used before June of 2008. Although the university initially agreed to administer both the grant and the project prior to grant approval they discovered that it would take several months for them to get through the steps necessary for hiring a grant facilitator and coaching
coordinator. Rather than delay project implementation the assistant superintendent asked the Regional Service Center to administer the grant, acquire and train the coaches, and provide overall supervision for the project. The superintendent of the RSC agreed to this partnership knowing that they would have to shoulder the heavy upfront costs associated with hiring, training, supplying the program, and paying salaries until they could begin billing the grant for the services provided. Adams felt that time constraints encountered both prior to the grant award and between the award date and school site implementation negatively impacted many aspects of his work during those first weeks and months.

**Urgency v. Clarity**

It swiftly became apparent to Dean Adams that the tasks set before him were daunting in scope and the partners involved did not have a clear plan in place to guide him. During the first days he participated in multiple meetings with the project partners as well as having daily contact with the RSC superintendent. Conflicting viewpoints were voiced by the various project partners regarding how quickly the coaches should be sent into the school sites. Regardless of the mixed messages received from the other project partners, Adams was given a crystal clear directive from the RSC superintendent. He was told to hire 55 teachers in the shortest time possible so that they could be trained and sent into school sites before the end of November. When asked about the likelihood of locating 55 teachers not currently under contract at this point in the school year, the superintendent seemed puzzled that this might be a problem. Adams suggested that perhaps a smaller number of coaches could be hired if some of them were willing to take on two schools instead of only one. He also suggested that a large applicant pool might be identified if they targeted retired teachers, particularly those who had taught in the
Perry City Schools. Adams stated that he believed coaches would be more easily accepted by teachers if they had many years of teaching experience on which to base their advice. The RSC superintendent agreed with his logic. He encouraged Adams to start using his considerable connections to reach out to as many retired teachers as possible. Adams shared his early perceptions regarding assumptions the project developers and partners made prior to program implementation. These included the following impressions:

The grant was all about you've got to get them out there and get going so we can bill. And again there was an assumption here that the Perry teachers in every building and administrators are just waiting with open arms for these know-it-alls to come in and save them…. the researchers started training coaches and did to my way of thinking all the right things. They stressed to the coaches that you've got to go in and treat every teacher as an individual. Every building is its own entity with its own problems… And yet the demise of the grant was because within the grant there was no individualization. Every coach, according to the RSC, was to do the same things in the same way at the same time, and if not then fire them.

**Hiring Coaches**

Dean Adams worked doggedly making contact with his significant network of colleagues and friends. Adams knew what really mattered to retired teachers, thus he appealed to their natural and continuing desire to make a difference in the lives of children and the teachers striving to teach them.
By the second week in October Adams had interviewed and hired 12 retired teachers. He was very pleased with the quality of the coach candidates. He felt that in addition to their extensive classroom teaching experiences, the newly hired coaches possessed one quality Adams considered even more critical to their success. He believed that a coach, first and foremost, had to be a people person. Looking back, he still feels a sense of pride that throughout the years he provided leadership to the project he got that right.

A short time later a coaching coordinator had also been hired by the RSC. Irene Thomas relocated swiftly from a large urban center several states to the east where she had been employed as a curriculum supervisor. Similar to Adams, Thomas was also new to the world of coaching. The stage was set for the coaches’ journey with the Perry Coaching Project to commence. Their story, from their perspective is narrated throughout the rest of this chapter.

Meanings Constructed by Coaches

Narrative Response Research Question 1

Research question 1. *What are the meanings constructed by educators through their experiences as instructional coaches?* Twenty-seven former instructional coaches with the Perry Coaching Project offered their impressions, insights, emotions, and personal stories about their practice through a combination of focus groups discussions and individual interviews conducted in August of 2011. Every session began with hugs and affectionate greetings that segued into lively social chatter. It was often difficult to get the group settled and focused on the topic of discussion but eventually their desire to be helpful and compliant outweighed their need to connect with one another.
Participants were asked to give an account of their coaching experiences in a generally chronological manner; however, they were not discouraged if the conversation veered off track. Frequently when the conversations ventured off course it led to even richer discussions. It was fascinating to observe the social dynamics displayed, as well as the obvious passion participants held for the phenomenon of coaching. Sometimes their voices became loud and excited. At other times they would actually whisper. This was particularly true when they described engagement in what they termed “clandestine coaching activities”, those times when they ignored the rules. Great trust in and affection for each other was evidenced through bouts of gentle teasing. Other examples included rejoinders such as, “be nice or I’ll tell everyone I know your pseudonym,” and “I know you aren’t always a rule-follower. You have a little rebellious streak.” When the room became filled with raucous laughter, with many participants talking over each other it was common to hear, “And this is why they never let us talk together in PD sessions.” They rushed to console each other when one of them told of a particular disappointment and frequently shared their own. They were quick to confirm mutual experiences or feelings. Interactions seemed relaxed and comfortable, those of not simply former colleagues but friends. It was quite apparent that they had shared something powerful together and they enjoyed reliving it through their collaborative reflections.

First Impressions

Orientation to the project. A cadre of twelve coaches, fondly referred to as the “dirty dozen,” were the first to be recruited, hired, trained, and sent into schools. A second wave of 15 to 20 (participants could never agree on a more exact number) followed less than two months later. Networking was described by the majority of
participants as the method by which they became aware of the positions available regardless of the year they entered the program. They were attracted by the flexible schedule, part-time hours, and a belief that coaching would be immensely helpful to classroom teachers struggling to teach in failing schools. Coaches’ first impressions of the Perry Coaching Project were quite varied. A number of them felt they had only a vague understanding of “what this thing was” and expressed this in the following descriptions. Many of the coaches described experiencing their interviews similarly to Angel, a classroom teacher for 20 years. She stated,

The interview was pretty general. It was very scary coming into this position because there was no real job description…. I don’t even know if they knew what they wanted. I think they had a vision, but since it was such a fairly new type of program, I don’t know.

Coaches that entered in subsequent years described a more formal interview process and expressed less confusion regarding the parameters of the project. The participants also offered a couple of impressions regarding the interview process regardless of the year they were hired. Participant coaches frequently explained that people skills and relationship building were stressed by the interviewers as critical skills needed to be successful coaches. Additionally, the former coaches reported that the interviewers also emphasized the role of a coach as non-evaluative and strictly supportive in nature.

A theme that emerged as the focus groups and interviews proceeded was that not only did the interview process evolve, but many aspects of the projects’ components and
procedures continued to change over time, often moving from feeling less restrictive, to more structured and eventually perceived as rigid.

**Initial training.** First and second wave coaches’ impressions of the initial training were generally positive. Coaches entering in the beginning of years two and three generally felt that the training was helpful in preparing them to enter schools. However, coaches who received their training at other points in the school year were more likely to express less positive feelings about the experience. Many coaches described their feelings regarding initial training as mixed. Marty, a four-year participant in the Perry Coaching Project, received his training in the third wave during year one. He expressed his perceptions saying, “There were some good things about it and some disappointing things about it…. It was overwhelming and left me with a lot of questions.” A few coaches who entered later in the project described much more negative impressions. This was particularly true for those who had some previous experience with either coaching or in designing professional development.

A number of coaches mentioned that they left the initial training feeling well-prepared to enter their school sites; however, when they reflected on it later they felt that many things were not covered that would have been more helpful than what was provided. One coach said, “We didn’t know what we didn’t know.” Other coaches left the training feeling they weren’t well prepared. For example, Zoe remarked,

I do remember too that I didn’t feel really, really as securely prepared when we were told to call your principal and make an appointment to introduce yourself and discuss beginning your work in the building. It was like they were saying you’re trained now, go with God. You’re on your own.
Much laughter and agreement circulated amongst the group following Zoe’s statement. It seemed that the prior knowledge and experiences of the coaches likely impacted their individual response to, or impressions of their training. Coaches who had previous training and experience within other coaching programs frequently viewed the initial training as “un-helpful,” or “insufficient,” or “lacking practical applications.” This same group of participants also made more frequent negative comments about the lack of clarity in the coaching model and procedures compared with those the experienced within their previous experiences. Coaches who had extensive experience designing and delivering professional development opportunities frequently made negative comments regarding the lecture-based format of the training sessions. Participants who were former employees of the Perry City School District were familiar with the plethora of acronyms specific to the district. In contrast, coaches who did not have previous experience in the district frequently expressed feeling overwhelmed with the volume of new terms. One coach compared it to learning a whole new language.

**Project Coaching Model**

The project’s coaching model was described within the initial training documents as a hybrid based on instructional coaching and cognitive coaching. These materials also included descriptors such as a data-informed and an evidence-based coaching model. Coaches were referred to as School Improvement Coaches throughout the training materials. The title of the project was identified as All School Improvement Process Coaching for Perry City Schools (ASIP-CPCS). The coaches’ role was broadly depicted as working in collaboration with the building’s Professional Leadership Team (PLT) to assist in the implementation of the All School Improvement Process (ASIP), along with
the periodic recommendations of the Curriculum Review Teams (CRTs) from the district level, in an effort to move schools currently in Academic Emergency status up to Continuous Improvement status based on state achievement test results. During training coaches were presented with six specific responsibilities related to their role. These included the following:

- Develop a supportive relationship with school personnel.
- Fully understand the data profile and planning characteristics of assigned schools.
- Assist school personnel (principals and teachers) in understanding school data at multiple levels (school and classroom) and establishing specific targets for improvement.
- Assist school personnel in selecting and implementing evidence-based approaches to addressing target areas and sub-populations of students.
- Provide counsel, resources, and feedback to school personnel as they exercise instructional leadership.
- Communicate the specific needs of school personnel to project staff so that resources can be mined and developed to meet priority needs.

Coaches indicated that during their initial training they were exposed to an overview of Costa and Garmston’s (1993) cognitive coaching as well as Neufield and Roper’s (2003) instructional coaching approaches but did not receive formal training in using either model. Coach participants explained that opportunities to participate in formal cognitive coaching training were communicated during early professional development sessions but that they did not materialize as expected.
Building the Airplane

**Perceptions of the initial coaching model.** One statement, “building the airplane after takeoff” was offered or referred to within nearly every focus group discussion and individual interview conducted. Coaches explained that this phrase was repeated frequently by project leaders when describing the coaching model implemented in the Perry Coaching Project. Although the majority of study participants described this build-as-we-go approach with understanding and a sense of humor, they also readily admitted that the lack of clarity caused significant frustration about their role and expectations for their daily practice. Tucker shared a more negative view of the building-while-flying approach. Her perceptions were consistent with those of several other coaches. She stated,

> If I hear one more time, “we’re building it as we’re flying it.” I just wanted to say, then get the hell off the airplane if that’s all you can talk about! (laughing) Really, to start it off and honestly be proud of this project we’re building as we’re going? I don’t think that is professional.

Other study participants that had prior coaching experience upon entering the project also indicated that the model used here was not what they expected based on those previous experiences. Across participating coaches wide-ranging perceptions of the initial coaching model were reported, however one commonality was depicted. The coaching model was never delineated as a model other than through published roles, a dos-and-don’ts checklist and various policies that changed throughout the implementation period.
Perceptions of the project implementation process. Coaches’ perceptions of the way in which the Perry Coaching Project was initially introduced and implemented were overwhelmingly negative. They offered descriptive phrases such as, “a completely top-down approach,” “forced participation,” “thrown onto the principal’s lap,” “blindsided with the program,” and “a total lack of awareness of coaching initiation at the building level” when asked for their impressions. Study participants reported that the Perry City Schools did not do an adequate job of introducing the building principals to the coaching project, communicating how their buildings were selected, what a coach’s role in the building should be, what typical coaching activities might be expected, or how the project might compliment their school improvement efforts. Some building principals told their coaches that the only notice they received about the project was in an e-mail communication with an attached document that they never managed to open. Coaches explained that as a result of this communication breakdown principals were unprepared to receive them in their buildings and had not prepared school staff for their arrival either.

Many coaches shared their feelings of discomfort when tasked with the responsibility of introducing themselves and the project to their principals without the presence of a PCS administrator or a coaching project leader. Quite a few of them mentioned that they felt under-prepared to provide the necessary overview of the coaching project, its goals, or even give a clear explanation of what they would be doing during their 17 hours in the building each week. Study participants seemed to agree that the project implementation process had a negative impact on their ability to initially establish coaching relationships within their school sites. Some indicated that they felt
they were never able to overcome its impact and as a result felt ineffective in their coaching practice.

**Perceptions of project leadership.** The coaches’ perceptions regarding project leadership were certainly not uniform but there appeared to be three basic themes that emerged across participants’ narrations. One theme was that the primary project leaders possessed very different leadership styles that impacted how coaches perceived and interacted with them. A second was that there were trust issues related to a lack of transparency and consistency of communication from the leaders about decision-making. A third was that many coaches felt that their knowledge, expertise, and professional judgment frequently went unrecognized and that their input was not valued, due to a focus on one leader’s agenda and need for control.

A majority of coach participants indicated that they felt supported by project leaders, just in different ways due to opposing leadership styles. Buckeye Bet offered her reflections on this topic in the following manner.

Well we had two different philosophies coming from our leaders in the beginning…. And I have to admit, I identified with both of them…. As far as support, you got support from both people but in a different manner. So, depending on what my problem was it depended on which one I called (laughing).

Buckeye Bet’s recognition of the dichotomy of leadership styles was echoed in many of the discussions focused on coaches’ perceptions of project leaders. There were also humorous accounts accompanied by much laughter and many admissions about coaches’ attempts to gain the answers they wanted by asking them to the “right leader.”
A preponderance of coaches’ recollections portrayed a lack of transparency and inconsistency in communication from one specific project leader to coaches. Several study participants went so far as to question the veracity of some information received. For example, coaches were told near the end of year one that they were prohibited from using any of the tools they had developed during actual classroom observations because the union had complained and wouldn’t allow them to use any type of instrument or checklist or even take notes. Eventually the veracity of this note-taking directive was called into question by a number of coaches after direct communications with union leaders. Some coaches suggested that this issue of trust emerged once Dean Adams, the project director was “pushed out” of the program. During their accounts of these issues participants evidenced strong emotions including what seemed to be a mix of sadness, disappointment, and anger.

An additional theme related to coaches’ perceptions of leadership was based on their feelings that they were not respected as highly-experienced professionals who were capable of employing professional judgment about the needs of their buildings. Added to this was a sense that their opinions and input about common concerns as well as ideas about how to address them were disregarded. When coaches described the monthly professional development sessions the majority expressed that they desired some consistent collaborative time to share with each other about their experiences, frustrations, and strategies. They represented the Coach Coordinator, Irene Thomas, as being unwilling to grant them the time requested.

However, it should be noted that not all the coaches who participated in the study had negative perceptions regarding Ms. Thomas. Even those who expressed some
negative aspects were careful to couch them within phrases such as “to be fair to her” or “she may have received directives about that from the higher ups.” They sometimes provided rationale for the weaknesses they identified citing that coaching was new to everyone back then, and that Thomas had many reporting responsibilities related to grant documentation that probably limited what she could do. A number of positive experiences and perceptions were shared by coaches in support of the coach coordinator. In addition to these more positive perceptions regarding the Coach Coordinator, a number of coaches extended the idea that Ms. Thomas was not directly responsible for many of her actions with which they took issue. They suggested that the RSC executive leadership directed her to do their “dirty work” related to personnel issues.

Perceptions of project partnerships. Coach participants also revealed a variety of opinions and understandings regarding the partnerships operating within the Perry Coaching Project. They were readily able to identify the partners including the Perry School District, the big university in town, the nationally known corporate sponsor, and the Regional Service Center. However, a significant number of comments indicated confusion regarding each partner’s role. Quite a few former coaches commented on what they saw as a lack of collaboration between the partners in relationship to the content of training, the actual roles coaches were to serve in buildings, and how coaches were to go about impacting student performance. Several coaches questioned the motivation of the partners in being involved with the grant project. Some indicated that they thought the RSC became involved because the superintendent saw it as an opportunity to turn a profit. Others seemed to share the belief that the assistant superintendent from the school district found the grant announcement and request for proposals and jumped on the
opportunity without clearly thinking through what needed to happen to make it a successful venture.

A number of coaches depicted the university researchers’ involvement as self-serving and believed that they were really more interested in collecting data relevant to their own research interests. Very few coaches seemed to have an understanding of how the nationally recognized company fit into the grant mix at all. They were sometimes referred to as “those big wig data people from a certain corporation.” One coach questioned whether those data people were paid from grant funds. Another expressed confusion about the need for five data coaches hired by the grant if the corporation was dedicating several of their full time employees to provide those services to the partner school district. Specific criticisms of the grant partners were offered regarding the effectiveness or usefulness of the on-going professional development provided by the university researchers. Another criticism made by a few coaches was that it was very unclear which partner or partners were actually in charge of the project.

A final concern about the nature of the grant partnerships mentioned by a number of coaches across different focus groups related to the apparent personal relationships held by several of the key players. These relationships were pointed out as evidence of an “old boys network” in action. It was explained that the PSD assistant superintendent was a long-time friend of one of the university researchers. The RSC superintendent was identified as having a close connection with the same university researcher. The other university researcher’s son was hired to develop and administrate the data collection software program utilized in the coaching project but licensed to the researchers’ private research firm. The second administrator of the project was identified as another close
friend of the RSC superintendent who was suddenly out of a different grant-funded job. The owner of the consulting firm hired to conduct at least two of the annual grant project evaluations was thought to be a longtime friend of the PCS assistant superintendent. A few coaches talked about feeling somewhat uncomfortable with this web of relationships and that they had questions about the ethical considerations underlying the partnerships formed or the actual motivations for the various partners’ involvement in the project.

**Initial Experiences**

**School site entry.** First wave coaches were sent into their school sites in mid-November. Second and third wave coaches entered in January and March respectively. Regardless of which wave they were in, the majority of them described troubling beginnings. The following conversation between several year-one coaches reflects some of the smoother school site initiations:

- Zoe: I remember when I walked into my first school assignment, and I did have an appointment with the principal, I said to the secretary, "I'm your new coach" and she said, "What do you coach?"

- Annie: Yeah, yeah, we got that a lot. (louder laughter all around)

- Jewel: Yeah, our name badges said coaching on it and the students always had to say "you coach?"

- Zoe: And what did you answer?

- Jewel: Sumo wrestling.... how did you?

Like Zoe, many of the other coaches were initially greeted with confusion and chaos. Others had more harrowing experiences. A few of them were told that they were not needed and to please go away. Nina, a retired teacher with more than 40 years of
classroom experience relayed the following story of how she was greeted at her first school site.

I was sent to a school and I introduced myself to the principal and she said, "Well we don't need a coach." And I said, "Oh, I'm sure you probably don't but I've been assigned to your school." And she said, "I hired a coach with my own money and we like her fine…there are other schools that would really like to have coaches" (loud laughter all around).

Nina’s story may seem extreme, but there were other introductions that were similarly uncomfortable for the coaches involved. However, not every coach had a rocky start in that first year. Coaches that entered their school sites mid-year seemed more likely to undergo frustrating experiences rather than harrowing ones.

The coach participants were careful to express their understanding that in many cases their principals felt blindsided by their arrival. They focused the blame for much of the confusion squarely upon the school district administration’s shoulders due to the manner in which the coaching program was implemented. Additionally, coaches expressed their disappointment at not being informed about the district’s recent attempt to implement an internal coaching program that had failed miserably. A lack of transparency and at times straight-forwardness in communications between the project leadership and the coaches began to emerge as a lingering frustration.

**Initial coaching activities.** Former coaches participating in this study explained that the majority of activities they undertook during their first year in a new school were aimed at building rapport, trust, and relationships with teachers, administrators, support staff, students, and in a few cases parents. Coach participants offered a multitude of
strategies they employed in this process. The following list is a sampling of their relationship-building efforts.

