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THE SUPERINTENDENT'S ROLE IN DEVELOPING PEER COACHING

A dissertation

Presented to

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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May 2010

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Keywords: Superintendent role, developing, peer coaching

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover how the behaviors of Indiana School district-level leaders create a culture of instructional, peer coaching in the district. An additional purpose was to discover any similarities between how district level leaders and leaders from different sized corporations behaved to create a climate of peer coaching. The increase in accountability brought about by both federal and state legislation has placed greater emphasis on providing each classroom with highly-trained instructors. One method of professional development that is currently being used to help ensure that students have access to excellent teachers is peer coaching; also known as instructional coaching.

The related literature reviewed included the areas of peer coaching benefits, the characteristics of peer coaching and the role of administrators in peer coaching. Lastly, one theoretical model of peer coaching was reviewed.

The participants in the study were nine school-district leaders from across the approximate northern third of Indiana. These leaders were interviewed and some common behaviors were identified. These behaviors included involvement in the coach selection process, securing funding for coaches, providing professional development for coaches and providing coaches to elementary teachers in literacy. Insight gained from this study should help district-level leaders create a climate conducive to peer coaching.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge the help and encouragement of many individuals. First and foremost, I want to thank my family. They provided me with the encouragement, support, and even the occasional nag. I could not have completed this work without them. I also want to thank my parents who instilled in me a love of learning. I hope that my efforts would have made them proud.

My coworkers and friends who supported me in this process and continually pushed me along on this journey. Specifically, I want to thank David Clendening who shared many hours driving and studying with me. Also, I owe a debt of gratitude to Jamie Lehman who helped me keep track of document changes and typed my rough drafts.

I also want to thank Dr. Robert Boyd whose leadership and support helped me on my journey. Additionally, Dr. Brad Balch and Dr. Noble Corey deserve kudos for serving on my committee and providing me with provoking discussion.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the most important people in the world to me: my wife, Lisa, and my children, Laura, Barrett, Katie, and Jennifer. Sometimes the road traveled does not go as expected. I would never want to be on my life's journey without each of you. I thank God every day for allowing you to be present in my life. You each provide a gift to me and I am forever grateful.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, schools in Indiana and throughout the nation have felt the pinch of increased accountability. In 1999, the Indiana General Assembly passed Public Law 221 (PL-221). This law, which went into effect in the fall of 2002, is Indiana's version of the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Both of these pieces of legislation effectively changed the climate of public education. The main objective of these laws is to mandate that all students have access to a world-class education. This education includes exposure to a challenging curriculum, safe and secure learning environments, and most importantly for the purpose of this paper, highly qualified instructors. Additionally, these pieces of legislation call for the demonstration of continuous improvement in student standardized test scores. In Indiana, that test is ISTEP+.

District-level leaders are obviously and correctly at the forefront of this accountability movement. These leaders are continually challenged with the need to meet the demands of PL-221 and NCLB. One aspect of these pieces of legislation that district leaders may find particularly difficult to address is the ability to provide all students with highly qualified teachers. District leaders need to ensure that best practice and research-based instruction is occurring in every classroom in their district. Since a major requirement of PL-221 and NCLB is the continuous improvement of student achievement as demonstrated on ISTEP+, it is apparent

that the ancillary goal is the continuous improvement of instruction. One method of professional development that has shown promise in the improvement of teaching methodology is that of instructional coaching.

What It Means To Have a Culture of Coaching

This study focused on the creation of a school-corporation climate that encourages peer coaching. What does it mean to create a climate of peer coaching? First of all, it means that peer coaches play a major role in the professional development of the staff. The coaches lead and/or plan professional-development activities. In consultation with the building principals and district leaders, coaches help set the course for the professional growth activities for the staff. Secondly, in a school that has a climate of peer coaching, the coach facilitates formal and informal discussions about teaching and learning. Coaches share best-practice strategies about teaching in many different venues and use their expertise to guide professional discussions with other teachers. Coaches also continue to learn themselves. In a school where peer coaching flourishes, it means there is laser-sharp focus on how each teacher (including the coach) can be just a little bit better as an instructor each day. A peer coaching climate in a corporation means that teachers recognize that the answers to their questions about teaching and learning are not some magic pill that is given to them. Instead, a corporation that believes in peer coaching recognizes that teachers learn best in collaborative settings. Instructors in *coached* corporations recognize that teaching and learning require ongoing support for the staff and often the best answer to the question is found in the discussion with the coach, not in the text read over the summer. Lastly, in schools that have peer coaching, teachers are willing and able to be coached. That is, the teachers in a peer-coached school are open to different teaching strategies that might enhance student learning. Not only are they open to such strategies, they are “hungry” for

methodologies that improve their skills in enhancing the learning opportunities for all students. This is not to say that all teachers must be willing to be coached at all times. Simply teachers must be willing to be reflective practitioners who are willing to accept and implement recommendations.

Importance of Coaching

Since instructional coaching does not occur in a vacuum, but instead occurs throughout a school building or corporation, it was significant to examine why a culture of peer coaching is important. Initially, if peer coaching permeates a unique culture within a school building in a corporation, that building or corporation implicitly believes in lifelong learning. Lifelong learning for a teacher implies that he/she want to be a better instructor. Teachers recognize that there are always new methodologies to investigate and new research to be examined. A climate conducive to peer coaching fosters discussions among teachers about best-practice instructional strategies. In this environment, teachers strive to learn about teaching practices that enhance student learning. When the building provides coaches, these conversations move to the next level. Not only will discussions about teaching and learning occur, but they will also be focused on research-based practices and will often be led by coaches who have varying degrees of expertise. Secondly, a climate of peer coaching implies that teachers are willing to learn from one another in a collaborative fashion. If a teaching staff is willing to be coached, then it must consist of a group of reflective practitioners. When teachers admit their shortcomings to each other or to the coach, they are then able to recognize their own need to improve their pedagogy. Recognizing the need for improvement is the first step towards becoming a better teacher; attacking inadequacies is the only way to move down the path to teaching expertise. Lastly, a coaching climate is one of the most effective ways to positively impact instruction (Showers &

Joyce, 1996). Obviously, the most important reason to institute peer coaching is the enhancement of student achievement. Coaching provides teachers with better methodology and therefore enhances the opportunities for students to demonstrate success on the ISTEP+ standardized test.

Problem Statement

The problem statement for this qualitative study was: What is the role of district-level leaders in the establishment of corporation climate that fosters an environment conducive to instructional coaching? Since instructional coaching has been shown to positively affect instruction, what must district leaders do to successfully implement instructional coaches? Furthermore, this study will attempt to describe the similarities and differences between how large, medium and small districts created instructional coaching environments.

A qualitative study method was selected for investigating this research problem because of the lack of research on the central-office behaviors that are antecedents to the creation of a climate of peer coaching. Since different district leaders often times take different routes to their creation of the culture of peer coaching, it was necessary to investigate several school districts. A qualitative study allowed for the in-depth exploration of the district leader's activity that facilitated a climate conducive to peer coaching.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the qualitative study was to discover how the behaviors of Indiana school district-level leaders create a culture of instructional coaching within their district. An additional purpose was to discover any similarities or differences between how district level leaders from different sized corporations created the instructional coaching climate. A culture of instructional coaching is generally defined as a process by which professional educators provide teachers with strategies for the improvement of instructional practices.

Research Questions

The research questions this study attempted to answer are as follows:

1. How do district leaders in peer-coaching districts describe their process of creating a peer-coaching climate?
2. How do district leaders in peer-coaching districts describe the experience of influencing their staff to accept peer coaching?
3. How do district-level leaders describe their role in the creation of instructional coaching?
4. How would the district-level leader describe his/her discoveries in implementing a climate of peer culture?

Researcher's Role

It is important for the reader to recognize the researcher's role in the preparation of this study. Having been an elementary principal and then a central office staff member in a district where coaching existed, the researcher was interested in how peer coaching in his district evolved. Having seen the positive influences on the teaching staff, the researcher was interested in determining what role the superintendent or district leaders played in establishing this method of staff development. The researcher had limited connections to the research sites and those connections were superficial at most.

Limitations and Delimitations

The major limitation of this research is the relatively small sample size involved in the study. Certainly, inferring conclusions about how all school district level leaders behave based on a sampling of nine districts is somewhat suspect. However, the results of the study can lead the researcher to the development of themes that are useful in examining district leader behavior.

A delimitation of this study is the geographic area selected by the researchers. The relatively small area of the study certainly excluded many possible alternative outcomes of the research. Additionally, the scope of the questioning is a delimitation of the study. Had a slightly different set of questions been asked by the researcher, significantly different outcomes may have been discovered. Finally, this researcher limited the scope of the findings to exploring leadership behaviors that are either consistent within specific size districts or behaviors that are highly consistent among all three size districts. Although, research concerning behaviors among two of three different size districts is presented in diagram form the researcher is most interested in determining highly consistent behavior across all district sizes.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following terms are defined.

District-level leaders are central office personnel that may include superintendents, assistant superintendents, or curriculum directors.

Instructional coaching/Peer coaching is the process of professional educators providing peer teachers with strategies for the improvement of instructional practices in a non-evaluative format.

ISTEP+ is Indiana's Standardized Test of academic achievement

Large district is a corporation greater than 3,000 pupils.

Medium district is a corporation between 1,500 pupils and 2,999 pupils.

Public Law 221 (PL-221) is Indiana's school accountability legislation.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the United States school accountability legislation.

Small district is a corporation of less than 1,500 pupils.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Benefits of Peer Coaching

Indiana schools in the 21st century continue to face greater pressures brought about by the increased expectation of student performance as measured by PL-221 and the NCLB act. Because of the stress of increased accountability, teachers have been under a greater burden to provide the best possible instruction for all of their students. One professional development method that has been shown to improve instructional practices in the classroom is instructional coaching. In fact, according to Knight (2006), initial research implies that effective coaching programs do have a positive impact on student achievement. Additionally, Robinson, Egawa, Riddle-Buly and Coskie (2005) state that coaching is “definitely a field of promise” (p. 66) and Hyman (1990) agrees when stating “peer coaching has potential and should be examined” (p. 52). Slater and Simmons (2001) acknowledge that peer coaching facilitates greater student learning since better prepared instructors teach more information to their students.

Mahurt (2006) adds support for the coaching model by arguing that coaches provide teachers with a skill set to help students’ succeed and that by creating more effective teachers, coaches significantly impact America’s future. For the purpose of this paper, instructional coaching is defined as a process of professional educators providing teachers with strategies for the improvement of instructional practices in a non-evaluative format. Instructional coaching

can take many forms and may include such terms as cognitive coaching, collegial coaching, peer coaching and even mentoring. For the purpose of this study, instructional coaching and peer coaching are synonymous. No matter what name is used, the benefits of instructional coaching are clear.

Improved Instruction

The primary reason to utilize peer coaching is its positive impact on instruction. Coaching exposes teachers to instructional practices that have a firm foundation in research (Black, 2003). Additionally, Neufeld and Roper (2003) state that “coaching does increase the instructional capacity of schools and teachers, a known prerequisite for increasing learning” (p. 5). First of all, coaching helps nearly all teachers introduce new teaching methodologies (Showers & Joyce, 1996). This view is also supported by Poglinico and Bach (2004) who state that educators are more open to changing their teaching methodology when coaching is involved. Hall and McKeen (1991) reported that the most effective source of personal growth stems from peer interaction. Because teachers who are coached by their peers are more willing to try new methods, they are continually increasing their current knowledge base. The knowledge they learn from their coach can be adapted and modified to meet their needs in various settings (Anonymous, 1997). Pi (2003) states that coaching is completely individualized as well as continual. Coaching takes on the individual needs of the teacher since the teachers’ themselves are identifying their areas for improvement (Buzbee Little, 2005). Once addressed, these needs can become strengths. Peer coaching has been shown to transfer skills learned during staff development into the classroom (Waddell, 2005) while Hall and McKeen (1991) state that for many teachers traditional in-service activities were the least effective form of staff development. This is an important aspect to consider in light of the fact that fewer than 10% of teachers ever

implement changes in methodology following traditional in-service activities (Robinson et al., 2005).

Coaching influences instruction due to its very nature. By providing an extra set of eyes and ears on a lesson, constructive critiques of the lesson can be shared (Koballa et al., 1992). The sharing of this feedback allows the teacher to be reflective in practice and creates an opportunity for the teacher to formatively evaluate the lesson (Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996). This opportunity to review the lesson, make corrections or adjustments and reteach is one of the most positive impacts of coaching on the improvement of instruction. Coaches are able to generate concrete suggestions or solutions that teachers can then incorporate. Swafford (1998) echoed that comment when she highlighted, “teachers viewed the lessons through the eyes of an experienced coach and by means of videotape. Both lenses provided opportunities for teachers to revisit a lesson and engage in assisted reflection” (p. 56).

The peer coaching model also allows for two-way communication which improves instruction. Karns (2005) points out that one superintendent believed that honest dialogue is at the heart of a school that promotes a positive culture of learning. Black (2003) highlights that teachers changed their conversations about what skills students did not possess to what skills they did. In many coaching models, the coach demonstrates a lesson. This allows the individual teacher to gain knowledge, not just through their own experiences, but also through observation of the coach (Burney 2004). Sariscany (1996) points out that one of the main components of coaching is demonstration. Through the use of demonstrations, teachers gain first-hand knowledge of how a lesson should look and can discuss how the lesson was implemented. The discussions following a modeled lesson allow the teacher and coach to learn from one another (Stiles & Loucks-Horsley, 1998). These dialogues create an increased knowledge base of

instructional practices for each participant. This improvement in instructional practices, therefore, allows a teacher to possess greater conceptual levels regarding how to instruct students. A teacher possessing greater skills is likely to initiate more differentiated instruction, therefore meeting the educational needs of a more diverse group of students (Uzat, 1998). Likewise, DuFour and Eaker (1998) assert that accomplished teachers have a repertoire of instructional practices that allow students to follow multiple paths to success in the subjects they teach. Put succinctly by Slater and Simmons (2001), “a peer coaching program can develop more expertise in teaching” (p. 75).

Improved Collegiality

In addition to the opportunities for improvement in instruction delineated above, coaching models also lend themselves to an increase in teacher collegiality. In the past, teachers were not willing or able to share their knowledge. They were often allowed to remain in isolation to teach. Buzbee Little (2005) describes this as the “four-wall mentality of teacher isolation” (p. 87). In fact, Hyman (1990) strongly agrees when he states, “traditionally, the life of a classroom teacher is isolated and insular. It is also infantilizing in that it keeps the teacher in virtually exclusive contact with a group of youngsters” (p. 55). Burney (2004) reaffirms this notion by stating that teachers craft knowledge that is usually hidden since there are no real methods to effectively share them. Horn, Dallas, and Strahan (2002) stress that teaching is often a solitary function, and Burney reiterates that there was no real reason for teachers to work together. Teachers kept what they knew and did not know secret from their peers (Burney, 2004). The ability to teach in isolation is problematic because it leads to a sense of discouragement for teachers who are unconnected. They often feel frustrated when they attempt new methodologies that are not effective (Sariscany, 1996). Hall and McKeen (1991) cite

various studies that lead them to conclude “isolation tends to inhibit teachers from using one another as sources of job-related knowledge and does not allow for teachers to develop a shared language” (p. 555). Coaching, by its nature of two-way communication, helps eliminate the teacher’s sense of isolation. As maintained by Blasé and Blasé (2000), collaborative networks among teachers are extremely important to the creation of an engaging environment of teaching and learning. Buzbee Little (2005) adds insight to this theory when she states that peer coaching helps foster a community of teachers who learn through the study of their craft in relationships with other teaching professionals. Also, teachers in coaching programs must plan, demonstrate, and review pedagogy in collaboration with others (Rieman & Deangelis-Peace, 2002). Koballa et al. (1992) state that reduced teacher isolation is one of the benefits of peer coaching. Slater and Simmons (2001) concur with that assertion when they declare that a coaching program helps diminish the feelings of teacher isolation. Other authors’ state that peer coaching did away with feelings of isolation and led to feelings of collaboration and professional growth. (Robbins & Raney, 1989). Buzbee Little (2005) concurs when stating, “in peer coaching, the teacher begins to feel less isolated from other educators” (p. 87). This collegial benefit is felt because peer coaching is non evaluative (Waddell, 2005). This non evaluative, non threatening format allows practitioners to enrich their teaching methodology. In fact, peer coaching promotes the taking of risks as well as a climate where experimentation is accepted (Koballa et al., 1992) and where helping teachers imagine and create other instructional possibilities is customary (Guiney, 2001). Showers and Joyce (1996) declare that teachers learn from one another by thinking about the impact of the instruction on student achievement.

