Instructional Coaching in Rural Schools: A Qualitative Study of Instructional Coaching Methods

and the Developmental Needs of Teachers

By

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Instructional Coaching in Rural Schools: A Qualitative Study of Instructional Coaching Methods and the Developmental Needs of Teachers

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Title of Study: INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING METHODS AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF TEACHERS

Major Field: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Abstract: Because they offer feedback and communicate school administration goals to teachers, instructional coaches are generally seen as leaders. Balka et al. (2010) discovered that instructional coaches can model lessons or team-teach with teachers to achieve teaching goals. Due to its multifaceted nature, instructional coaching can improve teaching practices or have no effect (Devine et al., 2013; Knight, 2007; Knight, 2009; Woulfin & Jones, 2018). Thus, good instructional coaching requires a supportive teacher-coach relationship. The purpose of this study is to explore, through the lens of Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), how successful instructional coaches alter their practices based on the developmental needs of the teacher and the teachers’ motivation for change.

Observations and interviews showed that connections underpinned this district's instructional coaching program. Relationships were maintained, although sometimes they were difficult or nonexistent. Participants said instructional coaches must build connections with teachers they work with. These partnerships help teachers develop their teaching further.

Interviews and observations emphasized teacher preparedness. Background, teaching style, and willingness to learn affect a teacher's preparation. The background and teaching traits of the teacher also contributed to the readiness level of the teachers. For this study, the theoretical lens of Situational Leadership Theory was used to examine the readiness levels of the teachers (Hersey & Blanchard, 1998). The four readiness levels addressed in Situational Leadership Theory are: willing and able, unwilling but able, willing but unable, and unwilling and unable.

This research focused on the specific leadership styles each instructional coach used, as found in the data and as explained by Situational Leadership Theory; they must shift between four modes of leadership: delegating, participating, selling, and telling. The instructional coaches each used different leadership styles for different situations.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Supervision in schools is the process of integrating individual components of instructional effectiveness into comprehensive activities at the school level (Glickman & Gordan, 2018). Instructional coaching offers both supervision and assistance to instructors as they incorporate new instructional approaches into their teaching. As a professional development technique for teachers, instructional coaching focuses on enhancing instruction by encouraging classroom teachers to reflect on their practice while also observing the practices of other, typically more experienced, classroom teachers (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010, p.225). Glickman & Gordan (2018) stated, “A paradigm shift toward the collegial model, if it is to succeed, must include a shift away from conventional or congenial supervision toward collegial supervision” (p. 7). Instructional coaches assist with this process by working “alongside” teachers as they engage in the coaching process. Specifically, instructional coaches are change agents that collaborate with teachers to bring about improvements in the classroom by providing focused and continuous assistance (Knight, 2011). Professional development sessions utilizing instructional coaches are generally geared toward instructional goals established within the district in collaboration with teachers, leadership teams, families, and communities. Subsequently, principals, in partnership with instructional coaches, continue working with classroom teachers to ensure the desired change is occurring (Knight, 2011).

Before the widespread use of instructional coaches, teachers were often left to "navigate the waters" of instructional change and reform independently (Knight, 2009). Specifically, teachers were expected to attend a professional development session or workshop on a subject and implement their learning in their classrooms. As a result, teachers were expected to improve
their instruction without much guidance or support from leadership teams. In contrast, in conjunction with professional development, instructional coaching leads to school reform in that "…educators have a clear, common, and urgent purpose linked to learning, achievement, and improvement" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 100). One way instructional coaches can promote change is by developing praxis or continuing learning through experimentation. Knight (2011) explains that “to be true to the principle of praxis, a coach’s actions are filtered by a focus on teaching” (p. 95) In order for the instructional coach to facilitate change they must support both the introduction of new ideas and enhance the ability of the teachers to adapt to a dynamic environment (Glickman & Gordan, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Instructional coaches are often perceived as leaders because they serve as liaisons between teachers and school leaders as they provide feedback and communicate goals set by the school administration. Consequently, and because of instructional coaches' influence on classroom teachers, they must develop leadership skills that enhance teaching effectiveness. Using instructional coaches to guide teachers through instructional change is one way that school leadership teams are working toward change in teaching practice that meets the ever-changing needs of the student population (Balka et al., 2010, Knight, 2009, Knight, 2011). Hargraves and Shirley (2009) suggested that to be successful; instructional coaches need to be part of leadership discussions involving school reform initiatives because these discussions allow the instructional coach to understand the needs of the leadership team and also represent the voice of the teachers. Further, as leaders, instructional coaches have been known to help teachers develop and refine lessons to meet the needs of their students, extending or following-up on professional development or school initiatives (Balka et al., 2010).
Additionally, Balka et al. (2010) found that instructional coaches can model lessons or team-teach alongside teachers, serving as role models to bring about desired teaching outcomes. As leaders, instructional coaches can offer specific feedback, after observation, that is not evaluative but is intended to be used solely for growth purposes (Knight, 2007). Therefore, instructional coaches can be a beneficial component in schools, meeting multiple classroom and district needs. These components put the instructional coach in a position to bring about change, placing the instructional coach in a leadership position.

However, because of the multi-faceted nature of instructional coaching, there are times when instructional coaching has a positive effect on teaching practices, while there are times when coaching does not have any impact on teaching practices (Devine et al., 2013; Knight, 2007; Knight, 2009; Woulfin & Jones, 2018). For example, instructional coaches are sometimes utilized in ways that do not significantly improve pedagogy. Rhodes and Beneicke (2002) emphasized that instructional coaches should work with all teachers, not just those needing improvement. Specifically, when instructional coaches only work with teachers who need improvement, they can be perceived as evaluative rather than supportive. An evaluative stance is indicative of a top-down approach in education, and this approach does not always work with all teachers (Knight, 2011).

Therefore, successful instructional coaching hinges on developing a supportive relationship between the teacher and their coach. According to Knight (2011), this approach is referred to as the Partnership Approach. Knight (2007, 2009) developed a partnership approach that suggests instructional coaches should build relationships with teachers while still maintaining leadership roles. Knight (2009) stated, "The partnership approach grounds any act of communication in the belief that everyone's point of view should be listened to because everyone
is equally valuable" (p.110). This approach stands in stark contrast to the evaluative approach mentioned above because, at the heart of a relationship-centered process, is a shared understanding of the goals a teacher is trying to achieve.

Hersey and Blanchard (1988) determined that to bring about needed change; educational leaders should adapt their behavior to the needs of the individuals whom they are supervising. In this way, understanding the needs of individuals and adapting leadership behavior to bring about change are qualities of an effective leader, as partnerships are developed to enhance teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, Kise (2006) believes an instructional coach must shift their coaching practice to meet the teacher's needs. According to Hersey and Blanchard (1988), leaders practice both directive and supportive behaviors, which depend upon followers' competence and commitment. Therefore, while instructional coaches can observe classroom practices and model best practices, the coach needs to remain cognizant of meeting the needs the teacher has communicated (Balka et al., 2010; Glickman & Gordan, 2018; Knight, 2011, Kise, 2006), and the instructional coach must understand teacher developmental needs as well as teacher motivation to meet goals (Kise, 2006). It follows logically that if instructional coaches approach their position as a partnership and understand the teacher's developmental needs and desire for growth, they are more likely to promote enhanced teaching methods as they engage with instructors (Glickman & Gordan, 2018; Knight, 2011, 2009).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore, through the lens of Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), how successful instructional coaches alter their practices based on the developmental needs of the teacher and the teachers’ motivation for change.

**Research Questions**
1. How do successful instructional coaches alter their practices to support teacher success based on the teachers’ needs/developmental level?

2. How do successful instructional coaches alter their practices to support teacher success based on teacher motivation for improvement?

3. What are teacher perspectives of the role that successful instructional coaches have had on their growth and development?

4. What are administrator perspectives of the role successful instructional coaches have had on teacher growth and development?

5. How does Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988) explain these findings?

**Epistemological Perspective**

This study utilized a constructivist epistemological perspective. The constructivist viewpoint allows the researcher to see things through the participants' viewpoint. Crotty (1998) explained the constructivist viewpoint in that people construct meanings around a subject matter based on experiences. Therefore, if the experiences are different between teachers and instructional coaches, this would not mean that one person was right or another wrong, only that they developed a different understanding through their interactions.

This research focuses on interactions between people, specifically instructional coaches, teachers, and administrators. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated, “…constructivist researchers often address the process of interaction among individuals” (p. 8). These interactions allow the researcher to use the understandings and viewpoints of participants to make meaning of the interactions and use it within a research component (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) used the term interpretivism to explain constructivism, stating, "The experience a
person has includes the way in which the experience is interpreted" (p.9). Using constructivism, participants' interactions are taken and explained through interviews and observations in this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Situational Leadership Theory served as the theoretical framework for this study (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard were contingency theorists who developed the Situational Leadership Model in 1977 (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

**Figure 1** Situational Leadership Model

![Situational Leadership Model](image-url)

*Figure 1. The four dimensions of the Situational Leadership Theory Model. Adapted by Mindy Englett from Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (1988).*

Hersey et al. (1996) described leaders as anyone who influences transformation or performance in other individuals. Hersey and Blanchard were interested in developing the
follower based on different leadership styles (Hersey et al., 1996). Hersey and Blanchard (1988) argued that a worker’s readiness to learn depends on whether the worker is leader-directed or follower-directed. Their model is grounded around the relationships workers have developed with leaders within four quadrants: low relationship, high task; high relationship, high task; high relationship, low task; and low relationship, low task, as seen in Figure 1. Task-oriented individuals tend to focus on the task or job at hand. In contrast, relationship-oriented individuals tend to focus on how the things they do affect the well-being of other individuals with whom they are oriented (Hersey et al., 1996).

For this study, the four dimensions were applied to the findings to understand the relationships between the instructional coach and the teacher receiving the coaching. The dimensions of Situational Leadership are defined below:

1. **Telling (Low relationship, high task):** "This leadership style is characterized by above-average amounts of task behavior and below-average amounts of relationship behavior" (Hersey et al., 1996, p.191). Within this dimension, the instructional coach would tell the teacher exactly what to do with detailed instructions and close supervision with a focus on getting the work done (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Within this cell, the teacher would be unwilling and unable to complete the task independently and have a low readiness to learn (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

2. **Selling (High relationship, high task):** “This leadership style is characterized by above-average amounts of both task and relationship behavior” (Hersey et al., 1996, p.192). This cell would represent the instructional coach who spends time explaining the reasons behind their suggestions and allows the teacher to ask for clarification of new ideas and decisions (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). This cell represents the teacher who is willing but unable to complete the task without guidance (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

3. **Participating (High relationship, low task):** "This style is characterized by above-average
amounts of relationship behavior and below-average amounts of task behavior” (Hersey et al., 1996, p. 1992). Instructional coaches who fall within this cell would mutually share ideas and make decisions with teachers who are unwilling but able to complete the task instead of delegating the ideas and decisions (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

4. **Delegating (Low relationship, low task):** “This style is characterized by below-average amounts of both relationship behavior and task behavior” (Hersey et al., 1996, p. 192). This is the step in the process where the Instructional Coach would turn the process over to the teacher; within this step, the teacher is willing and able to complete the task (Marion & Gonzales, 2014)

The Situational Leadership Model represents a continuum of learning and the progression the teacher, alongside a mentor or instructional coach, would make. While the Situational Leadership Model has been used to address business needs and demands within a business setting, the model can also be applied to leadership roles within an education setting (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). The Situational Leadership Model is well-suited for this study because it explains leadership behavior based on the leader's perception of the follower's needs. It has utility for explaining how successful instructional coaches adapt their behavior to bring about needed instructional change. Just as this model suggests using a different leadership method for different situations, different instructional coaching styles may be used in different contexts. This model provided a means for examining each of those interactions and how those interactions differed on the continuum, and the effects on teacher development. See Figure 1.

**Procedures**

The design for this study was a qualitative case study following Merriam and Tisdale (2016) as the methodologists. Qualitative research allows the researcher to construct meaning
and understanding from individual interpretations of events (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The case for this study is one rural district in the Midwest and the instructional coaches within that district. One district was chosen because of the lack of instructional coaching resources and coaches available for rural districts and the low percentage of teachers within these districts who utilize or have access to instructional coaches. In the district selected for this study, instructional coaches were introduced in 2018, just four years before this study. Instructional coaching in smaller rural districts in Oklahoma can be somewhat rare because of limitations in funding, leaving smaller districts without the ability to support the salaries of instructional coaches. This small district, however, has prioritized instructional coaching and has found a way to support this practice in their budget, suggesting that the enhancement of teaching and learning through instructional coaching is a priority in this district; Patton (2002) suggested the use of interviews, observation, and written documents to support qualitative research, and each of these sources of data will be used to support this case study. The lens of Situational Leadership Theory will be utilized to explain instructional coach leadership behaviors as they respond to the teachers' needs (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). A brief explanation of the methods chosen for this study is provided below. A more detailed description is provided in Chapter 3.

Research Context and Participant Selection

Case

This case study examined four schools—two elementary and two secondary—in a rural Midwest district that uses instructional coaching to support teachers. The National Center for Educational Statistics Locale Lookup tool classified the district as rural (2021). Due to the smaller number of students, schools in rural areas will likely have less funding available to cover the costs of instructional coaches' tools and compensation. The study avoided contextual
variations by selecting four schools from the same district. Four sites were chosen to align teachers with the instructional coaches within the study. One instructional coach worked at elementary sites, and the other at secondary sites in the district.

**Sampling Method**

The sampling method used in this study was purposeful sampling. This method allows the researcher to choose candidates that match the criteria outlined below. Using purposeful selection provides a robust context for exploring interpersonal relationships and leadership skills utilized by instructional coaches.

**Participant Selection**

Participants will be teachers who have utilized an instructional coach within the past two years, instructional coaches who work with these teachers and are deemed to be successful, and one administrator from elementary and one from secondary. Administrators as participants were utilized to triangulate the data.

**Data Collection**

**Interviews**

The interviews were completed using the online Zoom application. The interview questions are provided for administrators, instructional coaches, and instructors in appendices A, B, and C, respectively. Each interview used the same semi-structured interview protocol. Still, the questions varied depending on the interviewee—administrator, instructional coach, or teacher—while the questioning style or follow-up questions were determined by the participant's responses and the interview's advancement. However, were instances where probing questions were asked to gain more insight (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed using Temi software. Also included in the interview process were field
notes to record body language, eye movement, and laughter. In addition, each candidate was asked if the interview could be recorded and if they would allow me to contact them in the future to follow up or ask further questions. Interview questions are included in Appendix A, B, & C.

**Observations**

The preferred method of observation was in person. However, there were two instances where Zoom technology was used for the observation. The observations included one meeting between each teacher and their instructional coach. Data was collected using detailed notes, photographs, and recordings from Zoom. Observations were completed to triangulate data collected through interviews and artifact collection. The observation provided the researcher with specific incidents and context to tie back to the interviews and artifacts collected (Merriam, 1998). Data were compiled and coded as the interviews were using note cards.

**Artifact Collection**

Instructional coaches and teachers were asked to share artifacts with me. Artifacts included, but were not limited to, the coaching observation protocol, coaching documentation, pictures of the classroom, and photos of a coaching session. Artifacts allow themes to be further established and add to the study's validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Data Analysis**

Following the constant comparative method allowed for the organization of the data and reviewing of the data during the data collection process (Merriam, 1998). This method also allowed for the triangulation of the data and comparison among all data sources (Merriam, 1998). All interview data were transcribed and analyzed using open coding techniques (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). In addition to coding transcripts, I wrote key phrases and essential points from the transcriptions, observations, and artifacts on notecards. Initially open coding was utilized for
field notes, transcripts, observational data, and data collected from artifacts (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Axial coding was used to shift codes into categories once open coding was completed (Saldana, 2009). Categories were utilized to identify themes that emerged through data analysis.

**Significance of Study**

**To Practice**

Schools utilize instructional coaches as a support system for educators working to refine lessons to meet the needs of the diverse populations of their students (Balka et al., 2010). Rural educators have a diverse population in that they do not have access to the same resources larger districts may have access to. Utilizing instructional coaches is one of those resources. With the added use of instructional coaches in some rural districts, change in teaching practice because of the additional support may or may not be noted. There are many approaches instructional coaches can take to achieve this goal. Knight (2007) emphasized that the specific feedback instructional coaches can offer after observation can be used by teachers for growth purposes. Balka et al. (2010) found that instructional coaches can also be used to model lessons or team-teach alongside teachers modeling the desired outcome. This study will utilize the Situational Leadership Model; as teacher readiness increases, the leadership or instructional coaches should function as facilitators who support teachers as they gain more independence and accept greater responsibilities (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). This research will allow school leaders, universities, teachers, and instructional coaches to deepen their understanding of how to support teacher development best.

**To Research**

In 2007, Knight noted that instructional coaching was not a new practice, and the research around instructional coaching had been emerging for the past twenty years. While there
have been research initiatives focusing on instructional coaching, there is limited research focusing on instructional coaching as it pertains to leadership. Using Hersey and Blanchard’s (1988) Situational Leadership Model will allow research to be conducted on the role of instructional coaches as leaders to promote a better understanding of how that leadership role changes teacher practice.

**To Theory**

Some theories are widely researched surrounding mentoring and apprenticeships in business. However, the theories that guide instructional coaching seem to be lesser known, yet this is an educational perspective that is beginning to be used more and more by school districts and an approach some school leaders are using to broach the issue of buy-in from teachers on reform initiatives (Knight, 2009). Arguably, Jim Knight is one of the leading researchers on instructional coaching. Using the Situational Leadership Model developed by Hersey and Blanchard will allow consideration of both the relational side and the business or leadership side of instructional coaching. This model could be used to embrace both the business and educational worlds.

**Definition of Terms**

*Instructional Coaching.* “Coaching is a professional development strategy that provides one-on-one learning opportunities for teachers focused on improving science and mathematics teaching by reflecting on one’s own or another’s practice” (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010, p.225). Instructional coaches are change agents that provide teachers with concentrated and dedicated support, collaborating to bring about changes in the classroom while also recognizing the individual talents and requirements of the teacher to adjust teaching techniques to meet students’ needs (Knight, 2011) (Kise, 2006).
Leadership Style. Regarding task and relationship behaviors, leadership style examines what leaders do and how they behave (Hersey et al., 2004).

Mentoring. The interaction between a new or inexperienced teacher or student and an experienced instructor assigned to work with the novice to establish classroom practices and procedures and provide guidance is referred to as mentoring (Poth, 2020) (Stonyer, 2020). This position provides advice, career goal assistance, and a chance for professional development (Stonyer, 2020).

Readiness. The amount to which a follower exhibits the capacity and desire to do a specific job is defined as readiness in situational leadership (Hersey et al., 2004).

Situational Leadership Theory. A three-dimensional leadership style was developed by Reddin (1967) and subsequently refined by Hersey and Blanchard (1969, 1988) and Hersey et al. (2004) to enhance employee productivity. It focuses primarily on the observed behavior of leaders and their followers in different scenarios. According to Hersey and Blanchard (1969), the most successful leaders can adjust their leadership style to a given job and employ directive orientation while supporting their followers’ skills and meeting their needs.

Successful Instructional Coaches. Successful instructional coaches can look different in different situations. However, many researchers agree that a successful instructional coach should have also been a successful teacher (as shown in evaluations and referrals), be able to develop and maintain relationships among peers, including teachers and administrators, have a growth mindset and knowledge of developing that mindset, be visionary and work toward the vision statement and goals of the district, trustworthy, and being knowledgeable of the relationships built and can adapt to the needs of individual teachers (Balka et al., 2010) (Devine et al., 2013) (Knight, 2011).
Teacher Development. Teacher development is more about how teachers learn rather than how they change. It can be seen in how teachers cultivate attitudes and opinions over stages in their career, enrich their classroom practice, and concentrate on their mindsets connected to change (Evans, 2002).

Teacher Best Practices. “Best practice is characterized by an instructional approach based on modeling, demonstration, and mentoring as opposed to telling or giving information to others. Teachers give students opportunities to become problem solvers who take responsibility for their thinking. As teachers shift their practices toward a coaching model of interaction, they engage students in high-level questioning and responding through active learning strategies” (Benchmark Education Company, 1997-2019).

Summary and Organization of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter I introduces the study. The aspects addressed within Chapter I are the initial statement of the problem, the purpose, and the five research questions which will guide this study. A qualitative case study allowed for a deeper understanding of the teacher's motivation for change using instructional coaching. This study utilized the theoretical framework of the Situational Leadership Model of Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988) to show the relationship between instructional coach and teacher and how that influences the teacher's motivation to change.

Chapter II is a review of the literature to offer a better understanding of the topic. The topics addressed are the history and background of instructional coaching, the role or perceived role of the instructional coach, the relationship between coach and teacher, classroom practices, and challenges surrounding instructional coaching. The literature review concludes with possible reasons why instructional coaching at times, has a positive effect on teaching practices, while at
other times, it does not affect teaching practices.

Chapter III gives a detailed account of the research methods and procedures to be implemented in this study, including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis techniques. Researcher bias is also addressed as an ethical consideration. The conclusion of this chapter will include the trustworthiness and limitations of this study.

Chapter IV presents a rich description of the school sites and participants chosen for the study. This chapter will include the data collected through field notes, observations, interviews, and artifacts collected. Chapter V will be a continuation of this data but will be the portion in which the data is analyzed through the lens of the Situational Leadership Model.

Chapter VI concludes the research with implications and interpretations of the study. Implications include the significance of the study to practice, research, and theory. In conclusion, future research recommendations are provided.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The components of instructional coaching will be examined in the following literature review. This review will discuss instructional coaching, including a brief historical background, and the multiple modes of coaching. Next, this review will go through effective teaching and coaching practices. Finally, the relationship aspect between coach and teacher will be reviewed.

Hersey and Blanchard's (1988) Situational Leadership Model will drive this research and allow the researcher to look deeply into the relationship between the coach and teacher. The four dimensions of the Situational Leadership Model of Hersey and Blanchard (1988) will be the perspective that drives discussion surrounding the coach and teacher relationship.

Instructional coaching can also be seen as a method of professional development. In this instance, teachers determine the goal of the professional development, or instructional coaching. Then, the coach and the teacher research the goal and learn about teaching strategies to support the goal. Lastly, the coach and teacher determine what works and what does not work with the strategies by monitoring the progress through observation and feedback. This cycle is referred to by Jim Knight (2018) as the Impact Cycle where the team first identifies the goal, then learn about teaching strategies to support the goal, and finally, they improve the teaching strategy through observation and feedback. This describes instructional coaching as a form of personalized professional development.

**Instructional Coaching**

The role of an instructional coach is multi-faceted. Hersey and Blanchard (1988)
determined that to bring about needed change, educational leaders should adapt their behavior to the needs of the individuals whom they are supervising. In this way, understanding the needs of individuals and adapting leadership behavior to bring about change are qualities of an effective leader. Kise (2006) points out, that the individual needs of teachers must be recognized in order for a coach to bring about the desired change. Instructional coaches are often perceived as leaders in their positions because they serve as liaisons between teachers and school leaders as they provide feedback and communicate goals set by the school administration. Hargraves and Shirley (2009) presented, to be successful, instructional coaches need to be part of leadership discussions involving school reform initiatives because these discussions allow the instructional coach to understand the needs of the leadership team, but also represent the voice of the teachers.