- Building understanding at the school site regarding their role as a coach through large group, small group, or individual presentations
- Describing the non-evaluative nature of a coaching relationship during faculty meetings, grade level meetings, and within individual conversations
- Delineating types of services and assistance the coach could provide in presentations, group discussions, or in writing
- Offering to gather student performance data and to provide interpretive support if desired
- Attempting to develop coaching relationships with only one or two teachers in the hopes that word would spread that you are helpful and trustworthy
- Participating in school-wide activities or events to build a sense of camaraderie with colleagues and students, including parent nights, open house, school clean up day, concerts, athletic, and other extracurricular events
- Pitching in to help in an emergency by covering a class briefly so that a teacher could use the restroom or speak to a parent, filling in on lunch duty, or meeting other spur of the moment needs
- Writing memos to teachers explaining what to expect from the classroom observation process
• Complimenting people as a way to begin conversations and identify commonalities on which to build further conversations or interactions

• Bringing in food or treats to a meeting or simply to share in the lounge

• Conducting casual or brief observations with the intent of identifying possible resource needs across classrooms and to get familiar with the curriculum at each grade level providing an explanation of this intent in advance

• Attending All School Improvement Plan (ASIP) team meetings, grade level meetings, School Leadership Team (SLT) meetings, and Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) cluster meetings to gain understanding of their operation and focus

• Interacting with a teacher by asking questions about an interesting activity going on in his or her classroom or an effective strategy you observed while visiting with the intent of demonstrating authentic interest in his or her daily practice

• Delivering teachers’ quarterly and annual performance data reports in a personal way and encouraging them to share how they feel about the pressures of teaching in a school in academic emergency status in the hopes of communicating genuine understanding and possibly building upon that conversation at a later time

• Arranging an optional professional development opportunity that offered instruction in how to use SmartBoards and SmartResponse provided by
company representatives, then offering support to teachers in planning lessons for use as well as technical support setting up the devices

- Arranging optional professional development sessions on instructional strategies of interest and then offering to model their use in participating teachers’ classrooms

- Assisting in the implementation of a new reading series regarding which the teachers received no training or guidance, including exploring the supporting materials kits and organizing related centers for immediate use

Coaches put forward strong statements regarding the criticality of forming relationships and building trust within their school sites. Annie stated, “Building the relationships was the number one priority. If that doesn’t happen then the rest of it isn’t going to happen.” Annie’s belief about the importance of relationship building was echoed across all the study participants. There was also much discussion regarding the myriad of barriers they faced in attempting to do so. A considerable number of frustrations reported seemed clearly related to the methods utilized to implement the coaching project. Principals were informed about the project through an email communication received during the first weeks of school. Coaches did not enter the buildings until early November fully two months later. Many relayed to their coaches that they hadn’t even read the email yet. No follow-up emails about the implementation date were received at the school sites. Participation in the project was mandatory for schools in academic emergency status, thus principals did not have any choice but to participate. There was no training or overview provided to principals or teachers by either the school district or coaching project leadership. Jewel illustrated her position on the importance of
developing principals’ knowledge and understanding related to a coaching project well in advance of implementation even if they aren’t receiving a coach. She remarked,

I think that understanding of the building administrator is key. Case in point, my friend taught in a building where they were not assigned a coach and the principal said to them, “We’ve got to do well this year because we don’t want to be assigned a coach”, and I’m thinking she doesn’t understand the role of a coach. She felt like it was punishment.

This apparently haphazard approach to rolling out the project was not the only barrier recounted by study participants but they considered it to be one that could have easily been avoided.

Fighting negative perceptions stemming from teachers’ previous experiences with the district’s failed coaching project was another uphill battle faced when trying to forge trusting relationships. Babs described her first meeting with school staff that took place at a school-wide leadership summit,

I will never forget sitting at one of the summits, …and about three hours into it one of them looked at me and said, “You know we’ve had a coach before.” And I said, “You have?” And he goes, “All she ever did was sit in the library and drink pop and eat pizza.” And I remember looking at him and I said, “Well if it makes you feel better I really don’t like pizza and I usually don’t eat lunch” … All the while I’m thinking they’ve already had a coach before and it was somebody that sat and ate pizza and that’s what the staff thinks of coaching.

Nina, another coach taking part in this focus group session responded to Babs saying, “Well you had no place to go but up from there!” Denzel followed up saying, “So we
were working against a history of a bad name and a bad rap in a lot of cases.” He went on to explain that the teacher’s association had some initial reservations about this project based on all the things that had happened with the in-house coaching program. He also relayed that there were disgruntled feelings because some association members felt as if the outside coaches were taking away positions from teachers in the district. Denzel happened to be close friends with the local association president. A number of coaches expressed concern that they had not been made aware of the previous coaching project or the circumstances leading to its failure. They wondered why such an important contextual element had not been presented during initial training, along with some strategies for effectively responding to this problem.

Ms. Social told a story about the resistance she faced initially when moving from being a frequent substitute teacher in the building into the coaching role. Even though the teachers knew her well and wanted her there, their feelings soon changed when they discovered she would be observing in classrooms. She recalled,

They felt like I was a threat, like I was going to be telling the principal…. I even overheard one of them … she called the PEA in front of me. She was talking about now we have this teacher and she’s coming in our room and I want to know if this is legal. I mean she did it on purpose so I could hear her.

Rough starts when attempting to build relationships and garner trust seemed more common than not. Having knowledge of the way teachers think and respond to change, coaches recalled being prepared for the challenge and understood that it would take time to accomplish. However they reported being unprepared for the ramifications of a weak
implementation process, as well as the bad reputation and distrust in the wake of the district’s former attempt at coaching.

Participants told stories about eventually being accepted as worthy of trust and as a valuable asset, but this was tempered with feelings of disappointment that it took so long to establish. For the majority it seemed to take well into that second year in a building before they were able to get down to the real core of their work. Another frequently mentioned frustration was that just about the time when they began making real progress in forging coaching relationships, many of them were moved to different school sites where they had to begin the process all over again.

**Strengths identified.** Participant coaches identified a variety of strengths that their school sites possessed, mainly falling into just two categories. Strengths related to leadership and those presented as teacher attributes. Leadership strengths mentioned were mainly characterized by one positive component or leader attribute followed by a reason why those strengths were not effective in bringing about change in instruction or student learning outcomes. A number of coaches depicted principals who had a clear vision of where they wanted to move the school, but no solid plan for how to get there. Others described school leaders who were very data savvy, but overwhelmed teachers with stacks of data reports and no support for teachers or grade levels in how to move from reviewing them to utilizing them to plan for instruction, the remediation of instruction, or to identify when adjustments were necessary. Some principals were perceived as well organized and knowledgeable about their school performance data. They may have been aware of instructional weaknesses and knew what needed to happen for results to
improve, but their ability to communicate clear expectations to staff and then to consistently monitor the level at which those expectations were being met fell short.

A majority of school site strengths put forward by study participants were related to positive teacher attributes. Common among these were high levels of commitment and dedication to teaching, genuinely caring about students, and a desire to do their jobs well. Some coaches worked with teachers that were very willing to talk about student performance issues and were willing to at least listen to possible new strategies presented by the coach. Few of the strengths identified appeared to be closely related to instructional components. Marty described teacher strengths observed in his elementary school within the context of their inability to fully benefit from them. He stated,

Yes, the staff members were definitely dedicated professional teachers. They were hard-workers. They were willing to talk about issues but again the follow through was lacking. So, whatever strengths they had they didn’t give the time to make a plan to follow-up on those strengths.

Angelina passed along similar perceptions related to teachers’ strengths at the elementary building in which she coached. She remarked,

Well, they were organized…and they showed evidence of planning… they even stayed there at night, sometimes late, which wasn’t safe. These two were very dedicated to what they were doing…. What they were doing was getting dittos ready to pass out. It was just not time well spent.

When the coaches were thinking of and identifying strengths they observed within their school sites they seemed to feel almost apologetic that they were unable to unearth more examples. Their obvious discomfort often lead to attempts to account for meager
observable strengths in their buildings. Others responded to their discomfort by offering humor. For example, Nina said, “Well how many strengths could I possibly see? I mean this school’s been in academic emergency since Jesus was a baby!”

**Challenges identified.** The former coaches involved in this study did not have any difficulty identifying the numerous challenges they faced upon entering their school sites. Before coaches walked in the door they were tasked with the daunting challenge of improving student outcomes at schools that had been in academic emergency status for a number of years. Much of their time during those first few weeks in the building involved not only building relationships and trust with the staff, but also gathering information through casual interactions and observations about the more specific challenges they were facing. These challenges can be organized into eight categories including:

- Instructional planning
- Instructional design
- Instructional strategies
- Teachers’ behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions
- Teachers’ collaboration
- Teachers’ knowledge base
- Leadership skills and supports
- Contextual realities

Due to the vast number of challenges portrayed by coaches within each, I have organized them by category and present them in Tables 11-18. Each table is followed by a brief discussion along with specific examples described by participant coaches. It is important for the reader to know that the challenges listed were not reported as present by all
coaches in all school sites. However, many of them appeared to be observable across a majority of schools.

The instructional planning, instructional design, and instructional strategies categories encompassed nearly half of the specific challenges coaches revealed about their school sites. A paucity of meaningful lesson planning was the most consistently identified challenge across all participant coaches. Table 7 summarizes a variety of planning related weaknesses discovered by coaches within the first several months in their schools.

A common thread across coaches’ accounts was the limited use of formative assessment techniques. Because they weren’t gathering this type of critical information, teachers weren’t able to determine the need for instructional adjustments, remediation, or intervention. When formative assessment data were available they were not utilized in planning instruction. The use of summative data was also described as limited. Summative performance data were often reviewed at the school, grade or department level but did not seem to have much impact on teachers’ day-to-day lesson planning. As a result, coaches observed a lack of differentiation for class-wide or individual student learning needs.

One specific challenge related to instructional planning was described or confirmed by all participant coaches regardless of grade level or content area involved. An over-reliance on lesson plans, instructional activities, and particularly on the worksheets provided within the district common curriculum guide or in the textbook series referred to in the guide appeared to be the norm.
Table 7
Initial Challenges Identified by Coaches within School Sites: Instructional Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Challenges Observed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional planning</td>
<td>Ineffective use of planning time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of planning for formative assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of planning for remediation or intervention following instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of planning to spiral-in concepts or skills taught previously</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of reflection following a lesson to determine need for immediate instructional adjustments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formative and summative performance data not utilized in planning instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lessons not designed to meet needs of students in their classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliance on lesson plans, activities, and worksheets provided in common curriculum guide or textbook series, particularly for pacing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of planning for differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of meaningful lesson, unit, quarterly, yearly or vertical planning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Failure to “try out” hands-on activities prior to class time leading to chaos when the process didn’t go as planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIBELS reading assessments administered but results not used to adjust instruction or to plan remediation</td>
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</table>

Coaches noted that adherence to the published pacing guides was perceived by teachers as critical in order to avoid being “dinged” by Curriculum Review Teams (CRTs) during bi-annual school site visits. Coaches relayed that this perception was based on fact and resulted in significant frustration for teachers who knew their students did not have pre-requisite skills to handle the new skills being taught, nor the ability to absorb new concepts and gain new skills at the rate determined by the pacing guide. It seemed that
teachers were almost discouraged to differentiate content, instructional delivery, or timing. The curriculum and pacing guide did not suggest points at which to gather formative data to determine the need for remediation or re-teaching, nor did it have any time built into the pacing guide in which to do any of those that might be necessary. Coaches perceived that this reality led to almost scripted instruction that limited teachers’ creativity and knowledge of student interests and needs to be considered in the planning process. In many cases coaches reported that teachers’ didn’t see any real need to plan beyond printing and copying the worksheets provided in the curriculum guide. Marty explained how this over-reliance on the activities provided within the guide and the resulting lack of concern for planning sometimes translated into instructional mishaps. Examples of such mishaps included hands-on activities that couldn’t be completed, fell apart in the middle because critical materials were missing, or relied on unclear or even erroneous instructions.

Table 8 represents a number of challenges in instructional design uncovered by coaches. Weaknesses in instructional design were also revealed across the majority of coaching sites. The efficient use of small group learning formats was not frequently observed. When coaches asked about this they found that teachers were afraid of losing behavioral control leading to chaos and noise. Some explained that they had tried cooperative learning approaches in the past and that it just didn’t work for “these students.” When teachers did work with small groups for reading instruction or when administering one-on-one Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Learning Skills (DIBELS) assessments, the remaining students were frequently assigned busy work. Coaches judged this work as not always relevant to current concepts or skills being taught. When small
groups were formed they didn’t appear to be purposeful or flexible but rather were
usually determined by table or desk arrangements. Additional instructional formats such
as inquiry or project-based learning, student-led presentation of concepts, or opportunities
for student dialogue were not observed by most coach participants.

Table 8
Initial Challenges Identified by Coaches within School Sites: Instructional Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Challenges Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional design</td>
<td>Small group learning formats not utilized consistently or effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When small group instruction occurred, remaining students left to their own devices with busy work, little guidance or monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small groups not formed purposefully or flexibly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Instructional time not used efficiently or with a sense of urgency</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of varied instructional delivery formats, almost exclusively teacher-led, little opportunity for student dialogue, active participation, or inquiry processes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instruction not designed to promote student construction of meaning or to make connections to prior learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instruction not focused on application of skills taught</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional time lost due to chaotic transitions, waiting to transition, passing out supplies, and not attempting bell-to-bell instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More concerned with student compliance than authentic student engagement in learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear of losing control or experiencing chaos and noise in the classroom with other than teacher-lead instructional formats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited attention given to time-on-task</td>
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</table>
Administrative disruptions including intercom announcements and student assemblies held during prime instructional times were also reported.

Many teachers were observed to spend significant amounts of class time handling behavioral disruptions. Another time management concern mentioned was the lack of balancing instructional focus between teaching skills versus teaching skill application. Several coaches described skill application activities as almost an afterthought tagged onto the end of a lesson, or sometimes only addressed within students’ independent work. Due partially to these design limitations, coaches perceived that instruction observed was weak in promoting students’ construction of meaning or in assisting them to connect new concepts with prior learning.

Coaches mentioned that teachers rarely offered students opportunities to talk with each other about the concepts being learned in an effort to promote authentic engagement in the process of building understanding through discussion. There appeared to be more concern with gaining student compliance rather than with actual student engagement. Limitations in the number and effectiveness of instructional strategies were also noted across coaches’ classroom observations. Table 9 summarizes coaches’ remarks related to this category. Ineffective classroom management strategies were cited as barriers to the flow of instruction. Teachers reportedly perceived that they were barely in control of their classrooms currently and as a result attempting novel instructional techniques was too stressful.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Challenges Observed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional strategies</td>
<td>Inefficient or ineffective classroom management strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indifference, particularly towards addressing disruptive behaviors at the middle school and high school levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of real-time monitoring by walking around and spot-checking for accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliance on literal questioning without sufficient wait time for students to develop an answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students unaware of progress towards learning goals and not encouraged to reflect on their learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of student-developed learning goals or tracking progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scant use of student, classroom, grade, or school-wide level data displays indicating progress towards performance goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited use of the instructional technology available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boring content knowledge activities not designed to help students construct meaning (i.e., traditional vocabulary assignments in which students copied words and definitions into their notebooks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Word walls” expected to be displayed and referred to during instruction but rarely used or consistently updated and not existent in every room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some teachers were observed responding to disruptions with yelling, while others appeared indifferent to them. Coaches described a number of situations in which teachers remained at their desks doing other work while students engaged in independent practice. They stated that the lack of real-time monitoring of student learning and providing immediate corrections of errors was shocking to them given their own teaching practices.
Student awareness of current performance levels, development of personal learning goals, and involvement in tracking their own progress was not observed by coaches in most schools; however, this was described as emerging in some buildings by the fourth year of the project. Similarly, classroom or hallway displays of performance or progress data were rarely seen.

Lack of higher level questioning was also indicated as a common instructional weakness. One coach found this particularly puzzling within a middle school setting where the use of Bloom’s Taxonomy to promote the development of higher level thinking skills was the focus of one of the school’s improvement goals. As a result of identifying this weakness, several coaches embarked on school-wide projects attempting to increase the use of higher level questioning to promote student thinking about what is being presented.

A number of coach participants described school sites that had adequate, in some cases even abundant access to instructional technology. Many coaches indicated that interactive white boards and remote input devices (clickers), LCD projectors and document cameras were available in their buildings. Several classroom sets of laptops on portable carts spread out on each floor were not uncommon. However, utilization of this technology was infrequently observed. Coaches explained that teachers hadn’t been trained, or if trained didn’t have any building-level support when they tried to use technology in their classrooms. Additionally, coaches noted that teachers didn’t like having to sign-up ahead of time for the use of equipment not stored in their classrooms. The set up of equipment, once it was retrieved, was often viewed by teachers as too time-intensive. Coaches also identified that quite a few of the more seasoned teachers
continued to feel uncomfortable with technology in general. Table 10 represents a portion of the common concerns identified by coaches in relation to teachers’ behaviors, attitudes and perceptions.

Table 10  
*Initial Challenges Identified by Coaches within School Sites: Behaviors, Attitudes, and Perceptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Challenges Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teachers’ behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions | Responding to students using sarcasm, disrespectful language, or yelling; others not responding to disruptions at all  
“Talking-the-talk” about use of data, implementing effective instructional strategies, formative assessment, but not “walking-the-walk” in the classroom  
Discontinued use of previously implemented strategies once no longer targeted by an administrator or the teacher leader who was spearheading the effort (i.e., Reading Across the Curriculum at the high school level).  
Skepticism regarding new programs perceived as “flavor of the day” not worth the effort because they would be discontinued too soon to have an impact  
Indifference towards improving instruction along with resistance to reflection on the effectiveness of current strategies  
Attitudes held about “these kids can’t” or “these kids won’t,” or “these parents don’t.” Seen as rationalizations for poor performance in a unconscious attempt to avoid reflecting on their own teaching behaviors  
Perceptions that all performance data were “bad data” so they didn’t bother to even look at it at the high school level  
Teachers previously trained to use PIMS, the district’s data management system, but not using it to access performance data at all  
Teachers in chronically failing schools not expected to get good results seemed to believe they couldn’t impact student learning outcomes, thus no reason to fully commit to improvement efforts  
Lack of professional courtesy |
Teachers’ behaviors identified as challenges to instruction included disrespectful responses to students, the use of sarcasm, disrespectful words and tones, or yelling at students when trying to quell disruptions. These behaviors were observed across all grade levels.

Coaches relayed that quite a number of teachers held attitudes and perceptions that were seen as challenges not only to instruction but also to successful coaching that might have impacted changes in instruction. One was the frequently cited attitude of skepticism toward new programs as “the flavor of the day” that would soon go out of fashion. Thus, if we just wait it will go away, so what’s the sense in putting in much effort to implement it? Coaches attributed this pervasive attitude to the district’s long history of implementing innovations thought to be a magic bullet for improving test results but then discontinuing implementation within a year or two when test results continued to decline. Coaches empathized with teachers’ attitudes but also indicated that it was a rather convenient excuse for not attempting anything new.

Teachers’ perceptions of and attitudes towards students’ motivation to learn blamed on a variety of social ills and family circumstances also permeated the discussion regarding challenges that coaches faced. Coaches expressed frustration with teachers’ responses including the phrases “these kids can’t,” “these kids won’t,” or those related to a lack of parental support. This was reported as a significant barrier to get past when trying to get individuals or groups of teachers to reflect on whether their current instructional practices were effective or not. Again, this perception was considered by a number of coaches as a rationalization for continuing to use ineffective instructional strategies that fell within teachers’ comfort zones.
Coaches expressed similar frustrations with teachers’ attitudes towards performance data. They explained that teachers would frequently point out the flaws in the way the data was collected through state testing or within-district quarterly curriculum-based assessments, then dismiss any information they might have gained from the results.

