

A STUDY OF NOVICE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' VOICES ON THEIR
RETENTION AND THE ROLE OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

A Dissertation by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explored teacher retention in elementary schools by examining novice teachers' perceptions about instructional coaching and the influence it may exert on career decisions. The role of the instructional coach was analyzed within the structure of a school district using Bolman and Deal's four frames model, which strengthens a leader's ability to comprehend complex organizational processes. A total of thirteen instructional coaches and novice teachers from four elementary schools in the same school district participated in individual, semi-structured interviews that allowed for open-ended responses pertaining to the central theme of the study. Themes that emerged from the interviews revealed that teachers consider the role of the instructional coach to be supportive in the academic realm as well as in the emotional. While some new teachers viewed the instructional coach to be pivotal in their success, others considered the instructional coach as ancillary. Most prevalent in the findings was the symbolic image of school as "family." Novice teachers and instructional coaches returned to the concept of school as a family when they referred to a place where they felt comfortable. Finally, this study concluded that school organizations are capable of influencing teacher retention when they create environments where the newest members can find a sense of belonging.

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DEDICATION

To my grandmothers, Opal Lee Montford and Hattie Mardis Ellison, and to my mother,

Peggy Ellison Montford

CHAPTER 1

The growing problem of teacher retention is an increasingly localized issue in which schools lose up to approximately two-thirds of new teachers within the first five years of their careers along with fewer novice teachers entering the field (Papay et al., 2017). In 2013 there was no wide-scale teacher shortage; however, by the 2017-2018 school year it was estimated around 110,000 teachers positions were left unfilled (Sutcher et al., 2016). The negative impact of low teacher retention is especially pronounced at the elementary level where young children establish emotional stability that is provided through the presence of an experienced and established teacher (Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013). In schools that experience low levels of teacher retention, students lose opportunities to bond with a caregiver that can promote the development of emotional competence (Denham et al., 2012).

Retention of novice teachers especially at the elementary level is a persistent problem that plagues a vulnerable category of students, even more in locations that are fraught with the additional burdens caused by poverty, class, and racial disparity (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Springer et al., 2016). The loss of experienced elementary teachers who leave the classroom pre-retirement is especially damaging for students in disadvantaged communities who suffer from reduced academic growth (Hughes, 2012; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Low levels of teacher retention result in a loss of social capital that can undermine efforts to continue processes and programs that move an institution forward (Penuel et al., 2009). Effects of low teacher retention have repercussions for the school community as a whole in situations where an unstable setting is both the cause and the effect of teacher turnover (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

Instructional coaching could be vital to the outcomes of educators. As a strategy that was originally intended to improve the quality of teaching, instructional coaching is showing ancillary benefits by providing the institutional stability resulting in more teachers remaining in one school for consecutive years (De Jong & Campoli, 2018; Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013). The instructional coach as the “on site professional developer” (Knight, 2005, p. 17) is responsible for maintaining the academic and resource needs of the teaching staff. In urban settings, instructional coaches reinforce a school culture that places educators as risk-takers and as the intellectually curious (Steckel, 2009). Instructional coaching is also contributing to the development of positive and productive relationships between the instructional coach and teachers and holds real potential in improving retention, especially with the early-career professional (De Jong & Campoli, 2018; Larkin & Sandak, 2019; Shernoff et al., 2015).

Research Problem

Elementary teachers model emotional socialization which creates, in the minds of their young students, deeply-ingrained psychological templates from which children guide their responses as they learn to function through the school years and beyond (Horner & Wallace, 2013). In the early elementary years students learn the language of emotion to express their fears, joys, and frustrations from parents and teachers, whether explicitly or through passive observation (Morris et al., 2013). Low elementary teacher retention poses significant challenges for education of young children as the consistency of classroom leaders is vital for their social and emotional well-being and their future academic success (Denham et al., 2012; Poulou, 2005).

A significant challenge in education for students is the low levels of teacher retention seen in many schools, especially among novice teachers and those who are located in urban centers. On a national level, elementary teachers who intend to remain in the field maintain an

annual retention rate of 90%, higher than teachers in other disciplines (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Two-thirds of teachers who leave the career indefinitely cite the dissatisfaction they feel from working in poor conditions, in high-poverty schools, and in schools where there is a lack of support from their building level administrators (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Sutchter et al., 2016). Due to the lower levels of teacher retention in high-poverty areas with lower-performing students, (Bailey et al., 2020; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017) classes are often taught by less experienced teachers who leave the classroom at higher rates than their counterparts in middle-income areas (Kamrath & Bradford, 2020; Papay et al., 2017; Springer et al., 2016). Inner-city and urban schools located in high-poverty areas show the lowest rates of teacher retention, one of the factors in resulting lower achievement rates as indicated by nationally normed assessments (Whipp & Geronime, 2015). In a Texas study, it was found that in many lower-performing schools, the district test scores were negatively influenced by the egress of White teachers who favored positions in schools with nonminority and higher income students (Guarino et al., 2006). Experienced teachers typically migrate to, and remain in, schools where they are likely to teach students of their own ethnicity, away from minority, low-performing, and low-income students (Bailey et al., 2020; Cannata, 2010; Hanushek et al., 2004; Kamrath & Bradford, 2020; Tran & Smith, 2020), thus removing certified teachers from locations where their experience is of paramount importance.

School systems with greater resources are able to invest more in the teaching staff, which is reflected in their higher rates of teacher retention. Inner-city and urban schools typically have fewer resources to spend on teacher development (Garcia & Weiss, 2019) which, in turn, causes further financial strain when they must bear the added costs associated with recruiting and retaining a teaching staff with a high rate of turnover (Kamrath & Bradford, 2020). The

consequences of teacher turnover exact a heavy financial strain on school systems. For example, the estimated cost of replacing one urban teacher in 2017 was approximately \$20,000 (Podolsky et al., 2017).

Recognition of the challenges presented by a decreasing supply of qualified teachers in high-needs areas has hastened the call for school systems to focus on strategies to improve teacher retention. Some of these strategies include building level administrative support, purposeful financial compensation, and instructional coaching designed to support the success of the school as an organization. This process of reframing the complex problem of low teacher retention through different schema generates alternative solutions that may reveal novel solutions (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004).

A topic that has been studied widely to improve the length of time that teachers serve in one school is the support that teachers, especially novices, receive from the building administration (Brown & Schinker, 2008; Kim & Liu, 2005; Myung & Martinez, 2013). Specifically, teachers report that they are more likely to remain in a school, above all other factors, if the building principal provides opportunities for teachers to be involved in committees or workgroups that make substantive contributions to the school. Teachers who remain express a preference for remaining in schools where they have the authority to make autonomous curricular decisions that are aligned to the mission of the school and to hold positive, productive communication with the principal (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Li & Allen, 2020; Queyrel-Bryan et al., 2019; Sutchter et al., 2019; Swars et al., 2009).

