A MIXED-METHODS STUDY EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL COACH WITHIN A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Although instructional coaching and professional learning communities provide ongoing, job-embedded support and professional learning, little is known about what role the instructional coach serves within the setting of the professional learning community or what coaching skills teachers find most helpful within this setting. Research examining the specific role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community is nearly nonexistent. This mixed-methods study investigates the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community, what coaching skills teachers find most helpful within this setting, and what impact instructional coaches have on teacher perceptions of the professional learning community. Themes from semistructured interviews, observations, and open-ended survey responses revealed that teachers and instructional coaches perceive multiple roles and coaching skills within the professional learning community. The instructional coach serves as a bridge to guide teachers to new learning through providing specific supports, manifesting the partnership principles, showing availability and trust, and sharing instructional strategies and ideas. Utilizing the PLCA-R survey, descriptive statistics identified the impact instructional coaches have on teacher perceptions of the professional learning community.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Teacher professional development is an essential component for widespread educational reform, yet little, if any, guidance is provided for how educational leaders can achieve transformational change through professional development, and adequate time and support are rarely provided (Darling-Hammond, Wei, & Andree, 2010; Fullan & Knight, 2011). Without a detailed directive, the No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation mandated that states provide high-quality professional development for teachers (Borko, 2004). In a rapidly changing landscape of student learning, teacher learning has been slow to keep the pace. The greater demands of student accountability require focused teacher learning; therefore, leaders must provide the support and guidance that teachers need (Guskey, 2009). Fortunately, professional development can lead to improvements in instructional practices and student growth, and researchers are beginning to understand how teachers learn (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

Educational research has identified that learning is an ongoing activity and change is a continuous process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Dove & Freeley, 2011; Gulamhussein, 2013; Hord, 2009; Morrissey, 2000). Teachers must engage in professional learning that is sustained, intensive, and ongoing (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Gulamhussein, 2013), and they must share the role of both teacher and learner (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Stewart, 2014). Therefore, educators must shift the focus from professional *development* to ongoing professional *learning* that is job-embedded (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, Dookie, & Beatty, 2010; Bruce & Flynn, 2013; Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Desimone, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Gulamhussein, 2013; Hofman & Dijkstra, 2010; Morrissey, 2000; Sato, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2008;

Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015; Stewart, 2014). Job-embedded professional learning is most effective within a collective partnership of active learners who are able to apply knowledge directly to the classroom (Bruce et al., 2010; Croft et al., 2010; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Gulamhussein, 2013) and focus on student growth (Bruce & Flynn, 2013). The emergence of the professional learning community as a vehicle for job-embedded training addresses the needs of teacher learners, yet not all professional learning communities have the leadership, support, and structures needed to succeed (Hord, 2009; Owen, 2014; Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2015). One solution may be instructional coaches who can serve as the catalyst to assist and guide professional learning community implementation, collaboration, and ongoing transformative change (Boatright, DeVoogt Van Lare, Gallucci, & Yoon, 2010; Croft et al., 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Although ample evidence supports the benefits of professional learning communities, (Bruce & Flynn, 2013; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Hord, 2009; Lippy & Zamora, 2012; Tam, 2015), as well as the responsibilities of the principal as leader of professional learning communities (Hord, 2009), the research is limited regarding the role of the instructional coach within this context. Future studies are needed in the area of instructional leadership in relation to (a) teaching and learning (Neumerski, 2013); (b) how to support and maintain a professional learning community (Richmond & Manokore, 2011), especially the support needed to increase student growth (Williams, 2012; and (c) on-site professional learning and support in urban school districts (Cramer, Gudwin, & Salazar, 2007; Shernoff, 2011). Job-embedded, sustained learning can transform teaching practice and improve student achievement (Bruce et al., 2010; Croft et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). However, only a small percentage of teachers receive this

type of professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Teachers in the United States receive little if any job-embedded learning opportunities, coaching, or mentoring when compared with high-performing schools in other nations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). It is clear that professional learning in an era of accountability can no longer simply expose teachers to a new concept or provide basic knowledge about instructional strategies. Rather, it requires a transformation in practice that leads to student learning (Gulamhussein, 2013). Research is needed to determine how instructional coaches can support professional learning communities, what type of learning is best in small groups, and if instructional coaching is effective when professional learning topics are mandatory (Cornett & Knight, 2009).

Effective professional learning opportunities provide teachers with the time and tools to transfer new skills and strategies to the classroom (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Maloney & Konza, 2011). In other words, teachers must be able to connect new concepts and ideas and participate in decision-making (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Gulamhussein, 2013). Moreover, professional learning opportunities must focus not only on the instruction of effective instructional practices, but also on modeling how to become effective learners (Gulamhussein, 2013; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Teachers must have relational support through the formation of reciprocal relationships in order to take risks and have motivation to implement the new learning into the classroom (Maloney & Konza, 2011; Shernoff, 2011). Authentic professional learning shifts the focus away from working in isolation to a model of collaboration (Borko, 2004; Croft et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Edwards, 2008; Fullan, 2011; Hindin, Morocco, Mott, & Aguilar, 2007; Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010; Owens, 2010; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Schmoker, 2004; Williams, 2012). Furthermore, effective

professional development leads participants to reflection (Attard, 2012). Perhaps professional learning communities exhibit the characteristics of ongoing, sustained, job-embedded professional development, but do they have the support, guidance, encouragement, and leadership needed to reach their fullest potential as agents of transformational change?

Indeed, the research is limited on the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community, the coaching characteristics and skills that might be most helpful, and what difference, if any, an instructional coach might make on implementation and collaboration of the professional learning community. However, a large body of evidence exists supporting the work coaches do with individual teachers (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Cornett & Knight, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Joyce & Showers, 2002). For instance, instructional coaching provides ongoing consistent follow-up with teachers as they implement new instructional strategies (Croft et al., 2010) and encourages teachers to implement change with a higher degree of self-efficacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Cornett & Knight, 2009; Fullan, 2007). Also, when instructional coaches support teachers' new learning, teachers implement the changes to a greater degree, especially if the instructional coach utilizes the partnership principles: equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity (Cornett & Knight, 2009; Knight, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002). In addition, coaching contributes to the transfer of new skills to the classroom (Cornett & Knight, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 2002), as well as having an impact on teacher attitudes and instructional practices. This study examined the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community, what coaching skills teachers find most helpful within this setting, and what impact an instructional coach has on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community.

Background to the Study

Traditional professional learning opportunities consist of one-time events, or workshops (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; DuFour et al., 2005; Patton et al., 2015),that produce short-term results and lack full teacher participation (Hord, 1997). Educational researchers have argued that the most effective professional learning consists of teams who share problems, perspectives, and collegiality (Guskey, 1991). They have argued that leaders must help schools focus on a site-based, collaborative culture, rather than mere programs and projects (Croft et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; DuFour et al., 2005). In fact, Darling-Hammond, Wei, and Andree (2010) found that commonalities of schools in high-achieving countries include ample opportunities for continuous professional learning that provides job-embedded time for collaboration and planning during the school day. Professional learning communities have developed as a group of collective learners with the shared vision and purpose of ensuring that students learn (DuFour et al., 2005). These professional learning communities share the same values, goals, vision, collaborative work, collective inquiry, continuing improvement, and a focus on student results (DuFour et al., 2005). With the emergence of the professional learning community, teachers collaborating within the context of a community no longer work in isolation; rather, they develop a shared mission of student success and increase their commitment to goals for student growth (Croft et al., 2010; Hord, 1997; Shernoff, 2011). Such collaboration of teachers translates to the same type of collaboration of students in the classroom (Borko, 2004; Williams, 2012).

Educational researchers continue to examine adult learning within the collective context and seek to understand how adults can best reach transformative learning. They have found that teachers are most productive when the professional learning is continuous (Bruce & Flynn, 2013)

and combined with action (Borko, 2004; Schmoker, 2004). In other words, teachers are able to learn new skills, connect the new concepts to prior knowledge and instructional practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), and implement them immediately. In addition, teachers must be able to participate in professional dialogue (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010; Wells & Feun, 2013) rather than merely listening to a presenter. Also, the most effective professional learning is inquiry-based (Borko, 2004; Bruce & Flynn, 2013; Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). Adult learners prefer to experience new knowledge in an active manner much the same as students in the classroom. Knowles' (1973) theory of andragogy contends that the art and science of adult education differ from pedagogy, or the art and science of teaching. Knowles' (1973) theory recognizes the assumption that adults learn differently than children in these areas: independent self-concept, readiness to learn, the role of experience, orientation to learning, and internal motivation.

Finally, studies of adult learning have provided evidence that teachers prefer to work in a collaborative setting, rather than isolation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Edwards, 2008; Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010; Owens, 2010; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Schmoker, 2004; Shernoff, 2011). Jacobs and Yendol-Hoppey (2010) argued that collaboration leads to reflection, and reflection leads to transformation. Schmoker (2004) added that collaboration is "our most effective tool for improving instruction" (p. 431). Teachers collaborate more frequently when they receive coaching (Edwards, 2008).

While professional learning communities provide collective, continuous, job-embedded collaborative learning, they sometimes lack the support needed to reach their goal of increasing student growth. Whether teachers are working individually or within the collegial context of a professional learning community, they must have support (Collet, 2012), guidance (Dever &

Lash, 2013), leadership, trust (Cranston, 2011; Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010), and follow-up (Guskey, 1991; Leclerc, Moreau, Dumouchel, & Sallafranque-St. Louis, 2012). In fact, when teachers work within a professional learning community and have such support and opportunity for reflection, they create the same culture in their classrooms (Owens, 2010). Professional communities thrive with a leadership that builds a framework of support (Collet, 2012; Hord, 2009).

Today's principals are taxed with time demands from district administrators, parents, students, teachers, community members, and in some cases, government leaders. The level of collaboration necessary to benefit a professional learning community requires hard work, discipline, persistence, and commitment (DuFour et al., 2005). Indeed, the leadership within a professional learning community is instrumental in both defining the purpose of the group and leading a collaborative dialogue (Hord, 2009). Instructional coaching can provide guidance, support, follow-up, and modeling to teachers (Knight, 2007) in such cases where the principal is absent from the group. Often, teachers within a professional learning community need assistance with seeking new instructional methods, changing classroom practices, and examining student data (Wells & Feun, 2013). Instructional coaches can provide direction in such cases. A coaching style of instructional leadership has been shown to have the greatest impact on teachers implementing new strategies in the classroom (Dove & Freeley, 2011). Instructional coaching can provide the guidance and support needed within a professional learning community, but the specific skills that might be most beneficial to teachers need to be explored.

Research Questions

Creswell (2012) described how research questions can "narrow the purpose statement to specific questions that researchers seek to answer" (p. 110). The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community, the coaching skills teachers find most helpful within this setting, and the impact an instructional coach has on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community.

In this study, research questions explored the topics of professional development, professional learning communities, and instructional coaching. The primary research questions in this study included the following:

1. What is the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community?
2. What coaching skills do teachers find most helpful within this setting?
3. What impact does an instructional coach have on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community?

Description of Terms

In the following section, the pertinent terms relevant to the topics addressed in this study have been listed. The terms have been defined by a thorough examination of the related literature and are offered as guidance.

Andragogy. A theory of adult learning based on the assumption that adults learn differently than children in the following areas: independent self-concept, readiness to learn, the role of experience, orientation to learning, and internal motivation (Knowles, 1973).

Cognitive coach. A coach who helps the teacher become a self-directed, self-modifying, autonomous individual who continues to grow intellectually (Costa & Garmston, 2003; Edwards, 2008).

Collaboration. A group of professional learners who recognize they must collectively work together to achieve their purpose of learning for all students (DuFour et al., 2005).

Emotional intelligence. The set of competencies that encompass a person's ability to recognize the feelings of oneself and others, to motivate oneself, and to manage one's emotions well (Aguilar, 2013).

Instructional coach. A coach who provides intensive, differentiated support utilizing a partnership approach, in order that teachers may be able to implement research-based, proven instructional practices (Knight, 2007).

Job-embedded professional learning. A model of professional learning that refers to teacher learning opportunities designed to promote teacher's content-specific instructional practices that is grounded in day-to-day classroom experience integrated into the workday (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011).

Literacy coach. A specific type of coach who facilitates the development of a school vision about literacy and focuses on the data that reveal student and teacher learning (Shanklin, 2006).

Partnership principle. The embedded values in instructional coaching: equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2007).

Peer coaching. A model of coaching in which teachers plan together, share resources, and observe one another in the classroom (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Professional learning community. A group of teachers who collaborate regularly with shared responsibilities, a common set of teaching and learning goals, job-embedded learning, and data-driven decision-making. (Borko, 2004; DuFour et al., 2005; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Williams, 2012).

Teacher efficacy. The level of confidence a teacher has in his or her ability to promote student learning and to effect change (Bandura, 1997; Protheroe, 2008).

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community, the coaching skills teachers find most helpful within this setting, and the impact an instructional coach has on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community. This study has broadened the understanding of the relationship between instructional coaching and a professional learning community. This study may provide information to educators, researchers, instructional coaches, and administrators relating to the fields of professional development, professional learning communities, and instructional coaching. Possible benefits may include more specific direction for instructional coaches when working alongside teachers within the context of a professional learning community. With an uncertain future for any educational funding, especially financial backing for instructional coaching, it is imperative that coaches invest time in roles that make a difference for teacher collaboration. Also, this study will advance the understanding of how the partnership principles lay the foundation for the work instructional coaches undertake with teachers, and more specifically within the context of the professional learning community. In addition, it may offer principals more guidance and purpose when leading professional learning communities and providing the support of an instructional coach.

Overview of Research Methods

This mixed-methods research study included (a) semistructured individual interviews; (b) semistructured, follow-up, focus-group interviews; (c) a Likert-scale survey analyzing professional learning community attributes; and (d) observations and field notes. The purpose of

this study was to examine the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community, the coaching skills teachers find most helpful within this setting, and the impact an instructional coach has on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community.

Utilizing the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory online survey, the Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R) was e-mailed to 145 elementary teacher participants to ensure anonymity. The survey questionnaire was created to assess both classroom and school-wide practices related to the dimensions of professional learning communities (Olivier, Hipp, & Huffman, 2003). In order to answer the research questions, the researcher analyzed the survey responses of teacher perceptions of professional learning communities and the amount of coaching they received. In order to evaluate the open-ended question, the responses were coded and categorized by themes.

Theoretical Framework

Collaboration and partnership embody the core of instructional coaching and professional learning communities. The conceptual foundations of this study emerged from Knight's (2007) instructional coaching theoretical framework, Vygotsky's (1987) collaboration theory, and Hord's (2009) five dimensions of the professional learning community. A Knight (2007)-Vygotsky (1987) -Hord (2009)–Knowles (1973) theoretical framework was woven throughout this study, heeding Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond's (2001) contention that "theory can have very practical application because it can offer new perspectives on familiar activity, thereby enabling reflection and informing action" (p. 27).

The theoretical foundation for instructional coaching as outlined by Knight (2002) is known as the partnership principles theory, namely, that teachers are professionals and should be with equality and respect. The partnership principles theory is a paradigm used to understand

human relationships (Knight, 2002). Knight (2007) described a theoretical framework for instructional coaching largely based upon seven guiding principles of equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity, which are referred to as the partnership principles approach to professional learning. This theory "grew out of themes we found repeatedly in the literature from the fields of education, business, psychology, philosophy of science, and cultural anthropology" (Knight, 2011, p. 18). Knight (2011) synthesized these themes and developed the seven partnership principles that describe a "theory of interaction" (Knight, 2011, p. 18) that serves to guide instructional coaches. Knight's (2007) framework supports the premise that the role of an instructional coach is to provide job-embedded support through enrolling teachers, identifying goals, listening to teachers, explaining high-impact teaching practices, modeling instruction, and providing feedback. While instructional coaches spend a good deal of time working with individual teachers, they must also play key roles in working as educational change agents. In fact, Fullan and Knight (2011) observed that it would prove meaningless to develop the role of the instructional coach unless it is treated as part of an overall strategy to change systems. Utilizing the partnership approach to professional learning, instructional coaches can serve as implementers of change. System success is based on continuous instructional improvement driven by the ability of teachers to engage in instructional improvement with their colleagues (Fullan, 2011).

Vygotsky (1987) noted that, through the lens of social learning theory, humans learn best through interactions and communications with others. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1987) added that culture is a primary influence on the construction of knowledge. Such a premise supports a theory in which humans learn from discussion, collaboration, and feedback (Vygotsky, 1987). Professional learning communities epitomize Vygotsky's social learning theory because they

promote powerful collaboration as teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice (DuFour et al., 2005).

Knowles (1973) outlined five assumptions of andragogy: (a) the adult learner has an independent self-concept, and he can direct his own learning; (b) the adult learner has gained a variety of life experiences that provide a foundation for rich learning; (c) the adult learner has learning needs that are linked to changing social roles; (d) the adult learner is problem-centered; and (e) the adult learner is motivated to learn based on internal factors.

Hord (2009) identified professional learning communities as the most supportive context for learning professionals. Community, Hord argued, consists of a group who shares a common purpose with mutual caring and regard (2009). Hord's dimensions of a professional learning community include (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) supportive conditions of relationships and structures (Hord, 1997). Arguably, the most effective professional learning communities exhibit qualities of collegiality and experiential learning (Hord, 2009). According to Hord, professional learning is the most productive within a social context as "learning constructively requires an environment in which learners work collegially and is situated in authentic activities and contexts" (p. 41).

Collectively, instructional coaching and professional learning communities can propel professional learning. In fact, by weaving together these two models of professional learning and utilizing them in conjunction with each other, they are most conducive to development as seen through Vygotsky's lens of social theory (Eun, 2008). According to Eun (2008), "The importance of integrating the various models of professional development cannot be overemphasized as each individual model has a unique role in promoting the major tenets of

Vygotsky's theories" (p. 148). As instructional coaches collaborate within professional learning communities, they have the power to advance professional learning.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Although instructional coaching is a relatively new idea in education, coaching itself has roots that date back many years. The word "coach" originated with early modes of transportation when carriages were used to transport passengers from one place to another. For many years, athletic coaches have been transporting players from one place to another through training, motivation, and instruction. Coaching teachers has never been more important than in a high-stakes climate filled with constant change (Marzano & Simms, 2013) and has certainly proven effective in high-performing countries such as Switzerland, New Zealand, Korea, Japan, Italy, Israel, Greece, France, and Australia, where induction programs are mandatory (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

The following review of the literature first examined the background and the various types of educational coaches, then further explores the impact and role of the instructional coach more specifically. After providing an overview of instructional coaching, the review narrows to identify the theoretical and conceptual context that serves as the framework. Next, the review of the literature explains the evolving face of professional development and explores the emergence of professional learning communities as a form of ongoing, job-embedded professional development. Chapter 2 concludes with a theoretical framework that illustrates the extent to which instructional coaching can impact the collaboration and implementation of professional learning communities.

Background and Types of Coaching

Prior to the emergence of coaching in education, professional learning opportunities were limited to special event days set aside during a school year to deliver one-shot workshops of information (Guskey, 2000; Patton et al., 2015) with few opportunities for support, guidance, or follow-up (Joyce & Showers, 1983). Seldom did teachers have opportunities for input regarding the content, nor did the topics always apply specifically to their instructional setting (Guskey, 2000). In fact, during a traditional professional learning opportunity, only 10% of the participants implemented what they had learned (Joyce & Showers, 1983). However, when the participants received coaching following the professional learning, implementation of new strategies increased (Joyce & Showers, 1983; Panfilio-Padden, 2014). Development of new skills at a one-time professional learning event does not ensure transfer into the classroom setting (Joyce & Showers, 1983). On the contrary, teachers need between 15 and 20 ongoing modeling demonstrations of the new teaching strategy before transfer occurs (Joyce & Showers, 1983).

Coaching represents a method to eliminate ineffective forms of professional learning by providing a nonevaluative partnership between a teacher and a professional developer who both share the goal of learning together and improving instruction and increasing student growth (Knight, 2006). Indeed, the number of schools utilizing coaches has grown steadily due to the realization of school leaders that traditional professional learning has proven ineffective (Hall & Simeral, 2008; Knight, 2006). Arguably, the most effective professional learning occurs in the workplace, or is job-embedded, rather than simply during a workshop (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; DuFour et al., 2005; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015). Traditional professional learning simply is not enough to produce the collective capacity needed to make lasting change (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; DuFour et al., 2005).

A miscellany of coaching models can be found in different schools, each with a unique philosophy and implementation method. Although each strand of coaching differs somewhat, each shares a common goal of high-quality, job-embedded professional development with the goal of guiding teachers to improved instruction (Knight, 2007; Sumner, 2011).

The various forms of coaching in education include peer coaching (Joyce & Showers, 1983; Knight, 2007), cognitive coaching (Alseike, 1997; Costa & Garmston, 2003; Edwards, Green, Lyons, Rogers, & Swords, 1998; Knight, 2007), literacy coaching (Dole, 2004; Knight, 2007), and instructional coaching (Knight, 2007).

Peer Coaching

Defined by Joyce and Showers (1983) as a model in which all members of the faculty agree to work as teams in order to practice new strategies, support one another in implementation, plan lessons together that support the changes, and collect and analyze data to determine the effects of the new strategies, peer coaching is one of the oldest forms of educational coaching (Joyce & Showers, 1983; Sumner, 2011). Historically, peer coaching has been an effective tool for increasing the extent to which teachers implement new knowledge acquired from staff development (Joyce & Showers, 1983), as well as increasing the likelihood that they would implement change (Showers, 1984; Zepeda, Parylo, & Ilgan, 2013). Furthermore, peer coaching increases the transfer of learning for teachers (Showers, 1984). The benefits of peer coaching include companionship, technical feedback, analysis of application, and adaptation to students (Joyce & Showers, 1983). Peer coaching provides the support, feedback, and encouragement that are lacking in a profession requiring employees to work in isolation for a majority of the time (Joyce & Showers, 1983). Unlike other coaching models, peer coaching utilizes teams of teachers who offer mutual support within the same school.

Cognitive Coaching

In addition to peer coaching, cognitive coaching emerged in educational settings during the 1980s and is most commonly conducted at a district level (Sumner, 2011). Cognitive coaching is one of the most commonly used forms of coaching, and it focuses on changing a teacher's beliefs before changing behaviors (Knight, 2007). In addition, a cognitive coach serves as a mentor in order to develop growth in a teacher's thought process (Costa & Garmston, 2003). Cognitive coaching involves planning conversations between the coach and teacher, lesson observation, and a reflecting conversation (Knight, 2007). Research has shown that cognitive coaching can increase teacher efficacy (Alseike, 1997; Costa & Garmston, 2003; Edwards, 2008; Edwards & Newton, 1995; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998), increase time in self-reflection (Costa & Garmston, 2003), improve career satisfaction (Costa & Garmston, 2003; Edwards & Newton, 1995), promote higher order thinking, provide teacher support, and improve student achievement (Costa & Garmston, 2003; Edwards, 2008).

Literacy Coaching

Literacy coaching is generally a district-level form of professional development (Sumner, 2011) that seeks to improve literacy throughout the district by providing literacy support to all teachers regardless of content area (Shanklin, 2006). Literacy coaching is not as strictly defined by a common set of responsibilities or methodology like other forms of coaching (Cornett & Knight, 2009; Knight, 2009). Rather, it is any support provided to focus on literacy instruction and to benefit student learning (Knight, 2009; Shanklin, 2006). A literacy coach facilitates the development of a school-wide vision of literacy and improvement through collaboration and ongoing, job-embedded professional development (Shanklin, 2006). This might include informal conversations, modeling, book studies, and data analysis (Knight, 2009; Shanklin, 2006). The

term literacy coach should not be confused with reading coach (Knight, 2009). Although literacy coaches provide support and services to teachers, reading coaches work solely with students in a reading specialist capacity (Knight, 2009). Similar to the instructional coaching philosophy, literacy coaching is supportive, rather than evaluative in nature (Knight, 2009; Shanklin, 2006). In addition, research has shown that teachers are receptive to literacy coaching, and it has been found to improve classroom instruction (Buly, Coskie, Robinson, & Egawa, 2006).

Instructional Coaching

An instructional coach can be more broadly defined as one who works full time with teachers as an on-site professional developer (Knight, 2007). The primary work of an instructional coach is to help teachers utilize research-based best practices in their classrooms. The coach must be able to assist teachers with goal setting and planning and must also possess interpersonal skills, such as empathy, good listening, relationship building, and trust (Knight, 2007). Also, an instructional coach must be familiar with and have access to a wide range of scientifically proven best practices (Knight, 2007).

Although research concerning the role of an instructional coach is relatively new, the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning has developed a partnership model of instructional coaching based on the partnership principles of equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2002). This instructional coaching model operates under the assumption that an instructional coach is an agent of change (Fullan & Knight, 2011). The primary function of an instructional coach is one of change agent, and the system must be organized to create, develop, and maintain conditions for instructional improvement within the school (Fullan & Knight, 2011). The common daily routine of a change agent includes planning, modeling, and observing lessons with teachers; facilitating meetings; and reviewing student data.

Research has shown that as instructional coaches begin to work with teachers, they begin to positively change the culture of the school (Fullan & Knight, 2011).

Instructional coaches can utilize several strategies to act as leaders of change, but they must be both ambitious and humble (Knight, 2009). Conversely, they require different leadership skills than other instructional leaders, but they can implement strategies to lead change in schools, such as staying detached from personal feelings, maintaining a student-centered focus, communicating clearly, confronting reality with teachers, and understanding the school culture (Knight, 2009). Instructional coaching is a combination of leadership and partnership (Hall & Simeral, 2008; Knight, 2009).

In addition to being an agent of change, the role of an instructional coach is to introduce and explain the coaching cycle to teachers at the beginning of the school year (Knight, 2007). A coaching cycle best guides teachers through change by the process of enrolling teachers, identifying areas of improvement, and explaining best practices to utilize (Knight, 2007). Knight's extensive research through the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning has garnered a model of instructional coaching that includes eight components. The components include enroll, identify, explain, model, observe, explore, support, and reflect (Knight, 2009). Furthermore, Knight identified "The Big Four" as a framework for improving instruction through instructional coaching. These include behavior, content, direct instruction, and formative assessment (Knight, 2007).

Prior to engaging in a coaching cycle, an instructional coach must schedule one-on-one interviews with teachers at the beginning of the school year (Knight, 2007). This is important for both relationship building and promoting teacher buy-in, as most people feel more comfortable sharing in a smaller setting. An instructional coach must identify teachers who are ready and

willing to collaborate with the instructional coach (Knight, 2007). Coaches need to follow up immediately with potential teachers. The instructional coach must identify the needs of the teachers (Knight, 2007). Finally, instructional coaches must explain strategies effectively. Coaches must constantly be reading, synthesizing, and simplifying information and best strategies to share with teachers (Knight, 2007). Instructional coaches should have the best manuals highlighted and tabbed and have consistent communication with other coaches in order to share the latest research (Knight, 2007).

Instructional coaches encourage and empower teachers to learn new strategies and apply innovative learning to the classroom setting (Joyce & Showers, 1983). When coaches encourage teachers, it prevents teachers from quitting prematurely due to frustration and increases job satisfaction (Edwards, 2008; Joyce & Showers, 1983). Coaches provide genuine support (Boatright et al., 2010; Gibson, 2011; Joyce & Showers, 1983; Knight, 2007; Shidler, 2009). This support for teachers is vital when implementing difficult, new teaching practices or programs, which might soon be dropped without the support provided from an instructional coach (Knight, 2007). Knight (2007) asserted, "The instructional coach's job, in large part, is to make it as easy as possible for teachers to implement a new practice" (p. 32).

After the instructional coach helps the teacher adapt to change, understand the goal of instructional coaching, and feel positive about trying new methods, the coach must provide support and follow-up (Boatright et al., 2010; Cornett & Knight, 2010; Gibson, 2011; Hall & Simeral, 2008; Knight, 2007; Shidler, 2009). Teachers who receive instructional coaching implement new teaching strategies with greater frequency than teachers who do not receive coaching (Cornett & Knight, 2010). In addition, teachers who receive instructional coaching report positive perceptions of teaching new strategies (Cornett & Knight, 2010).

Additionally, researchers have gained insights into what ensures instructional coaching will be truly effective. For example, researchers have noted that if an instructional coach only provides encouragement and support, with no clearly defined outcomes, the coach's responsibilities have not been fulfilled (Fullan & Knight, 2011). Instructional coaching is certainly a complex role, with many descriptors of what constitutes an effective instructional coach (Fullan & Knight, 2011; Hall & Simeral, 2008; Knight, 2007).

The role of an instructional coach must be clearly defined by explaining the coaching cycle and partnership principles at the beginning of the school year in order to be effective (Fullan & Knight, 2011). In their research at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, Fullan and Knight (2011) found that many coaches explained that their coaching roles were not clearly defined, and their principals were unclear on how best to utilize instructional coaching within their school. Because of these combined factors, the instructional coaches found themselves in an administrative role, usually completing paperwork rather than helping teachers reach more students (Fullan & Knight, 2011).

If the role of coaching is clearly defined by explaining the coaching cycle, as well as the partnership principles, it can lead to significant teacher change (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Teemant, Tyra, & Wink, 2011). Coached teachers practice new strategies more often and with greater skill than teachers who do not receive instructional coaching. They also adapt new strategies to their own contexts and goals and are more likely to explain new models of teaching to their students (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Instructional coaching does lead to significant teacher change that is especially important in the area of teaching in diverse populations (Teemant et al., 2011).

Effective instructional coaches must possess emotional intelligence (Aguilar, 2013; Avant, 2012; McCrary, 2011; Scurry, 2010; Stephens & Vanderburg, 2010) and empathy (Knight, 2007). Avant (2012) found that emotional intelligence plays a key role in the instructional coach–teacher relationship, and successful instructional coaches utilize this while working with teachers. In addition, instructional coaches have greater impact when they have interpersonal and communication skills (Bennett, 2013; McCrary, 2011). In fact, when coaches do not emotionally connect with teachers, the teachers have indicated that observations are a weakness (Bennett, 2013). McCrary (2011) found that interpersonal and communication coaching efficacy is a predictor of the impact and behavior of the instructional coach, as well as a teacher's satisfaction with the instructional coach. Emotional intelligence is a vital component of instructional coaching effectiveness.

Scurry (2010) found another aspect of emotional intelligence that includes effective listening skills. Effective instructional coaches are masters of listening (Knight, 2007; Scurry, 2010). Instructional coaches demonstrate listening strategies when they master the skill of cultivating inner silence, listen without prior assumptions, pose clarifying questions, communicate understanding, and practice listening daily (Knight, 2007). Examining the relationship between teacher perceptions of instructional coaching attitudes and behaviors and teacher perceptions of increases in instructional self-efficacy reveals the most important coaching attitudes identify the ability to collaborate and listen (Scurry, 2010). These behaviors are the most important to teachers regardless of experience level (Scurry, 2010).

In addition to possessing emotional intelligence, effective instructional coaches must be able to research and utilize best practices to share with teachers (Fullan & Knight, 2011; Knight, 2007; Scurry, 2010). In order for coaches to be knowledgeable of best practices, they must be

trained (Fullan & Knight, 2011). Coaches who lack training become discouraged, negatively affect the school culture, and as a result may shorten the life of the coaching program (Fullan & Knight, 2011).

Furthermore, Knight (2007) noted that instructional coaches should always be reading, synthesizing, and simplifying information and best practices to share with teachers. Instructional coaches must have access to current research-based practices and have consistent communication with other coaches in order to share knowledge (Knight, 2007). Effective instructional coaches adopt instructional theory and guide teachers to apply it to their classroom instruction (Scurry, 2010).

Effective instructional coaches must also provide intentional scaffolding (Gibson, 2011) and gradually decrease support as teachers become more proficient using the gradual increase of the responsibility model (Collet, 2012). This model allows coaches to provide the necessary scaffolding for teachers, enabling a gradual increase in teacher confidence and ability (Collet, 2012).

In addition to providing scaffolding, effective instructional coaches assist teachers in collecting, analyzing, and using data to improve instruction (Huguet, Marsh, & Farrell, 2014; Killion, 2015; Marsh, Martorell, & Sloan McCombs, 2010). In fact, more experienced coaches use the data to provide direction for the school year (Huguet et al., 2014; Marsh et al., 2010). As a result, coaches influence teachers to make changes to instruction and improve both perceived teacher influence and student achievement (Huguet et al., 2014; Killion, 2015; Marsh et al., 2010).

Finally, effective instructional coaches must provide support and follow-up (Cornett & Knight, 2010). In an experimental study, teachers who were supported by instructional coaching

continued to use a new teaching routine from a professional development workshop more frequently than the teachers who received none (Cornett & Knight, 2010). Follow-up is necessary to this type of job-embedded professional development.