Teachers’ lack of collaboration was uniformly present within coaches’ conversations about weaknesses they immediately noticed in schools. Table 11 summarizes their recollections of collaborative challenges coaches observed. They described buildings in which teachers didn’t seem to know each other very well and more extreme cases where the norm was not to talk to each other at all. A climate of competition rather than collaboration was not uncommon. Seasoned teachers were not often observed sharing strategies with more novice teachers.

Coaches attributed the lack of collaboration to a number of factors. An expectation that teachers engage in collaborative planning or reflection did appear to be set by the leaders in most buildings. When the expectation was set, sufficient time to plan or reflect was not consistently provided. Principals were not consistently monitoring teachers’ use of collaborative opportunities provided, and frequently missed grade level or departmental meetings themselves. They also expected that these meetings were held regularly but did not monitor whether they were actually occurring.
Table 11
*Initial Challenges Identified by Coaches within School Sites: Collaboration*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Challenges Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ collaboration</td>
<td>Competitive rather than collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited relationships with other teachers with some in buildings where the norm was not to talk to each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time for collaborative planning not consistently provided; when it was teachers didn’t always participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncomfortable when asked or encouraged to collaborate, particularly if involving reflection on instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ineffective or sporadic grade level or department level meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of follow through with expectations communicated by leaders or decisions made collectively as a grade level or department team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seasoned teachers not sharing effective strategies with novice teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coaches discovered that when teachers met as a grade level or department there tended to be more griping than productive discussion. Curriculum and pacing might be a topic but instructional strategies or reflection on what’s working or not working was described as infrequent or non-existent. Once coaches began to encourage teachers to collaborate they were met with teachers’ resistance and discomfort engaging in reflection. Participant coaches also noticed that when teams made a joint decision to implement an idea or strategy, transfer of that idea to into day-to-day instruction was not always readily apparent. A number of elements related to teachers’ professional knowledge were highlighted during focus group sessions and interviews. Table 12 includes several of these elements. Former coaches indicated that once they began conducting classroom observations they discovered pockets of deficiency in content knowledge. This was more
apparent in the recollections of coaches supporting intermediate grades and middle schools in which teachers were required to departmentalize.

Teachers revealed their discomfort to coaches with instructing in specific content areas, frequently science and mathematics, which they might have been certified to teach but had not had ever had any experience doing.

Table 12  
*Initial Challenges Identified by Coaches within School Sites: Teachers’ Knowledge*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Challenges Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ knowledge base</td>
<td>Content knowledge deficiencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited knowledge of effective use of small group instruction, particularly in understanding that students must be explicitly taught how to function effectively in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited understanding of the critical nature of real-time monitoring of learning or the importance providing immediate feedback and corrections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited familiarity with technology or electronic media readily available to enhance instructional delivery and student engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coaches indicated that this situation occurred regularly due to lay-offs and mandatory transfer of teachers to other buildings. Transfers and lay-offs frequently occurred following child count week in late September.

Other knowledge base deficiencies reported by coaches were related to specific strategies like the use of small group instruction, centers, or the integration of technology or electronic media. Coaches also described conceptual weaknesses related to student engagement, learning processes needed for students to construct meaning, how to foster
critical thinking skills, the necessity of real-time monitoring, and providing immediate corrections during independent practice, or the value of formative assessment.

In the midst of describing challenges faced within their school sites, several comments frequently surfaced. “The principal is key,” “It all falls back on poor leadership,” and “Again, it’s all about leadership” were repeated throughout this discussion. Table 13 summarizes coaches’ observations related to building leadership. Specific leadership concerns relayed by coaches varied greatly across schools but at least one was confirmed as a weakness across the majority. Disciplinary management issues were perceived by coaches as overshadowing instructional leadership functions, even in schools where the principal fully understood the importance of these functions in improving student outcomes. A manifestation of insufficient principal attention to instructional leadership functions mentioned by coaches included the inability to consistently facilitate the required school improvement process leading to a coherent, measureable ASIP that held the commitment of teachers to implement it. This lack of leadership resulted in teachers’ perceptions that the ASIP was not important.

Additionally, coach participants explained that the majority of their principals had scheduled weekly grade level or department meetings. Some principals prepared agendas and intended to chair the meetings every week or every other week. A number of coaches reported that principals frequently missed the meetings and did not follow up after them. As a result, they observed that teachers did not always attend, or in many cases the meetings simply didn’t happen. Coaches also identified weaknesses in some principals’ knowledge or familiarity with curriculum content and common instructional methodologies used across the broader range of content areas. Others explained that
principals lacked effective strategies for accessing, sharing and interpreting performance data.

Table 13
*Initial Challenges Identified by Coaches within School Sites: Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Challenges Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership skills and support</td>
<td>Educational leadership functions overshadowed by disciplinary functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of support for teachers dealing with significant student management and disciplinary issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School improvement planning perceived as an “exercise in paperwork”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of buy-in to school improvement plan (ASIP) attributed to weak leadership throughout the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ineffective communication of expectations related to instruction, program implementation, school improvement strategies, use of data, planning instruction, and participation in grade level meetings, or using common planning periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited follow-through or monitoring of teachers’ progress towards meeting principals’ expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School leaders’ failure to model behaviors expected of teachers (i.e., punctual attendance at grade level meetings, or collaboration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dictatorial style of leadership employed by some principals seen as ineffective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of principal awareness of curriculum, content, and effective instructional methodologies across content areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of effective strategies for accessing, sharing and interpreting data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of trust built between leaders and staff causing serious climate and morale issues and limited their sense of community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principals often described professional learning communities that were not in actuality observable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A large proportion of the challenges discovered by coaches while getting acclimated to their buildings were in some way related to the larger school district context. These contextual factors are summarized in Table 14. They found that there were high principal and teacher turnover rates. Both groups were often re-assigned to other buildings or would leave to take positions in suburban school districts nearby. Teachers were quite regularly re-assigned in late September following the official count week determining school and overall district attendance. Newer teachers were also frequently impacted by annual lay-offs. Students’ rates of mobility were also reported as high both between and within school years.

Table 14
*Initial Challenges Identified by Coaches within School Sites: Context*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Challenges Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextual realities</td>
<td>High turn-over rates inhibiting continuity of expectations and programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High rates of student mobility frustrating for teachers when considering their accountability for results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of program implementation fidelity and continuity issues attributed to unavoidable bureaucracy within a large district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District-wide sense of urgency to improve failing schools quickly perceived as contributing to a cycle of new program implementation followed by discontinuation after only a year or two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time for instructional planning, teacher collaboration, collegial reflection, professional development described as scarce, at times attributed to school schedules, but also bargaining unit strength and strict adherence to the negotiated agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers in chronically failing schools not expected to have much success so motivating them to learn or try new instructional strategies was challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under-resourced learners present unique challenges that can’t be controlled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The unavoidable bureaucracy underlying a district of the size of Perry City Schools was acknowledged as another confounding factor. The sense of urgency held at the central office level to turn-around failing schools immediately was represented as foundational to a cycle of new program implementation followed by discontinuation after one or two years.

Coaches referred to additional contextual factors they viewed as contributing to teachers’ perceptions about their ability to positively impact student learning. These included the severe negative impact of the unique characteristics of what coaches called “under-resourced learners” that can’t be removed from the learning process. Payne (2008) described under-resourced learners as students who don’t have access to many of the resources necessary to support educational success. Payne referred to the following resources as important to student learning outcomes: (a) financial, (b) language, (c) emotional, (d) mental, (e) spiritual, (f) physical, (g) support systems, (h) relationships/models, and (i) knowledge of hidden rules. Similarly, teachers practicing in chronically failing schools where they were not expected to have much impact on student success were more difficult for coaches to motivate to learn or try out new instructional strategies.

A final contextual reality coaches presented as problematic to their work in the Perry City Schools was related to the organization of time. The manner in which teachers’ and students’ schedules were structured allowed little flexibility. Coaches explained that their efforts to offer professional development focused on specific building needs were severely restricted due to the few number of minutes teachers were in the building outside of student instructional time.
Common planning time was rarely available to permit teacher collaboration. Grade level meetings that might have been used for collaboration only offered 45 minutes or less once per week. In some buildings the schedule required substitutes simply to cover this 45-minute block of time. Teacher arrival times and departure times were less than 15 minutes prior to and following those of their students. Coaches suggested that at least a portion of the rigidity related to time available for professional development or teacher collaboration was due to the strength of the bargaining unit and the negotiated agreement.

Time for interacting with teachers that coaches deemed crucial to the success of any coaching program in encouraging teacher reflection and recognition of the need for change in their teaching practices was in extremely short supply. The restrictions of the coaching program itself added to the coaches’ frustrations related to time as well. They were limited to providing only 15 hours of service per week in each school and seven hours in one day. This meant that they were often unable to attend meetings held at the end of the school day if they had already attended one at the beginning of that day.

Even though coaches participating in the study discovered what could only be described as an overwhelming number of challenges faced when attempting to improve student achievement through instructional improvement, they didn’t report feeling overly discouraged. Many of the challenges identified were not within their ability to impact including the individual students’ contexts, school contexts or the broader school district contexts. They were also not tasked with providing specific leadership support, although some coaches did report doing so. Additionally, attempting to increase teachers’ content knowledge base in any other manner than providing resources or identifying professional
development opportunities offered both within and outside of the district was not possible given the time constraints of teachers’ schedules and hours. Coaches determined that the attitudes and perceptions about teaching and learning held by teachers within their schools could only be impacted over time through other facets of their coaching interactions as opposed to directly. However, there were abundant challenges remaining in the categories of instructional planning, design, and strategies, as well as encouraging collegial collaboration and reflection on instruction. Coaches stated that they simply used the information gathered about specific school site challenges to help identify a focus for their work and went forward from there.

An Evolving Program

Evolving scope. The Perry Coaching Project hired the first wave of coaches in October of 2007. They were trained and entered their school sites in November. Initially there were 14 school sites. A second wave of coaches was hired and trained in December and deployed in schools in January of 2008. As a result 20 more schools were provided coaching services. Approximately 10 additional coaches were hired and sent out into schools between January and May of 2008. A third wave of approximately 20 new coaches entered the project in August of that year. Some of them were replacements for a number of coaches who left to take other positions and a few who were asked to leave the project due to “poor fit.” Study participants suggested that a few coaches came from professional backgrounds outside of education and as a result did not have classroom teaching experience. They explained that these coaches had a difficult time gaining credibility with school staff and were perceived by some principals as inappropriate choices to support classroom teachers. Several of the younger coaches who were not
retired or even close to retirement age were hired by their school sites to fill teaching positions. Their departure caused a need to replace these coaches and also to hire additional ones to serve previously identified schools that still had not been assigned coaches. It wasn’t until midway through year two of the project that 53 of the 55 schools originally selected by the Perry School District were receiving coaching services. By the beginning of year three in 2009 there were approximately 60 coaches slated to serve 71 PCS schools. The week before school started coaches from 17 schools were informed that their schools had been dropped from the program because they moved out of Academic Emergency status based on their value-added scores on the state achievement tests. Study participants explained how shocking this revelation was to coaches throughout the project, not just to those who were suddenly out of a job. Over the first two years of the project several schools had been dropped from the project for the same reason but it hadn’t caused any of the coaches to lose their positions as they were transferred to other schools that still needed a coach or had lost a coach who had left the project. As year three progressed several new schools were added to the project and new coaches were hired to fill these positions.

Originally the coaching program was slated to either end or to be renewed at the end of the three-year grant-funding period. Coaches reported that they were told during the interview process that the project would run for at least three years and most likely for additional years because the grant was renewable. In actuality towards the end of each school year coaches indicated that there was always uncertainty about the program’s continuation into the next school year. They reported that they were never sure if they would continue to have work and that the project lost a number of talented coaches
because they could not wait until the end of the summer to find out if they would have employment through the grant or not. Near the middle of year three coaches were told that the grant was no longer renewable because the parameters of the grant had changed to include some type of teacher incentive component. The project no longer met the guidelines for the grant so an application for renewal would not be made. As the end of year three approached, project coaches were told that there was probably going to be a rather large pot of grant money remaining unspent at the end of the 2009-2010 school year. It was announced that the RSC was trying to garner the interest of some suburban districts in contracting with the agency for coaching services. Study participants explained that information communicated about the possibility of continued coach employment was proffered in a very tentative manner. They were told that if the school district received an extension in order to spend out the left over grant funds only 14 schools could be provided coaches given the amount of money remaining in each schools’ grant fund. The RSC was not able to garner any interest from local school districts to contract for coaching services. The Perry City Schools did get approval from the state for an extension of the timeline so that they could spend out a reported $600,000 remaining across 14 schools. Therefore the coaching project was extended for a fourth year with a drastically reduced number of coaches and schools. Due to this significant reduction the coach coordinator was assigned to another RSC project leaving her little time to provide support to the remaining coaches. Study participants who coached in year four of the project expressed feelings of empathy for the coach coordinator given the number of responsibilities she had on her plate.
Several changes coaches mentioned that occurred at different points were that the coaches hired in year one were paid at a different rate than coaches that followed in later years, regardless of similar levels of experience in education. This rate varied from $35 per hour for first year coaches down to $25 per hour for some coaches hired during years two and three. Former coaches indicated that they only knew about this disparity through private discussions and that the changes in the rate of pay nor the reasons behind the change were never communicated by project leaders.

Additionally, study participants expressed frustration that the number of hours they were allowed to work per day or per week changed significantly over time. During year one there was much pressure applied for coaches to log as many billable hours as possible because of the late start. They described extra coaching activities designed to spend the money allotted to each school. For example, the first wave of coaches were asked to review sample lesson plans posted on the State Department of Education or other educational websites for the purpose of developing a bank of resources coaches could access later in the program. These hours were charged to specific schools even though the services were not provided directly to those buildings. Another strategy for spending out each school’s funds during years one and two was to have coaches from other buildings go into schools where one coach couldn’t spend out the allotted funds because they were hired well into the school year. Then in year three the number of hours each coach could put in at their school sites was reduced from 17 hours per week to 15. The former coaches stated that this was frustrating to them because they really needed more hours than 17 per week in order to be effective. The majority seemed
to feel that the position needed to be full time if they were to impact change in teaching behaviors.

Coach participants acknowledged that the changing scope of the Perry Coaching Project from the 14 original schools to nearly 60 and from 12 coaches to approximately 60 had a negative impact in a number of ways. They explained that the sheer number of coaches participating in the monthly professional development sessions limited opportunities for meaningful collaboration and even their ability to get to know each other. Coaches expressed empathy for newer coaches entering the program because they perceived that they were entering a less collegial environment and probably didn’t have the opportunity to develop the depth of supportive relationships the earlier coaches did due to sheer size of the group. Study participants also suggested that after the director left during year two Ms. Thomas, the coach coordinator, who was not supposed to be responsible for personnel or human resources duties, was thrust into that additional role of trying to manage a significantly increased number of coaches without any supervisory assistance.

Former coaches also shared feelings of frustration about what they saw as a revolving door of administrators from the middle of year two and extending until the project’s end in year four. They explained that during the latter part of year two another administrator was brought in to provide some oversight but he only stayed a few months and his role was never made clear to the coaches. An overwhelming majority of study participants expressed disappointment and sadness over the first director’s departure. They attributed a sense of lowered morale amongst coaches to this loss. During year three a third administrator was assigned. The director position had been publically posted.
Several of the coaches who had previous administrative experience applied for the position, along with applicants from outside the program or the RSC. Interviews were scheduled but never held. Coaches recounted that a friend of the RSC superintendent whose regional supervisory position with the state Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) was eliminated was hired and assigned to the coaching project as an additional administrator but not under the title of director. None of the study participants were able to remember his name or to describe his role in supporting the project.

A final frustration related to the changing scope of the project set forth within focus group discussions and interviews was that in years one and two there were five full time data coaches that provided the instructional coaches with a great deal of support in gathering school achievement data and other resources they could use in their daily practice. They explained that they felt very supported by the data coaches and that the assistance they were offered allowed them to spend more time working directly with teachers in their buildings. At the end of year two the coaches were told that they should have developed their own skills related to data acquisition and analysis and that they had been given enough time to build teacher capacity to do so as well. The data coach positions were eliminated from the grant in year three and they were replaced with one instructional resource coach to provide technical support but not specific data retrieval services to the significantly increased number of coaches. When combined with the reduced number of hours they were allowed to work many coaches reported feeling overwhelmed with what was expected of them.

**Evolving procedures.** Changes experienced by coaches in the Perry Coaching Project were not limited to those related to the increased number of coaches and schools
combined with a decrease in supports. Former coaches also recounted a number of procedural changes implemented at various points throughout years two and three to which they had to adjust. Not all of these procedural changes were viewed in a negative light. Coaches explained that they understood that what project leaders learned from their experiences in year one led to a need to implement procedural changes in year two. However, many of the study participants shared feelings of frustration that ensued as a result of these changes. There were several categories into which these changes were organized including the following:

- Expectations for engaging in specific coaching activities and the percentage of time that coaches were to spend engaged in each
- Expectations for documenting coaching activities through ChildPoint (a fictitious name) reporting software including rules about where and when the reporting was to be completed
- Expectations for coaches’ development of annual goals and the establishment of evaluation procedures

**Evolution of clandestine coaching activities.** Coach participants admitted engaging in a wide variety of activities that were either expressly prohibited within the project coaching manual or were perhaps creeping toward the edge between acceptable and unacceptable. They also reported continuing to engage in a number of activities that were admissible during year one and in part of year two but were removed from the approved list at some point later. During the focus group sessions coaches frequently whispered their admissions of noncompliance. This was always followed by light-hearted teasing, laughing and others admitting that they did the same things. It was obvious the
former coaches felt discomfort and a little guilty that they had not followed the rules, but they generally presented seemingly valid reasons why they engaged in disapproved coaching activities. During the second round of focus group sessions, coaches began to describe these activities as “clandestine coaching activities” and suggested that I might want to change the title of the study report to reflect that idea. Others thought that a least a chapter within the study might be required to communicate a thorough picture of these covert activities and why they became necessary to the coaches’ practice.

Study participants set forth a number of their ideas regarding coaches’ engagement in disapproved activities. Lola explained that it was partially a result of having more than one boss and discomfort with feeling insubordinate if she did not do whatever was requested by her building principal. This feeling was echoed by other coaches who also added that sometimes they “just had to do what they had to do.” Denzel extended this idea saying that engaging in disapproved activities had to do with the coaches’ depth of character and commitment to helping the schools, principals, and teachers they had formed coaching relationships with.

A number of coaches explained that they made efforts to gain permission to engage in activities that were likely to be considered as existing in the grey area between acceptable and not permissible due to a particular need in their buildings. However, when attempting to get that permission from the coach coordinator their phone messages and emails went unanswered. At times they chose to consider this tacit approval of their requests and a “cover your butt” measure in the case that they were caught in the act of non-compliance.
The former coaches also described a number of techniques they employed to keep from getting caught including using the school secretary as a “look out and early warning system” when the coach coordinator signed in to the building. Other coaches altered their regular activities during the week when the coach coordinator announced that she would be visiting. A few coaches reported that they purposefully made their whereabouts in their buildings unknown while they were involved in clandestine coaching activities, thus requiring that an office helper would have to search them out before the coach coordinator could gain access to them.

Comparison of coaching expectations versus actual coaching activities. The coaches provided examples of many cases when they either engaged in disapproved activities or simply did not comply with expected ones. The most frequently identified coaching activities that varied from communicated expectations were organized across 15 categories and are described in the following paragraphs.