Another strategy that has been studied to attract and retain teachers is that of financial compensation. Stipends of a few thousand dollars to attract new teachers to high-needs schools have proven to be ineffective; however, a localized high starting salary can be effective in

recruitment and retention of teachers at all levels (Culbreath & Hart, 2019; Feng & Sass, 2018; Shifrer et al., 2017). Particular to elementary teachers and their retention, they show a propensity to remain in schools where there is a strong sense of collegiality, where they receive quality professional development, and in places where a belief in their abilities as educators is cultivated (Ingersoll et al., 2014; Li & Allen, 2020; Queyrel-Bryan et al., 2019).

Instructional coaching also shows the promise of keeping teachers in their schools and careers. Close and proximal instructional coaching has shown to be influential in improving increases in teacher retention in schools where it has connected teachers, especially novice teachers, to the culture of the institution (De Jong & Campoli, 2018; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Larkin & Sandak, 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Teachers report a stronger sense of belonging to an academic community when professional development is designed upon the premise that the school is both supportive of the adult growth and provides an environment in which other professionals serve their needs (Carroll, 2007; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Evans & Leonard, 2013; Steckel, 2009; Sun, 2018). Duties that coaches carry out to support the structural organization of the school and possibly ameliorate problems caused by low teacher retention include co-planning with teachers to ensure alignment with the established goals set forth by school leaders (Deussen et al., 2007; Kurz et al., 2017). A trusting relationship that has been established by the instructional coach and the novice teacher forms the basis for indoctrinating the newest teaching member into the organizational values that are commonly respected (Patti et al., 2015).

Despite the existing practices to improve teacher retention, the loss of elementary teachers pre-retirement continues to be a problem that impedes the operations of school systems. Acting as equal members of the school as an organizational system, teachers and instructional

coaches play a critical role in the overall organizational success of a school operating within the system's culture, relationships, roles, procedures, hierarchy, and politics (Deussen et al., 2007; Knight, 2005). Furthermore, although current scholarship on instructional coaching is positive about its role in teacher retention, the literature is largely limited to exploring the original design of instructional coaching and its contribution to the quality of instruction. Previous reporting from an oft-quoted meta-analytic study, Borman and Dowling (2008) found that initiatives designed to affect teacher retention were merely correlational, not causal and therefore offered no direction as to a solution.

There is a scarcity of research that has been conducted over the topics of elementary teacher retention, instructional coaching, and how the two interact. The two studies that have been conducted on the topic were limited to urban educators in a nation-wide K-12 survey, were quantitative in nature, and only cited improved teacher retention as a possible side benefit to instructional coaching (De Jong & Campoli, 2018; Shernoff et al., 2015). As quantitative, these two studies offered no insight as to the reasons teachers remain in a school organization that provides the assistance of instructional coaches.

Currently research on the concept of teacher retention as influenced by instructional coaching has not been fully developed from a systematic perspective, and therefore deserves further exploration. This study will attempt to illuminate the prospect that novice elementary teachers will remain in their schools when instructional coaches devote their efforts toward supporting them as they become accustomed to facets of the organization. Considering the importance of the elementary teacher in the emotional well-being of young children, the insights gained from this study might inform decision makers about the implications of developing

quality instructional coaching at the elementary level to promote the academic, financial, and future success of a school system.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Bolman and Deal's four frame model (1991), which theorizes that organizations function at their maximal level when guided by leaders who perceive their organizations holistically and simultaneously through multiple perspectives of the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. According to Bolman and Deal, each of the four frames provides a perspective through which characteristics of organizations can be understood. Specifically, the structural frame emphasizes goals and efficiency; the human resource frame centers the importance of the organization to meet the basic human needs of the constituents; and the political frame holds that organizations are arenas for continuing conflict and competition. Finally, the symbolic frame gives meaning to the organization through myth, story, and vision (Bolman & Deal, 1991, 2017). The four frame model applies to this study by providing a multi-faceted interpretive lens to categorize and analyze the responses of the participants. Later conclusions are aligned to the research problem, the two research questions, and a holistic understanding of a school organization as exposed through the four frames model.

Structural Frame

A characteristic of schools and school districts is they are organizational systems that operate within established procedures to handle the many complex responsibilities that must occur. The structural frame offers a method to understand how organizations define specialized roles and functions that operate through formal and informal chains of command. Six assumptions that describe the structural frame are:

Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives and devise strategies to reach those goals. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor. Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures. Effective structure fits an organization's current circumstances including its strategy, technology, workforce, and environment. (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 48).

Structural leaders and the organizations that follow their direction are characterized by clear expectations, policies that define limitations, systems that hold people accountable, and specific roles for each member (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Organizations that have highly developed structural systems are considered to be under efficient management (Thompson, 2000). Organizations that utilize elements of the structural frame, despite their awareness of the concept, first establish the operational parameters of roles, functions, and units, and then devise strategies to implement designated structures.

Organizational leaders who initiate or inherit structural systems establish the lines of communication, the responsibilities for each role, and the relationships that define the parameters under which their organizations will function. Generally, a top-down hierarchical structure that has been communicated across the organizations works well in settings that are stable, predictable and in situations where the uniformity of the product is known. Independent structural units that employ lateral communications methods and a flattened level of hierarchy are more likely to adapt in rapidly changing and ambiguous scenarios. The success of each organization is largely dependent on the ability to restructure and adjust to the prevailing

circumstances of technology, people, and environment to meet agreed upon goals (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Human Resource Frame

Through the human resource frame, schools are perceived as organizations founded on the principle of people working with and for other people, highlighting the importance of relationships, feelings, facilitation, and empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 1992). Contrary to the belief that people are destined to serve the needs of the organization, the human resource frame holds that the organization should not only serve but also thrive through the energy and talents of the people whom it serves. The belief is that people and organizations need each other in a symbiotic relationship in which each must fit the needs of the other. When this “fit” can be cultivated, both parties benefit. When the relationship between the individual and the organization is not in equilibrium there is a tendency for one or the other to become exploitative and victimized (Bolman & Deal, 2017). A school organization typified by the human resource frame provides the individual with a sense of professional unity that meets the basic needs of people better than those organizations that do not (Bolman & Deal, 1992).