As leaders, instructional coaches have been known to help teachers develop and refine lessons to meet the needs of their students, extending or following up on professional development or school initiatives (Balka et al., 2010). Balka et al. (2010) found instructional coaches can also model lessons or team-teach alongside teachers, serving as role models to bring about desired teaching outcomes. Instructional coaches can also offer specific feedback, after observation, that is not evaluative but is intended to be used solely for growth purposes (Knight, 2007). Because instructional change is part of teacher development, using instructional coaches to guide teachers through instructional change is a way for school leadership teams who are working toward change in teaching practice that meets the ever-changing needs of the student population (Balka et al., 2010, Knight, 2009, Knight, 2011). Therefore, instructional coaches are a beneficial component in schools, meeting multiple needs of both the classroom and the district. These components put the instructional coach into a position to bring about change, therefore, placing the instructional coach in a leadership position.
History of Instructional Coaching

The origins of instructional coaching may be traced back to the 1960s. Ellis (1965) proposed guiding principles for achieving knowledge transfer in research on the transference of training. Joyce and Showers (1980) were among the first to suggest instructional coaching, often known as peer coaching at the time. Coaching was defined by Showers (1985) as a method through which instructors may help one another learn new skills or teaching techniques and then use them expertly and successfully. At this time, Joyce and Showers (1985) called this coaching technique peer coaching. We could also view this form of coaching as mentoring.

Joyce and Showers (2002) began to discover that relationships that are fostered with collaborative efforts build trust among teachers and benefit teacher learning. Relationships are developed and the school culture benefits when instructional coaches and teachers collaborate on teaching techniques. Teachers' learning will benefit from relationships that are created via collaborative initiatives (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Kise (2006) developed this idea further by suggesting the idea of differentiated coaching where the coach makes changes based on the personality and individual needs of the teacher. Knight (2007, 2009) found the purpose of instructional coaching is to foster a collaborative relationship in which all parties are seen as "equal participants" in achieving school goals. Knight (2007) believed the instructional coach's primary duty is to work with colleagues to apply research-based techniques and promote reflective practice. This form of reflective practice will be considerably more difficult to achieve if there is no relationship between the coach and the instructor.

Kise (2006) used the term “Differentiated Coaching” to describe a method of coaching where the coaches change their behavior based on the need of the teacher. This idea came from the idea of differentiated instruction that was also emerging at this time frame. Kise (2006)
compares the work of teachers and students with the work of coach and teacher. A closer look was taken by Kise (2006) in creating situations that led teachers to reevaluate their ideas and become aware of opportunities for development. A suggestion of a paradigm shift was made in that there are four learning styles and we are learning about those learning styles and the effect of those on students when the teachers change their teaching behavior, and Kise (2006) suggested the same were true in that coaches needed to find out the learning styles of their teachers and change their approach to meet these styles.

Jim Knight (2007) developed the Partnership Approach, which currently influences instructional coaching, based on his perspective on partnerships and coaching. Knight (2007, 2009, 2011) identified seven partnership principles for instructional coaches. Those principles are:

1. equality-teachers and instructional coaches are equal partners
2. choice-the belief that teachers should be allowed a choice in the way they learn
3. dialogue-authentic dialogue should come from professional learning
4. voice-the voice of teachers should be empowered and respected through professional learning
5. reflection-allowing reflection is a vital piece of professional learning
6. praxis-when teachers apply their learning to real-life practices throughout the learning process
7. reciprocity-when you get as much as you give as an instructional coach (Knight, 2011).

When instructional coaches apply the Partnership Approach, they first focus on relationships and then move on to look at professional development and teacher efficacy by working together to improve teacher practice (Knight, 2018).
Instructional coaching has moved from a peer coaching standpoint, as shown by Joyce and Showers (1985) to one where the coach and teacher develop relationships and build teacher efficacy as a team as Knight (2009, 2011, 2018) suggests. As a result of this shift, instructional coaching has become more popular and important.

**Coaching Strategies**

Coaching may be done in several different ways. Coaching strategies that include continuing professional development, application, and feedback tend to be the most successful (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Joyce & Showers, 1980; Knight, 2007; Knight, 2016). Questioning, assessing, creating goals, planning, demonstrating, criticizing, reviewing, and adapting are all examples of coaching activities that take place throughout the coaching model (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Desimone & Pak, 2017). Jim Knight (2018) identified a coaching cycle known as the impact cycle where the coach and teacher identified goals to work toward, through observation and feedback developed strategies to meet those goals, and then implemented those strategies to either meet the goals or determined what was or was not working in meeting the goals and began the cycle again. All these factors play into the coaching strategies including professional development, application, and feedback.

**Professional Development**

One effective method for helping teachers grow professionally is instructional coaching (Desimone & Pak, 2017). One of the instructional coach's responsibilities is to help with the coordination and planning of successful school-level professional development (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Desimone & Pak, 2017; Knight, 2007; Knight, 2011; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010). Coaching is a professional development technique for teachers that focuses on enhancing instruction by reflecting on one's own or another's practice (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010).
Instructional coaches, according to Knight (2007), offer on-site professional development and aim to empower teachers via collaborative relationships so that research-based instructional strategies may be used in the classroom. Adult learners must be active in the design and assessment of their education, with a specific emphasis on their occupation (Knowles et al., 2005). Desimone and Pak (2017) believe that professional development is more effective when instructors have more opportunities to apply what they've learned and get feedback on it. Continuous, non-evaluative professional learning is provided by an instructional coach. Knight (2000) states, "...teachers resent professional development because it is offered in settings that are not learner friendly" (p.16). Kise (2006) believes the goal of professional development should be for “...teachers to habitually examine their beliefs and practices and then move toward affirming, modifying, or changing them as necessary to help all students learn” (p. 15).

Instructional coaches may provide professional development at the school site and with specific groups, as well as foster school cooperation.

Coaching, a sort of reform professional development, is designed to create strong teacher communities that collaborate in learning, produce a common knowledge essential for growth, and give a framework for developing reflective practice (Showers, 1985). Using instructional coaching in conjunction with professional development lends to the fourth way of school reform in that “...educators have a clear, common, and urgent purpose linked to learning, achievement, and improvement” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 100). The coaches' role in assisting instructors in navigating new instructional techniques based on their past knowledge and ideas about teaching gives coherence (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Neufeld and Roper (2003) define coaching as “school-based professional development designed in light of the district’s reform agenda and guided by the goal of meeting schools’ specific instructional learning needs” (p. 4).
Technical coaching is often utilized to supplement and enhance teacher training that has already been offered in professional development seminars or workshops (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). These coaches are instrumental in school reform, in that they are in the classrooms working alongside teachers to develop a practice that matches the current reform initiatives. Instructional coaching is one approach to building capacity for systemic literacy transformation and it has helped instructional coaches become important educational leaders (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Instructional coaches become integral members of the leadership team when used to promote school reform initiatives.

**Application of Coaching**

The teacher and instructional coach must apply the learning in the classroom. Knight (2007, 2011) emphasized the importance of the teacher's voice and the respect for teacher knowledge through professional learning and coaching. According to Knight (2007, 2011), research on coaching suggests that instructional coaching can influence teaching practices, resulting in increased student accomplishment. Instructional coaches stoke a teacher's drive to change by educating them about the existing situation and probing them with questions to enable them to come up with approaches that might help students learn more effectively (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Knight, 2018; Knight, 2011). Setting learning objectives for students aids instructional coaches and instructors in focusing their teaching and aligning learning goals with state requirements (Sweeney, 2011). The emphasis of goal-setting is on students' development rather than correcting the instructor (Sweeney, 2011). Instructional coaching is a method in which instructional coaches and instructors collaborate to increase student learning by following three steps within the coaching cycle: identify, learn, and improve (Knight, 2018). Jim Knight (2011) states, "What do we desire for educational leaders? We surely want the people with
whom we work to learn new ways to help students, to reflect on what they do, to change for the better” (p. 42). This desire directs and inspires both the teacher and the coach to use learning to achieve possible objectives, and it enables the coach to affect the teacher's teaching practice.

By employing effective instructional techniques, instructional coaching develops teacher capacity (Casey, 2006). A well-informed and well-educated instructional coach helps administrators develop a closer community of instructors, which in turn benefits learners (Wolpert- Gawron, 2016, p. 59). Teacher leadership, a professional development paradigm that includes instructional coaching, may be linked to Spillane's (2005) work, which compares teacher leadership to dispersed leadership. According to Spillane, the terms "distributed leadership" and "shared leadership" are interchangeable. Distributed leadership, according to Spillane (2005), is school leadership that incorporates several leaders. Shared leadership is described as a system of practice in which all components of an organization collaborate (Spillane, 2005). Peer observation, co-planning, student work evaluation, professional presentations, leadership, and writing are all examples of the application of learning through the use of an instructional coach (Joyce & Showers, 1985; Knight, 2011). Teachers have the potential to develop a professional learning network within their school community when they participate in active learning frameworks in their classroom (Knight, 2007). When coaching is applied to learning, it has the potential to enhance learning. Desimone and Pak (2017) theorize that when instructors have more opportunities to practice what they've learned and get feedback on it, professional development is more effective. This could be viewed as a benefit when applying instructional coaching.
Feedback

Feedback is an important component of instructional coaching. Observing a session and debriefing with the instructor as soon as feasible thereafter is a common coaching technique (Knight, 2011). This gives the instructor guided quick feedback to continue working toward goals that both the instructor and instructional coach are aware of. The instructional coach's support of instructors as they go through the transformation process is a critical component of perfecting their trade (Casey, 2006; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Knight & Nieuwerburgh, 2012). The instructional coach must be able to give directed feedback to teachers who are working toward change, but they must also be mindful of the relationship with the teacher and the bounds of that relationship (Knight, 2011).

Teachers are more inclined to cooperate or collaborate and be open to feedback when the relationship is defined by trust, according to (Anderson et al., 2014). It is the job of the instructional coach to build rapport with the teacher before the feedback stage (Knight, 2007). As the teacher is also the expert in the room, without a relationship the feedback can come off to be evaluative in nature (Knight, 2011). Teachers' learning will benefit from relationships that are created via collaborative initiatives (Joyce & Showers, 2002). An important part of building this relationship is ensuring the instructional coach does not come off as evaluative in nature (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight & Nieuwerburgh, 2012). The purpose of instructional coaching is to foster a collaborative relationship in which all parties are seen as equal participants in achieving school goals (Knight, 2007). Therefore, a coach should not be seen as the evaluator, as this would assume a managerial role where they would not be equal.

When offering feedback, the coach should remember to stick to the learning goals that were set in prior meetings with the teacher (Knight, 2011). The instructional coach should
remain cognizant of their job to properly involve the teacher and ensure that both the teacher and
the instructional coach have the same understanding of the goals (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Joyce
& Showers, 2002; Knight, 2011). Jim Knight (2011) describes this in his presentation of what he
calls The Partnership Approach. In this approach, the instructional coach is encouraged to act as
a partner to the teacher and to speak to them in a way that encourages dialogue between the
teacher and the coach, and not a manner of the instructional coach being the only expert in the
room (Knight, 2011). Developing relationships with teachers while giving feedback will promote
a more positive reaction to the coaching as well as the work environment. Deeper coach-teacher
ties result from interactions founded on trust and other good relationship traits (Anderson et al.,
2014).

There are many aspects to the roles of an instructional coach. May researchers agree that
many practices must be in place for the practice of instructional coaching to be successful
(Desimone & Pak, 2017; Joyce & Showers, 1980; Knight, 2007; Knight, 2016). Jim Knight
(2011) would argue that while there are many important components to instructional coaching,
the relationship between coach and teacher is the most important component. While there are
many positive correlations between instructional coaching and the teaching practice, there are
times when instructional coaching does not always work.

**Effective Teaching and Coaching Practices**

Due to the multi-faceted nature of instructional coaching, there are times when
instructional coaching has a positive effect on teaching practices, while there are times that
coaching does not have any effect on teaching practices (Devine et al., 2013; Knight, 2007;
Knight, 2009; Woulfix & Jones, 2018). Instructional coaches are sometimes utilized in ways that
do not lead to significant improvement in pedagogy. For example, Rhodes and Beneicke (2002)
emphasized that instructional coaches should work with all teachers, not just those in need of improvement. Specifically, when instructional coaches only work with teachers who need improvement, they can be perceived as evaluative rather than supportive. An evaluative stance is indicative of a top-down approach in education, and this approach does not always work with all teachers (Knight, 2011).

**Teacher’s Perceptions**

Many times, instructional coaching programs are put in place to support teachers in their teaching practice (Knight, 2018). However, teachers may be resistant to the coach's teaching material and methodology (Fullan & Knight, 2011; Jacobs, et al., 2018). When trying to coach resistant teachers, they should assess whether the coaching strategies are being applied in a way that does not account for the teachers' various needs or the significant changes they are being asked to make (Kise, 2006). Teachers' mental models surrounding the fear of the unfamiliar, danger of expertise, inability to see the need for change, experience with prior failed attempts, denial, and battle for dominance may further complicate this working relationship (Aguilar, 2019; Anderson et al, 2014; Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Heineke, 2013; Jacobs et al., 2018; Knight, 2009; Richardson et al., 2019).

“Instructional coaching requires teachers to accept three fundamental changes to their professional routine, namely (1) an acceptance of the need to make instructional shifts; (2) a reorganization of a teacher’s time to accommodate regular communication and meetings with a coach; and (3) shifts in their instructional practice to accommodate the coach’s feedback and associated new instructional demands” (Jacobs, et al., 2018, p. 691).
It is then up to the instructional coach and the teacher to work through changes together, making this a valuable partnership.

**Acceptance of Need**

The teacher must first understand that there is a need to be met and be willing to allow an instructional coach to help meet that need (Knight, 2018). Knight (2007) believed that teachers have the potential to develop a professional learning network within their school community when they participate in active learning frameworks. One of these frameworks can be a professional learning community. Within the professional learning community (PLC), teachers can voice and share data that highlights the specific needs of students, therefore having an understanding of a need (Fullan & Knight, 2011, Jacobs, et al., 2018, Knight, 2011). Hass (2018) determined that if a school was utilizing instructional coaches, it was important that they participate in these PLC meetings, therefore being exposed directly to the areas of need. Therefore, the participation in PLC meetings by the instructional coach may shine a light on areas of need and allow the instructional coach a way to begin working with teachers on those areas.

Instructional coaches must also commit to having a focus when working with teachers (Knight, 2018). While teachers much accept the need, it is the responsibility of the coach to be attentive to that need and find ways to try to meet that need (Kise, 2006; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Wolpert-Gawron, 2018). Teachers, according to Zimmerman (2006), are particularly averse to change when they do not believe a change is necessary, are unwilling to change their routines, perceive previous change as unsuccessful, perceive change as a threat to relationships with colleagues and school leadership, or believe their expertise would be harmed by the change. According to Kise (2006), even when coerced, the majority of individuals do not accept change.
simply because they are told they must or that the way they are doing things is incorrect. Knight (2007) suggests the idea that the coach first identifies the academic or behavioral goals of the student before moving into teacher goals, which will take the focus from the teacher to the students allowing the teacher time to become more familiar with the coaching process. This also reinforces the necessity for instructional coaches to participate in PLC sessions or regular meetings where a conversation may naturally lead to areas where instructors sense a need for change, providing a channel for the instructional coach to direct services.

**Time**

Coaches' time spent with instructors is an important aspect of altering teacher behavior (Piper & Zuikowski, 2015). Jacobs, et al. (2018) found that instructional coaches who said they were able to meet with instructors who were open to coaching more often, allowed them to spend more time refining teaching. Teachers who have utilized instructional coaches may have been under-exposed to coaching tasks including goal setting, modeling, and offering formative feedback due to the lack of time allotted to the coaching itself (Jacobs, et al., 2018). Jim Knight (2009) found among the more than 2,000 instructional coaches who worked for over four years, the most common complaint was that they are required to accomplish so many non-instructional activities that they have little time left to engage with instructors. The lack of time can lead to poor choices by the teacher and the coach to not adequately plan for coaching meetings. The many facets of both instructional coaches and teachers require time to be set aside and managed appropriately by both the coach and the teacher to ensure positive outcomes come from the coaching experience (Aguilar, 2019; Knight, 2018).

**Shifts in Instructional Practice**

Knight (2018) believed teachers are treated more like laborers than professionals when
they are told they must do things a certain manner whether they want to or not, and this frequently results in resistance rather than change. Heineke (2013) found educators within her study needed respect from the coaches and a desire to work together to address problems rather than being patronized. Professional learning opportunities are required to keep current with the best teaching techniques, yet change can be a terrifying and emotional experience for anybody, including educators. The idea of change may make teachers feel intimidated in a variety of ways (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Evans, 2002; Heineke, 2013; Knight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2006). Adding feelings of being treated as anything less than professionals can add to the fear that comes with change.

Fullan, et al. (2009) state "Successful change involves learning during implementation. One of the most powerful drivers of change involves learning from peers, especially those who are further along in implementing new ideas" (p. 12). This would suggest a teacher would be more adept at accepting new learning when using an instructional coach to guide them. However, this requires that the teacher be open and willing to change and be open and willing to use an instructional coach as a catalyst for change (Knight, 2009; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Kise (2006) proposed the following six components to assist teachers in changing their pedagogical practices:

1. A thorough grasp of teachers' ideas and strengths.
2. Hard data that sways opinions and demonstrates that change will be worthwhile.
3. Communication and support (coaching) in methods that consider the requirements and learning preferences of each teacher.
4. An emphasis on issues that worry the teachers.
5. Close coordination between teachers, coaches, and the leadership.
6. A standard structure for objective debate of education.

Research would suggest when bringing about shifts within the instructional practice, teachers must first be willing to change, and utilization of an instructional coach could be a practice that subsides some of the anxiety that change can bring about.

**Instructional Coach Perceptions**

Killion (2009) identified ten roles that an instructional coach can be perceived as having within a school. These roles include:

1. A data coach who works with individuals or groups of instructors to examine data on student results and develop improvement strategies.

2. Coaches are seen as resource providers because they are expected to be able to provide instructors with resources such as materials, lesson ideas, or references.

3. Coaches may act in the role of mentors for instructors who are new to the profession or their school. This necessitates the coach's understanding of the phases of teacher development, as well as the acclimatization of the new teacher to professional standards and practices.

4. Coaches can be the curriculum specialist and help instructors comprehend the curriculum, including proper pacing and assessment alignment with the curriculum's desired learning goals.

5. Coaches may place a greater emphasis on how to teach rather than what to teach (as opposed to when a coach acts as a curriculum specialist) making them an instructional specialist. Coaches can help instructors adopt evidence-based teaching techniques and match such approaches to their students' unique needs.

6. When a coach works with a teacher in the classroom, she or he is operating as a
classroom supporter. This necessitates the coach's ability to co-plan, co-teach, observe, and provide constant feedback and assessment.

7. Coaches may be responsible for organizing, coordinating, or facilitating professional development for a school's employees.

8. Coaches may advocate for school and district changes, seek to establish a positive school atmosphere, and serve on school-based teams and committees as school leaders.

9. Coaches, in addition to working as school leaders, operate as change agents by observing stagnant practices, expressing their point of view, and expressing unhappiness with the status quo. These attempts at change are directed toward specific objectives rather than change for the sake of change.

10. Coaches may attend conferences and seminars to further their education, increase their abilities, and learn about new ideas and resources.

These perceptions would suggest that the role of an instructional coach is diverse and varies from day to day. Pipper & Zuikowski (2015) suggest that over the course of a year, a coach's position or duties may change. Instead, she or he may need to adjust to the demands of the instructors with whom they collaborate (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Knight, 2018). Due to the abundance of duties of an instructional coach, some needs must be met for the coach to be successful. Most importantly, they must have adequate time with teachers, and continued professional development.

**Adequate Time**

Like teachers, time is an important factor in instructional coaching. According to Fullan and Knight (2011), more than 75% of coaches claimed that they spent less than 25% of their time teaching. Rodgers (2014) proposes four criteria for determining the amount of coaching that
takes place: 1) "Repetition," which refers to the number of coaching cycles in which the instructor and the coach collaborate; 2) "intensity," or how much energy or attention a coach puts into coaching; 3) "length," or how much time and effort a coach spends on a single coaching event; and 4) "engagement," or how much energy a teacher is willing to put into being taught. Every phase mentioned above requires adequate time. When coaches are forced to deal with a growing number of teachers, they can visit each teacher less often due to a high coach-to-teacher ratio (Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015). Smaller evaluations of the coach-teacher working alliance and lower advances in student performance are associated with fewer coach-client visits (Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015; Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015). Research suggests that protecting the time of instructional coaches is an important component of teacher and student success.

**Professional Development**

Instructional coaches must have scientifically validated strategies to offer if they are to make a difference in how instructors educate (Kise, 2006; Knight, 2009). Communication, listening, inquiring for understanding, relationship building, creating rapport and trust, fostering confidence in others, celebrating triumphs, change management, and managing teacher professional development are all technical skills associated with coaching and instructional coaches should be properly trained in all areas (Knight & Van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). In their study of instructional coaching, Shernoff et al. (2015) discovered a consequence of insufficient coach professional development was significant coach turnover. To be effective in helping teachers master their craft, instructional coaches must engage in professional development opportunities that support their work in improving their coaching practices, deepen their knowledge of the content and teaching practices they are sharing, develop trust-building skills, deepen their understanding of issues surrounding confidentiality and professional ethics, further
develop communication skills, and a variety of other areas (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Knight, 2007; Showers, 1985). Instructional coaches need to be prepared to do the job they are setting out to do, and not preparing them is setting the system up for failure.

**Administration**

Leaders who want their teams to work together must form groups that trust one another and place high importance on relationships. Administrators are critical in the development of instructional coaches' and teachers' relationships, and principals must explain the role and importance of instructional coaches to school faculty to facilitate communication and collaboration between instructional coaches and teachers (Walkowiak, 2016; Wolpert-Gawron, 2016). Instructional coaches with administrators who are willing to discuss the duties and responsibilities of instructional coaches to faculty are more likely to be able to foster a culture of trust and great connections with their students (Walkowiak, 2016). A well-informed and well-educated instructional coach helps administrators develop a stronger community of teachers, which ultimately trickles down to the students (Walkowiak, 2016). The administrators are ultimately providing the best scenarios for the teachers as well as instructional coaches whom they supervise.

**Teachers**

Principals and administrators must adequately define the roles of the instructional coach to the teachers (Knight, 2018; Knight, 2009). Having administrators who support instructional coaches will assist in gaining buy-in from the teachers (Walkowiak, 2016; Zimmerman, 2006). Principals can also entice reluctant teachers to work with the instructional coach by identifying the instructional coach as a resource for both teachers and parents, scheduling time for the instructional coach and teachers to meet individually and in groups, and ensuring that adequate
space is available for instructional meetings (Wolpert-Gawron, 2016). The administration is ultimately responsible for providing clear communication with the teachers on the roles of the instructional coaches and allowing teachers time and resources to develop relationships and collaboration routines with the coaches.

**Instructional Coaches**

The role administration holds with instructional coaches is different from that of the teachers. While instructors need open lines of communication most of the time, the administration has a larger role to play in managing the instructional coach. First, the leaders must develop a vision of what their instructional coaching program will incorporate and must then determine what attributes a good instructional coach will have, and then follow up by hiring the right people for the position (Aguilar, 2019; Knight, 2018).

Principals may help instructional coaches by engaging with them about their work, objectives, and professional development; attending professional development and grade-level meetings hosted by the instructional coach; and offering tools or books to help them do their jobs better (Wolpert-Gawron, 2016). Part of this includes gathering information on what goals need to be met, and what needs there are within the school (Knight, 2007). Principals can also entice reluctant teachers to work with the instructional coach by identifying the instructional coach as a resource for both teachers and parents, scheduling time for the instructional coach and teachers to meet individually and in groups, and ensuring that adequate space is available for instructional meetings (Wolpert-Gawron, 2016).

Knight (2007) explains that what administrators should not do is expect the instructional coaches to report inadequacies in teachers to them. Instructional coaches must be allowed to maintain a relationship with the teacher that is built on trust, and with the feeling of being
evaluative in nature, that relationship is strained (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Devine, et al., 2013, Fullan & Knight, 2011; Knight, 2007; Knight, 2018). “For trust to be built, coaching must be kept separate from evaluation. Strict boundaries around confidentiality must be maintained" (Aguilar, 2019, p.26). Knight (2009) makes it very clear that a coach is not expected to be an evaluator, and an administrator should not expect that task of them. The coach is there to support teaching, not evaluate it. Research shows that the coach must have the autonomy to build a relationship and be a peer to the teachers they are working with. The administrator must respect this confidentiality.