Required percentage of time spent in specific coaching activities. Coaches found the percentage requirements too rigid and not realistic in terms of what coaches were doing in schools day to day and how the building, teacher, and coaches’ schedules significantly limited what portion of the day coaches could interact with teachers. Some coaches didn’t engage in all the required activities, modeling lessons for example, because teachers were not interested in having them do so.

First wave coaches frequently indicated that they had already built themselves a role in the building and developed working relationships within those roles. When new parameters were set forth about acceptable and prohibited activities, they were unwilling
to discontinue activities that they perceived as meeting a specific need appropriate to coaching and feared that the relationships forged would be irreparably damaged.

**Direct contact with or supervision of students.** Coaches felt the forbiddance of direct interaction with students was in conflict with the expectation that they would provide model lessons or engage in co-teaching activities involving the use of one small group and one large group; thus they did it anyway. During year one the no-student-contact directive was not so strict. Coaches used the facilitation of small group activities to gain access to teachers’ classrooms and build trust. They found it difficult to stop when restrictions became more rigid and sometimes disregarded them so as not to damage hard won relationships. When asked to cover a classroom for a teacher that was arriving late, or to fill in for a duty in an emergency, or even to cover a classroom while a teacher used the restroom, coaches did so in order to be perceived as part of the school team.

**Coach activities during classroom observations.** Many coaches did take notes during classroom observations regardless of the directive not to do so. They explained that in these cases they always obtained the teacher’s permission. They used these notes to encourage teacher reflection during the post-conference and generally most reported that they handed over the notes to the teacher at the end of the meeting. Coaches also reported interacting with students during classroom observations as well as participating in the classroom discussion at times at the teacher’s request.

**Pre-conference, observation, and post-conference procedures.** A majority of coaches saw the benefit of the pre-conference, observation, post-conference procedures but explained that teachers rarely had that much time to spend with them. Pre-conferences tended to be more informal, occurring while passing in the hallway, during a
teacher’s duty, or at the mailboxes, and a number of coaches identified the restroom as a frequent location for short planning conversations related to observations.

Most coaches perceived the post-observation conference as critical to reflective conversations that often led to instructional areas in which to form goals for development. Again, a lack of teacher time made scheduling these and holding actual formal conferences very difficult. Coaches were not supposed to infringe on teachers’ lunch period and were cautioned not to take up an entire prep period. As a result, post-conferences were not always held or were very brief and not as effective as they could have been.

Coach collaboration during monthly professional development sessions. Frustration regarding the lack of collaborative opportunities provided during monthly coach professional development meetings, despite on-going and numerous requests to have them, led to the development of informal small groups that met outside of these meetings or after school hours. Some groups met for lunch, others for dinner. They shared strategies with each other that were working and talked about challenges. Outside of those meetings they also shared materials and ideas. However, not all coaches got a chance to participate.

Coaches also formed similar collaborative relationships with other coaches working in buildings serving the same grade levels. They arranged visits to each other’s schools and even sent teachers to visit model teachers in each other’s schools. One coach might even provide a professional development session at another coach’s school. At one point the coach coordinator docked a coach’s pay for doing this. So, in the future coaches described the need to keep these activities “on the down low.”
One coach described a clandestine mentoring relationship she formed with a coach who entered later in the program. She said that she thought this was very useful in helping the new coach get through the challenges of the first few months on the job. She also indicated that she was constantly in fear that the coach coordinator might pop in to her building while she was engaged in this clandestine activity.

**Hours spent at the school site within one day or one week.** A strong majority of coaches indicated that they frequently spent more than the limit of 7.5 hours in order to meet with individual teachers, provide volunteer professional development sessions, and to attend meetings after school when they had already one before school. Coaches did not bill the grant hours for these activities. However a couple of them mentioned leaving early or arriving late on occasion to compensate themselves for a few minutes of all the unpaid time.

Coaches also reported spending many hours in school on a voluntary basis attending extracurricular activities, choral performances, parents’ night, open house, conferences, tutoring one or two students, as well as taking part in socially oriented staff activities. One coach even participated in her school’s cleanup day.

**Daily reporting of coaching interactions in ChildPoint.** Coaches were required to complete daily ChildPoint reporting of their coaching interactions. The rule was that they needed to do them during their allotted school hours. Project leaders indicated that this should only take 10 to 15 minutes at the end of each day. Coaches reported that it regularly took an hour or more. Preferring not to take school time away from teachers, many coaches completed their reporting from home. Others began completing them only
out of compliance and made them vague in language and short in length. Still other coaches just stopped doing them altogether.

The format for ChildPoint involved a series of check offs that slotted interactions into various approved activities. Middle school and high school coaches felt that the categories offered were insufficient for their grade levels. They picked something close and tried to summarize what they actually did in the description section. Coaches also reported the needed to “be discreet” when writing the descriptive narrative so that they didn’t “tell on themselves” by recording an activity that they were not allowed to engage in.

**Involvement in ASIP and school leadership teams.** The coaches were expected to become involved and provide leadership to the school improvement team in their buildings. A few coaches became highly involved in the ASIP process over time at their schools, particularly those who continued through years three and four. However a significant number of coaches were never invited to or informed of meeting times even after asking to be notified.

Some coaches reported not participating on the School Leadership Team due to a variety of reasons including its lack of existence, infrequent meetings they weren’t invited to attend, and reluctance of the principal to have them take part. Other coaches reported that they attended meetings and provided some input but their suggestions were ignored. Some coaches were in buildings in which the principal wrote the document his or herself with little or no input from any teachers, let alone a coach.

The ASIP process was described as, “a joke,” or “an exercise in paperwork” by quite a few coaches. After initially trying to participate in the process these coaches
stopped because they didn’t want to lose valuable time. A few coaches worked in Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) schools in which the TAP master teachers were in charge of this process and did not welcome any additional input. One coach explained that the ASIP team and process was seen as divisive in her building. Those teachers appointed by the principal were “not to be trusted” according to the perceptions of the remaining teachers in the building.

Many coaches reported that the ASIP process and plan was not taken seriously in their buildings. They explained that there was very little evidence that any of the identified strategies for addressing the targeted problem of practice written in the ASIP were being implemented. When coaches asked about them teachers often said that they did not know what was actually in the plan. Fewer than half of the study coaches reported being a part of the School Leadership Team (SLT). Some who participated on the SLT recounted feeling uncomfortable doing so, or were unsure of their role as a member of this team.

**Relationships with principals.** There seemed to be some confusion regarding the expectations communicated regarding the type of relationships coaches were expected to develop with their building principals. Many of the former coaches recollected that during initial training they were told that they should avoid having much of a relationship with their building principal because teachers might think they were sharing confidential information with him or her. However, in the actual training document, collaborating with the principal was listed as one of their key roles, based on the recommendations of Neufeld and Roper (2003). Quite a few coaches found that developing a collaborative
relationship with their principal was key to forming goals for their coaching practice. So, they did.

Some coaches went so far as to provide mentoring or leadership coaching to principals who asked for and needed this type of support. This was particularly true when the coach was an experienced school administrator. Again, these activities were included within the Neufeld and Roper (2003) coaching model and within the training document.

Coaches related that their relationships with their principals developed over time once the principal gained an understanding of the coaches’ role and began perceiving their work as helpful. They also indicated that in time principals began to value coaches’ willingness to be a “sounding board” and sought out their professional opinions.

**Participation in the identified coach evaluation process.** Coaches were asked to create individual coaching goals beginning in year two. They were to be completed and handed in both electronically and on paper. Coaches found out after completing them in year two that nobody was going to follow up or give feedback on them. Thus in year three a number of coaches sent in copies of year two’s goals or didn’t bother sending them at all. One reported receiving an email complementing her on the quality of the goals that she never submitted for review.

Many coaches indicated that the coach evaluation procedures implemented at some point in year two were ridiculous, or useless. Project leaders were supposed to visit coaches at their school site and conduct an observation. The coaching coordinator communicated that she wanted to see them providing a model lesson or facilitating some sort of meeting. There were no specific appointments made with coaches and when either leader arrived to conduct their observation they had to observe whatever was happening
at the time. Coaches reported paying little attention to the school visit and put no stock in any written evaluation they were provided.

**Coaches’ participation in the annual project evaluation process.** Some coaches related that they had no memory of participating in any program evaluation activities, while others reported vague recollections about filling out a survey. Quite a number of coaches took exception to the year one evaluation in which surveys were sent out to random teachers in their school sites. Teachers frequently responded to the survey indicating that they didn’t even know whom the survey was about. Coach participants pointed to this as one indication that the grant partners and leaders did not have a clear understanding of what coaches were actually doing day-to-day in their buildings. They explained that they worked with a small number of teachers in their buildings or only one grade level at a time, thus limiting their exposure across all teachers in their buildings. Those coaches who remembered it understood that the evaluators were trying to introduce some type of randomization into the process, but they indicated perceiving that it was not in any way a valid measure of how their work was perceived by teachers.

A number of coaches reported that they didn’t bother filling out any of the evaluation questionnaires after year one because they did not receive a copy of the annual report or get any feedback from the evaluation at all. Several coaches described having been asked at some point to provide their honest feedback about the project that would be taken into consideration during the evaluation. One explained that she wrote pages and pages in the hopes that her perceptions would be useful and lead to appropriate changes that they’d been asking for all along. Several recalled providing this feedback also. The leader who collected these did not respond to coaches who offered this feedback.
Coaches reported that they did not receive any feedback regarding their recommendations and no changes based upon their input were apparent.

Supporting teachers with classroom management challenges. Participants stated that coaching teachers on classroom or behavior management strategies was not considered by project leaders to be an appropriate use of their time. Coaches said that the continued response to their questions about this was that if teachers improve their instruction then the behavioral issues would automatically disappear. Most coaches disagreed with this approach and explained that they frequently had to provide this type of assistance before they could begin to address actual instructional techniques. They expressed their perceptions that the coach coordinator had not had enough classroom experience to understand this concept.

Building teacher capacity to locate and utilize achievement data to guide instruction. This expectation proved problematic according to former coaches. It took quite a few of them many months to gain the skills necessary to locate and print out data reports themselves and longer to get support in understanding them. This was a slow process.

Some coaches indicated that their building principals were very data oriented and handed teachers multiple data reports covering school-level, grade-level, and teacher-level data. Teachers in those schools were not expected to retrieve their own reports. Thus, coaches in these buildings did not focus their coaching interactions on building teacher capacity to do so.

Coaches also reported that at some schools teachers already knew how to access their data but simply didn’t have time to do so. When they would ask coaches to run
reports for them reported that they did so and then utilized the opportunity to have a discussion about what the data meant and how it could be used for planning instruction.

A number of coaches mentioned that they spent a good deal of time teaching more seasoned teachers how to use the computer and data software as a precursor to building their capacity to do anything with it. On a similar note, a few coaches also indicated that many teachers nearing retirement were simply not interested in learning to use the computer or data.

High school coaches revealed that high school teachers frequently dismissed all performance data as “bad data.” They explained that while there were errors that made some of the data suspect, the overall trends should not have been ignored. These coaches felt they were never able to get past the negative attitude teachers held towards data.

Quite a few coaches felt strongly that they had made progress with teachers in accessing and reading performance data, but that they were disappointed not to have had any training from the project on how to move teachers forward by coaching its use for instructional planning. These coaches explained that during their teaching careers this type of data was not readily available to them, thus they never had a reason to develop data application skills themselves.

**Focus on evidence based instructional practices.** A number of coaches recalled that during initial training they were expressly told not to share instructional practices that were not evidence-based. When the professional developer from the university was asked to provide training involving the acceptable practices there was no follow-through. As a result many coaches reported sharing practices that had worked for them during their many years in the classroom. They also shared effective practices they came across
within their school sites. Many coaches reported sharing what they referred to as “best-practices” instructional strategies they culled from their own professional libraries, or some they found on the state educational website, as well as those shared informally across coaches with whom they were regularly collaborating.

Coaches described receiving a large quantity of books provided by the project leaders in an effort to provide a resource for best practices but not expressly evidence-based ones. Several coaches explained that they didn’t have time to read these books. Others indicated that they wish the strategies had been presented in some type of summary form. One coach even indicated that she thought they were superfluous and they were still in the trunk of her car where she had deposited them upon receiving them three years ago.

A large number of coaches stated that they would have liked more training on specific instructional strategies that had been proven effective so that they could expose teachers to them. When asked about the evidence-based strategy requirement set forth during coach training, the former director indicated that even the university researcher who provided that training eventually withdrew support for this initial expectation due to the limited number of actual scientifically proven strategies available. The former director stated that the professor recognized this at some point during year one and cautioned the project leaders against providing training on any strategies that had not been validated by research. Mr. Adams recalled that this put the project leaders in a difficult position because coaches were continually asking for further training in this area. As a result, they decided to provide a number of professional books for coaches to use as resources for identifying best practices.
Providing on-site professional development for school staff. The majority of coaches reported providing professional development sessions on a very limited basis due to issues with teachers’ schedules prescribed by the negotiated agreement, along with coaches’ limitations in the number of hours they could be in their building per day and week. Some coaches were unable to offer professional development sessions at all. Others offered voluntary sessions to interested teachers. A couple of coaches who were involved in facilitating grade level meetings used that weekly opportunity to provide short professional development sessions on strategies the team might commit to trying out.

The majority of coaches offered similar explanations for their decisions to either engage in disapproved coaching activities or not to engage in the expected ones. They seemed most concerned with doing what was right for their individual schools and teachers. A number of humorous accounts of their efforts to hide their clandestine activities along with what happened when one or two of them were caught were narrated during focus group sessions. Participants responded with uproarious laughter and even applause in response. They really seemed to enjoy exposing each other’s noncompliant behaviors as well.

Evolving professional development. The processes employed during coaches’ monthly professional development sessions were characterized as rigid and unchanging. What did seem to evolve over time was the coaches’ perceptions of and active engagement in them. Only one participant expressed feeling excited to attend each session because he always learned something new. Other study participants indicated that at times the content of the sessions was interesting but probably not particularly relevant
to their coaching practice. A couple of coaches reportedly spent their time during the professional development session immersed in a good book on their Kindles.

One of the most common complaints issued regarding the professional development throughout the project’s implementation period was that it was never differentiated in any way based on coaches’ background experiences or knowledge, nor the interests they communicated in learning specific skills. Quite a few coaches went further with this idea explaining that it might have been more useful if the vast knowledge and experience of the people in that group were capitalized on in terms of presenting on topics in which they possessed expertise.

Another frequent concern that appeared across many professional development discussions was focused on structure and a perceived desire of the coach coordinator to maintain tight control during the sessions. When the topic of the monthly meetings was brought up, there were similar responses across all groups and sessions. Coaches explained that they perceived the opportunity to collaborate with other coaches about experiences, strategies they were trying, what hadn’t worked and what might be something else to try, as the most valuable aspect of monthly meetings. They recounted their numerous efforts to gain formal time to engage in collaboration, not simply during coffee and donuts social time. When their requests led eventually to provision of small chunks of time coach participants explained that they were required to produce some type of artifact documenting that they had kept their conversations limited to the topic selected by the coach coordinator. As a result of coaches’ frustration with the lack of response to their requests and suggestions for professional development topics, many of them described withdrawing their attention from the presentations or activities, or not attending
at all. Others described covert collaboration throughout the sessions. Still others suggested that the only benefit they received by attending these meetings was a chance to see their friends.

**Evolving coach relationships and supports.** It was very apparent to me within the first minutes of the first focus group session how connected the coach participants were to each other. They did not just say, “hello, how’ve you been?” to the people they might not have seen for two years or more. They hugged fiercely and actually landed kisses on cheeks. They greeted each other with loud excited voices and the occasional squeal. I thought this might be out of the ordinary because it was the first session. By the third round of sessions I was convinced this is how they greet each other always. By simply observing coaches greet each other so enthusiastically, even the males got their hugs in, it was readily apparent that they had formed strong and lasting relationships not only as colleagues but many enduring friendships.

Once the actual discussions began the coach participants demonstrated comfort with and trust between each other. This was evidenced in the easy way they teased each other, laughed at each other’s stories, and reached out to touch one another when the topics led to strong emotional responses. Their trust in each other combined with their sense of humor led the first focus group to decide they should each choose what they referred to as a “hooker name” for their pseudonym. I explained this decision to the following groups and I ended up with quite an interesting list of fictitious names.

The relationships displayed were also strong enough that participants felt at ease disagreeing and offering opposing examples and opinions. Differences of opinion were respected and were frequently responded to with statements such as, “I can see your
point” or “I guess you could be right.” Coaches tattled on each other’s transgressions as well as encouraging each other to share success stories with which they were familiar.

Study participants continuously stressed the importance of the relationships they built with each other and the support coaches provided to each other throughout the years. Their behavior towards each other during focus group sessions illustrated the veracity of their words.

Coaches who participated in the study shared many more examples of the depth of their relationships with their coaching colleagues. These were varied in scope but were characterized by uncommon kindness and clear supportive relationships with each other. In example, several coaches with two schools offered up one of them so that other coaches who lost both of their schools at the outset of year three could still have employment. These weren’t just polite offers, they were genuine and they were accepted gratefully by several of their coaching friends. Another coach described a number of incidents in which a fellow coach whose husband experienced Alzheimer’s would leave her school site and drive with her coach friend around the city trying to locate him after he commandeered the car, drove away, and then forgot how to get home.

Themes Related to Research Question 1

Research question 1: What are the meanings constructed by educators through their experiences as instructional coaches?

Theme 1. The vast majority of coaches perceived that the rushed development of the Perry Coaching Project, along with flawed implementation procedures led to a lack of clarity and frustration regarding many aspects of the coaching experience. This lack of clarity included the coach’s role within the school, approved and prohibited coaching
activities, how coaches were perceived upon entering the school site, and on-going staff member perceptions of and willingness to engage in expected coaching activities. The majority of participants perceived that the failure to introduce the project purposefully and clearly to principals and teachers negatively impacted the coaches’ potential for success in developing the relationships and trust necessary to their practice.

**Theme 2.** Coach participants believed that their successful coaching practice hinged on relationships and trust. They perceived that forming strong relationships with both teachers and principals was critical to their ability to have any impact on thinking about teaching and learning, or changes in instructional practices. Also, building trust took time, and it took longer because of the poor introduction of coaches to schools. Forming close relationships with principals was discouraged during the early years of the project; however, many of the coaches believed that they would not have been successful if they did not form a partnership with the principal. The majority of coaches attempted to build relationships with only one or two teachers initially. Eventually, coaches were approached by more teachers who had learned from colleagues that the coach was trustworthy, and had knowledge, resources, or strategies to share that were helpful. Many coaches relayed that once established, their relationships with teachers were sustained over time. Sometimes they segued into personal friendships. A number of the former coaches maintained some of these relationships even after the project ended.

**Theme 3.** Coaches’ needs for high-quality initial training and on-going professional development were perceived as critical and frequently as unmet. Initial training was described as too intense, overwhelming, long on theory, and short on both coaching and research-based instructional strategies. Many coaches felt ill-prepared to
initiate their practice, particularly in skills related to technology, the location, retrieval, and utilization of performance data, and the skills necessary to provide leadership in the development of school improvement plans. They relayed that they wished that the training and on-going professional development had been differentiated based on their individual needs and requests for specific training. A number of coaches expressed negative feelings because they believed that their suggestions for improving the professional development, for example, providing time to collaborate with each other, were valid but ignored.

On the surface this theme appeared to be primarily related to coach professional development; however, it had a more profound meaning on a deeper level. The vast majority of participants perceived that their professionalism, expertise, and judgment were unrecognized and badly underutilized. The coaches’ engagement in clandestine coaching activities seemed to be the result of acting on their own professional knowledge and judgment about the actual needs in their buildings, rather than the prescribed or prohibited activities espoused by the project developers and leaders.