A school leader who operates from the human resource frame implements practices that place emphasis on the individual’s need to belong to an organization where one can grow both personally and professionally (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Human resource leaders are sensitive to the needs of employees in the organizations. They develop human resource strategic plans that involve hiring the right people by matching organizational and applicant values, they invest in

and empower current employees by offering specialized training and opportunities to advance in their careers, and they actively promote diversity in the workplace (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Human resource leaders form collaborative teams to promote participatory decision making that benefit employee and organization in times of tranquility or strife.

Political Frame

The political frame is described as the arena in which conflict and competition for scarce resources give rise to leaders who build their personal and organizational bases of power through coalition building (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Coalitions are comprised of individuals or interest groups that have enduring differences guided by values, beliefs, and perceptions of reality that drive competition to wrest power from the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017). This confrontation between scarce resources and enduring differences give rise to the defining characteristic of the political frame; the acquisition and maintenance of power is at the center of all organizational decision making (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Despite the negative perception of an organizational schema based solely on the competition for power, the political structure challenges the status quo; it stimulates personal and social change as opposing factions negotiate for a greater share in what they have not been given.

To achieve their aims, political leaders spend much of their time negotiating compromises with adversaries and allies to achieve self-serving goals to further their agendas (Bolman & Deal, 1992). In this arena, employees are often at odds with one another as they compete for limited resources among opposing coalitions. Leaders who perceive the workplace as political make calculated decisions to approach colleagues as members of a like-minded coalition, which resultantly lowers conflict, or as adversaries from an opposing coalition

(Bolman & Deal, 2017). Political leaders exercise positional power through the control of rewards and agendas that determine employee loyalty and the promotion of self-serving coalitions. Employees of an organization can also seize power informally by framing the narrative to their own benefit and by creating alliances outside of the official power structure.

Symbolic Frame

The symbolic frame is perhaps the most elusive of the four frames to define in concrete terms; however, if “the essence of high performance is spirit” (Bolman & Deal, 1992, p. 43), evidence of it is to be found in effective organizations. According to the symbolic frame, it is not the stated objective of an activity that holds the true meaning for the participants, but a deeper meaning connected to the cultural aspects not visible to the outside observer. The use of symbols as representations of organizational culture leads to interpretive ambiguity due the highly objective nature of personal analysis. In times of doubt and crisis people have clung to the enduring symbols of faith, nationality, and culture that transcend contemporary changes (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Symbolic representations of organizations are passed on to new members through myths, rituals, stories, ceremonies, and representative insignia to preserve a shared sense of mission that is enduring (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Leaders capitalize on the power of symbols by inspiring others with charismatic and passionate speech about deep internal meanings that connect to observable organizational goals (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Jaeger et al., 2014; Parmley, 2009; Thompson, 2000). Teachers who enter school systems inherit from their predecessors the symbols, myths, and stories that shape beliefs about the organization.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how instructional coaching influences elementary novice teacher retention within the structure of schools as interconnected organizations. The existing research is limited in establishing a positive correlation between teacher retention and instructional coaching and could benefit from further exploration of specific roles instructional coaches might play in the retention of novice elementary teachers. This study exposed the topic of teacher retention and the consequent influence of instructional coaching by investigating how the guidance from instructional coaches supported novice instructors in their interactions with the schools' organizational structure, the unity among the staff, the power of political relations, and the sense of mission as this pertained to teacher retention

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are novice elementary teachers' perceptions about the role of the instructional coach?
2. How does instructional coaching contribute to teacher retention within the structure of a school as a system with its relationships, culture, and politics?

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The first section of the literature review focuses on the topic of teacher retention in terms of administrative support, individual teacher characteristics, school and community factors, professional development, economics, and issues particular to elementary teachers. In the second section, I examined the nature of instructional coaching and its influence on teacher retention. The very few studies that examine the influence of instructional coaching on teacher retention show positive quantitative trends; however, in the absence of context, the transferability of their findings is limited. Research revealed that teachers prefer to practice their profession in locations where their colleagues support them and in communities that reflect a background similar to their own.

Teacher Retention

A growing challenge in public education is the low pre-retirement teacher retention (Sutcher et al., 2019), especially in schools systems that serve high levels of minority students and families with fewer economic resources, or schools from rural areas (Ingersoll et al., 2018). The difficulty in maintaining a viable workforce of qualified teachers is exacerbated not only by the natural exit of teachers through retirements, but also by the low numbers of new teachers entering the field and the untenable level of teacher retention (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019). It is estimated that most urban school districts lose about one third of their novice teachers per year, with as many as one half of them are no longer in the same school after just five years (Papay et al., 2017).

Teachers who remain in a school for consecutive years base their decisions on culture, professional, and personal needs. Many teachers who either leave the profession or move to other areas to teach are in search of a place in which they feel culturally congruent, where they feel that they can make a difference in the lives of children and young people (Fairchild et al., 2012). Additionally, novice teachers remain longer in schools where they believe the building administration to be supportive in their pursuits as their skills develop in ways that are aligned to community expectations (Marinell & Coca, 2013). Finally, literature reviewed here demonstrates that teachers give notice to the financial exigencies of life as well as the emotional need of belonging to a community of educators similar to themselves (Fitchett et al., 2017). Below is an overview of different factors influencing teacher retention.

Administrator Influence on Teacher Retention

School administrators who are aware of the need to retain novice teachers develop structured environments in which teachers are likely to grow and remain (Hughes, 2012). Effective school administrators instill a sense of mission and identity by setting positive behavioral norms for staff and students (Carver-Thomas, 2018), provide a community that is ambitious and focused on instructional improvements (Carroll, 2007; Kohli, 2018), and create structures in which professionals can sustain their work of improving equitable education for diverse populations. Generally, if the building principal is dedicated to establishing norms of behavior that are openly supportive of instruction and comporment, staff will follow in like terms (Kim & Liu, 2005; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

A strong predictor in a teacher's decision to continue the profession in a school is driven by the attitude held toward the building principal. To a large degree, teachers' career decisions are based upon their perceptions of the building principal with whom they work most closely,

more important than the factors of collegial relationships or school culture (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Novice elementary teachers are especially sensitive to the perceived quality of the relationship they hold with the building principal due to the loyalty they feel toward a supervisor who recently gave them a start in a professional career (Pogodzinski et al., 2012). A novice is less likely to return to a school than a veteran teacher if there is a low level of agreement between teachers and administrators over school policies and evaluation procedures (Pogodzinski et al., 2012). Teachers at any stage of their careers are more likely to remain in their careers and schools if they have frequent and positive communication with the school leadership (Kim & Liu, 2005), even when other environmental factors may not be suited to their personal preferences.