Many studies have been conducted in order to gather teachers' perceptions of instructional coaching. Research has shown that many teachers have found instructional coaching to be helpful and have believed there is value in the program (Bennett, 2013; Horne, 2012; Rush & Young, 2011; Stephens & Vanderburg, 2010). Teachers have cited the value of reflective questioning, coteaching (Bennett, 2013), collaboration (Stephens & Vanderburg, 2010), instructional skills, and self-efficacy (Dobbins, 2010; Scurry, 2010).

Teachers value the collaboration that instructional coaching provides, as well as the coaches' instruction of research-based practices (Stephens & Vanderburg, 2010). Coaching also enables teachers to reenvision themselves as teachers, take risks, and feel empowered in their profession (Stephens & Vanderburg, 2010). Instructional coaching encourages teachers to shift the focus from teaching to student learning (Stephens & Vanderburg, 2010).

Instructional coaching impacts teachers' instructional skills and feelings of teacher efficacy (Dobbins, 2010; Scurry, 2010). Instructional coaches can impact the skills of teachers, as well as student achievement, by modeling self-determination to improve student learning (Dobbins, 2010). Other studies have shown that instructional coaches improve teacher efficacy when they use data, theory, and explanations to help guide instruction (Marsh et al., 2010; Scurry, 2010). The most common predictor of efficacy in teachers is the ability of instructional coaches to take instructional theory and help teachers apply it to their instruction (Scurry, 2010). Teachers perceive a greater influence on and an increase in student achievement when

instructional coaches explain data to teachers and use the data to guide instruction (Marsh et al., 2010).

Conversely, studies have found some teachers have not embraced instructional coaching due to the lack of information about the coaching program, the perception that instructional coaching is an administrative position, or that instructional coaching did not have an impact on student learning (Horne, 2012; Kubek, 2011). Moreover, some studies have indicated that both veteran teachers and high school teachers do not perceive instructional coaching to be positive, do not feel instructional coaching has an impact on student learning (Horne, 2012; Kubek, 2011), and do not feel that instructional coaches are familiar with secondary content (Kubek, 2011). Conversely, new teachers find instructional coaching to be helpful (Horne, 2012). Kubek's (2011) study found that high school teachers did not feel they needed assistance from a coach. Teachers are not always aware of the support and resources available from coaches (Bennett, 2013; Kubek, 2011). In some cases, teachers noted a lack of consistency, lack of clarity, and the varying roles of instructional coaches as weaknesses in the coaching program (Bennett, 2013).

Few studies have been conducted linking instructional coaching to student achievement. Researchers have noted it is not enough to simply measure the amount of coaching or type of coaching that is given. Rather, one must examine the backgrounds of both the coach and students, along with the influence of culture, economic background, and race (Garcia, Jones, Holland, & Mundy, 2013). In addition, researchers must analyze the effectiveness of professional learning, educational and pedagogical background of the instructional coach, and how the coach spends time in the school (Garcia et al., 2013). Predictors of how and when student achievement increases with instructional coaching needs to be further examined (Garcia et al., 2013).

Professional Learning

Traditionally, educators have limited opportunities for professional learning (Patton et al., 2015) that are dispersed throughout the school year (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Guskey, 2000). Consequently, the learning has been limited to one-size-fits-all workshops that often do not relate to student learning or teaching (Patton et al., 2015). In many cases, professional learning is an opportunity, but also an obligation (Patton et al., 2015) providing little or no teacher input or shared decision-making (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Guskey, 2000). Furthermore, teachers have traditionally viewed professional learning as an opportunity to earn credits, advance on the pay scale, earn an advanced degree, or renew a teaching certificate (Guskey, 2000). What has been missing from traditional professional learning is the purpose of improving teacher practice (Guskey, 2000), affording opportunities for teachers to become more effective learners (Joyce & Showers, 2002), and providing a job-embedded, sustained model that can improve student achievement and transform teaching practice (Coggshall, Rasmussen, Colton, Milton, and Jacques, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Gulamhussein, 2013; Patton et al., 2015).

High-quality professional learning can transform teaching practice and increase teacher knowledge (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Historically, professional learning has not received adequate support in systematic reform efforts, nor has it produced the desired results in teacher implementation or student achievement (Schmoker, 2004). According to Schmoker (2004),

> Strategic planning promotes an often thoughtless, hasty commitment to a dizzying abundance of (so-called) goals, initiatives, and projects. This may explain the speculation that less than 10% of what gets planned actually gets implemented. The initiatives are not

> thoughtfully vetted on the basis of their direct or proven impact on outcomes but are more often adopted for personal or political reasons. (p. 427)

Effective professional learning shares common characteristics. Professional learning is most successful when it is research based (Guskey, 2009) and coherent (Birman, et al., 2000). Professional learning is more instrumental in changing classroom practice when there is coherence, such as linking professional learning to classroom practice or building on teachers' background knowledge (Birman et al., 2000).

Further studies of effective professional learning have indicated that teachers must have opportunities for active participation and engagement (Birman et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Desimone, 2009; Gulamhussein, 2013; Guskey, 2009; Knight et al., 2002), as well as shared decision-making (Birman et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Hall & Simeral, 2008). Effective professional learning must be grounded in inquiry and reflection and be participant driven (Birman et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). In fact, professional learning is most effective when it provides active and collective participation from teachers (Birman et al., 2000; Desimone, 2009) while teaching specific, rather than generic, content (Gulamhussein, 2013). Professional learning must include time for collaboration, or partnership learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Guskey, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight et al., 2002) and involve social, decisional, and human capital (Patton et al., 2015; Shernoff, 2011). A quantitative study conducted by the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning examined the influence of instructional coaching on professional learning (Knight et al., 2002). The results of the knowledge test scores showed that the teachers remembered significantly more content after experiencing the partnership model rather than through the traditional method (Knight et al., 2002). Furthermore, the course evaluation demonstrated that

teachers enjoyed the partnership model of professional learning more than the traditional method (Knight et al., 2002). Effective professional learning must be collaborative in addition to providing teachers opportunity for practice, as well as time to explore the new concept (Cogshall et al., 2012; Guskey, 1991; Joyce & Showers, 1983). The most successful professional learning allows the opportunity for teachers to share perspectives and seek solutions in a collegiate atmosphere (Cogshall et al., 2012; Guskey, 1991) that is rooted in social learning (Birman et al., 2002; Patton et al., 2015; Shernoff, 2011).

Another aspect of highly effective professional learning is the opportunity for modeling when introducing a new concept, in addition to feedback (Birman et al., 2002; Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Desimone, 2009; Gulamhussein, 2013; Guskey, 1991; Hall & Simeral, 2008; Joyce & Showers, 1983, 2002; Knight, 2007). Furthermore, effective professional learning provides opportunities for teachers to review student work and provide feedback on teaching (Birman et al., 2002; Desimone, 2009). New skills need to be modeled for teachers, preferably in the classroom (Joyce & Showers, 1983; Knight, 2007) or a setting that closely approximates the workplace (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Effective professional learning must also include specific training for instructional coaches (Boatright et al., 2010). In fact, instructional coaches may themselves be beginners and learners, especially in light of educational reform. Instructional coaches must appropriate new ideas, transform these into personal context, and share them with others in a way that could lead to continuous improvement and learning (Boatright et al., 2010). Most professional learning opportunities are geared toward teachers, but there must also be professional learning opportunities available for instructional coaches (Boatright et al. 2010). Instructional coaches should be considered when planning effective professional learning for all educators, including

educational leaders. Studies of high-achieving schools in other countries have found extensive opportunities for professional learning for teachers, as well as for mentors and coaches (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). For example, educators in England train coaches to partner with new teachers regarding effective pedagogy for students, as well as effective strategies to transform teaching practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

The crucial support for teachers can be offered in a variety of ways, including instructional coaching, modeling, and collective problem-solving (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Guskey, 1991). Professional learning rarely meets the needs and learning styles of all teachers (Patton et al., 2015), but perhaps instructional coaches can provide teachers with technical feedback that is both personal and practical (Knight, 2007).

Instructional Coaching as a Key Component of Professional Learning

Although research regarding instructional coaching and its relationship to professional learning is relatively new, several studies have shed light on the impact coaching has on teacher implementation of new ideas, curricula, and concepts. Studies have shown that instructional coaching provides necessary follow-up support to teachers (Chien, 2013), as well as proving to be essential in the transfer of new knowledge (Joyce & Showers, 1983; Panfilio-Padden, 2014). A qualitative case study involving one instructional coach and two English language learner teachers examined what tasks an instructional coach needs to undertake for professional learning and what attributes and expertise an instructional coach needs in order to coach English language learner teachers (Chien, 2013). The outcome demonstrated that the instructional coach took a major role as professional developer as she designed and delivered the workshop, mentored teachers, modeled and scaffolded the lessons for teachers, modeled teaching, and led them to self-reflection (Chien, 2013). The results showed that instructional coaching is a form of

professional learning that provides follow-up for teachers and influences the effectiveness of classroom practice (Chien, 2013; Panfilio-Padden, 2014).

Another reason instructional coaching is a key component to professional learning is that teachers who are supported by instructional coaching continue to implement new strategies learned at professional workshops (Cornett & Knight, 2010). Professional learning is more successful when a partner-coaching model is implemented (Knight et al., 2002).

Finally, instructional coaches provide companionship, technical feedback, an analysis of application, and the ability to help one another adapt to students (Joyce & Showers, 1983). "The coaching relationship results in the possibility of mutual reflection, the checking of perceptions, the sharing of frustrations and successes, and the informal thinking through of mutual problems" (Joyce & Showers, 1983, p. 19).

Professional Learning Community

Prior to its emergence in the educational setting, the professional learning community was practiced and perfected by members of the business sector as a collaborative group joining for a single purpose (Williams, 2012). For decades, teachers practiced their craft in isolation, often in a room fortressed with bricks and a fireproof door. Community existed only outside the walls. Rather than trying to reform the school system, leaders must create conditions for teams of teachers to continuously improve instruction and receive recognition for success (Schmoker, 2004). A professional learning community can be defined as a collegial group of teachers who meet regularly, have shared responsibilities and a common set of teaching and learning goals (Hord, 2009), and engage in job-embedded learning, data-driven decision-making, and collaborative development of pedagogical knowledge (Borko, 2004; Coggshall et al., 2012; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Williams, 2012). The primary goals of this community are to

ensure that students learn, to create a culture of collaboration, and to focus on results (DuFour et al., 2005). In this collaborative setting, leaders acknowledge that teachers have valued input in instruction, curriculum development, evaluation of practice, and assessment (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Strong professional learning communities can promote instructional improvement, enhance teacher learning (Borko, 2004), reinvigorate a passion for teaching (Owen, 2015), and transform teacher beliefs about practices (Owen, 2015; Tam, 2015). The research has indicated a strong relationship between collegiality, collaborative learning, and collective action that can lead to changes in teacher practice and student learning (Gulamhussein, 2013; Shernoff, 2011).

Authentic professional learning communities share a common focus (DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 2009). Arguably, professional learning communities allow professionals, namely teachers, to collaborate rather than work in isolation (Bruce & Flynn, 2013; DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 2009; Owen, 2014; Wells & Feun, 2013; Williams, 2012). In addition, professional learning communities promote an environment in which teachers learn collectively, as opposed to individually (DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 2009; Strahan & Hedt, 2009; Wells & Feun, 2013. Professional learning communities share a focus that specifically emphasizes results pertaining to student achievement (DuFour et al., 2005), data (Hord, 2009), or teacher improvement (Graham, 2007). Another common focus of a true professional learning community is the goal of assessment *for* learning, in lieu of assessment *of* learning (DuFour et al., 2005). Such formative assessments guide instructors to students who need additional assistance and inform their practice, rather than assessing students merely for a grade (DuFour et al., 2005). Furthermore, widespread leadership exists in professional learning communities diverting from the idea of one charismatic leader (Dever & Lash, 2013; DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 2009; Owen, 2014). The

final focus of a professional learning community is the ability for teachers to develop a sense of self-efficacy in their instructional abilities (Bruce & Flynn, 2013; DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 2009; Tam, 2015). Professional learning is most conducive in this context (DuFour et al., 2005).

Compiling research from several professional development studies, Hord (2009) constructed a list of five dimensions common to all effective professional learning communities, such as shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions of relationships and structures (Olivier & Hipp, 2010). Professional learning communities share values, beliefs, and a vision of what an ideal school could be (Hord, 2009; Leclerc et al., 2012; Lippy & Zamora, 2012; Olivier & Hipp, 2010; Owen, 2014). Another dimension of an effective professional learning community includes the idea that power, authority, and decision-making are equally distributed across the community (Attard, 2012 Cranston, 2009; Hord, 2009; Leclerc et al., 2012; Maloney & Konza, 2011 Olivier & Hipp, 2010; Owen, 2014), which allows participants greater access to a variety of methods, ideas, and materials (Schmoker, 2004). Shared and supportive leadership is a necessary dimension of this type of community (Hord, 2009; Olivier & Hipp, 2010). Support systems are vital for professional learning communities to succeed (Hord, 2009; Olivier & Hipp, 2010). Structures such as time, resources, training, and place are the framework that is sometimes overlooked but always needed (Attard, 2012; Cranston, 2009; Dever & Lash, 2013; Graham, 2007; Hord, 2009; Maloney & Konza, 2011; Olivier & Hipp, 2010; Owen, 2014; Schmoker, 2004). Leaders must recognize that structures and arrangements may need to evolve as teacher and student learning needs change (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Another type of support system needed for professional learning communities to optimally function is an environment of caring, respect, and most importantly trust (Brown,

Daly, & Liou, 2016; Cranston, 2011; Hord, 2009; Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010; Maloney & Konza, 2011; Owen, 2014). More specifically, the trust that teachers place in their colleagues is the most vital type of relationship in a professional learning community (Gray, Mitchell, & Tarter, 2014). In a study examining such supports, Cranston (2011) identified the characteristics that principals used to describe their conceptions of schools as professional learning communities. Examining focus groups that included 12 principals, Cranston (2011) found relational trust to be the strongest single factor for successful professional learning communities. In fact, relational trust was found to be the strongest indicator for an effective learning community to improve student outcomes (Cranston, 2011). In a similar study, Jacobs and Yendol-Hoppey (2010) discussed a qualitative study examining the characteristics of transformative professional learning communities. The researchers identified trust as a critical component of transformation, especially if teams worked together toward critical reflection (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). Support systems also include leadership opportunities, a hierarchy that supports teachers effectively performing jobs, and shared decision-making (Gray et al., 2014; Hord, 2009; Olivier & Hipp, 2010).

Hord (2009) identified collective learning as a dimension of a professional learning community. Teachers in these professional learning communities address student needs intentionally and learn to increase their own effectiveness (Bruce & Flynn, 2013; Graham, 2007; Hord, 2009; Owen, 2014; Padwad & Dixit, 2008). Ultimately, the success of a professional learning community rests on teams of teachers who build a sense of community by sitting down and engaging in discussions related to teaching and learning (Graham, 2007). Finally, an effective professional learning community allows peers to share their practice with one another in order to gain feedback (Graham, 2007; Hord, 2009; Leclerc et al., 2012; Owen, 2014; Strahan

& Hedt, 2009). In Strahan and Hedt's (2009) case study examining professional growth at the middle school level, the researchers discussed the synergy that developed during collaboration between team teachers. The teachers were able to learn about student reasoning, question assumptions about instruction, and set precise and individual goals (Strahan & Hedt, 2009), thus moving learning forward.

Challenges can certainly arise when individuals possessing different values, ideas, and beliefs join together to become a collaborative group with a shared vision. DuFour et al. (2005) identified several barriers that can impede collaboration. One challenge is the ability to develop and share knowledge (DuFour et al., 2005). In order to transform schools, teachers must develop a deep and shared knowledge of practices and then be disciplined enough to apply the concepts in their own settings (DuFour et al., 2005).

Also, sustaining the difficult work involved with change is a challenge for professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2005; Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, & Box, 2014; Lippy & Zamora, 2012). In their study of collaborative skills of preservice teachers, Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, and Box (2014) found that as participants began to understand the amount of work involved with professional learning communities, they were less likely to volunteer to participate in future teams. Another challenge for professional learning communities is the difficulty in transforming the school culture (Cranston, 2011; DuFour et al., 2005; Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). In a study examining the professional learning community characteristics identified by principals, Cranston (2011) explored the idea that professional learning communities are a journey, rather than a destination. Cranston (2011) noted, "The participants expressed a belief that, if schools are to be professional learning communities, there is a requirement for transformational change" (p. 9).

Certainly leadership can pose a challenge for professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2005; Graham, 2007). In fact, for professional learning communities to collaborate effectively, leaders must provide support and define the purpose (Cranston, 2011; Dever & Lash, 2013; Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010; Leclerc et al., 2012; Lippy & Zamora, 2012; Williams, 2012). In a qualitative study examining principals' perceptions of professional learning communities, Cranston (2011) concluded that any efforts to create effective learning communities will lack results if the key figure, the principal, lacks the clarity to guide the collaboration. In their in-depth case study of a middle school professional learning community, Dever and Lash (2013) found that although most of the teachers were delighted to have power of opinion and the ability to make changes, they still expressed a desire for more guidance and stronger support. In a qualitative study examining the factors that promote progression in schools that function as a learning community, Leclerc, Moreau, Dumouchel, and Sallafranque-St. Louis (2012) found that principal leadership was crucial regardless of the implementation phase. In fact, participants expressed a desire for the principal to provide physical support, guidance, encouragement, and direction (Leclerc et al., 2012). Not only must the principal build the structures and supports that foster successful professional learning community implementation, he or she sets the tone for collaboration and shared decision-making (Gray et al., 2014).

Time for teachers to collaborate is another challenge professional learning communities encounter (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Graham, 2007; Hord, 2009; Leclerc et al., 2012; Maloney & Konza, 2011; McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler, & Lundeberg, 2013). Teaching is somewhat unique to other professions in that there is little flexibility to the workday schedule. Mornings and afternoons are often obligated with staff meetings, parent meetings, working with individual students, outside duties, writing lesson plans, and correcting papers, which leave little

time for collaboration, let alone reflection. Yet time for critical reflection has been shown to be a vital part of the professional learning community experience (Attard, 2012; Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012). One solution for this obstacle is the implementation of virtual professional learning communities. In their qualitative study of a virtual professional learning community in a rural school district, McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler, and Lundeberg (2013) found that although participants preferred face-to-face meetings, virtual meetings were a solution when time and space were barriers to professional collaboration and learning. In studies of high-achieving schools in other countries, it was found that time for collaboration and teacher development was embedded during the school day (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). For example, schools in the United States typically provide between three and five hours each week, whereas teachers in high-performing countries spend between 15 to 25 hours per week for professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) found that when such a structure is built into the teacher's working time, learning can be sustained and ongoing, resulting in the type of professional learning that is context specific and most effective in supporting change in teaching practice.

Other barriers to a collaborative learning community include a lack of choice for a topic (Attard, 2012) and the lack of structure of the professional learning community (Bruce & Flynn, 2013). Participants in a qualitative study indicated factors for success of their learning community, including the opportunity to choose topics to discuss, rather than have the topics mandated. Relevance of the topic was increased "by not having a pre-set agenda where issues and topics would have been previously decided upon. Instead, issues and topics were chosen by members themselves according to what they deemed relevant" (Attard, 2012, p. 208). Adding to this evidence, Bruce and Flynn (2013) discussed a mixed-methods study that examined the

effects of collaborative professional learning. The study, which followed a professional learning community of math teachers for three years, found that a weaker area involved the lack of teacher choice in the structure of the professional learning community, including the setting, agenda, and overall structure (Bruce & Flynn, 2013). Teacher input and shared decision-making are common aspects of schools in high-performing countries (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

Finally, physical space can be an obstacle to effective professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 2009; Leclerc et al., 2012). Although virtual communities may be a solution for more rural areas (McConnell et al., 2013), other schools understand that space for learning can be a challenge. In the review of research, Hord (2009) found that principals must designate space that can accommodate the entire faculty. One study found that a principal rotated all professional learning community meetings to each classroom in the building. This rotation enabled teachers to view other students' work examples, as well as evidence of colleagues' teaching practices (Hord, 2009).

DuFour et al. (2005) outlined specific guiding questions for members of professional learning communities to adopt as a framework for collaboration. These ideas include shared mission, values, goals, and vision (DuFour et al., 2005). Team members must ask what it is they want students to learn (DuFour et al., 2005). In a qualitative study investigating teachers learning to do action research in a professional learning community, Chiou-hui (2011) found that action research was a valuable method of determining what students need to learn. Participants in the study utilized action research as a component of the professional learning community. Student achievement was the focus of the action research studies, and teachers found that action research could focus on student achievement and improve student abilities (Chiou-hui, 2011).

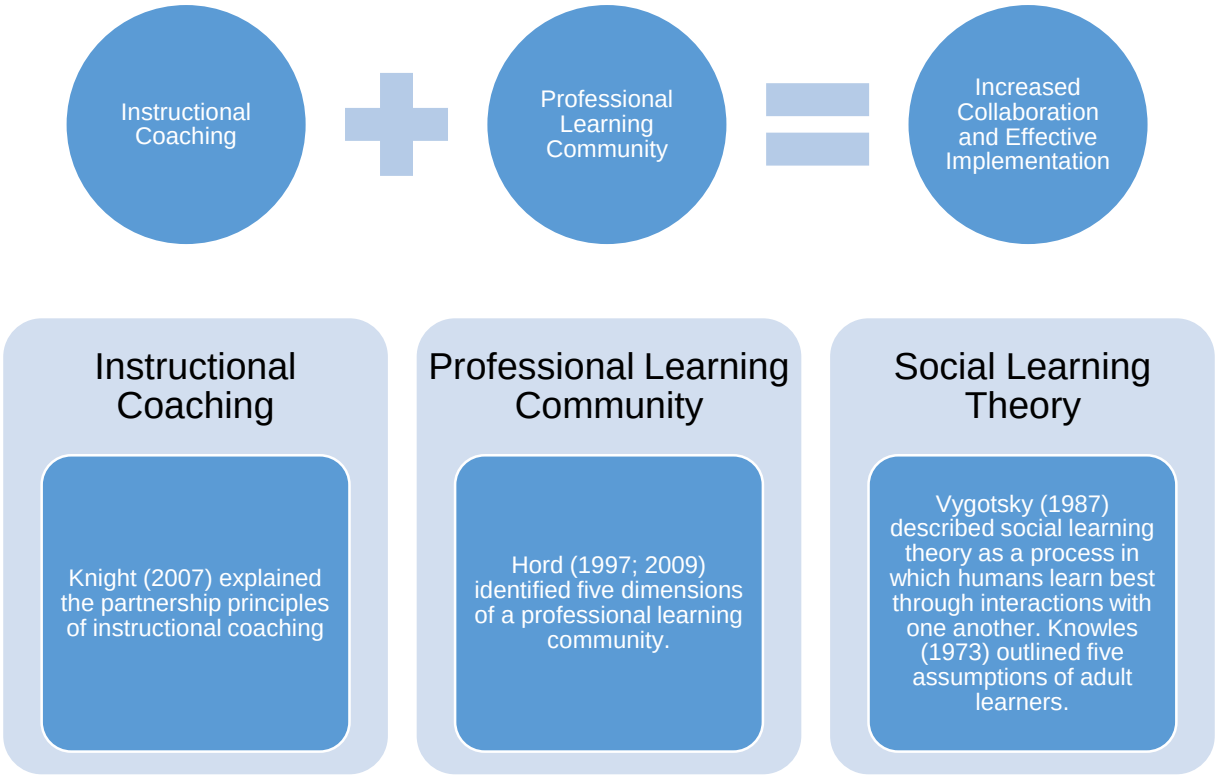
Next, DuFour et al. (2005) posed the following questions: How will teachers know when each student has mastered the essential learning? How will teachers respond when students face difficulty in learning? Is the response based on intervention rather than remediation? Is it systematic and timely? How will teachers deepen the learning for students who have already mastered essential knowledge and skills?

Theoretical Framework on Instructional Coaching

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework that guided this research study. The figure outlines the framework for instructional coaching and its potential impact on the effectiveness of a professional learning community's collaboration and implementation.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework Incorporating Vygotsky's Social Theory



Note. This figure illustrates the effectiveness that results when instructional coaches work within professional learning communities to increase collaboration.

This research encompassed Knight's (2007) theoretical framework for instructional coaching, Vygotsky's (1987) social learning theory, Knowles' (1973) assumptions of adult learners, and Hord's (2009) five dimensions of a professional learning community. Knight's (2007) framework for instructional coaching provided the definition that was examined in this study. Vygotsky's (1987) social learning theory guided the research questions in this study and the analyzation of the collaboration and implementation of the professional learning communities. Knowles' (1973) five assumptions of adult learning framed the interview questions and served as a lens for the observations of the professional learning communities. Hord's (2009) five dimensions of a professional learning community guided the survey.

Knight (2007) outlined a framework for coaching that describes the process of change in practice when working with an instructional coach. This framework is based largely upon the guiding principles of equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity referred to as the partnership approach to professional learning. Knight's (2007) framework suggests that the role of an instructional coach is to provide job-embedded support by first enrolling teachers in the coaching process, then identifying goals together, listening to teachers, sharing high-impact teaching practices, modeling instructional strategies, and providing feedback. Knight (2007) also identified the goal of increasing student learning, rather than only providing support for teachers. In fact, instructional coaches must serve as change agents as part of an overall strategy to transform systems (Fullan & Knight, 2011). Instructional coaches serve as implementers of change (Fullan & Knight, 2011; Knight, 2007).

Vygotsky (1987) described a framework for social learning theory, which contends that people learn best through interactions with one another. In addition, Vygotsky (1987) noted that

culture is a primary influence on the construction of knowledge, which supports the notion that people learn from collaboration, discussion, and feedback. Collaborative discussions and opportunities for feedback in an educational setting can occur between an instructional coach and a teacher within a professional learning community or with an instructional coach working with a professional learning community.

Hord (2009) identified professional learning communities as the most supportive context for learning professionals. Community consists of a group who shares a common purpose with mutual caring and regard (Hord, 2009). The common dimensions of a professional learning community include (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) supportive conditions of relationships and structures (Hord, 1997). The most effective professional learning communities exhibit qualities of collegiality and experiential learning (Hord, 2009).

Knowles (1973) outlined five assumptions of andragogy: (a) the adult learner has an independent self-concept, and he can direct his own learning; (b) the adult learner has gained a variety of life experiences that provide a foundation for rich learning; (c) the adult learner has learning needs that are linked to changing social roles; (d) the adult learner is problem centered; and (e) the adult learner is motivated to learn based on internal factors. These five assumptions framed the interview questions and served as the lens in which to observe the professional learning communities.

Professional learning communities epitomize Vygotsky's (1987) social learning theory as they reflect powerful collaboration as teachers work together to improve practice. In fact, system change can occur when teachers are given the opportunity to participate in instructional improvement with peers (Fullan, 2011).

Conclusion

Both instructional coaching and professional learning communities are examples of ongoing, job-embedded professional learning (Guskey, 2000; Knight, 2007). Staff development has the greatest prospect in cultures that exhibit collegiality, collaboration (DuFour et al., 2005), and collective trust (Brown et al., 2016; Cranston, 2011) in order to increase teacher efficacy (Bruce & Flynn, 2013) improve student learning (Garcia et al., 2013; Shidler, 2009), and promote teacher effectiveness (Bennett, 2013; Graham, 2007; Padwad & Dixit, 2008).

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

Introduction

One of the challenges facing educators is continuous change in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Schools are no longer simply expected to offer education and cover a given curriculum; rather, they are required to ensure that all students learn (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Educators attend various classes, seminars, and workshops, which all fall under the umbrella of professional learning. While professional learning is a valuable tool for teachers, studies have shown that it is less effective when no follow-up support is provided to teachers as they attempt to implement new strategies in the classroom (Guskey, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 1983). Furthermore, professional learning must engage teachers in such concrete tasks as observation, teaching, assessment, and reflection (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Teachers need to have opportunities to practice new skills acquired during professional learning right away in order not to lose them, necessitating a sustained, ongoing, and intensive support system (Coggshall et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Joyce & Showers, 1983). Such job-embedded professional learning is more effective than traditional workshops (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Instructional coaches are master teachers who provide this type of instructional support as an effective means of giving teachers the necessary support, modeling, and follow-up necessary to practice and retain new skills (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Knight, 2007). Instructional coaches strive to collaborate with teachers, implementing the seven partnership principles of equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2011). This model of professional learning allows instructional coaches and teachers to collaborate for success, as well as implement change (Fullan & Knight, 2011).

In addition to instructional coaching, professional learning communities allow teachers and instructional coaches to collaborate in an environment of consistent learning, shared decision-making (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Hord, 1997), and autonomy in order to plan for student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Such collaboration between groups creates what Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) referred to as "professional capital" (p. 36), which combines the talent of individuals, the collaborative power of the group, with the wisdom and experience of individuals to add value to the overall organization. Furthermore, collaboration represents the heart of both professional learning communities and professional learning, promoting a sharing of knowledge among educators and focusing on the community of practice rather than individual teacher practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011), thus creating conditions for ongoing professional learning and collaboration (Sheehy, Bohler, Richardson, & Gallo, 2015).

The professional learning community describes a group of teachers who collaborate regularly with shared responsibilities, a common set of teaching and learning goals, job-embedded learning, data-driven decision-making, and collaborative development of pedagogical knowledge (Borko, 2004; DuFour et al., 2005; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Williams, 2012). They are characterized by a shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (Hord, 1997). Supportive conditions must be in place prior to implementing a professional learning community (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Darling Hammond et al., 2010). In fact, in most Asian and European countries, 15 to 25 hours each week are dedicated to professional learning, such as attending study groups and seminars, collaborating with colleagues, pursuing research, and

visiting other schools (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Darling Hammond et al., 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013).

Contrarily, the average amount of weekly time provided for professional learning for teachers in the United States is three to five hours (Darling Hammond et al., 2010). However, more time spent with professional development does not necessarily lead to educational improvements. Time attributed to professional learning communities needs to be carefully structured, purposefully directed, well organized, and clearly focused (Guskey, 2009). Also, Bruce and Flynn (2013), Hoffman, Dahlman, & Zierdt (2009), and Padwad and Dixit (2008) suggested the benefits of the professional learning community include an increase in positive attitudes in conjunction with new skill development, as well as an increase in efficacy. Furthermore, Bruce and Flynn (2013) and Hoffman et al. (2009) contended that a professional learning community promotes a feeling of empowerment. Equally, Jacobs and Yendol-Hoppey (2010) observed that professional learning communities stimulate both critical reflection and transformation. Likewise, Graham (2007) and Hord (1997) noted further benefits include the ability for educators to learn from one another and a reduction in teacher isolation (Hord, 1997). Bruce and Flynn (2013) described an increase in student achievement. In addition, Hord (2009), McLaughlin and Talbert (1993), and Shernoff (2011) argued that learning is more productive within an inquiry-based collaborative, or social, context.

Although ample evidence exists supporting instructional coaching and professional learning communities as individually effective professional learning options, little has been written to guide instructional coaches toward professional learning community development. Guskey (2009) argued that further valid and trustworthy research is needed to understand the effectiveness of professional learning and perhaps even more importantly, the effectiveness of a

combination of professional learning models. In fact, Eun (2008) stated that when used in combination, the models of professional learning are most conducive to successful development as viewed through Vygotsky's lens of social theory. It is vital that the models of professional learning be integrated, as each model has an important role within Vygotsky's social theory (Eun, 2008).

Instructional coaching and professional learning communities both provide ongoing, job-embedded opportunities for collaboration, sharing of knowledge, and social interaction that are vital to effective professional development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Such a task may not be possible without first examining the daily environment in which such social interactions and resulting internalizations occur (Eun, 2008).

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community, the coaching skills teachers find most helpful within this setting, and the impact an instructional coach has on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community. This study followed a mixed-methods design, which Creswell (2012) described as "a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem" (p. 535). The fundamental questions of this study were as follows:

1. What is the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community?
2. What coaching skills do teachers find most helpful within this setting?
3. What impact does an instructional coach have on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community?

The researcher selected the mixed-methods, exploratory sequential design in order to look for relationships between the qualitative and the quantitative data. Creswell (2012) noted that "the purpose of the exploratory sequential mixed-methods design involves the procedure of first gathering qualitative data to explore a phenomenon and then collecting quantitative data to explain relationships found in the qualitative data" (p. 543).