Increased collegiality also often leads to an increase in the discussions about the profession of teaching; about what quality teachers actually do. Teachers must have a

competency to explore issues outside of their classroom (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This ability to help other teachers in a collegial atmosphere is an important feature of a coaching culture.

Teachers will often admit their shortfalls to the coach and be more willing to accept suggestions (Koballa et al., 1992). This increased dialogue about teaching creates, according to Hall and McKeen (1991), an increase in the competency of teachers in the classroom. Learning about becoming an effective teacher is a social behavior; it depends on continual discussion and demonstrations (Burney, 2004). Robinson et al. (2005) comment that one of the key components of coaching is “conversations between a teacher and a coach directed toward developing a collegial relationship establishing trust and identifying areas of collaboration” (p. 66).

The establishment of trust in its relationship to coaching is also a key characteristic of the collegial benefit of this method of professional growth. In fact, Colantonio (2005) states that trust is a prerequisite for the coaching model he calls instructional supervision. Hall and McKeen (1991) highlight that teachers must believe the coaching environment to be safe so that they can concentrate on the teaching task. The focus on collegial relationships is echoed repeatedly in the literature. Knight (2004) discusses about how coaches and teachers should consider themselves being equal in their relationship. Herll and O’Drobinak (2004) describe how coaches need to create a belief that they are on the same team with teachers. Swafford (1998) professes an atmosphere of “trust, collegiality and confidentiality” (p. 57), while Karns (2005) articulates the need for trust and collegiality when she comments “relationships matter, in the context of creating a positive learning environment” (p. 33). Additionally, Slater and Simmons (2001) acknowledge that “lack of trust can be the downfall of the peer coaching process” (p. 68).

Enhanced Experimentation with Methodology

Many teachers in traditional settings are often free to teach as they always did and there is no impetus to change teaching strategies. There often was no direct link from how teachers in traditional settings met the needs of their students. Furthermore, teachers who were not exposed to coaching did not formally look to others to expand and enhance their methodology. In fact, Fletcher and Barrett (2004) state that many teachers plan and teach independently of others. This is not the case in a peer-coaching environment. In reality, coaching brings about an acceptance of new ideas (Slater & Simmons, 2001). For this acceptance of ideas to be most effective, experimentation must occur. According to Cordingley (2003), “active experimentation with classroom practice was also found to be a consistent ingredient of effective (coaching)” (p. 71). This exploration with new methods is also highlighted by Gingiss (1993), when she points out that coaching allows teachers to explore various planning, instructional and management models and evaluate their effectiveness. Buzbee Little (2005) supports this view as well when she opines that coaching allows teachers the chance to try new things. Coaching offers support during that process.

This process of experimentation is critical to the coaching model because it allows teachers and coaches to collaborate in a problem-solving setting. Both coaches and teachers are experimenting to find the best possible research-based solution to a particular student issue. Neufeld and Roper (2003) point out that an essential component of effective staff development is experimentation based upon participants’ needs.

The coaches help establish a climate where experimentation is valued through a variety of means. The most important, perhaps, is the sharing of knowledge between staff members. Neufeld and Roper (2003) describe this shared information as a “community of practice” (p. 3).

The coaches help set the tone for experimentation by encouraging teachers to learn from one another and use inquiry to determine what strategies they might import into their own classrooms. Blasé and Blasé (2000) refer to this inquiry and experimentation as “risk-laden explorations to solve problems” (p. 30). This type of environment allows teachers to continually strive for the most effective methodology to improve student performance. Maeda (2001) confirms this view when she comments that coaching creates an environment where teachers are secure enough to experiment with new techniques. Koballa et al. (1992) echo that thought when they comment that peer coaching encourages teachers to be risk takers and experiment with their pedagogy. Burney (2004) goes one step further when stating that teachers who take risks are able to think and teach differently because they analyze their successes and failures in front of others. Thus, the coach creates an environment that encourages experimentation and transforms methodology.

Reflective Practice

Because teachers are under considerable pressure to improve student performance, there is an increasing need for them to think about and evaluate their instructional procedures. This process is often called reflection and consists of not only thinking about and evaluating their teaching, but to invite teachers to change their pedagogy based upon the evidence the teacher and coach has discovered (Mahurt, 2006). The development of reflective practitioners is one positive outcome of an instructional-coaching model. One advantage of peer coaching is the embedded reflective practice. During reflection, teachers are asked to discuss any problems they might encounter when implementing a new strategy (Sariscany, 1996). In addition to anticipating issues within lessons, reflective practice allows teachers to review lessons either independently or in a collaborative setting. A coaching relationship uses inquiry and observation of lessons to

create an atmosphere of reflection (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). This continual evaluation of one's teaching is a core precept of peer coaching. The reflection process following an observation allows a teacher to not only review what occurred but to also reflect on how to improve (Uzat, 1998). Burney (2004) points out that teachers learn through stating and justifying their ideas and arguing their point of view. Slater and Simmons (2001) support this point when they assert, "teachers also said they routinely discussed issues of methodology" (p. 73). This type of reflection takes the form of forcing teachers to evaluate their own beliefs. Uzat (1998) stated that reflection may be holistic in nature, focusing on a moral or social issue. However, the ultimate goal of reflection is improvement of instruction (Uzat, 1998). By evaluating one's personal performance against goals previously established, teachers have the formative information needed to revise their instruction (Pierce & Hunsaker 1996). This thought is supported by DuFour and Eaker (1998) when they state the goal of professional development is to, "develop thoughtful professionals who have the ability to assess and revise their own actions in order to improve the likelihood of success for their students" (p. 265). Teachers who have been exposed to a coaching model will learn how to participate in these reflective opportunities (Reiman & Deangelis-Peace, 2002).

The effective use of data is a crucial aspect of the reflection process. DuFour and Eaker (1998) highlight this notion by stating that facts and data are the driving force of effective staff-development programs. In order for teachers to reflect, they must gather and interpret data as well as report their findings to other teachers (Stiles & Loucks-Horsley, 1998). Guiney (2001) contends that coaches help teachers analyze results from formative assessments. Teachers must use this data to be informed of their individual teaching practices (Burney, 2004). Black (2003) adds her support to this tenet of peer coaching when she states, "coaches' work with teachers to

examine data patterns and show how the data can reflect the effectiveness of various teaching practices” (p. 45). This ongoing use of data during the reflection phase of peer coaching is crucial for the modification of teaching pedagogy which lead to the improvement of student performance. Pierce and Hunsaker (1996) put it quite succinctly when they state, “professional development which is not connected to gains in student outcomes is pointless” (p. 104).

Characteristics of Peer Coaching

Having explored the positive benefits of peer coaching, it is also crucial to look at the various characteristics that help define effective peer-coaching environments. Identifying these characteristics is necessary to separate true coaching models from other types of professional development. Furthermore, the ability to create these characteristics is critical to the formation of a professional learning environment where peer-coaching flourishes.

Non-evaluative. Perhaps no item in the literature is agreed upon more universally than the concept of coaching as it relates to teacher evaluation. In a true peer-coaching paradigm, evaluation through the coaching mechanism of the teacher does not occur. Ackland (1991) states this concept very succinctly when he articulates that “peer coaching programs are non-evaluative” (p. 23) while Mahurt (2006) warns against judging the teacher. Additionally, the process of peer coaching is not directly related to determining a promotion to a more important position (Maeda, 2001). Instead, the coaching model should be used exclusively as a means for improving instructional practices. Other authors also highlight the importance of the non-evaluative nature of coaching. Skinner and Welch (1996) state that evaluative coaching corrupts the collegial nature at the center of peer coaching. March, Peters and Adler (1994) state that coaching is a “formative, non-evaluative process” (p. 46). Meanwhile, Koballa et al. (1992) state that “peer coaching is not an evaluation” (p. 42). They continue with statements that further

support their view by commenting that peer coaching is not intended to take over the supervisory roles of the school leaders and is not intended to supersede the entrenched evaluation process (Koballa et al., 1992). However, the practice of evaluation and the practice of coaching hold a common thread—the use of the observation tool to identify teachers’ strengths and weaknesses. A coach uses the data that is gleaned to provide information for the improvement of instruction while a supervisor can use that same data to determine teaching performance (Maeda, 2001). While the two practices of evaluation and coaching can share a common link, the literature points out the need to keep the two processes separate. By eliminating the evaluation aspect from coaching, it is hoped that the teacher’s anxiety about being observed is minimized (Ackland, 1991). This non-threatening environment then allows for greater risk taking and creativity on the part of the participating teachers (March et al., 1994). In any case, it is clear that coaching should be “a non-evaluative and mutually-beneficial partnership” (Waddell, 2005, p. 85) and that “coaches should never evaluate teachers on their job performance” (Black, 2007, p. 44).

Post observation feedback. In addition to its non-evaluative nature, peer coaching has a second characteristic that permeates the existing literature. The characteristics consist of an opportunity for feedback after an observation. That simply states the coach observes the lesson and provides the teacher with information regarding some aspect of the lesson. Part of the definition of peer coaching used by Hall and McKeen (1991) includes obtaining instructional goals through a “process of regular observation and feedback” (p. 555). This feedback can be in the form of complex measurement instruments or can be as simple as frequency counts (Maeda, 2001). The observation does not need to be done in person. Some coaching models use videotape which allows both the teacher and the coach to examine and reexamine the pedagogy

practiced during the lesson (Ackland, 1991). The data gathered during an observation can be either qualitative or quantitative depending on the needs or desire of the teacher. In any case, the data must be used to drive the feedback regarding the observation. Because the data will be crucial to the feedback stage, it is important that the coach record only objective observations and avoid making value judgments about either teacher behavior or the lesson (Koballa et al., 1992). Mahurt (2006) agrees with the idea that coaches should take good notes that are non judgmental. The data the coach collects serves as a mirror to reflect back teacher behaviors regarding methodology, student interaction or the use of new instructional strategies (Stiles & Loucks-Horsley 1998). In many ways, this observation can lead to a very informal exchange of ideas. In fact, Showers and Joyce (1996) describe short exchanges and brief conversations as a follow-up to observation. It appears that the length and formality of the feedback is not the crucial factor. The occurrence of the observation and then the following feedback seems to be the crucial aspect. For example, Bowman and McCormick (2000) state that teaching skills are refined based upon the reception of immediate feedback. This immediate feedback is the tool that serves to influence future teacher behavior (Koballa et al., 1992).

Provides modeling. A third characteristic of peer coaching consists of modeling. In some coaching programs, coaches demonstrate specific skills to their protégé's. These models are often viewed as excellent examples of instructional leadership (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). Hyman (1990) suggests that coaches offer teachers a model to use for future pupil interactions.

Robinson et al. (2005) also state that observation of a coach demonstrating a methodology is a key component of most coaching models. Waddell (2005) additionally discusses the need for demonstration as a component of peer coaching, while Knight (2006) discusses the modeling of instructional practices in teachers' classes to help define the process of

peer coaching. Waddell also points out that the learner, (in this case a teacher) needs to know what the new learning will look like. Mahurt (2006) highlights, in a presentation, that in order for a coach to be effective they should ask their teachers to observe and reflect upon the coaches modeled lessons. Robinson et al. (2005) refer to teachers observing demonstration lessons facilitated by the coach. Knight (2004) also quoted a coach who stated, “Teachers need to see it; they need to see you modeling” (p. 32). Because peer coaches must be able to model effective teaching strategies, it is wise that they be respected teachers (Kirby & Meza Jr., 1997). Knight (2006) supports this view when he states that coaches “must be master teachers who are comfortable going into any classroom and love having the chance to work with other teachers” (p. 19). This ability to model effective lessons and new initiatives so teachers can see how they look in classroom is a large part of an instructional coach’s job (Knight, 2004).

Offering of encouragement. An additional component of almost all coaching paradigms is the encouragement offered by the coach to the teacher. “Peer coaches also provide support and companionship for their partners” (Slater & Simmons, 2001, p. 68). Richardson (2000) quotes a literacy coach from Boston who states “The coach can be your cheerleader” (p. 4). Because coaches provide a great deal of encouragement, the increased use of them provides an increase in the feeling of professional worth of teachers (Koballa et al. 1992). Additionally, this encouragement creates a peer-coaching support system (Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996). This support encourages teachers to take risks and stretch their teaching methods. Guiney (2001) highlights the encouraging aspect of peer coaching when she quotes a teacher speaking about her coach, “Charlotte is there to reassure me, to guide me” (p. 741). The encouraging role of coaches is not necessarily specifically stated in all the literature. However, it is often implicit in the role development of the coach. For example, Delany and Arrendondo (1998) talk about helping

“teachers learn from others” (p.10). In this case, the explicit support is not present; however, the basic tenet of encouragement exists. Similarly, Sariscany (1996) points out that coaches gave support to teachers at their weekly meetings. Even if the support from the coach is not transparent, it is vital for the coach to leave the teacher feeling energized, uplifted and with a feeling of empowerment about their own professional growth (Mahurt 2006).

Voluntary participation. One aspect of peer coaching that is difficult to manage from an administrative viewpoint is that for coaching to be most effective it should be voluntary (Swafford 1998). Although changing teaching methodology on a voluntary basis is difficult, it is also a tenet of successful peer-coaching programs. Knight (2004) comments that by offering teachers choices of what they were coached in they had significantly impacted a school district in Kansas. Furthermore, this voluntary participation helps create and foster the feeling of trust that has already been described in this paper. By volunteering, teachers and coaches lay the groundwork for the trust that is so crucial to a successful program. In fact, Slater and Simmons (2001) refer to volunteerism as being the cornerstone of a coaching program. This aspect of volunteerism is crucial because it creates relatively automatic buy in from the teacher. By giving teachers a choice to participate in peer coaching, administrators have effectively shown respect to the teachers and their decision-making abilities (Knight, 2004). That helps immediately establish a trusting relationship.

From a more practical consideration, teachers who volunteer to be coached are more open to the coach’s suggestions. Neufield and Roper (2003) establish this when they state that coaches “cannot make the learners learn” (p. 18). However, willing participants, by the very act of volunteering, have demonstrated a desire to learn. Additionally, if teachers volunteer they can choose what areas they will be coached in; making the coaching process more meaningful.

Knight (2004) quotes instructional coach Brasseur “teachers have a good idea of what they know and what they need, and if they aren’t involved in the decision making they aren’t going to embrace the idea” (p. 33). Neufeld and Roper have a very succinct comment about the willingness of teachers to be coached “if the learner does not or is not willing to learn, coaches cannot be successful” (p. 18).