The rate of teacher retention is also linked to the retention of the building principal. Teachers have a tendency to stay in schools where there is stable, supportive, and effective leadership (Allensworth et al., 2009; Bartanen et al., 2019; Bêteille et al., 2012; Brown & Wynn, 2009; Kamrath & Bradford, 2020; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Pogodzinski et al., 2012; Whipp & Geronime, 2015), not one where there have been recent changes in building principals (Swars et al., 2009). Similar to teacher retention trends, principals are more likely to leave a school in the first few years of their tenure to seek more desirable assignments or in the last few years due to retirement. A factor that makes the exit of a high-performing principal who has been successful enough to be transferred to a higher post especially damaging to schools is that high-performing teachers are also likely to leave simultaneously, thus adding to the institutional instability (Bartanen et al., 2019).

Individual, School, and Community Characteristics in Teacher Retention

Ultimately, a teacher's decision to remain in a school can be explained by student-teacher diversity, mobility imposed by school/district demographics, gender, and school location. The diversity gap that exists between teachers and students in classrooms today is one of the factors that influence teachers' decisions about their place in education. Approximately 50% of public school students are people of color (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2018), yet currently 75% of their teachers are White and middle class, a decrease from 90% White and middle class in 1987 (Snyder et al., 2019; Wiggan et al., 2020). The trend for Black and Native American teachers has also declined from 9% to 7% from 1999-2000 to 2017-2018 (Hussar et al., 2020). The only groups of teachers who have gained in relative numbers during the same time period from 1999-2000 to 2017-2018 are Hispanic and Asian teachers who now comprise over 11% of the teaching force (Hussar et al., 2020). Given the unequal distribution of diverse groups, teachers attempt to find communities in which they can have the greatest bearing.

Mobility patterns allow individual teachers to find the school environment amenable to their preferences, which are shown to be highly influenced by the ethnicity of the teacher. By their own initiative teachers are less likely to remain in schools with high numbers of non-White students (Bailey et al., 2020; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Lankford et al., 2002; Marinell & Coca, 2013), students who are low achieving (Culbreath & Hart, 2019; Hanushek et al., 2004), and in schools that are located in large urban settings (Ingersoll, 2001; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). White teachers show patterns of migration away from racially incongruent schools that serve large numbers of Black students where many of them reportedly feel uncomfortable (Cannata, 2010; Fairchild et al., 2012; Hussar et al., 2020; Sun, 2018; Tran & Smith, 2020). Teachers of color are more likely to seek employment and remain in urban schools

that are hard to staff, high-poverty, high-minority, and have fewer qualified teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Culbreath & Hart, 2019; Grissom, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Wiggan et al., 2020). While Black and White teachers have shown similar rates of leaving the profession of about 8% annually, Black teachers show higher rates of moving schools than their White colleagues, 12% compared to 8% respectively (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Black teachers show a tendency to relocate to schools that serve larger proportions of Black students where they find a sense of belonging in communities to which they can beneficially contribute (Cannata, 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Grissom, 2011; Sun, 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016). The overall trend with “movers,” the teachers who move from one school or district to another, is that many of them move away from the poor and the inner-city schools to areas where lower percentages of minority students are located (Berry, 2008).

The gender imbalance found in education has changed very little in the last few decades. From 1999 until 2017 the number of elementary teachers had risen from 1.5 million to 1.8 million; however, the percentage of women teaching from that same group had risen from 88% to 89% (Hussar et al., 2020). Overall, the percentage of women in education is increasing in number and proportion across all sectors of public education (Hussar et al., 2020; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Taie & Goldring, 2017). Patterns of teacher retention for those professionals in the field are influenced by factors attributable to gender. Studies conducted in 2000s (Guarino et al.; Kukla-Acevedo) showed that women had lower retention rates than men due to the demands of raising children (Ingersoll, 2001). More recent studies indicate that the retention rate of female teachers is now roughly equal to that of male teachers (Boyd et al., 2011; Grissom, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2019). An ongoing difficulty to keeping both men and women in the teaching

profession is the opportunity for “leavers” to advance out of the classroom, which effectively removes a qualified teacher from the classroom (Meyer et al., 2019). A disproportionate number of men leave the classroom, especially men who teach at the elementary level, for administrative positions to fulfill the more male-dominated field of management, further exacerbating gender imbalance in both the classroom and the principal’s office (Ashcraft & Sevier, 2006; Quartz et al., 2008) .

Gender differences between supervisor and employee can influence the level of satisfaction in the workplace and ultimately lead to career decisions (Li & Allen, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2019). In schools where there is gender congruence between teacher and principal, there is a higher level of job satisfaction, especially for men (Fairchild et al., 2012). A study conducted by Grissom and colleagues (2012) found the relationship with the opposite gender supervisor is not as important to women as it is to men, who show lower levels of retention when placed with a female principal. In general, teachers prefer working for male principals, who are perceived to be more successful than female principals, even when student academic results are equal at schools led by men or women (Nichols, 2014).

A region where a school is located can also be an influential factor as teachers consider where to pursue their career interests. Similar to urban areas, rural schools meet many of the trials presented by recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified teachers (Fowles et al., 2014; Fuller et al., 2020; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015; Goldring et al., 2014). Although teacher retention rates are statistically similar in urban and in rural schools, the challenge of keeping qualified teachers in rural areas is more localized (Meyer et al., 2019) due to the diverse definition of rural regions. Rural schools have difficulty attracting and retaining quality teachers for many of the same reasons that urban schools have including high proportions of students who are from low-income

families, minority students, and students who are academically challenged (Hammer et al., 2005; Springer et al., 2016). A distinct characteristic in rural schools is that they have an increasing number of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse in communities that are typically homogenous (Cole, 2017). Rural schools report that the level of teachers who leave their communities is greater than the influx (Meyer et al., 2019) due to the geographic isolation and generally lower salaries when compared to urban or suburban schools (Tran & Smith, 2020).

For an educator to seek employment and remain in a rural region, the responsibility for ensuring alignment between the expectations of the applicant and that of the school, it is recommended that the community be involved in the selection process (McClure & Reeves, 2004; Ulferts, 2016). Not all of the characteristics of life in rural areas are perceived as disadvantages, some educators enjoy the close relationships and the sense of belonging with the families and community they serve (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Rural schools attempt to retain new teachers in their area by connecting them to local groups of people with common interests; however, the most meaningful bond for the novice teachers is to be rooted to the community through a familial bond (McClure & Reeves, 2004). Recommendations for rural communities to develop qualified teachers from the local citizenry involve accessing programs that state licensing agencies and colleges have developed to offer expedited paths to teacher certification (Cole, 2017).