While instructional coaching is not always successful, the research shows that much of the success or lack thereof lies within the effectiveness of the practice. Many of the perceptions of the teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators lie around the view of the roles of the instructional coach and how those roles are viewed by different individuals (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Knight, 2018; Pipper & Zuikowski, 2015; Wolpert-Gawron, 2016). While all these viewpoints are important, the underlying issue revolves around relationships, and how relationships are developed between the instructional coach and the teacher.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study's theoretical basis will be the Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). In 1977, contingency theorists Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard created the Situational Leadership Model (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). According to Hersey and Blanchard (1969), leaders must exhibit a diversity of leadership styles. Leaders, according to Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958), must be proficient in both directive and subordinate leadership styles. According to Hersey and Blanchard (1969), leaders must be able to adjust their leadership style to a certain job and directive orientation while promoting their followers' strengths and needs.
Following a review of Ohio State University research on task- and relationship-oriented leadership behavior, Hersey et al. (2004) predicted that in the future, scholars would be able to not only distinguish specific environmental characteristics but also extend a systematic model of environmental variations related to leadership behavior. Over time, Hersey and Blanchard developed a model for their Situational Leadership Theory which shows four components within the management of behavior and relationship building between manager and employee. See Figure 2.

**Figure 2 Situational Leadership Model**

*Figure 2. The four dimensions of the Situational Leadership Theory Model. Adapted by Mindy Englett from *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources* by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (1988). Concepts*
According to Hersey et al. (1996), a leader is somebody who can influence the transformation or performance of others. According to Hersey and Blanchard (1988), a worker's willingness to learn is determined by whether the worker is a leader or a follower. As shown in Figure 1, their approach is based on the connections employees have built with leaders in four quadrants: low relationship, high task; high relationship, high task; high relationship, low task; and low relationship, low task. Individuals who are task-oriented prefer to concentrate on the work or job at hand, while those who are relationship-oriented tend to focus on how their actions influence the well-being of those with whom they are oriented (Hersey et al., 1996). This suggests that within instructional coaching, the same approach to coaching may not work with different teachers.

Based on task-oriented leader conduct, relationship-oriented leader behavior, and preparedness, situational leadership theory reveals a curvilinear connection (Hersey et al., 2004). When a leader judges that one of the workers in a workgroup has moved to a new level of skill while another has not, Hersey et al. (2004) hypothesized that the leader might adopt distinct leadership approaches to apply to the two individuals. This would imply that the instructional coach would notice the adjustments the teacher is making and where they are on the task-behavior continuum and will adjust their relationship behavior depending on the instructor's actions. Hersey and Blanchard were interested in how various leadership styles affected the growth of followers (Hersey et al., 1996). The instructional coach might give clear structure, teaching, and tight monitoring to instructors with poor readiness traits. The coach might adopt a relationship-oriented leadership style with instructors who are timid or hesitant. This instructional coaching approach emphasizes good group interaction and assists the instructor in building stronger interpersonal ties with his or her students or other teachers. Organizational
efficiency is attained when leadership style and preparedness levels are compatible (Hersey et al., 2004).

Task behavior and relationship behavior (Hersey et al., 2004) are notions that are comparable to the initial structure and consideration described in the Ohio State University Studies. Individuals who are task-oriented prefer to concentrate on the work or job at hand, while those who are relationship-oriented tend to focus on how their actions influence the well-being of those with whom they are oriented (Hersey et al., 1996). This implies that a task-oriented teacher would do well with explicit goals while relationship-oriented teachers should see the effect of their work on others. Telling, selling, participating, and delegating are the four leadership approaches (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). People's ability and desire to complete a task are measured by their readiness levels. Hersey et al. (2004) describe these four levels of accountability as (a) unable and reluctant to accept responsibility, (b) unable but willing to accept responsibility, (c) able but unwilling to accept responsibility, and (d) able and willing to accept responsibility. Knowing these levels will assist the instructional coach in determining which leadership style to use with specific instructors. As figure 1 suggests, a teacher who is at R1 would be unprepared to do the job, but also not psychologically prepared to do what it takes to change within the job; R2 teachers are those who show a low level of job preparation but a high level of psychological preparedness; R3 teachers are prepared and ready to do the job but they have a low level of psychological preparedness; while R4 teachers are prepared and they show a high level of psychological preparedness for the job (Hersey et al., 2004). The instructional coach needs to be aware of the teacher’s relationship and task behavior levels to ensure they are adjusting their leadership style to best fit the needs of the teacher.
Model

For this study, the four dimensions will be used to examine the relationships between the instructional coach or mentor, and the teacher receiving the coaching. The dimensions will be used as defined below:

5. **Telling (Low relationship, high task):** "This leadership style is characterized by above-average amounts of task behavior and below-average amounts of relationship behavior" (Hersey et al., 1996, p.191). Within this dimension, the instructional coach would be telling the teacher exactly what to do with detailed instructions and close supervision with a focus on getting the work done (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Within this cell the teacher would be unwilling and unable to complete the task on their own and would have a low readiness to learn (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

6. **Selling (High relationship, high task):** “This leadership style is characterized by above-average amounts of both task and relationship behavior” (Hersey et al., 1996, p.192). This cell would represent the instructional coach who spends time explaining the reasons behind their suggestions and allows the teacher to ask for clarification of new ideas and decisions (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). This cell represents the teacher who is willing but unable to complete the task without guidance (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

7. **Participating (High relationship, low task):** "This style is characterized by above-average amounts of relationship behavior and below-average amounts of task behavior" (Hersey et al., 1996, p. 1992). Instructional coaches who fall within this cell would mutually share ideas and make decisions with teachers who are unwilling but able to complete the task instead of delegating the ideas and decisions (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).
8. **Delegating (Low relationship, low task):** “This style is characterized by below-average amounts of both relationship behavior and task behavior” (Hersey et al., 1996, p. 192). This is the step in the process where the Instructional Coach would turn the process over to the teacher; within this step, the teacher is willing and able to complete the task (Marion & Gonzales, 2014)

The Situational Leadership Theory model gives instructional coaches the capacity to analyze teacher behavior and choose the most successful leadership style by giving them a mix of four distinct readiness levels and four fundamental leadership style behaviors (Hersey et al., 2004). Hersey et al. (2004) gave the following descriptions of the four types of leadership behavior:

1. **This leadership style is defined by higher-than-average task activity and lower-than-average relationship behavior.** The instructional coach in this technique would understand that the teacher is not ready to learn or accomplish the assignment, thus the instructional coach would have to tell the teacher what to do first before they could build a relationship. Once trust had been established and the instructor could see that the tasks the coach was assigning were useful, the relationship would be developed.

2. **Above-average quantities of tasks and relational activity define this leadership style.** Within this leadership style, the instructional coach explains explicitly the task at hand as the teacher wants to learn but still needs guidance toward the end goal.

3. **Above-average quantities of connection activity and below-average amounts of task behavior describe this leadership style.** This leadership style would have instructional coaches and teachers collaborating on activities and sharing ideas. The teacher may struggle with the task but is willing and open to sharing ideas because of the high
relationship between the teacher and instructional coach.

4. This leadership style is characterized by lower-than-average levels of task and relational conduct. Within this style, the teachers are now leading and completing tasks with little to no input from the instructional coach.

Follower preparedness has an impact on the two most important parts of leadership—task and relationship—when it comes to leader effectiveness (Blank et al., 1990). In this aspect, the follower would be the teacher with the instructional coach being the leader. Hersey et al. (2004) explain readiness as the degree to which a follower has the capacity and desire to do a certain duty. Nadler & Tushman (1990) would suggest when developing tasks, instructional coaches must be able to assess each teacher's preparedness level and assign duties in a way that benefits the learner and the teacher.

The abilities required to create objectives, implement standards, designate positions, and assign tasks and responsibilities are referred to as readiness skills in Situational Leadership Theory. These abilities include structuring abilities, which are necessary for successful leadership (Hersey et al., 2001). Hersey et al. (2001) explained that there are four degrees on the follower ready continuum, each expressing a unique mix of follower ability, willingness, and confidence. Those are:

1. (R1): Unable and unwilling. This is a situation where the teacher is not able or is incapable and is also unmotivated or insecure (Hersey et al., 2001).
2. (R2): Willing but unable. Although the teacher lacks aptitude, he or she is motivated and willing to put in an attempt (Hersey et al., 2001).
3. (R3): Unwilling but able. The teacher can do the work, but he or she is unwilling to utilize it. The teacher could also be capable of doing the duty but is unsure or fearful of
doing it alone (Hersey et al., 2001).

4. (R4): Willing and able. The teacher is capable of doing the work and is confident in doing so (Hersey et al., 2001).

Hersey et al. (2001) also discussed two supporting diminutions as it relates to the follower and the leader. Ability refers to a person's work knowledge, procedures, and abilities that are required for the task at hand while willingness has to do with a person's willingness to take on responsibilities and their desire to succeed (Hersey et al., 2001). The self-esteem and self-confidence a person inhibits also influence ability and willingness (Hersey et al., 2001).

Table 1 depicts the four degrees of preparation that correlate to the four different situational leadership styles that followers demand (Hersey et al., 2001).

**As the Theory Relates to Instructional Coaching**

Teachers can go forward and backward along the task behavior developmental continuum, according to the situational perspective. The teachers’ relative competency and dedication are represented by this continuum. Instructional coaches will need to determine where teachers are on the readiness continuum and change leadership approaches within the relationship behavior so that they directly match the teachers’ development level; this understanding is critical for coaches to be successful (Hersey et al., 2004).

Table 1: *Leadership or coaching styles appropriate for readiness levels*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readiness Level</th>
<th>Leadership or Instructional Coaching Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>R1</strong>&lt;br&gt;Low readiness&lt;br&gt;Unable and unwilling; unmotivated or insecure</td>
<td><strong>S1</strong>&lt;br&gt;Telling-High task; low relationship&lt;br&gt;The instructional coach is telling the teacher exactly what to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R2</strong>&lt;br&gt;Low to moderate readiness&lt;br&gt;Willing but unable; lacks aptitude but is motivated</td>
<td><strong>S2</strong>&lt;br&gt;Selling-High task; high relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
R3
Moderate to high readiness
Unwilling but capable; capable of the task but is unwilling or unsure

S3
Participating-Low task; high relationship
Instructional coaches and teachers mutually share ideas and make decisions.

R4
High readiness
Willing and able; capable and confident

S4
Delegating
The instructional coach turns the process over to the teacher; the teacher is willing and able to complete the task

Instructional coaches will answer questions around the current needs of the teacher when determining the kind of task, complexity, and teacher’s skill level to finish the task after identifying the nature of the problem. R1-level teachers, for example, are many times teachers new to the profession who may be ecstatic but have not fully grasped the job responsibilities (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). At the R-4 level, you'd find seasoned teachers that have shown talents and loyalty to the profession (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). However, this is not always true and the leader, or instructional coach, will need to determine the teacher’s readiness level to determine where their leadership level should be applied (citation needed).

The instructional coach’s second responsibility is to match his or her leadership style to the situational model's suggested leadership style (Hersey et al., 2004). The model depicts a one-to-one correspondence between subordinate, or teacher, readiness (R1, R2, R3, and R4), and the leadership style (S1, S2, S3, S4). If the teacher is at the R1 level of readiness, for example, the...
leader should use the S1 leadership style, which is high task and low relationship (Hersey et al., 2001).

**Situational Leadership Theory and Instructional Coaching**

The relationship between a leader's actions and the preparedness of his or her followers is used to assess a leader's performance. Cairns et al. (1998) found strong relationships among the independent variables in an Situational Leadership Theory research. The Fortune 100 firms' top executives and their followers were among the participants in the Cairns et al. (1998) research. The Carnes et al. (1998) found “the results of the present study indicated that over 80 per cent of the respondents were at the moderate or high readiness level” (p. 4). While the partitioned tests demonstrated a statistical difference at the high level of preparedness, the mean differences were in the same direction of Situational Leadership Theory at the low level, in contrast to the opposite direction at the high level of Situational Leadership Theory (Cairns et al., 1998). While the Cairnes et al. (1998) research did not explicitly support Situational Leadership Theory, the study provided some insights about Situational Leadership Theory variable relationships.

Not all research has indicated favorable responses to Situational Leadership Theory. Hambleton and Gumpert (1982) surveyed 159 leaders to see how their subordinates perceived their leadership styles (followers). According to the findings, 90% of high-performing leaders use a selling or engaging leadership style, according to their subordinates. The findings backed up the Situational Leadership Theory proposed by Hersey et al. (2001) by indicating that, when used appropriately, the model improves work performance (Hambleton & Gumpert, 1982). The research found that 29 percent of the time, the findings of the leadership style and follower preparedness levels coincided (Hambleton & Gumpert, 1982).
While the findings of Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory were encouraging, Hambleton and Gumpert (1982) concluded that "little is yet understood about the needs of successful leadership" (p. 238). Due to the study's results, Hambleton and Gumpert (1982) recommended further research. Graeff (1983) stated that the Hersey and Blanchard (1988) LEAD survey tool for assessing leadership style, range, and effectiveness sometimes contradicted itself, reducing its predictability as a quality instrument by 55 percent. Because the model isn't very useful, Graeff (1983) suggests that additional study into leadership style should be done using a more trustworthy diagnostic tool.

According to McClesky (2014), Situational Leadership Theory has three major flaws: dependability, consistency, and conventionalism. Even though no one leadership style has been established as the best in all circumstances, Situational Leadership Theory was supposed to depend on exquisite leadership styles that were nevertheless difficult to define and describe (McClesky, 2014). A study of air traffic control staff used Situational Leadership Theory as an example (McClesky, 2014). Participants were asked about their talents, decision-making ability, management structure, and past leadership experience to analyze the many sorts of leadership styles that were deployed across several settings (McClesky, 2014).

It was discovered that there is a link between leadership efficiency and stress, as well as between stress and performance, based on the reactions of the participants (McClesky, 2014). Another portion of the research questioned participants to assess the characteristics of a successful leader in a small group of organizations. The research discovered that leadership requires attributes that are commonly seen as good, such as decision-making abilities and task orientation, as well as consistency (McClesky, 2014).
Vecchio (1987) found limited acceptance for Situational Leadership Theory in a study of 14 high school administrators (leaders) and 303 high school teachers (followers). The research found support around poor follower preparedness, which required a lot of job guidance from the leader. Followers with greater degrees of preparedness also reacted well to moderate levels of task guidance and larger quantities of thought, according to the findings (Vecchio, 1987). Researchers should look at Situational Leadership Theory from a wider viewpoint, according to Vecchio (1987) since high levels of follower preparedness may eliminate the need for monitoring.

According to Shriver (2017), Situational Leadership Theory has several favorable characteristics as listed: a) the Situational Leadership Theory model can be used at any level of power in an organization; b) it creates a universal understanding of performance in an organization; c) it helps to accelerate and improve employee development; d) it is a process that leaders can repeat and use consistently to influence the behaviors of followers; e) it recognizes the need to successfully complete tasks by providing a framework for leaders to boost the performance of their followers (Shriver, 2017). Shriver (2017) believes the significance of Situational Leadership Theory is due to its applicability across generations and stages of experience for both the leader and the follower, notably in the corporate world.

Situational Leadership Theory is applicable across an employee's complete professional lifetime, from new hire status through mastery level job execution (Shriver, 2017). As a result, after just a few contacts with a follower, the leader is unable to have a substantial influence. To meet a follower's leadership demands and offer appropriate solutions to their queries, a leader must engage in regular contact and engagement with a follower – or employee – using Situational Leadership Theory (Shriver, 2017). The formation of a connection between the
employer and the employee in the workplace is aided by this regular communication between leader and follower (Shriver, 2017).

Situational Leadership Theory is a well-suited lens for this research because it provides an in-depth look at not just the behavior of the teacher, but that of the coach as well. It will consider where the teacher is on the readiness, or task scale and where the instructional coach is on the leadership, or relationship scale. Situational Leadership Theory will provide the framework that allows for a better understanding of both the ability level of the teacher and if the instructional coach is developing relationships and task development that meets the level of the teacher. Shriver (2017) describes the regular contact that must occur between leader and follower. This also explains the contact that is in place between instructional coach and teacher further supporting the use of Situational Leadership Theory for this research.

**Summary**

The Situational Leadership Theory and an in-depth examination of instructional coaching literature were presented in Chapter II. The history and backdrop of instructional coaching, as well as the many components of instructional coaching, were discussed first. Second, the role of relationship-building between coach and teacher was examined to determine how successful coaching and teaching may be. Finally, a comparison between Situational Leadership Theory and instructional coaching was made. The recommended techniques and processes for conducting this investigation are outlined in the next chapter, Chapter III.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As innovators of change, instructional coaches may develop relationships with the teachers with whom they work (Woulfin & Jones, 2018, Kise, 2006, Knight, 2007, 20011). Therefore, to maintain the relationship, there is a need to understand each teacher's development, meet them at that understanding, and guide them toward possible common goals (Kise, 2006). The interaction between the instructional coach and teacher could be examined more closely using the Situational Leadership Theory lens, with the coach acting as the model's leader.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore, through the lens of Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), how successful instructional coaches alter their practices based on the developmental needs of the teacher and the teachers’ motivation for change.

Research Questions

1. How do successful instructional coaches alter their practices to support teacher success based on the teachers’ needs/developmental level?

2. How do successful instructional coaches alter their practices to support teacher success based on teacher motivation for improvement?

3. What are teacher perspectives of the role that successful instructional coaches have had on their growth and development?

4. What are administrator perspectives of the role successful instructional coaches have had
on teacher growth and development?

5. How does Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988) explain these findings?

**Research Design**

The design for this study was a qualitative case study following Merriam and Tisdale (2016) as the methodologists. Qualitative research allows the researcher to construct meaning and understanding from individual interpretations of events (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The case for this study is one rural district in the Midwest and the instructional coaches within that district. One district was chosen because of the lack of instructional coaching resources and coaches available for rural districts and the low percentage of teachers within these districts who utilize or have access to instructional coaches. In the district selected for this study, instructional coaches were introduced in 2018, just four years before this study. Instructional coaching in smaller rural districts in Oklahoma can be somewhat rare because of limitations in funding, leaving smaller districts without the ability to support the salaries of instructional coaches. This small district, however, has prioritized instructional coaching and has found a way to support this practice in their budget, suggesting that the enhancement of teaching and learning through instructional coaching is a priority in this district. Patton (2002) suggested using interviews, observation, and written documents to support qualitative research, and each of these data sources will be used to support this case study. The lens of Situational Leadership theory will be utilized to explain instructional coach leadership behaviors as they respond to the teachers' needs (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

This study applied a constructivist epistemological perspective. The constructivist viewpoint allowed me to explore the viewpoint of the participants. Crotty (1998) explained the
constructivist viewpoint as a means to enable people to construct their personal meanings around a subject matter based on experiences. Therefore, if the experiences are different between teachers and instructional coaches, this would not mean that one person was right or another wrong, only that they developed a different understanding through their interactions.

This research focuses on interactions between people, specifically instructional coaches, teachers, and administrators. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated, “…constructivist researchers often address the process of interaction among individuals” (p. 8). These interactions allowed me to use the understandings and viewpoints of participants to make meaning of the interactions and use it within a research component (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) used the term interpretivism to explain constructivism, stating, “The experience a person has includes the way in which the experience is interpreted” (p.9). Using constructivism, this research took the participants' interactions and made meaning of them through interviews and observations.

Case

This case study focused on four school sites, two elementary schools, and two secondary schools in one rural district in the Midwest that utilizes instructional coaching to support teacher development. The district selected was deemed to be rural using the Locale Lookup tool from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2021). Due to the smaller number of students, schools in rural areas will likely have less funding available to cover the costs of instructional coaches' tools and compensation. Choosing four schools from the same district instead of multiple districts also minimized contextual differences that could influence the study's findings. Four sites were selected to align teachers with the instructional coaches within the study. The two instructional coaches worked at two separate sites, each within the district, with one coach
focusing on the elementary sites and the other on the secondary sites.

**Participant Selection**

The sampling method used in this study was purposeful sampling. This method allowed me to choose candidates that matched the criteria of having two instructional coaches, one elementary and one secondary, who were deemed by administrators as successful, and six teachers who had to utilize an instructional coach within the last two years and also currently met with the instructional coach. The criteria for the administrators were simply one elementary and one secondary administrator. Using purposeful selection provides a robust context for exploring interpersonal relationships and leadership skills utilized by instructional coaches. Using the blank screening materials document (Appendix D), the researcher met with administrators to gather information when selecting the instructional coaches and teachers. The administrators were asked to answer basic questions about the teachers and then rate them from one to five, with one being unwilling to learn to five being willing and able to learn. Then, purposeful sampling was utilized to ensure a variety of participants was selected that may fall into multiple categories of Situational Leadership Theory and have various backgrounds. Teachers with varying years of experience were chosen to get a multitude of backgrounds. There were also traditional and alternative certified teachers. Half of the teachers, coaches, and administrators were from the elementary level, and the remaining half were from the secondary level. There were also differing notations made by administrators on the willingness to learn.

Participants were six teachers who have utilized an instructional coach within the past two years, two instructional coaches who work with these teachers and are deemed to be successful, and one administrator from elementary and one from secondary. First, I emailed the district superintendent who was permitted by the Board of Education to allow me to conduct
research. I also inquired about campuses that utilized the instructional coaching process. The superintendent then put me in contact with five administrators. These emails led to only two administrators responding. The study called for one administrator from elementary and one from secondary. Therefore, I was able to recruit these participants after three email attempts. An administrator from one elementary site and one from a secondary site were then invited to participate. Administrator perspectives were included for the triangulation of data.

After the administrators were selected and consent forms were on file, we met and discussed teacher and instructional coach participants. I created a participant selection form (Appendix D) to organize the selection process with the teachers and instructional coaches. I shared the participant selection form (Appendix D) with the administrators. They were told and shown the following definition of a successful instructional coach:

Successful instructional coaches can look different in different situations. However, many researchers agree that a successful instructional coach should have also been a successful teacher (as shown in evaluations and referrals), be able to develop and maintain relationships among peers including teachers and administrators, have a growth mindset and knowledge of developing that mindset, be visionary and work toward the vision statement and goals of the district, trustworthy, and being knowledgeable of the relationships built and can adapt to the needs of individual teachers (Balka et al., 2010) (Devine et al., 2013) (Knight, 2011).

The district shared that they currently only have two instructional coaches on staff, and one coach works with elementary school sites while the other works with secondary school sites. According to building principals, both instructional coaches meet the definition of being successful. Therefore, the elementary and secondary instructional coaches were selected for this
research study. Both coaches agreed to be participants. After the instructional coaches signed consent forms, the instructional coaches, administrators, and I discussed the teacher participants. The instructional coaches were included in this conversation to be sure only teachers who utilized an instructional coach within the last two years would be potential candidates for participating in this study.

The principals and coaches were again given a copy of the participant selection form (Appendix D). On the participant selection form, the administrators and coaches rated each possible teacher participant from 1-5 on willingness to learn. In Appendix D, the question was, “On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being unwilling and unable to 5 being willing and able where would you rate their willingness to learn?” This step directly correlates to the theoretical framework of Situational Leadership Theory as it gave me a small picture of the task behavior of each teacher as seen by the administration and instructional coaches.