One last aspect of volunteerism that must be pointed out is the lack of formal power possessed by coaches. Since they cannot force teachers to participate, coaches are dependent upon volunteerism for success with their protégés. Knight (2004) points out the least successful strategies for involving teachers were ordering them to participate. Neufeld and Roper (2003) state that coaches cannot threaten teachers or insist that they follow the coach’s directions since they have no formal authority and that by doing so would simply undermine the coach’s credibility.

Research based strategies. As has already been stipulated in this paper, a major benefit of coaching is the enhancement of the instructional practices occurring in the classroom. An underlying principle for these improvements is the use of research-based strategies. Therefore, the coaches must provide teachers with research-based instructional practices (Knight 2004). To provide coaching in these strategies, coaches must continually delve into research providing best-practice instructional practices (Herll & O’Drobinak 2004). Coaches must also have an outstanding current knowledge base and a strong foundation in the theory (International Reading Association, 2004). This belief in providing teachers with coaches is further supported by Black (2007) when she states “coaches are highly trained in proven classroom management, content knowledge, instruction and formative assessments” (p. 44). Coaches must have more than a cursory knowledge of the techniques and strategies they are providing to the teachers. In fact, it

is imperative the coaches have a deep understanding of good teaching and their practices are grounded in research (Mahurt, 2006). Coaches must be sufficiently versed in research in order to work with teachers to encourage them to adopt any new method. Effective coaches must be able to glean evidence from the current research and then describe and model strategies that have been proven successful (Black, 2003). Without having the strong background in research, coaches may find it difficult to convince their protégés to attempt the new method. However, coaches must also be able to communicate the research information to teachers, too (Black, 2007).

The Role of Administration in Peer Coaching

Although there is a great deal of research about peer coaching, there is not a significant amount of information on the role of administration in creating a climate of peer coaching. March et al. (1994) state that very few articles directly address the principal's involvement in coaching. It does appear that administrators help facilitate an atmosphere of peer coaching by establishing certain guidelines. These guidelines include a well-defined job description, the support of the administration, a methodology for the selection of coaches, proper funding, and providing for the delivery of professional development for the coaches.

Defined job description. One of the most crucial roles that administrators can play in developing a climate where peer coaches flourish is the creation of a well-defined job description. Since the role of instructional coach is relatively vague, both the coach and the administration must understand what is expected. Each job description must contain what the school district views as essential to the success of the program (Riddle Buly, Coskie, Robinson, & Egawa, 2006). Keeping the vision on the essential aspects of coaching is echoed in Galm and Perry (2004) when they state, "site based staff developers were most effective when principals

set clear expectations for how the staff developers should work with teachers” (p. 2). Black (2003) further stipulates that for coaches to be most effective they must spend the majority of their day focusing on instruction while in direct contact with the teachers. However, it is not simply the principal’s role to set the expectations for the coach. The district administration must help shape the coaches’ work by focusing their coaches’ endeavors toward the districts instructional goals (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). This can only be done through the creation of clear and concise job descriptions. Neufeld and Roper (2003) continue to stress that coaches must “have well-specified roles” (p. 17). Galm and Perry also support this thesis when they highlight the mission and role of site-based staff developers as being be clear. Additionally, Symonds (2003) affirms that without clear roles and priorities, the superintendent will find other tasks for coaches to perform.

There is also a need for a specific job description due to the different types of coaching. For example, a coach who is filling an expert role would have a different purpose than a coach who was a peer mentor. Expert coaches have received training in a specific strategy. They are expected to pass on the unique aspects of that strategy while peer mentors simply share in lesson planning and reflection (Robinson et al., 2005). Obviously, the clarity of the job description would be crucial to the success of the different approaches. The coaches who are responsible for the different roles must know and understand their roles in order to maintain their effectiveness. This is stated very clearly by Galm and Perry (2004), “clearly defined roles helped staff developers (coaches) build and sustain confidentiality and trust” (p. 2).

Support of the administration. Although a well-defined job description is imperative to the success of a coaching model, another crucial factor leading to the success of such a model is the support of the principal. The principal not only helps establish and create the coaches job

description, he or she also lends overarching support to the whole model through a variety of ways. Some of the ways principals support coaching are quite mundane. For example, the protection of coach's time from noncoaching activities is a means of support. Asking coaches to perform such tasks as managing curricular materials or administering tests inhibits their ability to be successful (Galm & Perry, 2004). According to Neufeld and Roper (2003), "schools are often short staffed and have a myriad of tasks that are not clearly in either the principal's or teacher's domain, coaches often find themselves asked to pitch in inappropriate ways that interfere with their ability to coach" (pp. 17-18). The support of the principal is necessary to diminish these types of disruptions to a coach's day.

A second way that principals support coaching is to influence the school climate so that coaching becomes an appropriate method of staff development. One way principals can do this is through modeling a climate of collaboration (March et al., 1994). March et al. (1994) continue with this thought when they postulate that the participation of the principal in any program is the key to yielding positive results from that program. Black (2007) states coaches and principals must work together to positively impact instruction and learning. Maeda (2001) also establishes the need for administrators to model appropriate coaching activities by stating that principals should "demonstrate a willingness to be observed and receive feedback from teachers" (p. 146). In many cases, there is a significant need for the principal to model the expected behaviors because the principal may not completely understand the methodology being presented. In other words, the principal may need to be one of the first individuals to receive coaching in order to fully support the coaching venture (Knight, 2006). If the principal lacks significant knowledge about coaching content, then the coach may be in an awkward position of disagreeing with the principal over instructional methodology (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). This will most assuredly

lead to a less-effective model and is a rationale for having the principal participate in the coaching model.

Selection of coaches. If the coaching model of staff development is selected, one of the key issues facing the administration is the selection of coaches. It is imperative for the principal to play a role in the selection of coaches and this is one way the principal can support the coaching model. For example, the principal must recognize the kinds of skills the coach will need to ensure success. Given the time demands placed upon coaches, principals will want to select coaches who are able to prioritize those demands and still remain comfortable in their positions (Galm & Perry, 2004). This balancing act should be a concern to principals as they hire coaches since some coaches state that “balancing the demands of the regular position with the added responsibility of the coach is a concern” (Kirby & Mesa Jr., 1997, p. 85).

Principals must also make certain that coaches have the instructional skills needed to be successful. Simply stated coaches must be *master teachers* who are successful classroom teachers (Knight, 2006). It is crucial that building-level administrators find those master teachers who display the important classroom practices that teacher’s value in one another (Maeda, 2001). Neufeld and Roper (2003) point out that coaches need “professional expertise in order to demonstrate their value to teachers” (p. 37). Mahurt (2006) stipulates that coaches should have a solid understanding of adult learners and their special requirements. In addition to the aforementioned skills, principals should also try to select coaches who have a solid foundation of research at the base of their varied teaching repertoire (Mahurt, 2006).

The success of the entire coaching model of staff development can hinge upon the proper selection of the coach. Black (2007) lists the proper selection of the coach as a key antecedent to the success of the coaching model. She continues by stating that those selected as coaches must

be well respected and exceptional educators. Not only do the coaches need to be exceptional educators, they must also possess some personality traits that will help them achieve success. Knight (2006) highlights one key personality trait that administrators should search for when they are selecting coaches. Knight discusses finding coaches possessing the desire to be ceaseless change agents for their school. In other words, coaches must be willing to work extremely hard to facilitate the improvement of instruction within their building. Kirby and Meza Jr. (1997) stated half the coaches in their study were selected, in part, because of their commitment to change.

A second personality trait that should be sought in a peer coach is exceptional interpersonal skills. Since the coach needs to enter many classes and interact with many teachers, he/she must have the ability to get along well with others. Knight (2004) highlights that instructional coaches must be “likeable, good listeners with great people skills” (p. 5). Black (2007) states that coaches are “friendly and likeable” (p. 44) and Knight (2006) states that “coaches should be highly skilled at building relationships” (p. 39). Mahurt (2006) also endorses the humanistic aspect of coaching when she highlights the need for coaches to develop trusting relationships while displaying a sense of humor. The relationship building skill set for coaches cannot be understated. Payne (2002) attributes a quote to Comer, “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship” (p. 21). Knight (2006) brings this point home when he states, “If they like the coach, they usually will try out what the coach suggests. If they don’t like the coach, they’ll even resist helpful teaching practices” (p. 39).

Funding for coaching. An issue for administrators to consider when establishing a coaching model is the availability of funding. Supporting a coaching model involves costs that must be acknowledged. For example, Knight (2003) encourages paying teachers for committing

to a coaching model. Securing funding for instructional coaching is an issue in some school corporations. Spokane public schools in Washington secured a \$16.4-million-dollar grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation to help meet the financial needs of coaching (Black, 2007). Clearly, looking for this kind of funding shows administrators support for the coaching model. In addition to securing new funding sources such as grants, Symonds (2003) suggest cutting funding for other school programs. Once again, placing this kind of emphasis on coaching demonstrates its importance to the central office administration. Black (2007) also discusses using Title I funds in schools or districts that qualify in order to support the financial needs of coaching.

Often, the cost of coaching to school districts is not in the direct expense of the coaches, but of the expenses associated with coaching. Burney (2004) discusses the need for school districts to “dedicate the necessary resources—time, personnel expertise and money” (p. 529) in order to fully develop a culture of coaching. Some of these resources that administrators must fund include release time, special scheduling and providing adequate time for coaching experiences (Gingiss, 1993). One way to fund coaching so that the aforementioned resources can be procured is to make coaching a priority. Symonds (2003) talks about finding funding for coaching by making it one of a very short list of highly-important strategies to improve student achievement. By eliminating, or at least limiting, strategies for student achievement Symonds argues that more funding will be available for coaching. By making coaching a priority some other costs will need to be considered. For example, Knight (2006) points out that although coaches are available to perform non-instructional tasks they cannot be asked to perform these tasks. “It is a poor way to spend money and perhaps an even poorer way to improve teaching practices in schools” (Knight, 2006, p. 37). Guarding the coaches time is crucial, but sometimes

can be costly. Kirby and Meza Jr. (1997) highlight the need of the superintendent to approve the time commitment made by the coaches and their protégés. Each of these methods of securing funding, protecting coaches from noninstructional tasks or freeing up resources to pay for coaching shows a firm level of administrative support.

Provide professional development. Previously, the need for the coach to be perceived as a master teacher has been highlighted (Kirby & Meza Jr., 1997; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). It becomes a logical extrapolation then, that coaches themselves must continue to grow professionally. Therefore, a major contributing factor to producing successful coaching models is the district administration's commitment to providing those professional growth opportunities to the coaches. Galm and Perry (2004) highlight the need for regularly-scheduled professional-growth opportunities for coaches. Neufeld and Roper (2003) describe and highlight about the need that coaches have for their own focused staff development. This need for professional development for coaches would obviously look different if the expert coaching model is used. For example, Knight (2006) stipulates that successful coaches will need to receive consistent and thorough training in the methodology they are presenting to the teachers while Pi (2003) highlights receiving significant amounts of training in the coaching model developed for school administrators helped that model achieve some degree of success. Instructional coaches gain support from their administrators through ongoing professional development. This professional growth for coaches can also take many forms. Riddle Buly et al. (2006) state coaches need to be supported in the development of their skills. In fact they cite a school district that utilizes experienced coaches to act as coaches to newly appointed coaches (Riddle Buly et al. 2006). Some other options of staff development for coaches are also in use. Not all of the methods are formal however, for example, Knight (2004) describes coaches who "learn in a variety of ways,

through formal and informal professional development” (p. 36). In either case, however, it is important that the staff development be focused on the needs of the coach. Neufeld and Roper (2003) point out that coaches “require professional development of their own so they can improve their knowledge and skill to tailor their coaching to the needs of the teachers and schools with which they work” (p. 11). One formal example of this type of professional development is asking coaches to attend a five-day yearly workshop (Knight, 2006). A less formal method of staff development for teachers is to have monthly professional learning-community meetings with other coaches. At these meetings, coaches share what they have gleaned from reading professional research (Knight, 2006).

Challenges with Peer Coaching

Even though there is a great deal of research to suggest that coaching is “a field of promise, it is not without its challenges” (Robinson et al., 2005, p. 66). These challenges do not indicate that districts should not pursue coaching as a valuable tool of staff development. Instead, these challenges are presented so that they can be recognized and addressed.

Allocation of coaches. One major challenge that districts face when implementing a peer-coaching model is how to allocate the coaches that are available to them. Districts have limited resources to commit to coaching, therefore district leadership must determine how coaches are assigned to schools. The district may decide to have one coach provide services to several buildings. According to Neufeld and Roper (2003), this is seldom effective. They state, “when coaches are spread thinly across a district’s schools, teachers have insufficient opportunities to learn from them and coaches find themselves frustrated by their inability to make a significant difference” (p. 19). In addition to the inability to influence change if coaches are spread thinly, it is also difficult for coaches to establish the trust needed to create an effective

coaching paradigm. Knight (2006) highlights the need for coaches to have an appropriate amount of time with teachers and the need to establish a trusting relationship. Both of these antecedents form a solid coaching model and are dependent upon how coaches are allocated.

One additional allocation issue to be briefly considered is whether coaches should continue to teach students, too. Some coaching models have coaches that are part-time coaches as well as part-time teachers. Although there may be some benefit to this type of arrangement, Neufeld and Roper (2003) point out that the demands of coaching may create stress for the coach. They will wrestle with the demands of preparing for coaching versus preparing for teaching.

Finding adequate time. A second challenge to the coaching model, and indeed in all of education, is finding enough time to do the work. Knight (2006) pointed out that one of the greatest concerns of coaches was that they had limited time to work with teachers. This point is supported further by Neufeld and Roper (2003) when they highlight that some school districts have had implementation difficulties because coaches did not have sufficient time to fulfill their coaching role. Additionally, Hyman (1990) also points out the need for sufficient release time during the regular work day. Finding appropriate time is a key challenge faced by school districts that wish to implement a peer-coaching program.

Hiring qualified coaches. Perhaps the greatest challenge facing school corporations that want to begin a peer coaching staff development program is to find and hire qualified individuals. According to the International Reading Association (2004), there are no requirements and often teachers are simply selected. The International Reading Association states that there “is ample anecdotal evidence that people are being dubbed coaches. These ‘coaches’ can be from specialist to librarians to biology teachers, virtually anyone, including

people who have never taught reading in any way” (p. 18). Obviously, this is a significant issue if unqualified people are coaching. Knight (2006) talked about the need for coaches to have a deeper understanding about subjects and pedagogy than their protégés. This obviously creates difficulty because this need for a deeper knowledge eliminates a large percentage of a district’s teaching staff.

One Theory Behind Instructional Coaching

In addition to acknowledging the benefits, characteristics and challenges involved in peer coaching it is also important to have a theoretical model that links behaviors to principals. One such model can be found in the work of Knight (2007) where he refers to his model as “The Partnership Philosophy” (p. 6). This model has at its center the principles behind instruction coaching while emanating from the center are the following words: Equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis and reciprocity. Between the center of the model and the principle words are action words describing the principle. These words are recognizing, respecting, encouraging, engaging in, enacting and experiencing. This model is presented in Figure 1.