Due to a decreasing number of available certified teachers, many states now offer alternative pathways for teachers to become licensed (Aragon, 2016). An increasing number of teachers who represent the diversity of their communities have become licensed through alternative pathways that generally lead to lower levels of career retention (Bailey et al., 2020; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Marinell & Coca, 2013). Teachers in this category

are typically as much as three times less likely to have completed a student teaching semester, are ill prepared to teach their discipline, and their retention is drastically lower. Participants of alternative-licensed special education teaching programs perceive the quality to be lower than that of traditional four year university plans of study (Scott, 2019). By offering teaching licensure through alternative means, schools are able to bring in candidates who would have limited access to a four-year degree, yet the result is often a short-lived novice teacher who is unequipped to endure the rigors of the classroom.

Professional Development

Effective teachers expect and prosper from professional growth opportunities across the length of their careers. Participation in professional development as a facilitator or a recipient has a positive effect on retention, especially on the occasions when teachers take on the role of the expert and guide their novice colleagues in the field (Larkin & Sandak, 2019; McCann & Zuflacht, 2015). Teachers are more likely to remain in a school when they are able to develop into strong cadre, proficient in their craft, and connected to the diversity of their communities (Fortner et al., 2015; Pogodzinski et al., 2013; Valenzuela, 2017). Schools and school districts that provide structures to allow for more teacher autonomy and control over curricular decisions, including professional development, act upon the expressed desires of teachers (Brown & Schinker, 2008; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Evans & Leonard, 2013; Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Li & Allen, 2020; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Moore, 2012; Sutchter et al., 2019; Swars et al., 2009). By adapting to, and implementing new pedagogical skills, teachers begin to grow their personal sense of confidence and collective efficacy as a school staff (Ingersoll, 2001; Springer et al., 2016).

Professional development that is aligned to the needs of the school, has been especially effective in high-needs schools where recruiting and retaining teachers is a continuing struggle (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Culbreath & Hart, 2019). Notably, Grow Your Own (GYO) programs have been successful in cultivating nontraditional and minority candidates to become novice teachers by attracting diverse entry-level teachers who generally have higher retention rates than teachers not from the school community (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Guarino et al., 2006; Hanushek et al., 2004; Jessen et al., 2020). Teachers who have received professional development through GYO programs find success by what is described as having “resistant capital,” (Gist et al., 2019) or the ability to overcome linguistic, cultural, and financial barriers that they and their students face on a daily basis. For many prospective GYO teachers, their reasons for not pursuing education as a career are attributed to their personal economic hardships that place the expenses of college out of reach (Gist et al., 2019).

Financial Incentives

Employment in the field of education provides the teaching practitioner with a level of pay that is stable despite fluctuations in the overall economy, but for many it is insufficient to justify continuing in the profession. Contributing to low teacher retention are the liminal social status and low pay that plague the profession (Allensworth et al., 2009; Ashcraft & Sevier, 2006; Han, 2020; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Wiggan et al., 2020). In some states the average beginning salary of \$39,000 for a novice teacher minus the amount paid for college tuition and student loans places the new teacher in a marginal state of poverty and a diminished social category (Wiggan et al., 2020). Teacher salary lags 23% behind other college graduates when comparing the weekly teacher wage of \$1,137.00 compared to the \$1,476.00 earned by other college graduates (Allegretto & Mishel, 2018). The high cost of living in states such as California and,

especially in cities and suburban areas, has complicated recruitment and retention efforts for teachers who cannot afford to live where they work (Podolsky & Sutchter, 2016). During times of economic downturn, employment in education often becomes a financial shelter for those who are eligible to apply for and receive teaching certificates, only until more lucrative positions open in times of prosperity (Wiggan et al., 2020).

A measure that has had positive results for school districts as they compete for quality teachers is to offer a beginning salary structure that is higher than those found in the surrounding area and reward teachers for improved academic results (Carroll, 2007; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ryu & Jinnai, 2020; Springer et al., 2016). Decisions based upon salary play a part in mobility as schools that offer a higher salary attract and retain more teachers, especially men (Guarino et al., 2006; Hendricks, 2014; Swars et al., 2009). Loan forgiveness programs have been shown to be effective in keeping new teachers who are burdened with student loan payments (Feng & Sass, 2018; Liou et al., 2010; Steele et al., 2010). While teachers may not be attracted to additional stipends for their work in high-needs schools, especially in competitive positions such as special education, they will generally accept offers of employment and remain longer in schools that are able to provide competitive compensation (Culbreath & Hart, 2019; Feng & Sass, 2018; Shifrer et al., 2017).

Elementary School Teacher Retention

Characteristics of elementary teachers are minimally different when compared to all public school teachers in the United States, with the notable exception of gender. Using statistical information from three separate reports published by the U.S Department of Education (Goldring et al., 2013; Hussar et al., 2020; Taie & Goldring, 2017), the following analysis

provides a summary of the 1.8 million elementary teachers who were employed in public and private schools in the 2017-2018 year.

In an average elementary school, 89% of the teachers are women, a number that has changed very little since the 1999-2000 school year. Another disproportionate area in education is in the ethnicity of the classroom teacher. In rural regions, 90% of elementary school teachers are White, while Hispanic and Black teachers represent only 8% of certified staff. Elementary teachers have a slightly lower level of master and doctoral degrees, 55% compared to 61% for secondary teachers. They earn less than their high school equivalents, \$57,000.00 compared to \$60,400.00 respectively. Even though elementary teachers can be viewed as dissimilar to their communities in many ways, they strive to build collegial networks within their organizations.

Areas of similarity found when comparing elementary teachers to secondary teachers include their age, years of experience, ethnic identity, and professional qualifications. Both elementary and secondary teachers are on an average 42 years of age. Approximately 14% of those teachers are novices with four years of experience or less in the classroom. The ethnicity of the classroom teacher at both levels is roughly equal with 10% of elementary teachers and 8% secondary teachers who identify as Hispanic, with only minor variations represented in other groups. The predominant ethnic group at both levels is represented by White teachers who compose approximately 80% of the teaching force (Taie & Goldring, 2017). In terms of professional qualifications, 90% elementary and secondary teachers hold teaching licenses (Hussar et al., 2020).