A total of twelve teacher participants were identified as possible candidates for participation after the participant selection form was complete. I contacted all potential participants via email and asked if they were willing to participate in this study. From that email, ten teachers responded stating they would be participants. After this, I selected the participants based on the study's criteria that the teacher must have worked with an instructional coach in the last two years and were currently working with an instructional coach. I also used the data of the years they had taught and their willingness to learn. Data were gathered during the participant selection to ensure a diverse population of teachers was represented. Selecting three teachers who work with each instructional coach also met the requirement of having three elementary and three secondary teachers since one coach focuses on elementary and the other on secondary.
Table 2: Administration Initial Perspectives on Teacher Willingness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Administrator Perspectives Willingness to Learn Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Interviews

Once participants were in place, I began interviewing participants utilizing the Zoom application. A key research component is interviewing since it enables the presenter to show the research from the participant's viewpoint (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Each interview used the same semi-structured interview protocol. Still, the questions varied depending on the interviewee—administrator, instructional coach, or teacher—while the questioning style or follow-up questions were determined by the participant's responses and the interview's advancement. The interview questions can be found in Appendices A, B, & C. The interviews were completed through online meetings using videoconferencing software. Each person interviewed was asked the same questions designed to strengthen the research. However, there were also instances where probing questions were asked to gain more insight (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each interview was transcribed using Temi online software, and then I listened to the interview and edited the transcriptions from Temi to ensure accuracy. Editing transcriptions...
allowed me to add all words and phrases, including fillers such as “um” and “hm.” Also included in the interview process were field notes to record body language, eye movement, and laughter. These notes added depth to the interviews by recording attitudes or actions that may not have been discerned in interview transcripts. In addition, each candidate was asked if the interview could be recorded and if they would allow me to contact them in the future to follow up or ask further questions.

**Observations**

Observations were completed to triangulate data used from interviews and artifact collection. Observations allow themes to be further established and add to the study's validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Observations included six teacher meetings held in the teacher’s classroom with their instructional coach. Merriam (1998) suggests that observations represent a firsthand interaction with the phenomena of interest. Therefore, observational data were collected to provide information that has not been filtered via the perspectives of participants.

The preferred method of observation was in person. The Zoom application was utilized in two situations when scheduling issues did not allow for in-person observations. The observations included one meeting between each teacher and their instructional coach. Also, an unintended result of the timing for observations was it allowed me to spend half of a school day with each instructional coach, which was more time than initially allotted and allowed more insight for the research.

Four of the six observations were completed in person. For these observations, I took detailed field notes. I also took photographs of the meeting as it was happening to capture the body language of the instructional coaches and the teacher. I also took pictures of some of the details of the field notes to have something that allowed me to describe further what was seen.
through words. Data were recorded using detailed notes and recordings from Zoom for the two observations completed via Zoom. Even though two of the observations were conducted via the Zoom platform, the researcher met each participant in person at the time of other in person observations in the school.

The strength of observing participants within their classrooms was viewing the participants in a natural setting. This allowed participants to converse without interruption. The weakness of the observation was my presence, creating changes in behavior or interactions. A disadvantage of using Zoom technology was it did not allow as much for a personal connection. The observations provided specific incidents and context to tie back to the interviews and artifacts collected (Merriam, 1998).

**Artifact Collection**

Collecting artifacts from the instructional coach, such as observation notes and documents they share with the teacher, was used for triangulation. During the observation process, I asked the instructional coaches and teachers to provide access to the methods by which they track interactions with each other. Examples of artifacts collected were: coaching observation protocol, coaching documentation, pictures of the classroom, and pictures of coaching sessions. Again, the data from artifacts were coded and placed into themes as the interviews and observations were.

**Coding Data**

The constant comparative method of data analysis was used in this study, as described by Merriam (1998). Merriam (1998) described this method as a constant collection of data and reflection and analysis of the data that happens simultaneously. As part of this constant comparative data analysis process, key phrases and essential points from the transcriptions,
observations, and artifacts were written on notecards. For field notes, transcripts, observational
data, and data collected from artifacts, initially open coding was utilized (Merrian & Tisdale,
2016). Following open coding, I began sorting codes into categories. Axial coding was then used
to group the categories into themes. For example, one overarching theme was teacher readiness.
When initial grouping occurred, the categories were teacher background and teacher traits. These
themes were considered sufficient if they met the purpose of the research (Merriam, 1998).
Saldana (2009) describes axial coding as the transition between the initial and final coding
processes. Creating categories is mostly an intuitive process, but it is also methodical and guided
by the study's objective, the researcher's background and expertise, and the meanings made clear
by the participants themselves (Merriam, 1998). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advise labeling
these topics, putting the data into categories, and searching for and discovering patterns in the
data. Using the constant comparative method allowed the organization of the data. This method
also allowed for the triangulation of the data and a comparison among all data sources (Merrian,
1998). Additional detailed information about data analysis is provided in Chapter 4.

Researcher Role

Researcher Bias

My career in education began as a special education paraprofessional in a rural school
setting. I worked on this career path for six years as I completed my bachelor’s degree in Early
Childhood Education. I continued my career at a neighboring rural school before returning to
teach at the school where I began my career for one year. I am now the superintendent of that
same rural school. My background is heavy within the rural school setting. I chose a rural setting
to conduct research because of my experience, this could be seen as a bias within the study. I
understand the many roles rural educators take on. This understanding was used to guide my research further.

Before my superintendency, I was an instructional coach for one year and was the manager and director of a grant for mentoring and coaching for two years. Therefore, I am aware of the instructional coaching process and practices that I feel are supposed to be happening. It remained of the utmost importance that I remained cognizant of these biases and kept them at the forefront of my mind throughout the research process.

Strategies for Influence (2022) lists several quotes by Ken Blanchard, with one being, “People don’t mind being challenged to do better if they know the request is coming from a caring heart.” I first saw this quote several years ago during a professional development when I was an instructional coach. I wrote it down and kept it in a notebook. This quote guided my practice as an instructional coach and still does now as a superintendent. When I began researching Situational Leadership Theory and Ken Blanchard, this quote again came up. Furthermore, this supports the importance of remaining cognizant of my bias throughout this research because the research is so close to my heart.

**Ethical Considerations**

The Human Subjects Protection Program at Oklahoma State University (OSU) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) establish all study protocols, which will be strictly adhered to. I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative training (CITI). The study was submitted to the IRB after receiving permission from the dissertation committee. Before the data-gathering procedure, participants were advised of their confidentiality and privacy rights. Participants were also given instructions on withdrawing from the research if necessary. Consent papers were produced for the school district and each participant to safeguard their
confidentiality rights. First-name pseudonyms were generated and utilized for each participant to safeguard participants' identities before and after the research. Formal permission was also sought from the rural district in which the study took place.

**Trustworthiness of Findings**

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the four criteria Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed for determining trustworthiness in qualitative investigations. And objectivity was the trustworthiness of research, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985).

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), validation in qualitative research entails determining the accuracy of the findings as best represented by the researcher, participants, and readers. Furthermore, the naturalists' equivalent of internal validation, external validation, dependability, and objectivity was the trustworthiness of research, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985).

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), validation in qualitative research entails determining the accuracy of the findings as best represented by the researcher, participants, and readers. This indicates that any research report represents the author's representation.

Table 3: *Trustworthiness of Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credibility</th>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prolonged engagement</td>
<td>Developed rapport</td>
<td>Sent personal messages to interviewees prior to interview, conducted small talk before and after interview, paid for their meal, and used open body language and tone to encourage conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Built trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Built relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persistent Observation</td>
<td>Obtained in-depth data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Obtained accurate data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sorted relevancies from irrelevancies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recognize decepts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reflection, personal communication, and recognize bias

Multiple sources of data: interviews, observations, reflections, documented artifacts

Informal discussions with peers through text, e-mail, and face to face

Selected candidates from schools who had received instructional coaching, schools were selected based on ruralness and on access to instructional coaching, and candidates were teachers with classrooms at schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Data verified</td>
<td>Multiple sources of data: interviews, observations, reflections, documented artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer debriefing</td>
<td>An additional perspective and guidance from a trusted source</td>
<td>Informal discussions with peers through text, e-mail, and face to face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposive sampling</td>
<td>Selected school sites and candidates based on meeting rural definition, and instructional coaching</td>
<td>Selected candidates from schools who had received instructional coaching, schools were selected based on ruralness and on access to instructional coaching, and candidates were teachers with classrooms at schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Transferability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thick description</td>
<td>Provided data base for transfer ability judgment</td>
<td>Provided relevant data from interviews and observations, and history supports use of instructional coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provided a vicarious experience for the reader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dependability/Conformability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to audit trail</td>
<td>Allow auditor to determine trustworthiness of study</td>
<td>Following documents ready: transcripts of the interviews, interview notes, data note cards, observation notes, communications, and artifacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Credibility**

As advised by Erlandson et al. (1993), I used the strategies of prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and purposive sampling to ensure the credibility of this research. Prolonged engagement enabled me to form connections with people
taking part in the study, making them more comfortable with me and allowing for a more accurate research outcome. Persistent observation allowed me to look at the big picture, see inconsistencies, and sort out any misinformation. Triangulation was used to sort through multiple data sources such as observations, interviews, documented reflections, and artifacts. The researcher observed instructional coaching sessions during which the coach and teacher interacted. Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators were interviewed to get their perspectives on the instructional coaching process. In addition, instructional coaching artifacts and documentation, such as coaching notes and debriefing sessions, were gathered. After each piece of data was obtained, I reflected, and those reflection pieces were also included in the triangulation process. Other instructional coaches and members of the researcher's cohort at Oklahoma State University were used to perform peer debriefing. These debriefing meetings provided the researcher with a fresh viewpoint and increased the credibility of the research. Using purposive sampling, I could select only participants who had utilized an instructional coach within the last two years, the coaches who were coaching the teacher participants, and the district administrators. Purposive sampling also enabled me to choose schools within a rural area, narrowing the scope of the study to a smaller number of people.

**Transferability**

In qualitative research, the researcher strives towards transferability, which aids someone thinking about transferring the data in determining whether transferability is feasible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). For this research, a “thick description” was used. Creswell & Creswell (2018) describe a thick description as a means to “…transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences” (p. 200). Furthermore, according to Creswell & Creswell (2018), including a thick description in research adds to the validity of the findings by
providing different viewpoints that allow for richer and more realistic outcomes. The thick description can be found in Chapter IV of this research.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

The possibility of a study's results being duplicated is called dependability, whereas the likelihood that another researcher has a similar interpretation of findings is referred to as confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is recommended to have auditors have access to research records to determine the trustworthiness of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I will make all transcripts of the interviews, interview notes, data note cards, observation notes, communications, and artifacts available to auditors to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings is achieved.

**Summary**

Chapter three explains the methodology for this qualitative case study in detail. Details concerning the study population, sample, data collection, and data analysis are provided. The issue of researcher bias was discussed, along with my experience in education, instructional coaching, and the rural school context. The research's trustworthiness was established explicitly, with concrete instances of how the results are legitimate and reliable.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study is to explore, through the lens of Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), how successful instructional coaches alter their practices based on the developmental needs of the teacher and the teachers’ motivation for change. The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. How do successful instructional coaches alter their practices to support teacher success based on the teachers’ needs/developmental level?
2. How do successful instructional coaches alter their practices to support teacher success based on teacher motivation for improvement?
3. What are teacher perspectives of the role that successful instructional coaches have had on their growth and development?
4. What are administrator perspectives of the role successful instructional coaches have had on teacher growth and development?
5. How does Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988) explain these findings?

The purpose of Chapter Four is to provide the themes that arose from data analysis, and those themes will be used to answer each research question in Chapter Five. This chapter begins with a thick description of the case, including its setting, demographics, and history. To provide context, the chapter begins with a description of the district that served as the case for this study.
before moving to a thorough discussion of the school. Then, a profile of each interview participant is provided so that readers may better comprehend the distinctive individuals included in the sample. To maintain participant confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for both the participants and the school district. The themes that emerged from data analysis follow the Presentation of Data.

**Presentation of the Data**

Information about the setting of this study is provided in this section. First, the school district and sites are described, followed by a description of the instructional coaching program and its evolution within this district, and finally, a description of each participant is provided.

**District Overview**

Red River Public School is a rural district in Oklahoma. This district is classified as rural by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2021). According to the district website, an estimated 1,500 students are served in this school district. Red River is known as a significant trading hub for crude oil. The job market in Red River is focused heavily on oil production. This community also houses a correctional facility. As is the nature of prison communities, Red River administration reported that many families move in and out of the community based on the movement of inmates.

Red River school district houses an early childhood site, two elementary sites, one middle school site, and one high school site. Proficiency statistics from state standardized exams were available on the district website for each location. These assessments are often administered during the spring semester. The state examinations are administered to students in grades three through eight, while the ACT assessment is utilized to gather data for students in ninth grade and beyond. At the time of this study, the district had 30% of students scoring at or above proficiency
in reading and 39% of students at or above proficiency in mathematics (District Website, 2022). A contributing factor to these test scores could be that poverty levels in Red River are more than 50%. It is widely acknowledged that to educate students effectively, it is imperative to ensure that their fundamental needs are adequately addressed. According to Oklahoma State Department of Education (2023), 33% of students in Red River are classified as economically disadvantaged, but district administration reports that this reporting may not be accurate due to the free lunch program that was happening due to COVID. Administration reports that having this free lunch program caused fewer students to return documentation with household income. Niche (2022) reported 60% of students in Red River as being economically disadvantaged.

Red River District boasts a low student-to-teacher ratio. Using data from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (2023), the overall student-to-teacher ratio is 13:1. Red River also has lower numbers of inexperienced teachers within the district with only 5%, or about six of the one hundred sixteen teachers within the district, in their first or second year of teaching, according to the administrators and instructional coaches within the district (Personal Interview, 2022). Every first-year teacher is assigned an instructional coach.

**School Sites**

**Early Childhood.** The early childhood building in Red River has an enrollment of 80 pre-kindergarten students (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2023). According to the school website (District Website, 2022), the school contains six classrooms and teachers. Proficiency ratings are not available for this school site because students in early childhood are not required to take state assessments. No teachers at this site were selected as participants.

**Lower Elementary.** Red River has one lower elementary building in the district. According to the Oklahoma State Department of Education (2023), this elementary houses about
258 students. Information from the district website (2022) indicates that this building houses kindergarten through first grade. Oklahoma State Department of Education (2023) shows that 39.83% of these students are economically disadvantaged. According to district administration, there are thirteen self-contained classrooms from kindergarten to first grade and one special education teacher, one PE teacher, and one reading specialist for a total of sixteen teachers in the building (Personal Interview, 2022). One teacher is a first-year teacher with an instructional coach, and the other is a veteran who utilizes an instructional coach. Both were chosen as participants. These participants were chosen because they have used an instructional coach within the last two years, and they are currently utilizing an instructional coach.

**Upper Elementary.** The upper elementary school in Red River houses approximately 340 students from second through fourth grades (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2023). Oklahoma State Department of Education (2023) shows that 39.91% of these students are economically disadvantaged. Of the third and fourth-grade students, 40.8% of the third and fourth-grade students are proficient in reading, and 63.4% of the third and fourth-grade students are proficient in math at this site (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2023). Building administration indicated that there are sixteen self-contained classroom teachers, one math specialist, two reading specialists, one PE teacher, one music teacher, and two special education teachers, for a total of twenty-three building teachers at this site (Personal Interview, 2022). One first-year second-grade teacher was selected from this building for this study. This teacher met the criteria of utilization of an instructional coach within the last two years and currently meeting with an instructional coach.

**Middle School.** The middle school in Red River enrolls approximately 420 students from fifth to eighth grade (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2023). Oklahoma State
Department of Education (2023) shows that 42.8% of these students were proficient in reading, and 48.7% were proficient in math. There are 40.92% of students who are identified as economically disadvantaged at this site (Oklahoma State Department of Education). The district administration indicated that the school employs thirty-four subject area teachers, two counselors, one reading specialist, and three special education teachers within this building (Personal Interview, 2022). Two teachers utilize instructional coaches. These participants met the criteria of utilizing an instructional coach within the last two years and currently utilize an instructional coach.

**High School.** The high school in Red River enrolls approximately 470 students, from freshmen to seniors (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2023). The district has a typical graduation rate of greater than 95% (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2023). Oklahoma State Department of Education (2023) describes that 36% of students are proficient in reading and 24% in math in this building. 27.05% of students at this site are considered economically disadvantaged (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2023). According to building-level administration, this building employs thirty-six subject area teachers, three special education teachers, and two counselors (Personal Interview, 2022). One teacher participant from this site met the criteria of using an instructional coach within the last two years and currently using an instructional coach.

**Instructional Coaching Program**

Administrators reported that Red River began using instructional coaches in 2018 (Personal Interview, 2022). For the three years prior to this study, Red River contracted with an organization to come into the district and provide instructional coaching. The goal of this contractual relationship was to begin training teachers to serve as instructional coaches from
within the district so that the district could provide instructional coaching in the future. In the year of this study, the district initiated the practice of employing instructional coaches from within the district for the first time. The instructional coaches also serve as Red River’s curriculum directors. This combination of roles enables the instructional coaches to oversee the implementation of the district’s curriculum and provides the district with a firsthand account of practices in the classroom that are working or not working.

While the outside instructional coaching organization no longer provides direct instructional coaching for teachers at Red River School District, the district continues to contract with this organization to provide support and professional development for the instructional coaches, training for administration, and to act as mentors for instructional coaches. This training for administrators, coaches, and teachers takes place for 2-3 days prior to school starting. Following the initial professional development, these groups convene on a quarterly basis for the academic year to engage in further professional development activities.

Every teacher is assigned an instructional coach during their first year working for the district. In addition, any teacher requesting an instructional coach is allowed to work collaboratively with a coach even if they have more experience in the classroom. This collaboration with new and veteran teachers allows the instructional coaches to understand classroom needs more fully. It also allows the instructional coaches to oversee the curriculum being put into practice and gain a better understanding regarding how various instructors achieve classroom and district goals.

**Instructional Coaching Protocol.** Red River instructional coaches use a protocol when working with teachers. Before any work can begin, the instructional coaches work to establish relationships with the teachers. The instructional coaching process starts with the initial step of
conducting classroom observations. Following the first observation, the instructional coach does a classroom observation approximately every other week. On the weeks between observations, the coach meets with the teacher to provide feedback. Consequently, weekly contact between the instructional coach and teacher takes place on a consistent basis throughout the academic year. During the intervals between face-to-face sessions, the instructional coach and teacher engage in regular email correspondence. Additionally, the instructional coaches assert that they make periodic visits to monitor teachers' progress throughout the week. Both instructional coaches explained that this process is ongoing throughout the school year.

Instructional coaches use an Instructional Coaching Binder (Appendix E) throughout this process. The instructional coaches developed this binder and the documents included in this binder drawing upon their participation in professional development sessions focused on the instructional coaching process. The document the instructional coaches developed for note-taking before and during the observation, found within the coaching binder, facilitates the observation process by delineating specific areas of focus within the lesson plan. This area of focus is agreed upon in weekly meetings between the instructional coach and teacher. The document enables the instructional coach to record specific evidence related to the intended objective of the observation. The provided observation sheet facilitates the instructional coach in documenting specific events or details observed in the classroom including instances of students raising their hands, replies to questions posed by the students, and the type of questions posed by the instructor. An additional document created and used by the instructional coaches enables the coaches to maintain a chronological record of classroom activities. During the observation, the instructional coach records what the teacher is doing at any given time and what the students are also doing at that point in time.
Following the observation, the instructional coach schedules a feedback session with the teacher. During this time, the instructional coach can share any insight gained during the observation and offer suggestions for resources that may support the teacher’s success. Within the Instructional Coaching Binder (Appendix E) is guidance for feedback. For example, there is a document that the coaches created that includes dialogue stems to structure the conversation with the following steps: praise, follow-up on previous action steps, evidence, new action steps, plan or practice of the action step, and the conclusion of the meeting. The instructional coaches utilize these dialogue guidelines to facilitate and direct conversations between the coach and the teacher. This process enables instructional coaches to strategize and prepare for the targeted feedback session. The utilization of these coaching documents enables the instructional coach to provide feedback that is specifically pertinent to the goals that the teacher and coach have set. Moreover, guidance outlined in the Instructional Coaching Binder (Appendix E) facilitates discourse that is centered and directed toward the intended objective.

Sample

The sampling method used in this study was purposeful sampling. This allowed me, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest, to uncover, comprehend, and get profound insights, necessitating the deliberate selection of a sample that maximizes the potential for knowledge acquisition. By using purposeful sampling, I was able to carefully choose individuals who possessed an array of knowledge, enabling a comprehensive understanding of this case (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

The criteria for selection of administrators were to include one elementary and one secondary administrator who directly supervise the instructional coaching process. These administrators were chosen from the two building sites selected for this study. Following
selection of administrators, they were asked to identify effective instructional coaches in their buildings, defined as “working effectively with teachers to bring about improvement or needed change.” This approach facilitated the selection of two instructional coaches, one working with teachers in elementary education and one working with teachers in secondary education. In addition to the two administrators and two instructional coaches selected for participation, six teachers who had engaged with these instructional coaches within the past two years and were presently engaging with the instructional coaches were chosen.

In a zoom meeting with administrators and instructional coaches, the following questions were asked about potential teacher participants who met the criteria of utilizing an instructional coach within the last two years, and who were currently working with an instructional coach. The answers from the questions below were recorded on the Participant Selection form, as can be found in Appendix D:

1. What are the names of teachers in your building that utilize an instructional coach?
2. How many years of teaching experience do they have (approximately)?
3. On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being unwilling and unable to 5 being willing and able where would you rate their willingness to learn?
4. How long have they worked with an instructional coach and who is their instructional coach?
5. What grade level do they teach?
6. What is their email address?

The outcome of the participant selection can be found in the table below.
Table 4: *Participant Selection Outcome*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Instructional Coach</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Certification</th>
<th>Administrator Perspectives Willingness to Learn Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Alternative</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Alternative</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers that met the criteria of utilizing an instructional coach were assessed by administrators and instructional coaches on a scale ranging from one to five, with a one being unwilling and unable to learn, and five being willing and able to learn. In some cases, the data supported the administrator rating, while in other cases it did not. For example, the administrator rated Diana as a three on the scale, but findings found her as being unwilling and unable to learn. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of individuals who might belong to different categories under Situational Leadership Theory. This allowed a more varied selection of the teachers who had worked with an instructional coach within the past two years and was currently using an instructional coach.

**Participant Overview**

Table 5: *Administration and Instructional Coach Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years in District</th>
<th>Years in Classroom Teaching</th>
<th>Years in Coaching or Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>Instructional Coach</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>Instructional Coach</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Administration

**Pat.** Pat serves as the building administrator at the Lower Elementary campus. Pat is from a lineage of teachers, with both of her parents beginning their careers as teachers and both retiring as administrators. Her grandfather was also a teacher. Pat has served in the field of education for twenty-six years. However, before a career as a teacher, Pat obtained a journalism and public relations degree. Then, through substitute teaching, she discovered a love of education and went back to school to obtain a degree in elementary education.

Pat taught first grade for one year and fifth grade for her remaining nine years as a classroom teacher. Pat was a teacher for ten years before becoming a building principal. Pat has been a principal for sixteen years. Pat describes the culture of the building as “one where you are always a learner, no matter what position you are in” (Personal Interview, 2022).

**Jack.** Jack currently serves as the middle school principal for Red River. Due to the loss of his mother early in life, Jack did not, initially, consider going to college. Jack enjoyed public speaking and music, so he began a part-time career as a local radio disc jockey at the age of fifteen (Personal Interview, 2022). After graduating from secondary school, he established a disk jockey business. This craft is still something Jack enjoys doing sporadically when his schedule allows. At twenty-nine years of age, Jack began attending college to pursue two degrees: one in speech education and the other in English education.