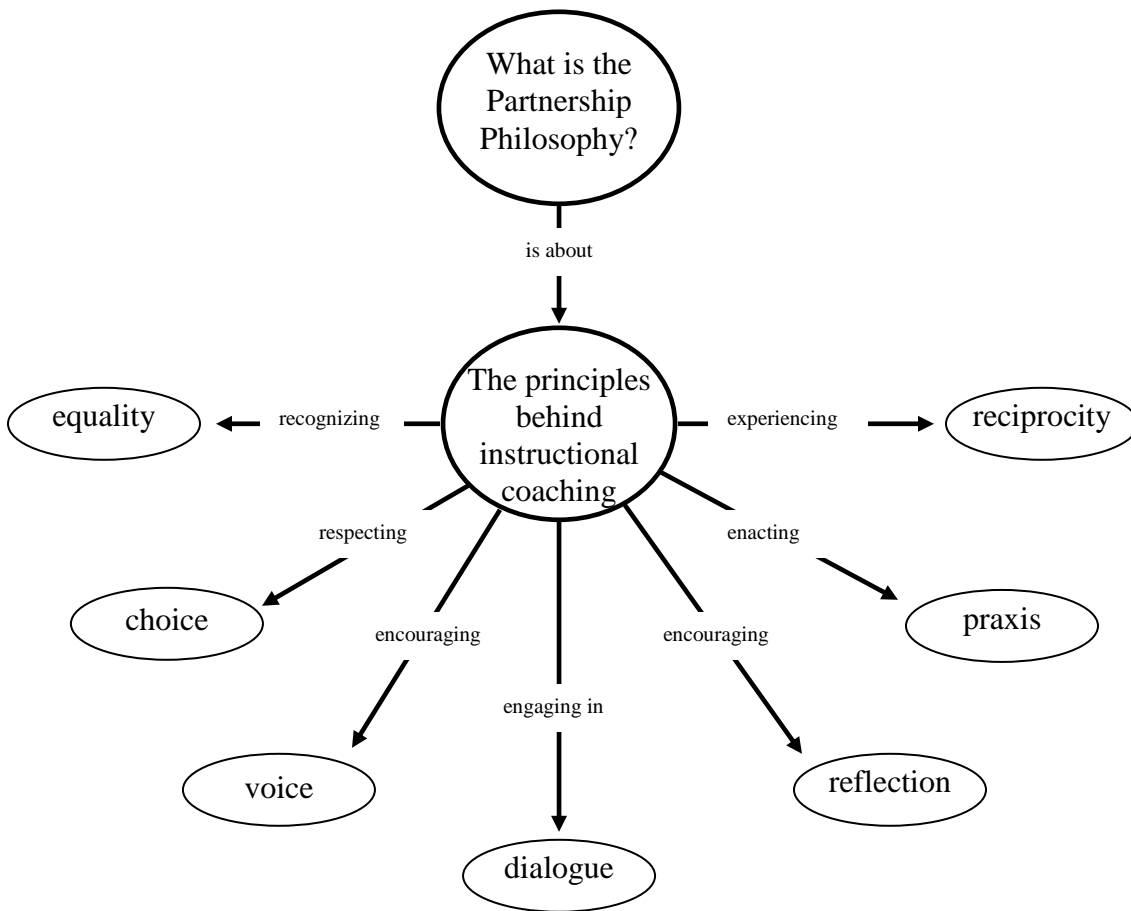


Figure 1. The partnership philosophy (Knight, 2007).

Equality. In Knight's (2007) theoretical model, the word *equality* simply means that the teacher and the coach both have ideas that are worthwhile and valuable. The teacher and coach are equal partners in the process even if their knowledge base is not. The term *recognizing* is the action word Knight uses. In this model, *recognizing* means the coach must recognize that each teacher is entitled to his/her own point of view.

Choice. In Knight's (2007) model, *choice* refers to allowing teachers to determine how much or what kind of coaching they wish to be involved in. *Choice* allows teachers to implement a coach's recommendation while utilizing their own teaching style. The action word

associated with *choice* is respecting. Because a coach allows for teachers to choose strategies or implementation techniques the coach is respecting the individual teacher.

Voice. *Voice*, in Knight's (2007) model, refers to allowing teachers to share their own opinions. Additionally, it refers to coaches who clearly listen and value the thoughts expressed by the teachers. Giving teachers *voice* involves a certain amount of empathy on the coach's part; it requires the coach to draw out what is truly important to the teacher. The action word found in the model for *voice* is encouraging. In this case, encouraging means attending to teachers. Listening, validating and drawing out opinions helps an instructional coach encourage a teacher's *voice*.

Dialogue. *Dialogue*, in the model Knight (2007) espouses, means that the coach and the teacher are involved in open and honest communication about content or methodology. This type of communication leads to certain synergy that provides motivation for both the teacher and the coach. *Engaging in* is the action link between the principles and dialogue. By creating opportunities for teachers to engage in dialogue coaches provide teachers with more opportunities to reflect on their pedagogy.

Reflection. In Knight's (2007) model, *reflection* refers to the ability of teachers to make meaning out of the coach's instruction. In other words, *reflection* time allows teachers to create their own learning based on the dialogue held with the coach. When teachers reflect on information shared with them by their coach, the teacher has a chance for self-improvement based on how or even if they try to implement the coach's suggestion. Coaches need to encourage their protégés to reflect on their performance to seek self-improvement and self-learning.

Praxis. *Praxis* is defined by Knight (2007) as “the act of applying new ideas to our own lives” (p. 49). It is an important aspect of Knight’s model because it infers a direct link between what a teacher does and what the teacher thinks about doing. *Praxis* is the next step beyond reflection because *praxis* calls for action. It is the act of thinking about, learning about and then acting on something. Teachers effectively practice *praxis* when they learn a specific teaching strategy, try it, reshape it and then reteach it while being fully engaged in the entire process. The action word associated with *praxis* is *enacting*. The coach must see the teacher engaged in *praxis*; actually putting into practice and revising what has been presented by the coach.

Reciprocity. Since Knight (2007) refers to his model as a *Partnership Philosophy*, it is simple to assume that *reciprocity* refers to a mutually-beneficial relationship. Not only do teachers learn from instructional coaches, but the reverse is also true. Coaches continually learn about the instructional practices of their protégés, creating a unique experience in which both professional and educators experience growth. Experiencing is the action word that links *reciprocity* to the model. For without truly experiencing *reciprocity*, the partnership philosophy cannot genuinely exist.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the qualitative study was to discover how the behaviors of Indiana school district-level leaders created a culture of Instructional Coaching within their district. Since research suggests that instructional coaching is an effective way to improve instruction, it was necessary to determine what actions are antecedents to the creation of a culture where coaching can flourish. This qualitative case study identified those actions district-level leaders took in the creation of successful coaching models in their Indiana districts. In other words, what did district-level leaders do to ensure successful coaching occurs in their district. An additional purpose was to discover any similarities between how district-level leaders from different sized corporations created the instructional-coaching climate. Because the actions of the district-level leaders were generalized and analyzed by the researcher, a grounded theory strategy of intervention was used (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, the researcher will discover, examine, and compare and contrast the behaviors and actions that district-level leaders used to develop peer coaching within their district. Creswell (2003) supports the use of grounded theory for the purpose of exploring “process, activities and events” (p. 183). Haig (1995) acknowledged the utilization of grounded theory in educational studies as well as other social science disciplines.

This study answers the following questions:

1. How do district leaders in peer-coaching districts describe their process of creating a peer-coaching climate?
2. How do district leaders in peer-coaching districts describe the experience of influencing teaching staff to accept peer coaching?
3. How do district-level leaders describe their role in the creation of instructional coaching?
4. How would the district-level leader describe their discoveries in implementing a climate of peer culture?

In answering the research questions, the significance of this case study will become clear.

District-level leaders must find ways to positively impact instruction. Coaching is one documented method to enhance instruction. District-level leaders must therefore know how to create an environment where coaching can flourish. While many leaders espouse the virtues of professional development, it is necessary for them to incorporate a method of professional growth that has proven to be effective in changing teaching methodology. These changes are necessary due to the demands of increasing accountability placed upon schools. All district leaders are examining the most efficient method of improving student achievement through the improvement of instruction. District leaders may be called upon to create environments where peer coaching thrives. This study identifies the behaviors district leaders take to ensure such a learning environment. In addition to examining behaviors necessary to establish a climate of coaching, this study will also attempt to identify any similarities that the leaders displayed depending on the size of their district. In other words, are there certain behaviors that worked in

small districts that might not be successful in medium or large districts? The Venn-Euler diagram in Figure 2 helps visually illustrate this model.

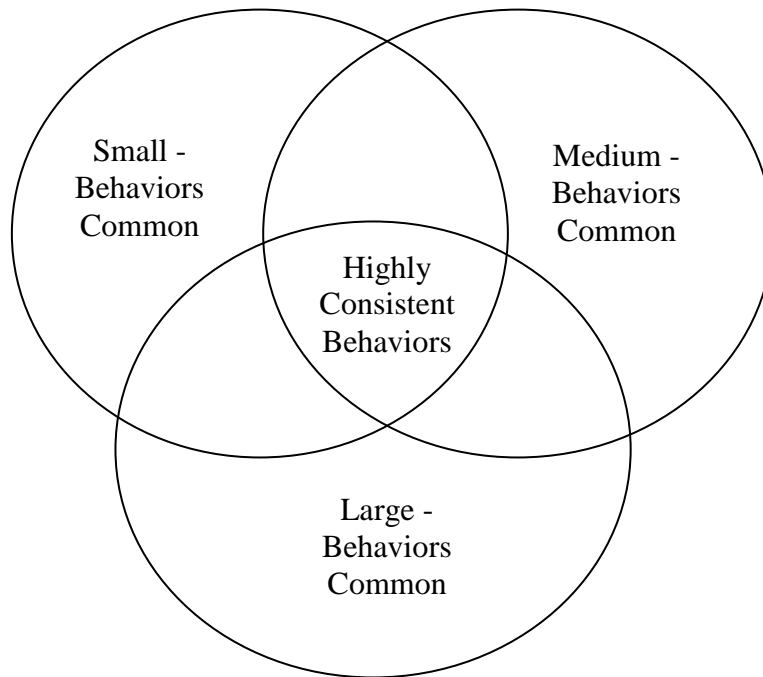


Figure 2. The Venn-Euler diagram.

In Table 1 the same data can be viewed through a different lens. The consistent behaviors within the various size corporations are seen in the first three rows while the highly consistent behaviors are clearly visible in the last four rows. Outside the scope of this research and perhaps fodder for additional study are those behaviors that appear in two of the three districts. These behaviors are involvement of coaches as association officers, the development of a formal job description, the use of non evaluative language when discussing coaching with their association and finally the genesis of the coaching model from Literacy Collaborative and Reading Recovery. By examining the similarities between the different sized districts, it may be

possible to determine what actions are completely necessary to facilitate peer coaching, what actions are helpful and what actions played less of a role in the development of coaching.

Table 1

Similarities Among Leaders From Different Sized Districts

Behavior	S	M	L
Principals used to communicate with Staff	X		
Used math coaches		X	
Communicated with board at public meetings			X
Principals communicated with each other			X
Coaches were association officers	X	X	
District leader developed formal job description	X	X	
Highlighted non-evaluative language with association		X	X
Genesis of model from LC/RR	X		X
Elementary literacy coaches	X	X	X
Funded from Title money	X	X	X
Involved in coach selection	X	X	X
Provide local PD	X	X	X

Participants

The participants in this grounded theory qualitative research study were nine Northern Indiana district-level leaders whose corporations utilized coaching an ongoing part of their staff-development activities. There were three leaders from each size district: large, (over 3,000

students), medium (1,500—2,999), and small (less than 1,500). The protocol for selecting the participants was the following:

1. District-level leaders from the following counties were recruited for this study. Allen, DeKalb, Elkhart, Fulton, Jasper, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Lake, LaPorte, Marshall, Newton, Noble, Porter, Pulaski, Stark, Steuben, St. Joseph and Whitley.
2. Each district-level leader was assigned an identification number and participants was selected randomly and placed in order on a tabulation sheet.
3. If a district-level leader declined to participate or their district did not offer ongoing coaching, the next leader was selected from the tabulation sheet.

The leaders were interviewed using structured, open-ended methodology. “Researchers using Grounded Theory will learn about a culture or a group by speaking with...the members of the group. The types of interviews conducted by researchers using this approach vary in degree of formality (Robert Woods Johnson Foundation, 2008, ¶ 2). The researcher took notes of both the reflective and descriptive nature during the course of the interviews. All interviews occurred in the summer or fall of 2009.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data derived from the interviews were analyzed using the following methodology. Initially, notes from the interviews taken in the field were organized into different categories based upon the information expressed. A second step in the analysis of the data was to obtain broad brush strokes about the general ideas expressed. Creswell (2003) discussed the development of a pattern of broad themes. Next, the general ideas were organized into specific informational topics which generated themes which appear throughout the research. The themes that were created are presented in the narrative regarding the research. According to Haig

(1995), “The general goal of grounded theory research is to construct theories in order to understand phenomena” (¶ 3). Lastly, the researcher interpreted the findings based on both the personal beliefs brought to the investigation and a comparison with the related literature. Recognizing the potential bias the researcher may bring to the study is an important aspect of Grounded Theory research. Creswell highlights the possible bias in any type of qualitative research when he states “It means that the researcher filters data through a personal lens that is situated in a specific sociopolitical and historical moment” (p. 182). Because of this fact, it is important to acknowledge that this study could be impacted by the researcher’s personal or professional experiences. Furthermore, some bias could exist because of the researcher’s own values, judgments and possible previous knowledge of some of the districts involved in the study. To help assure validity, the researcher used member checking; in this case by taking the specific topics back to a sampling of district leaders to confirm the accuracy of the topics. The researcher also summarized the contents of the interview before leaving the respondents’ offices. Additionally, discrepant information is presented in the narrative report.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter delineated the methodology for this grounded theory qualitative research study. It also identified the geographical location of the potential participants, the time frame for the research and the questions to be posed to the district-level leaders. This chapter openly pointed out potential bias of the researcher. The researcher sought to determine the superintendent’s role in developing peer coaching. In Chapter 4, the data and results of the nine participant interviews is presented.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the behaviors of Northern Indiana district-level leaders created a culture of instructional coaching within their districts and to determine any similarities between how district-level leaders from different-sized corporations created an instructional-coaching climate.

The research study was designed to answer four overarching questions:

1. How do district leaders in peer-coaching districts describe their process of creating a peer-coaching climate?
2. How do district leaders in peer-coaching districts describe the experience of influencing their teaching staff to accept peer coaching?
3. How do district-level leaders describe their role in the creation of instructional coaching?
4. How would the district-level leader describe their discoveries in implementing a climate of peer culture?

Nine district level leaders from the northernmost 18 counties in Indiana were selected to participate in the study. There were three leaders from small districts of less than 1,500 students, three from medium sized districts; those having 1,500—2,999, and three from large districts with 3,000 or more students. The participants were asked the same questions in the same order so that

themes could be identified by the researcher in regards to the four over-arching questions. These emergent themes were generated based on the respondent's responses to the questions and were developed by the researcher after the interviews took place, but prior to the final development of the narrative.

The interviews were conducted during the late summer and early fall of 2009. The researcher interviewed each district level leader in his/her respective office. During the interview, the researcher took notes based on a set of subquestions that were asked. Those notes included direct quotations as well as short descriptive highlights of the respondent's answers. In addition, the researcher used the Venn-Euler diagram (Figure 2) to visually present the similar and different behaviors found in the different-sized school districts.