In this mixed-methods analysis the researcher first conducted seven one-on-one interviews with the elementary instructional coaches, as well as the head instructional coach in the school district. Second, the researcher conducted 12 one-on-one interviews with elementary teachers in the district, representing each of the elementary schools. Next, the researcher conducted follow-up, focus-group interviews, first with the seven instructional coaches and second with the teachers, which included two focus-group interviews. In addition to the interviews with instructional coaches and teachers, the researcher visited each elementary school and conducted an hour-and-a-half observation of the instructional coach's work with teachers during the professional learning community collaboration time each Wednesday afternoon. Finally, the participants completed a Likert-scale assessment, PLCA-R (see Appendix A), that was utilized to understand to what extent the schools were following the five identifying attributes of a professional learning community. Olivier, Hipp, and Huffman (2003) developed the survey instrument. The five attributes of the professional learning community include (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) supportive conditions of relationships and structures (Hord, 2009; Olivier et al., 2003).

Participants

In this mixed-methods study, the researcher addressed the ways in which instructional coaches collaborate with teachers in the context of a professional learning community. The participants included seven instructional coaches, as well as teachers from five elementary schools (see Table 1).

Table 1

Instructional Coach Participant Synopsis

Pseudonym	Personal	Coaching Years	School
Elsa	Female	second year	Elementary One
Avery	Female	first year	Elementary Two
Liberty	Female	fourth year	Elementary Three
Desiree	Female	first year	Elementary Four
Kala	Female	fourth year (half-time coach; half-time, third-grade teacher)	Elementary Five
Maddie	Female	first year (half-time coach; half-time, third-grade teacher)	Elementary Five
Claire	Female	fourth year (lead district coach)	District Coach

Table 2

Teacher Participant Synopsis

Pseudonym	Personal	Teaching Years	Grade Level	School
Danielle	Female	16	Kindergarten	Elementary One
Daisy	Female	20	Kindergarten	Elementary One

Shannon	Female	19	Music	Elementary One
Jessie	Female	24	First grade	Elementary Two
Morgan	Female	9	First grade	Elementary Two
Anacani	Female	13	Kindergarten	Elementary Three
Wendy	Female	9	Sixth grade	Elementary Three
Karma	Female	16	Fourth grade	Elementary Four
Remy	Female	16	Fifth grade	Elementary Four
Tiana	Female	14	Sixth grade	Elementary Five
Lynn	Female	31	Resource	Elementary Five
Jasmine	Female	4	Third grade	Elementary Five

Six elementary instructional coaches and one district coach were recruited from the school district. The instructional coach participants were site-based, elementary coaches and had worked collaboratively with the teachers within the professional learning communities. Three of the instructional coaches were beginning their first year in the role, and two of the coaches were sharing the role of instructional coach and team teaching in the third grade. Additionally, the researcher recruited the lead district instructional coach as both a gatekeeper to the elementary instructional coaches and as an interview participant. The school district provided some training specific to the work that instructional coaches were conducting with teachers in the district. Last year, the district provided collaboration time with Jim Knight, in which principals and instructional coaches participated in a round-table discussion on instructional coaching effectiveness centered on Knight's book, *Unmistakable Impact.* The researcher had the

opportunity to attend this valuable day of training in the district with the principals and instructional coaches.

This mixed-methods study also included 12 elementary teachers representing each of the schools in the district. These teachers were recruited through the use of purposeful sampling based on the number of years they had taught in the district and their work with an instructional coach, as well as belonging to a professional learning community. After obtaining consent forms from the elementary teachers who met the purposeful sampling criteria, the researcher created a stratified table to elicit a participant group. Daniel (2012) noted that an advantage of stratified sampling is that it gains a more representative sample "because it ensures that elements from each stratum are represented in the sample" (p. 140).

All participants were chosen from a public school district in the northwest region of the United States. This school district had also experienced growth in its student population since the 2000 census. According to data retrieved from the City website the population in 2000 was 6,924 residents, and in 2010 it increased to 15,210 residents. Thus, this area had increased in population by 119% since the 2000 census. Student enrollment had increased from 2,951 students in 2000 to 5,002 students in 2010.

With a student population of approximately 5,000, this district ranked among the largest school districts in the state, with fully accredited schools and programs. As of the 2010 census, the city's population included 15,210 people, which represented 3,383 families and 4,782 households residing in the city. The ethnic diversity of the city was comprised of 91.2% White, 8.6% Hispanic or Latino, 3.6% other races, 2.9% from two or more races, 0.8% Native American, 0.7% Asian, 0.6% African American, and 0.1% Pacific Islander. The 2010 census information revealed an annual median income of $31,510. The locations included five

elementary schools: three elementary schools for grades PK–6 and two shared campuses that each included an elementary primary building for primary grades and an elementary intermediate building for intermediate grades. The schools included the following:

- Elementary School One served 518 students in grades PK–6 and possessed an ethnic minority enrollment of 9% (majority Hispanic), as compared to the state average of 23% (Public School Review, 2015.
- Elementary School Two served 523 students located in two buildings, one primary, and one intermediate, on one campus for grades K–6. It possessed an ethnic minority enrollment of 8% (majority Hispanic), as compared to the state average of 23% (Public School Review, 2016).
- Elementary School Three served 693 students in grades PK–6 and possessed an ethnic minority enrollment of 9% (majority Hispanic), as compared to the state average of 23% (Public School Review, 2016).
- Elementary School Four served 574 students in grades PK–6. The school consisted of one primary and one intermediate building located on separate campuses. This school possessed an ethnic minority enrollment of 8% (majority Hispanic), as compared to the state average of 23% (Public School Review, 2016).
- Elementary School Five served 595 students in grades K–6 and possessed a minority enrollment of 10% (majority Hispanic), as compared to the state average of 23% (Public School Review, 2016).

The researcher established a trusting relationship prior to conducting the interviews but did not have a prior professional connection with any of the participants and, therefore, was unlikely to be a biased observer.

Data Collection

The methodology most appropriate for this study was a mixed-methods design. The advantage to this type of study was that the rich data created a better understanding of the research problem and allowed the researcher to combine both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Clark, 2007). Creswell (2012) added that the mixed-methods, exploratory sequential design "allows the researcher to identify measures actually grounded in the data obtained from study participants" (p. 544). This allowed the researcher to listen to the views and insights expressed by both the instructional coach and teacher participants, rather than approaching the concept by interjecting the researcher's own set of predetermined variables and ideas.

Information gathered for this research study on instructional coaches' work within professional learning communities included information derived from interview responses. The researcher conducted one-on-one, semistructured interviews with six site-based elementary instructional coaches and one district-level coach in order to understand the attitudes, experiences, and beliefs of coaches working within the framework of a professional learning community. Interviews were conducted at the beginning of the study, and questions were piloted with a group of instructional coaches located at another site. Questions were piloted in August 2015 with the group of coaches. The researcher then gathered the six elementary instructional coaches and the lead district instructional coach for a follow-up, focus-group interview. Krueger and Casey (2009) noted that the purpose of conducting a focus-group interview is to listen to participants, gather information, and better understand how people think about a certain issue. Krueger and Casey (2009) defined a focus group as "a carefully planned series of discussions

designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment" (p. 2).

Furthermore, the researcher conducted one-on-one, semi structured interviews with 12 elementary teachers who had worked with an instructional coach in the past year, as well as currently participating within a professional learning community. Following the one-on-one teacher interviews, the researcher conducted two follow-up, focus group interviews in order to gain a greater understanding of their perception of the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. Krueger and Casey (2009) stated that focus groups work best when "participants feel comfortable, respected, and free to give their opinion without being judged" (p. 4). In order to ensure the participants felt comfortable and respected, the researcher engaged them in ice-breaking conversation and introductions prior to the interview. In addition, the researcher gained trust during the one-on-one teacher interviews.

The researcher piloted the elementary teacher interview questions in August 2015 with a group of elementary teachers at another site. Creswell (2013) argued that the purpose of piloting the interview questions is to refine the questions and procedures further. Therefore, the researcher obtained feedback from the piloted group in order to discuss the quality, clarity, and length of the questions. Furthermore, the principle researcher requested feedback as to the length of the questions and whether the questions were comfortable and clear enough to answer. Based on this feedback, the researcher changed the length and wording of several of the interview questions.

Respondents were asked semi structured, open-ended questions in order to gain an understanding of the instructional coaching roles and responsibilities and to answer the following research questions: (a) What is the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning

community, and (b) what coaching skills do teachers find most helpful within this setting? Interview questions were constructed utilizing Knight's (2011) partnership principles, including equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity. The interviewer also modeled these principles throughout the semi structured, open-ended interviews. For example, the researcher allowed the participants to select a comfortable meeting place, made certain the participants were able to express views, provided opportunities for respondents to reflect, engaged participants in dialogue, and made certain the process was reciprocal. Interview data are valuable because they allow the researcher to gather information that cannot be obtained in person and to customize specific questions pertaining to the study (Creswell, 2012).

Participants were asked to sign informed consent forms prior to the interviews and were assured that identity and interview locations would remain confidential and pseudonyms would be assigned to protect the participants' identities. Following the interviews, the researcher analyzed and coded the transcripts for themes, at which time the researcher contacted the participants via e-mail. Creswell (2012) explained that member checking is the procedure in which the researcher confirms accuracy of the interview account by asking the participants to check the report.

In addition to interviews, the researcher conducted observations during the instructional coach meetings and the school professional learning community meetings. Observations were conducted to answer the following questions: (a) What is the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community, and (b) what coaching skills do teachers find most helpful within this setting? Creswell (2013) noted that in qualitative research, observations are a key tool for collecting data. The researcher observed at each of the five elementary sites during professional learning community meetings. In order to document notes during the observations,

the researcher recorded reflective field notes in order to discover broad themes that might emerge. In addition to writing observational field notes, the researcher collected artifacts from the professional learning community collaboration, such as meeting agendas. The superintendent of the school district granted permission to enter the sites (see Appendix B), and the researcher obtained permission from the principals. The researcher began the observations as a complete observer but recognized this role might evolve throughout the study. In addition, in accordance with Creswell (2013), the researcher designed an observation protocol in order to best record important aspects of the setting. Creswell (2013) suggested that after slowly withdrawing from the sites, the researcher must prepare all notes immediately after the observation in order to gather a rich narrative description; therefore, the researcher immediately prepared notes to accurately portray the experiences.

Following the interviews and observations, the participants were asked to complete a Likert-scale assessment, PLCA-R (see Appendix A), which had been developed to understand the extent to which schools followed the identifying attributes of a professional learning community. The survey instrument, developed by Olivier et al. (2003), revealed a Cronbach's alpha of < .7, revealing that the items were statistically reliable and therefore could be included in the analysis without compromising the data. The authors examined the following attributes of the professional learning community: (a) shared and supportive power and leadership; (b) shared values, beliefs, and vision; (c) collective learning and application; (d) shared personal practice; and (e) supportive conditions of relationships and structures (Hord, 2009; Olivier et al., 2003). In addition, Olivier et al. (2003) reviewed the PLCA-R instrument for internal consistency resulting in the following Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for factored analysis (n = 1209):

- Shared and supportive leadership (.94)

- Shared values and vision (.92)
- Collective learning and application (.91)
- Shared personal practice (.87)
- Supportive conditions—relationships (.82)
- Supportive conditions—structures (.88)
- One-factor solution (.97)

In addition to completing a Likert-scale survey, teachers were asked to respond to an open-ended question to probe more deeply into the specific instructional coaching roles, skills, and characteristics that teachers found to be most helpful for collaboration in a professional learning community. Creswell (2012) noted that survey data are suitable to "assess trends or characteristics of a population; learn about individual attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and practices; evaluate the success or effectiveness of a program; or identify the needs of a community" (p. 403). This type of data collection also allowed the researcher to anonymously canvas the participants without biasing the responses (Creswell, 2012).

Analytical Methods

The superintendent of the school district granted permission to conduct this mixed-methods study (see Appendix B). The researcher disclosed the purpose of the research to the participants and obtained signed consent forms (see Appendix C) prior to conducting the interviews. Also, the researcher took steps to develop trust with the participants. Upon the conclusion of the study, the researcher locked away notes, transcripts, digital recordings, reflection journal, survey data, and general data in a locked drawer for three years, after which time all data will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.115, 2015).

The researcher analyzed the text from the interview transcriptions to identify themes. Creswell (2012) noted that the purpose of the coding process "is to make sense out of text data, divide it into text or large image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes" (p. 243). Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher utilized the theoretical framework incorporating Knight's (2007) partnership principles, Hord's (2009) dimensions of a professional learning community, Knowles' (1973) five assumptions of adult learning, and Vygotsky's (1987) social learning theory to develop the semistructured questions. The questions were coded according to each theorist's criteria. Subsequent to identifying a list of codes from the interview data, the researcher reduced the list to five themes.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community, the coaching skills teachers find most helpful within this setting, and the impact an instructional coach has on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community. This study included the PLCA-R survey instrument; individual instructional coach and teacher interviews; follow-up, focus-group interviews; and observations and field notes. Creswell (2012) emphasized that "limitations are potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher" (p. 199). However, Creswell (2012) added that such weaknesses add to the body of existing knowledge for future researchers and provide direction for further studies. One possible weakness of this study may include the instructional coach's knowledge of working within the professional learning communities. Although three of the six instructional coaches in this study had prior experience and had received training from Jim Knight, three of the instructional coaches were beginning their first year. In theory, the three

new instructional coachers may not have had adequate time to build the relationships and trust necessary for collaborating with teachers in the professional learning community setting. Furthermore, the new instructional coaches did not receive the same Jim Knight training or any other formal professional learning. Other possible limitations in this study exist and may include the following: sampling technique, the population, and the researcher's time and resources.

Purposeful sampling was selected for the semi structured interview portion of the study, based on the following criteria: teachers who had invested at least one year in the professional learning community, equal representation from each of the five elementary schools in the district, and equal representatives from primary and intermediate grade levels. More specifically, the researcher selected homogeneous sampling in order to provide an in-depth examination of the instructional coaches and teachers within the professional learning communities. However, this type of sampling can be prone to researcher bias. In addition, the selected population might not be generalizable to all school districts and could therefore be a limitation to the study. Furthermore, the researcher's time and resources may have limited the observation time and the amount of qualitative data gathered during visits to the professional learning community collaboration meetings. Finally, the time of year may have impacted the interview conversations and survey responses of teachers and instructional coaches. If instructional coaches and teachers did not have adequate time to form collaborative relationships with new teachers, teams, or principals within the context of the professional learning community, that lack would become a limitation in this study.

Delimitations in this study included the time frame of the observations of the professional learning communities within the elementary schools. The researcher considered studying the district's middle schools and high schools in order to gain more significant information.

However, this would not have allowed the necessary time to conduct the qualitative aspects of this study. This study may not be able to be generalized beyond the scope of the sample represented by this school district.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

Professional learning is most effective within a collective partnership of active learners who are able to apply knowledge directly to the classroom (Bruce et al., 2010; Croft et al., 2010; Desimone et al., 2002; Gulamhussein, 2013) and focus on student growth (Bruce & Flynn, 2013). The emergence of the professional learning community as a vehicle for job-embedded training addresses the needs of teacher learners, yet not all professional learning communities have the leadership, support, and structures needed to succeed (Hord, 2009; Owen, 2014; Patton et al., 2015). Instructional coaches might provide such leadership and support and serve as the catalyst to assist and guide professional learning community implementation, collaboration, and ongoing transformative change (Boatright et al., 2010; Croft et al., 2010).

Instructional coaching is an effective means of facilitating transformative change in teacher practice through job-embedded professional learning by partnering with teachers to set student learning goals (Cornett & Knight, 2010; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight, 2007; Teemant et al., 2011). Vygotsky (1987) revealed that greater cognitive learning transpires when learners work together to share ideas, solve problems, and brainstorm. As teachers collaborate to unpack standards, implement new curriculum, analyze student data, improve instruction, and create units, what coaching skills do teachers find most helpful? Research is needed to determine how instructional coaches can support professional learning communities, what type of learning is best in small groups, and if instructional coaching is effective when professional learning topics are mandatory (Cornett & Knight, 2009).

The research is limited regarding which coaching skills teachers find most helpful and

how instructional coaching impacts teacher perceptions of the professional learning community. The questions guiding this dissertation study were the following:

1. What is the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community?
2. What coaching skills do teachers find most helpful within this setting?
3. What impact does an instructional coach have on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community?

Chapter 4 offers findings pertinent to each question utilizing data gathered from the PLCA-R survey instrument; five professional learning community observations; seven in-depth, instructional coach interviews; one instructional coach follow-up, focus-group interview; 12 in-depth teacher interviews; and two teacher follow-up, focus-group interviews at five elementary schools in a school district in the Western United States.

Research Question 1

Much has been explored and substantiated regarding the role of the instructional coach working individually with teachers through the coaching cycle within the classroom setting (Knight, 2007). However, gaps exist in the research regarding the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community (Cornett & Knight, 2009). Therefore, the first research question posed in this study asked, what is the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community?

Merriam-Webster (Role, n.d.) defined a role as, "a function or part performed especially in a particular operation or process." The researcher identified codes in the qualitative data to identify the function of the instructional coach during the process of collaboration. Creswell (2013) contended that qualitative research can best be represented by the image of a spiral, whereupon the researcher analyzes data in a circular pattern, rather than

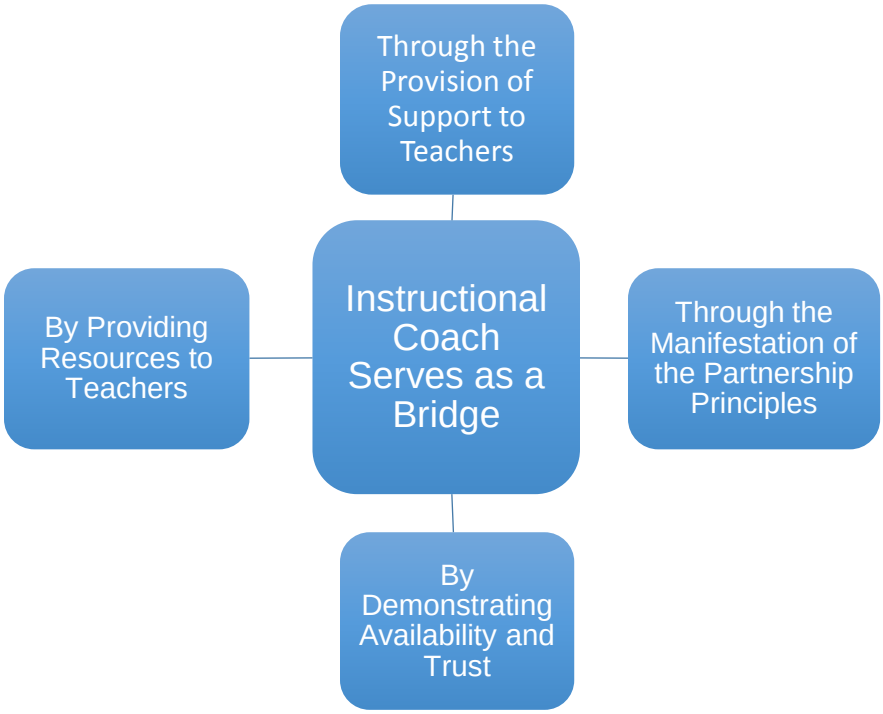
linear. Consequently, a qualitative researcher enters the process with data and exits with a narrative (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the researcher engaged in a spiraling process of data analysis in this mixed-methods study.

Utilizing a group of 12 volunteer teacher participants, 12 individual semistructured interviews (see Appendix D) were conducted, transcribed professionally, and coded for themes to determine the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. In addition, two follow-up, focus-group interviews (see Appendix E) were conducted with 10 of the teacher participants in order to probe more deeply into the dynamics of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. Furthermore, the researcher conducted seven individual instructional coach interviews (see Appendix F) with seven volunteer participants. These semistructured interviews were also conducted, transcribed professionally, and coded for themes to understand the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. A follow-up, focus-group interview (see Appendix G) was conducted with the instructional coach participants in order to probe more deeply into their role within the professional learning community. In addition to conducting teacher and instructional coach interviews, the researcher observed a Wednesday professional learning community collaboration meeting at each of the five elementary schools. Throughout the observations, the researcher took careful field notes, gathered artifacts such as professional learning community team agendas, and collected follow-up e-mail correspondences. Observational notes were transcribed and coded for themes to understand the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. Finally, the researcher posed one open-ended question within the PLCA-R survey instrument. The open-ended question was written as the following: What is the most helpful role of your instructional coach within the professional learning community? A total of 89

participants completed the PLCA-R, and each of the 89 survey volunteers answered the open-ended question. Figure 2 shows the themes found throughout the interviews.

Figure 2

Themes From Qualitative Data



In this diagram, the role of the instructional coach is described as serving as a bridge for teachers through support, availability, partnership, and resources.

Instructional coach serves as a bridge. Throughout this study, teachers and instructional coaches discussed the many changes that had transpired and initiatives that had been launched by the district in the past few years. District initiatives included the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum, Mathematical Thinking for Instruction (MTI) math instruction, Common Core standards implementation, creation of standards-based report cards, and new math curriculum. Other changes included a turnover in administrative and teaching staff. The role of

the instructional coach is one of a bridge for teachers within the setting of the professional learning community.

Throughout this chapter, fictional names were given to the participants.

Table 3

Instructional Coach Participant Synopsis

Pseudonym	Personal	Coaching Years	School
Elsa	Female	second year	Elementary One
Avery	Female	first year	Elementary Two
Liberty	Female	fourth year	Elementary Three
Desiree	Female	first year	Elementary Four
Kala	Female	fourth year (half-time coach; half-time third-grade teacher)	Elementary Five
Maddie	Female	first year (half-time coach; half-time third-grade teacher)	Elementary Five
Claire	Female	fourth year (lead district coach)	District Coach

Table 4

Teacher Participant Synopsis

Pseudonym	Personal	Teaching Years	Grade Level	School
Danielle	Female	16	Kindergarten	Elementary One
Daisy	Female	20	Kindergarten	Elementary One
Shannon	Female	19	Music	Elementary One
Jessie	Female	24	First grade	Elementary Two

Morgan	Female	9	First grade	Elementary Two
Anacani	Female	13	Kindergarten	Elementary Three
Wendy	Female	9	Sixth grade	Elementary Three
Karma	Female	16	Fourth grade	Elementary Four
Remy	Female	16	Fifth grade	Elementary Four
Tiana	Female	14	Sixth grade	Elementary Five
Lynn	Female	31	Resource	Elementary Five
Jasmine	Female	4	Third grade	Elementary Five

Music teacher *Shannon* observed, "(The instructional coach) lets you go from where you are and get you to where you want to be." The frequency of codes indicated 48 instructional coaches implementing the district vision or district initiatives, 39 facilitating vertical collaboration, and 37 instructional coaches as a bridge to new learning or change agent.

Evidence from instructional coach interviews indicates that the role of the instructional coach is to serve as a bridge for new learning for teachers. *Desiree* was beginning her first year as instructional coach at Elementary School Four and expressed a clear vision of her role, stating that she would, "meet them (teachers) where they're at, have organized steps so that they feel success personally, and then the students, obviously, will then feel that success." Instructional coach *Morgan*, who began team coaching with *Kala* this year, shared that her philosophy was "being willing to meet the teachers where they're at…whatever it is that they need help with, then…going there and building that confidentiality to where we can continue to move on."

Additionally, district instructional coach *Claire* discussed the balance between pushing and supporting teachers. *Claire* shared, "That's my philosophy, that I'm to help them and support them, but…sometimes that's with a push, too." During the instructional coach follow-up

interview, *Claire* added that the professional learning community collaboration time allows coaches to "meet teachers where they are." This evidence suggests that the instructional coach pushes teachers but always with support. In other words, the instructional coach serves as a bridge to new learning.

Data from teacher interviews indicate the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is that of a bridge from teachers to the district. Resource teacher *Lynn* stated,

> Our instructional coaches have done a lot of saying, "This is what we need and this is what we're going to start." And it's not always easy at first for them or for the people, because you know how hard change is sometimes. But they keep pushing and helping.

Additional teacher interview data revealed that the instructional coach serves as a bridge for district initiatives. For example, teacher participant *Morgan* described the district requirement for each teacher to set a SMART goal towards evaluation. The instructional coach served as a bridge to help teachers meet those goals as *Morgan* elaborated,

> Our instructional coach is also kind of there to support any personal goals we have, and that's kind of been different roles, I would say, based on the teacher….I'm sure they [coaches] have a different relationship with each teacher, support teacher's goals, for their SMART goals, or…whatever towards their evaluation.

Evidence from instructional coaching interviews concurred. Instructional coach *Desiree* commented, "One of our initiatives this year is writing, and the focus is supporting our writing instruction." Instructional coach *Avery* agreed that writing and math were the focus for the new school year. *Avery* shared,

> I know as coaches,…our job is to disseminate curriculum and information out. We're also a product of our school, employees of our administrators. It puts you in that strange role, so I think as a coach you're supporting the vision of the district while still supporting the vision of your school at the same time. I just think mostly that vision is driven by the district, supported by the administration, and you're kind of there as the go-between for both.

Evidence shows that the role of the instructional coach is one of a bridge to district initiatives. *Daisy* described this as a "push" as she described the district's implementation of the Lucy Calkins curriculum or while looking at math data. Daisy described how the instructional coaches served as a bridge to teachers during these district "pushes," as she stated,

> There was always a focus that came from *Elsa* and [the principal] about what specifically was going to be looked at and examined that month. And it was often tied to our monthly staff meeting, too, where we would do a data walk-through or something like that. So it seemed to mesh together really well month to month. And it was based on whatever need there was.

In addition, the teacher interview participants shared that the instructional coaches served as a bridge to the district by sharing monthly professional learning opportunities based on district initiatives, as well as being able to troubleshoot and let the district know what teacher needs were based on professional learning community meetings. *Jessie* noted, "She [*Avery*] is directly hearing what our needs are at our collaboration meetings, then that becomes part of our PD [professional development].…It's very nice to have someone in that capacity." First-grade teacher *Morgan* commented that her instructional coach *Avery* was able to provide monthly professional learning opportunities that not only shared district initiatives but also met teacher

needs. *Morgan* stated, "We have monthly PDs once a month after school. And that's really driven by teacher need." Evidence from the instructional coach focus-group interview corresponded to teacher perceptions. Instructional coach *Avery* shared ways in which she served as a bridge between teachers and school-wide goals by leading professional learning opportunities twice monthly for teachers. Teacher participants also described how the district instructional coaches met together to plan professional learning for their schools. *Daisy* shared during her follow-up interview, "I think they get together as a team and plan PD for the district…and then go back and share it all with us." Teacher participant *Jessie* discussed the manner in which her instructional coach *Avery* served as a bridge for district initiatives through professional learning, as she stated,

> Knowing that she's planning PD for us when we have those dates set aside, it's going to be something that will directly benefit [us when] we come back to the classroom….There have been times when the district has things they want us to know, but I feel like this year's a little bit more setup where we're going to be doing a little bit of both. So we get to bring in some things we asked for help with….*Andrea's* just very good at that. She's very in-tuned; I think some people can kind of be in a higher realm and that's good, but if they don't' know how to bring it back down to the actual classroom level, then it's never going to benefit when rubber meets the road and you're going to actually work with a student.

Evidence from teacher interviews also indicates that the instructional coach role is to serve as a bridge to administration. *Jessie* indicated that the instructional coach was able to look at the "big picture." Tiana added that the instructional coaches could "be an advocate…in between [us and] the principal, and we have had our coaches ask some pretty important questions that we didn't

want to ask, and they go right to him." District instructional coach *Claire* shared similar ideas during her individual interview. *Claire* noted, "I'm not in any way an admin, but I'm kind of the liaison between the coaches and admin, so in that sense I get in on a lot of admin activities, meetings."

In addition to serving as a bridge to the district and administration, evidence from teacher interviews indicates that the role of the coach is also a bridge between teams and grade levels. Teacher participant *Daisy* shared that during Wednesday collaboration, it was very helpful for the instructional coach to help with direction. *Daisy* shared that it was "helpful in some ways to keep you on track as far as really both the principal and the instructional coach knowing exactly which direction each team was going." Kindergarten teacher *Danielle* expressed an appreciation for *Elsa's* ability to facilitate cross-collaboration between teams, as well as cross-grade-level observations. *Danielle* stated, "She pulls you out of your classroom and opens the doors to other places to help you."

Sixth-grade teacher *Wendy* shared similar observations regarding her instructional coach *Liberty* at Elementary School Three. *Wendy* stated that *Liberty* also facilitated opportunities to visit other classrooms, as she shared that "she's great about coming and covering a class for 20 minutes or whatever, so you can go observe somebody." Teacher participant *Morgan* shared her perspectives on the instructional coach serving as a bridge with classroom observations. *Morgan* stated, "There's always been the option for the instructional coach to come in and watch and provide feedback or cover your class for you so you could go watch someone else."

Evidence from teacher interviews also indicates that instructional coaches serve as a bridge for cross-grade-level collaboration. This was especially evident at Elementary School Two, which housed separate buildings on one campus. First-grade teacher *Jessie* related, "Our

coach has worked really hard for us at our school to come up with a plan that would keep everybody close but would put us back in our classrooms so we could have technology and have materials that we want to share and use." She explained that in years past, collaboration was a barrier due to the split campus. Further evidence from instructional coach interviews confirmed this idea, as instructional coach *Elsa* shared, "[Y]ou could have Kinder math and you've got sixth-grade math, which look very different, but yet have similarities, and so how can we bridge from grade to grade and have those alignments?" Instructional coach *Morgan* expressed this role as she shared the importance of making connections during collaboration that "especially being in third grade (second grade's on the other side)…I think it's really important to have those cross-grade-level interactions." *Morgan's* instructional coaching partner *Kala* agreed:

> I think getting a systemic viewpoint helps you as well when you're going in and meeting with them at a PLC level, because…I've come to the conclusion it doesn't matter if it's third grade, sixth grade, eighth grade, Kindergarten—best practices are best practices.

During the instructional coach, focus-group interview, participants discussed the vertical alignment that can occur. Instructional coach participant *Liberty* shared,

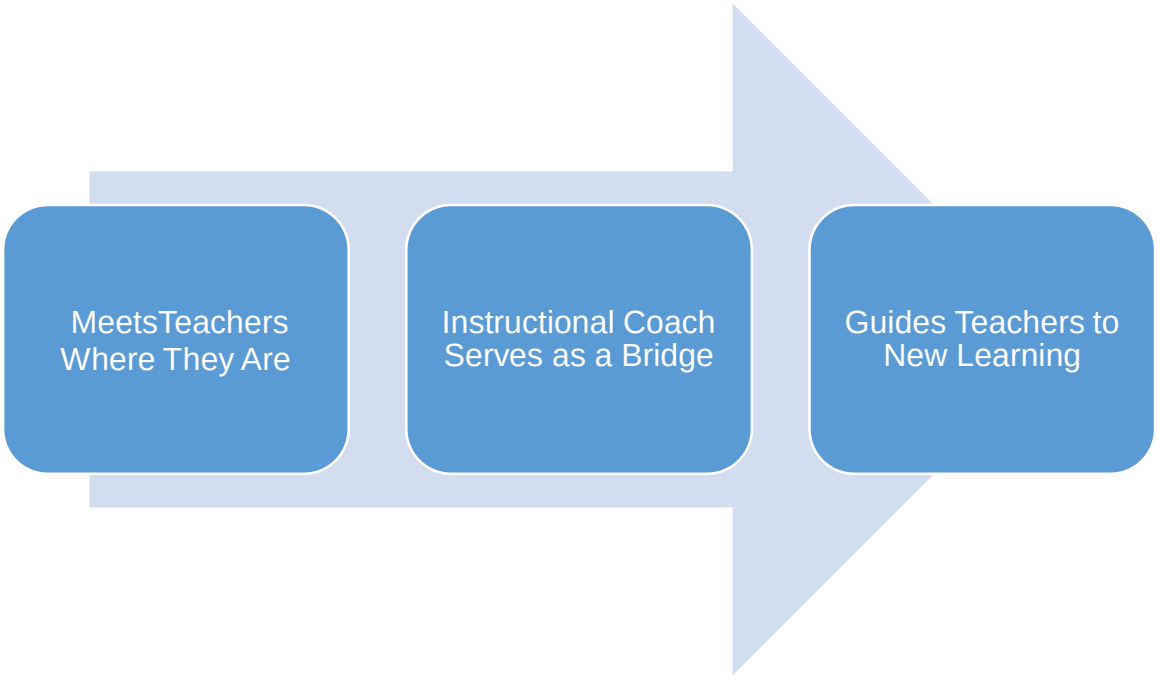
> I think our ability, too, to be able to bounce around to the different teams allows us to help with those vertical conversations. So some of my teams, like my fourth grade, had an example about a science unit, and I went…knowing where third grade's been. I can have those conversations, so helping that vertical alignment, too, is kind of nice.