Teacher retention is a particularly important topic at the elementary school level because young children learn social and emotional skills from stable caregivers to whom they are attached (Choi et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2018; Zinsser et al., 2015). As preschool and

elementary children grow emotionally, they pattern communication and conflict-management styles from the adults they encounter inside and outside of their families (Poulou, 2005). In preschool and early elementary classes, it is the teacher who models how to label and manage emotions in effective ways (Denham, 2006; Horner & Wallace, 2013). Early childhood teachers create environments in which children learn social and emotional self-regulation skills that are crucial for later academic success from the adults around them as they take part in, and observe, interactions in their surroundings (Denham et al., 2012; Morris et al., 2013). For children who live in unstable home environments, the elementary teacher provides the safety and security of a solid emotional base to guard against physical and emotional instability (Choi et al., 2019; Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013). The future success of elementary students is based upon lessons learned in the early grades from elementary teachers who had gained knowledge from successive years of experience.

Even though elementary teachers have the lowest rate of turnover compared to secondary teachers, their loss results in long-term negative effects for students, especially for students in urban centers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hanushek et al., 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Students in 4th and 5th grades lose significant gains in reading and math when they are enrolled in schools with high teacher turnover (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). The academic loss that occurs as a result of teacher turnover is more severe at elementary schools than it is at middle schools due to the nature of the elementary classroom as an all-day placement for students (Henry et al., 2011). Typical of an elementary teacher team is that they plan collaboratively, thus improving their familiarity of the curriculum over time, and therefore the loss of an elementary teacher results in an aggregate loss of curricular knowledge (Kamrath & Bradford, 2020; Kraft & Papay, 2014). Resultantly, the departure of an elementary teacher

represents a loss of familiarity with school practices, staff, students, and families that adversely affect student outcomes (Brown & Wynn, 2007).

As previously established, there are distinctions in the characteristics of elementary teachers. Research based upon their responses in the professional realm also indicate distinctions, especially in the areas a positive and collegial school environment. Studies conducted in elementary schools with teachers who are still in the beginning years of their careers reveal that in places where there is a perceived positive and collegial climate, job satisfaction, and consequent teacher retention are improved (Boyd et al., 2011; Li & Allen, 2020; Pogodzinski et al., 2013). As novice teachers acculturate into new environments, they begin to evaluate the collegial atmosphere and how their beliefs about trust and collective responsibility align with that of other professionals in the building (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Pogodzinski et al., 2013).

Novice elementary teachers analyze the collegial social networks of their schools that are influenced by the formal structures of staff meetings, professional development, and modes of communication (Penuel et al., 2010). Three factors that are shown to improve intrinsic job satisfaction among elementary teachers are professional development, autonomy in making decisions at the macro and micro levels in the school, and a belief in their ability to improve academic outcomes (Ingersoll et al., 2014; Li & Allen, 2020; Queyrel-Bryan et al., 2019). Elementary teachers are generally satisfied with their coworkers, the work that they do, and the decision to remain in their school. (Queyrel-Bryan et al., 2019). The feeling of belonging to an effective community of learners is significant in preserving novice and elementary teachers against the many demands of their profession.

Teachers at the elementary level confront stressors from a multitude of sources that cause them either to react in a renewed commitment to their careers or to question their place in the

classroom. Having an assignment in a demanding classroom, such as kindergarten, teachers are especially prone to stress (Lambert et al., 2019). Elementary novice teachers also find parents, standardized tests, classroom management, and evaluations from principals as main sources of stress (Rieg et al., 2007). When job-related burdens are greater than available resources, the stress placed upon novice teachers in elementary schools can lead to burnout and attrition (Fitchett et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2005; Kelly & Northrop, 2015; McCarthy, 2009). To reduce the stress placed upon educators, especially first-year practitioners, policy makers are recommended to consider the results of implementing additional policies and programs such as new academic initiatives that include burdensome compliance which could be delayed or deferred to veteran teachers (Fitchett et al., 2017).

Summary and Analysis of Teacher Retention Literature

Consistent throughout the literature on teacher retention was the conviction that teachers will remain in a school where the leader of the organization values relationships and the development of the professional including locations where the rate of teacher retention is abysmal. Contrary to trends found in inner-city schools where teacher retention is critical, teachers will remain where there are opportunities to seek advancement, where they have some authority in decision-making, and in places where they trust their colleagues. There is a propensity for teachers to feel a sense of unity with the organization. That unity is most often expressed in terms of the working relationship with the building principal early in the career, and later with equal-status colleagues. This trust is developed over time with frequent and productive communication both vertically, with other organizational members above and below, and horizontally with colleagues.

Another principal tenet in the subject of teacher retention is that the decision a teacher makes to stay in a school is often guided by a perception of belonging. Scarcely described in current literature, reasons behind this belonging are affiliated with the ethnic identity of the average teacher. Whereas the student body is increasingly diverse, the average elementary teacher is still predominately White, female, and middle-class. The literature outline the patterns of teacher movement away from the inner city, but are missing any specific explanation as to why those teachers did not find their place in diverse settings. In the design of this study, the concept of belonging is considered to define motives in teacher turnover.

Research regarding teacher retention has provided readers with an abundance of categorical information over teacher's characteristics, their preferences in teaching locations, and the influence of financial compensation. However, the reasoning behind some of the decisions to remain in a school is less evident. An example of this disparity is seen in the survey research suggesting the willingness of teachers to stay in a school if the building principal is supportive of them; however, the rationale for leaving inner-city schools in favor of suburban schools is not recorded. Statistical information cited earlier in this section shows that a disproportionate number of teachers leave schools where the ethnic and economic composition of the student body is distinct from their own, yet research rarely records a compelling reason.

Additional limitation in existing research on the topic of teacher retention is that it is mainly survey-based and focused on strategies to reduce teacher attrition. Decades of studies are modeled after Dr. Richard Ingersoll's studies on teacher attrition and retention using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow up Survey (TFS) starting in the 1980s. Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond is another often-quoted researcher on the topic of teacher quality who has written a copious amount of research/opinion pieces for over thirty years. Most of the

research on the topic studies the stayers or the leavers, but rarely the movers, which obscures our understanding of teacher retention due to the lack of tracking teachers who move between districts and states.

Considering the large elementary teacher population, the number of studies that are devoted to them apart from teachers of other levels is limited. Biographical data of elementary teachers give a clear definition of who they are, their age, gender, ethnicity, and where they choose to work. The limited amount of research that has been conducted exclusively on elementary teachers concerning their retention patterns is related to the ways in which they respond emotionally to job-related stress and how they view collegiality as essential to career satisfaction.