Study Population

The northernmost counties of Indiana were selected for this study because of their proximity to the researcher. There were 18 counties selected by the researcher. They generally stretch across Indiana from the southern tip of Newton County on the west edge to the southern border of the Allen County line. School districts within that 18 county region were then divided into small districts (less than 1,500 students) medium districts (1,500—2,999 students) and large districts (3,000 students or more). There were 80-school districts within the regional constraints of the study and according to data found on the Indiana Department of Education website there were 28 small districts, 23 medium districts and 35 large districts. A random sample of three districts from each category was selected by a blind draw. The superintendents from those districts were contacted by letter and then by e-mail to determine if they chose to participate. Seven of the nine superintendents volunteered and also had coaches on staff. However, two of the small districts decided they could not take part in the study. Therefore, a second and

eventually a third district was contacted from the initial tabulation in order to gain access to three small districts.

The interviews were held with primarily the superintendent from each district, however, in some instances, assistant superintendents or curriculum directors were also involved in the discussion process. No information was tracked on the demographics of the district leaders or on their tenure at their current district. The codes that were assigned to the district leaders were simply small district one (SD1), small district two (SD2) and small district three (SD3). Correspondingly, medium districts were coded MD1, MD2 and MD3. Lastly, large districts were coded as LD1, LD2 and LD3.

The sample of the nine districts represented a total of seven different counties. Lake County in northwest Indiana had two districts represented, while Elkhart County also had two representatives. However, no county represented more than two respondents in any of the categories.

Presentation of the Data

This section contains the findings from the interviews. These data were analyzed and sorted by the questions asked as well as categorized by district size. The data are presented using the district leader's responses relevant to the questions. Certain themes emerged throughout and are discussed in the Chapter 5.

Overarching question 1. How do district level leaders in peer coaching districts describe their process for creating a peer coaching climate? In order to gather information pertinent to this overarching question, the researcher asked three subquestions. The first subquestion asked, "How did you decide to use peer coaching as a staff development model?" The district level leaders answered this question with a variety of responses. SD1 instituted a

coaching model to focus on the differentiation of instruction. This district leader was receiving pressure from the parents of the district's high-ability students to improve instruction for the high-ability classes. The leader had come from a district that used coaches and had firsthand knowledge of how coaches might be able to provide professional development on differentiated instruction.

SD2's leader inherited an existing coaching model. However, this leader had supported the coaching model and had made small changes to the program based on knowledge brought with him to this district. He stated, "I knew about it and like it so we left it in place."

There were three districts whose coaching models evolved from their connections with either the Literacy Collaborative (LC) originating out of Ohio State University or the closely connected Reading Recovery Program. SD3 decided to use peer coaching to train their teachers in the Literacy Collaborative model. This coaching model originated as a new teacher (first and second year) mentoring program, but "blossomed into a more intensive program." This district felt it needed to provide this coaching because Literacy Collaborative teaching calls for ongoing coaching. LD2 decided to use coaching after it saw the improvement of achievement in students who had teachers who had received Reading Recovery training. These highly trained teachers also relied on a great deal of coaching to hone their skills. Therefore, LD2 adopted the model to create teachers who would "be exposed to ongoing staff development." This leader also believed that coaching allows teachers to be current in best-practice instruction. LD3 also had the genesis of its coaching model spring out of Literacy Collaborative. LC was implemented in one building and coaching was required for participation. After seeing its positive impact on instruction with that building, coaching then spread throughout the elementary schools in that district. According

to LD3's superintendent, coaching "allows my teachers to continue to explore the most appropriate teaching methods."

MD1's leader explained that he wanted all first- and second-year teachers in his district to have coaches. In this case, the leader wanted new teachers to have a professional relationship with a more experienced teacher. MD1's idea behind a coaching model was to create a safety net of sorts for beginning teachers.

MD2 and LD1 shared similar ideas when asked how they decided to use peer coaching as a staff development model. MD2 stated that a Title 1 school had used some of their monetary allotment to create a coach for that building. After two years, other elementary principals began to ask for coaches. "It basically migrated from one building to several," stated the superintendent of MD2. LD1's leader described a similar process, "Coaching evolved, it started in Title 1 and English as a New Language buildings. Before long, I had principals throughout the corporation requesting coaches." The coaching model in (LD1) was clearly driven by the principals not central office."

MD3 came to have coaches based on a need that was recognized by its district leader. This superintendent decided to use peer coaching to foster consistent conversations about curriculum instruction and assessment. The leader highlighted, "Since we did not have a director of curriculum or instruction we needed shared leadership." MD3's leader simply chose coaching after examining different ways shared leadership in those areas could be developed.

The second question that was asked of the district leaders was, "How did you communicate the peer coaching model to your school board?" Each district-level leader stressed the need to openly communicate with his/her board. However, how each district did this was slightly different. This communication allowed each leader to feel supported in his/her decision

to implement peer coaching. The leadership at SD1 went as far as presenting the school board with a coach's job description and a time line for all the coaching activities. This leader also brought in coaches from other entities to present to the school board. At SD2, the district leader simply provided yearly updates to the board regarding the progress of coaching throughout the district. SD3 shared data that demonstrated the need for coaches. This leader also asked principals to provide regular board reports to SD3's school board. SD3 also reported that their coaches are not paid out of general fund, which alleviated some possible board consternation.

In the middle sized districts, MD1 simply explained the coaching model to a highly functional board that expected ongoing professional development for staff. MD1 stated, "Our board would be upset if we were not providing good PD (professional development)." MD2 also shared the need for coaching by exposing the board to student achievement data. Much like SD1, MD2 created a job description for the board to review before making the case for the coaches. "It was easy to show the need with the data and how the coach could help." MD3 used a more personal approach to garner board support. The leader of this district used one-on-one conversations with the board members to let the board know that coaching was a positive staff development tool. In that regard, when it came up publically, the board was aware and could support the leader's position.

It the larger districts, the methods the leaders used to communicate with the board regarding peer coaching were very similar to each other. Each district used open board meetings with principals reporting on the possible benefits of coaching. The only difference was in LD3 where in addition to the public meetings, the superintendent also sent out a regular newsletter to the school board that contained information on upcoming board reports. Other than that specific

difference, the large districts followed much the same path when communicating the peer coaching model with their boards.

The third question that was asked of the district level leaders was, “What specifically (grades level, subjects, etc.) does your coaching model look like?” In answering this question, SD1 responded that they had a half-time reading and writing coach for grades kindergarten through second grade. This district also had a reading and writing coach for grades three through eight. This position was also half-time. In reality SD1, had one full-time equivalent staff person assigned to coach reading and writing for grades kindergarten through eight. SD1 provided coaching sessions on a weekly basis for teachers in grades kindergarten through second and on a monthly basis in grades three to eight. These coaching sessions were mandatory, though the topics discussed in the sessions were not. SD1 leader stated that, “People who want to teach here need to know our expectations and if they don’t want to work under those conditions, we encourage them to move along.”

SD2 had a unique model that leaned upon the principals to provide coaching. The principals of this district met weekly with groups of teachers. These meetings were held during a student late arrival schedule and focused on a specific topic. Principals in SD2 held coaching sessions on topics ranging from the use of technology in the classroom to student management strategies. SD2 also employed a coach other than the principal at the elementary level. This half-time coach focused primarily in the area of literacy. These coaching sessions occurred during the student late-arrival schedule and throughout the teacher work day.

SD3 had still a slightly different coaching model. At this district, all first- and second-year teachers were provided with a coach. These coaches held different weekly meetings for both years and addressed any questions these less experienced teachers had. The topics these

coaches confronted were content specific or focused on teaching methodology. SD3 also provided a full-time coach who according to SD3's superintendent "focuses her attention on the literacy realm." This coach worked with all teachers in grades kindergarten to fifth to help ensure excellent literacy instruction within the Literacy Collaborative framework. The coaching done in this district occurred throughout the teacher contract day and was done individually or in small groups. "In (SD3) if you are a first- or second-year teacher or an elementary teacher, receiving coaching is an expectation. It is not an optional activity," stated this leader.

When responding to the third question regarding the coaching model utilized, MD1 responded with several different coaching models. According to the superintendent, MD1 "provides coaching for all first- and second-year teachers." In this case, MD1 provided all of the new teachers with more experienced teachers to guide their introduction into the teaching profession. In addition to this safety net for new teachers, MD1 also provided a full-time literacy coach for grades kindergarten through three and a half-time literacy coach for grades four and five. These coaches provided individual and small-group coaching sessions. Although not completely mandatory, MD1's leader stated, "Most, if not all, of our elementary staff are receiving some literacy coaching." Completing MD1's list of coaches was an elementary math coach. This coach was not given any release time, but was instead paid a stipend to lead bimonthly math teaching workshops. According to MD1's superintendent, "our elementary teachers go to her for all things math."

MD2 had a very distinctive coaching model. They trained one coach at each grade level in grades kindergarten through eight as well as several coaches representing different content areas at the high school. All of MD2's coaches were trained to lead teachers in discussions on instruction, assessment and curriculum. All teachers in MD2 were required to attend weekly

grade level/subject area meetings facilitated by the various coaches. The coaching sessions occurred during the teacher contract day and were scheduled prior to the beginning of the school year. MD2's leader stated that, "Our coaches are paid a stipend of \$3,000 per year and are expected to model best practices in instruction, curriculum and assessment." MD2 also supported their teachers with a district-wide math coach. This coach was expected to provide support in the teaching of mathematics for each teacher in the district. MD2's leader shared that, "The math coach works with our math teachers to align the curriculum and the instructional process kindergarten through 12th grade."

MD3's leadership reported that in the district, they had two half-time literacy coaches for grades K-5. They also had one half-time literacy coach at grades six to eight. In their model, MD3 expected coaches to be in different classrooms modeling literacy lessons for teachers. These coaches also led all district professional development in the area of literacy. In MD3's superintendent's words, "The coaches are our literacy experts and we turn to them for leadership." At the middle-school level, the coaches worked primarily with the language arts teachers although MD3's leader stated that, "They will help any teacher with a writing lesson." Based on their experiences with literacy coaches, MD3 also added a half-time district-wide math coach. This coach served every school in the district and led all mathematics professional development. According to MD3's superintendent, "We just felt like it (coaching) was a good way to provide professional development, so the math coach evolved."

LD1 reported a very diverse model. LD1 used several literacy coaches in all grades in the district. This superintendent was unsure of the exact number. Additionally, LD1 reported having coaches in different buildings dependent upon the specific building's needs. These building-specific coaches provided assistance in science, math or English as a New Language

instruction. This was in addition to the literacy coaches. According to LD1's leader, "These people coach only and do not have regular classroom teaching responsibilities." Since so many of LD1's coaches are building based, the superintendent was unable to describe the specific coaching format. However, LD1's leader stated that, "Obviously those coaches provide PD (professional development) in their area of expertise in their building."

In answering the question, "What specifically does your coaching model look like?" LD2 stated that they provided balance literacy coaching for grades kindergarten through fifth grade. "We provide four coaches for three buildings," stated LD2's superintendent. In their model, LD2 had one full-time literacy coach and three half-time literacy coaches. The coaches in this district were expected to be in each classroom. According to LD2, "We expect our coaches to model best-practice literacy instruction in the classroom and, in turn, we expect our teachers to learn from our coaches."

In describing the coaching model in LD3, the leader succinctly stated, "We provide one literacy coach for each of our elementary schools and one half-time coach at the middle school." In this district, the coaching at the middle school also focused only on the improvement of literacy instruction. The coaches model lessons and lead staff development for all teachers responsible for language arts instruction in grades kindergarten to eight.

Overarching question 2. How do district leaders describe the experience of influencing their staff to accept peer coaching? The second overarching question attempted to gain information regarding how district leaders influenced the various constituents that made up their staff. The first subquestion in this category of questioning dealt with how the coaching model was communicated to the teaching staff. The district level leaders were asked, "How did you communicate the coaching model to your teachers?"

SD1 commented that the coaching model was communicated by the district leader. The district's focus was on differentiation of instruction and their student achievement data was used to support the need for coaches. The leader shared the data and outlined how coaches would be used in order to gain the teachers' support. One of the most important parts of this leader's plan to gain support for coaching was "to share the steps of the (coaching) selection process so the teachers knew what skill set we were trying to get." Because the leader was transparent in the coach selection process, the teachers at SD1 had an easier time supporting the model. In addition to the original transparency of the coach selection, SD1 used the districts leadership team to continue to talk to the teaching staff about the coaching model. The principals took an entire school year to talk about coaching in their buildings. SD1 stated that, "Our teachers had been hearing about the coaching model since the previous October."

SD2 was not able to provide much information on how the coaching model idea was communicated to the teachers since it was already in existence when the current leader took charge. When making changes to the program, SD2 simply stated, "We use the principals to deliver that kind of info to our teachers." This leader went on to clarify that the changes that SD2 has made to the originally-adopted coaching model were relatively minor, and so asking the principals to share those changes with their staffs was not a significant task.

SD3 also used the district's principals to communicate the coaching model to the district's teachers. Since they were a Literacy Collaborative district, their principals were trained in literacy before many of the teachers. Because of this, the principals in SD3 were in position to espouse the virtues of coaching. According SD3's leader, "Our principals had been coached and knew the benefits so asking teachers to be coached was easy for them." SD3's leader's role in

communicating with teachers was to simply make sure the principals were effectively communicating about the use of the coaching model.

In answering the question, “How did you communicate the coaching model to your staff?” The middle sized districts had a variety of answers. MD1’s superintendent brought the idea of coaching up to a group of teachers. The leader’s conversation focused initially on the need to provide support to first- and second-year teachers. The conversation was simply a meeting with “lead teachers” that MD1 principals identified as high-quality instructors. The district leader simply brought the idea of coaching up at several different meetings until in MD1 leader’s words. “Our coaching model just evolved.” This leader simply had ideas about coaching and made it a topic of discussion with teachers that could influence their peers. The process MD1 took to inform his teaching staff was very informal and based upon the concept that teachers influence one another more effectively than a leader’s directive.

While MD1 took a fairly unstructured avenue to informing the teaching staff about the coaching model, MD2’s leader took a significantly more formal process. At MD2, the leader made a concerted effort to speak personally with all certificated staff. This leader attended staff meetings to help impress the idea of coaching on the teachers. In addition to personal appearances before the teachers, this leader also used written newsletters to inform the teachers about the status of the coaching model. MD2 also used principals to keep the teachers informed. The principals used strategies such as memos and notes to their staffs and presentations at faculty meetings. These methods helped inform the teachers about MD2’s leader’s desire to move forward with a coaching model.

MD3 garnered support for the coaching by allowing it to be completely voluntary. “In its initial stages, we allowed teachers or groups of teachers to volunteer to receive coaching” stated

MD3's leader. By creating a completely nonthreatening environment, MD3 hoped to garner support for coaching while simultaneously gaining an improvement in the instructional practices of the district's teachers. In MD3, the district leader hoped that teachers who were voluntarily coached would help encourage their peers to become involved. In other words, MD3 used collegial pressure to help facilitate communication regarding peer coaching.

In LD1, the teachers were kept abreast of the coaching model when they were informed that select teachers were going to be coached. Some of LD1's principals felt the need to change instructional practices within their Title 1 and ENL departments. The principals simply informed those specific teachers within those specific buildings that coaching was going to take place. After informing the teachers, LD1 used the positive experiences of the Title 1 and ENL teachers to help influence the remainder of the teaching staff. LD1's superintendent also credits an assistant superintendent within the corporation as being "a real cheerleader for coaching." In the case of LD1, teachers that received coaching reported mostly positive experiences to their colleagues while simultaneously, a central office leader was also spreading a positive message about coaching. This two-pronged method allowed LD1 to facilitate the staff's knowledge of peer coaching.

LD2 had a significantly different approach of communicating the peer coaching model. In LD2's case, coaching began through their Literacy Collaborative program and then began to permeate through the buildings. According to LD2's leader, "We just started doing it and then we formalized the process." In their case, LD2 only formally communicated with their teachers after they had a model in place. In reality, the communication with the teaching staff was informal and for the most part, unplanned.