The evidence from the instructional coach, focus-group interview portrays the role of bridge between grade levels. Instructional coach *Elsa* contributed, "When you're the coach and that outside party, you can bring in that alignment, K–6 or whatever." Teacher participants noted that instructional coaches had served as a bridge for new teams and new principals this year through

turnover in the district. Instructional coaches in three of the schools had remained a constant through change.

Figure 3

Instructional Coach Serves as a Bridge



Note. In this diagram, the role of the instructional coach is a bridge.

Provision of support to teachers. During the interviews, professional learning community meetings, and responses to the open-ended question, participants communicated the importance of the instructional coach providing support to teachers. Teacher participants discussed various ways in which they received support from their instructional coach, as well as the types of supports they offered. In addition, the instructional coach participants detailed the role of providing support to teachers within the professional learning community setting. The researcher identified the most frequently mentioned types of instructional support, such as support for new curriculum implementation, ongoing job-embedded support and follow-up, and troubleshooting and problem-solving teacher concerns. The school district had undergone much

change in the past two years, including the adoption of the MTI Idaho math initiative, implementation of Idaho Common Core math and language arts writing standards, development of standards-based report cards, and the utilization of the Lucy Calkin's Units of Study series for teaching reading and writing. The instructional coach served as a bridge in which to guide teachers to successful implementation of new curriculum.

Jasmine began teaching at Elementary School Five four years ago and had appreciated the way in which her coach had partnered with her during changes in the district. Reflecting on this instructional coaching support, she recalled,

> She will come in and model-teach. She'll come in and explain a new lesson that she's learned, or new curriculum, and help you kind of dive into it and understand it at a deeper process, deeper analysis—doesn't let you flounder around.

Another teacher conveyed similar perceptions of ways in which the instructional coach had served as a bridge to curriculum implementation. *Tiana* had been teaching for 14 years and also had taught at Elementary School Five. *Tiana* had been teaching sixth-grade. upper-level math and had benefitted from the MTI support the instructional coaches had provided. Referring to this support in math implementation, she noted,

> It's those things that we would be here until midnight just figuring out or planning at home if it wasn't for that person dedicated to that objective, basically, to help the teacher out….[I]t doesn't matter what it is in curriculum; if I ask her a question, like "How do I go about teaching this MTI unit? You know, with fractions, dividing fractions, how do you get kids to see that visually? And how do you teach that with a model?" And so she'll figure it out, come in, and show me; we'll talk about it and we'll coteach.

The researcher observed the type of job-embedded support described by the teacher

participants during the individual interviews. For example, first-year instructional coach *Desiree* tenaciously provided math support for the Kindergarten team during the professional learning community collaboration time. Due to the Kindergarten rotating team schedule, *Desiree* could only meet with one teacher at a time, but she took careful notes to ensure her conversations were consistent amongst both teachers. Elementary School Four was piloting new math curriculum, ORIGO, and the Kindergarten teachers requested support from *Desiree* to gather materials, plan lessons for the following week, access online math resources, prepare manipulatives for math centers, select appropriate formative assessments, read through the learning targets, and demonstrate how to record the data from math assessments online. *Desiree* served as a bridge, guiding these Kindergarten teachers to new learning through job-embedded support during the professional learning community collaboration time.

Instructional coach *Liberty* had served in her position at Elementary School Three for four years and had established a supportive relationship with teachers in her building. The researcher observed specific types of support during the professional learning community collaboration time. For example, the fifth-grade team were discussing ways to lead the new Lucy Calkins writing curriculum and how to pretest writing with the Lucy Calkins program. The fifth-grade teachers expressed an interest in having *Liberty* coteach and model minilessons for their classes. *Liberty* had attended the Lucy Calkins writing conference and offered support to the teachers in her building as they began implementation. She shared with this team, “My goal is to lead you through what I learned at the conference.” Meeting with the second-grade team, *Liberty* supported teachers with planning Lucy Calkins lessons for the following week and planning for the materials they would need to prepare. *Liberty* stood beside teachers and read the learning targets with them as they planned.

Instructional coaches expressed their desire to support teachers. Instructional coach interview participant *Avery* shared, "I just really want to support the teachers in any way they're feeling comfortable in supporting them." More specifically, *Avery* explained the district's expectations for implementing the new Lucy Calkins writing and the MTI math instruction as she noted, "It's all new, and my administrators [are] expecting more use of the math units from our teachers this year than before…with more rigor than before. I think I'll be supporting teachers a lot in that respect." Instructional coach *Kala* explained the ways in which she supported teachers with the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum. Kala shared,

> I really had to read what I can, go down and get training, come back, implement it,…really get my teacher friends to let me into their classroom to try it, then get buzz out on the street, and then pretty soon I'm in every single classroom doing writing with them.

Instructional coach participant *Maddie* asserted that support for teachers is not always easily received. *Maddie* described her interactions with teams during professional learning community collaboration time, as she noted, "Sometimes you'll meet resistance that, you know, they won't ever really feel comfortable with you there and that's okay, but just letting them know that you are there." During her interview, *Maddie* explained the importance of meeting teachers where they are, identifying what they need, and helping them progress from there. This evidence supports the supportive role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. Instructional coach *Liberty* summarized her coaching philosophy as, "just as supporter, in one word—being support. Letting teachers know I'm here for them."

Instructional coaching support for teachers was also frequently mentioned in the PLCA-R open-ended question: What is the most helpful role of your instructional coach within the professional learning community? One teacher responded, "The most important role of our

instructional coach is to support teachers and give guidance on questions that teachers may have, or find the answers to questions teachers may have." Another noted, "She has been able to provide us with support on the new writing curriculum. Without her help and support, we would not have been able to roll this out." A common form of support identified by interview participants, survey respondents, and the researcher's observations was ongoing, job-embedded instructional support and follow-up provided for teachers in implementing new curriculum, specifically in the areas of writing and math.

In conclusion, the most mentioned role for the instructional coach within the professional learning community was one of support. As teacher participant *Daisy* from Elementary School One noted during the focus-group interview, "[T]here's very little academic-based support for teachers outside of our instructional coach. And I don't know what we would do without her." Following support, respondents indicated that the role of the instructional coach was one of availability.

Demonstration of availability and trust. Participants indicated that the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community was simply to be available. In fact, the availability of instructional coaches and the instructional coaches being present was mentioned 67 times throughout the teacher interviews, as well as for the PLCA-R open-ended question. Developing trust was mentioned 25 times by the teacher participants, and interestingly, availability and trust were connected within several of both interview and survey responses.

During her interview, teacher interview participant *Jasmine* mentioned availability as an important role of the instructional coach during professional learning community collaboration time. *Jasmine* noted,

So they pop in; I mean, you can ask them to come for a longer period of time, but

> generally they come around during…collaboration days, and they will see what you need, see what you're working on, see how they can help. So it's like a quick pop-in. Here's what I can help you with, and then leave.

Teacher participants asserted that coaches did not need to stay during the entire collaboration time; rather, they only needed to stop by, pop in, or check in to show their willingness to help. *Tiana* agreed that the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community was availability. She stated, "They're always checking in and asking us what we need." *Tiana's* instructional coach, along with the other elementary instructional coaches in the district, provided teacher surveys at the beginning of the school year in order to better assist teachers and to demonstrate availability.

Kindergarten teacher *Anacani* had been teaching for 13 years and represented Elementary School Three. When asked about the role of her instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community, she added, "She makes it around, she checks, sees what we're doing, sees if there's a way to help, but isn't necessarily an integral part *every* week for planning." Teacher participants agreed that the coach did not need to be present for the entire collaboration block; rather, he or she simply needed to demonstrate availability.

First-grade teacher interview participant *Jessie* from Elementary School Two reiterated the importance of availability. *Jessie* brought 24 years of teaching experience, as well as a wealth of knowledge from her time working at the State Department of Education. She noted, "I think that one of the things that's really nice is just being able to have little short conversations because she's available and she's here." When asked about the frequency and duration of the instructional coaching visits, *Jessie* responded,

> Well, right now I would say she's been there at every time; I don't remember a time that

> she hasn't been there. And not…the whole time, but certainly she's been there for…10 to 15 minutes. [I]f she's not there right in the beginning, then we start making a list of what we're going to talk to her about when we do get her time."

In addition to availability, teachers discussed trust as a necessary trait within the role of instructional coach. Teacher participant *Tiana* shared, "That's the trust that you have to have built and that's very important. If you didn't trust your coach, you wouldn't be able to be honest with them."

Interestingly, teacher interview participants agreed that it was beneficial to preschedule time with the instructional coach during the professional learning community collaboration time. The researcher noted this type of availability during the observations of the professional learning community collaborations at each of the five elementary schools. In fact, at Elementary School Three, instructional coach *Liberty* began prescheduling visits to each team during collaboration time and received positive feedback from teachers. During the collaboration observation at Elementary School Three, the fifth- and sixth-grade combination teacher prescheduled a visit from *Liberty* to discuss the new Lucy Calkins writing curriculum. This teacher had already formulated several questions and concerns to discuss with *Liberty*, and this seemed to maximize the collaboration between them. *Liberty* demonstrated her availability to this teacher by allowing him to preschedule their collaboration time, which enabled the teacher to formulate questions and allowed *Liberty* to bring the necessary resources and ideas to their session.

At Elementary School Two, instructional coach *Avery* had to balance collaboration by walking back and forth between two buildings on a large campus. *Avery* deliberately established availability to teachers by physically moving her two offices to a centralized location in each building. *Avery* intentionally divided her time between both buildings and checked in with as

many teams as possible during collaboration.

Availability could have been even more challenging for instructional coach *Desiree*. Elementary School Four was not only physically broken into two buildings, but it was also located on two separate campuses about one block apart from one another. The researcher observed the ways in which *Desiree* showed availability within the context of this challenge. *Desiree* organized her time, carefully mapping each block and each team within a binder. On a particular visit, she checked in with teams at the primary campus. It was apparent during the observation that the teams expected her visit and had prepared a list of questions and concerns. Availability and trust were evident during *Desiree's* collaboration time, especially during her visit with the second-grade team. Teachers expressed concerns with the new Lucy Calkins writing curriculum. One of the second-grade teachers stated,

> Don't take this the wrong way. I really like Lucy Calkins, but there is so much reading. I literally only have 24 hours in the day, and I need three of them to sleep. We need your help to trim the fat.

Desiree listened, asked reflective questions, and brainstormed with the second-grade team in order to help with implementing new curriculum. She established availability to these teachers through following up with their request for her visit during the professional learning community collaboration time.

Teacher survey respondents also indicated that the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community was to be available. One respondent shared that the role of the instructional coach was "being available to answer instructional questions and feeling comfortable and respected to answer those questions." Another expressed that "she is available and willing to coach, mentor, and coteach, observe, or brainstorm on anything you want to focus

on in your classroom to help you become a better teacher." Teacher respondents explained that instructional coaching availability was helpful to teams. In fact, a teacher noted, "She is available to help with projects that our grade-level needs but has not time to complete." Availability seemed to include a physical presence, as well as a willing attitude. This was expressed by a teacher respondent who added, "She is always available and will help, or find a way to help, whenever she can. She is very accessible and knowledgeable." Others shared comments, such as "always available," "available to collaborate," "available," and "accessible." One teacher respondent added, "*Elsa* is available to help and support in whatever capacity is needed!" Clearly, teachers asserted that an important role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community was to demonstrate availability.

Manifestation of the partnership principles. Knight (2007) outlined specific ways for instructional coaches to work with teachers in a partnership capacity that are known as the partnership principles. These include equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2007). Throughout the teacher interviews, participants described the respectful teamwork that existed between teachers and their instructional coach. In addition, the researcher observed many examples of the partnership principles in action. Teacher survey respondents also mentioned ways in which their instructional coaches worked alongside them utilizing the partnership principles. During the coding process, the researcher noted the phrase "learning partner" (or similar phrase) mentioned 67 times and "comfortable relationship" 46 times. Ideas that occurred frequently included learning partner, comfortable, dialogue, listening, encouraging, feedback, brainstorm, and collaborate.

Morgan was a first-grade teacher at Elementary School Two and had been teaching for nine years. She shared that her instructional coach *Avery* utilized the partnership principle of

dialogue as she facilitated "deeper instructional conversations." In addition, she shared that *Avery* developed professional learning opportunities for teachers based on their input, which emphasized the partnership principle of voice. *Morgan* participated in a follow-up, focus-group interview with a group of teachers. The discussion focused on the perceived importance of instructional coaches within the district, as well as the many benefits. Teacher participants shared the value of working with nonevaluative partners with the goal of improving instruction. Certainly, the principle of equality was represented when she stated,

> There is something, too, about knowing that that person really is just there to help you be a better teacher and there's no evaluation involved and there's no strings attached, you know. And you can just really feel like, hey, this is where I'm at and be realistic and not have to worry about,…oh, is this going to make me look bad, but this is what I need help with.

Daisy had been teaching for 20 years but had stepped out of the mainstream classroom for several years. When she decided to return to the Kindergarten classroom at Elementary School One last year, she experienced what she referred to as an "identity crisis." If it hadn't been for *Elsa*, she shared, she would not have been successful. She referred to this partnership in the interview:

> Last year, in my first year…(I tell her this and I don't think she believes me),…she really did save my life because it was a very difficult year for me in many ways, and I would not have made it through my year without her.

Daisy elaborated that the most meaningful help from her instructional coach *Elsa* was simply the partnership principle of listening. *Daisy* shared that it was *Elsa's* listening that "allowed me to

find my footing." An important role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community is that of a nonthreatening, nonevaluative partner.

Both experienced and novice teachers agreed that the role of the instructional coach included demonstrating the partnership principles within the professional learning community setting. Elementary School Four teacher *Kala* had been teaching for 16 years but appreciated the role of the instructional coach as being nonevaluative. *Kala* worked previously with her instructional coach *Desiree* as team teachers and had already established a relationship of trust and collegiality prior to *Desiree* working as an instructional coach. *Kala* expressed appreciation for the work that coaches engage in with teachers as she shared,

> That's part of the partnership, and the instructional coach comes in now not having to worry about specific students and can give you feedback….[S]he's not grading you or critiquing you in a sense. But she can see what you're doing and offer suggestions.

Similarly, Elementary School Five resource teacher *Lynn* expressed evidence of the partnership principles with her instructional coach interactions, as well. She stated that the information her two instructional coaches share was "not something that's shoved down your throat, but it's giving you a chance to be able to change and grow." She continued by asserting, "And we feel like they're a part of us. They're not just buddies sitting on the side giving you ideas or instructions. They are actually working with us." *Lynn* emphasized her coaches' modeling of the partnership principles choice and reciprocity as important roles.

The role of the instructional coach is to develop a comfortable relationship with teachers as equal partners. *Anacani* expressed this idea when she noted, "She can come in and make observations and suggestions in a very comfortable way. It's not offensive." In addition to

teacher interviews, the principle researcher observed the manifestation of partnership principles during the observations of the professional learning community collaboration meetings.

The principle researcher observed this partnership role during visits to each elementary school during their weekly collaboration meetings. Each of the instructional coaches demonstrated the partnership principles of equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2007) during conversations with teachers. Instructional coach *Elsa* partnered alongside teachers at Elementary School One as they worked to select math assessments and navigate the district math website for math resources. As *Elsa* sat next to the second-grade team at the back of the classroom, she offered choice, stating, "See that's okay. We can stick to what we did or we can work on creating something new." Throughout this brief collaboration, the teachers dialogued with *Elsa* and clearly had a voice, even though they were implementing new math standards.

Similarly, at Elementary School Five, team instructional coaches *Kala* and *Maddie* manifested the partnership principles as they divided their collaboration time. *Kala*, whose experience lay in the upper grades, worked with the intermediate teams including third through sixth grades, and *Maddie* met with Kindergarten through second grades. The researcher observed *Maddie* for the first half of the professional learning community collaboration time. *Maddie* modeled partnership dialogue as she facilitated discussion, asked clarifying questions, listened, and took notes. As she met with the second-grade team, she listened and probed as they expressed concerns about low test scores in reading. *Maddie's* partnership dialogue included phrases, such as "What I'm hearing…," "Another option is…," and "So what you are saying is…" Clearly, *Maddie* provided opportunities for teachers to reflect while utilizing partnership principles. It was evident to the researcher that *Maddie* had developed trust with teachers as she

was relaxed in her conversation, and the teachers seemed comfortable interacting with *Maddie*. Collaborating with the first-grade team, it was clear *Maddie* and the teachers were partners as they brainstormed ideas for creating reading groups. *Maddie* had developed trust with these teachers and acted as an encourager and cheerleader for their progress. The researcher observed collegial laughter and a good deal of trust with this team.

Observations during *Kala's* meeting time with teachers showed further that the role of the coach includes demonstrating partnership principles. *Kala* checked in with the sixth-grade team who were grappling with implementing the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum. *Kala* partnered with teachers and offered to model-teach two Lucy Calkins lessons the following week in order for teachers to visualize instruction. At the close of this meeting, one teacher exclaimed, "You are our savior! We had no clue last week. Lucy is so wordy and we have not had training." *Kala* smiled and offered, "You rock!" and "We'll get there." It was evident that *Kala* demonstrated the partnership principles of equality, dialogue, and praxis with the sixth-grade teachers. Furthermore, the teachers clearly trusted *Kala* to return the following week and model lessons to their students.

In addition to teacher interviews and professional learning community observations, the partnership principles were evident in the PLCA-R survey open-ended responses, as well. One teacher respondent noted that her instructional coach was "easy to talk to and get along with. She makes you feel comfortable asking even the simplest of questions." Such a comfortable relationship might be attributed to the partnership principles of equality and dialogue. Teacher respondents shared, "I leave our times together feeling empowered and encouraged" and "I feel very comfortable about inviting her into my classroom and helping me." This is further evidence that the role of the instructional coach is to manifest the partnership principles within the

professional learning community setting. Comfort and approachability were reiterated as a respondent thought about her instructional coach, "She is highly approachable; you feel comfortable knowing she has 'been there, done that' in almost all realms of education. If she doesn't have an immediate answer, she does what she can to seek it out." The instructional coaching partnership principles include equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity and support the working partnership between teachers and instructional coaches (Knight, 2007).

Providing resources to teachers. Another theme that emerged throughout the interviews, observations, and open-ended survey response was that the role of the instructional coach is a bridge to teachers by providing resources. The most frequent codes that emerged were sharing ideas and strategies, which occurred 49 times; providing resources, which also occurred 49 times; providing a huge resource for Lucy Calkins implementation, which occurred 45 times; and making professional development and training both meaningful and useful, which was noted 42 times. The researcher noted other codes, such as modeling Lucy Calkins and MTI lessons, providing research, being a content expert, and planning with data during professional learning collaboration times. Clearly, the role of the instructional coach is a bridge for teachers in the provision of resources. *Morgan* expressed the value of the resources provided by her instructional coach *Avery*. She explained that she could have informal conversations with *Avery* about becoming a better teacher, and with *Avery* she could "really dig into research, resources, and things that don't come up in just a typical work conversation." Similarly, fourth-grade teacher *Karma* expressed the benefits of the resources provided by her instructional coach *Desiree*. *Karma* shared, "It's [coaching's] been wonderful to have…that's extra hands in the

classroom, it's extra resources, or additional resources; it's connections to resources that we don't know we have."

Teacher participants also indicated the need for curriculum-specific resources. Kindergarten teacher *Daisy* outlined the resources directly linked to district MTI implementation as she discussed her instructional coach *Elsa's* use of resources:

> Our instructional coach has a very strong math background,…so she's very connected with the developmental math thinking and all of that.…But I think she's been the most helpful to our team when we've gone to her with a specific question or problem, and she's very willing to take [it], research it, really spend time working through what our questions [are] because we don't have time to do that.

The instructional coach can serve as a bridge as districts implement new curriculum, providing the necessary resources teachers need in order to be successful but lack the time to research, create, and investigate themselves. Teacher participant *Danielle* also identified MTI resources provided by *Elsa* as a benefit, as she commented,

> Oh, she's amazing. She's so good about finding a different way or bringing someone in if…she doesn't feel competent in doing it. She brought in a teacher from Boise to come observe me do a math lesson. She helped us find a grant for our math cubes."

In addition to MTI implementation, teacher interview participants indicated the benefit of the instructional coach in providing resources for the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum. *Tiana* stated, "Oh my gosh. I love my instructional coaches. It's been a huge resource for our new writing unit, specifically, that we're implementing here the Lucy Calkins writing." *Tiana* elaborated during the follow-up interview, "They do a lot of research that we don't have time to do, which is huge. Like, I need a lesson on this or I need a lesson on that, I want this more exciting, or I need more

manipulatives." *Wendy*, a sixth-grade teacher at Elementary School Three, described similar resource benefits from her instructional coach *Liberty*: "Our instructional coach, the minute we ask her for something or more ideas, she's researching it. And she's sending us stuff all the time. 'Hey, I found this great website. Hey, I found this great source.'" Teacher interview respondents indicated the value of the role of the instructional coach as one who provides resources to successfully implement new math and writing curriculum, as well as new standards-based report cards.

Kindergarten teacher *Daisy* shared the value of *Elsa's* role as resource provider in transitioning to a standards-based report card. When asked about how she perceived the role of the instructional coach during her professional learning community collaboration time, she commented,

> We really need some more insight…or we need some help kind of fleshing it out and adding some meat to the skeleton of our thinking in a direction. For example, the standard-based report card, just showing her what we had, asking her,…what options do we have? What direction can we take this? And she just really is a great resource of looking at something a little bit more objectively.

In addition to the resources mentioned by teacher interview participants, the researcher observed the resources provided by instructional coaches during the professional learning community observations. Clearly, the role of the instructional coach is to serve as a bridge by providing resources to teachers. For example, instructional coach *Maddie* made comments, such as "I'm going to do some investigating," "Let me dive into that," "Is there anything else you want me to come back with?," and "I'll dig into that." *Maddie* was offering to provide resources to teachers. During the observation at Elementary School One, instructional coach *Elsa* discussed her

involvement at the district level developing the online math resource for aligning standards. She commented about this new resource: "I love integrating, but I have to have a format. Teachers are glad to have this laid out for the year." The researcher observed *Elsa's* work with the second-grade team utilizing this online math resource she helped create. The role of the coach is to provide resources for teachers. *Desiree* provided math resources for her Kindergarten teachers as they piloted the new ORIGO curriculum. She also created spelling binders for all grade-level teachers in order to streamline their resources and save them time. Working with the second-grade team, *Desiree* shared a lesson plan template for the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum in order to help teachers implement the new writing. She even offered to write one or two lessons for the teachers as an example.

Observing at Elementary School Three, the researcher noted the ways in which instructional coach *Liberty* served as a bridge to her teachers by providing resources. The third-grade team indicated a lack of books for lower level students who needed intervention. *Liberty* took careful notes and offered to take care of any curriculum needs teachers may have had. In another meeting, the researcher observed as *Liberty* explained resources available for the fifth- and sixth-grade combination teacher, who was grappling with implementing the new Lucy Calkins curriculum. *Liberty* sat side by side with this teacher and shared active engagement strategies, as well as grouping strategies, for his students as he began to implement the curriculum.

Open-ended survey responses supported the idea that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to serve as a bridge to teachers by providing resources. Teacher respondents indicated thoughts, such as "seeking out resources and providing feedback for instruction, units, and district goals," "coaches can also be helpful in

leading staff to appropriate resources," "our instructional coach provides resources to help us do our jobs more effectively," "finding resources for grade level teams," "our instructional coach is good at bringing resources to us," and "to provide resources that we may not have known were out there for a specific teaching strategy."

Table 5 illustrates the most frequent codes from individual teacher interviews, individual instructional coach interviews, focus-group interviews, observational field-notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended response question. The researcher identified support for new curriculum implementation as the most frequent code, and ongoing job-embedded support and follow-up were recognized next.

Table 5

Top 10 Frequent Codes From Teacher Interviews, Instructional Coach Interviews, Observations, and Open-Ended Survey Responses

Role of Instructional Coach Within PLC	Number of Responses
Support for new curriculum implementation	75
Ongoing job-embedded support and follow-up	68
Availability/checking in	67
Learning partner	67
Sharing ideas, suggestions, and strategies	49
Providing resources	49
Implementing district vision and initiatives	48
Developing comfortable, nonevaluative relationship	46
Huge resource for Lucy Calkins' curriculum	45

Research Question 2

Working with teachers through a typical coaching cycle, an instructional coach employs skills that partner to facilitate change in student learning (Knight, 2007). However, there are gaps in the research regarding the coaching skills teachers find most helpful within the professional learning community setting (Cornett & Knight, 2010). For this portion of the study, qualitative research methods were considered to be the most effective way to determine the answer to the second research question: What coaching skills do teachers find most helpful within the professional learning community?

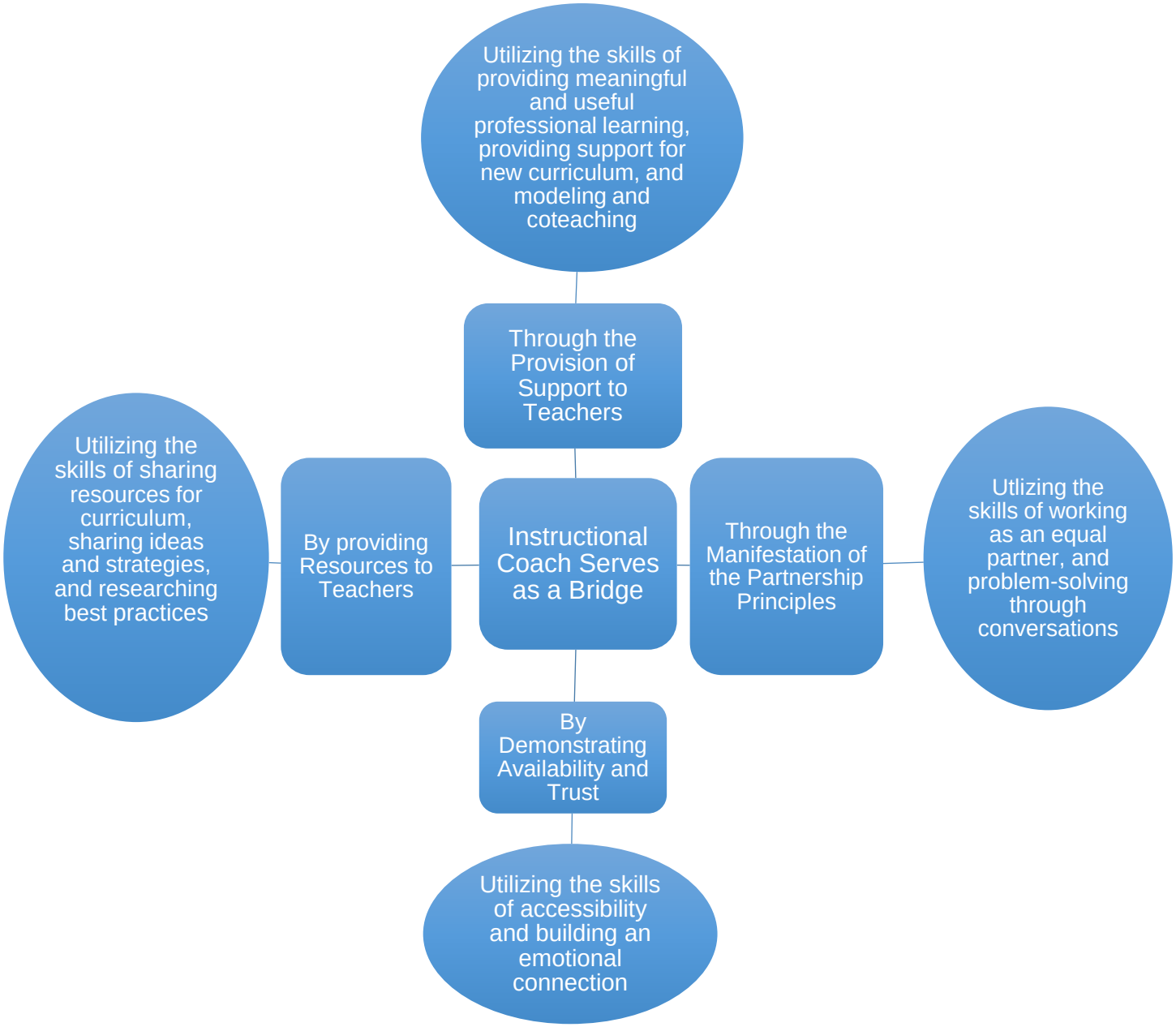
Considering that the role and the skills of the instructional coach within the professional learning community are similar in nature, the researcher utilized the constant comparative approach to saturate the categories in order to answer the first two research questions (Creswell, 2013). Utilizing the group of 12 volunteer teacher participants, 12 semistructured interviews were conducted, transcribed, and coded for themes to determine the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. In addition, two follow-up, focus-group interviews were conducted with the same teacher participants in order to probe more deeply into the dynamics of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. Also, the researcher posed one open-ended question within the PLCA-R survey instrument. The open-ended question was written as the following: What is the most helpful role of your instructional coach within the professional learning community? A total of 89 participants completed the PLCA-R, and each of the 89 survey volunteers answered the open-ended question. The

researcher analyzed the open-ended responses and coded specific coaching skills noted by the teacher participants.

Merriam-Webster (Skill, n.d.) defined a skill as "the ability to do something that comes from training, experience, or practice." The researcher identified codes in the data to identify the specific instructional coaching abilities that teachers found most helpful. The evidence revealed that the role of the instructional coach serves as a framework for the instructional coaching skills that teachers find most helpful.

Figure 4

Themes From Qualitative Data



Note. In this diagram, the role of the instructional coach serves as a framework for the instructional coaching skills that teachers find most helpful.

Demonstrate availability and trust through the skills of availability, accessibility, and building an emotional connection. Teacher interview participants shared the value of the

skills of availability and accessibility in their instructional coaches. Teacher participants described the benefits of the time their coaches spent touching base or checking in with them during professional learning community collaboration time. Furthermore, teachers reported that they found the skill of building an emotional connection important to their work together. Teachers indicated that this skill enabled instructional coaches to be comfortable and available. Music teacher participant *Shannon* summarized the skill of availability and accessibility:

> She's always willing to set an appointment or just talk to us when we catch her in the hallway or happen to see her in the copy room and ask a quick question, you know. She's visible and available a lot of the time…and her office is kind of in the middle of the school, so it's pretty easy to get to…if we need to just pop in and ask a question.

Evidence from teacher interviews indicated that availability and accessibility were helpful instructional coaching skills. First-grade teacher participant *Morgan* appreciated her instructional coach "checking in with each team, hearing what our concerns are…and our biggest area of need." Teacher participants indicated that a quick check-in demonstrated the skill of accessibility. *Jasmine,* a third-grade teacher at Elementary School Five valued the skill of her instructional coach "popping in" during collaboration. *Jasmine* shared, "A lot of times our coach would come in and see what we're talking about and then offer strategies, or things to pull for you to use. So, it's kind of like a quick pop-in." Although evidence from teacher interviews revealed the skill of accessibility, teachers also indicated that they preferred professional learning community visits to be prescheduled in order to be prepared with questions.

During the teacher follow-up, focus-group interview, participants discussed the preference for prescheduled visits. *Wendy*, a sixth-grade teacher at Elementary School Three stated,

> Because we know she's coming, we don't want to ask her all those random questions if maybe one of us or somebody can answer it. So I think we kind of narrow down our focus and discuss it and then we're ready when she comes in so that we can ask her our questions.

Focus-group participant *Daisy* agreed:

> I feel like we just schedule time when we need it with *Elsa* so that it's just…on an as-needed basis, whether it's regarding math or pacing or report card….[It] just depends on her schedule. She's very available to us and is very flexible in when she'll meet with us.

Evidence from teacher interviews revealed that teachers found the instructional coaching skill that they found most helpful was utilizing the skills of accessibility and building an emotional connection with teachers. Fifth-grade teacher participant *Remy* expressed this connection during her focus-group interview, as she stated, "I feel like there's that personal connection with our instructional coach." In addition, teacher participant *Daisy* shared that her instructional coach *Elsa* was a "constant source of encouragement" and has been "willing to do whatever [is needed]." She stated, "I don't know how we did it without her."

Evidence from the PLCA-R open-ended responses indicated the value of availability, accessibility, and building an emotional connection. One teacher survey respondent shared, "She is highly approachable. You feel comfortable knowing she has 'been there, done that' in almost all realms of education. If she doesn't have an immediate answer, she does what she can to seek it out."

Providing meaningful and useful professional learning, support for new curriculum, and modeling and coteaching. Evidence from teacher interviews identified providing support through the development of meaningful and useful learning opportunities as a top instructional

coach skill. In addition, the evidence revealed that support for new curriculum through modeling and coteaching was a helpful instructional coaching skill for teachers. Teacher participant *Karen*, a fourth-grade teacher at Elementary School Four, described her instructional coach *Desiree's* skill of leading professional learning as being helpful. *Karen* stated,

> Our instructional coach has been our PD deliverer as well, so she actually did quite a bit of training on her own time and then also went to workshops so that she could give us a full-day training on Lucy Calkins in September.