Instructional Coaching

The development of instructional coaching as an educational strategy has evolved from an early definition of teachers working in pairs to improve their practice through a progression of phases that has resulted in coaching as a mandated form of professional development. As coaching grew after federal legislation made it an integral part of the school improvement plan, adaptation to changing circumstances in education clarified the role of the coach. In time, it was discovered that instructional coaching held the promise of benefitting education beyond the singular design of improving classroom instruction.

An overview of the extant literature on the topic of instructional coaching reveals that despite the relatively short history, there are tangible benefits for school systems that harness the experience of their professional instructional support staff. Aside from the original intent of instructional coaching, which is to improve the quality of instruction, the added benefits are improved relationships within the school and in the community through an acculturation process

serve to the overall success of the institution. Final in this literature review section is the assumption that instructional coaching leads to greater job satisfaction for teachers, which, in turn, leads to higher levels of teacher retention.

Historical Background of Instructional Coaching

Instructional coaching is an educational strategy that has evolved from its inception. Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers first coined the term instructional coaching in 1981 while researching strategies to improve the transfer of knowledge into a practical classroom application. A noted criticism in educational professional development at the time was that teachers were provided with new resources and strategies without the opportunity to expand their instructional repertoire. As it was originally developed, instructional coaching was to follow a novel professional development regimen for teachers that would include pedagogy similar to what was used with students, one that involves the context of realistic instruction and feedback (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 1981; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Neumerski, 2013). The nascent theory of instructional coaching began as the still-used routine of demonstration, practice, and feedback. The following year (Joyce & Showers, 1982) work on the subject promoted instructional coaching as a structural arrangement between classroom teachers who would improve their practice by “coaching” one another in pairs. This collaborative model was later developed into a formalized process to avoid the regression that teachers experience when one-day workshops are not followed by subsequent professional development (Showers & Joyce, 1996).

Federal legislation and subsequent funding measures that were passed with the intention of increasing academic outcomes for underserved populations moved instructional coaching from a localized and optional structure of professional development to a nationwide mandate.

Beginning with the Elementary and Secondary Act of 2000, there was a call to implement scientific-based strategies, materials, and instructional practices in every classroom (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). Later, provisions from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 recommended instructional coaching as a strategy to provide professional development in schools that implemented the Reading First Initiative, a program designed to assist those students who demonstrated reading difficulties and the economically disadvantaged (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Nugent et al., 2017). Early indications from elementary teachers in Reading First schools were positive about the work that was being accomplished by instructional coaches (Scott et al., 2012). Embedded professional development, enacted via a reading coach, aligned to the exigencies of the federal legislation became a requirement in Reading First schools, but was later scaled up to meet the needs of other schools that were implementing school reform.

In the years since the advent of NCLB, instructional coaching has become an integral strategy to provide professional development for teachers in support of such educational policy initiatives as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, the Race to the Top Act of 2011, and Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Desimone & Pak, 2017; Kurz et al., 2017). Before NCLB and subsequent legislation intended to improve educational outcomes, reading coaches were virtually nonexistent (Powell et al., 2009). In the rush to place a sufficient number of support staff in schools to sustain the demands of federal legislation, early instructional coaches were often classroom teachers working without job descriptions or a solid theoretical understanding of their roles (Deussen et al., 2007; Dole, 2004; Knight, 2005). After federal funds were approved to hire and train the initial Reading First instructional coaches in 2004 (Powell et al., 2009), the specific roles they were to fill were later defined.

The role of the instructional coach that developed over time, as summarized in Table 1, was originally conceived as an academic intervention, but later included cultural and administrative capacities. Table 1 demonstrates the historical evolution of instructional coaching at formative points as it was being developed, consequently the studies used to inform the reader may appear to be dated. The researchers included in the table conducted studies that explicitly addressed the roles and responsibilities of the instructional coach at the time of their publication. As the role of the instructional coach was expanded cumulatively over time, more expectations were added, as is reflected in the cited studies.

Table 1

Instructional Coach Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities	Researcher(s) and Year
Provide Professional Development	Guide educators individually or in small groups to improve their skills. Meet with grade level teachers. Model lessons Co-teach	Knight (2005) Scott et al. (2012)
Implement Adopted Programs	Serve as an extension of the implementation plan. Bring order in an era of federal compliance.	Scott et al. (2012) Coburn and Woulfin (2012) Neufeld and Roper (2003)
Improve Quality of Instruction	Intervene in the structure of classroom delivery. Co-plan lessons with teachers. Observe lesson delivery. Analyze the outcome of lessons.	Knight (2005) Haneda et al. (2017) Teemant (2014) Kurz et al. (2017) Reddy et al. (2019) Wood et al. (2016)
Acculturate New Teachers	Improve relationships with the community. Transmit cultural values Enhance cultural competency	Khalil and Brown (2015) De Jong and Campoli (2018) Warren and Kelsen (2013)
Serve as Quasi-Administrators	Shape the implementation of instructional programs. Advise teachers on the expected level of program fidelity. Ensure educational equity	Coburn and Woulfin (2012) Ramkellawan & Bell (2017) Ward Parsons et al. (2019)

As part of a network to support reading and math initiatives, the instructional coach and the associated duties became discernable over time. Neufeld and Roper (2003) summarized instructional coaching as “grounded in inquiry, collaborative, sustained, connected to and derived from teachers’ work with their students, and tied explicitly to improving practice” (p. 11). Also described as “an on-site professional developer” (Knight, 2005, p. 17) who guides educators individually or in small groups to improve their skills, the instructional coach works to implement adopted programs. In what came to be known as “high leverage coaching practices” in elementary school settings, the fundamental role of the instructional coach evolved into a

regimen of lesson modeling, co-teaching, and meeting with grade-level teachers (Scott et al., 2012). Part of the original intent in implementing instructional coaching was to provide a level of coherence with educational programs under NCLB and related legislation. This practice of using the coach as an extension of the implementation plan became standard, beginning with Reading First, but later with school improvement plans (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). These novel duties of instructional coaches were expected to bring order to the many trials of school improvement in an era of federal compliance.

Despite the formal interactions of collaborative lesson planning, co-teaching, and consulting that occurs between instructional coaches and teachers, there are doubts as to the efficacy of coaching as a vehicle that leads to school improvement. Teacher perceptions of instructional coaching bring into question the usefulness of coaching as no changes had been made to daily teaching practice as a result of instructional coaching (Scott et al., 2012; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). Instructional coaches express dismay that many of their efforts are consumed ineffectually by the competing interests of teachers' time and overriding personal agenda (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014). Reportedly, coaches spend very little time meeting with teachers about literacy, as little as 5 hours per week nor are they able to make evaluative observations over instruction, a responsibility which is typically within the exclusive purview of the building principal (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014). Confronted with the realities of instructional coaching as a model for providing professional development that is not universally accepted, practitioners have continued to refine the application of coaching as beneficial.