LD3's leader believes that coaching model used in their district was communicated to the teachers almost exclusively by the district's principals. In LD3, the district-level leader played almost no role in the direct communication with teachers. "Our principals drove it," stated LD3's leader. Furthermore, LD3's leader commented that, "My only role was communicating with the association." In LD3's case it is clear that the district-level leader played a very small role in communicating the peer-coaching model directly with the teaching staff.

The second question the district leaders were asked regarding how they described the experience of influencing their staff was, "Did you involve your teachers association in this process and, if so, how?" The intent of this questioning was to determine how teacher association members were influenced by district leaders. SD1 reported that the teacher's association members were influenced by district leaders. SD1 reported that the teacher's association in that district was kept informed through discussable meetings. Additionally, SD1's leader reported, "Numerous informal conversations kept the association informed." SD1's leader added one caveat for his/her district and that was the association president was also interested in becoming a peer coach. Therefore, those informal discussions were easily cultivated. The district leader stressed that having the association president as a supporter of the model made the transition to peer coaching much easier.

In SD2 the leader simply reported that the association was notified about the coaching model through the discussion process. When the researcher asked for additional clarification, SD2 leader simply responded that the association brought up no negatives or concerns and so the coaching model just continued.

SD3 described an experience with the association that was similar to SD1. In SD3's case, the association president was already a trained coach. Therefore, communication with the

association was redundant. SD3's leader stated, "When I talked to her about coaching, it was in effect already approved."

MD1 reported that the informal meetings that were held to initially discuss the coaching model with "lead teachers" including association leadership. In this district's case, the president of the local association was also interested in becoming one of the coaches. In MD1 leader's belief, "having the president involved and interested was a huge benefit." One of the comments that was enlightening from the leader of MD1 was "because the model is non evaluative our union did not have issues with it."

MD2 involved the association in a much more formal manner. Before ever speaking to the teaching staff, this leader asked the teachers association for help in the establishment of a peer coaching model. "I went to them (teachers association) and asked, 'How can you help me roll this thing out?'" In this case, the leader of MD2 pointed out that because the association knew the plan they were supportive of it. In the discussions with the association, MD2 leadership shared job descriptions for coaches as well as student data that highlighted the need to improve instruction.

While MD2 took a very formal and very well-developed plan for involving their association, MD3's leader simply stated, "We keep our association well informed on all issues like this." When the researcher asked for clarification, MD3's leader commented, "We would not have moved ahead on this if they (the association) had major concerns."

LD1 described their interaction with their teachers' association while developing peer coaching as positive. LD1 leadership pointed out that their association is always interested in providing opportunities for staff development for the association members. LD1 leaders also pointed out that their association recognized the changing student achievement data. Therefore,

even though the original coaches were mandated by central office, the growth in the model has been supported by the association. Additionally, LD1 stressed that “once they knew coaches could not evaluate teachers they were for it.” One other point that LD1 made was that one of their association officers was also a coach in the district. According to this leader, that helped facilitate good communications. “We hear about concerns when they are little rather than having them blow up” stated LD1’s leader.

LD2 stated that their association was never really concerned with the coaching model because the coaches are not evaluating the teachers. LD2’s leader commented, “We make it very clear that our coaches are not to evaluate.” Additionally, since most of their coaches still have some teaching responsibilities the teacher’s association views the coaches as teachers rather than quasi administrators.

LD3 also reported very limited interactions with their teachers association. Since the model used at LD3 was primarily developed at the building level there was very little communication with the association at the district level. Most of the conversations took place at the building level between the principals and the discussables teams. According to LD3’s leader, “Since it (coaching) has been driven primarily at the building level, union support has not yet been an issue.” This leader simply communicated with the principals about coaching and made sure they then relayed that information to the building discussable teams.

In order to gain further insight into how district level leaders influenced their staff to accept peer coaching, they were also asked, “How did you communicate this model to your principals?” To answer this question SD1’s leader stated that numerous administrative meetings with the district’s principals were held. These meetings were both formal and informal. One additional situation that has played a role in SD1’s leader’s communication with the district’s

principals is the turnover in principals. In this district, the superintendent was able to replace several of the district's principals just prior to implementing the coaching model. Since the leader knew peer coaching was a method of professional development worth exploring, it was imperative that the incoming principals held similar beliefs. "If they were not interested in supporting coaching we did not extend them the opportunity to work (here)" stated SD1's leader.

SD2's model of coaching involved the principal in the actual coaching sessions. Therefore, SD2's principals knew about the move to coaching prior to its institution. In this district, the principals were actually trained as coaches. In this case the leader did not know how the peer coaching model was communicated to the principals but was certain that they knew about the model before being trained.

Although not identical to SD2's experience in communicating with principals, SD3's leader explained a similar situation. SD3 was a Literacy Collaborative district and therefore principals within the district received coaching. Communication with the principals began when the district moved to the LC model. The further expansion of peer coaching model was a fairly easy extension of those conversations. According to SD3's leader, "When we decided to join the collaborative, our principals were supportive."

When MD1's superintendent communicated the model to the principals the leader focused on the need to help teachers be successful in their first and second year. In this leader's opinion, it is easier to provide coaching assistance than to replace a poor teacher. MD1's leader made the point by stating "I told them, we could either work harder or work smarter. We had a model to use that created very little work for them (the principals). It (coaching) was certainly less work than firing a teacher." In MD1's case the initial communication with the principals focused on the improvement of instruction and the benefits of having a safety net for less

experienced teachers. From that point forward, the communication about extensions of that model occurred at administrative meetings.

MD2 involved the principals in their district from the initial conversations about exploring the option of peer coaching within the district. According to MD2's leader, the principals played a role from the outset. "They helped develop the job description" pointed out MD2's leader. The involvement and communication with the principals in MD2 was formal and very well developed. The principals were crucial to the decision to move forward with peer coaching and crucial to its further development.

MD3's principals were kept informed regarding peer coaching through formal administrative meetings. Since MD3 was exploring ways to share leadership, the principals were involved in those discussions. The district leader continued to facilitate those conversations after the peer coaching model was selected. In this case, the district level leader communicated directly and consistently to the principals.

In answering the question, "How did you communicate the coaching model to your principals," the large districts had a group of similar responses. LD1 involved their principals after examining student achievement data at Title 1 and ENL schools. The principals at those buildings knew that they needed to change instructional practices so they were willing to explore the coaching model. The principals in those buildings helped spread the word regarding peer coaching. The district level leaders simply allowed and facilitated discussions between building principals. Those conversations took place at regularly scheduled administrative meetings as well as summer retreats. The district leaders asked the principals with coaches share information regarding what was happening and how coaching was proceeding. The principals who had coaches started making comments to the district leader that implied the need for, and success of,

the coaching model. The leader of LD1 stated, “I had principals at staffing meetings say, don’t take my coach away.”

LD2 reported that their principals communicated with one another regarding the coaching. Once again, the Literacy Collaborative model was being used so some of the principals were already being coached. The informal information sharing took place primarily at the building administrator level. As it was with the teaching staff, LD2’s leader’s communication with the principals regarding peer coaching was very informal. According to LD2’s leader, “The principals talked to each other about how it (coaching) might work in their buildings I simply listened.”

LD3 reported very similar experiences as LD2. Since they were also a Literacy Collaborative school district, the principals were also trained and had received coaching. Those principals then reported back to the other principals regarding the successes of coaching. In addition, the coaches provided some single opportunity professional development for buildings without coaches. According to LD3’s leader, “When our coaches provided trainings in other buildings, those principals saw the potential.”

Overarching question 3. How do district level leaders describe their role in the creation of instructional coaching? The third overarching question attempts to gain insight into how the district level leader influences coaching through the selection of the appropriate personnel to become coaches. Additionally this section addressed how district leaders influenced the coaching model used in their districts through financial means. A further area of exploration for this section was the leader’s role in the type, and amount of professional development provided to the coaches.

When asked “How were coaches selected?” the small districts had a very wide range of responses. SD1 had a very formalized process. In this district, a complete job description was created that included a list of skills the coach should possess. This leader then went through a screening and interview process in order to hire the coach. SD1’s leader stated “We put a committee together and went through our normal process.” SD1 basically followed their standard procedure for hiring any staff member. This normal process included the potential for selection of a candidate from outside the school district. SD1’s leader described the possibility of hiring an outside candidate “remote” because of the way the job was posted. The job, however, was clearly open to any candidate wishing to apply.

SD2’s coaches were selected almost by default. Since, in this district the principals provide the vast majority of the coaching, they were appointed as coaches. Obviously, there was no additional selection process because once the principals were selected as building administrators the coaching duty was simply assigned. SD2 also employs a 50% literacy coach. This coach was appointed by the principal and the district leader based on the perception that this person was “The best candidate for what we were looking for” commented SD2’s leader.

SD3 had yet another option for the selection of coaches. The literacy coach in SD3 was selected because this teacher was already serving as a reading specialist within the corporation. According to SD3’s leader, “She already had expertise in reading and literacy.” In this district’s case, the process of coaching selection was simply selecting the person on staff who already had a high degree of expertise. The coaches for the first and second year teachers were selected by the building principals and were chosen based upon their teaching abilities. The selection of these coaches was simply made known to the district leader. SD3’s leader played no role in the selection of these people.

MD1 selected the coaches that served in its district at the building level. The principals and the school leadership team selected the coaches. MD1's leader stated, "I do not play any role in the selection of the coaches." However, when asked about the districts literacy and math coaches, the leader responded, "We (the central office administration and the building principals) select those through an interview process." Therefore MD1 had different processes for selection of coaches. Coaches that work within one building were selected by the building principal and teachers within that building. On the other hand, district wide coaches were selected by district level leaders and all of the corporation's principals. One additional note regarding MD1's selection process was that all coaches be current employers, no outside applicants are considered.

In contrast to MD1, MD2 went through an entirely formal process. The coaches in this district completed a formal application and went through a comprehensive screening and interview process. The selection committee in this district included the superintendent and the curriculum director as well as principals and teachers. Although not technically closed to outside applicants MD2's process made it extremely difficult for an outside candidate to be selected. MD2's leader pointed this out by articulating, "We look for someone who has been active in curriculum development, displays leadership and is credible to our teachers."

At MD3 the selection of coaches was a district level decision. In their model MD3's leader, assistant superintendents and a building principal determined who coaches. That small committee selected from internal candidates only and based their decision on a set of non formalized ideals. "We look for rapport with staff and people who are well respected," commented MD3's leader. Although the process involved interviews in the process, it was not nearly as structured as the one used by MD2.

LD1 answered the question about coach selection by stating that coaches were hired using the traditional method in that district. Coaches were screened and interviewed by the principal of the building where the coach would work. If the coach worked in multiple buildings, the principals in all the buildings involved were part of the process. The district level leadership was not involved in the selection process except for approving the job description. According to LD1's leader, "We let our principals' select who they thought could best meet their needs." In this district, coaches had to be existing teachers in the district.

LD2's process for selection of its coaches was not really a selection process at all. Rather, it was a shifting of people that already had expertise in literacy. LD2's leader simply moved Reading Recovery teachers and teachers with extensive literacy training into the coaching role. The process for selection of coaches in LD2 was not formalized. The process simply involved the principals and district leaders convincing these highly trained teachers to move into coaching. "We took advantage of natural fits" stated LD2's leader. In this case, there was no formalized interview or selection process. The building principals and district leaders simply recruited certain existing staff members who were expert teachers into coaching.

LD3's selection process had very little input from the district level leaders. This leader stated, "We ask for volunteers first and then the principals interview and select the best candidate." The leader clarified that, by volunteering, the potential coach expressed the desire to work with teachers. This district's coaching model was almost exclusively driven at the building level and the selection of coaches was not significantly different. Although technically open to anyone, the interview process made it difficult for a teacher who was not on staff to be hired. "We look for coaches who are respected by our staff," stated LD3's leader.

A second question asked of all nine district level leaders when attempting to get them to describe their role in the creating of instructional coaching was, “How were coaching positions financed?” SD1’s leader answered that the districts coaches were paid out of grants. “We have used high ability grants mostly,” commented the leader. In addition to that grant the leader of SD1 also pieced together other grants to fund the coaches.

At SD2, most of the coaching was done by the principals but any additional coaching and costs associated with coaching were funded from Title I. SD3 also used grants to pay for all of the coaches in the district. This leader commented, “I use Title I and Title II Part A to pay for the coaches.” This leader also pointed out that the districts supplemented the coaching budget anytime it could by writing for specific grants.

The middle size districts were consistent in their methods for financing their coaching model. These districts did not use any general fund dollars to provide allotments for coaching. MD1 used Title II to fund their coaching positions and the associated costs. “We use that (Title II) strictly for professional development” commented MD1’s leader. At MD2, the district leader stated that they also used Title II dollars to fund coaches. In MD3 the leader reported that they take most of the money from Title II but “We do use some grant money if it’s available.”

The larger districts also used very little general fund money to finance their coaching programs, although there was one stark exception. LD1 and LD3 both used large amounts of Title funds to pay for their coaches. LD1’s leader stated that they used Title I, Title II and Title III. He highlighted, “We fund it (coaching) from several sources, mostly Title I, II and III.” Similarly, LD3 used its Title I allocation to pay for coaching. “Our coaches are funded though Title I” succinctly stated LD3’s leader.

In contrast to the other districts, LD2 paid for the coaches out of their general fund. “We did not want to have to cut the program because the money dried up” commented the leader of LD2. Although funding coaches through the general fund created its own set of problems, “At least we can decide if we want to keep funding it” reiterated LD2’s superintendent.

Another question that was asked of the district leaders in order to ascertain their role in the creation of a peer coaching model was, “How was professional development provided for coaches.” This question attempted to gain information on how coaches were trained and what, if any, role the district leader played in that process. At SD1, coach’s professional development took many forms. State financed field coaches provided some initial training. “We originally had the state High Ability field coaches work with our people” stated SD1’s leader. In addition to the original professional development provided free by the Indiana Department of Education, this school corporation also used training from the All Write Literacy Consortium. This group provided study meetings for local and regional literacy coaches. Lastly SD1’s leader reported that the district provides a large professional library for its coaches.

The methodology for professional development at SD2 was actually a model of coaching. SD2 brought in coaches from an organization called Hallmarks of Excellence. This organization met with SD2’s coaches to provide coaching during the school year in one-on-one settings. In addition to those sessions, the coaches in SD2 also had weekly collaboration meetings together. These meetings allowed coaches to stay abreast of best practice instruction.

At SD3, the coaches who worked with first and second year teachers were provided with single session staff development opportunities throughout the school year. “We pick these coaches because they are excellent teachers, we just provide them with a little extra support” stated SD3’s leader. In contrast to that model, SD3 supported their literacy coach with monthly

study council meetings of all the literacy coaches in the county. These meetings focus on everything from teaching adult learners to teaching specific literacy skills to students. In SD3 the literacy coach also attended several state and national conferences or workshops. SD3's superintendent commented, "Our literacy coach is highly trained, going as far back as her Literacy Collaborative work."

At MD1, the professional development consisted of eight full days of training in cognitive coaching. These training days take place at a regional location and were attended by many different school districts. In addition to the eight full days, the literacy coaches at MD1 were involved in monthly meetings where topical issues were discussed. These meetings involve several are corporation literacy coaches. "We think our training helps our coaches" stated MD1's leader.

Coaches' professional development at MD2 was done completely within the district. The coaches were originally trained by central office staff. "We knew what we wanted our coaches working on" stated MD2's leader. In addition to the original training, MD2 also had coaching trainings two times a month during the school year and two additional days during the summer.