Evidence from teacher interview suggests that instructional coaches provide professional learning for the entire staff in a large-group setting, as well as within a team setting. Teacher participant *Daisy* expressed a preference for working within the smaller groups for professional learning: "I appreciate the full group things she does, but what's most meaningful to us are the really specific issues that we're struggling with or needing help with."

In addition to the skill of providing meaningful and useful professional learning, teacher interview evidence disclosed the importance of the instructional coach providing support for new curriculum by modeling and coteaching. Kindergarten teacher participant *Anacani* from Elementary School Three described her instructional coach:

> She is a teacher. She will teach us about whatever we want. When we started implementing Lucy Calkins last year, she would come in here and not only help us plan the lessons, but teach with us like she was a coteacher on those lessons.

Teacher participants described the support for new curriculum by modeling and coteaching as an important skill. Sixth-grade teacher *Wendy* explained this benefit during the follow-up interview:

> Our instructional coach is phenomenal. She's been with the Lucy Calkins and none of us have taught it; she's been in our classrooms helping us teach lessons. She stopped by, she

> stops by every Wednesday, has been really good to set aside time to talk about Lucy Calkins if we have any questions.

Teacher participant *Anacani* agreed and valued the support for new units. *Anacani* utilized her instructional coach *Liberty* by asking, "We're starting this new unit; we have some questions, can you come and help us, can you come support us, can you give us ideas?" Similarly, third-grade teacher participant *Jasmine* shared, "She'll come into the classroom, and she will show you how to teach something or show you a new program or new strategy and then let you kind of coteach with her so you get comfortable with it." Teacher interview participant *Tiana* summarized, "I feel very lucky that I do have so much support. You don't feel like you're on the island by yourself." Evidence from teacher interviews revealed that teachers valued the instructional coaching skills of providing meaningful professional learning opportunities, as well as providing support for news curriculum by modeling and coteaching.

Evidence from the PLCA-R open-ended responses indicated that the instructional coaching skills of providing meaningful learning opportunities, providing support for new curriculum, and modeling and coteaching were helpful to teachers. One survey respondent shared that the most helpful coaching skill was "organized professional development and surveys to see what we need help with." Another respondent noted, "Our instructional coach is there to help us with any area of instruction we are having trouble in. The instructional coach is also there to help by modeling lessons and provide ideas for improving our teaching." One respondent stated, "Coaches can be helpful in providing guidance and instruction in the delivery of programs." Other survey respondents shared coaches help with "implementing new programs" and "planning and teaching new curriculum." Another noted that it was helpful for the instructional coach to "simplify new curriculum and help teachers effectively implement the new

curriculum."

Providing resources to teachers by sharing resources, ideas and strategies, and researching best practices. Evidence from teacher interviews identified the instructional skills of sharing resources for curriculum, sharing instructional ideas and strategies, and researching best practices were helpful to teachers. Music teacher participant *Shannon* stated, "She's always modeling some really good ways of teaching…with games or something…that we could oftentimes use in our classrooms." *Shannon* added that her instructional coach *Elsa* also brought other ideas for curriculum, "still using my music standards but bring[ing] some reading ideas with it." Focus-group participant Tiana added, "They do a lot of research that we don't have time to do."

Evidence from the PLCA-R survey open-ended responses indicated that the coaching skills of sharing resources for curriculum, sharing ideas and strategies, and researching best practices were helpful to teachers. When asked what help the instructional coach provided, respondents shared comments, such as "access to materials," "resources," "seek what we need," and "expertise in strategies and curriculum." Knight (2007) outlined specific ways for instructional coaches to work with teachers in a partnership capacity that are known as the partnership principles. These include equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2007). Research question 1 identified the partnership principles as a role for the instructional coach within the professional learning community. Evidence from teacher interviews indicated that the skills teachers found most helpful while utilizing the partnership principles included the instructional coach working with the teacher as an equal partner and problem-solving through conversations.

Teacher participant *Karma* described the equality of the instructional coach and teacher

relationship: “She’s not here to compete with me; she’s here to help my students, too, and anybody that helps my students is helping me.” *Karma* added that she values the way her instructional coach *Desiree* provides feedback without critiquing or evaluating. *Karma* shared, “But she can see what you’re doing and offer some suggestions or even say, ‘You know, I like the way you did that. Did you try that over in this type of lesson? Or in this subject?’”

Evidence from teacher interviews also cited the value of the instructional coaching skill of problem-solving through conversations. Teacher participant *Morgan* expressed the benefits of this partnership after a visit from her instructional coach *Avery*: “I felt like I can have a conversation with her about that.” Resource teacher participant *Lynn* noted that her coach possessed the skill of problem-solving conversations. *Lynn* shared, “[W]orking together, we can solve problems instead of just being frustrated.”

Respondents of the PLCA-R open-ended response indicated the helpfulness of instructional coaches who utilized the skills of working as equal partners and problem-solving through conversations. One survey respondent stated,

> The most helpful role of my instructional coach is that of a troubleshooter. I am able to brainstorm and talk things through with my coach. This helps me in two ways: saving time from having to do extensive research (because my coach has many of the answers and will help share the load of any necessary research) and offering expert advice that helps me help myself. I leave our times together feeling empowered and encouraged.

Table 6

Top 10 Frequent Codes From Teacher Interviews and Open-Ended Survey Responses

Coaching Skills Teachers Find Most Helpful Within the PLC	Number of Responses
Availability, touching base, checking in	36
Providing meaningful and useful training and professional development	32
Huge resource for Lucy Calkins curriculum	31
Providing coaching support for new curriculum	31
Sharing ideas, suggestions, and strategies	30
Providing resources	28
Model and coteach lessons (Lucy Calkins)	27
Learning partner (not grading or critiquing)	26
Ongoing job-embedded support	20
Comfortable, approachable	19

Research Question 3

While a large body of educational research exists regarding the benefits of professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 2009; Olivier & Hipp, 2010), there continues to be a gap in the roles of the instructional coach within the professional learning community setting and how teachers perceive the professional learning community when they have worked with an instructional coach (Cornett & Knight, 2010). Research question 3 sought to address this gap: What impact does an instructional coach have on teacher perceptions of a professional

learning community?

The researcher administered the online PLCA-R survey instrument to the elementary teachers in the school district. The PLCA-R was created by Olivier, Hipp, and Huffman (2003) and developed as a tool to assess perceptions of principals, teachers, and staff regarding the attributes forming the professional learning community within the school (Hipp & Huffman, 2003. In addition, the questionnaire was designed to measure the levels at which schools function along the dimensions of the professional learning community (Hipp & Huffman, 2009). The PLCA-R consisted of 52 statements describing Hord's (2009 five dimensions of the professional learning community and utilized a Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. The development of the survey instrument, PLCA-R was created as an extension of Hord's (2009) work at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. The dimensions of the professional learning community include (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) supportive conditions of relationships and structures (Hipp & Huffman, 2009). Following the Likert responses, demographic information was collected from participants regarding (a) building and campus, (b) gender, (c) years of teaching experience, (d) currently serving or had served as a team leader, (e) years at the campus, (f) highest degree obtained, (g) currently serving or had served on a school leadership team, (h) specific grade level, and (i) had worked with an instructional coach. Although the survey instrument was sent to all certified elementary teachers in the district, not everyone participated. Of the entire sample population of approximately 145 teachers in the district, 89 (or 61%) completed the survey instrument. The researcher utilized the descriptive statistical analysis to answer research question 3.

Figure 5

Professional Learning Community Assessment Comparison

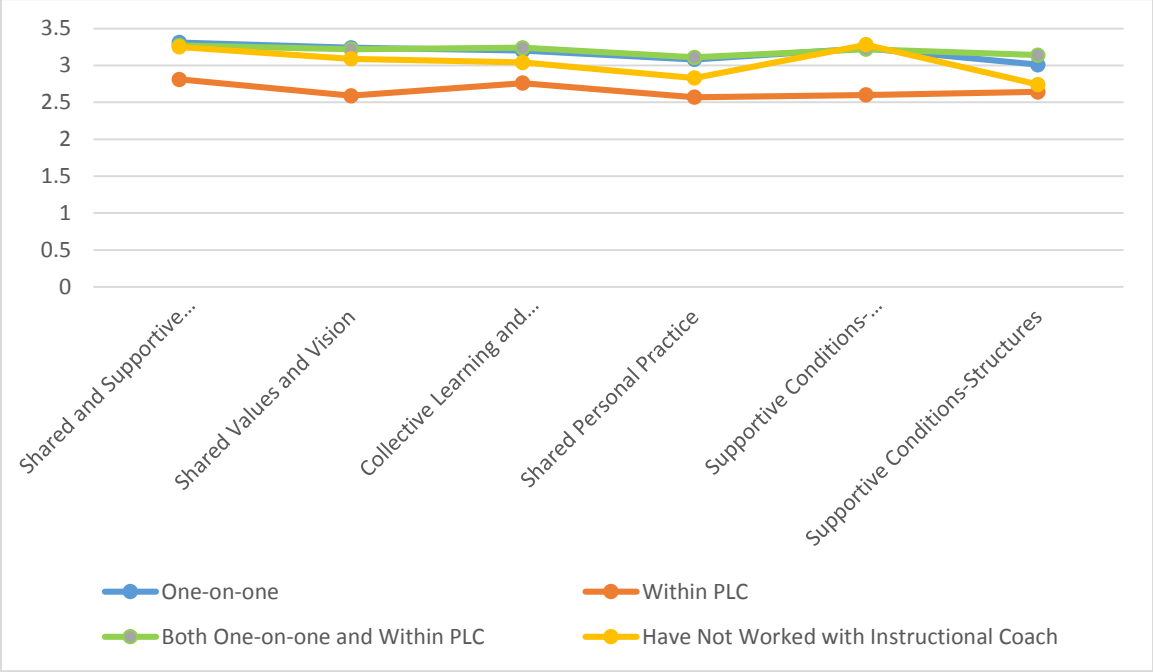


Figure 5 illustrates teacher perceptions of each of Hord's (2009) domains of the professional learning community. The four categories of teachers included teachers who worked one-on-one with an instructional coach, teachers who worked with an instructional coach within the professional learning community, teachers who worked with an instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community, and teachers who had not worked with an instructional coach.

Table 7

Professional Learning Community Assessment Comparison

Selection	#		Shared and Supportive Leadership	Shared Values and Vision	Collective Learning and Application	Shared Personal Practice	Supportive Conditions of Relationships	Supportive Conditions of Structures
One-on-one	20	*M*	3.31	3.24	3.20	3.08	3.23	3.01
		SD	0.60	0.64	0.61	0.66	0.66	0.70

Within PLC	7	*M*	2.81	2.59	2.76	2.57	2.60	2.64
		SD	0.89	0.69	0.52	0.54	0.85	0.74
Both one-on-one and within PLC	57	*M*	3.27	3.22	3.24	3.11	3.22	3.14
		SD	0.77	0.72	0.64	0.69	0.75	0.77
Have not worked with an instructional coach	5	*M*	3.25	3.09	3.04	2.83	3.28	2.74
		SD	0.58	0.56	0.64	0.92	0.74	0.69

Evidence gathered from the PLCA-R survey instrument indicated teacher perceptions of each dimension of the professional learning community. Teachers who worked one-on-one with an instructional coach revealed a mean score (M = 3.31, SD = .60) within the shared and supportive leadership dimension. This was greater than teachers who worked with an instructional coach solely within the professional learning community (M = 2.81, SD = .89), both one-on-one and within the professional learning community (M = 3.27, SD = .77), and teachers who did not work with an instructional coach (M = 3.25, SD = .58).

Teachers who worked one-on-one with an instructional coach revealed a mean score (M = 3.24, SD = .64) within the shared values and vision dimension. This was greater than teachers who worked with an instructional coach solely within the professional learning community (M = 2.59, SD = .69), both one-on-one and within the professional learning community (M = 3.22, SD = .72), and teachers who did not work with an instructional coach (M = 3.09, SD = .56).

Teachers who worked one-on-one with an instructional coach revealed a mean score (M = 3.20, SD = .61) within the collective learning and application dimension. This was less than the perceptions of teachers who worked with an instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community (M = 3.24, SD = .64). Teacher perceptions of those who worked with an instructional coach solely within the professional learning community indicated a mean score (M = 2.76, SD = .52) and teachers who had not worked with an instructional coach

revealed a mean score (*M* = 3.04, *SD* = .64).

The mean professional learning community perception score for teachers who worked one-on-one with an instructional coach (*M* = 3.08, *SD* = .66) was lower than teacher perceptions from those who had worked with an instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community (*M* = 3.11, *SD* = .69) in response to shared personal practice. Perceptions of teachers who worked with an instructional coach solely within the professional learning community revealed a mean score (*M* = 2.57, *SD* = .54) and teachers who had not worked with an instructional coach indicated (*M* = 2.83, *SD* = .92) within this domain.

The supportive conditions – relationships dimension indicated a mean score (*M* = 3.23, *SD* = .66), which was less than teachers who had not worked with an instructional coach (*M* = 3.28, *SD* = .74). Teachers who worked with an instructional coach both one-on-one and within the setting of the professional learning community (*M* = 3.22, *SD* = .75) was greater than teachers who worked solely with coaches in the professional learning community (*M* = 2.60, *SD* = .85).

Finally, evidence gathered regarding teacher perceptions of supportive conditions – structures revealed that teachers who solely worked one-on-one with an instructional coach (*M* = 3.01, *SD* = .70) perceived this dimension lower than teachers who worked with an instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community (*M* = 3.14, *SD* = .77). Teachers who worked with an instructional coach only within the professional learning community revealed a mean score (*M* = 2.64, *SD* = .74) and teachers who did not work with an instructional coach indicated a mean score (*M* = 2.74, *SD* = .69).

Table 8

Categories Based on Hord's Dimensions and Number of Statements in Each Category

Category	Number of Statements
Shared and Supportive Leadership	11
Shared Values and Vision	9
Collective Learning and Application	10
Shared Personal Practice	7
Supportive Conditions—Relationships	5
Supportive Conditions—Structures	10

Additionally, the researcher examined the groups to determine if there was a relationship between instructional coaching and teacher perceptions of the professional learning community. The researcher conducted an initial independent-samples t-test to compare teacher perceptions of the professional learning community between teachers who worked with an instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community and teachers who worked solely one-on-one or solely within the professional learning community. There was a significant difference in the teacher perceptions between teachers who worked with an instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community (M = 3.2000, SD = .06164) and teachers who worked solely one-on-one or solely within the professional learning community (M = 2.9200, SD = .28803) conditions t(-2.321)= , p = 0.034. community.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 presented a summary of the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods investigating the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. Themes through constant comparison of the emergent codes from semistructured teacher and instructional coach interviews, professional learning community observations, and the open-ended survey responses found that the role of the instructional coach is that of a bridge. In addition, themes emerged from semistructured teacher interviews, as well as the open-ended survey responses, and identified the instructional coaching skills that teachers found most helpful within the professional learning community. Descriptive statistics identified teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the professional learning community. Teachers who worked with an instructional coach within the professional learning community *and* one-on-one reported higher satisfaction than teachers who did not work with an instructional coach or only worked with an instructional coach within the professional learning community setting. The data presented in this chapter will be expanded in the following chapter to discuss the role of the instructional coach as a bridge within the professional learning community and what skills instructional coaches can best utilize in this setting in order to be agents of change.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

Through the hours spent sitting beside the elementary teacher and instructional coach participants during this study, the researcher was impressed and surprised by the professionalism, optimism, and a passion for student learning that they each revealed. Teachers expressed a strong desire to help students develop a love of learning, to make a connection with children and watch them grow, to savor the moment in which the light bulb turns on, and to learn alongside students. These professional educators joyfully shared a belief that all students can learn and that students are eager to learn. The researcher marveled at the genuine enthusiasm evident in both the teachers' voices and faces as they beamed when asked about their favorite aspect of being a teacher. As the interviews progressed, however, it was clear that incorporating district initiatives, initiating a new writing curriculum, developing math curriculum, and implementing Common Core standards was a challenging and taxing undertaking. The district provided each Wednesday afternoon as time designated for collaboration and professional learning for teachers. In addition, the district provided a full-time, on-site instructional coach for each of the five elementary schools. The researcher wanted to discover the role the instructional coaches played within the setting of the professional learning community.

Research in the field of professional learning has indicated that professional learning is most effective when it is collaborative (Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, & Goe, 2011; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hindin et al., 2007; Morel, 2014), is ongoing and job-embedded (Coggshall et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull, & Hunter, 2016), and provides support (Niemi, 2016; Owen, 2015; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014;

Sahlberg, 2010). Furthermore, professional learning thrives within a collaborative group of learners who are able to directly implement new learning in the classroom (Bruce et al., 2010; Croft et al., 2010; Desimone et al., 2002; Gulamhussein, 2013), while focusing on student growth (Bruce & Flynn, 2013). Professional learning communities (Bruce & Flynn, 2013; DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 2009; Owen, 2014; Wells & Feun, 2013; Williams, 2012) and instructional coaching (Cornett & Knight, 2010; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight, 2007; Teemant et al., 2011) have been shown to provide such collaborative, job-embedded, ongoing, professional support for teachers; however, minimal research has been conducted to examine the ways in which instructional coaches can work within the setting of the professional learning community.

Research in the field of professional learning is increasing but often focuses on either instructional coaching or professional learning communities rather than on how they collaborate together. Studies have recently been conducted examining supports needed for professional learning communities (Hord, 2009; Patton et al., 2015; Thessin, 2015). Another recent body of research in the field of professional learning has examined instructional coaching supports provided individually with teachers (Akhavan, 2015; Knight, 2016; Thomas, Bell, Spelman, & Briody, 2015). Marsh, Bertrand, and Huguet (2015) conducted a study that examined the mediating role of instructional coaches and professional learning studies. More specifically, the researchers examined how the instructional coaches and teachers used data to alter instructional practice.

Although there is a need for continued research on the effectiveness and supports provided by professional learning communities and instructional coaching, the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community must not be overlooked.

Currently, most often professional learning does not meet the needs of teacher learners (Patton et al., 2015). Huguet, Marsh, and Farrell (2014) argued that further research is needed to determine what strategies an instructional coach can utilize in order to reduce teacher resistance and build buy-in while building capacity of an entire faculty. Cornett and Knight (2009) noted that the primary goal of instructional coaching research should be to identify the most efficient and effective means of promoting high-quality learning for teachers. Moreover, they contended that research is needed to determine what types of learning require one-to-one coaching interactions and which types can transpire in either small- or large-group settings. Though instructional coaches play a significant role in teacher professional learning, the research is nearly silent on their role within the setting of the professional learning community.

The questions investigated in this study were the following:

1. What is the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community?
2. What coaching skills do teachers find most helpful within this setting?
3. What impact does an instructional coach have on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community?

Chapter 5 interprets the results of this study, describes how they interact within the context of the theoretical framework, and discusses implications for further research.

Summary of the Results

This study investigated the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community. Because many variables affect teacher learning and collaboration, neither qualitative nor quantitative research was utilized independently to fully explore the phenomenon. Creswell (2013) noted, "Both types of data, together, provide a better understanding of your research problem than either type by itself" (p. 535). In this study, a series

of semistructured, audio-recorded, and transcribed interviews with seven instructional coaches and 12 elementary teachers were designed to determine the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community. In addition, three semistructured, audio-recorded, and transcribed follow-up, focus-group interviews were conducted. Participants were selected through the stratified random sample procedure after signing an informed consent form. Teacher participants were selected based on the following criteria: teachers who had invested at least one year in the professional learning community, equal representation from each of the five elementary schools in the district, and equal representatives from primary and intermediate grade levels. Creswell (2013) contended that this method "guarantees that the sample will include specific characteristics that the researcher wants included in the sample" (p. 144). Observations were conducted during one professional learning community collaboration time at each of the five elementary schools. The researcher gathered, transcribed, and coded the observational field notes and collected artifacts from the sites. Additionally, the online PLCA-R survey instrument was sent electronically to elementary teachers at each of the five elementary schools in the district. The open-ended question was written as the following: What is the most helpful role of your instructional coach within the professional learning community? A total of 89 participants completed the PLCA-R, and each of the 89 survey volunteers answered the open-ended question.

Creswell (2013) described a process for identifying themes in qualitative research. Each of the themes will be discussed individually in this chapter. All will be illustrated with the perceptions of the participants in the study, available research, and the Knight (2007)-Hord (2009)-Vygotsky (1987)-Knowles (1973) framework for instructional coach and professional learning community collaboration.

Research question 1. What is the role of the instructional coach within a professional

learning community? In this study, it was important to address the perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of the elementary teacher participants and their instructional coaches. Participants were asked to describe their thoughts and experiences of instructional coaching, using the lens of Knight's (2007) partnership principles; their perceptions of professional learning communities, utilizing the lens of Hord's (2009) six dimensions; their philosophies of adults as learners, incorporating Knowles (1973) adult learning theory; and their experiences of collaboration, employing Vygotsky's (1987) social learning theory. The researcher wove this theoretical framework throughout the four sets of interview questions: individual teacher participants; follow-up, focus-group teacher participants; individual instructional coaches; and follow-up, focus-group instructional coaches (see Appendices D, E, F, and G).

The results of the study suggest the importance of the instructional coach serving as a catalyst, or bridge, to meet teachers where they are, utilizing the partnership principles (Knight, 2007), and guide them to new learning and application in the classroom. The instructional coaches in this study served as a bridge between the district and classroom teachers, a bridge between grade levels, a bridge to new learning, and a bridge throughout a time of high turnover in staff. Such job-embedded, continuous support is needed for the success of teachers collaborating within the setting of the professional learning community (Hord, 2009; Owen, 2014; Patton et al., 2015).

Theme 1: Instructional coach serves as a bridge. The instructional coach role as a bridge is the first major theme for the qualitative portion of the study, which sought to answer the first research question in the study. Participants purported that the instructional coach serves as a bridge, meeting teachers where they are and guiding them to new learning.

Educational research has indicated that a common theme of high-quality professional learning is teacher buy-in (Archibald et al., 2011; Huguet et al., 2014). Teachers who perceive a disconnect between professional learning and classroom practice and discern a lack of core content in learning activities will disengage from professional learning if they are unable to connect new strategies and concepts to their unique settings (Archibald et al., 2011; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Huguet et al., 2014). Additionally, teachers might not apply professional learning to the classroom (Hindin et al., 2007). Professional learning is more effective when it is explicitly linked to classroom lessons (Desimone & Garet, 2016; Hord, 2009). Follow-up and feedback are necessary for these teachers to reengage in professional learning in order to facilitate changes in teaching practice (Archibald et al., 2011; Hord, 2009). Instructional coaches can serve as a bridge to teachers by providing the necessary follow-up, feedback, modeling of lessons, and a clear connection to authentic classroom application and practice. In the theoretical framework, Hord (2009) identified the six dimensions of professional learning communities, including collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions of relationships. Such conditions create an opportunity for instructional coaches to serve as a bridge for teacher learning.

Bridge for district vision and initiatives. Participants provided evidence of the instructional coach's role as a bridge within the setting of the professional learning community. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 48 responses indicating the instructional coach's role was to serve as a bridge between the district and the individual schools by implementing the vision and initiatives, such as the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum, Common Core standards, and MTI math instruction. The instructional

coaches in the district collaborated biweekly to discuss district initiatives and vision, create professional learning opportunities for their schools supporting the initiatives, share the initiatives and vision with teachers in a professional learning setting, provide follow-up and support during weekly professional learning community collaboration times, as well as individualized support with teachers through modeling lessons, codeveloping standards, cocreating units, and coanalyzing assessment data to guide instruction. Through this process, coaches served as a bridge between the district's vision and teacher implementation. District initiatives during the time of this study were comprised of implementing the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum, MTI math instruction, and Common Core standards. Additionally, Elementary School Four piloted the ORIGO math curriculum. Instructional coach participants demonstrated an understanding of the principles underlying Knowles' (1973) adult learning theory and capitalized on their internal motivation, prior knowledge, and previous experiences while designing professional learning opportunities. It is vital for instructional coaches to recognize the complexities of working with adults (Knight, 2016; Vygotsky, 1987) and incorporate the partnership principles (Knight, 2007) while serving as the bridge between the district and teachers.

Throughout each of the five Wednesday professional learning community observations, the researcher noted instances of instructional coaches communicating and explaining district initiatives. For instance, the researcher noted that four of the five instructional coaches focused on explaining Common Core standards in math, as well as district expectations during at least one of the grade-level team collaboration meetings. Instructional coach *Elsa* walked a second-grade team through the new district website containing standards, learning targets, essential questions, and tasks. *Elsa* invited the teachers to share how they thought through the standards,

thus serving as a bridge between district initiatives and teacher learning. Similarly, instructional coaches served as a bridge by assisting the teachers with the district's vision to implement SMART goals. Instructional coach *Avery* communicated the district's math plan and shared the background behind math improvement as a SMART goal. During the professional learning community observation at Elementary School Three, the researcher noted instructional coach *Liberty* serving as a bridge. *Liberty*, collaborating with the fifth-grade-level team, explained the reasoning behind the district's vision to administer math assessments simultaneously. Additionally, instructional coach *Desiree* walked alongside a Kindergarten teacher who was implementing Common Core standards while piloting the ORIGO curriculum. Due to the Kindergarten split schedule, the teacher did not have a collaboration partner on Wednesdays. *Desiree* worked alongside this teacher as she entered unchartered waters. The researcher noted that the district's implementation of the Common Core standards had necessitated this type of collaboration. Coaches worked to come alongside teachers due to the higher standards, increased expectations, and the importance of the district vision, "every student succeed."

In addition, instructional coach interview data reveal that the role of the instructional coach is to serve as a bridge between district vision and initiatives and teacher learning and implementation of that vision. As instructional coach *Avery* stated, she perceived that the "vision is driven by the district, supported by the administration and you're there as the go-between for both." District instructional coach *Claire* described how the district vision was brought down through the instructional coaches during Wednesday collaboration. She elaborated on the importance of taking ownership and making a commitment to the vision that "every student will be learning every day in every classroom." Another district initiative, the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum, was discussed by the instructional coaches. Instructional coach *Elsa* shared ways in

which she structured conversations with teachers to assist them with implementation. *Elsa* shared her thought process: "How can I structure this or pare it down?" *Elsa's* goal was to take district initiatives, such as the Lucy Calkins curriculum, and make it more accessible and visible for teachers. Other instructional coaches explained they were a bridge to the district due in large part to their positions and consistent communication with district personnel. Instructional coach *Liberty* noted that she often received administrative questions from teachers because she worked closely with the principals and stayed informed about what was taking place in schools or the district.

Moreover, teacher interview data illustrate the role of the instructional coach as a bridge between district vision and initiatives and teacher learning and implementation of that vision. Teacher participant *Wendy* expressed relief as she described the support, follow-up, feedback, and reminders she received from instructional coach *Liberty* upon learning new district initiatives during professional learning. In addition, teacher participant *Daisy* expressed her appreciation of the follow-up she received from instructional coach *Elsa* following the district training. She shared that there was not time given to teachers to implement new training, but *Elsa's* follow-up made implementation a bit easier. Teacher participant *Anacani* explained the ways in which her instructional coach eased the burden of new learning from the district. She shared that the coach took the initiatives and made them learner friendly and provided resources, ideas, options, and follow-up. Music teacher *Shannon* indicated an appreciation for the way in which instructional coach *Elsa* shared input on district initiatives but treated her as a professional teacher and adult learner. In describing *Elsa*, she shared that *Elsa* "lets you go from where you are and gets you to where you want to be." Teacher participant *Tiana* shared frustration about a lack of math curriculum but an appreciation for her instructional coach in the areas of Common Core and MTI

math instruction. Finally, PLCA-R teacher survey participants mentioned the importance of the coach as a bridge between the district and teachers. Survey participants indicated the help provided during the changes in district policy and new curriculum. For example, one survey respondent shared that the role of the instructional coach was "clarifying expectations of teachers as presented by the district." The coach's role as a bridge between district initiatives and vision and teacher learning and implementation was mentioned during 12 of the 14 teacher interviews. Clearly, instructional coaches served a valuable role in the district as they continued to entertain new ideas that supported the vision that "every student is learning every day."

Bridge between grade levels. Additionally, qualitative data evidence reveal the instructional coaches serve as a bridge between different grade levels through their intentional facilitation of cross-grade-level collaboration. Initial coding divulged 39 responses explaining this vertical alignment between the grades. Instructional coaches noted the benefits of curriculum alignment while teachers expressed the advantages of increased communication, collaboration, collegiality, and trust between the grade levels benefitting the entire school. Vygotsky (1987) contended that greater learning occurs through this type of social learning setting. Instructional coach participants in the study united grade levels through dialogue and conversation. Effective instructional coaches apply effective methods of communication to partner with teachers to facilitate collaboration (Garmston, 1997; Knight, 2007, 2016; Sparks, 2002). During the Wednesday professional learning community collaboration observations, the researcher noted the way in which the instructional coaches purposefully organized cross-grade-level collaboration. The researcher observed as coaches *Avery* and *Liberty* utilized Vygotsky's (1987) social learning theory to increase learning and collaboration. In fact, *Avery* revealed the way in which she reconfigured the physical space during Wednesday collaboration to facilitate various grade levels

working together in closer proximity. Teachers brought their materials, books, and resources to a designated classroom to work as grade-level teams, and the other grade-level teams moved to nearby classrooms. Additionally, *Avery's* sixth-grade team shared the desire to observe and meet with seventh-grade teachers at the middle school. *Avery* brainstormed a solution for these teachers to observe one another and collaborate on an upcoming collaboration day. Similarly, instructional coach *Liberty* served as a bridge between grade-level teams at Elementary School Three. Because *Liberty* rotated between teams each week and engaged in instructional conversations, she had a school-wide view of curriculum, instruction, and students. During the collaboration meeting observation, the researcher noticed a particular example during the fourth-grade team visit. Teachers were concerned about the science scope and sequence. As they brainstormed solutions to the problem, *Liberty* shared some ideas for ways they could dialogue with the third-grade team to address the issues. *Liberty* served as a bridge between the third- and fourth-grade teams and quite possibly cleared up potential confusion and conflict.

Additionally, instructional coach interview data reveal that the role of the instructional coach is to serve as a bridge between grade-level teams within the professional learning community. Instructional coach participants expressed a desire to align curriculum, facilitate cross-grade-level collaboration, and create a cohesive scope and sequence for all grade levels. The role of the instructional coach as a bridge between grade levels was discussed in five of the seven interviews. Wednesday grade-level team collaboration meetings allowed the instructional coaches opportunities to rotate between teams and dialogue with a unique, school-wide perspective. Teacher participants described their coaches as "neutral" and "objective" within these conversations, enabling collaboration without conflict or clouded judgment. Instructional coach *Liberty* identified these meetings as "vertical conversations" and "vertical alignment." It

reminded the researcher of the image of a bumblebee buzzing from flower to flower cross-pollenating each plant, producing growth and life. Additionally, instructional coach *Kala* shared the vision of bridging grade levels by aligning the Common Core standards and building score and sequence through side-by-side dialogue within the professional learning community. *Kala* described this as a "systemic viewpoint of K–6," which she attributed to improving collaboration time. Because of *Kala's* ability to see the big picture and rotate between teams, she was able to serve as a bridge between grade-level teams. Furthermore, instructional coaches sought to bridge grade levels through communication and availability. For example, instructional coach *Maddie* recognized the division that the physical location of classrooms can cause, such as the case in Elementary School Five. *Maddie* described how she intentionally made connections between the grade levels that did not have opportunities to collaborate often, as she stated, "I think it's really important to have those cross-grade-level interactions." Similar findings emerged from Elementary School One as instructional coach *Elsa* shared the adventure of meeting with many different grade levels and discussing ways in which to be a bridge between grade-level curriculum. She stated the importance of asking, "How can we bridge from grade to grade and have those alignments?"

Moreover, teacher participant interview data reveal the role of the instructional coach as a bridge between grade levels. Vygotsky (1987) asserted that greater learning occurs through the social learning model. Evidence from this study supported this idea as teacher participant *Tiana* described her experiences: "All of those brains working together, you come up with some pretty cool things." Additionally, teacher participant Jessie explained the way in which her instructional coach *Avery* worked to change the physical arrangement of Wednesday professional learning community meetings to facilitate cross-grade-level collaboration. Teacher participant *Morgan*

agreed by observing that instructional coach *Avery* facilitated cross-grade-level collaboration by "connecting the themes throughout the school" and having the "perspective of the school-wide vision." *Morgan* expressed appreciation for the way in which *Avery* successfully weaved together the grade levels for math assessments. Hord (2009) identified supportive conditions of structures as a dimension of a successful learning community. Evidence from this study suggests that the role of the instructional coach is to serve as a bridge between grade levels, thus providing a structure in which teachers can effectively collaborate.