**Theme 4.** The purpose of and outcome goal of the Perry Coaching Project was to move chronically failing schools out of academic emergency status on the state report card up to continuous improvement status in a short period of time. Coaches perceived the intended goal as unrealistic given the scope of the project. The vast majority of participants suggested that the number of contracted coaching hours per week (15), and hours per day (7) provided to schools was insufficient to allow them to engage with enough teachers or teams to influence school-wide change in teaching practices that might eventually impact student outcomes. A strong majority also believed that
measuring the impact of coaching based only on whether students’ test scores improved enough to change the school’s report card status was inappropriate and set the project up for failure.

**Theme 5.** The potential of coaching to bring about change and improve teachers’ instructional practices was perceived as quite strong by a majority of the coach participants. However, many also cautioned that meeting this great potential for success depends on just the right set of conditions and factors that may be difficult or even possible to control. A commonly stated perception held by coaches was that having an effective building principal who is committed to the implementation of coaching, and who communicates and follows up on expectations for teacher engagement in coaching may be the most important determinant affecting its impact on change.

**Theme 6.** The relationships coaches developed with each other were believed to be critical to the individual successes experienced by many of the participants. These relationships were described as particularly supportive during Year 1 of the implementation when the majority of coaches’ said they “felt as if we were making our way by the seat of their pants.” They believed that through sharing their frustrations, resources, strategies, stories, and much laughter they were able to persevere through the experience of chaos. Many of the coaches formed lasting friendships as a result of these collegial relationships. However, there were one or two negative case examples regarding this theme. A couple of the participants felt that they did not have the same opportunities to develop close relationships with other coaches. They both attributed this to joining the project later in the implementation and also mid-year.
Theme 7. A strong majority of the participants felt that their participation in the Perry Coaching Project was worthwhile and personally meaningful. They believed that it allowed them to share expertise they had developed through many years of teaching with teachers who were struggling to make a difference for their students. Many of them also thought that having a coach would have been extremely beneficial to them during their teaching careers. A majority of the coaches expressed a sense of great pride in what they were able to accomplish during their experiences in the project. A number of the retired participants also relayed their perceptions that they had personally learned a great deal as a result of their participation, and felt happy that they could still do so.

Defining Coaching Success

Narrative Response: Research Question 2

Research question 2. Given the meanings constructed through the experience of instructional coaching, how do you describe a case of coaching success? Identifying how participants in the Perry Coaching Project defined cases of coaching success was one of the primary objectives of this dissertation study. Study participants expressed their appreciation that someone actually cared enough to ask them. They explained that there was never a time provided at the project’s end when they could reflect on and share their experiences with other coaches who had also participated in the project. Although all of their efforts didn’t end in success, the former coaches offered countless examples of those they perceived as cases of coaching success.
Personal Definitions of Coaching Success

Coach participants were asked how they defined a case of coaching success. They did not respond in an impulsive way, but rather considered their thoughts for a bit before sharing them. The definitions offered covered a broad spectrum; however, a uniting theme across them all was an element of change in teacher thinking or behavior. The following responses, while not an exhaustive list, were volunteered when former coaches were asked how they defined coaching success:

Woody: When I would sit down with a teacher following an observation and he or she told me what I already knew based on what I observed. The teacher did a reflection and saw what I saw either a difficulty or a success; it was recognized.

Angelina: I felt success when one teacher actually came to me and asked for my help during that first year.

Annie: I guess one way I would describe coaching success is when I would actually see somebody make a change and do something differently.

Jewel: Success was when I implemented something with one teacher and it spread from that teacher to another and another without my help.

Maria: So, it was just a small thing but this was a teacher you can easily picture in a middle school setting. He sat at his desk kind of in the front of the room and he never got out of his desk…. He actually did some small group things. So I remember that of all the things, that was my favorite success because he really didn’t want to get out of that chair!
Ms. Social: I knew it was a success when the teacher who called the union rep in front of me in the teachers’ lounge to complain that I’d observed in her classroom started asking me for help.

Chino: When both of my schools moved out of Academic Emergency up to School Improvement status I defined that as a success.

Buckeye Bet: In September of year two when teachers began coming to me saying, “BB, help me devise a strategy for how to do this,” or “I need a strategy on how to develop my beginning of the day routine.” That’s when I knew I had been accepted as a co-worker and not an evaluator.

Terri: I felt success when teachers or administrators began thanking me for my work and indicating that it really was helpful.

Tucker: I defined a case of success when I would hear teachers talking about their success with strategies that I had suggested to other teachers when they did not know I was in the vicinity listening.

Trixie: When we developed a collaborative focus with the principal and he finally saw the value of coaching and the connection between our work and the ASIP plan development, implementation supports and monitoring. That was success for us.

Queenie: Success was finally being part of the development of the ASIP plan and providing suggestions about strategies that were then actually incorporated into the plan. This helped us as coaches support teachers in understanding the connection between the plan and what they might want to work on with a coach.
Maria: I always felt successful when a teacher came to me and they wanted to build on something we had done the year before. That was exciting too.

Sari: Real success was working with a teacher who didn’t want to teach. She wanted to sit behind her desk a lot. I got her to use those kits from the reading series and to incorporate at least one small group learning activity a day. She started doing that.

Woody: When a teacher actually put into practice something I modeled for him or her I thought that was a great success.

Jewel: One success was when I finally convinced teachers that a cooperative group learning format could work with “these students” if they were taught prerequisite collaboration skills. This seed was firmly planted and I got to see them use group learning formats more and more regularly.

Trixie: I felt a success was when we held a number of department meeting discussions focusing on student compliance versus engagement. Then we went on to whole group staff meeting discussions about what student engagement looks like. We started by having them identify what teacher engagement in a staff meeting looks like. These were good reflections on a whole-staff level. I could then go back and have more in-depth discussions of this problem within individual coaching interactions.

Percy: A specific problem I identified in the school almost immediately was how much instructional time was wasted. In collaboration with the principal and teachers I initiated a school-wide focus on getting the most out of every instructional minute. Through continued discussions at weekly TAP
cluster meetings teachers began actually thinking more about the use of time. Not long after, bell-to-bell instruction was taken on as a school-wide effort. I saw that as a very important success because it involved every person in the building reflecting on one over-arching problem and then genuinely coming up with strategies to organize time for instructional advantage.

Dawn: After three years of applying cognitive behavioral techniques to change teachers’ mindsets about what is possible to change I experienced a true success. The third grade teachers decided to group students differently based on needs in reading and math. They split the students across two classrooms with each classroom having two teachers. This allowed them to utilize primarily small group learning formats in which they could break students down even further to meet individual needs. They brought the idea to me for feedback only. I wasn’t the one who sparked the idea.

Another common element within coaches’ individual definitions of success was that they didn’t define success in terms of what they had accomplished, they defined success through a change in others. Success was not about the coaches; it was about those who were coached. Participants were equally forthcoming about their coaching disappointments or failed strategies employed. Former coaches from the Perry Coaching Project were proud of the changes they helped bring about, but they were not boastful and often downplayed their importance in allowing those changes to come to fruition. Some described their role in these successes as merely planting seeds that teachers decided to act upon. Others described their role as being a pollinator of ideas.
Coaching Success Stories and Strategies

The study participants seemed eager to describe their most effective strategies so that “some other coach might not have to reinvent the wheel in the future.” Some of these were previously mentioned in the list of initial coaching activities included earlier and will not be repeated here. In order to provide organization to these additional successful strategies they have been sorted into eight categories with specific descriptions in the following paragraphs.

Instructional design. Successful strategies coaches offered in this category included the importance of sufficient wait-time after asking a question, and increasing the use of higher level questioning with the use of question stems provided by coaches. The frequency of teachers’ implementation of these two strategies was measured by collecting frequency data. Coaches also introduced the concept of and strategies for bell-to-bell instruction in a number of their schools.

They assisted teachers in planning for and implementing small group learning formats and encouraged a change in primary focus from student compliance to authentic student engagement and meaning making opportunities. In support of these efforts several coaches arranged professional development on and support in integrating the use of instructional technology leading to increased student engagement.

Coaches also facilitated discussions regarding the importance of real-time monitoring of student performance (formative assessment), along with co-planning and modeling these strategies in teachers’ classrooms. They helped develop intervention opportunities following formative assessment. In addition, they presented, discussed, and modeled how to plan instruction based on student need rather than strict adherence to the
district pacing guide. The former coaches engaged teachers in planning activities designed to increase student awareness of their own performance and progress, as well as taking ownership of their learning. They also worked directly with teachers to improve the balance between instructional time spent teaching specific skills and teaching application of skills.

**Data usage.** Coaches reported encouraging data use in planning instruction by demonstrating how to do so during co-planning sessions. They also modeled the use of performance data to group students for instruction, remediation, or intervention during these sessions.

Coaches analyzed school-wide data as part of the All School Improvement Process (ASIP) to identify a problem of practice, develop goals, and select possible strategies to address the problem of practice. They followed this up by facilitating grade-level data discussions leading to collaborative problem solving and selection of target strategies for implementation. Coaches at the high school level engaged in this type of collaborative data analysis in an effort to identify possible gaps in the curriculum.

Study participants encouraged sharing performance and progress data with students in a manner that allows them to understand how they are doing compared to learning targets. Additionally, they asked teachers who were successfully using data charts in their classrooms to motivate students to attend different grade level team meetings and share what they were doing and how students were responding. Other grade levels often adopted the strategy presented by another teacher.
Program implementation. Coaches gave an account of a number of programs to which they provided leadership in implementing in their buildings including the following:

- The newly adopted Story Town reading series (Beck & McKeown, 2008)
- A “Word of the Day” program based on vocabulary from the newly adopted reading series along with those targeted on the state achievement test at each grade level.
- An Accelerate Reader-type program
- “The Daily 5” independent literacy system (Boushey & Moser, 2006)
- The “Café Book” literacy assessment and instruction system (Boushey & Moser, 2009)
- “Literacy Workstations” program (Diller, 2003)

A number of these programs were initiated in year one and continued implementation across all four years of the coaching project.

School improvement processes. Many of the coaches described being actively involved as a member of the School Leadership Team (SLT), as well as a member of the All School Improvement Process (ASIP) Team, in some cases providing significant leadership in the development and monitoring of the annual ASIP plan. A few participated in the periodic Curriculum Review Team (CRT) site visits and assisted in aligning the CRT recommendations with the ASIP goals and strategies.

Coaches accessed, delivered, analyzed, and assisted school staff members in using performance data to identify critical areas of weakness and even groups of students to
target for intensive intervention because they were approaching a higher performance level and could realistically be helped to get there.

A number of coaches provided instructional leadership in partnership with or sometimes even in place of the building principal. A few also became actively involved in grade-level or departmental team meetings, sometimes planning and facilitating them weekly.

**Professional development.** Several coaches facilitated professional book study groups followed by assistance implementing strategies discovered in the book. They also arranged for continuing education credits (CEUs) for participation. A number of former coaches reported that they provided optional professional development sessions on topics of teacher interest outside of teacher scheduled hours and then followed up with coaching support to implement strategies presented. A few coaches offered to attend off-site PDs of interest to teachers along with them so that coaching follow-up support could be more easily provided. Some coaches provided or arranged professional development sessions that were required school-wide. Data were then collected regarding the frequency of use of new strategies during classroom observations or brief walk-throughs. The combined data were shared with the staff as a whole to stimulate collaborative reflection, problem solving, and the development of short-term objectives for increased frequency.

One coach attended weekly off-site grade level meetings, held at a different restaurant each time, during which the coach described an instructional strategy that was implemented and worked really well in a classroom during an observation. The group would talk about it and then some of them would go back and try it. They’d talk about how it worked for them at the next meeting.
**Reflective practice.** Coaches engaged teachers in the pre-observation, observation, post-observation conference cycle to build teachers’ capacity to reflect on their own instruction and self-identify areas for improvement. They utilized classroom level performance data as the focus of discussions guiding teachers’ reflections on needs and offering possible strategies to address the needs identified. Former coaches reported that they modeled reflective practices whenever possible.

**Collegial collaboration.** Study participants explained that they developed and facilitated authentic professional learning communities. They often facilitated effective grade or departmental meetings in which collaboration between teachers was supported and expected. Many coaches arranged opportunities for teachers to visit each others’ classrooms or even teachers at other schools to observe instruction and reflect on their own as a result.

**Measuring implementation of target strategies or programs.** Several of the measurement strategies employed were previously identified in the professional development strategies. Additional strategies coaches recalled are included here. One coach developed a brief teacher frequency data collection form that only required a tally mark documenting when a strategy was used. For example making tallies under each type of higher-level question asked. Tallies were then used for reflective conversations with the coach. The coach also collected similar data while observing a lesson. He perceived that comparing their data with the teacher’s assisted them to think deeply about intentions versus reality of their instruction.

Quite a few coaches collected multiple types of data during classroom observations based on the planning completed during the pre-observation conference.
They explained that at times simply handing the data to the teacher for personal reflection was all that was needed. Coaches stated that once teachers became more comfortable with this process coaching conversations sometimes led to much deeper levels of collaborative reflection and teacher recognition of a need to try another strategy or to problem solve with the coach about next steps in the process.

One coach kept a field journal with individual sections for each coaching participant in order to record interactions, decisions, goals, strategies to target, the teacher’s perceptions of student responses, along with classroom observation notes. He recorded a mix of qualitative and quantitative data across many coaching cycles.

Study participants were very generous in reporting specific strategies they successfully employed in their practice. A majority of strategies described were put forward by multiple coaches, and across focus group sessions and individual interviews. I have attempted to include as many different strategies as seemed reasonable within a dissertation study report. However, I will maintain all the strategies offered in the hopes of publishing them in their entirety at some point in the future.

**Measuring Project Success**

Frustrations expressed related to measuring the impact of their coaching on the school site, administrators, teachers, and students were numerous and consistent across all focus group sessions and individual interviews. There appeared to be great confusion regarding the purpose of the ChildPoint reporting software designed for the project. Some coaches indicated that it was a tool the project leaders used to measure coaches’ compliance in engaging in the approved coaching activities. Others felt very strongly that the ChildPoint reporting was purely a way for the university partners to collect data for
their own research interests. Woody offered his take on ChildPoint reporting, “It took a lot of time. It could have been used as a vehicle for reflection, but as it turned out I don’t know what it was. I think it was a lot to do about nothing.” Sari shared similar concerns about the purpose of ChildPoint saying,

What data were we really collecting with ChildPoint? Their targets seemed to change over time. It seemed like they were trying to track your daily activities, then later they said they weren’t…. So, since we never got consistent explanation of its purpose, no feedback on our efforts, or consistent directions I just skipped a lot of them.

A number of coaches indicated having no understanding of how the success of the project was to be measured. Echoing the responses of others Tucker stated, “I have no idea how the project measured success; we were never told. We were never trained to collect any type of quantitative data related to our coaching activities. We just filled out those ChildPoint reports that told how often we did each thing.”

Quite a few participating coaches seemed to share an understanding that the only real measure of the project’s success was their schools’ annual state testing results and whether they improved enough to move from Academic Emergency status up to Continuous Improvement status on the state report card. A majority of coaches seemed to believe that measuring the impact of coaching using annual state test results was inappropriate because there were so many mitigating factors that also impacted performance on those tests that it would be impossible to isolate the specific effect of coaching. Participant coaches also reported that at several points throughout the project implementation that Dr. Anthony David, the primary university researcher, explained that
coaches needed to be sure that the data being collected was measuring what they needed to know.

Study participants also related that at some point during year three, Dr. David declared that there weren’t enough data gathered to substantiate the effectiveness of the project. Coaches reported that he explained that they didn’t collect enough data because it was hard to gather. Marty, one of the coaches who continued with the project through year four, explained that they eventually had to come up with their own measurement strategies for use in year four because it became a new and urgent expectation.

Coaches’ considerable frustration over the methods used to measure the success of the Perry Coaching Project seemed to cause some of them to describe their work as unsuccessful. A few study participants expressed feeling that they had not had an impact on teacher or student performance at their schools. Cabo shared her feelings saying,

When your school moved out of school improvement within that three-year span that was coaching success. That means that I was not successful (in a sad tone of voice). Oh yes, there were things I felt good about that happened but I’m talking about as a whole because that was our job, to be there to get them out of Emergency status by increasing their state test scores.

Other coaches admitted feeling that they had a positive impact but no way to prove it. Their perceptions and feelings regarding measurement of the program’s impact seemed to carry over directly into the next discussion in which they were asked to describe their overall impressions of the success of the Perry Coaching Project.
Impressions of Project Success

The vast majority of coach participants shared positive impressions about the overall success of the Perry Coaching Project. Their responses frequently included statements about having the right focus, doing the right things to support schools and students, and experiencing personal coaching successes. Most of the coaches expressed confidence that they had made a difference through their coaching practice but simply didn’t have the right kind of data to prove it. Dawn shared her impressions stating, “My overall impression of the impact of the project was positive, I just think we need to rethink the model for future implementations.” It seemed as if a great many former coaches shared that impression as well. Another impression echoed in many of the former coaches’ remarks was related to the limited time the project was funded and implemented. Maria expressed her disappointment about the project’s ending arriving well before the impact of their work was even measureable. She explained,

There were so often things we would do and it was like lighting something and now it’s gone out the window. There was so much potential there. There were possibilities left untapped, things that were unfinished. We could have done more in our project and I think every aspect could probably have been better, but there won’t be an opportunity to fine-tune it. It’s just gone as if it never existed.

Very few of the study participants had negative impressions about the project’s impact. Participants commented again and again that they believed the research on implementing any new program says that it may take five to seven years to see the results. Tucker offered the following remarks in relation to what many coaches perceived as the short
sightedness of a three-year implementation. She stated, “I won’t say it was a project doomed to failure but it was not a project designed to succeed.”

**Themes Related to Research Question 2**

**Theme 8.** In Year 1 coach participants defined a case of coaching success in terms of their acceptance in the school sites as someone who was truly there to help teachers. Examples of first year successes included being permitted to observe in a teacher’s classroom, and being approached by a teacher to help them find instructional resources, or to access student performance data. When a teacher actually accepted and acted upon a suggestion by a coach they perceived it as a reason to celebrate, no matter how small the change.

**Theme 9.** In Years 2-4 coaches defined a case of coaching success as having influenced a change in teachers’ willingness to reflect on their own teaching practices, or demonstrated a change in their day-to-day instructional practices. If coaches’ observed a teacher use a strategy they introduced was sustained over time it was judged as an even higher level of success than a short-term change.

**Importance of Context**

**Narrative Response: Research Question 2a**

**Research question 2a.** *From coaches’ perspectives, what role did context play in relation to coaching success?* As previously mentioned the critical importance of context, the facts and circumstances within which the project was situated, wound throughout coaches’ narratives regarding their experiences and perceptions about barriers to their effectiveness. They offered numerous examples of these contexts with the common ones
including those related to project development, implementation procedures, components of the coaching model, training and on-going professional development content, process, and individual needs of schools. All of these were viewed as elements about which context seemed to be left unconsidered and thus unaddressed by project developers and partners, yet viewed by coaches as vitally important to the work. Other contextual issues put forward included how individual contexts impacted coaches’ acceptance and efficacy in their school sites, as well as their ability to influence change, the continuity of their practice, and sustainability of coaching within the broader school district context.