Using regional consortia for training was the primary model of professional development for coaches at MD3. At this district the literacy coaches from several districts gathered to provide training for new coaches in those districts. Ongoing professional development was also provided by this group. Although this group had no set curriculum, it did address the issues that new or existing coaches expected to face. MD3 provided no specific professional development for the math coach in the district.

LD1 had a wide variety of professional development opportunities for their coaches. Many of their coaches were specialist in their coaching area so their professional development

focused on those areas. For example LD1's leader stated "Our ENL coaches often attend a local college for additional training." This district also sent coaches to local and regional trainings in their specific areas of expertise. These trainings covered a variety of topics but were usually content specific.

LD2 and LD3 had very content specific professional development models for their coaches. All of these coaches were trained in the Literacy Collaborative model which involved intensive two-year training through Ohio State University. Following that training, the coaches in these districts were also required to attend continuing education meetings. LD3's leader highlighted "The OSU training is extensive." In addition to this professional development LD2 also sent their literacy coaches to a local coaches meeting for additional support. This multiple district meeting, "allows coaches to have frequent discussions about issues they are currently facing" stated LD2's leader. Both LD2 and LD3 also reported having significant professional libraries available to their coaches.

Overarching question 4. How would district level leaders describe their discoveries while implementing a climate of peer coaching. The final set of questions asked of the district leaders attempted to determine what they learned during the implementation process. The initial question asked under this overarching section was, "What steps during the implementation process worked well and why?" SD1's leader stated that establishing the need for coaches worked well. The sharing of student achievement data was a key component in the implementation process. "We pointed out the need using data and then gathered support." In addition to the student data information SD1's leader also felt like the transparency of the coach selection process was a key to the districts implementation process. Finally, the leader of this

district felt the involvement of the teacher's association president was a positive because it mitigated one potential obstacle to the process.

At SD2 the district leader felt the strength of their process was the ability to get individual staff members to accept responsibility for student growth. This leader also felt that their model, which primarily used principals as coaches, was non intrusive. Lastly, SD2's leader commented, "we have a lot of discussions about coaching that I think are helpful." The discussions take place between the coaches and central office administrators.

SD3 answered the question regarding what worked well during the implementation process with the following comment, "We were not top down, coaching was a model that came from the buildings." This leader felt the best thing the district did was take an idea that teachers and principals had and try to figure out how to make it work. This leader even went so far as to comment, "We now have teachers as cheerleaders (for coaching)." An additional positive pointed out by this leader was the inclusion of the teacher's association president in the process. Once again the fact that the president was a coach eliminated a potential roadblock in the establishment of the coaching model.

In answering the question about what steps worked well during the implementation process, MD1's leader focused primarily upon coach selection. In general teams, this leader believed that the principals in the district did a good job of selecting the correct people to coach. MD1's superintendent stated, "They picked coaches who were very positive and upbeat." Although not stated directly, the researcher took these comments to infer that even the district coaches fit this same description. Basically, in this district, the leader felt the best part of the implementation process was the selection of the coaches.

MD2's leader answered that same question with a wide range of responses. First of all, this leader perceived strength of the process being that the original movement of coaching from building-to-building was not mandated by the district leadership. Instead, principals saw the potential and asked for the positions. The leader of MD2 saw this "migration" as a positive. Additionally, the coaching model at MD2 was instituted to address a need that was already perceived by the majority of the staff. "We were not creating a solution to a problem no one recognized" highlighted MD2's leader. A last highlight pointed out by this leader was the positive involvement of the teacher's association. The leader had the association's support and input prior to the coaching model being utilized. This leader stated "That was one issue we didn't have to battle" when discussing association involvement in the development of the coaching model.

In MD3, the non evaluative nature of the coaching model was one of positive aspects of the implementation process. "We really felt like we would get more buy in if people knew coaches wouldn't evaluate" stated MD3's leader. From this leaders perspective that had been the case. "We knew we wanted our coaches in classrooms frequently and we knew if teachers didn't trust them that would be difficult" highlighted this leader in discussing their non-evaluative model.

MD3's leader also believed that their selection of coaches had been a positive in their implementation process. Placing the right people in the coaching positions was perceived as strength in MD3's implementation process. This district's focus on selecting coaches who were highly respected by the teaching was believed to be a positive highlight to this district's process.

LD1 responded to the question, "What steps during the implementation process worked well and why" by stating that having the coaches as a form of professional development was well

supported. This leader commented, “We had good overall support for professional development.” This leader added that this decision to move forward with coaching was simply a response to that support. LD1’s superintendent also pointed out that a positive step of their implementation process was the growth of the coaching model from within the individual buildings. “Our principals really lead this” commented the district leader. In this district the building principals and the teachers were clearly involved at the nexus of the process.

At LD2, the leader went directly to the personnel selected as coaches as the most positive part of their implementation process. This leader reported the selecting coaches who had high levels of energy and who maintain an optimistic point of view were keys. “Without a doubt, the best thing we did was hire the right people for the job,” stated LD2’s leader. This leader continued, “We hired coaches that were positive and that understood the change process.” At LD2, it was clear that the selection of coaches was a critical step in the process of implementing the coaching model.

When asked about the positive parts of the implementation process at LD3, the leader commented primarily about the building level support. In this district coaching grew from within. This leader highlighted, “We allowed it to be building driven.” Adding further that although this leader thought coaching was a solid method of staff development, it was never the leader’s intent to make all schools participate in coaching. The other positive aspect this leader pointed out was the almost nonexistent concerns of the teachers association. In this district, association issues were contentious but the use of coaches was not. The leader felt this was due in part to the model initially being instituted at the building levels.

The second question that attempted to gain information from district leaders regarding their discoveries while implementing the coaching process was, “What steps during the

implementation process would you do differently and why?” SD1’s answer to this question was, “We did it right.” This leader’s only comment about how the district might have done anything differently was to point out that accountability comes with the process. “We found a way to fund it and get it done but now if it doesn’t work, I am accountable.” Although not directly stating that this was something to be done differently, it was clearly a comment this leader wanted to point out.

Interestingly enough, SD2’s leader stated that one of the strengths of their process was also perhaps the greatest weakness. This leader opined that the use of principals as coaches created some issues. “We should have trained our teachers to be coaches” stated this superintendent. He believed that his teachers would have owned more of their own growth as teachers if administrators were not involved. In this leader’s view the teachers look to the administrators to lead almost all of the professional development within the district. SD2’s leader felt like this was not the most efficient use of staff development time. In reality, the addition of the half-time coach was an attempt to address this leader’s concern over the lack of teacher coaches within the district.

SD3’s leader reported that the district would do nothing differently during the implementation process. This leader stated, “We have had no problems with coaching or coaches.” In this leader’s opinion, the district was able to get a coaching climate institutionalized with no implementation issues.

MD1 responded to the question regarding what steps would be changed during the implementation process by focusing on the number of coaches. This leader pointed out that the coaches were spread fairly thin. The half-time literacy coaches in this district worked between multiple buildings. These people taught, coached, and led professional development meetings.

“These people are asked to do too many things.” stated MD1’s leader. Clearly, this leader felt that the number of coaches or at least the responsibility of the coaches needed to be modified in MD1.

MD2’s leaders believed that the process of implementation went extremely well. The formal communication, hiring, and public relations strategy used at MD2 did not need to be revamped according to the leader. “We had no issues,” stated MD2’s leader. Clearly, this superintendent felt that the process they went through did not have to change.

The leader of MD3 responded that their biggest concern with the process was the selection of replacement coaches. This district had not yet had issues with replacing coaches. However, this leader was concerned about possible ramifications if many of the existing coaches chose to return to the classroom. “We have some great coaches and I am concerned about how we would replace them.” commented MD3’s leader. Although not a direct result of the implementation process, this was a direct outcome of the coach selection process.

When asked about what steps during the implementation process they would have done differently, LD1 highlighted communication issues. “Our first teachers were simply told they were going to be coached. We should have done that differently,” stated LD1’s leader. In addition to communication with the teachers, this leader also pointed out that central office communication with the principals should have been more formalized. In this leader’s view, the communication that took place was relatively informal and unplanned and should have been directed more by the district leadership.

The selection of coaches was stipulated as an area of change in LD2. This leader commented that they had selected a coach with the wrong experiences. “Classroom experiences are important,” stated this leader. This leader believed that because the process for selecting the

coach was informal, it was possible that a coach with the wrong skill set was selected. LD2's leader commented, "Credibility with the teachers is important." Clearly, this leader believed that, given the same set of circumstances, the selection of the coaches would have taken a different path.

When asked about changing the implementation of the coaching LD3's leader discussed the pacing of the process. This leader believed that the benefits of coaching were clear and wanted the coaching model to be in place more immediately. "I wanted to go faster," was the comment this leader made. Additionally the length of time it took to train the coaches was also a drawback for LD3's superintendent. However, this leader also added that coaching may not have worked as well had the pace of implementation been faster.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This chapter reviews the overarching and subordinate questions and the methodology used and presents a summary of the findings. This chapter also presents similarities between how leaders in different sized districts implemented coaching models. Finally, possible recommendations and information on potential areas of inquiry for additional research are presented. The purpose of the qualitative study was to discover how the behaviors of Indiana School district-level leaders create a culture of Instructional Coaching within their district. An additional purpose was to discover any similarities or differences between how district level leaders from different sized corporations create the instructional coaching climate. A culture of instructional coaching is generally defined as a process by which professional educators provide teachers with strategies for the improvement of instructional practices.

Grounded theory methodology was selected because this research explored processes and events and because similarities and differences between the different sized districts were explored (Creswell 2003). The participants in this study were nine district level leaders from Northern Indiana whose districts utilize peer coaching. There were three leaders from districts of less than 1,500 students, three from districts of 1,500 – 2,999 students and three leaders from districts with 3,000 or more students.

The leaders were asked a series of questions in order to gather information regarding the four overarching questions. The following questions were answered in this study.

1. How do district leaders in peer coaching districts describe their process of creating a peer coaching climate?
 - 1.1 How did you decide to use peer coaching as a staff development model?
 - 1.2 How did you communicate this model with your school board?
 - 1.3 What specifically does your coaching model look like (grades, subjects, etc)?
2. How do district leaders describe the experience of influencing their staff to accept peer coaching?
 - 2.1 How did you communicate the coaching model to your teachers?
 - 2.2 Did you involve your teachers association in this process and if so how?
 - 2.3 How did you communicate this model to your principals?
3. How do district leaders describe their role in the creation of instructional coaching?
 - 3.1 How were coaches selected?
 - 3.2 How were coaching positions financed?
 - 3.3 How was professional development provided for coaches?
4. How would district leaders describe their discoveries while implementing a climate of peer coaching?
 - 4.1 What steps during the implementation process worked well and why?
 - 4.2 What steps during the implementation process would you do differently and why?

These questions were framed by the review of the literature. The literature provided a foundation for the researcher and also provided a basis for the overarching questions. Although

there was a significant amount of literature on the topic of peer coaching, the researcher sought information specific to the process of implementation of a coaching model.

Discovery of Themes

There were several themes that the researcher discovered during this study. These appeared across all sized districts and appeared in many, but not necessarily all, of the interviewee's comments.

The first theme was that all the leaders felt the need to provide coaching in the area of literacy. In fact, all nine districts provided some type of literacy support for their teaching staff. Perhaps the reason for the consistent support in the literacy coaching realm was best summed up by the leader of LD1. "We had to do something different to try to get our kids to pass ISTEP. We knew if our students couldn't read the assessment, they could not pass it." Although not stated outwardly by all district level leaders, the increased accountability of PL221, NCLB and ISTEP+ clearly was a driving force in the leaders' decisions to provide literacy coaches.

A second theme that appeared was the involvement of the corporation principals. All district level leaders used their principals to communicate with some part of their constituency. The district leaders either used the principals to communicate with the school board, the teaching staff, the teachers association, the school board or even other principals within the district.

Sometimes the district leaders used the principals to communicate in a formal manner and sometimes in an informal manner but in any case it is apparent that district level leaders felt compelled to use the principals to help facilitate communication. LD3's leader pointed this out by stating, "Our principals are the people in our district who know the most about how teachers will respond to an initiative. We felt like they were in the best position to inform our staff."

This leader went on to summarize that the district principals were also in the best position to gather feedback about coaching and to share that back to the district leader.

The importance of financing the coaching positions was a third theme that developed during the research. Each leader pointed out the need to find ways to make sure funding for coaches was secure. Although not all districts used the same funding source, each leader did play a role in determining where the money came from.

The importance of coach selection was a fourth theme. Many of the district leaders pointed out the need to insure that the proper personnel were placed in the position of coach.

Perhaps no leader in the study was any more aware of this than SD1's. This leader used the most formal of processes to try to ensure that the best candidate was selected. This leader pointed out how important this decision was when stating, "We absolutely wanted to make sure we got the right person. We knew that if we couldn't find a coach who could get along with others we were not going to see the benefits we wanted." The method of coach selection was not consistent across all districts but the importance of picking the right coach was.

Interpretation of the Findings

The following information summarized the answers from the nine district level leaders and provided insight into the actions taken by district level leaders to create a climate of peer coaching.

How do district level leaders in peer coaching districts describe their process of creating a peer coaching climate? The district level leaders in the nine districts study reported instituting peer coaching for a variety of reasons. Ultimately however, the major focus of the coaches was to improve the overall instructional strategies of the teachers in the district.

The primary focus in most districts was in elementary literacy. There were also some districts that attempted to create collegial supports for less experienced teachers in areas other than literacy. “We wanted all our first and second year teachers to have a relationship with an experienced teacher stated MD1’s leader.”

In this case “why” coaching was instituted was much more clear than “how” coaching was implemented. District leaders reported everything from inheriting a coaching program to bringing a coaching philosophy with them from another district. There was really no single, clear reason that district leaders decided to use coaching as a staff development model.

However, it was clear that several of the districts decided to use coaching methodology because it was part of the Literacy Collaborative framework. LD3’s leader stated “We saw benefits from the coaching that occurred in LC.” This comment was also supported by the leaders of SD3 and LD2.

Most leaders were also able to create support for their coaching programs through meaningful communication with their school boards. The leaders used a variety of methods to ensure that their school boards were solidly behind the initiative. The methods they used varied from corporation to corporation in style. Some leaders reported extremely formal communication processes while others simply kept their school boards informed of any changes. Some leaders were direct in their communication with board members while still others used the district’s principals and coaches to communicate with the board members. As the leader of MD2 stated, “I felt like it was our job as administrators to show the board why we needed to have coaches.”

The coaching model used in each district was also a reflection of how district leaders describe the process of peer coaching implementation. Primarily, districts focused on elementary

literacy as an area to provide coaches. Although there were also other grade and subject levels where coaches were provided, it was clear that leaders were attacking early literacy. LD1's leader articulated concerns regarding the need for students to be able to read the state mandated assessments in order to demonstrate academic success. Perhaps MD2's leader's comments were most direct to this point. "In looking at all our different assessment tools, reading scores were lowest and we needed to do something to improve them."

In summarizing how district leaders described their process of creating peer coaching, it was clear that the decision to use peer coaching was not completely driven by any single piece of the leader's background. However, it was clear that in all instances the leaders believed that the coaching model was going to increase teacher expertise and therefore student achievement. In addition, board support was necessary for district leaders to create a climate of peer coaching. There seems however to be a variety of ways to achieve that support. Lastly, it appeared that elementary literacy was an area where district leaders felt the most comfortable in recommending the coaching model.