Bridge to new learning as change agents. Instructional coaches provide support and guidance to teachers as they implement new instructional strategies after professional learning (Hall & Simmeral, 2008; Knight, 2009). Additionally, when instructional coaches utilize data during collaboration with teachers within the professional learning community, deeper level changes in pedagogy occur (Marsh, Bertrand, & Huguet, 2015). Research has indicated the role of the instructional coach is that of a change agent for teachers (Fullan & Knight, 2011). This was consistent with the findings of this study as instructional coach participants guided teachers during the professional learning community collaboration meetings. Instructional coaches sat side by side with grade-level teams as they collaboratively discussed methods for teaching the new Lucy Calkins writing curriculum, planned math units incorporating MTI and Common Core standards, and prescheduled class periods for instructional coaches to model lessons. Teacher participants expressed appreciation and gratitude for this job-embedded support their instructional coaches provided within the classroom setting. Current research supports this idea that professional learning must be designed to include guidance, support, and opportunities for teachers to integrate new learning into their daily instruction, rather than relinquishing the burden to teachers (Desimone & Garet, 2016). Professional learning is most successful when it is

directly linked to classroom lessons (Desimone & Garet, 2016), as evidenced with the instructional coaches modeling lessons for teachers in this study. Teacher participants indicated that it was easier to make instructional changes and apply new knowledge and skills with the guidance and modeling of the instructional coach. Knight (2011) referred to this as praxis, one of the partnership principles. While several instructional coach and teacher participants described moving toward new learning as a "push," they added that "push" always came with "support" in the instructional coaching relationship. Instructional coach *Maddie* shared that she was always "willing to meet teachers where they are" and "building that confidentiality to where we can continue to move on." Similarly, coach *Desiree* agreed that her philosophy was to meet teachers where they were and develop organized steps to ensure they felt successful. In this study, the instructional coach's role was a bridge to new learning while providing necessary trust and support, as well as helping teachers make connections to this new learning. District instructional coach *Claire* described this relationship as a combination of push and support in order to move learning forward. Evidence revealed that the instructional coaches worked as change agents through this process. Additionally, teacher participants agreed that instructional coaches were willing to meet them where they were and provide support to move them toward new learning. Instructional coach *Elsa* summarized this dichotomy of push and support as she shared, "When you're an agent of change, which oftentimes you are, then there's probably going to be a little bit of resistance." However, *Elsa* concluded that while being an agent for change was uncomfortable, it was challenging and exciting as well.

Bridge to stability throughout a time of high turnover in staff. The school district in this study experienced population growth, a transition to Common Core standards and new curriculum, and a turnover in school personnel. During the duration of this study, two of five

principals began their first year at their prospective buildings, three of six instructional coaches newly transitioned from classroom teachers to their coaching positions, and participants also indicated that a number of classroom teachers transitioned between either grade levels or buildings within the district. Teacher participants indicated that turnover within administration and faculty was noteworthy. In fact, teacher participants *Karma,* from Elementary School Four, and *Morgan,* from Elementary School Two, observed that all but one grade-level team experienced a change in membership this year. Additionally, Elementary School One underwent transitions with a new building principal and several new teachers. Teacher participant *Shannon* noted, "It's been a real project of getting everybody up to speed on what our culture is." Building cohesiveness within grade-level teams proved challenging. For example, teacher participant *Wendy* expressed, "It's always that shaky period when somebody new comes in." However, they also indicated an appreciation for the stability, support, and constancy of the role of the instructional coaches within their buildings. Furthermore, participants indicated a trust must be built between instructional coaches and teachers, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

Theme 2: Provision of support to teachers. Professional learning is most effective when job-embedded support is provided for teachers (Desimone & Garet, 2016; Hord, 2009; Niemi, 2016; Owen, 2015; Pirtle & Tobia, 2012; Sahlberg, 2010). This was consistent with the findings in this study. Instructional coaches served as a bridge to teachers through the provision of support to teachers in new curriculum implementation, providing ongoing job-embedded support and classroom follow up, and through troubleshooting and problem-solving teacher concerns within the setting of the professional learning community. In addition, teacher participants revealed that they perceived grade-level teams, rather than as an entire school, to be most effective for receiving instructional coaching support during Wednesday collaboration meetings.

Examining support through the theoretical framework lens of Hord (2009) indicates a need for supportive structures and relationships to achieve successful collaboration within a professional learning community. Furthermore, Knight (2007) asserted that instructional coaches must practice the partnership principles to most effectively support teachers.

Support for new curriculum implementation. Participants provided evidence of the instructional coach's role as a provider of support within the setting of the professional learning community. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 75 responses indicating the role of the instructional coach as a supporter within the professional learning community during the process of implementing new curriculum. Participants described the adoption of the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum and the process of writing new math curriculum to implement Common Core standards. In addition, one of the five elementary schools was piloting new ORIGO math curriculum for the district. A topic woven throughout the teacher interviews, instructional coach interviews, professional learning community observations, and the PLCA-R open-ended response was the challenge of new curriculum implementation. Instructional coaches supported teachers through dialogue during Wednesday grade-level collaboration meetings. Discussions centered around strategies for teaching a Lucy Calkins writing lesson, simplifying the Lucy Calkins teacher guides, methods for incorporating lessons into the language arts block, and developing writing rubrics. In addition, instructional coaches *Kala* and *Liberty* attended the Lucy Calkins writing conference and shared their learning with teachers. *Kala* developed a set of videos in which she modeled the Lucy Calkins writing lesson demonstrations with actual students in the classroom setting. She shared these videos with the other elementary instructional coaches who then showed them to

their teachers for professional learning. The instructional coaches also supported curriculum implementation during Wednesday collaboration meetings by scheduling modeling and follow-up visits to classrooms. Qualitative data reveal that one role of the instructional coach is support for curriculum implementation.

Support through providing ongoing, job-embedded support and follow-up. Studies have suggested that professional learning is most effective when it is continuous, job-embedded (Coggshall et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Jensen et al., 2016), and supportive (Niemi, 2016; Owen, 2015; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Sahlberg, 2010). Evidence from this study supports research in the field of professional learning. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process gathered 68 responses indicating the role of the instructional coach as a supporter within the professional learning community by providing ongoing, job-embedded support and follow-up. Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) contended that in top-ranked nations, support for teachers provides "extensive opportunities for ongoing professional learning, embedded in substantial planning and collaboration time at school" (p. 1). The researcher observed support provided to teachers by the instructional coaches during the Wednesday professional learning community collaboration meetings. Instructional coaches sat side by side with grade-level teams at kidney bean-shaped tables. During the observational visit at Elementary School Three, the researcher noted the job-embedded support exhibited by instructional coach *Liberty*. *Liberty* discussed possible ideas, strategies, and methods for teaching the Lucy Calkins curriculum. *Liberty* went beyond mere dialogue, however, by offering to return to the class during the language arts block and model a lesson for the teacher. It was evident to the researcher that this teacher was not left to grapple with teaching the new curriculum in

isolation. Rather, he was equipped with the necessary supports, including the choice of a plethora of instructional strategies and follow-up through lesson modeling in his classroom setting. This evidence corresponds with Knight's (2007) partnership principles framework, namely choice and dialogue. Additionally, the evidence is supported by recent studies of professional learning that indicate professional learning is most successful when it is intentionally linked to classroom lessons (Desimone & Garet, 2016). Interview data indicated that several coaches' philosophy of instructional coaching focused on this idea of providing support to teachers.

Support though troubleshooting and problem-solving teacher concerns. Qualitative data indicate that a role of the instructional coach is to provide support to teachers through troubleshooting and problem-solving. Ideas such as "brainstorming," "solving problems," and "troubleshooting" were noted 27 times throughout the coding of teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This role of the instructional coach is supported through the Knight (2007)-Hord (2009)-Vygotsky (1987)-Knowles (1973) theoretical framework. Hord (2009) outlined six dimensions of effective professional learning communities, including collective learning and application of learning, which emphasize that the collegial relationships formed can originate appropriate and creative solutions to problems (Hord, 1997; Morrissey, 2000). Knight (2007) contended that if instructional coaches utilize the partnership principles of equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity, it creates an effectual environment for collaboration. As instructional coaches problem-solve alongside grade-level teams, they must account for teachers' prior knowledge and learning, as well as their self-motivation (Knowles, 1973). Social learning theory (Vygotsky, 1987) argues that greater learning will occur as these professionals work together to brainstorm solutions together. Teacher interview participants

indicated a district *push* of vision and initiatives, and consequently instructional coach interview participants mentioned both a *pushing* and supporting of teachers. Such a dichotomy might create an environment in which brainstorming, problem-solving, and troubleshooting teacher concerns are needed roles of the instructional coach.

Support through small-group collaboration. Although not a major subtheme, evidence reveals that teachers prefer the instructional coach to work with them in small groups rather than with the whole faculty. A preference for small groups was indicated 10 times by the 12 teacher participants. During the follow-up, focus-group teacher interviews, participants openly dialogued about the unique aspects of small-group collaboration as opposed to entire faculty collaboration. Teachers simply shared that they perceived stronger support from the instructional coach within small, grade-level teams. Participants expressed an appreciation for the individualized and differentiated learning that can occur within small groups, whereas entire faculty collaboration with the instructional coach tended to focus on generic topics that did not always apply to each classroom setting with its own characteristics. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) noted that teachers need opportunities to "connect new concepts and strategies to their own unique contexts" (p. 1). A role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community is to provide support within small groups in order to meet teachers where they are and guide them to new learning.

Theme 3: Demonstration of availability and trust. Trust is the foundation for adult relationships and collaboration and promotes willingness for teachers to grow professionally within the professional learning community Cranston, 2009; 2011). Additionally, research has revealed that trust between colleagues can positively and significantly affect teachers' collective efficacy on instructional practices (Lee, Zhang, & Yin, 2011). Organizational trust impacts the

professional learning community, and leaders must foster an atmosphere of trust in this setting (Hallinger, Lee, & Ko, 2014; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014). Similarly, research has contended that trustworthiness proves to be an essential characteristic of an instructional coach (Knight, 2006; Psencik, 2015). Instructional coaches who demonstrate self-awareness, sincerity, honesty, reliability, competence, and the ability be other-centered tend to build trust with teachers (Psencik, 2015). Knight (2006) asserted that trust is an essential part of an instructional coaching relationship because teachers equate their profession to their self-identity. Furthermore, instructional coaches provide support to teachers through being available and allowing time for dialoguing, interacting, meeting, observing, providing follow-up, sharing feedback, modeling lessons, and listening to teachers. Availability and time maximize the effects of instructional coaching and improve collaboration between coach and teacher (Akhavan, 2015; Anderson, Feldman, & Minstrell, 2014; White, Howell-Smith, Kunz, & Nugent, 2015). Evidence from this study confirms the idea that the role of the instructional coach is to serve as a bridge to teachers by exhibiting availability and trust.

Instructional coaches: Showing availability and being present. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to show availability and be present. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 67 instances revealing the importance of availability and presence of the instructional coach. The researcher observed as the instructional coach participants demonstrated presence of mind during professional learning community conversations. Also, the researcher observed the instructional coaches' mental presence during the professional learning community collaboration meetings through reflective questioning,

checks for understanding, body language, eye contact, and other nonverbal cues. In addition, the instructional coaches established a physical presence by intentionally rotating between grade-level teams, participating in informal hallway conversations, and following through with commitments of visiting classrooms.

Research has indicated a correlation between improvements in teacher practice and the amount of time instructional coaches spend with teachers (Anderson et al., 2014; Knight, 2007). Knight wrote, "The simplest way to improve the effectiveness of a coaching program is to increase the amount of time coaches are actually coaching" (p. 50). Evidence from this study supports this idea as coaches emphasized the importance of "just being there" for teachers in the professional learning community setting. Data from interviews revealed that six of the seven instructional coaches noted their intentionality with showing teachers availability and presence. The architectural design of the newer buildings in the district encouraged and promoted the physical presence of the instructional coaches at three of the five elementary schools. These newer facilities housed the instructional coach offices in the heart of the building, which was centrally located. These offices resided within the main arteries of the school, which allowed teachers to pass by regularly, prompting informal questions, visits, and conversations. Instructional coaches *Avery* and *Desiree* served in older buildings at Elementary School Two and Elementary School Four. Unfortunately, both of these campuses accommodated two buildings, creating a physical division among the teachers.

Although time and availability might have become a limitation for the instructional coaches in this study, the instructional coaches creatively found possible solutions. For instance, as *Avery* started the school year as a new instructional coach, she quickly asked for the instructional coaching office to be moved to the center of the primary building and established an

annex at the intermediate building. *Avery* shared that showing availability was one of her goals as she began the role of coach. Similarly, new instructional coach *Desiree* tackled the physical challenges associated with a split campus by residing in two offices and establishing a rotational schedule to visit both buildings during professional learning community collaboration meetings. *Desiree* recognized the challenges of dividing her time between the buildings and utilized her organizational skills to manage her time and be available to collaborate with teachers. Instructional coach *Maddie* resided at a new building, but classrooms were spread throughout the building. *Maddie* intentionally made herself present throughout the school building and habitually popped into classrooms to demonstrate availability and encouragement to teachers. Similarly, instructional coach *Elsa* demonstrated availability through popping in to grade-level team collaboration frequently to build relationships and establish trust, and instructional coach *Kala* expressed the habit of constantly letting teachers know that she was available for them while offering positive feedback. The PLCA-R open-ended question respondents indicated the value of instructional coach availability, with 12 of 89 respondents indicating that the most helpful role was simply being available to teachers. Similarly, data from teacher participant interviews disclose the value of instructional coach availability. Teachers discussed the role of the coach as being available and present for teachers in 10 of the 14 interviews. Participants discussed the value of coaches checking in, providing follow-up, popping in, making the rounds, being flexible, showing visibility, touching base, and demonstrating accessibility. Also, teacher participants indicated that their instructional coaches established comfortable relationships with teachers, further demonstrating availability.

Instructional coaches: Develop trust. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R

open-ended question. This process garnered 25 instances that revealed the importance of the development of trust by the instructional coach. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to develop trust. Although not a subtheme, several teacher participants shared that they valued their instructional coach's willingness to observe lessons in their classroom setting. Knight (2007) contended that trust is an essential component of the instructional coach's relationship with the teacher. Clearly, the instructional coaches in this study established trusting relationships with teachers prior to observing instruction in their classroom, because, as Knight (2007) observed, "Teachers see their profession as an integral part of their self-identity" (p. 52). Trust emerged as a subtheme from the qualitative data analysis. Although data from the PLCA-R open-ended question response did not reveal the word "trust," other indicators suggest that trusting relationships existed between instructional coaches and teachers. For example, survey respondents described trust with their instructional coach as they shared ideas, such as offering feedback, teaching side by side, easy to talk to, approachable, easy to get along with, makes [the teacher] feel comfortable asking the simplest of questions, accessible, pleasant, and shares the load. One survey respondent exhibited trust while noting that the instructional coach was available to "walk alongside us as we try and possibly fail at teaching with a new strategy." Observational data from each of the five Wednesday collaboration visits indicated instances of instructional coaches either offering to provide follow-up or providing follow-up to teachers. The evidence revealed that the instructional coaches in this study established trusting relationships by demonstrating integrity. Furthermore, teacher interview data show the role of the instructional coach includes developing trust. For instance, seven teachers expressed a certain comfort level in allowing instructional coaches to observe lessons and offer feedback. Additionally, they

described the comfort level, personal connection, and approachability of their coaches, indicating the presence of trusting relationships. Focus-group teacher participant *Tiana* shared, "That's the trust that you have built and that's very important. If you didn't trust your coach, you wouldn't be able to be honest with them."

Theme 4: Manifestation of the partnership principles. Knight (2007) identified seven partnership principles as a framework for successful instructional coaching. The principles include equality, in which coaches and teachers work as equal partners; choice, in which instructional coaches provide teachers choices to determine how and what they learn; voice, which asserts that professional learning must always be respectful of teachers' voices; dialogue, which provides a two-way, back-and-forth communication; reflection, which is a key component of professional learning; praxis, which promotes the idea that teachers should be able to apply new learning directly to their classroom; and reciprocity, which states that instructional coaches should expect to learn as much from teachers as teachers learn from them (Knight, 2007). During the spring semester prior to this study, the researcher had the opportunity to observe the instructional coach participants, their principals, the district superintendent, and Jim Knight as they spent a day collaborating and discussing Knight's book *Unmistakable Impact.* Four of the instructional coach participants studied the partnership principles and were immersed in Knight's (2007) model of instructional coaching. Evidence from this study supports the idea that effective instructional coaches utilize the partnership principles when collaborating with teachers. Partnering with teachers through the manifestation of the partnership principles is one role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community.

Partnership principles: Instructional coach as a learning partner. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning

community is to participate in learning as a partner. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 67 instances that revealed the role of the instructional coach as a learning partner within the setting of the professional learning community. Knight (2007) referred to this learning partnership as reciprocity, which illustrates the instructional coach expecting to receive as much as they give to teachers. Knight stated that in this relationship, one of the instructional coach's goals should be to learn alongside teachers. This study supports research indicating the need for reciprocity during instructional coaching collaborations. Observational data revealed examples of instructional coaches utilizing the partnership principle of reciprocity in each of the five grade-level collaboration meetings. For example, instructional coaches modeled side-by-side planning, offered choices to teachers rather than mandating, and brainstormed as equal participants. The researcher noted a collegial atmosphere as evidenced by laughter, relaxed body language, and respectful conversation. Furthermore, data from instructional coach interviews revealed that the coaches shared a love of learning, which initially attracted them to their roles. Instructional coach *Maddie* expressed reciprocity as she reflected that her favorite aspect of coaching was "being in the classrooms and just seeing the awesome teaching that my colleagues do, and getting tips from them, and seeing what's happening around the building." Additionally, coaches shared a common passion for instruction, planning, and education in general. Data obtained from teacher participant interviews support the role of coach as learning partner within the setting of the professional learning community. Teacher participant *Anacani* shared that together instructional coaches and teachers "learn and grow from one another." Furthermore, teacher participants shared examples of collaborating alongside their instructional coaches on developing units, implementing learning

targets, developing essential questions, utilizing assessment data, launching new curriculum, and creating standards-based report cards. Teacher participants expressed that their instructional coaches supported teachers as professionals through the provision of options and choices. Finally, data from the PLCA-R open-ended response question illustrated the helpful coaching roles of collaborating alongside teachers during professional learning community team meetings and offering to coteach lessons. Knight (2007) argued that true partnership reflects reciprocity in which all participants benefit and grow. Teacher participant *Morgan* expressed, "We're all taking the best of everyone's idea and making one thing that's better." This study confirms that the coaching skill teachers find helpful within the professional learning community is working together as learning partners.

Partnership principles: Instructional coach develops comfortable relationships. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to develop comfortable relationships with teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 46 instances that identified one role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to develop comfortable relationships. Hord (2009) identified the dimensions of a successful professional learning community, including the supportive conditions of relationships. Professional relationships include a demonstration of caring, respect, and trust within the learning community (Hord, 2009). Vygotsky (1987) argued that learning best occurs within a social setting. These relationships are best realized through the partnership principle of equality in which coaches and teachers work together as equal partners (Knight, 2007). Evidence from this study supports the importance of developing caring relationships within the

professional learning community and adds the pivotal role of the instructional coach in forming these relationships to the goal of increasing professional learning. Observational data revealed comfortable coaching relationships within the Wednesday grade-level collaboration meetings. The researcher observed laughter, comfortable conversations, and relaxed body language during the collaboration with instructional coaches and grade-level teams. Two grade-level meetings included teacher concerns and slight negativity. In both cases, instructional coaches *Maddie* and *Desiree* diffused potential conflicts with active listening skills, smiles, patient listening, empathy, and note-taking. Furthermore, instructional coach interview data revealed evidence of the role of developing comfortable relationships. For example, instructional coach participants indicated the intentionality behind establishing relationships with teachers at the beginning of the school year. Coaches mailed surveys to teachers to gather input and better understand their needs, practiced availability with frequent, informal visits and hallway conversations, and practiced the art of listening to teachers and being present during conversations. Instructional coach participants indicated the importance of developing trusting relationships with teachers before collaborating with teams in the professional learning community setting. For example, instructional coach participant *Desiree* described the coaching relationship as including a comfort level, trust, and equality as she stated, "We are all on the same playing ground." Teacher interview data verified the success of this campaign as teachers noted how comfortable, approachable, and accessible their coaches were. For example, focus-group teacher participants discussed their instructional coaches and described them as easy to talk to, good listeners, nonjudgmental, and supportive partners. Additionally, teacher participants shared that they felt comfortable with their coaches. Teacher participant *Morgan* explained, "There is something about knowing that the person really is just there to help you be a better teacher, and there's not evaluation involved and there's no

strings attached." Furthermore, the PLCA-R open-ended question survey responses revealed evidence of developing comfortable coaching relationships. Respondents shared descriptors such as accessibility, comfortable, relationship, walk alongside, advice, and gentle spirit. Evidence from this study indicated the important role of establishing comfortable relationships with teachers within the professional learning community.

Partnership principles: Instructional coach practices dialogue. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to practice dialogue with teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 38 instances that disclosed the importance of dialogue between the instructional coach and teachers. Dialogue is defined as mutual conversation in which partners learn together, explore ideas, and arrive at mutually acceptable decisions (Knight, 2007). Knight (2011) contended, "(W)hen a coach and teacher engage in dialogue, they let go of the notion that they must push for a particular point of view" (p. 2). Dialogue, therefore, allows for partners to discuss ideas in a two-way conversation in which each person's ideas are heard and valued (Knight, 2011). Instructional coaches must employ what Knight (2007) referred to as "a language of ongoing regard" for teachers (p. 47). Evidence from this study supports the importance of dialogue. For example, observational data revealed that dialogue was a key component of the grade-level collaborations with the instructional coaches. Instructional coach *Desiree* modeled dialogue as she collaborated with the third-grade team discussing the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum. Teachers expressed concerns and frustrations initially, but as the meeting progressed, and *Desiree* patiently listened, dialogue transpired. *Desiree* and the teachers discussed options for teaching Lucy Calkins lessons, incorporating a

template, developing instructional strategies for students, and making the teacher's guide user friendly. The researcher noted the back-and-forth dialogue in which all participants worked together to create a solution. Additionally, the researcher observed examples of dialogue between instructional coach *Liberty* and the fifth-grade team. Again, teachers began the meeting by expressing concerns to *Liberty* regarding assessments. *Liberty* utilized dialogue with the team in order for all participants to better understand and brainstorm solutions. Furthermore, evidence from the instructional coach interview data showed the role of dialogue within the professional learning community. For example, instructional coach participant *Desiree* shared, "We're all on the same playing ground. There's that equality there and that voice; anyone can express what they're thinking, feeling, so that work can move forward." In addition, instructional coaches discussed the intentional practice of utilizing Knight's (2007) partnership principle of dialoguing with teachers as equal learning partners. Evidence from teacher interview data revealed the teachers' perceptions of dialoguing with their coach within the professional learning community. Teachers expressed the value of dialogue to promote reflection, clarify thinking, and guide goal setting. Finally, the PLCA-R open-ended responses indicated the value of coach–teacher dialogue. For instance, one survey participant responded, "The most helpful role of my coach is being able to go and discuss situations, lesson ideas, and struggles I may be having to get a new perspective in order for me to better teach my students." Other respondents indicated the importance of dialogue as one respondent noted the value of "having conversations to make sure lessons are purposeful and high-quality instruction is occurring every day." This study identifies masterfully implementing dialogue within the setting of the professional learning community as an important role of the instructional coach.

Partnership principles: Instructional coach poses questions for reflection. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to enable teachers to think reflectively by posing questions. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 34 instances revealing the impact of reflective questioning. Knight (2011) stated, "Much of the pleasure of professional growth comes from reflecting on what you're learning" (p. 2). Reflection includes analyzing what happened, what was supposed to happen, what the difference was between the two, and what could be done differently next time (Knight, 2007). The instructional coaches in this study modeled the process of asking reflective questions during the Wednesday collaboration meetings. Instructional coach *Desiree* asked a plethora of questions to teachers. Instructional coach interview data also divulged the importance of posing reflective questions as coaches shared the intentional strategies for helping teachers self-contemplate their instruction. For example, instructional coach *Elsa* shared that teachers *have* the necessary skills, but sometimes need guidance to be more reflective of their teaching practice in order to realize they have the skills. Explaining this further, she stated that guiding teachers to self-reflection involves "walking them through their own thinking and making sure they're coming to the conclusions that they want as a teacher." Instructional coach participants expressed the importance of empowering teachers to be reflective on their practices to guide them to autonomous decision-making. Furthermore, teacher interview data revealed the part reflection plays in the coaching relationship. Finally, the PLCA-R open-ended responses indicated the value of posing reflective questions. For example, one survey respondent shared that the instructional coach "provides another set of eyes to help teachers reflect on best practices."

Partnership principles: Instructional coach models authentic listening. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to model authentic listening with teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 34 instances that disclosed the importance of the role of the coach as an authentic listener in the context of the professional learning community. Knight (2011) asserted that effective coaches listen to teachers as partners, as he wrote that listening ensures "that others know we hear them and that we want to know their ideas" (p. 3). In addition, listening increases professional learning and collaboration (Knight, 2007; Morel, 2014). Observational data revealed consistent authentic listening among the instructional coaches. For example, during the grade-level team collaborations, coaches focused their eyes on teachers, wrote notes in spiral notebooks as teachers spoke, and paraphrased teacher comments with "so what I hear you saying is." Each of the six elementary instructional coaches either kept a spiral notebook or binder in which to write teacher questions, document team visits, and note follow-up action items. The researcher noted the organizational systems coaches utilized in order to model authentic listening and provide future follow-up. Additionally, instructional coach interview data revealed the role of instructional coach as authentic listener within the professional learning community. For example, instructional coach *Kala* shared, "I'm trying to make sure that I'm using authentic listening skills in that I am hearing what they're needing from me and that I'm able to give feedback to them." Evidence from this study indicates that authentic listening benefits teachers by providing feedback, helping teachers reflect on their practices, and guiding teachers to consider solutions on their own. Instructional coach *Elsa* shared, "I find myself listening a lot, just making sure that I'm hearing what they're really asking

and getting deeper into their needs." Finally, the PLCA-R open-ended responses revealed the value of the role of the instructional coach as a listener within the setting of the professional learning community. Respondents described the importance of a listening ear to teachers, a coach who is easy to talk to and is approachable.

Partnership principles: Instructional coach empowers and encourages. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to empower and encourage teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 33 instances that disclosed the role of the instructional coach as one who empowers and encourages teachers. The role of the instructional coach is to motivate and inspire teachers by providing unilateral backing and encouragement (Hall & Simeral, 2008). Evidence from observational data supports the role of the instructional coach as one who empowers and encourages teachers within the setting of the professional learning community. While research has indicated the value of encouragement provided by the coach, this study examined the encouragement specifically within the collaborative dynamic of the professional learning community setting. The researcher noted examples of instructional coach participants providing encouragement to and empowering the grade-level teams during the Wednesday meetings. For example, at Elementary School Five, instructional coach *Maddie* radiated encouragement to teacher teams through her empowering words, enthusiasm, tone of voice, and cheerful facial expressions. *Maddie* demonstrated a unique blend of instructional expert, cheerleader, and counselor to the teachers as she spoke: "You ladies do some good work here!," "This is impressive! You made progress, ladies!," "I love it! You have some good groups," "Good problem to have," "I love the creativity," "I love seeing this take place," "It's

going to be really fun," "You rock!," and "We'll get there!" Additionally, evidence from instructional coach interview data divulged that the coaches intentionally sought to empower, encourage, and equip teachers. The instructional coaches in this study believed in the teachers they served and desired to instill that belief in the hearts and minds of the teachers. PLCA-R open-ended respondents concurred, as one participant shared, "I leave our times together feeling empowered and encouraged." The role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community includes empowering and encouraging teachers.

Theme 5: Providing resources to teachers. Evidence from qualitative data indicates that teachers and instructional coaches perceived that the instructional coach role is to provide resources to teachers within the setting of the professional learning community. Research in the field of instructional coaching has agreed that one role of the instructional coach is to provide resources to teachers (Hall & Simeral, 2008; Knight, 2007). Evidence from this study identifies types of resources that instructional coaches provide within the setting of the professional learning community, which include ideas and instructional strategies, instructional resources, new curriculum implementation, and the provision of useful and meaningful professional learning opportunities.

Instructional coach shares ideas and instructional strategies. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to provide ideas and instructional strategies for teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 49 instances that disclosed that one role of the instructional coach is to share ideas and instructional strategies. Knight (2007) asserted that instructional coaches must have scientifically proven strategies and best

practices to share with teachers in order to make a difference in the way they teach. Furthermore, he added that instructional coaches must have a deep understanding of the research-based strategies they share (Knight, 2007). Evidence from this study supports the role of the instructional coach as one who provides ideas and instructional strategies within the setting of the professional learning community. For example, observational data revealed the provision of strategies and ideas as coaches worked with teachers to develop Common Core math curriculum. The researcher observed as instructional coach *Desiree* walked alongside the Kindergarten teacher to find ways to incorporate the ORIGO math and Common Core with her existing math centers. *Desiree* presented specific ideas and options for the teacher to select one that might work best for her students' needs. Furthermore, instructional coach *Kala* collaborated with the sixth-grade team at Elementary School Five, discussing strategies for incorporating the new writing curriculum. Instructional coach interview data disclosed that the instructional coaches assisted teachers with digging deeper into the standards, shared specific instructional practices, and helped teachers make improvements with the content they were teaching. Teacher interview data revealed that teachers utilized the professional learning community agenda to write notes and questions for the coaches. Teachers shared that this allowed them to communicate specific instructional needs and concerns with coaches, who were than able to research strategies and ideas to bring back to the team the following week. Additionally, PLCA-R open-ended survey responses supported the importance of instructional coaches sharing instructional strategies and ideas with teachers. Survey respondents shared their thoughts, such as the value of instructional coaches sharing new ideas, teaching the teachers how to use them, and watching to make sure the teachers implemented them correctly. In addition, survey respondents noted that coaches refresh teacher knowledge of best practices, share new materials and instructional ideas. This study

examined the unique role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community as a provider of ideas and instructional strategies.

Instructional coach provides instructional resources to teachers. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to provide ideas and instructional strategies for teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 49 instances that disclosed that one role of the instructional coach is to share resources with teachers. Research has indicated that instructional coaches can provide the resource of access to programs, coordinators, deep content knowledge, and pedagogical expertise (Hall & Simeral, 2008). Evidence from this study supports the role of instructional coach as a resource provider not only through one-to-one coaching, but also within the collaboration of grade-level teams. Observational data indicated that the instructional coaches in this study shared research-based knowledge; provided content experts such as MTI math professors; continued their own learning through book studies, attending conferences and classes; and collaborated as an instructional coach in the professional learning community biweekly. During the visit to Elementary School Two, the researcher noted that instructional coach *Avery* scheduled a math expert to visit the campus. Furthermore, instructional coaches *Liberty* and *Kala* shared knowledge and content expertise they obtained through their participation in a weeklong Lucy Calkins writing conference. Instructional coach *Elsa* served as a math liaison between the school district and local college Boise State University, allowing teachers access to current MTI math practices and experts in the field. Additionally, instructional coach interview data supported the role coaches play in providing content resources for teachers. During the focus-group interview, instructional coaches discussed

their passion for digging into standards, serving as content experts and providing the resources teachers need. Also, instructional coaches shared that they utilize one another as content-expert resources as teachers raise specific content questions. Instructional coach *Liberty* noted that oftentimes teachers become overwhelmed with the amount of content they need to teach; therefore, instructional coaches step in and provide the resources needed for them to be successful. Professional learning community conversations with the instructional coaches communicated the need for specific resources, and coaching interactions within these grade-level meetings expedited the process of obtaining them. Teacher interview data corresponded with the role of the instructional coach as an instructional resource provider. For example, teachers expressed the challenges of implementing district initiatives, such as writing math curriculum, implementing Common Core standards, creating standards-based report cards, and teaching the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum. Teacher participants indicated the value of instructional coaches providing resources in these areas, as they did not have the time to research, the expertise to write curriculum, or the background knowledge to create standards-based report cards. Finally, the PLCA-R open-ended responses revealed the value of instructional coaches' role of providing instructional resources to teachers within the setting of the professional learning community. Respondents indicated the benefits of the instructional coaches' provision of resources, access to materials, and knowledge of content.