Jack’s educational training led to his first position in education as a choir and drama teacher for three years. After holding those positions, Jack worked for ten years as a middle school teacher at the same school where he currently serves as principal. During that time, Jack taught English, communications, and yearbook and was the student council sponsor. Jack also began working to obtain a master’s degree in administration. After ten years in the classroom,
Jack was hired as the middle school assistant principal for two years and then accepted the principal position, where he has served for twelve years. Jack describes his most important role as “making sure the talented teachers and staff who help [students] learn have all of the skills and tools they need to get the job done” (Personal Interview, 2022).

**Instructional Coaches**

**Ava.** Ava serves as an instructional coach at the elementary level at Red River school district. Ava was a dance coach and teacher at a local dance studio before teaching in the classroom. Ava earned a bachelor’s degree in fashion marketing with a minor in business administration. Despite her training in a profession other than education, Ava had a love and passion for education. Her entry into the field of education happened when she accepted a position as a permanent first-grade substitute for a year. This experience led Ava to become an alternatively certified teacher the following year, in 2017-2018, when she continued teaching in the first-grade classroom. Ava has remained in this classroom until now. While teaching, Ava also obtained her master’s degree in early childhood education. Ava has prior experience working with an instructional coach as she served as a mentee during the 2019-2020 academic year.

Ava has taken on a multifaceted instructional coaching role and works on many projects around professional development, curriculum, and instruction. The instructional coaching team from the outside organization and building leadership saw qualities in Ava that led to her being offered the elementary-level curriculum coordinator position and instructional coach for 2021-2022 (Personal Interview, 2022). Ava stated, “I do not have a ton of experience, but my passion for education is what shines through to others. I believe I was hired because of my drive to do what is best for all students” (Personal Interview, 2022).
Ellen. Ellen is a lifelong educator. She has served her entire career in Red River, including her student teaching. Ellen’s teaching experience is secondary education. She taught Title I English in high school for a year and then at the middle school for four years. Ellen then returned to the high school, where she taught junior English and yearbook for seven years. Subsequently, she transitioned to the position of teaching senior English for ten years, culminating her tenure in the classroom. In 2021, she assumed the responsibilities of secondary curriculum coordinator and instructional coach.

Jack describes Ellen as having qualities that support her success in the instructional coach position. These qualities include the ability to build relationships and work with staff at the secondary level who do not necessarily think they need classroom assistance (Personal Interview, 2022). Ellen’s love for the district is evident in her allegiance to this district for the entirety of her twenty-eight-year career. Ellen explained this district as one where “…you just do not want to leave because of the amazing climate and culture that the district has built” (Personal Interview, 2022).

Teacher Participants.

Diana. Diana is a first-year special education teacher at the lower elementary. She is traditionally certified and was assigned an instructional coach because she is a first-year teacher. Diana explained that she is working to understand how to meet students' specific learning needs. She is primarily focused on improving her own classroom management techniques and making those techniques work with the special needs population (Personal Interview, 2022). At the time of this study, Diana had worked with an instructional coach for two months. When determining participants, administrators rated her at a “three out of five” for willingness to learn (Appendix D). However, during interviews with administration and instructional coaches, it became clear
that Diana was unwilling to learn at this time, and therefore, her rating was probably a one on the scale.

**Christy.** Christy is a twenty-one-year veteran teacher. She currently teaches Kindergarten at the lower elementary. Christy has utilized an instructional coach in the past and is not required to do so by the district. Christy began working with an instructional coach last year and was reluctant to change coaches and continue the process this year. However, Christy voluntarily participates in the instructional coaching program because she values another person's input into her classroom practices. She feels that utilizing an instructional coach makes her a more effective teacher. Instructional coaches and administrators rated Christy as a “five out of five” for willingness to learn (Appendix D). The data supported this rating of five.

**Sue.** Sue teaches second grade. While the year this study was conducted was her first year as an elementary educator, she was a college professor for twelve years before teaching young children. Because this was her first year at the elementary school, Sue was assigned an instructional coach. Sue explained that she and her instructional coach work to improve her small-group instruction. Ava is her instructional coach, and she describes Sue as being “…very willing to learn” (Personal Interview, 2022). Administrators and instructional coaches rated her a “five” for willingness to learn (Appendix D). While Sue was very willing to learn, she was still unable because she lacked experience. Therefore, a rating of five as willing was probably correct.

**John.** John was in his third year of teaching in Red River and sixth year of teaching at the time of this study. John is a coach and technology instructor at Red River middle and high schools. John reported that he was approached by the administration and the instructional coach and asked if he would consider participating in the instructional coaching program. While he did
not understand or think he needed coaching, he eventually agreed to participate. John reported that he is currently working on classroom management strategies to keep students engaged in the lesson. Administrators and instructional coaches rated John a “three” for willingness to learn (Appendix D). The findings showed John was openly unwilling to learn and showed no desire to work toward academic change, so I would have rated this as a one on the willingness to learn scale.

Laura. Laura was in her tenth year of teaching at the time of this study. She is a middle school math teacher. She utilizes an instructional coach to provide extra support and have someone with whom she can try new instructional techniques. She enjoys collaborating with her coach, Ellen. Her coach describes Laura as someone who enjoys learning, has a passion for teaching, and strives to reach her students in the best way possible. The administrators and coaches rated Laura a “five” for willingness to learn (Appendix D). Laura was very willing to learn, and the data supports this rating of five.

Taylor. Taylor is an alternatively certified high school drama teacher. While Taylor has worked with children at a local theater on theatrical productions, she has not had experience teaching in a public-school setting until now. Taylor was assigned an instructional coach because this is her first year of teaching. Taylor’s instructional coach, Ellen, explained that “Taylor has great ideas but struggles to implement them and reach the entire classroom” (Personal Interview, 2022). Therefore, Taylor is working on strategies to engage students. The instructional coaches and administrators rated Taylor a “five” for willingness to learn (Appendix D). The data supports the rating of five, as Taylor showed a great willingness to learn. Like Sue, Taylor is new to the classroom, and is still unable to lead the feedback sessions, and still relies on the instructional coach to explain classroom practices to her.
Data Analysis

Observations, interviews, and artifacts were used as data sources for this research study. Data analysis was conducted using the constant comparative approach (Merriam, 1998), which required me to code new data as it was gathered. During the coding process, I generated introspective notes. The process of analysis was cyclical, allowing me to keep in mind how each piece of data linked to the goals and research questions of the study. For example, during the research process, the data from interviews conducted with instructional coaches and administrators was utilized in subsequent teacher interviews to inform the formulation of follow-up questions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state, “You make adjustments in your interviewing as you go along. You sense that the respondent is onto something significant or there is more to be learned” (p. 122). Probes and follow-up questions allowed me to glean more information from the participants to gain clarity in the research.

When collecting the data, I examined each piece of data and reexamined crucial data to ensure a thorough examination of the data. Following open coding, I began axial coding by organizing codes into categories (Saldana, 2009). Using the constant comparative method, I began to “compare one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences” and then grouped the data based on similarities, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p.32). Axial coding allowed me to combine the codes into more manageable categories (Saldana, 2009). I subsequently contemplated how the codes I had identified aligned with the study's theoretical framework, Situational Leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). Subsequently, I arranged codes into themes. It is important to note that many of the codes aligned with the four quadrants of Situational Leadership; however, not all codes neatly fell into those categories because, at times, student learning and change were addressed, and this study was only focused
on the interworking of the instructional coach and the teacher. Following the creation of categories, I then analyzed the categories to discern themes that emerged.

The following section presents the themes that emerged from data analysis. As previously stated, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of participants and the school district.

**Thematic Findings**

The following themes emerged through data analysis: relationships, teacher readiness, and instructional coaching process and styles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Behavior</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Relationship Behavior</th>
<th>Instructional Coach (es)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wiling and Able</td>
<td>Laura and Christy</td>
<td>Delegating</td>
<td>Ava and Ellen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwilling and Able</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>Ellen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing and Unable</td>
<td>Taylor and Sue</td>
<td>Selling</td>
<td>Ava and Ellen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwilling and Unable</td>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Telling</td>
<td>Ava</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Thematic Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Cultivation of Relationships</td>
<td>Difficult Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Readiness</td>
<td>Background</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Coaching Process and Style</td>
<td>Coaches and Coaching Leadership Styles</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Relationships**

It was evident from observations and interviews that meaningful relationships had developed through the instructional coaching program. These relationships facilitated interactions between instructional coaches and mentees, providing a foundation for the success of the instructional coaching program. Participants suggested that it is essential for instructional coaches to develop relationships with the teachers with whom they collaborate. These relationships provided support for teachers to enhance instruction in the classroom. While most relationships were cultivated and maintained, occasionally, relationships were complex or nonexistent. The influence of the lack of relationship between instructional coach and mentee is explained following the explanation of cultivation of relationships.

**Cultivation of Relationships**

All but one teacher, both instructional coaches, and administrators, emphasized the importance of relationships for successful instructional coaching.

**The Influence of Preconceptions or Misconceptions on Relationships.** Prior to the initiation of the instructional coaching process, several participants had various preconceptions and misconceptions regarding the notion of instructional coaching as well as their own personal
past. Jack explained that at the beginning of the year, “…it took time for the instructional coaches to gain the trust of the teachers…because teachers did not fully understand the role of the instructional coach” (Personal Interview, 2022). Pat believed that “in previous years, teachers have assumed the instructional coaches were sent into the classroom to spy on them for the administration” (Personal Interview, 2022). Pat went on to share that once teachers realized that the instructional coach was not there “to tell on the teacher” or evaluate the teacher, she began to notice that teachers developed better relationships with the instructional coaches (Personal Interview, 2022).

It is noteworthy that the instructional coaches approached this situation with preconceived beliefs and prejudices about how they would be received. Ellen explained, “Initially, I was a little intimidated because I was afraid because I don’t have a doctorate” (Personal Interview, 2022). Ellen was concerned that teachers would not respect her as much because of her education status. Similarly, Ava was concerned about gaining teacher trust because she does not have as much experience in the classroom as many teachers in the district. Ava reported, “I felt like others would see me as unqualified to do the job I was hired to do because I lacked the experience others have” (Personal Interview, 2022). Consequently, instructional coaches learned that they needed to address and rectify their own preconceptions before actively engaging in the process of establishing meaningful connections with teachers.

**Prior to the Coaching Cycle.** Administrators and instructional coaches in this study emphasized the necessity for instructional coaches to develop relationships with teachers before they begin the instructional coaching process and cycle. This necessity came heavily from the preconceptions and misconceptions previously noted. Pat, an elementary administrator, feels that
a “partnership between coaches and teachers must be established before work can begin” (Personal Interview, 2022).

Jack, a middle school administrator, explained that teachers in previous years had expressed “dissatisfaction with the coaching process because the instructional coaches did not take time to build relationships prior to classroom observations and feedback” (Personal Interview, 2022). Ava and Ellen both said that instructors had inevitable frustrations due to the lack of relationship-building by previous instructional coaches. Both instructional coach participants believe that their focus on cultivating connections with the instructors they were assigned resulted in more positive reactions from those teachers, in contrast to the responses they obtained prior to establishing these relationships. This element has significance due to the involvement of instructional coaches in assisting instructors in establishing objectives for their own development and learning, as well as offering valuable feedback. Participants felt that this reciprocal work between coach and teacher became far more manageable after interpersonal connections had been established.

It is important to acknowledge that this study was conducted in the middle of the fall semester, and the instructional coaches had already formed relationships with the participants. These ties were initially formed during professional development events held in the prior summer. Upon recognizing the necessity for fostering relationship development, the Red River district implemented a requirement for all newly hired teachers to participate in a professional development program prior to the start of a new school year. This initiative’s aim was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the instructional coach’s responsibilities and facilitate the establishment of relationships among administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers. During this period, the instructional coaches utilized the opportunity to familiarize
themselves with the instructors and proactively initiated the sharing of classroom ideas to support the professional growth of teachers, even prior to the commencement of the academic year. Ava stated, “this was an opportunity to make initial contact and start the relationship-building process.”

**Intentionality.** Data from this study further suggest that once relationships have been developed, these individuals had to work to maintain those relationships intentionally. Building relationships was something the instructional coaches had to work through on their own at the beginning of the process. The instructional coaches intentionally promoted a supportive environment by being friendly and having conversations with teachers. They indicated that some discussions may not pertain to anything in the classroom, allowing the coaches to get to know the teachers personally. Both instructional coaches who participated in this study reported that they began by just talking to teachers well before any instructional coaching sessions began. Building relationships early helped build rapport and trust to support their work.

Ava explained that she did not follow coaching protocols at the beginning of the year but, instead, intentionally focused on building relationships. Ava reported, “I gave teachers a paper they gave back to me with their likes, dislikes, and how they learned best, oh, and also some favorite things so I could bring them little gifts” (Personal Interview, 2022). Ava began to determine what the teachers liked and their personality traits, and she made it a habit to leave personal notes or small gifts for the teachers. Sue, a new teacher in the district, explained that Ava was “thoughtful” and brought her gifts at the beginning of the year to welcome her to the district.

Ellen indicated that she intentionally developed relationships with teachers she already knew to facilitate relationships with new teachers. She indicated that she believed that other
teachers would see her efforts, which would build her reputation with the newer teachers. Taylor explained that Ellen made “a connection early on, and then we just kind of built on that” (Personal Interview, 2022). Ellen emphasized her desire to support teacher success when she said, “When I talk to people, I like to make sure that they know that I’m here to help them” (Personal Interview, 2022). Ellen stated that she was willing to “put in the work” to cultivate relationships (Personal Interview, 2022).

Another use of intentionality is evidenced in the instructional coaching binder the instructional coaches have created (Appendix E). The instructional coaches utilize this binder that has all the documentation they may use in interactions with teachers. This binder contains examples for the coaches to refer to when providing feedback and templates for notetaking during observations and feedback sessions. As evident in the instructional coaching binder (Appendix E), the instructional coaches try to encourage teachers and find positive comments to share during every visit.

**Communication.** The significance of positive communication for the preservation of relationships was apparent. According to Ava, early communication seemed to help the coaching process. For example, Ava said that the first several times she visited the classroom, she brought nothing but a notebook with her and “simply asked teachers if they needed anything to help their day go better” (Personal Interview, 2022). Ava explained that this approach allowed for “more open lines of communication…” to be developed (Personal Interview, 2022). Ava was proactive in mitigating any hurdles that might impede effective communication. This was apparent via her ability to discern the teacher's immediate needs and avoid pressuring them into engaging in more conversation or activities.
Ellen has learned that asking the right questions helps maintain positive relationships with teachers because it makes them feel they are part of the learning process. This communication was evident in one observation of Ellen and Taylor. Taylor was not understanding what Ellen was asking of her. Therefore, Ellen started asking her questions about her classroom, such as, “What do you notice when you are standing in the back of the classroom teaching versus standing in the front of your classroom?” (Personal Observation, 2022). Using questioning strategies facilitated Taylor's transition into a more active role as the primary agent in the learning process.

The instructional coaches are changing their communication styles to meet the needs of the teachers. Many teachers explained that maintaining good communication helped them develop a good relationship and trust with their instructional coach. Four of the six teachers interviewed talked about the practical communication skills of their instructional coach. Two teachers mentioned they could text their instructional coach anytime; she is readily available. Christy indicated that she believes open communication between the instructional coach and the teacher helps create a more comfortable learning environment for everyone. Numerous teacher participants highlighted the need for positive communication to ensure that instructional coaches refrain from creating feelings of inadequacy among them. The behaviors of instructional coaches at Red River suggest the establishment of beneficial channels of communication.

**Developed Relationships.** Teachers and instructional coaches did many things throughout the coaching process that demonstrated the trusting relationships they have with one another. Laura explained that she is not defensive when Ellen suggests a change in instruction because she has grown to trust her. After one feedback session, I observed Ellen hug Laura, the teacher she was working with. Laura expressed how much she appreciates that her coach praises
and recognizes her efforts. She went on to say the instructional coach “celebrates wins with teachers” when they have success in the classroom (Personal Interview, 2022). Laura stated that she is not concerned that her instructional coach will overstep her role. Laura said she “appreciates that [the instructional coach] comes by frequently to check in. I feel like she truly cares about how I am doing, and I know she truly cares and wants to help” (Personal Interview, 2022). Laura further explained a scenario where her instructional coach encouraged her to try a new idea she had come up with, and this encouragement left Laura feeling “empowered to just go for it” (Personal Interview, 2022). This feeling of empowerment is a direct result of the relationship Ellen has built with Laura.

I noted in the meeting with Ava and Christy that they were very comfortable with one another and sat side by side as Ava talked through a PowerPoint presentation on centers, a topic that Christy had reached out to her and asked for help with. Prior to this observation, Ava shared that she was initially nervous about working with Christy because Christy has more teaching experience, but she now feels like they work well together because of the relationship they have established.

Sue believes she can go to her instructional coach with any classroom issue without the feeling that the coach will judge her or make her feel inadequate. Sue stated, “I think she cares. You know, she cares that I’m successful and that I’m confident so then I can teach all these twenty kids in my class” (Personal Interview, 2022). When referring to Ava, Sue said “I see [Ava] as much more than a coach, I consider her a good friend now” (Personal Interview, 2022).

Ellen explained, “I always want [teachers] to be able to feel like they can come and talk to me about things and realize that I’m not an enemy, but I’m somebody who’s gonna help them succeed” (Personal Interview, 2022) Taylor, when talking about her relationship with Ellen, said,
“And now, I mean, I love her. She’s like one of my favorite people. She’s so helpful,” supporting the understanding that this instructional coach is working to develop relationships throughout the year (Personal Interview, 2022). Taylor said her instructional coach “…embraced me early on and so that, that kind of shocked me because I really thought it would be more of a telling me what to do as opposed to an embrace.” Taylor then added that the personal connections made by her instructional coach early on encouraged her to be fully “on board” with the coaching process (Personal Interview, 2022). During her feedback session, Ellen commented on how Taylor had worked with a special needs student. Taylor became emotional at the positive comment. Taylor then told the coach that she has a special needs brother and tries to make every effort to be more inclusive to special needs students. Ellen’s affirmation “opened the door” to developing that relationship even more profoundly.

It is evident by the interactions with these instructional coaches and teachers that they have taken the steps necessary to cultivate relationships in a meaningful way. This cultivation enhances the instructional coaching process. Multiple teachers described the instructional coaches as kind and caring individuals who strive to get along with others. This interaction suggests that these instructional coaches have skills that help maintain relationships. From observations, these relationship skills were noted in all but two cases. The coaches sat side by side with the teachers, sharing notes and taking notes in four of the six observations. In five of the six observations, the teachers reciprocated and took notes, indicating that what the instructional coach said was essential to them.

According to instructional coaches, their aim is to allocate sufficient time to ensure that teachers feel appreciated and significant within their professional relationships. Numerous educators see their association with coaches as a collaborative one, wherein the teacher's
perspective is actively sought and esteemed. The instructional coaches have successfully cultivated connections with the teachers, fostering an environment conducive to cooperation and inspiring the generation of innovative ideas applicable to their respective classrooms.

**Administration.** When the school year began, the principals took time during staff meetings to discuss district initiatives and to explain how the instructional coaches would provide support for these initiatives. Following those meetings, teachers could work with their instructional coaches to develop plans to work toward these initiatives. Pat explained that, during these meetings, she made an effort to explain the utilization of instructional coaches and emphasized the fact that she, too, trusts the instructional coaches. She assumes that, by emphasizing her trust in them, the teachers would also begin to trust the instructional coach.

Jack stated that he noticed that teachers in his building trust the instructional coaches enough to share their failures. He explained that they realize now that the instructional coaches are not “running to administrators with their failures but are helping them overcome their failures” (Personal Interview, 2022). Jack explained that teachers have moved from the initial feelings that instructional coaches were put in place to “spy” on them to having trusting relationships and even friendships in some instances. Jack attributes that to the instructional coaches working to maintain relationships with the teachers with whom they work.

**Difficult Relationships**

While some teachers and coaches viewed their relationships as excellent, observational and interview data revealed that other relationships between some instructional coaches and teachers were not as solid. When describing her relationship with her instructional coach, Taylor explained, “I know some others that have some coaches, not that they don’t respect them, but
they don’t. It’s not quite that much of a friendly relationship, you know. It’s more teacher and student” (Personal Interview, 2022).

Pat explained a scenario in which Diana did not necessarily have a supportive relationship with the instructional coach. She was refusing to work with the coach because, even after training, she was still apprehensive of the instructional coach and the process. As an administrator, Pat stepped in and forced Diana to work with the instructional coach. This approach influenced the relationship negatively and created some difficulty in coaching for some time. Ava shared this scenario during her interview as well.

Ava explained that she is investing time into relationship building and is slowly developing a relationship with Diana. Ava stated, “When teachers are not responsive to developing relationships, I take more time getting to know them on a personal level, making a point to check in with them personally before professionally” (Personal Interview, 2022). When Diana and Ava were observed, I noted the differences between this relationship and the others. With all the other teachers, Ava sat side by side. With Diana, Ava sat further away. Ava was more guarded with this teacher than the others she worked with and was still building the relationship. An example I noted was, Ava seemed to use the instructional coaching notebook more, and she had her questions and responses more planned out. During the feedback session I observed, Ava offered scenarios in which they could work together on goals. Ava described a relationship with Diana as “a safety net,” and in return, Diana appreciates that Ava is “open and easy to communicate with” (Personal Interview, 2022). This conversation indicates that Diana feels safe with Ava and that Ava has developed a relationship that is a safe space for Diana. This and the behaviors exhibited indicate a relationship that has not fully been developed, and Ava is still working toward the relationship being one where the teacher will take control of her
learning. Ava said, “It actually took me by surprise that I was struggling with building a relationship. That is usually one of my strengths” (Personal Interview, 2022). She has found that different personalities make it difficult to build relationships. This suggests that instructional coaches will have to adapt their approach to align with the specific demands of teachers, even in cases when establishing a productive partnership may present challenges.

It seems that John and Ellen are also still working to develop their relationship. When John was asked about his relationship with the instructional coach, he shared that they were previous co-workers and stated, “I mean, I knew of her.” During the interview, John shared that he was worried that the instructional coach would not understand the methods he used because his methods were different from those she used in the classroom. However, he reported that the coach has “been supportive of hands-on teaching methods I use in my classroom” (Personal Interview, 2022). He also shared that he was asked to utilize the instructional coach and assumed she was meeting with him because he teaches computers, which is different from what she is used to seeing. When John and Ellen had their feedback session, they sat across from each other. While all of the other teachers took notes, John did not. His responses were flippant in nature, and the instructional coaching did not seem important to him. He explained, “It’s been a good relationship with us because I haven’t tried to fight anything she said” (Personal Interview, 2022). This response suggests that he takes a passive approach to communication with his instructional coach. His definition of a ”struggling relationship” seemed to be conversations in which he disagrees with the person frequently. Because he does not frequently disagree with Ellen, he does not see this as a struggling relationship. However, evidence from interviews and observation suggests that John rarely integrates the suggestions that his coach provides. Ellen describes the most challenging teachers to work with as “…never fully buying into the
instructional coaching program no matter how hard the instructional coaches are working to build relationships” (Personal Interview, 2022). This statement would indicate that some teachers can be perceived as unwilling to learn by instructional coaches and would also suggest that instructional coaching does not work for all teachers.

**Teacher Readiness**

The second theme that emerged was teacher readiness to fulfill teaching responsibilities in the classroom. That readiness encompassed all strategies employed by teachers inside a classroom setting to facilitate learning. During the interviews and observations, teacher readiness was heavily addressed. The teacher's readiness level is often influenced by their background, teaching style, and willingness to learn from others. Jack described the differences and explained that “…every teacher’s room that you go into has a different style.” He went on to explain that the instructional coach must learn to differentiate between the teacher’s style and how to coach the teacher within that style to ensure the teachers are meeting student needs (Personal Interview, 2022). Readiness appeared to be influenced by a teacher’s background and the teacher’s personality traits.