How do district leaders describe the experiences of influencing their staff to accept peer coaching? Much of the answer to this question focused on the leader's ability to communicate with the various stake holders. In some cases, the ability to influence staff members to accept peer coaching involved the facilitation of communication between others. An example of this type of facilitation occurred at SD1. In this district, principals spent the majority of a school year talking with teachers about the instructional coaching model. The district leader made sure the principals communicated with the teachers. In certain instances, it was a direct result of the leader's communication skills. Often, as in the aforementioned SD1, the district level leaders used the principals to influence the teachers in their building. In other cases, the

district leader, either through direct, verbal or written communications, attempted to influence the staff and association members. LD3's leader, for example, met directly with teachers who were going to be coached and simply let it be known to them they would be receiving the benefits of an instructional coach. While at SD1 the leader's use of direct but informal communications with association members was influential in that corporations transition to instructional coaching.

Often principal's communications about the use of the coaching model was collegial in nature; occurring in informal settings often between peers. Perhaps the best example of this type of communications occurred at LD2. "Our principals talked about coaching and how it might work in different buildings." Similarly, the leaders describe their involvement with the teacher's association in different degrees of formality. Some leaders used very formal and well developed communication plans while others used significantly less formal means. Interestingly enough, several leaders reported having association officers as coaches therefore easing communication.

In conclusion, district leaders used a wide variety of strategies to influence their staff. However most of the strategies involved the district level leader's ability to communicate with the various stake holders such as teachers or teacher association members. The decision on what strategy to use seemed to depend on which staff group the leader was attempting to influence. Additionally, it appeared that the leaders used the building principals to help them influence the various groups which would include other principals.

How do district level leaders describe their role in the creation of instructional coaching? The role the district level leader played in the selection of coaches varied from being an active part of the selection process to being a small part of a very informal process. However, the leaders described the selection of coaches as important in the coaching model. The leader of

MD3 articulated this fairly strongly when stating, “It is important for us to get the best people and I feel like I need to be part of the selection process.” In addition to the selection of coaches, district leaders described securing funding for coaches as a priority. Although all but two of the leaders described using grants and various Title funds to pay for their coaches, the leaders report this was one area in which they were usually involved. LD2, as opposed to most of the other districts, paid for coaching out of general fund but made the case for all respondents regarding this issue. Their leader stated, “I can make the decision if we want to continue to fund it.” In terms of the leader’s role in providing professional development, the respondents clearly saw this as a function of financial support. Professional development methods for coaches was also very inconsistent across districts from very formal training provided by outside experts to local study groups led by peers. However, offering professional growth opportunities for coaches was consistent.

In summarizing how district level leaders described their role in the creation of instructional coaching, most of the leaders clearly highlighted the need to play some role in the selection of coaches. Secondly, leaders clearly highlighted the need to fund coaches and to protect that funding. District leaders did not report being as involved with the professional development of coaches. However, they saw the need to provide it to them.

How would district level leaders describe their discoveries while implementing a climate of peer coaching? District level leaders reported learning that the selection of coaches and the communication with the various stakeholders was critical to establishing a climate where peer coaching could flourish. Additionally, the leaders reported that allowing their subordinates to help communicate the various aspects of the coaching model was helpful. Furthermore, the respondents believed that demonstrating the need for improved instruction helped them create

the sense of urgency needed to begin the process of instructional coaching. The district leaders also reported that spreading coaches over too wide a grade range or giving them too many teachers to work with may hinder the development of instructional coaches.

Similarities and Differences

Figure 3 describes the similarities among the respondent's answers depending on the size of the corporation. As a reminder, for the purposes of this study, small districts had less than 1,500 students, medium districts had 1,500 – 2,999 students and large districts had 3,000 or more students. In order for an idea to appear in any size category it was very similar or common to all answers within that size.

In order for an underlying idea to appear in the center of the diagram, it appeared in at least six of the respondent's answers and was found in at least one district of each size. This research will acknowledge, in tabular form, but will not discuss in depth any behaviors that were common to only two of the three sized districts since that is outside the scope of the research.

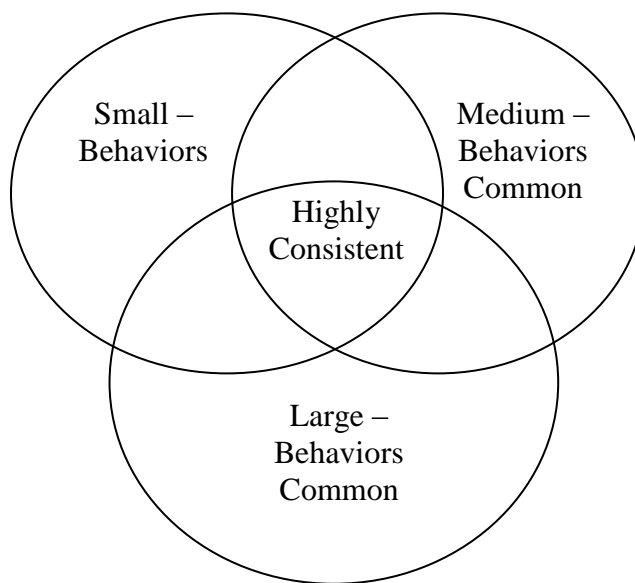


Figure 3. Similarities among the respondent's answers depending on the size of the corporation.

In examining the broad stroke similarities among small districts there appeared to be very little consistency in the responses. The only area where small district leaders appeared to share a common behavior with each other was the use of principals to communicate the coaching model. All of the small districts used principals to share ideas, data, philosophies and general knowledge about instructional coaching to their staff. Although other sized corporations used principals to communicate coaching pedagogy to their staffs, the thresholds to place it in other circles was not met.

In the middle size districts, the results indicated similarities in the ability to provide at least one math coach. MD3's leader perhaps articulated the view for the middle size districts by pointing out that coaching was a solid model for providing staff development and therefore using it in subjects like math was "just common sense." Once again, there were similarities among two of the three districts but not all of three. The middle district leaders also shared common behaviors, with other sized districts which were highlighted in the highly consistent behavior section of this chapter.

Large district leaders had two behaviors that were common among all three school districts. The first behavior was their method of communication with their school boards. Each large district leader reported that they communicated about the coaching model at public board meetings. In all three large districts there was little if any, communication with the school board about instructional coaching that did not occur at regular, public board meetings. These district leaders did not feel the need to meet with their board members individually or do a great deal of "behind the scenes" communication in order to have the support of their boards in the area of instructional coaching.

A second behavior of the large district leaders had in common was the facilitation of communication between the principals in the district. The large district leaders often used the principals to communicate with each other about the positive aspects of instructional coaching. Often these conversations between principals were held at regularly scheduled principals meetings. Sometimes these dialogues were informal in nature but there is no question that the larger district leaders asked their building principals to communicate with each other regarding the benefits of peer coaching. Additionally the principals helped spread peer coaching to other buildings in the district as a result of those conversations.

There were some highly consistent behaviors across small, medium and large district leaders. In these cases, a minimum of six district leaders needed to report the behavior before the researcher believed it to be highly consistent. These behaviors took place in all three sized districts to varying degrees.

The first behavior shared across all nine leaders was the instructional coaching content area. Across all nine respondents, elementary literacy was addressed by the leaders. Not all leaders directly answered why they felt the need to provide literacy coaching, but it was clear that across all nine leaders, elementary literacy was a focus.

The second behavior that was highly consistent was the method of funding for coaches. Seven of the nine district leaders reported using federal government Title funds to support their coaching model. All nine leaders reported that funding for coaching needed to be a priority but seven of them tapped federal funds for this purpose.

A third behavior that was highly consistent between the leaders of the various sized districts was their role in selection of coaches. Six of the nine district leaders reported taking some role in coaching selection. This role ranged from selecting every coach to being part of the

selection committee. In one case, the leader was even critical to the shifting of expert teachers from the classroom into the coaching role. As in the other common behaviors, the district leaders were demonstrating interest and support through their involvement.

The last highly consistent behavior was the desire to provide local professional development to the coaches. Although all nine leaders provided some professional development to their coaches, seven of them provided time for their coaches to attend local and on regional coaching trainings, workshops or study councils. These professional development activities were more on-going and timely than one-shot workshops and showed a commitment to continual professional growth of coaches. The similarities within district size and the highly consistent behaviors between leaders from different sized districts are reflected graphically in Figure 4.

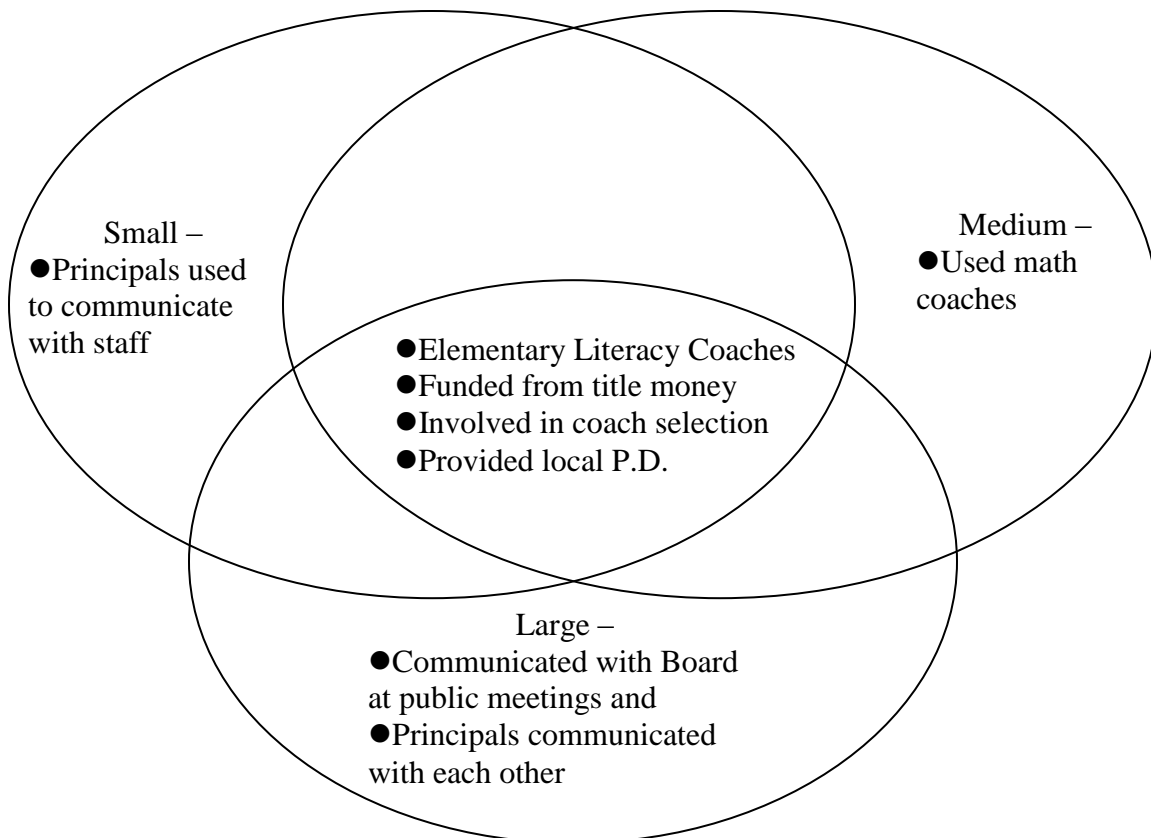


Figure 4. Similarities among leaders from different sized districts.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations that can be made from exploration of the data and the review of literature. These recommendations are global in scope and may not be specific to each sized district. Additionally, these comments represent recommendations and are certainly not meant to be exhaustive or required for a leader to institute instructional coaching.

The initial recommendation when instituting instructional coaching is that the district leader must lend overall support to the coaching model. This support can take a variety of forms and may include securing appropriate funding, providing professional development for coaches or assuring the correct staff is hired to fill the role of coach. Knight (2006) discusses the need for building level leaders to support coaching in a variety of ways. The data gathered during this study would support the same ideas for district level leaders. The district leader establishes the corporation climate for instruction coaching. Symonds (2003) makes this point clearly by quoting a superintendent, “If (literacy coaching) is not your priority, don’t step into it. Because what you will have to do is look at every aspect of the district and reorganize it so that you can have your emphasis be your coaches” (p. 54).

A second recommendation for district leaders aspiring to institute peer coaching is to provide an abundance of communication to all individuals who might be impacted. The leader needs to effectively communicate with the school board, the teaching staff, the teachers association and the building level administrators. Symonds (2003) again makes this point clearly, when she quotes a superintendent, “By talking about this (literacy coaching) with parents and the governing board, I’m hoping that when push comes to shove in some of these tight budget years, their financial priority is the literacy coach” (p. 55). There is further support for persuasive administrative communication in the peer coaching districts in the article by Skinner

and Welsh (1996) when they discuss the need for the established of clear purposes goals and process for the staff and administrators participating in coaching. It is not completely necessary for the leader to be the sole instrument of communication but the leader must assure that communication occurs.

Possible Additional Research Topics

In the course of this study, the researcher discovered several topics that are significant enough to warrant additional study. They are reported here in no particular order with the researcher's comment.

1. Why were several teacher association leaders involved in coaching? What specifically lead those teachers to become interested in coaching? Was it their teaching skills or the leadership position they held within the association that facilitated their possible involvement in the coaching program?
2. How were coaches evaluated? What kinds of evaluation tools were available to district leaders and who was responsible for completing the evaluation? It seems as though coaches are to provide professional development and therefore leaders should know how they are performing. Evaluation tools are one way to gain that information.
3. The current study examined the behavior of teachers at different sized corporations. An area for further study might examine the behavior leaders if they were segregated by per pupil expenditure or by ISTEP results. Did leaders behave differently in districts that had high or low per pupil expenditure? What about ISTEP results? Would district leaders behave differently if their students were passing above the 90% range? What about if their students were passing below the state average?

Conclusion

This study set about to discover how the behaviors of Northern Indiana school district level leaders established a climate of peer coaching. The data gathered from interviews of nine leaders from small, medium and large districts lead the researcher to develop four themes. These themes were the use of early literacy coaches, the use of building principals for communication purposes, the importance of financial support and the importance of selecting the right personnel to coach.

This research attempted to discover any similarities between the leaders from different sized districts. In summary very few behaviors were particular to one size district. Leaders appeared to pick and choose a myriad of behaviors. These choices did not appear to be dependent upon the district size but rather other factors that influence the leader's decision making.

There were four highly consistent behaviors that appeared in at least two thirds of the respondent's answers and across all three district sizes. These were:

1. Coaches were provided in early literacy
2. Coaches were paid out of federal Title funds
3. District leader was involved in coach selection
4. District leader committed to provide the coaches with local staff development

The four highly consistent behaviors are closely related to the previously articulated themes. The involvement of coaches in literacy and the selection coaches are two behaviors that are exactly the same. The theme of financial support is directly related to the behaviors of using federal dollars to fund coaching and providing professional development. A district level leader

desiring to implement a peer coaching model would be well served to use some, if not all, of the highly consistent behaviors.

Researcher's Summary

In summary, the researcher learned the following information while performing this research:

- 1) District leaders can have a significant positive impact on the instructional practices in their buildings. Supporting the use of instructional coaches is one way they can achieve that objective. District leaders can demonstrate that support by making certain there is adequate funding, professional development, and sufficient time are devoted to instructional coaching.
- 2) District leaders must make certain that appropriate personnel are selected to serve as instructional coaches. It was made clear to the researcher that an inappropriate hire as a coach could be extremely detrimental to the entire instruction coaching program.

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