Instructional coach is a resource for new curriculum implementation. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to be a resource for new curriculum implementation for teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 45

instances that disclosed that one role of the instructional coach is to be a resource for new curriculum implementation. Observational data revealed a consistent theme throughout the five elementary schools: grade-level teams grappling with the implementation of new curriculum. The researcher noted that teams collaborated with their instructional coaches to implement the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum at each of the five schools, and additionally, math Common Core standards and curriculum writing (or piloting ORIGO at Elementary School Four). Teachers and coaches discussed how to incorporate new curriculum into their schedules, how to find time to read the teachers' guides and write new units, and how to gather necessary materials and resources. Instructional coaches listened to teacher concerns, brainstormed solutions, offered to create lessons, offered to cocreate units, and offered to model lessons in their classrooms. Data from the instructional coach interviews supported these observations. For example, the instructional coach participants shared the ways in which they provided resources for new curriculum implementation. Instructional coach *Kala* created a video in which she model-taught a Lucy Calkins lesson to students in the classroom setting. *Kala* shared the video with the other instructional coaches to provide to teachers a visual example of teaching a Lucy Calkins writing lesson. Additionally, teacher interviews revealed the role of the instructional coach as serving as a resource during new curriculum implementation. Again, teachers discussed the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum, piloting the math ORIGO at Elementary School Four, implementing MTI math instruction, and Common Core math standards. Teacher participant *Tiana* shared, "You can work until midnight and still not get everything done. So creating these big units is really hard if you're on that by yourself." Focus-group interview teacher participants indicated an appreciation for the resource of instructional coaches within the professional learning community for new curriculum implementation, but also expressed some frustration regarding a lack of collaboration

time to create curriculum and a lack of expertise for writing curriculum, specifically curriculum for Common Core and MTI. Instructional coach interview data also indicated a lack of time for teachers to create curriculum, describing teachers as "crunched for time." Finally, PLCA-R survey responses supported the role of the instructional coach as a resource for new curriculum implementation. Respondents expressed the importance of coaches providing expertise in strategies and curriculum, planning and teaching new curriculum, simplifying new curriculum, and helping teachers implement new curriculum. One survey respondent indicated, "Instructional coaches can be helpful in providing guidance and instruction in the delivery of programs." Evidence from this study indicates that a role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community is to be a resource for teachers during new curriculum implementation.

Instructional coach makes professional learning meaningful and useful. Participants provided evidence that the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to make professional learning meaningful for teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 42 instances that disclosed that one role of the instructional coach is to make professional learning meaningful and useful for teachers. One important role of the instructional coach is to make professional learning meaningful and useful through modeling, discussing, teaching, and mentoring (Hall & Simeral, 2008). Observational data supported this research as instructional coaches sought to make professional learning meaningful during the Wednesday grade-level collaborations. Additionally, teacher participants shared the value of the training coaches provide during the all-faculty collaboration meetings, although overwhelmingly, teachers indicated a preference for small groups rather than entire faculty trainings, which they perceived did not

apply to their specific classroom settings and individual needs. For instance, music teacher interview participant *Shannon* shared, "A lot of times what happens in the professional development days are not even close to meeting any of the needs in our classroom situation." Teacher participant data revealed the benefits of instructional coaches collaborating for professional learning within grade-level teams, rather than with an entire school professional training. Throughout each of the five Wednesday professional learning community observations, the researcher noted the way in which instructional coaches differentiated professional learning based on each grade-level teams' concerns, needs, and questions. Each of the five elementary school teams created a collaboration agenda and often added notes to the agenda specifically for the instructional coaches. Instructional coach interview data showed that coaches personalized weekly professional learning to focus on teacher needs. Teacher interview data revealed that teachers preferred the coaches to schedule visits to the professional learning community collaboration in advance, in order for teachers to prepare with questions, ideas, and concerns prior to their arrival. Evidence from instructional coach interview data also revealed that Wednesday collaboration time was a pivotal time for teachers and professional learning, and as instructional coach *Elsa* stated, "Then as you have coaches and admin helping support that, it becomes even more powerful and useful and productive." Evidence from this study supports Vygotsky's (1987) social learning theory, as teachers, instructional coaches, and principals learn together.

Research question 2. What coaching skills do teachers find most helpful within this setting? The researcher sought to identify coaching skills specific to the professional learning community setting. Research question 2 was answered through the qualitative analysis, which included coding the teacher interview data, instructional coach interview data, observational field

notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. Similarly to research question 1, the researcher investigated to gain a better understanding of specific coaching skills teachers found most helpful during Wednesday grade-level collaboration meetings. *Skill* refers to a person's ability to use knowledge readily and effectively, whereas *role* refers to the function or part performed within a particular process. Therefore, the researcher examined the particular activities and actions the instructional coaches executed within the setting of the professional learning community. Research has indicated that instructional coaches need skills such as leadership, relationship building, communication, and change management (Knight, 2007). Additionally, instructional coaches must sharpen their instructional skills such as understanding how to enroll teachers in the coaching cycle, sharing best research-based practices, modeling instructional strategies, and gathering and discussing data to improve teaching (Knight, 2007). Evidence from this study supports the skills needed for successful instructional coaching but examines the unique skills required for collaborating with grade-level teams within the setting of the professional learning community.

Theme 1: Demonstrate availability and trust through the skills of being accessible and building an emotional connection. Studies in the field of instructional coaching have revealed that trust, time, and approachability characterize effective instructional coaching relationships (Akhavan, 2015; Anderson et al., 2014; Knight, 2007; Psencik, 2015). Additionally, studies in the field of professional learning communities have disclosed that trust is also a component of successful teacher collaboration (Cranston, 2009; 2011; Hallinger et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2011; Morrissey, 2000; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014). Evidence from this study determines that one role of the instructional coach is to foster trusting relationships with teachers through availability and forming comfortable relationships through accessibility.

Check in regularly with teachers. Participants provided evidence that one of the coaching skills teachers find most helpful within the professional learning community is checking in regularly with teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 36 instances that revealed teachers found the coaching skill of checking in regularly to be helpful in the professional learning community. Evidence from the observational data revealed that the instructional coach participants checked in regularly with grade-level teams during the Wednesday collaboration meetings. The researcher noted that the coaches rotated amongst as many grade-level teams as possible. In some cases grade-level teams prescheduled the instructional coach's visit. With spiral coaching notebook in hand, the researcher walked with each coach from room to room, observing the interactions. Instructional coach *Liberty* began prescheduling visits to grade-level teams at the beginning of the school year. During the duration of this study, *Liberty* was the first coach to experiment with this model. The researcher noted that instructional coaches *Desiree, Kala, Avery, Maddie,* and *Elsa* had been requested by various grade-level teams to stop by for a few minutes to either brainstorm or answer questions.

Be approachable. Participants provided evidence that one of the coaching skills teachers found most helpful within the professional learning community was creating a comfortable relationship with teachers and being approachable to them. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 19 instances that revealed teachers found the coaching skills of establishing comfortable relationships and being approachable as the most helpful skills within the professional learning community. Evidence from observational data revealed that the instructional coaches appeared approachable during the Wednesday grade-level collaborations.

Teachers asked questions, brainstormed, and dialogued with their coaches, while including them in collaborations as equal partners. The researcher observed comfortable conversations as teachers and coach were seated together at the kidney bean-shaped tables in the back of each classroom. Laughter and relaxed body language was evident between instructional coaches and teachers.

Theme 2: Providing meaningful and useful professional learning, support for new curriculum, and modeling and coteaching. Research in the field of professional learning communities has illustrated the importance of support for successful collaboration and professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Niemi, 2016; Owen, 2015; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Sahlberg; 2010). Support is not a single type of assistance but rather a "multilayered array of different types of assistance that help teachers successfully transfer learning from a professional development setting to a classroom setting" (Burns & Lawrie, 2015). Additionally, research in the field of instructional coaching has identified the importance of instructional coaches modeling instructional strategies for teachers (Knight, 2007). This current study revealed the types of skills instructional coaches need to support teachers within the professional learning community by providing meaningful and useful professional learning, support for new curriculum implementation, and support through modeling and coteaching lessons.

Create meaningful professional learning opportunities. Participants provided evidence that one of the coaching skills teachers found most helpful within the professional learning community was creating meaningful professional learning opportunities for teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 32 instances that revealed teachers found the coaching skill of creating meaningful and useful professional learning opportunities to be helpful

in the professional learning community. Professional learning is most successful when it is job-embedded, continuous, and applies directly to the teachers' classroom setting (Coggshall et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Desimone & Garet, 2016; Jensen et al., 2016; Niemi, 2016). Neimi (2016) contended, "School development cannot be separated from teachers' development" (p. 291). This study identified the ability of the instructional coach to foster meaningful professional learning during the Wednesday collaboration meetings. Cornett and Knight (2010) contended that a goal of research should be to determine the most efficient and effective ways to facilitate high-quality learning for teachers. Furthermore, research is needed to understand which types of learning require one-to-one interaction, and which types of learning require small or large groups (Cornett & Knight, 2010). This study identified teachers' preferences for professional learning to be small groups rather than large groups during Wednesday collaborations. Evidence from observational data revealed that instructional coaches collaborated with small grade-level teams of teachers within the setting of the professional learning community, but teachers and coaches shared that occasionally professional learning transpired with the context of the entire staff and more infrequently within the entire district. Instructional coaches also provided professional learning to new teachers within the district through a program entitled New Teacher Academy.

Provide support for new curriculum. Participants provided evidence that one of the coaching skills teachers found most helpful within the professional learning community was providing support for new curriculum implementation for teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 31 instances that revealed teachers found the coaching skill of providing support for new curriculum implementation to be helpful in the professional learning

community. Evidence gathered from observational data revealed several instances in which instructional coaches worked directly with teachers to support the new curriculum implementation, specifically Lucy Calkins writing, ORIGO math, and Common Core math.

Offer to model and coteach lessons. Participants provided evidence that one of the coaching skills teachers find most helpful within the professional learning community is modeling and coteaching lessons for teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 27 instances that revealed teachers found the coaching skill of modeling and coteaching lessons to be helpful in the professional learning community. Cornett and Knight (2010) stated that research is needed to determine when it is essential that instructional coaches model in classrooms and how effective modeling looks. This study identified specific examples of essential modeling in classrooms, as well as examples of effective modeling. For example, observational data revealed instances in which instructional coaches offered to model Lucy Calkins writing lessons or share a video in which instructional coach *Kala* modeled Lucy Calkins.

Theme 3: Providing resources to teachers by sharing resources, ideas and strategies, and researching best practices. Research in the field of instructional coaching has identified the importance of instructional coaches sharing research based instructional strategies and best practices (Knight, 2007). Evidence from this study identifies the specific types of resources instructional coaches can provide teachers within the setting of the professional learning community. Qualitative data revealed that support for curriculum implementation, sharing instructional strategies and ideas, and providing resources were the most beneficial to teachers working with the coach in the professional learning community.

Support teachers with new curriculum implementation. Participants provided evidence that one of the coaching skills teachers found most helpful within the professional learning community was providing support for new curriculum implementation. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 31 instances that revealed teachers found the coaching skill of providing support with new curriculum to be helpful in the professional learning community. Huguet et al. (2014) identified a need for further research in the field of instructional coaching. They observed that research is lacking to better understand what capacity building strategies an instructional coach requires to effectively increase teacher buy-in and reduce teacher resistance (Huguet et al., 2014). This study answered this question by identifying specific coaching skills teachers found most helpful while implementing new curriculum. Through problem-solving, brainstorming, dialogue, sharing instructional strategies, and providing a lesson plan template, instructional coaches eased teacher concerns and alleviated their fears during the Lucy Calkins curriculum implementation in the district. Additionally, instructional coaches scheduled follow-up visits to individual classrooms in order to model lessons.

Share ideas and instructional strategies with teachers. Participants provided evidence that one of the coaching skills teachers found most helpful within the professional learning community was sharing ideas and instructional strategies with teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 30 instances that revealed teachers found the coaching skill of sharing ideas and strategies to be helpful in the professional learning community. Knight (2007) asserted that instructional coaches must have a compilation of research-based teaching strategies ready and available to share with teachers. This study found that instructional coaches

shared ideas and strategies during the Wednesday collaboration meetings. Incorporating the theoretical framework, Vygotsky (1987) discovered that greater learning occurs within the social context of many minds working together. Within the professional learning community, teachers were able to discuss different strategies suggested by the instructional coaches and determine how they might best fit their setting. Furthermore, Hord (2009) described this type of collaboration, utilizing the professional learning community dimensions of supportive relational conditions and collective learning. Hord (2009) explained, "Social interaction introduces multiple perspectives through reflection, collaboration, negotiation, and shared meaning" (p. 41).

Provide resources. Participants provided evidence that one of the coaching skills teachers found most helpful within the professional learning community was providing resources for teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 28 instances that revealed teachers found the coaching skill of providing resources to be helpful in the professional learning community. Hord (2009) identified supportive structural conditions as one of the necessary dimensions of a professional learning community. Such structures include time, place, and resources (Hord, 2009). This study found that the instructional coaches utilized their coaching skills to research, attend conferences, read books, attend classes, and share resources with teachers.

Theme 4: Guiding teachers to new learning by exhibiting the partnership principles. Knight (2007) identified the seven partnership principles instructional coaches can utilize when working with teachers: equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity.

Learn as partners: Don't evaluate or critique. Participants provided evidence that one of the coaching skills teachers found most helpful within the professional learning community was

learning together as partners rather than evaluating or critiquing teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 26 instances that revealed teachers found the coaching skill of learning as partners rather than evaluating or critiquing to be helpful in the professional learning community. Knight (2007) argued that a partnership consists of relationships between equals. Instructional coach participants in this study provided evidence of implementing partnership principles as they skillfully worked alongside grade-level teams as equal partners, rather than as evaluators. Evidence from this study supports the importance of instructional coaches utilizing the partnership principles. However, this study examined the partnership principles within the unique framework of the professional learning community. Observational data showed several examples of instructional coaches utilizing partnership skills during their grade-level collaborations. For example, the researcher observed the instructional coaches collaborating with teachers as equals, offering teachers choices, allowing teachers to have a voice, and guiding teachers to self-reflection through dialogue. The researcher observed as instructional coaches worked alongside teachers within the professional learning community setting. Furthermore, observational data revealed that instructional coaches encouraged grade-level teams and did not judge or critique.

Troubleshoot, brainstorm, and solve problems. Participants provided evidence that one of the coaching skills teachers found most helpful within the professional learning community was troubleshooting, brainstorming, and solving problems with teachers. Qualitative analysis included coding the teacher interview data, observational field notes, and the PLCA-R open-ended question. This process garnered 14 instances that revealed teachers found the coaching skill of troubleshooting, brainstorming, and problem-solving to be helpful in the professional

learning community. Knowles (1973) argued that adults learn differently than children, bringing with them prior knowledge and experiences, as well as self-motivation. As the instructional coaches worked alongside teachers in this study, they implemented the skills of working with adult learners to troubleshoot, brainstorm, and solve problems. Evidence gathered from observational data reveals the importance of troubleshooting, brainstorming, and solving problems within the setting of the professional learning community. These collaborative coaching conversations were evident in all five observations. Together, instructional coaches and teachers brainstormed ways to incorporate new curriculum with students, methods for incorporating resource teachers during lessons, options for providing interventions for specific students, ideas for teachers to meet the needs of students of all ability levels, ways to dig more in-depth in instruction, and strategies for teaching the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum. Furthermore, evidence gathered from the instructional coach interview data revealed the coaching skills of troubleshooting, brainstorming, and problem-solving. Instructional coach participants discussed these conversational skills during the focus-group interview. Participant *Kala* shared, "I've been asked sometimes to help navigate a touchy subject with a team." *Kala* described the process of continually steering the conversation back to standards or student work. Additionally, instructional coaches explained their intentionality in keeping conversations focused in order to slow them down and allow them to self-reflect. Data revealed that instructional coaches utilized the skills of crafting intentional, focused, and purposeful conversations within the setting of the professional learning community. Furthermore, evidence from teacher interview data revealed that teachers perceived that their voices mattered and they were comfortable sharing concerns with other teachers and instructional coaches during Wednesday grade-level collaborations. Finally, the PLCA-R open-ended responses indicated the

value of specific coaching skills during collaborative conversations. For example, respondents shared the importance of brainstorming and thinking outside the box, troubleshooting, and talking things through with the coach. Evidence from this study shows that instructional coaches require the conversational skills of troubleshooting, brainstorming, and solving problems.

Research question 3. What impact does an instructional coach have on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community? While a large body of educational research exists regarding the benefits of professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 2009; Olivier & Hipp, 2010), there continues to be a gap in the roles of the instructional coach within the professional learning community setting, and how teachers perceive the professional learning community when they have worked with an instructional coach (Cornett & Knight, 2010). The researcher administered the online PLCA-R survey instrument to the elementary teachers in the school district. The PLCA-R was created by Olivier et al. (2003) and developed as a tool to assess perceptions of principals, teachers, and staff regarding the attributes forming the professional learning community within the school (Hipp & Huffman, 2009). In addition, the questionnaire was designed to measure the levels at which schools function along the dimensions of the professional learning community (Hipp & Huffman, 2009).

The PLCA-R consisted of 52 statements describing Hord's (2009) six dimensions of the professional learning community and utilized a Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. The development of the survey instrument, PLCA-R was created as an extension of Hord's (2009) work at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. The dimensions of the professional learning community include (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) supportive conditions of relationships, and (f) supportive conditions of

structures (Hipp & Huffman, 2009). Following the Likert responses, demographic information was collected from participants regarding (a) building and campus, (b) gender, (c) years of teaching experience, (d) currently serving or had served as a team leader, (e) years at this campus, (f) highest degree obtained, (g) currently serving or had served on a school leadership team, (h) specific grade level, and (i) worked with an instructional coach. Although the survey instrument was sent to all certified elementary teachers in the district, not everyone participated. Of the entire sample population of approximately 145 teachers in the district, 89, or 61%, completed the survey instrument. The researcher utilized the descriptive statistical analysis to answer research question 3.

Figure 5

Professional Learning Community Assessment Comparison

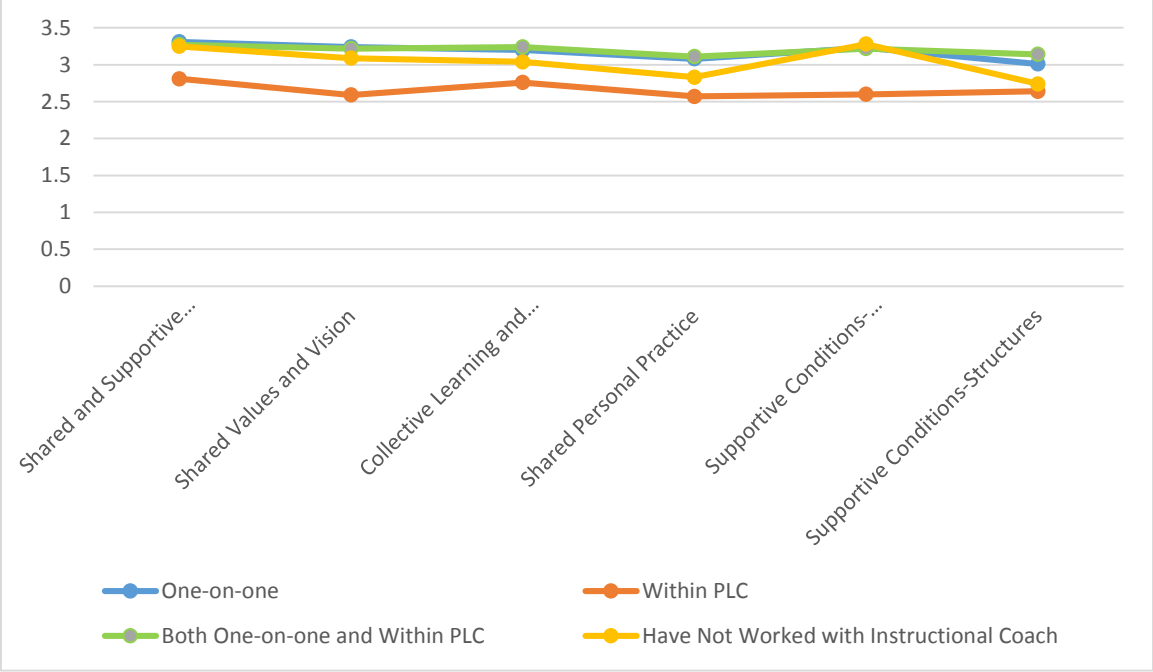


Figure 5 illustrates teacher perceptions of each of Hord's domains of the professional learning community. The four categories of teachers included teachers who worked one-on-one with an

instructional coach, teachers who worked with an instructional coach within the professional learning community, teachers who worked with an instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community, and teachers who had not worked with an instructional coach.

The researcher analyzed descriptive data to understand what impact the instructional coach had on teacher perceptions of the professional learning community. Evidence gathered from the PLCA-R survey instrument indicated that teachers who worked with an instructional coach in a one-on-one setting reported greater satisfaction with the professional learning community in the areas of shared and supportive leadership, and shared values and vision. Participants, who worked with the instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community indicated greater satisfaction in the dimensions of collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions – structures. Vygotsky's (1987) social learning theory asserted that greater learning would occur when participants learn together within a social context. PLCA-R data revealed that teacher and instructional coach collaboration increased teacher perceptions of the professional learning community in each of Hord's (2009) dimensions.

In addition, the researcher was intrigued by the possibility of a relationship between instructional coaching and teacher perceptions of the professional learning community. Therefore, the committee suggested conducting an initial independent-samples t-test to compare teacher perceptions of the professional learning community between teachers who worked with an instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community and teachers who worked solely one-on-one or solely within the professional learning community. There was a significant difference in the teacher perceptions between teachers who worked with

an instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community (*M* = , *SD* =) and teachers who worked solely one-on-one or solely within the professional learning community (*M* = , *SD* =) conditions t( )= , p = . These results may suggest that the instructional coach has the greatest impact on teacher perceptions of the professional learning community when coaching takes place both one-on-one with teachers and within grade level teams. In addition, these results validate the qualitative findings that the coaching role and skills that teachers find most helpful include one-to-one interactions such as developing comfortable relationships, demonstrating availability, building trust, and providing follow-up. These coaching interactions are prerequisites to the collaborative grade level team relationships that exist within the professional learning community. Instructional coaches provide the necessary resources, support, and partnership that strengthen Hord's (2009) dimensions of the professional learning community. Also, these results affirm the Knight (2007) Hord (2009) Vygotsky (1987) Knowles (1973) framework asserting that when instructional coaches partner with teachers within the setting of a professional learning community, greater collaboration occurs.

Conclusion

The questions examined in this mixed-methods study were:

1. What is the role of the instructional coach within a professional learning community?
2. What coaching skills do teachers find most helpful within this setting?
3. What impact does an instructional coach have on teacher perceptions of a professional learning community?

A series of semistructured one-to-one interviews were conducted with six elementary instructional coaches who work with teachers within the setting of the professional learning

community. Additionally, one follow-up focus group interview was conducted to facilitate discussion between the instructional coaches regarding their role within the professional learning community. Next, a series of semistructured one-to-one interviews were conducted with 12 elementary teachers who belong to a professional learning community. These interviews were also followed up with two focus group interviews to gain an understanding of the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. Observations were conducted at each of the five elementary schools during Wednesday professional learning community collaboration in order to perceive the role of the instructional coaches as they worked alongside teachers. Finally, 89 teacher participants responded to an open-ended survey response question indicating the most helpful role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. The shared perceptions of participants demonstrated that the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community is that of a bridge between teachers and new learning. The coach serves as a bridge to new learning for teachers by providing support, demonstrating availability and trust, manifesting the partnership principles, and supplying resources.

Evidence from qualitative data indicated the role of the instructional coach is to serve as a bridge to new learning by serving as a change agent, acting as a liaison between the district and teachers, and facilitating cross-grade level collaboration within the professional learning community. Additionally, participants revealed the importance of the support provided by instructional coaches through assistance with new curriculum implementation, follow up and ongoing job-embedded support, and trouble-shooting and problem solving with teachers. Teacher participants revealed that they prefer instructional coaches to work with them in small groups such as grade-level teams rather than within the context of the entire staff during

professional learning community collaborations. Availability and trust also emerged as an important role of the instructional coach within this setting. Evidence suggested that the instructional coach demonstrates availability through both scheduled and unscheduled visits to the collaboration meetings, popping in to classrooms, informal hallway conversations, and a willingness to follow up with teachers through classroom observations later in the week. Also, teacher and instructional coaches described the importance of developing trust within the role of instructional coach. Availability and trust were often mentioned together during interviews. Qualitative data also disclosed the role of coach within the professional learning community as one who manifests the partnership principles. Observational data overwhelmingly noted the frequency of coaches modeling equality, voice, choice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity throughout the collaborations. In addition, qualitative data revealed the instructional coaches working as learning partners, developing comfortable relationships, engaging in dialogue, posing questions for reflection, demonstrating authentic listening, and empowering and encouraging teachers. Participants shared the role of the instructional coach as resource provider within the professional learning community setting. Coaches provided resources through sharing ideas and instructional strategies, providing resources, assisting with curriculum implementation, and making professional learning meaningful and useful.

Semistructured one-to-one teacher interviews were conducted with 12 participants to understand the specific coaching skills teachers find most helpful within the professional learning community. Additionally, two follow up focus groups interviews were conducted. Observations of the Wednesday collaboration meetings were also conducted at each of the five elementary schools, and teacher respondents completed the open-ended survey question. Specifically, the instructional coaching skill of serving as a bridge between teachers and new

learning through the skill of bridging high turnover in staff was indicated. Also, data revealed the instructional coaching skill of availability and trust through touching base with teachers, regularly checking in during collaboration meetings, forming a comfortable relationship with teachers, and being approachable. Support for teachers was indicated through the coaching skills of providing meaningful and useful training and professional learning, providing support for new curriculum, offering to model and co-teach sample lessons, and through imparting job-embedded support. Furthermore, qualitative data revealed that teachers appreciated the instructional coaching skill of providing resources. Instructional coaches provided resources for new curriculum, shared instructional ideas and research based strategies, and provided other resources specific to the needs of the grade-level team. Finally, the coaching skill of working within the framework of the partnership principles was revealed through qualitative data. Teacher participants indicated the value of coaches working as learning partners rather than grading or critiquing. Additionally, teachers found the coaching skills of trouble shooting, problem solving, and brainstorming to be important within the setting of the professional learning community.

Instructional coaches increased teacher perceptions of the dimensions of the professional learning community as indicated by the 89 PLCA-R survey responses. Teachers who worked with instructional coaches both one-on-one and within the context of the professional learning community indicated greater satisfaction with the professional learning community than teachers who only worked either one-on-one or within the professional learning community.

Evidence from PLCA-R descriptive data indicated that teacher perceptions of the professional learning community were greater with the presence of the instructional coach both in a one-on-one coaching interaction as well as both one-on-one and within the professional

learning community. Teacher and coach collaboration impacted teacher perceptions of each of Hord's (2009) professional learning community dimensions, including shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions – relationships, and supportive conditions – structures. Additionally, the independent-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between teacher perceptions of the professional learning community. Teachers who worked with the instructional coach both one-on-one and within the professional learning community setting reported higher perceptions than those who only worked with the coach in one setting.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is important to continue studying the role of instructional coaches within the professional learning communities as they are growing in popularity in schools in the United States. While this study focused on elementary instructional coaches and professional learning communities, further research is needed at the secondary level. Secondary instructional coaches tend to be content specialists and the roles and skills that teachers find most helpful may be different in this setting.

Instructional coaches in this study collaborated and worked in unique settings and circumstances. For example, two of the elementary instructional coaches shared the role by teaching half time and coaching half time. Further research would benefit the field of instructional coaching by examining this instructional coaching job share and exploring how sharing the roles might impact the collaboration in the professional learning community. Other unique settings identified in this study included the two coaches who each worked at split campuses. These instructional coaches were housed in two separate offices in two separate

buildings. Future research examining how instructional coaches working at two buildings might establish trusting relationships and demonstrate availability within these constraints.

Evidence from this study supported research noting the benefits of providing job-embedded, ongoing professional learning and support. The participants in this study repeatedly mentioned the advantages of working with an instructional coach during Wednesday collaboration time, but they also discussed that this was not enough time. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) identified provision of time as a common characteristic of Countries modeling successful professional learning practices. Future research examining how to restructure the school day to create more time for professional learning would benefit the entire nation.

Additionally, evidence from this study revealed the coaching roles and skills within the setting of the professional learning community. However, the instructional coach participants did not receive training specific to working with entire faculty groups in the case of leading district professional training, or within the setting of grade-level teams. Instructional coach training typically focuses on one-to-one coaching rather than coaches collaborating within the professional learning community.

Implications for Professional Practice

There has been little research conducted exploring the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community. The results of this study will be helpful to any school that utilizes instructional coaches or professional learning communities. Better understanding the role of the instructional coach and the coaching skills teachers find most helpful within this setting can help instructional coaches know how to specifically structure their time during grade-level collaborations. Instructional coaches can use this study to design a

framework to structure professional learning community collaborations, utilizing the identified skills and roles.

Instructional coaching and professional learning communities provide ongoing, job-embedded support and professional learning and eliminate teachers working in isolation. The Knight (2007) Knowles (1973) Vygotsky (1987) Hord (2009) framework theorizes that when instructional coaches collaborate with teachers utilizing the partnership principles greater learning will occur. Teacher participants shared concern that the district might one day eliminate the instructional coaching program and emphasized the value, support, and help their coaches provide within the setting of the professional learning community. Results of this study reinforce the important role that instructional coaches provide to education when they partner with teachers in the professional learning community.

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Appendix A

PLCA-R Survey Instrument

Professional Learning Communities Assessment – Revised

Directions:
This questionnaire assesses your perceptions about your principal, staff, and stakeholders based on the dimensions of a professional learning community (PLC) and related attributes. This questionnaire contains a number of statements about practices which occur in some schools. Read each statement and then use the scale below to select the scale point that best reflects your personal degree of agreement with the statement. Shade the appropriate oval provided to the right of each statement. Be certain to select only one response for each statement. Comments after each dimension section are optional.

Key Terms:
- Principal = Principal, not Associate or Assistant Principal
- Staff/Staff Members = All adult staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students
- Stakeholders = Parents and community members

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)
2 = Disagree (D)
3 = Agree (A)
4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Shared and Supportive Leadership	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
1.	Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	0	0	0	0
2.	The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.	0	0	0	0
3.	Staff members have accessibility to key information.	0	0	0	0
4.	The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	0	0	0	0
5.	Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.	0	0	0	0
6.	The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	0	0	0	0
7.	The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	0	0	0	0
8.	Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	0	0	0	0
9.	Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	0	0	0	0

10.	Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	0	0	0	0
11.	Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					
	STATEMENTS	**SCALE**			
	Shared Values and Vision	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
12.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	0	0	0	0
13.	Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
14.	Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	0	0	0	0
15.	Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	0	0	0	0
16.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	0	0	0	0
17.	School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	0	0	0	0
18.	Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	0	0	0	0
19.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	0	0	0
20.	Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					
	Collective Learning and Application	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
21.	Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	0	0	0	0
22.	Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	0	0	0	0
23.	Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	0	0	0	0
24.	A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	0	0	0	0

25.	Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	0	0	0	0
26.	Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
27.	School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	0	0	0	0
28.	School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	0	0	0	0
29.	Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
30.	Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					
	STATEMENTS	**SCALE**			
	Shared Personal Practice	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
31.	Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.	0	0	0	0
32.	Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
33.	Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	0	0	0	0
34.	Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
35.	Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	0	0	0	0
36.	Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	0	0	0	0
37.	Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					
	Supportive Conditions – Relationships	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
38.	Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	0	0	0	0
39.	A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	0	0	0	0
40.	Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	0	0	0	0

41.	School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	0	0	0	0
42.	Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					
	Supportive Conditions – Structures	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
43.	Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	0	0	0	0
44.	The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	0	0	0	0
45.	Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	0	0	0	0
46.	Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	0	0	0	0
	STATEMENTS	**SCALE**			
		SD	**D**	**A**	**SA**
47.	Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	0	0	0	0
48.	The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	0	0	0	0
49.	The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	0	0	0	0
50.	Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.	0	0	0	0
51.	Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	0	0	0	0
52.	Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

Source: Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2010). Assessing and analyzing schools. In K. K. Hipp & J. B. Huffman (Eds.), *Demystifying professional learning communities: School leadership at its best.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Appendix B

KSD Superintendent Research Approval

[redacted] School District

Inspiring each student to become a lifelong learner and a contributing, responsible citizen.