**Background**

The teachers in this study entered the profession with different backgrounds and experiences. These backgrounds influenced their readiness level. This study included teachers from their first year of teaching to their twenty-first year of teaching. One participant came immediately out of a teacher preparation program, while another came from experience teaching in higher education for thirteen years. While the first-year teachers were overwhelmed, the teachers with a longer teaching history expressed fewer feelings of being overwhelmed. They explained that they could focus on specific areas of their instruction that needed improvement. It
was evident that the teachers each asked for specific information from the coaches, and it was then up to the coaches to change their coaching style to meet the needs of teachers with differing backgrounds.

**Novice Teachers.** During the time of the study, Oklahoma had a notable increase in the presence of alternatively or emergency-certified instructors, a trend that was also observed in the Red River region. This creates a situation where novice teachers come from a variety of contexts. Therefore, these teachers came to the instructional coaches with a wide range of needs that they anticipated would be met by the instructional coaches. All first-year teachers at Red River District, regardless of their experience or background, are required to have an instructional coach. Teachers who were just beginning their careers were more unsure of themselves and had feelings of being overwhelmed with the teaching process.

Sue shared that she has leaned heavily on her instructional coach to help her transition from teaching college students to teaching second-grade students. Sue knew she would need help, which helped her be more open to utilizing an instructional coach. When being interviewed, Sue stated, “…I mean, I’m new, I don’t know” when asked about her thoughts on using an instructional coach and why she thinks they are beneficial. Ava stated that shifting her practice to “teach a college professor to teach a room full of second graders has had challenges, but I am learning from her as well. Some of the aspects of a college classroom, surprisingly, work in a second-grade classroom” (Personal Interview, 2022). The participants who are newer to the teaching profession are the teachers who also seem to be overwhelmed because of their lack of experience. Sue is overwhelmed, as is evident in the statement, “…this year, I think I’m in survival mode” (Personal Interview, 2022). Sue is also struggling to navigate “what everyone else is doing in the classroom” (Personal Interview, 2022).
While all first-year teachers in Red River are provided with an instructional coach, Diana is a traditionally certified special education teacher who was previously employed by Red River district as a paraprofessional. Diana was initially concerned that her instructional coach would not comprehend the requirements of a special education classroom and stated, “a lot of the time, teachers in a regular classroom do not understand the work that goes into the special education classroom” (Personal Interview, 2022). This reluctance caused friction within the coaching relationship initially and is only starting to heal, as the principal had to force Diana to follow the policy for all first-year teachers to take part in the instructional coaching process. While Diana was very reluctant to follow the process in the beginning, she now expresses a desire for more presence of the instructional coach inside the classroom setting, with the intention of receiving assistance in a broader range of topics. Diana stated that her main classroom goal this year is to “Keep my head above water” (Personal Interview, 2022). This statement is one example of this teacher possibly showing signs of stress in the classroom. Diana is accustomed to receiving guidance from a teacher in her role as a paraprofessional. Currently, she has transitioned into the position of a teacher and places significant reliance on her administrators and instructional coach to offer professional advice, even though she harbors concerns regarding their lack of experiential qualifications to address her classroom needs.

Taylor described herself as feeling “like an infant that is just absorbing everything around me” (Personal Interview, 2022). Similarly, Taylor states, “I feel [laughter] I need, I need help with everything” (Personal Interview, 2022). Taylor is just beginning and feels like she needs help, but she also explains that her instructional coach has been readily available to offer that help.
Veteran Teachers. At Red River, choosing to work with an instructional coach is optional for veteran teachers. Because of various backgrounds, this opportunity to choose whether to utilize instructional coaches has led to different first impressions of instructional coaching. The veteran teachers showed less nervousness and a deeper focus and understanding of the coaching aspect. Data from observations and interviews indicated that more experienced instructors, those who have been in the profession for six years or more, were able to focus on the actual education being provided in the classroom during coaching sessions and were able to focus less on classroom management.

Laura, a ten-year veteran teacher, mentioned in the interview that her primary focus this year in her instructional coaching sessions was on her mathematics instruction. In the observation, it was noted that Laura wants to work toward students setting goals for learning. Laura also mentioned that teachers are “…hesitant to do new things in the classroom because we’re afraid. What if it fails?” (Personal Interview, 2022). Laura also states that she collaborates with Ellen when reviewing student data and then uses that data to guide her practice. She went on to explain that having the instructional coach to “fall back on” to get feedback has “brought back excitement to teaching” because it has allowed her to try new things. She indicated that if those new ideas fail, she has someone she can go to and share her frustrations and successes (Personal Interview, 2022). Laura believes she would have been a much better teacher if she had had an instructional coach in the early phases of her teaching career. This finding provides more evidence to support the idea that novice instructors benefit from the guidance of an instructional coach in terms of acquiring foundational classroom management skills, whereas more experienced teachers may shift their focus towards enhancing instructional practices within the classroom.
Christy’s experience in the classroom is extensive. Christy explained that through the years, she has learned about childhood trauma and the issues this can present in the classroom. She believes this is an area of strength for her, allowing her to see and know her students on a deeper level. Her classroom goal for the year is to build strong relationships with her students and make sure they are comfortable in the classroom so they can learn. Christy knows the importance of “meeting students where they are and growing them from there” (Personal Interview, 2022). Christy sets a positive atmosphere in the classroom for all students, and she feels that working with her instructional coach has had “a huge positive impact in my classroom” (Personal Interview, 2022). Christy described her instructional coach to me, stating, “She has turned into being just an extra mind, extra hands, lifeline for me in the classroom, and I definitely will recommend her to see everybody hopefully” (Personal Interview, 2022). Christy was concerned that adding an instructional coach “would just be one more thing on my plate” (Personal Interview, 2022). However, Christy soon concluded that the instructional coach could be helpful to her and “take things off her plate” (Personal Interview, 2022). The teachers lacking sufficient background exhibited signs of nervousness or apprehension due to the inherent uncertainty. Conversely, the more seasoned teachers demonstrated apprehension over the actual coaching process, maybe influenced by its potential personal impact.

Both Christy and Laura mentioned they are beginning to “step up” and lead in their district because of the encouragement of the instructional coach. Laura has started leading professional development sessions with Ellen on mathematics in the Red River district. Christy shared that she often shares teaching techniques and classroom resources she uses in the classroom with other teachers to “pay it forward” (Personal Interview, 2022). Both teachers have
utilized their work with their instructional coach to begin to help others. This finding indicates that they are now not just learners but also leaders.

Ellen approached John in May of 2022 about participating in the instructional coaching program. Over the summer, John thought Ellen had forgotten she had asked him to be in coaching sessions and that he had agreed. John claimed he had forgotten about this agreement, and then she contacted him in the middle of the summer, asking him again if he would like to participate, and he again complied. He knew of Ellen and was “fine with her coming in” (Personal Interview, 2022). John thinks “there is always some room for improvement” and hoped Ellen could help him improve his instruction (Personal Interview, 2022). This finding indicated that although John possessed teaching competence, his stance towards the instructional coaching process was impartial, devoid of any discernible positive or negative sentiments. During the observation, John appeared to adopt a passive listening stance, perhaps motivated by a desire to finish the discussion to move forward with other things. This was evident when he repeatedly stated that he “needed time to get a snack and use the restroom” (Personal Observation, 2022). However, there was a noticeable lack of genuine interest on his part towards the subject matter being discussed.

**Teaching Traits and Connections to Teaching Goals**

Another sub-theme that emerged under the theme of teacher readiness was the importance of teaching traits in the coaching process. Findings from this study indicated that these teachers teach in different styles, and many have different traits. Consequently, the instructional coach was obligated to identify strategies for addressing instructors' unique needs, taking into account their level of preparedness and receptiveness to learning, and offer assistance
in a manner that aligns with their preferred learning style. Therefore, establishing a conducive environment for successful coaching lies with the instructional coaches.

**Teaching priorities.** The teachers participating in this study exhibited varying priorities within the instructional setting. Because of her experience in higher education, Sue strives to teach students of all ages to be successful. She explains, “…my goal is to make them, the students, feel as comfortable as they can be in my classroom, make it a safe learning environment filled with comfort, love, um compassion, all those things” (Personal Interview, 2022). Diana needs help with classroom management. As a special education teacher, Diana feels classroom management “is harder on me, I think, … than anything else I teach.” Ava shared that without the classroom management aspect in place, she struggles in other areas in the classroom. Taylor’s primary goal for the year has been to build and establish relationships with her students, successfully make it through the year, meet students' needs, and do all that is required of her. Christy is concerned with best utilizing the new reading curriculum that allows her to target all students and student learning. Laura’s goal for her classroom is to “have students leave her classroom with a positive feeling about math” (Personal Interview, 2022). John explained that his goal is to have kids enjoy his class and to be “known as the fun teacher” (Personal Interview, 2022). This data further supports that given the unique priorities and areas of focus of each teacher, the instructional coach must consider teaching goals and devise customized coaching strategies to address the specific needs of each instructor effectively.

It was evident that the instructional coaches at Red River are working to meet the needs of each teacher. When initially asked about teaching goals, Sue was unsure of her goals, but instead, she focused on how the instructional coach helps her in the classroom. The instructional coach helps Sue “feel like she is doing an okay job” (Personal Interview, 2022). Sue needs the
reassurance the instructional coach provides and relies on the coach to give her feedback to help build her confidence. Diana feels her instruction and classroom management have improved because of her work with Ava. Diana explained, “It’s definitely helped me be more comfortable in the classroom. I am still not my best, but it’s definitely helping” (Personal Interview, 2022). Taylor said she “will be using this opportunity to learn all she can from [Ellen] and get better and better this year and each year going forward.” It is evident that Taylor welcomes an instructional coach’s input and seeks ways to improve her teaching. Christy reports that the instructional coach is helping her find the most critical components of the curriculum and build lessons from there. When asked how the instructional coach helps her with the lessons, Christy states that her coach encourages her that she has “time to stop and take a breath and not be stressed out if I cannot fit it in all-in-one day” (Personal Interview, 2022). Laura has seen changes in her classroom because of instructional coaching. She shared that her students have gone from being hesitant in the math classroom to being more engaged with mathematics. She attributes this change to the work she and her instructional coach are doing together. John demonstrates an understanding of his action step and goal: to ensure optimal utilization of classroom time and promote continuous learning over the duration of each class session. Nevertheless, during the feedback session, Ellen saw that there were still several occurrences in which students completed tasks rapidly, resulting in more than enough time for further learning opportunities. This finding demonstrates that individual teachers choose to use their instructional coaches in diverse manners, leading to varied outcomes.

Receptiveness. Finally, an additional aspect that the instructional coach had to consider throughout the coaching process was the impact of teachers' receptiveness to coaching. Sue actively participated in ongoing efforts to determine the most effective pedagogical approaches,
seeking input from Ava as they engaged in a reciprocal exchange of ideas and insights on the effectiveness of various teaching strategies.

In contrast, Diana consistently displayed a sense of unease in the classroom environment, leading her to question the effectiveness of her efforts in meeting the needs of the students in special education. Furthermore, it was important for Diana to demonstrate complete confidence in Ava’s judgment on the most optimal strategy for the special education classroom, and her apprehension was impeding the development of such strong trust. This came across in her teaching style as Diana explained that she was still uncertain as to what would and would not work.

Taylor said, “[Ellen] gives me confidence in my teaching abilities and working toward my goals” (Personal Interview, 2022), she is also still nervous in the classroom because of the fear of the unknown. Taylor does not like the idea of multiple things happening simultaneously in the classroom. As a consequence, she exhibits greater caution within the educational setting and maintains a certain degree of hesitancy towards embracing change.

Christy was very comfortable in the classroom. She has a natural ease that comes across when speaking to her. She also is very aware of what students need and is willing to try new things without much apprehension. During the course of the observation in Christy’s classroom, Christy assumed the role of the primary facilitator during the feedback session, by actively engaging with her coach as they discussed the many strategies she had implemented within the classroom setting. Furthermore, she sought more guidance and support to further develop and expand upon her pedagogical ideas.

Similarly, Laura was also very much in charge of her classroom. Laura was different in that she was asking the coach to extend the work they had already begun together. The instructor
had a strong passion for the subject matter she taught and displayed a commendable dedication to improving the quality of her teaching.

John enjoys being relaxed in the classroom. John believes that students take this class with the expectation of having fun because this is an elective course, and “if kids like the class and have fun, it means they trust the teacher” (Personal Interview, 2022).

The existence of distinct teaching traits and goals inherently implies the existence of distinct coaching methodologies as well. The instructional coaches at Red River collaboratively engaged with each teacher, tailoring their support to address their unique professional requirements. This was evidenced in the observations with the differing forms of feedback the coaches gave. Some instructors were provided with clear and specific instructions, whereas in the case of others, the researchers allowed the teachers to take the lead in providing feedback while offering assistance and ideas to enhance their educational approach.

**Instructional Coaching Process and Styles**

The third theme that emerged from this analysis was the instructional coaching process and the styles coaches used in this process. Both Ava and Ellen were trained in the spring semester of 2022 as instructional coaches. Part of that training included shadowing other instructional coaches. This training came from an entity outside of the district. The district was working toward “growing their own” instructional coaching program, hiring teachers from within the district and training them to be instructional coaches. These instructional coaches also serve as the curriculum directors for the district, so their job is truly multi-faceted.

Findings in this study suggest that both Ava and Ellen change their leadership or coaching style to meet the specific needs of the teachers they coach. This section will focus on the specific leadership styles each instructional coach uses, as evidenced by the data. This data
lies within the observations of the collegial conversations taking place between coaches and teachers.

**Collegial Conversations**

In an observation of Ava and Christy, Ava started the conversation by asking how the reading centers were working and what strategies she was using during that time. Christy had everything she was using on hand. She began to share some of those strategies with the instructional coach. As Christy shared, they discussed different changes, and Ava shared ideas to support these strategies. Christy disclosed her engagement in collaborative efforts with fellow educators inside the school building, whereby she actively exchanged instructional techniques and methods with her colleagues. Christy had an app on her smart board to manage the noise level in the classroom. Christy wanted to share the application with the instructional coach. Ava engaged in the process of capturing pictures and asking questions of Christy, with the intention of disseminating these ideas among teachers across the whole district.

This reciprocal collegial conversation also happened in the meeting between Laura and Ellen. Ellen promptly inquired about the progress of the differentiation process. Subsequently, Laura assumed the role of steering the remainder of the meeting. Laura began the process of retrieving many different educational resources within her classroom and proceeded to disclose all the activities her pupils had been engaged in. Laura would pause and ask Ellen for ideas where she could elaborate on an idea. Ellen would write those down and tell Laura she would research them more. Laura said she would also be researching, and they discussed meeting later in the week to share what they each found. Ellen was not pushing any ideas or explicitly explaining anything. She was listening and collaborating. At the end of the meeting, Ellen requested that Laura deliver another session of professional development that dealt with the topic
of differentiation. Ellen informed Laura that she would either collaborate with her during the presentation or, alternatively, Laura had the choice to speak on her own.

In the observation with Ellen and John, Ellen asked John about bell work. They had previously discussed that this could be an idea to help John get his classes started in a more orderly way. John seemed to like the idea and even seemed to be utilizing the idea when he was being observed. However, during the feedback, Ellen noted that students needed to be more comfortable with the process. Then, John admitted that he did not remember to provide bell work every day, and sometimes, students even had to remind him to put the bell work on the board. During the interview with John, he admitted that he only sometimes incorporated everything he and the instructional coach agreed upon.

Ellen elaborated before going into the feedback session that she struggles when working with John because she has tried to give him the ownership of learning he desires, but he needs to follow through. “He enjoys being the teacher everyone likes but thinks if he has structure in the classroom, students will not like him. I am working to gather ideas from him that his students would like, but he would also utilize” (Personal Interview, 2022). Throughout the observation, Ellen would ask John what he thought would work in different situations he explained to her. At one point, John mentioned a classroom issue of students not turning their work in. He had mentioned this at the last meeting, and he and Ellen had devised some solutions together. When it came up again, Ellen asked if he had tried any of the strategies previously discussed. John admitted that he had not because “…it’s just middle school kids being middle school kids. They go through stages of not turning their work in. They will get out of it on their own” (Personal Observation, 2022)
When working with Sue, Ava had examples pulled up on her laptop, and as they were reviewing reading center scenarios, Ava was able to walk Sue through what that should look like. Sue actively participated in the discourse by posing questions. However, she did not assume the role of leading the meeting. Sue depended on Ava for the provision of answers and resources. Sue acknowledges that her initial recourse for support is to reach out to Ava. Ava stated, “These newer teachers need more supports in place, and I can be that for them. I try to give resources and ideas that are easy to put into place immediately. Then, I try to be there to observe and tweak on the spot if needed” (Personal Interview, 2022). Ava has an awareness that Sue is currently lacking the necessary preparedness to effectively implement new ideas, despite her willingness to take chances with new methods within the educational setting.

When Ellen and Taylor were observed, Taylor had worked on engaging and keeping the entire class's attention. Before Ellen had started helping Taylor with this issue, Taylor was teaching from various parts of the room, and mostly the back of the room. Ellen had her move to the front of the room and look at various parts of the room when teaching. Ellen tracked and noted that her engagement increased in the classroom from about 50% to at least 90% just by her making this shift. Ellen had given explicit directions. Ellen explained that it is her duty “…to get teachers good footing to teach, and that begins with effective classroom management strategies” (Personal Interview, 2022). Ellen explained that with Taylor she was still taking baby steps and gave her a “directed path” toward the goals they were working on (Personal Interview, 2022). In the observation, Ava and Diana seemed to have a very formal relationship. They were not sitting side-by-side as Ava had been observed doing with other participants. They, instead, sat across from each other. Ava was telling Diana precisely what she needed to do to manage
some behavior issues in the classroom. During the observation, I noted that Ava had typed out a step-by-step procedure for Diana to follow. Diana even questioned Ava on exactly where to seat certain students to implement this procedure. Ava had to give explicit instructions and tell Diana precisely what steps to take and what to do in the classroom. Diana required much more explicit guidance from her instructional coach than other participants. This partly concerns Diana’s uncertainty and her previous unwillingness to work with the instructional coach.

**Summary**

Chapter Four presented the themes that emerged from data analysis. This chapter provided a detailed description of the case, the district containing the case study sites, and then a comprehensive discussion of the school. Then, a profile of each interviewee was provided. The themes that emerged from the data analysis were presented in order to provide a thematic perspective on the data that emerged from this study. Chapter Five will provide answers to the research questions and an overall summary of the case study.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Chapter V provides answers to research questions, discussion of the findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The implementation of instructional coaching is acknowledged to be challenging (Devine, et al., 2013; Kise, 2007; Knight, 2009). According to Devine, Meyers, and Houssemand (2013), the effectiveness of instructional coaches is contingent upon the involvement and cooperation of several stakeholders, including national and local government entities, school culture, principals, and teacher acceptance. Further, because instructional coaches work collaboratively with teachers to support teacher capacity, instructional coaches are often considered to be instructional leaders within the building. Therefore, in an effort to enhance instructional capacity in their mentees, it is likely that successful instructional coaches must first understand the needs of their mentees and then alter their practices to support their needs. The purpose of this study is to explore, through the lens of Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), how successful instructional coaches alter their practices based on the developmental needs of the teacher and the teachers’ motivation for change.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study were:
1. How do successful instructional coaches alter their practices to support teacher success based on the teachers’ needs/developmental level?

2. How do successful instructional coaches alter their practices to support teacher success based on teacher motivation for improvement?

3. What are teacher perspectives of the role that successful instructional coaches have had on their growth and development?

4. What are administrator perspectives of the role successful instructional coaches have had on teacher growth and development?

5. How does Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988) explain these findings?

This section will discuss the answers to each research question.

**RQ1. How do successful instructional coaches alter their practices to support teacher success based on the teachers’ needs/developmental level?**

The instructional coaches at Red River first prioritized the establishment and cultivation of a strong relationship between themselves and their mentees. The purpose of these relationships seemed to be to facilitate conversations that led to enhanced understandings of teacher needs and capacities. Once a connection had been developed and the process of instructional coaching began, the instructional coaches gained a better understanding of each teacher’s needs. For example, Christy and Laura were both veteran teachers who were motivated by wanting to increase student understanding. Christy had a new curriculum, but she wanted to be sure she was utilizing that curriculum to her students’ best interests. Laura was incorporating new ideas into the mathematics classroom and wanted to be sure these changes were impacting student learning positively. Sue and Taylor were both new to the teaching profession. They both
described themselves as wanting to grow and change in their teaching practice, and they were gleaning knowledge from the instructional coaches to do so.

In contrast, John had taught for numerous years and did not hide the fact that he was happy with his classroom and classroom practices, even though the administration and instructional coaches were not. John was not inclined to change anything about his practice. He even went so far as to say he listened to the instructional coach but did not feel as though he needed to implement any of her suggestions. Diana was a first-year teacher who did not want to utilize an instructional coach, but the administration forced her to do so. She was still working to understand how the instructional coach could help her classroom without having taught in the capacity of a special education teacher herself. While she lacked classroom experience, she was also pushing against someone who could help her development as a teacher.

Both instructional coaches discussed the differing needs of the teachers with whom they worked. The instructional coaches at Red River used different methods when coaching teachers depending upon their motivation toward goal pursuit and teaching capacity. For example, Christy and Laura, both highly motivated and capable teachers, were leading their feedback sessions, while the instructional coaches led the sessions with other teachers. This indicates a noticeable change in the coaching practices employed by the instructional coaches as they changed from leading and guiding teachers toward a goal, to allowing these teachers to lead and guide the conversation. Christy and Laura were able to articulate their goals and could identify specific steps to reach those goals. Another example of differentiation of practice occurred in that Laura and Christy received help in the form of shared resources; however, Taylor and Sue were provided with advice and basic direction. Laura shared articles with Ellen and asked her to read them and share her opinion on the next visit. One article included information about a classroom
experience Laura was wanting to incorporate. While Ava gave Christy some resources to supplement curriculum in areas Christy felt the curriculum was lacking, Christy also shared some classroom management resources with Ava in hopes she could share with other teachers. John and Diana also received specific feedback and direction from instructional coaches. The specific feedback and direction were based upon observations the coaches made in the classroom, and they were responses to immediate needs to address student learning and the classroom environment. This evidence supports the understanding that the instructional coaches at Red River changed their practices in multiple ways to meet the developmental needs of the teachers they were coaching.

RQ2. How do successful instructional coaches alter their practices to support teacher success based on teacher motivation for improvement?

During the interview process, the topic of learning goals and how instructional coaches determine learning goals was discussed. Within this discussion, both instructional coaches explained that the discussion can go several ways based on whether the teachers are motivated toward professional growth, or if they are not. The instructional coaches explained that through discussion, they get an understanding of what teachers’ goals are and if they are motivated for change. Findings through interviews with administration, instructional coaches, and teacher participants as well as observations showed that while most teacher participants within this study were motivated for improvement, there were two teachers who seemed to struggle with motivation.

Diana was an example of a teacher who was reluctant to meet with her assigned instructional coach. It was initially unclear whether Diana’s reluctance was a reflection of her resistance to the instructional coaching process or if her resistance was an indication of lack of
desire to recognize the need for improvement goals. After repeated attempts to schedule a meeting, Diana’s instructional coach approached administration to seek additional assistance in encouraging Diana to meet with her. During coaching meetings, Diana could not articulate what changes needed to be made in the classroom. This finding suggests that Diana may have been intimidated by the process of instructional coaching because she did not understand how to set goals for professional growth. In response, Ava came up with the action items for her based on what she had observed in the classroom and then gave her resources to meet these goals with explicit instructions on how to move forward. The instructional coach explained that this direct approach was employed to give Diana explicit examples of areas of need in the classroom because she was unwilling or unable to communicate or visualize needs. Further, Ellen identified John as a teacher who lacked the motivation for change. John explained that he was satisfied with his classroom “as it is now.” John’s instructional coach began the feedback session by asking John probing questions. However, the coach soon reverted to direct feedback and instruction, as the teacher was not engaging in the conversation. In both instances, the instructional coaches gave direct feedback and explicit instruction to these teachers on what changes needed to be made and how to make them. Direct instructions toward improvement were provided with the intent of enhancing the teacher’s capacity to gain a better understanding of areas of need within the classroom both in student learning and teaching.