**Themes Related to Research Question 2a**

**Theme 10.** District-level realities and conditions were thought to serve as negative influences on the success of the Perry Coaching Project as well as the success of individual coaches. The most common context coaches perceived as negatively impacting the potential of the coaching project to be successful was the recent discontinuation of an in-house coaching project that was implemented in the district for only one year and was vigorously opposed by the teachers’ association. A long-lived rapid cycle of school improvement initiatives introduced in the district and then discontinued after a year or two was perceived by a strong majority of coach participants as a barrier to success. High rates of teacher and principal turn-over were also believed to be conditions that led to the high number of inexperienced teachers and principals present in their school sites. Many of the coaches contended that new teachers and principals lacked confidence in their practices and seemed overwhelmed during their initial years on the job. Coaches found that novice teachers and principals were more likely to refuse any offers of assistance or coaching services as it might be an admission that they were not doing a good job.
Participants also believed that experienced but ineffective teachers and principals were passed from failing school to failing school instead of being non-renewed. This cycle was perceived as another district-wide reality that served as a negative influence on the success of coaching across a number of buildings.

**Theme 11.** Numerous building-level realities and conditions were perceived by coaches as significant barriers to coaching success. These included school climate, culture, teacher willingness to collaborate, previous experiences with coaching, principal effectiveness, the lack of an effective student behavior management system, safety in the neighborhood, ineffective or non-existent school improvement planning or leadership teams, student transiency, frequent teacher transfers, the length of time the school had remained in academic emergency status, and how much improvement was required for the school to change their report card status. Some of the conditions were thought to be used by staff members as a rationalization for failure to make academic gains, or why teachers could have little impact on student learning outcomes. Coaches felt that these rationalizations kept many teachers from being willing to reflect on their own teaching practices. Many years of being blamed for low test scores and experiencing pressure to improve them was perceived by a number of coaches as at least one reason teachers resisted coaching participation or to interact with coaches at all. Some of the coaches felt empathy for teachers’ sense of helplessness; others did not.
Coach Recommendations for Future Success

Narrative Response: Question 2b

Research question 2b. *What recommendations do coaches offer in support of future coaching successes?* Study participants seemed eager to offer their suggestions on how to improve the Perry Coaching Project by making adjustments to the model, the implementation process, training, leadership expectations, measuring impact and several more aspects they perceived as barriers to effectiveness. Many of these recommendations are sprinkled liberally throughout this research report. Other recommendations can be implied through their description of frustrations, challenges, and barriers coaches faced. The former coaches had obviously given thought to necessary adjustments prior to participating in the study because each time they were asked to share their impressions about specific project components they did so. Then without seeming to take a breath, they often launched into their ideas for how to improve that component. There was no waiting until the final focus group session or until the end of the interview to share their recommendations. They were unleashed in a steady stream that wound throughout multiple sessions and topics. The study participants would frequently apologize first for offering a recommendation for improvement on a topic because they knew that was supposed to come later and then without pausing for the approval I surely would have given, they’d lay it right out there for the group to consider. Their enthusiasm was boundless and contagious. Who was I to stop their flow? Appendix D contains 99 recommendations coach participants offered in support of the success of future coaching projects, organized into the following seven categories,

- coaching model (17),
• implementation model (10),
• project leaders’ qualities, skills, and prior experiences (16),
• coaches’ qualities, skills, and prior experiences (14),
• initial and on-going professional development (22)
• coaching activities and strategies (11), and
• measuring project impact (9).

The category related to training and on-going professional development encompassed not only the highest number of differing recommendations (22), but was also the category that had the highest number of overall comments (100+) compared to any other category. None of the other six categories had over 50 comments. Even though only 22 of the 99 recommendations made were regarding initial training and professional development, they represented 22 percent of the total. This seemed to be an indication of just how critical the coaches believed training and professional development is to the success of future coaching projects. Due to the emphasis the participants placed on this category, all of their professional development recommendations were included within the body of this dissertation in Table 15.

Themes Related to Research Question 2b

Theme 12. The participant coaches believed that they gained significant knowledge about not only the practice of coaching, but also knowledge about circumstances and elements that could inform the success of future coaching implementations. They perceived that having experienced participation first hand, they were in an excellent position to make recommendations. Many of the coaches felt disappointed that they were not asked for input or feedback at any point in the
implementation of the Perry Coaching Project. The former coaches offered 99 recommendations.

Table 15

*Coaches’ Recommendations Regarding Training and Professional Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial and On-going Coach Training</td>
<td>Spread out the training across more days with fewer hours in each, as the amount of content covered in eight full days was overwhelming.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conduct training needs assessments and several training paths based on the results.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rely on effective adult learning models in terms of delivery format, structure, and collaborative, hands-on activities, and opportunities for reflective discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use videos to provide practice conducting classroom observations including some type of observation instrument focused on teacher behaviors and practices that have a proven link to increasing student achievement, allow coaches to reflect in pairs or triads about the video observation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct actual classroom observations in pairs utilizing an observation guide, followed by discussion about both coaches’ perceptions of the instruction, and why they recorded what they saw as they did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide in-depth training on how to set up simple data collection forms and procedures so coaches will be able to document changes in teacher practices, and so that they can share these with teachers in relation to collecting formative data on student learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide explicit training on how to do the tasks expected when coaching and less time spent on endlessly pointing out what coaches are not allowed to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide new coaches with cognitive coaching training and certification, or training in some of the other respected models out there such as the Aspen Institute Model, or Knight’s Instructional Coaching Model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The professional developers and presenters must know the needs of their audience and be familiar with the contexts they practice in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keep in mind the extensive research regarding 10% transfer rates of traditional PD formats. Isn’t that why we are offering coaching services in the first place?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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</table>
| Initial and On-going Coach Training (continued) | Provide training in providing emotional support to teachers when they “fall apart” in your office.  
Individualize on-going PD based on a coach’s background, year in the project, grade levels supported, and their own requests for further training on specific topics or skills.  
Capitalize on the wealth of knowledge and experiences coaches in the project possess by having coaches be presenters of instructional or coaching strategies that have worked for them.  
Provide formal opportunities for coach dialog and collaboration during monthly PD sessions or meetings without constraining the topics or requiring some busy-work task be completed as part of the process. Coach collaboration should be recognized as valuable and as crucial to their professional development as any whole-group presentation of concepts.  
The quality of initial training should not be dependent on the point at which a new coach enters the program.  
Collect coach input on the value of the professional development sessions each time. Take their input seriously and make adjustments to the PD design, delivery, or content as needed. Don’t request coaches’ feedback if it won’t impact future sessions.  
Attempt to capture the content and dialog stimulated during PD sessions to share with those who weren’t able to attend or as a resource for coaches hired at a later point, particularly presentations on strategies presented by coaches.  
Incorporate shadowing of experienced coaches as part of the initial training process.  
Utilize inter-coach shadowing as part of on-going PD; encourage joint classroom observations followed by reflective discussions.  
Offer PD in small groups organized by grade levels served and held outside of regular school hours so that coaches aren’t taken away from their school sites during prime coaching interaction times.  
Provide coaches with their own coaches throughout the implementation period permitting them to have assistance in continuing to develop specific skills and competencies.  
Be sure that the content presented during on-going PD is relevant to coaches’ practice as well as their differing school contexts. |
Summary of Results

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to recount the experiences of instructional coaches employed in the Perry Coaching Project in an effort to give them a voice within the professional dialogue. This chapter narrated their shared story. All the research questions posed were answered within the narrative of this chapter. Twelve themes that emerged during the investigation were also stated.

I provide readers with my interpretations of these results within the text of Chapter V. Connections between the results narrated in this chapter and the literature review discussed in Chapter II are addressed in the next chapter. The implications of the study’s results and recommendations for future research on the phenomenon of coaching for instructional improvement are also addressed in the final chapter that follows.
CHAPTER V

Summary and Discussion

To accommodate the reader, this chapter begins with a restatement of the research questions posed, along with a review of the methodology employed in this study. Chapter V also includes researcher discussions regarding several additional elements including: (a) a review of the research results, (b) relationships between this study and prior research, (c) study limitations, (d) recommendations for future research, and, (e) implications of this dissertation study for practice.

Re-statement of the Research Questions

As stated in Chapter I, the research questions posed at the outset of this investigation were:

RQ1: What are the meanings constructed by educators through their experiences as instructional coaches?

RQ2: Given the meanings constructed by instructional coaches, how do coaches describe a case of coaching success?

At the mid-point of the data collection and analysis phase emerging themes were discussed with the study participants to gather their feedback on the accuracy or feasibility of the emerging themes I had identified thus far. This member checking activity led to the addition of two sub-questions related to research question two. The sub-questions added were:

RQ2a: From coaches’ perspectives, what role did context play in relation to coaching success?
RQ2b: What recommendations do coaches offer in support of future coaching success?

A description of how I went about answering these four research questions is discussed in the following review of methodology.

**Review of Methodology**

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to develop a deeper understanding of the lived-experiences of coaches formerly employed in a four-year instructional coaching project that was implemented in a large inner-city school district located in the Midwest. Twenty-seven coaches formerly employed within the Perry Coaching Project participated in the study. The former project director also participated in an individual interview for the purpose of gathering background information about the projects’ development process and funding.

Qualitative data were collected utilizing three methods. One method was by conducting a series of 13 focus group sessions held on four days spread out across three weeks in August of 2011. A second method was conducting 12 individual interviews throughout August and several days into September of 2011. The focus group sessions provided a broader scope of data and allowed me to observe aspects of the coaches’ relationships and interactions with each other. The one-on-one interviews often delved deeper into the meanings constructed and perceptions held by individual coaches. A third method of collecting qualitative data was the acquisition of six documents related to the Perry Coaching Project. A review of these documents assisted me in building my own understandings regarding the initiation and development of the project, the funding
source, timelines, partnerships, and program evaluation. Information gleaned from the documents also provided me with insights regarding the emergent themes.

Nearly 40 hours of digital audio recordings were transcribed. The transcription texts were organized and coded by category, and response type. The coded texts were then sorted and analyzed to identify emerging themes. The emergent themes were discussed with the focus groups during the second, third, and fourth sessions in order to gain participants’ confirmation of the accuracy of themes. Five coach participants offered feedback on the emergent themes identified following the fourth day if data collection. All coach participants received a copy of the proposed final themes and were asked to provide confirmatory or critical feedback. Based on the transcribed texts from the focus group sessions and individual interviews I composed the coaches’ collective narrative in which I answered the research questions posed. The emergent themes related to each of the research questions were also reported. At several points throughout the investigation, feedback and advice were also sought from members of my dissertation committee regarding the research process, data collection and analysis procedures, as well as the content of the research report.

Summary and Discussion of the Results

Themes: Meanings Coaches Constructed

Research question 1. What are the meanings constructed by educators through their experiences as instructional coaches?

Theme 1. The vast majority of coaches perceived that the rushed development of the Perry Coaching Project, along with flawed implementation procedures led to a lack of clarity and frustration regarding many aspects of the coaching experience.
Theme 2. Coach participants believed that their successful coaching practice hinged on relationships and trust.

Theme 3. Coaches’ needs for high-quality initial training and on-going professional development were perceived as critical and frequently as unmet.

Theme 4. The purpose of and outcome goal of the Perry Coaching Project was to move chronically failing schools out of academic emergency status on the state report card up to continuous improvement status in a short period of time. Coaches perceived the intended goal as unrealistic given the scope of the project.

Theme 5. The potential of coaching to bring about change and improve teachers’ instructional practices was perceived as quite strong by a majority of the coach participants.

Theme 6. The relationships coaches developed with each other were believed to be critical to the individual successes experienced by many of the participants.

Theme 7. A strong majority of the participants felt that their participation in the Perry Coaching Project was worthwhile and personally meaningful.

Themes: Definitions of Coaching Success

Research question 2. Given the meanings constructed by instructional coaches, how do coaches describe a case of coaching success?

Theme 8. In Year 1 coach participants defined a case of coaching success in terms of their acceptance in the school sites as someone who was truly there to help teachers.
**Theme 9.** In Years 2-4 coaches defined a case of coaching success as having influenced a change in teachers’ willingness to reflect on their own teaching practices, or demonstrated a change in their day-to-day instructional practices.

**Themes: The Importance of Context**

**Research Question 2a.** *From coaches’ perspectives, what role did context play in relation to coaching success?*

**Theme 10.** District-level realities and conditions were thought to serve as negative influences on the success of the Perry Coaching Project as well as the success of individual coaches.

**Theme 11.** Numerous building-level realities and conditions were perceived by coaches as significant barriers to coaching success.

**Theme: Recommendations for Future Coaching Success**

**Research question 2b.** *What recommendations do coaches offer in support of future coaching successes?*

**Theme 12.** The participant coaches believed that they gained significant knowledge about not only the practice of coaching, but also knowledge about circumstances and elements that could inform the success of future coaching implementations. The former coaches offered 99 recommendations.

**Researcher Insights**

**Coaches’ Recommendations**

My perceptions regarding the former coaches’ recommendations are comprised of several understandings I gained while preparing to tell their story. I grew to have great
respect for their unique position from which to offer recommendations. The Perry Coaching Project was large enough in scope and of sufficient duration to inform the professional dialogue regarding what it means to be a coach in a school setting. As they frequently noted, “we were in the trenches doing the work.” Coaches’ maturity and career stages allowed them to base their recommendations on understandings they developed across many years of experiencing failed attempts at educational reform. Their advice is not merely theoretical, but practical. They have “been there and done that.” Considering their counsel may be a way to stop re-inventing the wheel and start with what we learned from the last wheel we built. In my estimation gaining their input and trying to integrate their understandings with what we are still learning about the phenomenon of coaching makes good sense.

When reflecting on the coaches’ recommendations I kept thinking that they sounded quite familiar. In fact, many of their suggestions were supported within the professional literature I had recently surveyed during the preparation of the review of literature contained in Chapter II. In the following sections I describe connections I found between the literature and the qualitative data collected during the study.

Coaches’ Wealth of Knowledge

During focus group sessions and individual interviews it was not uncommon for participants to identify a confounding element and then follow-up with a reason it was problematic based on professional literature or research. Having had previous connections with the coach participants through my own involvement in the Perry Coaching Project I knew that the former coaches were all highly experienced classroom teachers or administrators before joining the project. From listening to them speak to each
other and hearing their responses during monthly professional development sessions I
learned that they were insightful, articulate, and highly reflective about their practice as
coaches. I also knew that the study participants were enthusiastic and had a passion for
helping others, especially teachers whom they regard with great respect. What I was
unprepared for was their wealth of knowledge related to generalized program models and
development processes including (a) the importance of context at each level of
involvement, (b) the importance of building a model that is well thought out and
anchored in research, including the criticality of having the right people sitting at the
development table; (c) the crucial elements involved in introducing and implementing a
project across multiple schools and a large number of individuals, (d) understanding of
the key elements involved in the design and delivery of professional development
opportunities, and (e) their level of understanding the complexity of measuring impact of
a large school improvement project like the one in which they participated. Thus, I was in
agreement with the majority of their impressions and recommendations. The meanings
they constructed seemed quite plausible given their experiences as described, as well as
the knowledge they brought with them to the role of coach.

Coaches’ Relationships

A final characteristic of the study participants that I was only moderately aware of
prior to conducting the investigation was the strength of the relationships coaches built
with each other and with many of the teachers they interacted with in their school sites.
Far beyond the necessary collegial relationships, these were highly developed
collaborative relationships that more often than not evolved into long-term friendships.
There were hugging and kissing, raucous laughter and teasing, inquiries about spouses,
children, pets, and current family and social activities that occurred at the beginning of
the first focus group session. I gained a great deal of understanding about the depth of the
participants’ relationships and their care for each other. I am somewhat hesitant to
describe it as love, given the nature of this research report, but that’s clearly what was
evidenced throughout the focus group sessions and interviews. To my surprise these
lengthy rituals were repeated at every session with hugs and kisses before leaving as well.
Gender did not seem to be an issue. Everybody shared these expressions of love and
friendship.

I believe the depth of feelings coaches demonstrated towards each other helped to
surface a significant theme that emerged and remained constant throughout the study.
The former coaches not only cared about each other, they evidenced similar strong
feelings towards their practice as coaches, and the district in which many of them taught
during their entire career. They portrayed extraordinary levels of respect and empathy for
children and their families living in impoverished and violent neighborhoods. Even
though most of them were retired for at least a year or two, they still wanted to reach out
and make a difference for children and teachers. They seemed to simply radiate a level of
great passion and commitment to the broader field of education.

Definitions of Coaching Success

Given the preponderance of successes represented in coaches’ narratives
recounting their lived experiences and the powerful impact participation in the Perry
Coaching Project had on them as individuals, it is in my belief that the success of the
project cannot be denied. Regardless of the grant’s overall objective of moving failing
schools to higher levels of achievement status as measured by performance on state
achievement tests, many informal short term objectives established through coaching interactions at the individual and school-wide level were attained. Some schools that received coaching services did move out of Academic Emergency report card status, but attempting to link that movement specifically to coaching is not scientifically responsible given the lack of representative data collected throughout the life of the project and the multitude of variables that would have to be isolated through very complex quantitative analysis procedures.

**Measuring the Impact of the Project**

I found it confusing that the projects’ developers did not include any short-term measurable objectives that when periodically measured could have given an indication of progress towards the long-term goal. Perhaps individualized teacher growth based on data collected through cycles of coaching could have been utilized to do so. I recognize that the developers and particularly the school district may have seen the All School Improvement Process (ASIP) plan as the method through which schools were expected to identify problems of practice through data analysis, write measurable goals to address the problems of practice, and select evidence-based strategies that coaches were supposed to support. However, based on the coaches’ narratives, the responses of the former director, and the content of training documents, I got the impression that the developers, grant partners, and school district leaders may not have had sufficient knowledge of how effectively or ineffectively schools were engaging in the school improvement process.

At the time when the Perry Coaching Project was being developed in late summer of 2007, research related to coaching was still mainly descriptive in nature focused on model development, defining coaching, identifying coaching activities, and the potential
that coaching might impact teachers’ implementation of new instructional strategies learned through traditional methods of professional development (Edwards, 2008; Knight, 2009; Truesdale, 2003).

The Neufeld and Roper (2003) paper that served as one component on which the Perry Coaching Project’s hybrid coaching model reportedly was based was designed as a guide to assist school districts interested in developing a coaching program. These authors recommended that school districts develop their own instruments to assess the quality of coaches’ work and their impact on the school because each school and district has individual needs that should determine the coaches’ role and activities. They also warned district leaders that when they decide to implement coaching as part of a broader school improvement plan, they are subscribing to an as yet unproven theory that coaching will lead to improved classroom instruction which will in turn lead to improved student achievement.

Cognitive coaching was also reported as a component of the hybrid Perry Coaching Project model. This model has one of the stronger research bases related to the impact of coaching on both teachers and students. However, only a few studies attempted to measure the impact of coaching on student academic growth (Hull et al., 1998; Rennick, 2002; Slinger, 2004). These researchers relied on content-specific standardized tests or researcher developed formative assessments in their investigations. Each of the studies assessed students’ growth comparing groups when teachers had either participated in coaching or not. Two of the studies found positive statistically significant differences between the performance of students taught by teachers that had been coached compared to students of teachers that not been participated in coaching. However, it should be noted
that coaches in the Perry Coaching Project reported receiving what they perceived as an overview of Cognitive Coaching, rather than eight training sessions spread across 12 to 18 months recommended by the model developers (Costa, & Garmston, 2002).

None of the studies I reviewed in preparation for this investigation attempted to identify even a correlational link between individual teachers’ participation in coaching and school-wide performance on state academic achievement tests. The former project director did not think that the grant language specified exactly how success of the program was to be measured. Given the parameters of the coaching project as described by study participants, in combination with the training documents reviewed and the lack of precedence set in the coaching research, I do not believe that the manner in which the project’s success was measured was scientifically or practically appropriate.