November 7, 2014

Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st floor
623 S University Boulevard
Nampa, Idaho 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mrs. Christie Jorgensen

Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRRC that Administration at [redacted] School District has reviewed the proposed dissertation research plan including subjects, intervention, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. Mrs. Jorgensen has permission to conduct her research with instructional coaches and teachers within [redacted] School District. The authorization dates for this research study are July 2015 to April 2016.

Respectfully,

[redacted]
Superintendent

[redacted]
Superintendent

[redacted]
Assistant Superintendent

Appendix C

Informed Consent

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Christie L. Jorgensen, doctoral candidate, in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to the impact instructional coaches have on the collaboration within professional learning communities. The study will determine to what extent instructional coaches influence the effectiveness of professional learning communities, and which specific coaching strategies members find most vital. We appreciate your involvement in helping us investigate how to better serve and meet the needs of students.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to sign a consent form stating your permission to participate in the study.
2. You will answer a set of interview questions and engage in a discussion about instructional coaching.
3. You will be asked to read a debriefing statement at the conclusion of the interview.
4. You will be asked to reply to an email at the conclusion of the study asking you to confirm the data that was gathered during the research process.

These procedures will be completed at a location mutually decided upon by the participant and principal investigator and will take a total time of about 45 minutes.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. Some of the discussion questions may make you uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.
2. For the research project, the researchers are requesting demographic information. Due to the makeup of Idaho's population, the combined answers to these questions may make an individual person identifiable. The researcher will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.
3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, audio tapes, and flash drives will be kept in a locked d file cabinet and the

key will be kept in a separate location. In compliance with the Federal-wide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46,117).

D. BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help educators to better understand the role instructional coaches have within the professional learning community.

E. QUESTIONS

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. Christie L. Jorgensen can be contacted via email at cljorgensen@nnu.edu, via telephone at 208-[redacted] (W)/208-[redacted](C) or by writing: 1416 Thorn Creek Court, Nampa, Idaho 83686.

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

F. CONSENT

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

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have not influence on your present or future status.

I give my consent to participate in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio taped in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	**Date**

THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTE HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

Appendix D

Teacher One-to-One Interview Questions

Project: The Role of the Instructional Coach within PLC
Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Position of Interviewee:

One-on-One Teacher Interview

Welcome! Thank you for taking time to talk about instructional coaching and PLC's. My name is Christie Jorgensen and I am from NNU. I am conducting a study about the role of the instructional coach within the context of a PLC.
You were invited because you have participated in a PLC, received support from an instructional coach, and you have been in the school district for at least three years.
You've probably noticed the recording devices. I am tape recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and we can't write fast enough to get them all down. We will be on a first name basis today, but I will not use any names in the report. You may be assured of confidentiality, as I will use a pseudonym in place of your name. I anticipate this interview will last about one hour. Please take a moment to sign the consent form. Are there any questions?

Professional Learning Communities Six Domains

Ice Breaker Questions

1. What is your grade level and how many years have you been teaching?

2. What is your favorite aspect of being a teacher?

3. Please describe the purpose of the professional learning community (PLC).

Shared and Supportive Leadership: School administrators share power, authority, and decision making, while promoting and nurturing leadership (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 13).

1. Question: Please describe how school administrators share power, authority, and decision making in your school.

   Probe: Please give examples of school administrators promoting and nurturing leadership within staff.

Shared Values and Vision: The staff share visions that have an undeviating focus on student learning and support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 13).

2. Question: How might you describe the vision and focus of your staff?

   Probe: Please describe how your vision and focus guide decisions about teaching and learning.

   Collective Learning and Application: The staff share information and work collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning opportunities (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 13).

3. Question: Please describe the ways your staff works collaboratively.

   Probe: Please give examples of how your staff works together to solve problems, plan, and improve learning.

   Shared Personal Practice: Peers meet and observe one another to provide feedback on instructional practices, to assist in student learning, and to increase human capacity (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 13).

4. Question: Please describe how peers on your staff work together to provide feedback on instructional practices and to share their personal practice?

   Probe: Please give examples of how peers provide feedback and share personal practice.

   Supportive Conditions – Relationships: Relationships include respect, trust, norms of critical inquiry and improvement, and positive, caring relationships among the entire school community. (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 13).

5. Question: How would you describe the level of respect and trust in your school community?

   Probe: Please give examples of positive and caring relationships in your school community.

   Supportive Conditions – Structures: Structures include systems (i.e., communication and technology) and resources (i.e., personnel, facilities, time, fiscal, and materials) to enable staff to meet and examine practices and student outcomes (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 13).

6. Question: Please describe how the systems such as communication and technology enable you to meet and examine practices and student outcomes. (i.e. communication and technology)

   Probe: Please give examples of the resources that provide support, such as personnel, facilities, time, materials, and financial support.

Theoretical Framework: Principles of partnership include equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2007).

7. Question: Please describe the ways in which your instructional coach works with you in a partnership capacity.

8. Question: Please describe how you perceive the role of the instructional coach in your PLC?

Theoretical Framework: Learning occurs through social interaction (Vygotsky)

9. Question: Please describe the interactions you have (such as discussions, collaborative writing, and problem-solving) with your instructional coach.

10. Probe: Please describe the interactions you have within the context of your professional learning community.

Theoretical Framework: Knowles: The five assumptions underlying andragogy describe the adult learner as someone who (1) has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning, (2) has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning, (3) has learning needs closely related to changing social roles. (4) is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge, and (5) is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors.

11. Question: Please describe the ways in which your PLC addresses your needs as an adult learner.

Probe: Please describe the ways in which your instructional coach addresses your needs as an adult learner.

Kuna Values Questions (Wendy Johnson, Superintendent)

12. Question: Please describe what the decision making process looks like in your school.

13. Question: Please describe what professional support looks like in your school.

14. Question: In what specific ways do you utilize your instructional coach in your school setting?

15. Question: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your PLC or instructional coach experiences?

R.Q.	T.F.	Interview Question
	Hipp & Huffman (2010); Hord Domain 1	1. Please describe how school administrators share power, authority, and decision making in your school. **Probe**: Please give examples school of administrators promoting and nurturing leadership within staff.
	Hipp & Huffman (2010); Hord Domain 2	2.Question: How might you describe the vision and focus of your staff? **Probe**: Please describe how your vision and focus guide decisions about teaching and learning.
	Hipp & Huffman (2010); Hord Domain 3	3.Question: Please describe the ways your staff works collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning. **Probe**: Please give examples of how your staff works collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning.
	Hipp & Huffman (2010); Hord Domain 4	4.Question: Please describe how peers on your staff work together to provide feedback on instructional practices and to share their personal practice? **Probe**: Please give examples of how peers provide feedback and share personal practice.
	Hipp & Huffman (2010); Hord Domain 5	5.Question: How would you describe the level of respect, trust, norms of critical inquiry, and caring relationships in your school community? **Probe**: Please give examples of respect, trust, norms of critical inquiry, and caring relationships in your school community.
	Hipp & Huffman	6. Question: Please describe how the resources (i.e. communication, technology, personnel, facilities, time, fiscal, materials) enable you to examine teaching practices and student outcomes.

	(2010); Hord Domain6 Knight	**Probe**: Please give examples of the resources that provide support. 7.Question: Please describe the ways in which your instructional coach works with you in a partnership capacity.
	Vygotsky	8.Question: Please describe the interactions you have (such as discussions, collaborative writing, and problem-solving) with both your instructional coach and within the context of your professional learning community.
	Knowles	9.Question: Please describe the ways in which your PLC and your instructional coach address your needs as an adult learner.
	District Values	10. Question: Please describe what the decision making process looks like in your school.
	District Values	11. Question: Please describe what professional support looks like in your school.
	District Values	12. Question: In what ways do you utilize your instructional coach?
	District Values	13. Question: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your PLC experiences?

Thank you again for your cooperation and participation in this interview. Your responses will be confidential, and I look forward to getting together again for a follow up group interview.

Appendix E

Teacher Focus-Group Interview Questions

Focus-Group Teacher Interview

Welcome! Thank you for taking time to talk about instructional coaching and PLC's. My name is Christie Jorgensen and I am from NNU. I am conducting a study about the role of the instructional coach within the context of a PLC.

You were invited because you have participated in a PLC, received support from an instructional coach, and you have been in the school district for at least three years. The results will be used in this study.

There are no right or wrong answers, only differing points of view. You've probably noticed the recording devices. I am recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Because we are recording the session, it will be helpful to have only one person speak at a time. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and we can't write fast enough to get them all down. I have placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. We will be on a first name basis today, but I will not use any names in the report. You may be assured of confidentiality, as I will use a pseudonym in place of your name. I encourage you to keep confidential what you hear today, and please do not feel pressured to speak. Are there any questions?

Teacher Focus Group Interview Questions

R.Q.	T.F.	Question
	Ice Breaker	1. Please tell us which school and grade level you represent, as well as how long you have been teaching.
	Hord	2. How is leadership shared within your professional learning community? Probe: Tell me about your SLT's and how this distributes leadership. How often do leaders rotate?
	Hord	3. Please describe the vision that is shared within your professional learning community. Probe: How does this vision impact your work as teams during Wednesday collaboration?
	Hord	4. Please describe what collaboration means to you.

		Probe: Please share what collaboration looks like within your professional learning community.
	Hord	5. Tell me about the level of trust that exist in your professional learning community. Probe: Please describe the level of trust that exists within your team.
	Knight	6. Describe how you work with your instructional coach in a partnership capacity.
	Vygotsky	7. Please share which interactions with your coach are most helpful to you as a learner. Probe: In what ways does your instructional coach impact collaboration; specifically during your Wednesday collaboration time?
	Knowles	8. Please describe how your experience impacts your work with your professional learning community. Probe: Please describe how your experience impacts your work with your instructional coach.
	Kuna	9. Please describe the decision-making process in your professional learning community. (More specifically, Wednesday collaboration time)
	Kuna	10. Please describe the professional support in your professional learning community.

		11. What instructional coaching roles are most helpful to you during your Wednesday collaboration time? Probe: Do you prefer for your instructional coach to present to the entire staff, or work with teams during Wednesday collaboration?
		12. How do you perceive the role of the instructional coach during your Wednesday collaboration? Probe: Do you prefer for her to "pop-in" or schedule a time to meet with your team?
		13. Is there anything else you would like to share about PLC's or instructional coaching that we have not discussed today?

Appendix F

Instructional Coach One-to One Interviews

Project: The Role of the Instructional Coach Within a PLC
Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Position of Interviewee:

Instructional Coach Interview

Welcome! Thank you for taking time to talk about instructional coaching and PLC's. My name is Christie Jorgensen and I am from NNU. I am conducting a study about the role of the instructional coach within the context of a PLC.

You were invited because you are an instructional coach in your district. The results will be utilized to help us identify the instructional coach roles that teachers find most helpful within a PLC for this study.

You've probably noticed the recording devices. I am recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. You may be assured of confidentiality, as I will use a pseudonym in place of your name. I anticipate the interview to last about one hour. Please take just a moment to sign the consent form. (Turn on the recorder and test it). Are there any questions?

	Ice Breaker	1. Please share how long you have been an instructional coach, and the journey that led you to becoming a coach.
	Ice Breaker	2. Please share your favorite aspect of being an instructional coach.
2	Knight	3. Please describe any instructional coach training you have received.
2	Knight	4. Please describe your top three instructional coaching skills.
2	Knight	5. Please describe the coaching skills you think are making the greatest difference?
1	Knight	6. How would you describe your coaching philosophy?
1	Vygotsky	7. Please describe the coaching interactions you have had within the professional learning communities.
		8. Please describe how you established yourself as part of the professional learning community?
		9. What steps would you recommend coaches take to become part of a professional learning community?
3	Hord	10. Please share through the coaching lens how leadership is shared within the context of your PLC's.
3	Hord	11. Please share how vision is shared within the context of your PLC's.
2	Knowles	12. Please describe your philosophy of adults as learners.

		13. Please describe the support you receive as an instructional coach.
		14. Is there anything else you would like to share about instructional coaching within the framework of the professional learning community?

Thank you again for your cooperation and participation in this interview. Your responses will be confidential, and I look forward to a follow-up interview in a focus-group setting in a couple of weeks.

Appendix G

Instructional Coach Focus-Group Interview Questions

Project: The Role of the Instructional Coach Within the PLC
Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewees:
Position of Interviewees:

Focus-Group Instructional Coach Interview

Welcome! Thank you for taking time to talk about instructional coaching and PLC's. My name is Christie Jorgensen and I am from NNU. I am conducting a study about the role of the instructional coach within the context of a PLC.

You were invited because you are an instructional coach and have participated in a PLC. The results will be used in this study to help us understand which coaching roles teachers find most helpful within the PLC setting.

There are no right or wrong answers, only differing points of view. You've probably noticed the recording devices. I am recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Because we are recording the session, it will be helpful to have only one person speak at a time. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and we can't write fast enough to get them all down. I have placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. We will be on a first name basis today, but I will not use any names in the report. You may be assured of confidentiality, as I will use a pseudonym in place of your name. I encourage you to keep confidential what you hear today, and please do not feel pressured to speak. Please take a moment to read and sign the consent form. Are there any questions? (Turn on the recorder and test it).

Instructional Coach Focus-Group Interview Questions

R.Q.	T.F.	Question
		1. Please tell us which school you represent, as well as how long you have served as an instructional coach.
		2. Please share how long you have been working within a PLC, and describe any training you have received specific to the PLC.

		3. Describe in general, the work you do within your PLC.
	Knight	4. Please share the top coaching skills you use when you are working with the PLC?
	Knight	5. Please share the coaching skills you have noticed make a difference in the PLC?
		6. Describe your role as instructional coach within your PLC.
	Knght	7. Please share the ways you have incorporated Jim Knight's instructional coach training within the setting of a PLC?
	Vygotsky	8. Please share the ways in which instructional coaching affects the interactions that occur during a PLC.
	Hord	9. Describe the vision that is shared during PLC. Vision? Trust?
	Knowles	10. Please share the ways in which instructional coaching and PLC's address the needs of adult learners.
		11. How do you as coaches meet together as a PLC?
		12. When and how do you meet with you administration? (PLC)
		13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your work as an instructional coach?

Thank you for your cooperation and participation in this interview. Your responses will remain confidential, and I remind you not to share what was discussed today in order to maintain confidentiality within this group.

Appendix H

Human Research Review Committee Approval

Dear Christie,

The HRRC has reviewed your protocol: Protocol #932015 - A Mixed Methods Study Examining the Role of the Instructional Coach within a Professional Learning Community, the Coaching Skills Teachers Find Most Helpful within this Setting, and What Impact an Instructional Coach has on Teacher Perceptions of a Professional Learning Community. You received a "Conditional Approval". Please make the corrections/changes listed below. You can access your protocol at https://nnu.submittable.com/submit. There you will see a drop box titled "Dashboard." In the drop list will be an option titled "My Submissions." Here you will find your protocol.

Here are the necessary changes, additions, and edits.

1) Are participants being asked by the superintendent for participation? If so, this might be considered undue influence. Also, if the researcher is in a position of leadership over any of those asked to participate, undue influence must be addressed. If neither of these things is the case, please make this clear in section 7a.

2) In the consent form you say that there is no payment, but there is remuneration. This needs to be consistent. I suggest removing this piece from your consent form entirely.

3) I need to see the email you send out to get consent for on-line survey. I see the consent form for interviews, but not for email survey.

Once all of these corrections/changes have been made, please resubmit the protocol (by clicking the "mark as done and closed for editing" button) and send an email to me (jabankard@nnu.edu), your research adviser and the HRRC (hrrc@nnu.edu) letting us know that the protocol has been edited and resubmitted.

Good luck. If the HRRC doesn't receive an edited protocol within 3 months, this protocol will be closed out. If you need an extension just contact the HRRC (hrrc@nnu.edu) and your adviser.

If you have any questions, let me know.

Joseph Bankard
Email: jabankard@nnu.edu
Northwest Nazarene University
HRRC Member
623 S University Blvd
Nampa, ID 83686

Appendix I

National Institute for Health Certification

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Christie Jorgensen** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 12/29/2014

Certification Number: 1639321

Appendix J

Electronic Instructional Coach E-mail Greeting

1416 Thorn Creek Court
Nampa, Idaho 83686

January 30, 2015

[redacted] Elementary
[redacted] Avenue
[redacted] Idaho [redacted]
Dear Ms. [redacted]

My name is Christie Jorgensen, and I am working on doctoral research at Northwest Nazarene University. I received your name from [redacted] School District office. She recommended you as a valuable resource to someone who is interested in instructional coaches and their work within professional learning communities. I am hoping you might be willing to complete a brief online survey, and set up an informational interview at your convenience. I would be happy to meet you at your local coffee shop.

I am particularly interested in your work as an instructional coach, your role within the professional learning community, and the coaching practices you find the most beneficial to teachers. You can reach me at [redacted] if you have any questions. I will call within the next two weeks to see whether we will be able to meet. Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,
Christie Jorgensen

Appendix K

Electronic Principal E-mail Greeting

1416 Thorn Creek Court
Nampa, Idaho 83686

January 30, 2015

[redacted] Elementary
[redacted] Idaho [redacted]
Dear Mr. [redacted]

My name is Christie Jorgensen, and I am working on doctoral research at Northwest Nazarene University. I received your name from [redacted] School District office. She recommended you as a valuable resource to someone who is interested in instructional coaches and their work within professional learning communities. I am interested in working with your instructional coach, and some of your teachers who have experience working within your leadership teams.

I am particularly interested in the work of your instructional coach, your coach's role within the professional learning community, and the coaching practices teachers find the most beneficial. You can reach me at [redacted] if you have any questions. I will contact your instructional coach and teachers who are able to participate within the next two weeks. They will be asked to complete a brief online survey, and participate in an interview. In addition, I will conduct observations during at least one grade-level team meeting. Thank you so much for your willingness to assist with this study.

Sincerely,
Christie Jorgensen

Appendix L

Verbatim Instructions

Hi _____!

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Audio-Recorded Interviews
An audio-recorded interview will be conducted with each participant. These procedures will be completed at a public location mutually decided upon by the participant and the investigator and will take a total time of about 45-60 minutes.

This process is voluntary and you can select to suspend your involvement at any time. You can select to answer questions that are of comfort to you and are not obligated to answer all of the questions.

Do you have any questions or can I clarify anything?

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix M

Debrief Statement

Thank you for your participation in this study.

After I have an opportunity to analyze the data, I will email you the results and ask for feedback. Mainly we want to ensure that we captured the essence of our discussion, accurately portraying our discussion and your thoughts. This study will conclude by March 31, 2016.

Questions
In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, Christie Jorgensen can be contacted via email at cljorgensen@nnu.edu, via telephone at (208) [redacted], or by writing: Christie Jorgensen, 1416 Thorn Creek Court, Nampa, Idaho 83686.

Thank you for your participation!

Christie Jorgensen
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University
HRRC Application # 932015

Appendix N

Member Checking E-mail

Date

Dear

I hope that this email finds you and your students well. Thank you for your participation in the study entitled *A Mixed Methods Study Examining the Role of the Instructional Coach within the Professional Learning Community.* I wanted to let you know some of the themes that resulted from the interviews in this particular study. Please let me know if these accurately depicted our conversation. If you have any suggestions, modifications, or questions, please let me know as soon as possible.

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community and identify the coaching skills teachers find most helpful.

The guiding research questions in this study were

1. What is the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community?
2. What coaching skills do teachers find most helpful within this setting?
3. What impact does an instructional coach have on teacher perceptions of the professional learning community?

There were many themes that emerged from the interviews in which you participated. After reading, re-reading, and coding the transcripts, the results showed that the role of the coach is to serve as a bridge to guide teachers to new learning through the provision of support, partnership principles, and availability and trust.

The role of the instructional coach is to serve as a bridge between the district and teachers. Instructional coaches implement the district vision and initiatives and guide teachers through this process. Also, instructional coaches serve as a bridge between grade levels through the facilitation of cross-grade level collaboration. Coaches bridge new learning for teachers while acting as a change agent. Finally, instructional coaches can serve as a bridge between staff during times of turnover in the school building.

Instructional coaches provide support to teachers through new curriculum implementation. Coaches can support as teachers implement Lucy Calkins, MTI, and Common Core Math Standards. Also, coaches provide ongoing job-embedded support and follow-up to teachers. Additionally, instructional coaches support teachers through trouble shooting and problem solving with teachers within the professional learning community.

Another role of the instructional coach within the setting of the professional learning community is to show availability and to develop trust. Instructional coaches demonstrate availability by popping in to grade-level meetings, having informal hallway conversations, and being present. Trust was seen as an important aspect to the collaborative relationships within the professional learning community.

In addition, the coaching role was viewed as a partnership within the setting of the professional learning community. Instructional coaches and teachers work alongside one another and develop comfortable relationships. Dialogue is a key component to this partnership. For example, instructional coaches and teachers work as equal professionals, listening to, and valuing one another's ideas. Instructional coaches purposefully ask questions to teachers with the purpose of guiding them toward self-reflection, rather than simply telling teachers what they should do. The role of the coach is to model authentic listening, while empowering and encouraging teachers.

Lastly, the role of the instructional coach is to offer resources to teachers through the sharing of instructional ideas and research based strategies. Teachers also shared that providing instructional resources was beneficial, especially resources for the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum. Instructional coaches serve as a resource by creating professional learning opportunities that are meaningful and useful. Many teachers prefer coaches to work in small-group settings, rather than whole staff during training. Teachers also appreciate when coaches pre-schedule visits to the professional learning community meetings.

If these ideas do not reflect your experiences or you would like to comment further please respond to this email or contact me at the number below. Thanks again for participating in my dissertation study. It would not have been possible without you.

Christie Jorgensen
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University
cljorgensen@nnu.edu
Telephone: 208-[redacted]

Appendix O

Complete List of Codes from Qualitative Data Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What is the role of the instructional coach within the professional learning community?

Support	Number of responses
New Curriculum	75
Ongoing Job-Imbedded and Follow-Up Support	68
Troubleshoot/Problem Solve Teacher Concerns	27
Prefer Small Groups	10
Support Student Centered Goals	9
Extra Set of Hands, Eyes, Brain	6
Offer Help	5
Guidance	5
Provide Peer Observations	5
Not Necessarily Part of Every Week	2
Mentor	2

Availability/Trust	Number of responses
Available/Present	67
Develop Trust	25
Observe	13
Willing To Do Anything	9
Willing To Explain	2

Bridge	Number of responses
Implement District Vision/Initiatives	48
Facilitate Cross Grade Level (Vertical) Collaboration	39
Bridge To New Learning (Change Agent)	37
Bridge During Turnover of Staff	18
Cross Curriculum Integration	1

Resources	Number of Responses
Share Ideas and Strategies	49
Provide Resources	49
Huge Resource For Lucy Calkins	45
Made Professional Learning and Training Meaningful and Useful	42
Model Lucy Calkins and MTI Lessons	26

Research	20
Content Expert	18
Data--Read and Plan Around It	17
Co-Plan/Side By Side Planning	14
Huge Resource	14
Bring Teaching Experience	12
Answer Questions	10
Share Knowledge	9
Standards Based Grading	8
Finds Experts	5
Organized	4
Organized Binders	3
Set Up Khan Academy	1

Partnership	Number of Responses
Learning Partner	67
Develop Comfortable Relationship	46
Dialogue	38
Questions For Reflection	34
Authentic Listening	34
Empower/Encourage	33
Provide Feedback	21
Brainstorm	16
Collaborate	16
Coaches Are Scheduled/Invited to PLC	15
Provide Choice	13
Survey Teachers	12
Equality--Treat Teachers As Professionals	7
Approach In An Understanding Way	4
Flexible	4
Coaching Cycle	3
Objective Neutral Voice	2
Communicate	2

Appendix P

Complete List of Codes from Qualitative Data Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What coaching skills do teachers find most helpful in the PLC setting?

Support	Number of responses
Provide Meaningful and Useful Training and Professional Learning	32
Provide Support For New Curriculum	31
Model and Co-Teach (Lucy Calkins)	27
Ongoing Job-Embedded Support	20
Provide Feedback	17
Support for Common Core Math	14
Support for Standards Based Grading	6
Guidance/Direction	6
Data Support	5
Extra Set Of Hands/Eyes (To Share The Load)	3
Willing To Explain	2
Mentor	2
Explain New Lessons	1
Plan	1
Organized	1
Implement New Programs	1
Facilitate Learning And Professional Growth	1
Cross-Curricular-Integration	1

Availability/Trust	Number of responses
Available, Touch Base, Check In	36
Comfortable, Approachable	19
Observes	11
Ongoing Follow Up	8
Willing To Do Anything (Help)	7
Encourage/Empower	4
Treat Teachers As Professionals	4
Level Of Trust	1

Bridge	Number of responses
Bridge For Turnover/New Staff	16
Huge Resource	10
Prefer Working With Coach In Informal Teams	8
Support For District Initiatives	7

Instructional Coach Role Clearly Defined	7
Prefer PLC Time With Instructional Coach To Be Scheduled	6
Bridge For Communication	5
Gives Input On Things We Need To Know From District	4
Perspective Of School-Wide Vision	4
Takes Us From Where We Are To Where We Want To Be	2
Not Necessarily Part Of Every Week	2
Can Be Uncomfortable	1
Facilitates Cross-Grade-Level Collaboration	1
Pushes Me	1

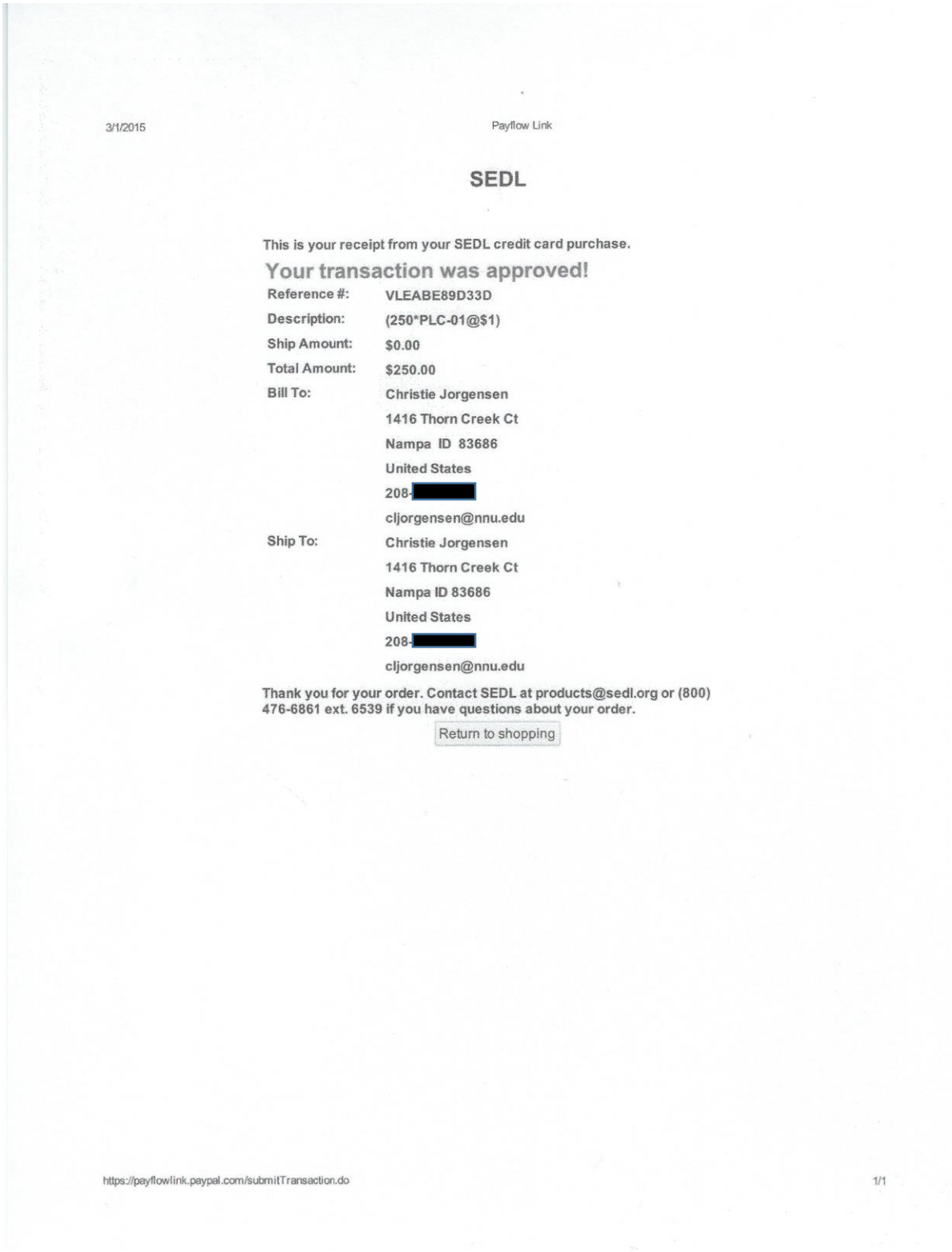
Resources	Number of Responses
Huge Resource For Lucy Calkins	49
Shares Ideas And Strategies	49
Provides Resources	45
Research	42
Answer Questions	26
Share Knowledge	20
Content Expert	18
New Perspective (Outside The Box)	17
Provide (Arrange) Peer-Observations	14
Provide "Experts"	14
Co-Plan Lessons	12
Organize Spell Binders	10
Provide Options	9
Book Studies	8
Set Up Khan Academy	5
Direct Us To Get What We Need	4
Chocolate	3

Partnership	Number of Responses
Learning Partner (Not Grading Or Critiquing)	67
Trouble Shooting, Brainstorm, Problem Solving	46
Discussions/Conversations	38
Survey Teachers	34
Approaches In Understanding Way	34
Collaborate	33
Hears Teacher Needs/Listens	21
Coaching Cycle	16
Flexible	16
Share Ideas Of What Is Working And What Is Not Working	15

Asks Questions	13
Objective Person	12
Second Brain	7

Appendix Q

SEDL Proof of Purchase



3/1/2015 Payflow Link

SEDL

This is your receipt from your SEDL credit card purchase.

Your transaction was approved!

Reference #:	VLEABE89D33D
Description:	(250*PLC-01@$1)
Ship Amount:	$0.00
Total Amount:	$250.00
Bill To:	Christie Jorgensen
	1416 Thorn Creek Ct
	Nampa ID 83686
	United States
	208-[redacted]
	cljorgensen@nnu.edu
Ship To:	Christie Jorgensen
	1416 Thorn Creek Ct
	Nampa ID 83686
	United States
	208-[redacted]
	cljorgensen@nnu.edu

Thank you for your order. Contact SEDL at products@sedl.org or (800) 476-6861 ext. 6539 if you have questions about your order.

Return to shopping

https://payflowlink.paypal.com/submitTransaction.do 1/1

Appendix R

PLCA-R Permission Letter

Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
P.O. Box 43091
Lafayette, LA 70504-3091

September 8, 2015

Christie Jorgensen
1416 Thorn Creek Court
Nampa, Idaho 83686

Dear Ms. Jorgensen:

This correspondence is to grant permission to utilize the *Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised* (PLCA-R) as your instrument for data collection for your doctoral study through Northwest Nazarene University. I believe your research examining *teacher perceptions of the professional learning communities process and the role of the instructional coach within PLCs* will contribute to the PLC and instructional coaching literature. I am pleased that you are interested in using the PLCA-R measure in your research.

This permission letter allows use of the PLCA-R through paper/pencil administration, as well as permission for the PLCA-R online version. For administration of the PLCA-R online version, services **must** be secured through our online host, SEDL in Austin, TX. Additional information for online administration can be found at www.sedl.org. While this letter provides permission to use the measure in your study, authorship of the measure will remain as Olivier, Hipp, and Huffman (exact citation on the following page). This permission does not allow renaming the measure or claiming authorship.

Upon completion of your study, I would be interested in learning about your entire study and would welcome the opportunity to receive an electronic version of your completed dissertation research.

Thank you for your interest in our research and measure for assessing professional learning community attributes within schools. Should you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Dianne F. Olivier

Dianne F. Olivier, Ph. D.
Associate Professor/Coordinator of the Doctoral Program
Joan D. and Alexander S. Haig/BORSF Professor
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership

College of Education
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P.O. Box 43091
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(337) 482-6408 (Office) dolivier@louisiana.edu

Reference Citation for Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised measure:

Source: Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2010). Assessing and analyzing schools. In K. K. Hipp & J. B. Huffman (Eds.), *Demystifying professional learning communities: School leadership at its best.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Appendix S

PLCA-R Introductory E-mail Letter

Dear colleague,

You are invited to participate in a questionnaire related to Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

The purpose of the questionnaire is to determine what people are concerned about at various times during the process of becoming a PLC. The survey is called the Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised, and it will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

The survey is available online at:

https://www.sedl.org/plc/survey/

Enter the password: **p57wma** to log on.