When the instructional coaches met with teachers who were motivated to grow professionally, the instructional coaches were able to engage in a more cooperative, less directive, discussion. For example, Christy was motivated to learn to integrate the new curriculum being implemented in the district. During the observation, Christy began the session by expressing her own ideas to Ava regarding how she was addressing some learning needs in
the classroom. Laura and Ellen had a similar experience. Laura explained that she was motivated to reach more students, and she and her instructional coach began to explore together how to make that happen. During the feedback sessions of Sue and Taylor, both instructional coaches at Red River shared resources and asked the teachers how those resources could be implemented in their classrooms. Ava shared a webpage with Sue that had several activities for second grade students. Then she and Ava discussed some of the activities and how they could be utilized to supplement the classroom curriculum to meet various needs of students. Ellen had copied and shared some ideas, or bellringers, that Taylor could use to begin her class. In a previous meeting, Ellen had also shared the idea that Taylor should teach from her stage facing the class, and Taylor had implemented the change in the classroom. Ellen was able to then have a discussion with Taylor about the observed changes she saw and then added further practices for Taylor to incorporate. Unlike with the unmotivated participants, the coaches and teachers were able to have a robust discussion about those suggestions and resources. The instructional coaches did not provide specific instructions to motivated instructors about how to implement the change the teachers desired in their classroom, such as classroom management strategies, and curricular needs. Instead, the discussion was characterized by a reciprocal dynamic, where the coaches took the lead in some cases, and the teachers took the lead in others. The instructional coaches in these instances are guiding teachers within their learning, rather than directing. Christy, Laura, Sue, and Taylor evidenced the motivation for change to implement action items that both the teacher and instructional coaches can articulate. Their motivation was shown by the reciprocal conversation, shared resources, and attentiveness and understanding of the needs within their classrooms. Likewise, motivation for growth was not as evident for either Diana or John. The
instructional coaches at Red River changed their practices based on the motivation of each teacher.

**RQ3. What are teacher perspectives of the role that successful instructional coaches have had on their growth and development?**

Teachers in this study had varying perceptions of the role of the instructional coach on their teaching practices. Findings suggest that the teachers at Red River who expressed the importance of the instructional coaching process had greater movement toward classroom goals. All but two teachers at Red River attributed their instructional improvement to the instructional coaching they had received. Diana, for example, indicated that she was not certain that her practices had actually improved. Diana did not recognize growth in her own classroom practices; however, her coach, Ava, praised Diana for “taking more initiative” and implementing some of the classroom management strategies that they had discussed. Additionally, John, who expressed disinterest with the instructional coaching process, evidenced little change in classroom practices even though he indicated that he puts “more effort” into teaching on the days the instructional coach is in his classroom. Ellen, his coach, noted that she has not seen changes made in his classroom practices since the coaching process began.

In contrast, Sue, Christy, Laura, and Taylor reported the significant improvement in their practices after utilization of the instructional coaches. These were also the teachers who expressed a motivation toward growth. Sue explained that Ava has helped her by sharing her knowledge of the classroom, and by supporting her in her classroom practices by sharing resources and explaining new teaching techniques she may not understand. Taylor said she now knew she needed the support of her instructional coach and believes she is a better teacher because of it. Both Taylor and Sue explained they were unsure what to expect from instructional
coaching in the beginning, but they both now embrace and welcome the coaching. Christy and Laura are more experienced teachers who chose to utilize and instructional coach. Both participants expressed concerns about potential judgment or criticism from instructional coaches regarding their classroom practices. However, they discovered that coaching serves as a valuable support system, enabling them to experiment with novel ideas in the classroom. Moreover, they appreciate having access to knowledgeable and experienced individuals who can provide feedback on these innovative approaches.

RQ4. What are administrator perspectives of the role successful instructional coaches have had on teacher growth and development?

The administrators at Red River expressed strong support for the instructional coaching process. They explained that instructional coaches have the ability to support teacher growth because their feedback is distinct from teacher evaluation. Instead of providing an evaluative experience, instructional coaches provide formative feedback that can lead a teacher toward improvement in the classroom. Administrators stressed that the success of the instructional coaches lies heavily on the relationships they build with teachers. The administrators noted that the instructional coaches at Red River are trained to meet the needs of teachers, and more time has been spent with the teachers’ and instructional coaches building relationships than in years past. The administrators report that this training and the time taken before school started has made a difference in the relationships between the instructional coaches and the teachers.

In previous years, when the instructional coaches were provided through a contracted service between the school and an outside entity, teachers were reluctant to work cooperatively with an instructional coach because they “did not want an outside entity coming into their classrooms.” This year, however, the instructional coaches were employed by the school. The
findings suggest that administrator perspectives are that these changes have made a difference in the teachers’ attitudes toward instructional coaching so that teachers are more open to the instructional coaching from the district level. The enhanced relationships and willingness of teachers to work collaboratively with an instructional coach were referenced by administrators who were seeing positive changes in classroom management, student learning, and instruction as a result of the instructional coaching.

RQ5. How does Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988) explain these findings?

This study framed the instructional coaches as the leaders and the teachers as followers. As discussed above and in Chapter Four, both instructional coaches varied in their approach with different teachers. The findings show that the leadership style of the instructional coaches directly reflected the readiness level shown by the teacher. Furthermore, the degree of support provided by the instructional coach, particularly in terms of the relationship component, as contingent upon the teacher’s preparation level for establishing such a connection. Additionally, the teacher's specific needs for guidance and direction, as well as their receptiveness to such assistance, influenced the nature of the help received.

Hersey and Blanchard (1969) contend that leaders should demonstrate a range of leadership styles depending upon the development level and motivation toward growth of their followers. In this research study, the instructional coaches assumed the role of leaders, while the teachers were classified as followers. The strategy employed by Hersey and Blanchard (1988), as seen in Figure 3, is predicated upon the interpersonal ties that workers have established with leaders across four distinct quadrants. These quadrants are characterized by varying degrees of relationship quality and task orientation, namely: low relationship and high task, high
relationship and high task, high relationship and low task, and low relationship and low task. According to Hersey et al. (1996), individuals who exhibit a task-oriented orientation prefer directing their attention toward the specific tasks or responsibilities they are now engaged in. Conversely, those who possess a relationship-oriented orientation tend to prioritize considering the impact of their activities on the overall welfare and satisfaction of the others they are connected to.

**Figure 3 Situational Leadership Model**

![Figure 3](image)

*Figure 3.* The four dimensions of the Situational Leadership Theory Model. Adapted by Mindy Englett from *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources* by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (1988).

**Participants and Situational Leadership Theory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Behavior</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Relationship Behavior</th>
<th>Instructional Coach (es)</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wiling and Able</td>
<td>Laura and Christy</td>
<td>Delegating</td>
<td>Ava and Ellen</td>
<td>Instructional coaches have turned the process over to the teacher and teachers are willing and able to perform the tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Willing, Able, and Delegating. When Christy was initially approached about the opportunity to utilize an instructional coach, she “passed” on the opportunity because she was concerned that the instructional coach would not see her at her best because of the new curriculum the school had adopted. Nevertheless, the way she felt quickly shifted, leading her to develop a strong resolve to successfully implement the instructional coaching program as a means to enhance her teaching practices. Christy shared, “I had to step back and see that this was best for students because it was a way to help improve my instruction” (Personal Interview, 2022). When observing Christy and Ava, it was evident that Christy led the feedback sessions, with her coach, Ava, offering input as necessary. During the observational session, Ava requested that Christy provide updates on her current classroom activities. Because Christy had self-identified that she experienced challenges in the management of classroom centers, she

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unwilling and Able</th>
<th>Participating</th>
<th>Ellen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willing and Unable</th>
<th>Selling</th>
<th>Ava and Ellen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taylor and Sue</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unwilling and Unable</th>
<th>Telling</th>
<th>Ava</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
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</table>

Instructional coach is sharing ideas and making decisions with a teacher who is able to complete tasks, but remains unwilling. Instructional coaches explain reasoning and the teachers are asking questions and taking time for clarification. The instructional coach gives exact steps and tells the teacher exactly what to do the teacher lacks the ability and willingness to complete the task on their own.
assumed leadership of the feedback session and proceeded to outline the classroom practices she was implementing to address this challenge. This suggests that Christy had the willingness and capability to fulfill the many responsibilities associated with her position as a classroom teacher.

Similarly, Laura assumed control of the meeting with her instructional coach, Ellen. Laura exhibited comfort in setting her own goals, while the instructional coach served as a resource of ideas and suggestions to help Laura reach those goals. This finding suggests that Laura can make decisions and implement plans but has developed a relationship of support with Ellen. Laura wanted to try new things but felt she “just needed somebody else to tell me that was fine” (Personal Interview, 2022). Laura said that she initially got “overwhelmed and stressed out,” but she discussed the changes with the instructional coach, and they agreed to take things slower and step-by-step (Personal Interview, 2022). Laura illustrated that following the successful implementation of the differentiation strategy developed collaboratively with Ellen, she is currently striving to address the individualized learning requirements of each student in a more targeted manner. The teacher expressed to Ellen her desire to help students set and reach their goals during the feedback session. Ellen suggested using a goal notebook. Then, a conversation occurred about what the utilization of a goal notebook could look like. The meeting between Laura and Ellen was led by Laura, with assistance from Ellen. Laura showed a high level of comfort and confidence during the meeting, taking the initiative to establish her own objectives. In this collaborative setting, the instructional coach was a valuable source of ideas and strategies to support Laura in achieving her goals. This implies that Laura has the ability to make decisions and execute plans while also fostering a supportive connection with Ellen.

The level of comfort displayed by Laura and Christy with their instructional coaches was evident during the instructional coach meetings. Both individuals were actively engaged in
exchanging ideas and strategies that they had used within the educational setting while also engaging in open and collaborative discussions with their instructional coach. The observed dynamics appeared to reflect a collective endeavor rather than a situation where the coach had a dominant leadership role. This is indicative of the leaders as delegators and the followers as being willing and able.

**Unwilling, Able, and Participating.** John was the sole participant who belonged to this category. John’s perception was that, as a teacher with six years of experience, he should possess the necessary qualifications and expertise to successfully and efficiently deliver instruction at the current stage of his profession. According to John, the instructional coach does not exert any form of pressure on the teacher, nor does she induce feelings of nervousness in him. In the interview, John claimed he was not changing his teaching based on instructional coaching. However, he does claim to care about the observations. In the interview, John stated,

“No matter who you are, if a teacher or observer says they’re gonna come in, you’re gonna work a little harder on that lesson plan the day they're coming in. You’re getting observed. You kind of want to look good” (Personal Interview, 2022).

As he made this statement, his arms were folded as he leaned back in the chair, laughing. He went on to share that he does get more out of students on observation days because the lesson is set up and planned. He also shared that he does not like unannounced observations because he may not have anything prepared for that day.

In the coaching feedback meeting, John allowed the instructional coach to do most of the talking. The teacher exhibits a reluctance to heed the information provided by the instructional coach despite the coach’s provision of implementation suggestions and candid comments during classroom observations. He did not take notes but listened and gave input as needed. At one
point, the instructional coach asked John about the type of questions he was using on bell work, which John and Ellen had been working on, and he gave her a short, succinct answer. When further probed about the bell work, he responded that he tries to get it in but admitted that students usually must remind him. When discussing Ellen’s observations of John in his classroom, she noted that many students seemed to be finishing early and were then talking and disrupting the learning of others. John made excuses for this observation. He stated that he believes Ellen needs to understand that some kids finish faster than others, and it is not an issue for him as long as students are not causing problems in the classroom. There was also a discussion between the two around the idea that just because students are quiet does not mean they are on task. Ellen shared ways that John could encourage students to do activities where they discuss the classwork and not just sit there talking. John insisted that students were actually discussing their classwork even though Ellen had seen no evidence of those types of conversations. John’s demeanor and behavior towards the coach implies a lack of seriousness towards implementation suggestions, as seen by his casual attitude. Again, this shows that he has the ability, not the willingness, as a follower, and leaves the instructional coach as the only active participant in the process.

Willing, Unable, and Selling. Taylor (2022) explained that Ellen helps her “narrow down learning goals and helps focus in on what is important now.” Taylor (2022) explained that her coach gave her an idea and then walked through it with her before she executed it independently. Even as the teacher executed this new idea independently, the instructional coach was observing in the classroom and was providing real-time feedback and help as needed. According to Taylor, this experience enhanced her self-assurance in attempting novel endeavors and instilled a sense of support from Ellen because Ellen reassured her that she would not fail. In
the coaching feedback session, I observed Taylor asking the instructional coach for ideas and the instructional coach sharing ideas and telling the teacher how to make those ideas work in her classroom. The instructor was diligently writing notes and actively seeking clarification by asking relevant questions. This evidence indicates that Taylor is willing and receptive to instructional coaching, but she is still unable to execute change without direction from the instructional coach entirely.

Similarly, Sue indicated a strong willingness to learn but was very dependent on her instructional coach. Sue shared that anytime she does not know something or struggles with something, she immediately asks her instructional coach for help. Her response indicates that she wants guidance from the instructional coach and does not take the initiative to find the answer independently. Ava leads the learning process, with Sue taking over when she is ready. During her coaching feedback session, Sue was apprehensive about sharing struggles when the meeting began but she began to “open up” by the end of the meeting. Ava asked Sue to explain strategies she tried in the classroom, specifically in her reading lessons. Sue was unsure about her strategies and relied on Ava to share her thoughts and ideas on why things may or may not be working. During the observation with Sue, Ava shared multiple reading resources with her and even offered to put the ideas together and email them to her. According to Sue, the instructional coach lets her know if she is on track with others and makes the appropriate changes in instruction to meet student needs. The instructional coach gives Sue clear instructions, but Sue still questions herself. Sue shared that when Ava gives her feedback, she uses that feedback to learn and know where she can improve, but she also knows in what areas she is doing well in because of the feedback.
Both Taylor and Sue may be classified as individuals who possess the willingness to engage in a particular activity or task but have limitations or constraints that prevent them from doing so. Both individuals express a desire for change and are diligently striving to bring about such changes. However, their endeavors remain unsustainable in the absence of instructional coaches, whose supervision is essential. Both teachers explained that they lean on their instructional coach at this time to help guide their instruction. They both explained situations in which the instructional coach was heavily guiding their steps in instruction. When the teachers execute task items, the instructional coach is still there, offering immediate feedback and helping as needed. The teachers lack confidence and the ability to execute tasks on their own. In both scenarios, the instructional coach assumes the role of leading the learning process, while the teachers assume responsibility after reaching a state of readiness. Nevertheless, this observation indicates a positive connection and interaction between the instructional coaches and the instructors. This observation highlights the presence of educators who are willing to enact change but have not yet acquired the total capacity to do so independently. When the followers have not yet acquired the ability for a task but are willing to try, it leaves the leaders as the individuals selling the ideas to keep those followers motivated to continue working toward change.

Unwilling, Unable, and Telling. Diana is a first-year teacher and, thus, is required by the district to meet with an instructional coach. Both the administration and instructional coach reported that Diana was initially unwilling to meet with the coach. The building principal stepped in and forced the issue. Therefore, Diana was utilizing an instructional coach. This reluctance and unwillingness at the time of the research is indicative of Diana being an unwilling follower.
During observations, the instructional coach did not sit close to Diana as she had the other teacher participants. She shared her computer screen, and Diana took notes and participated in the discussion. During the feedback session with Ava, Ava led the meeting and provided Diana with the exact steps for the implementation of change. Diana prefers the instructional coach to engage in classroom activities actively, assuming the responsibilities assigned to Diana, rather than adopting a passive role of observing and providing direction while Diana practices independently. Diana relied on Ava to give her ideas as well as explain how to implement the ideas. Diana even asked Ava to show her where her students should sit. While Diana was reliant on Ava for many classroom management techniques, Diana expressed her belief that the instructional coach should possess a thorough knowledge of what takes place inside the special education classroom. Diana had a sense of doubt over Ava's potential efficacy in her classroom, given Ava's lack of specialization in special education. The above-mentioned situation also contributed to Diana's hesitance in collaborating with an instructional coach. Evidence suggests that Diana relies heavily on her instructional coach while still not completely trusting her. Diana stated, “I am happy I am getting to work with her (instructional coach) when I don’t really have anybody above me to help me all the time” (Personal Interview, 2022). Diana made this statement, but in interviews with her instructional coach and administration, this was not always the case.

Diana's characterization as being unwilling to learn stemmed from her early trepidation and cautiousness, which were perceived as indicators of her unwillingness to acquire new information. Although the initial readiness level may undergo adjustments over a period of time, Diana continues to harbor reservations regarding the instructional coaching process. At the time of this study, Diana had difficulty completing tasks or developing ideas independently. She was
heavily reliant on the instructional coach while still being apprehensive of the instructional coach. This finding indicates that Diana is still growing in her willingness to work with her instructional coach; however, she remains cautious in the relationship. Therefore, Diana was placed in the unwilling and unable category, with Ava telling Diana the exact steps to take and many times explicitly demonstrating those techniques.

Discussion

Instructional Coaches and Teachers

Many researchers agree that the most important aspect of instructional coaching is the successful establishment of relationships (Anderson, et al., 2014; Devine, et al., 2013; Kise, 2006; Knight, 2007; Showers & Joyce, 1996; Wolfin & Jones, 2018). The findings from this study were consistent with a significant body of existing research, highlighting the significance of establishing pre-existing connections between instructional coaches and instructors at Red River prior to engaging in the coaching cycle. Administration and instructional coaches maintained that the building and establishment of relationships was vital to the instructional coaching program and process at Red River.

In Jim Knight's (2007) Partnership Approach, the author emphasizes the significance of the collaborative relationship between the coach and the instructor. Knight (2007) emphasizes the importance of the organization and format of the feedback sessions conducted with instructors in this method. According to Knight (2007), it is essential for the instructional coach to possess a comprehensive awareness of the teacher's position on the learning continuum and to determine the most effective instructional coaching strategies that align with the teacher's needs. This research discovered that the instructional coaches employed feedback sessions in Red River to address the requirements of instructors. Each session was thoughtfully tailored to cater
to the unique learning demands of individual teachers. In similar terms, Kise (2006) proposed that the instructional coach should take a differentiated approach in instructional coaching. This entails leveraging the insights acquired through the established rapport with the teacher to ascertain the most effective feedback strategies for facilitating learning in each unique instructional context (Kise, 2006). This was also found to be true in Red River.

The instructional coaches took on a differentiated approach, as Kise (2006) suggests, with the teachers and differentiated their coaching style to meet the needs of the teacher. This differentiation also supports the Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). The instructional coaches knew the needs of each teacher and altered their practices to meet those individualized needs. Christy and Laura were classified as willing and able. With Christy and Laura, the instructional coaches were delegating the information. In this scenario, the coaches allowed the teachers to take ownership of the learning, and the teachers were, in turn, leading the feedback sessions with the instructional coach offering support as needed. The teachers who were willing but still unable are Sue and Taylor. The instructional coaches took on a selling, or coaching, approach. Both Ava and Ellen were using selling or coaching techniques while guiding the discussion and explaining classroom processes and the teachers asked clarifying questions and offered input as needed. Diana was unwilling and unable at the time of the study, but Ava reported that she was beginning to see changes in her classroom practice. To meet the needs of Diana, Ava was in the telling, or directing phase as she gave explicit steps and direction to implement changes necessary in the classroom, specifically around classroom management. John was unwilling but able to learn. Because John was still unwilling to learn even though he was able, Ellen supported him and continued to offer support and guidance, even though John seemed unreceptive.
Knight (2011) explains, the instructional coach is required to provide targeted feedback to instructors who are actively pursuing change. However, it is crucial for the coach to be cognizant of the teacher-coach relationship and the limitations inherent within it (Knight, 2011). The findings at Red River suggest that the instructional coaches are providing the targeted feedback these unmotivated teachers need, but they remain aware of the underdeveloped relationships they have with these teachers. Knowing a teacher lacks motivation, the instructional coaches at Red River deliver feedback in a specific and explicit direction. This aligns with the work of Knight (2011) because the instructional coaches are providing a targeted feedback that is explicit to the needs of the teacher. Instructional coaches enhance a teacher's motivation for change by providing education on the current context and engaging them in a process of inquiry through questioning, so empowering them to develop strategies that have the potential to enhance students' learning outcomes (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Knight, 2018; Knight, 2011). With the teachers who are motivated, the instructional coaches offer resources and support for action items the teachers want to and are ready to engage in because of their motivation. This study found that in addition to this, the instructional coaches encourage teacher growth by fostering a collaborative relationship.

Administration

Principals play a pivotal role in elucidating the significance and responsibilities of instructional coaches to the faculty of the school, hence facilitating enhanced communication and cooperation between instructional coaches and instructors (Walkowiak, 2016; Wolpert-Gawron, 2016). The findings of this study indicate that the principals not only demonstrate support for the instructional coaches, but also perceive them as a means for their own professional development. The administration at Red River are implementing measures to ensure the effectiveness of
instructional coaches by providing them with comprehensive preparation and offering assistance through collaboration with instructors.

**Implications**

This section will discuss the implications of this study for research, theory, and practice.

**Implications for Research**

There has been a great deal of research surrounding school leadership and Situational Leadership Theory, and instructional coaching and the importance of relationships (Cairns et. al, 1998, Devine et. al, 2103, Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, Hersey & Johnson, 2004, Knight, 2011). While instructional coaches have been researched as leaders (Knight, 2009, Neufield & Roper, 2003) and the relationships they build have been researched (Knight, 2007, Knight, 2011, Woulfin & Jones, 2018), there has been little to no research on instructional coaching in rural schools or the application of instructional coaching to Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). This study aspires to address a research vacuum by examining the implementation of instructional coaching in rural regions while simultaneously examining its use within the framework of Situational Leadership Theory. One could argue that the most noteworthy aspect of this study is the investigation into the relationships formed between the instructional coach and the teachers with varying levels of prior experience and abilities. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of tailoring coaching approaches to meet the specific needs of each individual teacher.

This study also implies the importance of the administration within the instructional coaching process. While Red River administrators perceive instructional coaches as members of the leadership team, not all districts envision them as such. What was vital to the success of this instructional coaching program was that while the administrators allowed the instructional
coaches to lead, they also learned alongside the instructional coaches and had clearly defined roles. Clarity in instructional coach responsibilities, with an emphasis on formative rather than summative feedback, allowed the instructional coaches to build relationships with teachers that were non-evaluative in nature.

Lastly, this study has highlighted the importance for instructional coaches to change the style in which they coach to meet the needs of teachers. While it is crucial for instructional coaches to build relationships with teachers, and those relationships held strong at Red River, it is equally important to change the coaching style to meet the needs of teachers. For years, teachers have worked to change their teaching style to meet the needs of the diverse learners in the classroom. Findings from this study suggest that the same holds true for instructional coaches and the teachers they are leading toward change.

**Implications for Theory**

Situational Leadership Theory has been used for years to study the relationship and behaviors of leaders and followers (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). This study looked at Instructional Coaching in education through the lens of Situational Leadership Theory. This research supports the understanding that Situational Leadership Theory has utility to understand the instructional coaching process because it provides an explanation of how these successful instructional coaches altered their behavior to promote teacher growth and capacity. Specifically, in this study, coaches utilized a leadership style that met the specific needs of the teacher. By adjusting their behavior according to teacher needs, the teacher was motivated to move toward professional growth goals. This study also added important understandings to the importance of relationship building between the leader and follower. Situational leadership focuses primarily
on leader actions based on follower motivation and capacity. This study added an understanding of the importance of relationship building as a precursor for leadership effectiveness.

**Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study indicate that it is crucial for instructional coaches to cultivate a pre-existing rapport with the instructors with whom they are engaged before providing feedback. The initiation of the partnership process by Red River involved providing training to instructional coaches, administrators, and teachers on the coaching process and the anticipated expectations for the future. The training session was a collaborative process that was conducted with the active involvement of all involved parties. Consequently, a period of mutual learning was created as instructional coaches and instructors entered the process, enabling them to acquire knowledge from one another before engaging in a scenario where the instructional coach provided feedback and coaching recommendations. Findings from this study further suggest that it is also essential that the instructional coach be mindful of the leadership style they are using and how their approach needs to change based on the needs of the teacher.

One unexpected discovery pertained to the relationship between administrators and instructional coaches and the subsequent enhancement of the leadership team resulting from these interactions. According to Jack, establishing connections with instructional coaches has eased his role as an administrator by enabling him to leverage the coaches as trusted individuals who can assist him in promoting and implementing district initiatives. Pat mentioned that she collaborates with instructional coaches to engage in observation rounds, enabling her to enhance her evaluation abilities. Pat acknowledges that the coach's role is non-evaluative, but she believes that this method has facilitated the cultivation of a positive rapport with the coaches, helping make her “a stronger principal” (Personal Interview, 2022). Additionally, this practice has helped
support Pat’s relationship with teachers because these rounds have assisted her in gaining insight into the fact that on certain occasions, she “focuses on too much” when observing a teacher, putting a strain on relationships with some teachers (Personal Interview, 2022). Pat explained that this district strives for teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators to work together toward professional growth. Pat feels that the establishment and ongoing cultivation of strong relationships are vital for facilitating personal and professional development. This finding would suggest, schools looking to include instructional coaching must also look at how the instructional coaches will work alongside the administration. Red River has found the relationships built with the administration team and the instructional coaches to be not only beneficial to the teachers and the teaching, but also beneficial to the administration and their practice.

Ava highlighted that, as an instructional coach, she is now observing enhanced relationships with others due to her collaborative efforts with the administration and their collective participation in training initiatives. Ava believes that maintaining the relationships with administrators and teachers has created “less room for pushback” that she was previously receiving because teachers did not understand the coaching process, and administrators did not know how to explain the process (Personal Interview, 2022). Jack indicated that he believes that, while the instructional coaches must build trust and rapport with teachers, it is up to the administrators to “back up” the instructional coaches to show that the administration also has a trusting relationship with them (Personal Interview, 2022). Once more, this inadvertent finding underscores the need of integrating the instructional coach into the leadership team and ensuring ongoing administrative support throughout the coaching process.
Limitations

While I have strived to develop a trustworthy research case, there are limitations to this research. First of all, according to Creswell & Creswell (2018), case studies are constrained by time and activity, which could easily be seen as a research limitation. I remained aware that this research was relevant to this district and this instructional coaching program, but it could be replicated to fit other districts and other programs.

When I first explored this district for this study, they used an outside entity for their instructional coaching. However, the external entity was simultaneously training district employees as instructional coaches. As the research began, there were some abrupt resignations within the outside entity, which could have created discord within the study. This study utilized the two district instructional coaches trained by the external entity. I worked to remain cognizant of the ongoing situation while focusing on the research's integrity.

During my study, I could only get data snapshots by conducting interviews, observations, field notes, and artifacts during school hours. The preferred method of observation was in person. The Zoom application was utilized in two situations when scheduling issues did not allow for in-person observations. As previously stated, researcher bias had a role in the study. It was never my intention to demonstrate bias, and I tried diligently to remain aware of it, but it should be acknowledged as a potential study constraint. I am aware of my lack of research experience, which may be seen as a research restriction. There are limitations to most studies and research, which are often related to the interpretation of the data by the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, a thick description of the data was used in this research.
Recommendations for Future Research

This study demonstrated the significance of instructional coaches as leaders who adapt their leadership style to address teachers' instructional demands successfully. Findings from this study support the idea that the utilization of Situational Leadership Theory in developing instructional coaching frameworks may be beneficial. Additional research is needed to understand if incorporating Situational Leadership Theory into the professional development and training of instructional coaches before they engage with teachers could prove advantageous.

This study primarily examined the interaction between instructional coaches and teachers. However, it also identified additional elements that were not the primary focus of the research. Significant alterations in student behavior were seen because of the use of instructional coaching within the classroom setting. Potential areas for future study might focus on identifying the specific changes observed in students as their teachers progress through the instructional coaching cycle over the course of an academic year.

The focus of this study was centered around the implementation of in-person instructional coaching. In recent times, there has been a notable trend towards the adoption of virtual instructional coaching. There is a pressing need for further study in the field of virtual coaching. This study has the potential to offer a framework for guiding future research endeavors.

As previously said, it would be advantageous to obtain a more extensive dataset and examine the evolving trends of teacher willingness and the instructional coaching behaviors throughout the course of the academic year. This analysis may demonstrate the modifications in the instructional coach's behaviors to accommodate the teacher's current needs, as well as the corresponding adjustments in the teacher's behaviors as their task behavior evolves over the
course of the year. Additionally, it may reveal the consequential alterations that transpire in the instructional coaching process as the teachers grow in their profession and ability to learn.

**Summary**

Chapter V included a comprehensive overview of the study findings, which were examined in relation to the research objectives and analyzed via the framework of Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). This study provides evidence on the adaptations in instructional coach leadership behavior in response to variations in teacher's task behavior. This modification facilitated the instructional coach in engaging in more substantial feedback and exchanges with the instructors they collaborated with. Like previous research, this study highlights the significance of cultivating a strong rapport between the instructional coach and the instructor. The purpose of this study is to explore, through the lens of Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), how successful instructional coaches alter their practices based on the developmental needs of the teacher and the teachers’ motivation for change. Additional study is required to provide comprehensive guidance to instructional coaches regarding task behavior, virtual instructional coaching, as well as the implications and statistics associated with student change.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions Teachers

Interview Questions:

1. Describe your teaching and learning style.

2. Explain the instructional coaching process.

3. Describe your relationship with your instructional coach.

4. What differences, if any, have you noticed in your classroom practices as a result of instructional coaching?
   a. Why do you think these differences happened?

5. What were your initial feelings on working with an instructional coach?
   a. How have those feelings changed over time? Why?

6. How would you evaluate the coaching process?

7. In what ways, if at all, does your instructional coach show concern for you?

8. Tell me about a situation in which you felt your instructional coach was pushing you toward your personal goals, and what was the biggest factor that influenced your teaching?
9. How do you determine goals you want to meet with your instructional coach?

10. How do you and your coach determine when and if goals are met?

11. Tell me about a problem you have had in the classroom and how you utilized your instructional coach to solve that problem? In what ways did the instructional coach lead you through the issue?

Is there anything I have not asked that you would like me to know?

If there are any other questions I think of in the future, may I contact you?
Appendix B: Interview Questions Instructional Coaches

Interview Questions:

1. Describe your leadership style.

2. Explain the instructional coaching process.

3. Describe your relationship with teachers you coach.

4. What differences, if any, have you noticed in the classroom practices of teachers, as a result of instructional coaching?
   a. Why do you think these differences happened?

5. What were your initial feelings on working with and developing relationships with teachers as an instructional coach?
   a. How have those feelings changed over time? Why?

6. How would you evaluate the coaching process?

7. In what ways do you show concern for the teachers you work with?

8. Tell me about a situation in which you pushed a teacher toward their personal goals, and what technique you utilized to move toward change?

9. How do you address learning goals set by the teachers?

10. In what ways do you determine that teaching goals are met?
11. Tell me about a problem a teacher has had in the classroom and how you were utilized to solve that problem? In what ways did you lead the teacher through the issue?

Is there anything I have not asked that you would like me to know?

If there are any other questions I think of in the future, may I contact you?
Appendix C: Interview Questions Administration

Interview Questions:

1. Explain the instructional coaching process.

2. Describe your relationship with instructional coaches and how you view them within the leadership team in your building.

3. What differences, if any, have you noticed in classroom practices of teachers in your building as a result of instructional coaching?
   a. Why do you think these differences happened?

4. What were your initial feelings on having instructional coaches in the building
   a. How have those feelings changed over time? Why?

5. How would you evaluate the coaching process?

6. What ways do you see coaches showing concern for the teachers they work with? Do the teachers view instructional coaches as having concern for them?

7. Tell me about situations in which a teacher has needed to change and how the instructional coach motivated the change.

8. How do teachers determine the goals they are working toward and in what ways do the instructional coaches address those goals?
9. What ways do you see teachers meeting their goals and how are instructional coaches determining if those goals are met?

10. What classroom problems have you noticed being addressed by the collaboration of instructional coaches and teachers? How have the teachers changed? What leadership approaches did the instructional coach use to address these issues?

Is there anything I have not asked that you would like me to know?

If there are any other questions I think of in the future, may I contact you?
Appendix D: Participant Selection

This table template will be used when meeting with administration to get guidance on teachers and instructional coaches when selecting the best sample for this research study.

7. What are the names of teachers in your building that utilize an instructional coach?
8. How many years of teaching experience do they have (approximately)?
9. On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being unwilling and unable to 5 being willing and able where would you rate their willingness to learn?
10. How long have they worked with an instructional coach and who is their instructional coach?
11. What grade level do they teach?
12. What is their email? (I need this to send study information and a consent form to be in the study)

Teacher Information

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Willingness to Learn</th>
<th>Length of time they have used IC and IC name.</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Email</th>
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Instructional Coach Information

1. What are the names of the instructional coaches?
2. How many years have they been an instructional coach?
3. Using the following as the definition of a successful instructional coach, would you say they are successful or not?

   **Successful Instructional Coaches.** Successful instructional coaches can look different in different situations. However, many researchers agree that a successful instructional coach should have also been a successful teacher (as shown in evaluations and referrals), be able to develop and maintain relationships among peers including teachers and administrators, have a growth mindset and knowledge of developing that mindset, be visionary and work toward the vision statement and goals of the district, trustworthy, and being knowledgeable of the relationships built and can adapt to the needs of individual teachers (Balka et al., 2010) (Devine et al., 2013) (Knight, 2011).

4. What is their email? (I need this to send study information and a consent form to be in the study)

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<th>Administrators opinion successful or not successful</th>
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Administrators:

Elementary Administrators list and email:

Secondary Administrators list and email:
### Coaching Feedback Conversation Exemplar

**Action Step:** When a question is posed to you, throw the question out to the group (ask for raised hands) and then stamp the key point

- Use a neutral tone
- Ask for a student to answer the posed question
- Stamp the key point

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agenda Item</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>Plan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Praise/Follow Up on Past Action Step</td>
<td><strong>Follow up on past action steps:</strong> Analyzes the impact of the previous action step on students and the teacher. Names if the action step is complete or ongoing.</td>
<td>Previously we discussed some various questioning techniques, including cold call, call out questions, and raised hands. In the time that I was in your classroom, you had 17 call out questions and 4 raised hand questions. The call out questions really helped with the energy in the room, especially those last few minutes after the video failed. I could tell that you are quick to think on your feet and I think we learned a powerful lesson about closures when your work at the end of class. What insights did you learn from the questions you posed at the end.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Presents evidence:</strong> Provides clarity about the strengths of the instruction grounded in student-level evidence and the corresponding teacher actions.</td>
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</table>

Previously we discussed some various questioning techniques, including cold call, call out questions, and raised hands. In the time that I was in your classroom, you had 17 call out questions and 4 raised hand questions. The call out questions really helped with the energy in the room, especially those last few minutes after the video failed.

I could tell that you are quick to think on your feet and I think we learned a powerful lesson about closures when your work at the end of class. What insights did you learn from the questions you posed at the end.
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**Analysis**

- **Presents evidence:** Provides clarity about a specific and narrow weakness of the instruction grounded in student-level evidence and the corresponding teacher actions.
- **Identifies the gap:** Analyzes the root causes of problems.
- **Builds the case:** Using the evidence, builds the case for change, including the impact on students and teachers.

I want to hone in on a single interaction that happened in your class and to build off of your goal of having more participation from your students.

We can always rely on Braylee to help move the conversation forward. She asked “How did it pass the Senate on this date but then it wasn’t ratified until this date?”

You responded - “Well, it had to go through a process.”

You even came back to this at the end - “When did it pass? When was it ratified?” and there was a misconception about the difference.

Why was that question so important? How
does that question connect to some of your overall goals for your class?

In this case, you did the heavy lifting for the students. I know we have talked previously about not having the content expertise. Right now, when you answer those questions, you are positioning yourself as the expert when we need them to do more of the cognitive work.
| **(New) Action Step** | **• Clearly defines the action step:** Provides clarity about the one thing that you will work on together.  
**• Includes rationale:** Builds a sense of urgency to solve the identified areas of opportunity. Analyzes the impact of the action step.  
**• Breaks down the action step:** Includes a clear how - the exact steps it will take to master the action step, which may include coach modeling. | **Today, I want to focus on this action step. When a question is posed to you, throw the question out to the group (ask for raised hands) and then stamp the key point**  
• Use a neutral tone  
• Ask for a student to answer the posed question  
• Stamp the key point  

Why could this be a powerful move, especially for your students like Braylee and Corbin?  

Listen for:  
• Helps them understand that they actually have the answer if they thought more deeply about it - reducing learned helplessness and more critical thinking  
• Positions the class and... |
<table>
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<th>students as the experts</th>
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<td>- they can learn</td>
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<td>from each other</td>
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| Plan/ Practice | • **Plan, then practice:**
|               | Gives teachers time to plan out the practice and enables their success.
|               | • **Practice to mastery:**
|               | Provides multiple “at bats” to build skill in a specific action step.
|               | • **Increased complexity:**
|               | Gives the teacher an opportunity to practice the action step in a more rigorous or challenging setting (i.e. students misbehaving, student misconceptions, etc.).
|               | • **Direct feedback planning:** Plans for feedback by planning for common errors.
|               | • **Includes rationale:**
|               | Connects new skill to the impact on students. |
|               | Walk me through your lesson for today.
|               | Pause on the first slide: What questions do you anticipate students will have here?
|               | Questions about the process →
|               | What are they doing at this meeting and why are they taking notes?
|               | Why do they keep having discussions with Lincoln? -
|               | Okay - I’m going to play Braylee. Then, you are going to respond in the neutral tone, kick it to the group, and then you will stamp the key point.
|               | Errors to look for:
|               | • Not using a neutral tone
|               | • Not defining
the participation method
• Not stamping the key point after the student responds
• Not giving enough wait time

Increase complexity:
• Increase wait time
• Reinforce critical thinking and growth mindset
| Close/Plan Follow Up | • **Determine the follow up**: Based upon the evidence from the practice, the coach defines the follow up method and is direct about the next steps, including the timeline.  
• **Restate action step**: Defines the action step and all of the components.  
• **Generate excitement**: Offers encouragement and builds excitement around expected progress. | Tell me again - what is this move that we are practicing?  
What is the impact of this move? What do we anticipate students will struggle with?  
Next week is our last week - we will step back on your year and start projecting forward.  
Next week: Lincoln’s assassination  
Restruction  
Jim Crow/KKK |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
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<td><strong>Action Step</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
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</table>
Teacher __________________ Date __________ Time ______ Hr. ______

Objective __________________ Number of Students ______________

Lesson Plan Notes: *Preview before Observation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hand Raises</th>
<th>Questions Asked</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold Calls</td>
<td>Open Ended</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choral Response</td>
<td>Closed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**What am I looking for today?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management/Participation</th>
<th>Rigor/Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of time/pacing</td>
<td>Strategic Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating Strategies</td>
<td>Clarity of Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Narration</td>
<td>Respond to Student Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Radar</td>
<td>Key Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Routines and Procedures</td>
<td>Independent Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Management</td>
<td>Strong Voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intentional Monitoring</td>
<td>Effective Lesson Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Arrangement</td>
<td>Rigor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Voice</td>
<td>Other</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes/Room Sketches


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Teacher Action</th>
<th>Student Action</th>
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<td>Time</td>
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## Coaching Template

**Praise/Follow Up on Past Action Step**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence (Low-Inference)</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>New Action Step</th>
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<th>Plan/Practice</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Close/Plan Follow Up</th>
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</table>
# Classroom Sweep

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Observations</td>
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REFLECTIVE LISTENING

"I get a sense that..."
"It sounds like you..."
"I'm picking up that you..."
"I get the impression that..."
"What I hear you saying is..."
"It seems as if you're feeling... because..."
"I'm not certain I understand. You're feeling..."
"Help me to understand. On one hand you... and on the other hand you..."
"It's difficult/easy for you to..."
"Let me see if I understand..."
"You don't see a need to..."
"Is that accurate?"
Coaching Conversation Tips

Tip #1

Instead of Offer advice Immediately.
Try asking,
Were you just needing to vent or did you want some help with that?

Tip #2
direct communication isn't wrong your needs are equally as important it's not too late to start using direct communication kindness and honesty are compatible not conflicting

Tip #3
Instead of saying...
Aw, don't be upset!
Try saying,
That sounds heavy. Is there more?
Coaching Conversation Tips

Tip #4
"THANK YOU" instead of "I'M SORRY"

Thank you for listening to me. Thank you for your patience. Thank you for helping me out. Thank you for helping me improve. Good catch! I'll make the updates.

Sorry I'm not making sense. Sorry I am late. Sorry I have to ask a favor of you. Sorry I made a mistake. Sorry I messed that up.

Tip #5

When someone is resisting your coaching, shift from advising (telling) to curiosity (asking questions).

Tip #6

Instead of asking, "How do I hold her accountable?"

Try asking, "How can I support her growth and remove barriers?"
Coaching Conversation Tips

Tip #7
3-step process for fostering HOPE:

Create goals Opportunity for agency
Provide multiple ways of achieving goals

Tip #8
How to build a psychologically safe environment:

Create a shared understanding of what failures are to be expected.
Not all failures are created equal.
Embrace the "messengers" of the mistakes.

✔️ Create a culture of blameless reporting.
Be transparent about what acts are blameworthy and hold people accountable.

✔️ Spend time intentionally analyzing and detecting failures as a team.

✔️ Admit what you don't know.
Coaching Conversation Tips

Tip #9

STOP responding to complaints with "It is what it is."

Tip #10

Stop assuming the support you provide is helpful. Try asking for feedback.

Tip #11

Integrity builds trust. your motives and intentions what actions you're taking by when you'll take them
Coaching Conversation Tips

Tip #12

Stop Dismissing Compliments

Oh, it was nothing!
I just threw something together. It's not that good.

I didn't really do anything.
It was ok. If I had more time, I could have made it better.
This really didn't take me that long.
It's not a big deal.

Tip #13

Choosing **courage** over **comfort** doesn't mean being fearless. It takes acknowledging the fear and doing it anyway.
Coaching Conversation Tips

Tip #14
When someone is giving you a hard time, respond with...
"What I hear you saying is..."
Leave them feeling heard.

Tip #15
Decision fatigue can cause you to:

- have difficulty with self control. fall back on easy choices.
- get stuck in analysis paralysis.

Tip #16
To encourage engagement over compliance, assess their level of engagement:

- Authentic Engagement
- Strategic Compliance
- Ritual Compliance
- Retreatism
- Rebellion
Tip #17

You train people how to treat you.
If you don't like their behavior, change your response.

☑️ It doesn't work for me when you do "x". I prefer it when you do "y".

☑️ I appreciate it when you do "x" because...
   (I know I can trust you...it makes my job easier...etc.)
Appendix F

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 09/28/2022
Application Number: IRB-22-387
Proposal Title: Instructional Coaching in Rural Schools: A Qualitative Study of Instructional Coaching Methods and the Developmental Needs of Teachers

Principal Investigator: Mindy Englett
Co-Investigator(s):
Faculty Adviser: Kathy Curry
Project Coordinator:
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Exempt
Exempt Category:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:
1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.
Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB
Appendix G

School of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Aviation

CONSENT FORM

Instructional Coaching in Rural Schools: A Qualitative Study of Instructional Coaching Methods and the Developmental Needs of Teachers

Background Information
You are invited to be in a research study of instructional coaching in rural schools focusing on instructional coaching methods and the developmental needs of teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because you have utilized an instructional coach within the last two years. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

This study is being conducted by: Mindy Jo Englett, M.S., Oklahoma State University, College of Education and Human Sciences-School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Aviation, under the direction of Dr. Katherine Curry, Oklahoma State University, College of Education and Human Sciences-School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Aviation.

Procedures
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participate in one 45 minute interview about your experiences as a teacher who utilizes instructional coaching, instructional coach, or principal who oversees teachers and instructional coaches in a rural school setting in Oklahoma. During the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions and you will asked for consent to be audio and video taped through the Zoom application. I will also observe one session of each teacher and instructional coach meeting together. Administrators will participate in one interview. Teachers will participate in one interview and one observation of a coaching session. Instructional coaches will participate in one interview and one observation of three separate coaching sessions with the teacher participants. You may also be asked to provide artifacts such as instructional coaching documentation, photographs, and other artifacts that may pertain to this study.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: Administrators will have a total time commitment of approximately 1 hour for the interview. Teachers will have an approximate time commitment of 2 hours with one hour being devoted to the interview and a one hour observing a coaching session. Instructional coaches will have a total time commitment of approximately 4 hours with one hour being devoted to the interview and 3 hours being devoted to three separate coaching sessions.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study
The study involves the following foreseeable risks: There are no known risks associated with this project, which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.
The benefits to participation are: There are no known benefits to participants at this time. In a broader sense, this may further help researchers gain a better understanding of instructional coaching methods and teacher development and may help future and current instructional coaches and teachers design interventions to better guide teacher development.

There is a potential risk of breach of confidentiality which is minimized by use of password protected devices, locking file cabinets, and the deletion or shredding of documentation upon completion of this research.

Compensation
You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

Confidentiality
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number/pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

We will collect your information through interviews, observations, district documentation, and video or audio recordings. This information will be stored on a password protected device and in a locked file cabinet. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the code list linking names to study numbers will be destroyed. This is expected to occur no later than May 31, 2023. The audio/video recording will be transcribed. The recording will be deleted after the transcription is complete and verified. This process should take approximately two months. This informed consent form will be kept for 3 years after the study is complete, and then it will be destroyed. Your data collected as part of this research project, will not be used or distributed for future research studies. Any artifacts and/or photographs gathered from the district will have any identifying information covered, and the original copies will be destroyed to maintain confidentiality.

It is unlikely, but possible, that others responsible for research oversight may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will only share your information if law or policy requires us to do so.

Voluntary Nature of the Study
Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. The alternative is to not participate. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview/survey at any time.

Contacts and Questions
The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at 918-381-4903, mindyjk@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this
study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

_You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records._

**Statement of Consent**
I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Indicate Yes or No:
I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.
  ___Yes  ___No

I give consent to be videotaped during this study:
  ___Yes  ___No

Signature:___________________________________________  Date: __________

Signature of Investigator:________________________________  Date: __________
VITA

Mindy Jo Englett

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING METHODS AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF TEACHERS

Major Field: Education Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for Doctor of Education in Education Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2024.

Completed the requirements for Master of Education in Teaching, Learning, and Leadership at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2018.

Completed the requirements for Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education at Bacon College, Muskogee, Oklahoma in July, 2008.

Experience:

Director of Educational Pathways, Sapulpa Public School, Oklahoma July 2023-present
Superintendent, Avant Public School, Oklahoma July 2020-June 2023
Principal, Avant Public School, Oklahoma July 2019-June 2020
Grant Director and Manager, Osage County Interlocal, Oklahoma July 2016-June 2019
Instructional Coach, Tulsa Public School, Oklahoma, July 2016-June 2016

Professional Memberships:

Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration (CCOSA)
Oklahoma City, OK 2019-present