**The Importance of Context**

I believe that the coaches were in a unique position to evaluate the role context, the conditions and situations unique to the district and individual school sites, played on the effectiveness of the project. After listening to and reflecting on the reported barriers faced by coaches’ from the first day they set foot in their school sites, continuing until the project’s end, I am inclined to agree with the former coaches. Context and the developers’ seeming inattention to or perhaps even indifference to its possible negative impact on the potential success or failure of the coaching project appeared indisputable.
Relationships of the Current Study to Prior Research

Synthesis of Data

A large volume of data were compiled as the former coaches’ recounted their experiences of, perceptions about, and meanings they constructed. Prior to collecting any data, I completed an extensive review of the current professional literature included in Chapter II of this investigation report. Four topics appeared throughout the relevant literature as well as the coaches’ experiential narratives including:

- Critical elements in implementing a school-wide improvement project
- Contextual issues affecting responses to change and acceptance of coaching
- Importance of high quality professional development for teachers, principals, and coaches
- Challenges in measuring the impact of participating in coaching on instruction, the school, or student achievement

Troubled Implementation Process

One recurring element highlighted by the former coaches as having a serious negative impact on their initial, and in many cases on-going, abilities to build productive coaching relationships leading to changes in teachers’ thinking or instruction was that the implementation process was highly flawed.

The literature regarding the implementation of school reform efforts served to validate coaches’ perceptions (Datnow, 2005; Edmunds, 2005; Evans, 1996). Successful implementation of a school change or improvement effort is impacted by a number of factors including: school level interest in change, support of teachers and principals for the effort, a critical number of teachers involved in implementation, and a clear plan for
implementation and monitoring (Datnow, 2005). Teachers need time to discuss and reflect on a number of questions when they are faced with the need to change including: (a) Why do we need to make a change? (b) What change do we need to make? and, (c) How should we go about making the change? (Evans, 1996). In the case of the Perry Coaching Project, there were no opportunities for principals or teachers to engage in answering these questions related to coaching. According to Edmunds (2005) the support and buy-in of both principals and teachers were identified as playing a vital role in implementing school improvement efforts; they will either support the effort or they may sabotage them.

Coach participants clearly recognized the points made in the literature regarding the precursors and conditions necessary to successfully implement a school-wide project such as coaching. Due to their own experiences in responding to change projects within their careers, coaches were able to empathize with and understand teachers’ reluctance or resistance to participate in a coaching relationship. The majority of them were able to successfully navigate teachers’ initial responses and build coaching relationships one at a time during the first year or two of the Perry Coaching Project.

**Impact of a Variety of Contextual Issues**

Former coaches in the Perry Coaching Project held consistent perceptions about the critical role context played in the success of their practice in schools. Out of approximately 100 recommendations the study participants offered for the success of future coaching projects more than one quarter were easily identifiable as related to context at either the district, RSC, building, or individual teacher levels. A variety of
contexts believed to impact innovation projects were discussed in the literature and
research reviewed including the following:

- Policy contexts outside of the school district
- Policy and procedural contexts within the school district
- Contexts related to individual schools within the district
- Individual contexts experienced by teachers

A number of authors suggested that these should be kept in mind when planning,
initiating and sustaining school improvement efforts (Adams, 2007; Hargreaves, 2005;
Neufeld, & Roper, 2003; Olsen, & Sexton, 2009). Coach participants gave multiple
examples of the contexts in which the project was embedded that they perceived as
influencing how and why the project was developed, its potential for successful
implementation, along with its sustainability. Their examples aligned easily with the
contexts identified in the literature.

They explained that one context impacting the project was the state policy context
within which the grant was offered. They perceived that the goal of the grant was ill
conceived as attainable within a three-year period. Coaches’ also explained that the grant
was also underfunded based on the enormity of the expected outcomes because it only
included enough funding to pay for one coach per school for 15 hours per week,
regardless of the size of the staff or how far the school’s performance would have to
increase to come out of Academic Emergency status.

A wide variety of building level contexts were described as either supportive of or
a hindrance to their practice. One was the attitude and communicated support of the
principal for the program. Others were the existence or effectiveness of the School
Leadership Team and the All School Improvement Process Team along with the leadership abilities demonstrated by the principal. Within-teacher contexts were also described such as willingness to participate in coaching based on career stage, pessimism regarding any new project, or perceptions that they didn’t need to make any instructional changes. The study participants provided multiple examples from the project of the same intervening contexts identified in the professional literature.

**High Quality Professional Development for Coaches and School Staff**

Literature reviewed related to coaching offered plentiful recommendations regarding the importance of high quality professional development for both school staff members and coaches. Many publications regarding teacher professional development were also included in the review of literature. Study participants provided more than 20 different recommendations regarding coaches’ professional development needs.

The professional literature on coach professional development clearly supports project coaches’ recommendations. In terms of the design or format of coach learning opportunities authors set forth similar recommendations including time for collaboration with other coaches, time to share strategies that worked and those that didn’t, and time to plan and discuss novel research-based instructional practices (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2009). Content of coaches’ professional development sessions suggested by Blamey et al. included effective adult learning strategies, practical applications as opposed to a theoretical focus, and hands-on experiences. Denton and Hasbrouk (2009) suggested initial training on topics including

- coach role development,
- strategies for site entry and trust-building,
• critical nature of confidentiality and non-evaluative functions,
• time management,
• goal setting with teachers,
• data collection, and
• designing and providing effective professional development for adults.

Other coach professional development suggestions from the literature included orienting new coaches to the reform projects currently implemented in the district, along with hearing consistent messages from the school district over time (Neufeld, & Roper, 2003). Mentors or coaches for the coaches were also recommended (Stock, & Duncan, 2010).

At times when describing their frustrations with professional development, participant coaches cited highly respected authors on the subject including, Darling-Hammond, Guskey, and Huberman. They were well aware of what constitutes high quality professional development and they expressed feelings of disappointment that they weren’t receiving what they felt they needed.

**Challenges of Measuring Impact**

Measuring the impact of participation in coaching on teaching practices, teachers’ level of collaboration, and increasing student achievement, and overall impact of the project were frequently mentioned as challenges the former coaches were not able to overcome. They attributed their frustrations to a lack of training in how to create simple data collection devices, and a lack of expectations or guidance related to measurement from project leaders. The coaching literature contained a number of references to the methodological complexities involved in trying to isolate the impact of coaching on student learning outcomes because of the number of variables that affect academic
performance (Borman, & Feger, 2006; Knight, & Cornett, 2008; Peterson et al., 2009).

Only recently have researchers started to use validated observation instruments and
scientifically rigorous research designs to measure the impact of coaching on teacher
instructional practices and impact on student achievement (Campbell, & Malkus, 2011;
Kretlow, Wood, & Cook, 2011; Teemant, Wink, & Tyra, 2011). A few of the former
coaches described a number of data collection tools they created in later years of the
project to measure the frequency of teachers’ implementation of target instructional
practices. They reported feeling much more confident about their impact on teaching
behaviors as a result.

After I reviewed both the literature and coaches’ narratives related to measuring
the impact of coaching I realized that this issue also continues to frustrate model
developers, researchers, and schools that have implemented coaching projects. However,
I did see an emergence of both formal and informal attempts to collect such data within
the more recent research reports. An outgrowth of the more rigorous research and the
development of validated instrumentation should be the integration of these new
measurement techniques at the practitioner level.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Numerous opportunities remain for research on the topic of coaching for
instructional improvement. Through my review of literature I was unable to locate any
cost-benefit studies conducted on any of the coaching models described. Certainly this
has to do with the methodological difficulties in determining the benefits, but the number
of impact studies seems to be increasing each year. Once reliable measurement
techniques have been validated cost-benefit studies are sure to follow.
Efficacy studies related to specific coaching techniques or procedures, critical coach competencies, and effective coach professional development are also needed to further the professional knowledge base. There is also a need to identify clear coaching models and frameworks that will allow comparisons of impact across different models. The barrier to that currently is that even models sharing the same name are often different based on a variety of implementation contexts.

The development of new or refined coaching models based on the current knowledge base is another recommendation. Attempts to develop new models should include frameworks that have enough clarity to be reproduced in successive projects, but enough flexibility to be applied across a variety of different school contexts. It may also be necessary to develop models that are not copyrighted as intellectual property so that comparative efficacy studies can be conducted in the future.

My final recommendations for future coaching research are directly related to two topics that were emphasized by the study participants as critical to the success of coaching. One was the importance of high quality training and on-going professional development for coaches. Future studies might explore the effectiveness of training and on-going professional development programs that are designed based on the coaches’ recommendations, combined with the conclusions of professional development research that were identified through the review of foundational literature. I did not discover any studies that sought to gather coaches’ perceptions about what they needed, desired, or believed was important to include in the training and on-going professional development provided to coaches. Thus, the recommendations related to professional development
made by coaches in this investigation may be considered to new knowledge, and worthy of further study.

The second topic highlighted by the study participants was the importance of the collaborative and supportive relationships that developed between coaches. Many of the former coaches suggested that without these relationships they would not have been able to achieve the successes that they did in their practice. Their recommendations for coach training and on-going professional development emphasized the need to provide time, multiple opportunities, and encouragement to develop these relationships with their colleagues. Future research might explore the significance or impact of relationships between coaches, or to compare the perceived effectiveness of professional development designs that emphasize relationship building, with designs that do not have relationship building as a specific focus. The depth of the relationships between the study participants was so apparent as to be almost palpable. It seemed to be a powerful phenomenon worthy of further study so that a deeper understanding of the influence of collegial relationships on the successful practice of coaching.

**Implications for Practice**

This phenomenological case study investigating the experiences and resulting perceptions of educators involved in a four-year coaching project adds to the current professional knowledge base. A number of themes emerged during the process of telling the story of the Perry Coaching Project from the coaches’ viewpoints. Numerous recommendations were offered by the study participants in an effort to support the success of future coaching endeavors. These recommendations based on lived experiences of the phenomenon of coaching are similar to those found in the coaching
literature, but some are unique. The developers of future coaching models or projects may want to consider these themes and the wisdom shared by the study participants in an effort to avoid the significant barriers coaches’ identified as negatively impacting their successful practice and the overall success of the project. Within their story there are also many examples of coaching successes and strategies on which those successes were built. There is much to learn from their narratives.

It is my hope that by documenting the knowledge gained and meanings constructed by coaches who participated in the Perry Coaching Project that what they learned and experienced will not be lost. Their understandings and wisdom shared are valuable to the profession of education and should be recorded and published for others to consider for the benefit of teachers and the children they teach.

Conclusions

At the conclusion of this dissertation study it is possible to say with greater certainty that the potential for coaching relationships to influence changes in thinking about learning and in actual instructional practices is clear. Despite the barriers and challenges encountered during their journey, every coach participant in the study believed that their practice made a difference in the lives of teachers and the students they educate. Their stories of coaching successes are practical evidence of what is possible through this method of professional development aimed at instructional improvement.

Coaches’ voices and critical input should inform the professional dialogue and future research regarding coaching. New models of coaching should be designed to address the limitations of current models identified through this review of current professional literature and the knowledge gained from this dissertation study. I hope that
other researchers will conduct and report on similar investigations conducted in a variety of contexts and involving a variety of coaching models.
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APPENDIX A

TABLES 16-18
### Table 16

*Factors that Positively Influence Successful Instructional Change*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive influences on instructional change</th>
<th>Researcher(s) who identified the influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ perceive the innovation as helpful in teaching low performing students</td>
<td>Berman &amp; McLaughlin (1976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals and teachers share goals for the outcomes of change as well as clear understandings of the targeted instructional practices</td>
<td>Adams &amp; Copeland (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fullan (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hargreaves (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of the change is not too broad and not too rigid</td>
<td>Berman &amp; McLaughlin (1976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained commitment of district and building leaders to the targeted innovation</td>
<td>Berman &amp; McLaughlin (1976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change initiative driven by a group of committed teachers in the building</td>
<td>Huberman &amp; Miles (1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers receive high levels of technical support in the classroom during initial implementation of the innovation until mastery and integration in day-to-day practice</td>
<td>Assor et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coburn &amp; Hill (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desimone et al. (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fuchs &amp; Fuchs (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kinder, Gersten, &amp; Kelly (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supovitz et al. (2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zembylas &amp; Barker (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development that includes active learning activities including collegial dialogue, collegial study groups, teacher networking, problem-solving task forces, action research projects, creation of teacher resource centers, collaborative identification of problems of practice, brainstorming possible solutions</td>
<td>Cohen &amp; Hill (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darling-Hammond et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garet et al. (2001)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Supovitz &amp; Turner (2000)</td>
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</table>
Table 16 (continued)

*Factors that Positively Influence Instructional Change*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive influences on instructional change</th>
<th>Researcher(s) who identified the influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development specific to the targeted practice(s) that continues across 6 to 12 months and includes 30 to 100 contact hours</td>
<td>Banilower (2002) Corcoran, McVay, &amp; Riordan (2003) Supovitz &amp; Turner (2000) Yoon et al. (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development that is embedded within a larger school improvement plan</td>
<td>Birman et al. (2000) Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) Yoon et al. (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is provided for teachers to reflect on their characteristics and practices compared to the targeted innovation</td>
<td>Coburn (2001) Fabry (2010) Olsen &amp; Sexton (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers with higher efficacy beliefs</td>
<td>Guskey (2001) Tshannen-Moran &amp; Woolfolk Hoy (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative influences on instructional change</td>
<td>Researcher(s) who identified the influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>School conditions and climate that do not support collaboration, effective teaching, and responsibility</td>
<td>Borko, Wolf, Simone, &amp; Uchiyama (2003)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Edmunds (2005)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fullan (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of transfer of target teaching practices from professional development into classroom instruction</td>
<td>Bush (1984)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Showers &amp; Joyce (1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early and late teacher career stages</td>
<td>Hargreaves (2005)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Huberman (1985)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kauffman (1993)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stanovich (1993)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Top-down implementation of innovations susceptibility to waning support due to administrative turn-over</td>
<td>Evans (1996)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Fullan (1991)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Huberman &amp; Miles (1984)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Schlechty (1992)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of on-going or follow-up support to master new instructional practices after initial professional</td>
<td>Coburn &amp; Hill (2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>development</td>
<td>Darling-Hammond et al. (2009)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Desimone et al. (2002)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fuchs &amp; Fuchs (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guskey &amp; Yoon (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development of less than 14 hours, time constraints not always under principals’ control</td>
<td>Kinder, Gersten, &amp; Kelly (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Showers &amp; Joyce (1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supovitz, Mayer, &amp; Kahle (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yoon et al. (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content and context of professional development not viewed as a coherent part of a whole school</td>
<td>Edmunds (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improvement plan</td>
<td>Yoon et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opportunities for personal and collegial reflection on the targeted instructional practice during and</td>
<td>Coburn (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>following introductory professional development</td>
<td>Darling-Hammond (2009)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fabry (2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guskey &amp; Yoon (2009)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 17 (continued)

*Factors that Negatively Influence Instructional Change*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative influences on instructional change</th>
<th>Researcher(s) who identified the influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low sense of teacher efficacy</td>
<td>Guskey (1988, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johnson (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tschannen-Moran &amp; Woolfolk Hoy (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators placing blame for change project failure on teachers’ negative attitudes and resistance to changing instructional practices</td>
<td>Evans (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noguera (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership failure to understand and attend to the skills required to implement a novel practice, or the complexity of internalization process necessary for teachers to sustain novel instructional practices</td>
<td>Assor et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigid defensiveness and psychological myopia in response to perceived threats to teachers’ professionalism and competency</td>
<td>Olsen &amp; Sexton (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator response to teacher defensiveness in an autocratic, coercive leadership style</td>
<td>Evans (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pierce &amp; Newstrom (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation of more than one change project at a time, and discontinuing most after only one or two years</td>
<td>Borko, Wolf, Simone &amp; Uchiyama (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fullan (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Olsen &amp; Sexton (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norms of the profession favor isolation and privacy, cultural norms in schools that impede collaboration</td>
<td>Darling-Hammond et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goddard, Goddard, &amp; Tschannen-Moran (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louis, Marks, &amp; Kruse (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McLaughlin &amp; Talbert (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of structural supports related to professional development including released time to attend, stipends, time set aside in the school schedule, and time for collegial dialogue</td>
<td>Darling-Hammond et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18  
*Conclusions Reported in the Coaching Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Peer Coaching)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers who had been coached implemented target strategies more frequently and more effectively than non-coached teachers</td>
<td>Joyce &amp; Showers (1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached teachers maintained the target strategies after the coaching had stopped</td>
<td>Baker (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following PD target strategies were frequently observed in coached teachers’ classrooms. Target strategies were infrequently observed in non-coached teachers’ classrooms.</td>
<td>Bush (1984) Showers (1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in peer coaching increased collaboration between teachers, as well as sustained use of target strategies.</td>
<td>Kohler, Crilly, Shearer, &amp; Good (2001) Truesdale (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Cognitive Coaching)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students of coached teachers demonstrated significant improvement on a measure of achievement compared to students of non-coached teachers.</td>
<td>Rennick (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached teachers scored significantly higher than non-coached teachers on a measure of efficacy beliefs.</td>
<td>Alseike (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers reported that cognitive coaching was a significantly more positive model of supervision than a traditional supervision model.</td>
<td>Edwards (1993) Mackie (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Literacy Coaching)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in coaching led to the development of a collaborative school culture.</td>
<td>Symonds (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached teachers were more receptive to changes in instruction than non-coached teachers.</td>
<td>Symonds (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached teachers demonstrated an increased focus on equity of instruction.</td>
<td>Symonds (2003)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18 (continued)

*Conclusions Reported in the Coaching Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Literacy Coaching) continued</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in coaching improved communication between teachers and district leaders.</td>
<td>Symonds (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in coaching increased leadership capacity in teachers and administrators.</td>
<td>Symonds (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students of coached teachers demonstrated increased performance levels on the reading portion of the state achievement test</td>
<td>The Learning Network (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached teachers demonstrated significant increases in the frequency of explicit instruction, students’ time spent reading, and engagement in high quality practice across a variety of grade levels.</td>
<td>Gamse, Kemple, &amp; Jacobs (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached teachers made observable changes in reading instruction.</td>
<td>Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, &amp; Schock (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached teachers performed significantly higher on a standardized measure of the quality of literacy instruction than non-coached teachers.</td>
<td>Newman &amp; Cunningham (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students of coached teachers demonstrated significant gains across all subjects on a standardized measure of early literacy.</td>
<td>Elish-Piper &amp; L’Alier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Instructional Coaching)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers who participated in coaching PD reported that compared to traditional PD they had higher rates of personal engagement in learning and enjoyment, were more likely to implement the target reading strategy, and had increased ability to recall the information learned during the PD.</td>
<td>Knight (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers engaged in on-going coaching paired with frequent interactions with the coach were more likely to demonstrate changes in instructional practices than non-coached teachers.</td>
<td>Rivera, Burley, &amp; Sass (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher frequencies of coach classroom observations, model lessons, and feedback sessions increased the likelihood of sustained teacher implementation of the target instructional practice.</td>
<td>Rivera, Burley, &amp; Sass (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More frequent dialogue specific to teachers’ instructional practices had a strong positive influence on teachers’ change in classroom instruction.</td>
<td>Rivera, Burley, &amp; Sass (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached teachers reported increased implementation of target practices from PD sessions.</td>
<td>Knight (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers strongly agreed that observing a coach model a targeted strategy made it easier for them to implement and also increased their fidelity of implementation.</td>
<td>Knight (2004)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18 (continued)  
*Conclusions Reported in the Coaching Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Instructional Coaching) continued</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coached teachers implemented a targeted unit organizer strategy within 91.5% of observations compared with 36.2% of non-coached teacher observations.</td>
<td>Knight &amp; Cornett (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When a target strategy was implemented the quality of the implementation was low across all non-coached teachers observed.</td>
<td>Knight &amp; Cornett (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached teachers reported that they were much more likely to use a target strategy in the future compared to non-coached teachers.</td>
<td>Knight &amp; Cornett (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistically significant teacher growth in the use of a five standard instructional model was demonstrated by coached teachers, along with a linear trend of consistent growth in the use of the strategy over time.</td>
<td>Teemant, Wink, &amp; Tyra (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers demonstrated increased accuracy in the delivery of math instruction when an initial training session was followed by participation in coaching.</td>
<td>Kretlow, Wood, &amp; Cook (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students taught in schools where teachers received math coaching demonstrated statistically significantly higher scores on the math portion of state achievement tests compared to control groups.</td>
<td>Campbell &amp; Malkus (2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT FORM
A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND
Ms. Monica Hummons, a doctoral candidate at Ashland University, is conducting a research study to help understand the experiences of, perceptions of, and meanings constructed through participation in the Columbus Coaching Project. Additional components of this research are to explore how coaches went about identifying cases of coaching success. You are being invited to participate in this study because you were employed by the Perry Coaching Project (a pseudonym) as an instructional coach during at least one school year of the implementation.

B. PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate in the study, the following will occur:

1. Ms. Hummons will conduct a series of four focus group discussions focusing on your coaching experiences, perceptions formed about coaching and the project, and recommendations for future coaching project development or refinement.

   Study participants will be asked to attend at least three of the four scheduled focus group sessions. These discussions will be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis at a later date. Each focus group meeting will last approximately one hour. Coaches’ real names will not appear in the researcher field notes, research report or any subsequent publications.

2. Once the focus group data has been coded and analyzed and a draft of the conclusions has been written by Ms. Hummons participants will have an opportunity to review the draft document and provide feedback. This process will involve the option of receiving your input via e-mailed or postal delivery of written comments or verbally during a personal interview or phone conversation. Participation in this feedback process is important to the research process but is not mandatory.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
1. Confidentiality: Participation in research will involve a loss of privacy; however, every attempt will be made to allow participants to feel emotionally, psychologically, socially, and professionally “safe”. The use of pseudonyms within any documentation is an example of these efforts. Additionally, participant consent forms, printed data, and researcher notes will be stored in a locked file.
cabinet in Ms. Hummons’ home. She will be the only person with access to this data. Any electronic data will be stored as password protected files on an external data storage device (flash drive), also stored in the locked file cabinet. Any personally identifiable research data will be destroyed after 60 months. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study.

2. **Confidentiality**: Ms. Hummons will ask all focus group participants not to tell anyone outside the group what any particular person said within the session. However, Ms. Hummons cannot guarantee that everyone will keep the discussion private.

3. **Confidentiality**: Ms. Hummons will transcribe audio-recorded interviews and focus group discussions. After the transcription has been completed, all audio-recordings will be destroyed.

4. **Confidentiality**: Ms. Hummons will securely store all field notes. These will be held confidential by the researcher and will be destroyed after 60 months.

D. **BENEFITS**

The direct benefit to participating teachers is that they will have an opportunity to provide in-depth feedback regarding all aspects of participation in the instructional coaching project. Participation in the research will allow you to have a “voice” in professional dialogue informing future development, enhancement of, and evaluation of similar projects.

E. **COSTS**

There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this research.

F. **PAYMENT**

You will be paid $100.00 for participating in at least three of the four focus group sessions. If you attend fewer than three sessions you will receive $30.00 per session. If you participate in an individual follow-up interview you will also receive $30.00. You will be paid in cash in August of 2011, following the conclusion of all focus group and follow-up interview sessions.

G. **QUESTIONS**

While you have been introduced to the nature and procedures involved in this research by reading these introductory materials you may still have questions about participation. You may call Ms. Hummons at 614-940-9937 at any time to have your questions answered without any need to identify yourself by name. You may also contact Ms.
Hummons through e-mail at mhummons@me.com, but keep in mind that this is a less confidential method of communication.

H. CONSENT
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. Participants are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

If you agree to participate, you should sign below.

______________________________________________
Date                                                   Signature of Study Participant

______________________________________________
Date                                                   Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS
Interview and Focus Group Discussion Topics

1. Please describe your experiences related to the following components of the Columbus Coaching Project:
   - Recruiting, interviewing, qualifications required, and hiring process
   - Training and orientation process
   - Columbus Coaching Project framework and procedures
   - Project initiation at the district and administrator level
   - Coaches’ roles and responsibilities
   - On-going support provided by project coordinators or data coaches
   - On-going coach professional development opportunities
   - Coaches’ supervision and evaluation
   - Opportunities to participate in the project evaluation process
   - Interactions with teachers at the school site
   - Interactions with administrators at the school site
   - Availability of coaching resource materials and supplies
   - Any additional components not mentioned

2. Please describe aspects of the following coaching project components you perceived as *most helpful* in supporting your work as an instructional coach:
   - Recruiting, interviewing, qualifications required, and hiring process
   - Training and orientation process
   - Columbus Coaching Project framework and procedures
   - Project initiation at the district and administrator level
   - Coaches’ roles and responsibilities
   - On-going support provided by project coordinators or data coaches
   - On-going coach professional development opportunities
   - Coaches’ supervision and evaluation
   - Opportunities to participate in the project evaluation process
   - Interactions with teachers at the school site
   - Interactions with administrators at the school site
   - Availability of coaching resource materials and supplies
   - Any additional components not mentioned
3. Please describe aspects of the following coaching project components you perceived as barriers to your work as an instructional coach:

- Recruiting, interviewing, qualifications required, and hiring process
- Training and orientation process
- Columbus Coaching Project framework and procedures
- Project initiation at the district and administrator level
- Coaches’ roles and responsibilities
- On-going support provided by project coordinators or data coaches
- On-going coach professional development opportunities
- Coaches’ supervision and evaluation
- Opportunities to participate in the project evaluation process
- Interactions with teachers at the school site
- Interactions with administrators at the school site
- Availability of coaching resource materials and supplies
- Any additional components not mentioned

4. Please describe what coaching activities you spent the most time engaging in and why.

5. Given your coaching interactions and classroom observations of instruction, what do you think were teachers’ greatest areas of weakness?

6. Please describe recommendations you have for coaching project developers regarding the following components of instructional coaching:

- Recruiting, interviewing, qualifications required, and hiring process
- Training and orientation process
- Columbus Coaching Project framework and procedures
- Project initiation at the district and administrator level
- Coaches’ roles and responsibilities
- On-going support provided by project coordinators or data coaches
- On-going coach professional development opportunities
- Coaches’ supervision and evaluation
- Opportunities to participate in the project evaluation process
- Interactions with teachers at the school site
- Interactions with administrators at the school site
- Availability of coaching resource materials and supplies
- Any additional components not mentioned

7. Please describe the benefits of coaching to students, teachers, administrators, and school districts you perceive as a result of your instructional coaching experience.
8. Please describe the personal benefits of providing coaching.

9. How did you go about documenting your work as an instructional coach?

10. How did you go about identifying cases of coaching success?

11. How did you feel when the coaching project came to an end?
APPENDIX D

COACHES’ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE COACHING SUCCESS
### Coaches Recommendations for Future Coaching Project Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Model</td>
<td>Meet the definition of a model and be easy to communicate to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be well developed, based on research, published, and communicated to all stakeholders prior to project implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be flexible enough to allow for meeting individual school needs and contexts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Include the use of an observation instrument to provide a framework for working with individual teachers and grade levels on improving instruction by focusing on teacher behaviors or practices that have been found to impact achievement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Utilize the pre-conference, observation, post-conference format but not without designating or creating time for teachers and coaches to engage in the process appropriately</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deploy coaches in pairs with attention given to complementary knowledge, skills, and expertise</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Require full-time salaried coaches for each school site so that they can be on-site whenever teachers are present and available for critical meetings regardless of when they occur. This would also permit them to become a true part of and demonstrate investment in the school even if hired through an outside agency.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pay should be commensurate with experience and level of responsibility required.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Coach contracts should be provided for the entire length of project implementation with plenty of forewarning if there’s a possibility of discontinued implementation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Include clearly stated purpose, goals, and expected realistic outcomes if implemented with fidelity for a minimum period of time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Set out to create a school culture of collaboration in which coaching is not only accepted but is desirable as a means of improving professional practice because there’s always room for growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching Model (continued)</td>
<td>Not be marketed as a “silver bullet” to improve student achievement in a short period of time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Require a minimum five to seven year commitment to fund and implement coaching in the district or school in order to measure its full impact</td>
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<td>Offer flexibility in the coach’s role based upon the current school improvement plan</td>
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<td>Not put former colleagues in coaching relationships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recommend pairing coaching with a professional rounds school improvement process</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Communicate an expectation that a coach’s work will filter down to the student level increasing understanding and ownership of their learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Include a very clear and comprehensive coach job description detailing critical skills necessary, especially the level of computer skills necessary as well as everything related to data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>More time needs to be spent in collaborative planning between the district administrators, principals, the agency providing services, and any other partners so that all of them have a good understanding of purpose and goals of the project, what the model is and how it operates, expected outcomes and how they will be measured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>Seek bargaining unit input regarding purpose, goals, expected activities, and coaches’ roles. Perhaps asking them to join in the collaborative planning process as one of the partners at the table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principals and schools should receive an overview of the proposed program presented by someone with deep knowledge of the model and processes of coaching during which they can ask questions for clarification. This should be followed by collegial dialog weighing the pros and cons of participating. The decision to participate in the project or not should be made at this level, not by school district edict. A strong building-level commitment is crucial to success.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Once that commitment is made, all teachers should be required to take part in coaching. Incentives for a building’s participation in the project should be considered.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Principals and teachers should be provided with introductory training prior to the coach’s entry at the school site. This should cover roles, activities, what to expect from the coach, non-evaluative and confidential context of coaching interactions, what coaches should be asked to do and what they are not permitted to do and why.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Project developers should try to uncover the district’s cycle of innovation implementation for consideration prior to implementation. Steps may need to be taken to assure that this project will be maintained long enough to see positive effects if there seems to be a revolving door pattern of innovation in the district currently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involve the principal in the coach hiring process because they will know better if a candidate would be a good fit in their school context.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Possible prerequisites to coaching implementation in a building might include: (a) Principal’s commitment to support coaching and to communicate clear expectation for his staff to participate, (b) teacher’s recognition of the need for instructional change and willingness to make those changes through engagement in coaching, (c) a functioning School Leadership Team, (d) a functioning School Improvement Planning Team, (e) regularly scheduled grade level or departmental team meetings in place, (f) time available to permit teacher/coach interactions, and (g) time available for on-site professional development sessions.

A privately contracted instructional audit would provide the principal and coach with a good sense of current instructional strengths and weaknesses. The audit, along with the achievement data could be used to help them collaboratively determine an immediate focus for the coach’s work.

Consider allowing participation in coaching to be included in the IPIDPI process for teacher license renewal. Offer CEUs for participation in coaching professional development sessions as well.

Maintain consistent, transparent communication between all partners in the coaching project throughout every stage of implementation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Leaders’ Qualities, Skills, and Prior Experiences</td>
<td>Training or certification in relation to at least one common coaching model (i.e., cognitive coaching, instructional coaching, change coaching) and prior experience in a coaching role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extensive and recent classroom teaching experience (building administration counts)</td>
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<td>Well-developed leadership skills and experience in supervision and evaluation of personnel</td>
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<td>Extensive experience in designing and presenting professional development including in depth understanding of effective adult learning models</td>
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<td>Superior communication and interpersonal skills, including the ability to demonstrate professional courtesy</td>
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<td>A sense of humor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Training in curriculum and instruction, as well as familiarity with evidence-based instructional practices and the limited number of them available. Also familiarity with a large number of instructional best practices found by teachers to be effective</td>
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<td>Commitment to being transparent in decision-making and communication across all stakeholders</td>
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<td>Willingness to admit when they don’t have the answer, but will follow-up and find out rather than giving an inaccurate answer that later must be revised</td>
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<td>Demonstrate professional respect for the knowledge and skills of people who have been in education for 20 years or more, and the ability to capitalize on all the knowledge and expertise in the room</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Understands the importance of responding swiftly to a coach’s request for information or help</td>
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<td>Has the ability to model what’s expected of coaches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Leaders’ Qualities, Skills, and Prior Experiences (continued)</td>
<td>Must be able to balance necessary supervision functions against a personal need for control over the actions of others. Must be willing to accept criticism and reflect on it, admit and apologize when wrong, accept when personal professional changes are needed and commit to making them.</td>
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<td>Able to ask for help when needed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Strong conflict management and resolution skills</td>
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<td>Category</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coach Qualities, Skills, and Prior Experiences</td>
<td>At least 10 years of recent classroom experience teaching in at least one major content area such as math, language arts, science, or social studies</td>
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<td>High level of computer and technology skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>An abundance of “people skills”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Comfort with and competence in all aspects of data use</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A deep understanding of instructional design</td>
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<td>A multitude of “best practice” strategies on the tip of their tongue</td>
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<td>Well-developed group facilitation skills</td>
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<td>An ability to build trusting relationships quickly and then move people forward from that feel good stage into the real work, must understand when to push</td>
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<td>Strong leadership skills and the ability to recognize leadership potential and support the development of leadership skills in others</td>
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<td>Conflict mediation skills</td>
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<td>Empathy and a desire to see the perspective of others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Good sense of humor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Excellent listener with the ability and desire to pick up on people’s stories, their personal contexts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ability to assess school culture and climate that they’re working in and hope to influence</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Category: Initial and On-going Coach Training

Recommendations:

Spread out the training across more days with fewer hours in each, as the amount of content covered in eight full days was overwhelming.

Conduct training needs assessments and several training paths based on the results.

Rely on effective adult learning models in terms of delivery format, structure, and collaborative, hands-on activities, and opportunities for reflective discussions.

Use videos to provide practice conducting classroom observations including some type of observation instrument focused on teacher behaviors and practices that have a proven link to increasing student achievement, allow coaches to reflect in pairs or triads about the video observation.

Conduct actual classroom observations in pairs utilizing an observation guide, followed by discussion about both coaches’ perceptions of the instruction, and why they recorded what they saw as they did.

Provide in-depth training on how to set up simple data collection forms and procedures so coaches will be able to document changes in teacher practices, and so that they can share these with teachers in relation to collecting formative data on student learning.

Provide explicit training on how to do the tasks expected when coaching and less time spent on endlessly pointing out what coaches are not allowed to do.

Provide new coaches with cognitive coaching training and certification, or training in some of the other respected models out there such as the Aspen Institute Model, or Knight’s Instructional Coaching Model.

The professional developers and presenters must know the needs of their audience and be familiar with the contexts they practice in.
Provide training in providing emotional support to teachers when they “fall apart” in your office.

Individualize on-going PD based on a coach’s background, year in the project, grade levels supported, and their own requests for further training on specific topics or skills.

Capitalize on the wealth of knowledge and experiences coaches in the project possess by having coaches be presenters of instructional or coaching strategies that have worked for them.

Provide formal opportunities for coach dialog and collaboration during monthly PD sessions or meetings without constraining the topics or requiring some busy-work task be completed as part of the process. Coach collaboration should be recognized as valuable and as crucial to their professional development as any whole-group presentation of concepts.

The quality of initial training should not be dependent on the point at which a new coach enters the program.

Collect coach input on the value of the professional development sessions each time. Take their input seriously and make adjustments to the PD design, delivery, or content as needed. Don’t request coaches’ feedback if it won’t impact future sessions.

Attempt to capture the content and dialog stimulated during PD sessions to share with those who weren’t able to attend or as a resource for coaches hired at a later point, particularly presentations on strategies presented by coaches.

Incorporate shadowing of experienced coaches as part of the initial training process.

Utilize inter-coach shadowing as part of on-going PD; encourage joint classroom observations followed by reflective discussions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial and On-going Coach Training (continued)</td>
<td>Offer PD in small groups organized by grade levels served and held outside of regular school hours so that coaches aren’t taken away from their school sites during prime coaching interaction times.</td>
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<td>Provide coaches with their own coaches throughout the implementation period permitting them to have assistance in continuing to develop specific skills and competencies.</td>
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<td>Keep in mind the extensive research regarding 10% transfer rates of traditional PD formats. Isn’t that why we are offering coaching services in the first place?</td>
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<td>Be sure that the content presented during on-going PD is relevant to coaches’ practice as well as their differing school contexts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching Activities and Strategies</td>
<td>Permit note taking or the use of an observation instrument during classroom observations so that they can be used as a method of promoting teacher reflection and to give structure to post-observation conferences.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Incorporate the Deming Cycle of Plan, Do, Study, Act as a strategy for coaches to use with grade level or department teams, leadership teams, school improvement teams, or any group they might assist in making improvements.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Move beyond data review and analysis activities into strategies for using the data to do something or to improve student learning.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We never seemed to get to the point where we assisted teachers in using the data for day-to-day lesson planning, making instructional adjustments, offering remediation, providing intervention, or encouraging students to be aware of their own learning. These deeper data activities are ones where teachers need the most help. They don’t dismiss the data handed to them because they don’t care, they just don’t know how to use it. Teachers know they are supposed to say they use data to drive their instruction, but when you probe further into how they are doing that they often become defensive. They know the rhetoric but not how to actually do what it says.</td>
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<td>Encourage collaboration between principals and coaches, particularly in determining a focus for the coach in the early stages.</td>
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<td>Permit leadership coaching with the principal or maybe provide a leadership coach to the principal as a part of the model.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Have stronger and clearer expectations that the coach will be involved in the school improvement process and participate in the development of the annual school improvement plan. Also have an expectation that the goals and strategies included in the school improvement plan are a major focus of coaching interactions with teachers and teams of teachers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Encourage leadership team involvement in determining the focus of coaching in their building within broad guidelines determined by the coaching project.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Activities and Strategies (continued)</td>
<td>Collect data on collaboratively developed, measureable, goals at teacher, grade, and school-wide levels.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Make coaching classroom management strategies permissible and even recommended when necessary to get to targeted instructional strategies.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Don’t strictly prohibit working with or interacting with kids within some basic guidelines based on common sense.</td>
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</table>
Coaching projects should have a means to collect both qualitative and quantitative progress data and should not be totally based on student test data at the end.

Measuring the impact of coaching on a building should tie in with the measurement of progress on the annual school improvement plan.

Data used to measure the impact of coaching should focus on the attainment or short range and long-range goals developed collaboratively with teachers, grade level teams, or all school team members.

If using computer software to collect data or for reporting purposes make sure coaches are involved in its development to insure that it’s user-friendly, and it includes every category of coaching activity, and that it’s appropriate to the organization of all grade levels.

Incorporate the use of a coach field journal for documenting their work with each teacher or group in order to record both qualitative and quantitative data as well as coach reflections. This would be more valuable to coaches than filling out a report involving check off boxes that may or may not apply to the work you’ve done that day.

Teach coaches how to apply an action research model that will provided necessary data on effecting instructional change. For example, the coach administers a PD needs assessment, the most glaring need that also ties in with the ASIP goals is selected and PD is provided. A quick pencil-paper comprehension assessment is administered following the PD session to determine level of knowledge gained. Next the coach engages in individual coaching interactions to assist in planning for and implementing the strategies from the PD. Strategy implementation data are collected using walk-through style observations. The data are organized and displayed in chart format and presented to the larger group for reflection on progress and to brainstorm ways to keep moving forward. Short-range goals for improvement are set and the process continues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measuring Project Impact (continued)</td>
<td>The development of short and long range SMART goals should be required with consideration given to whether the goals and data collection procedures can isolate the effect of coaching on goal attainment.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collect formative data related to teacher’s change in instructional practices throughout each coaching cycle.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engage in an on-going meaningful project evaluation process and share to results with all stakeholders in the project. Use the periodic evaluation results to generate collegial reflection and problem solving on how to improve coaching success.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>