Currently, the overriding purpose of the instructional coach has evolved to serve as an onsite professional developer to improve the quality of instruction delivered to students (Haneda et al., 2017; Knight, 2005; Teemant, 2014). In contrast to episodic forms of professional

development, instructional coaching has evolved into a method of intervening in the structure of classroom delivery on a continual and ongoing basis (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Kurz et al., 2017; Reddy et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2016). Instructional coaching generally involves at least co-planning of a lesson with both the coach and the teacher(s), reciprocal observation of lesson delivery, and a reflective session to analyze the outcome of the lesson (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Kurz et al., 2017; Teemant, 2014). As primarily former classroom teachers, instructional coaches utilize their experience as instructional experts to support teachers, not only with prescribed educational programs, but also with classroom management, planning, data, intervention systems, and other areas identified by either the teacher or a building principal (Deussen et al., 2007; Reddy et al., 2019).

Instructional coaches operate in school organizations that can unwillingly limit their efficacy to practice a specialized craft designed to serve people. There is often misalignment between the expected duties of working with teachers to develop their skills and the actual duties of performing routine tasks unassociated with improving instruction. This is especially prevalent in schools where the principal and the instructional coach are not in agreement about different programs or initiatives to move a school forward (Penuel et al., 2010). In schools where the building level administration is not supportive in the continuation of instructional coaching, or if the process of coaching is unsupervised and unmonitored, there is a tendency for coaches to lose motivation and for students to miss valuable learning opportunities (Patti et al., 2015; Reddy et al., 2019).

Further limiting the benefit of instructional coaches is the training they receive to prepare them to work either with individuals or with the staff of a school. Most of the professional development for instructional coaches emphasizes individual communication, a factor that can

jeopardize their ability to work in a staff setting (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014). To carry out the complexities of their positions effectively, instructional coaches are expected to adapt to the localized rituals of the school, the staff, and the administration (Lotter et al., 2014). Coaches must explore and understand the bases of power in a school to affect change (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014). For instructional coaches to be successful, they must determine the implications that professional development holds for a teaching staff and how to view their reactions in terms of structure, human resource, politics, and school symbolism (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Hunt & Handsfield, 2013; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014). An instructional coach must be dynamic in personality to manage the evolving circumstances they encounter (Knight, 2005).

Benefits of Instructional Coaching

Instructional coaching serves the educational community by connecting people and programs in the common original purpose of improving the quality of teaching while producing positive ancillary benefits. Relationships are at the center of a productive partnership between instructional coaches and the teachers they serve. To reduce the isolation and to develop a beneficial fit, a solid coaching relationship can lead to greater job satisfaction and commitment to the profession (Bolman & Deal, 2017; De Jong & Campoli, 2018; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Larkin & Sandak, 2019; Li & Allen, 2020; Shernoff et al., 2015). As teachers develop the ideal symbiotic relationship based upon trust with an instructional coach, there is a mutual and simultaneous growth visible to both teachers and instructional coaches (Ramkellawan & Bell, 2017).

A role of the school-based instructional coach is to be a conduit from which teachers new to the school become acculturated into the customs and communications of the institution. Schools reflect society and therefore transmit cultural values through the staff and students

(Khalil & Brown, 2015). Instructional coaches also referred to as curricular coaches, can enhance cultural competency, which, in turn, improve relationships with the community at large (De Jong & Campoli, 2018; Warren & Kelsen, 2013). The resulting improved sense of community belonging is shown to lead to improved teacher retention (De Jong & Campoli, 2018). In addition to having an influence on cultural values of an institution, coaches often guide teachers in shaping attitudes towards the academic realm.

A characteristic that differentiates the instructional coach from other members of a school community is the level of authority that is inherent in the position, above that of the frontline teacher, yet below the administrative staff. As such, the instructional coach is in a position to shape the development and attitudinal disposition toward the academic program. They shape the implementation of instructional programs by advising teachers on the level of required, versus practical program fidelity they should aspire to when faced with new initiatives (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). They are able to shape school culture through their expertise in professional development and influence changes to instructional practice. Instructional coaches are also tasked with the responsibility of having direct conversations with classroom teachers to change their predetermined mindsets to ensure educational equity (Ramkellawan & Bell, 2017; Ward Parsons et al., 2019).

Instructional coaching is shown to be highly effective in the enactment of, and fidelity to, new initiatives that require teachers to change their practices (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Desimone & Pak, 2017; Knight, 2005). The primary purpose of the instructional coach is to provide on-site professional development directly to teachers as they learn to improve their instructional skills; however, they also fulfill many duties that are considered to be quasi-administrative in support of the overall mission of the school (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). Even

though the reality of on-site instructional coaching tends to pull the coach away from face-to-face interactions with teachers, their participation in planning, committee representation, and resource coordination serve to benefit the school community (Bean et al., 2010).

Staff development that is delivered through the effective use of an instructional coach is distinct in form and outcome when compared to episodic staff development provided by outside consultants (Reddy et al., 2019). Professional development to promote new initiatives that is presented with a traditional method of delivery typified by description, modeling, practice and feedback only has a classroom transfer rate of approximately 20% to classroom use. In contrast, the same professional development with instructional coaching added holds a 95% rate of transfer to the classroom (Cornett & Knight, 2009). Teachers who receive assistance from instructional coaches as they implement new practices are generally appreciative, they feel confident about introducing new material, and in turn are more effective in their practice (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). As teachers learn to apply critical analysis in their lesson planning with a collegial instructional coach, they become agents in their own learning and begin to speak positively of their learning and contributions made by the process of co-planning (Haneda et al., 2017; Knight, 2005).

Instructional Coaching and Its Effect on Teacher Retention

Among the very few studies that examine a causal link between teacher retention and instructional coaching, there are indications that teacher retention can be positively influenced when teachers engage in personalized and collaborative professional development with the assistance of an instructional coach (De Jong & Campoli, 2018). The presence of an instructional coach increases job satisfaction for teachers, which subsequently results in improved retention (Khalil & Brown, 2015; Li & Allen, 2020; Shernoff et al., 2015). Earlier studies conducted

before NCLB first mandated coaches in Reading First schools found that teachers experienced greater satisfaction in schools where there were instructional coaches present to provide professional development (Edwards et al., 1998).

Of the two available studies that specifically explore a relationship between teacher retention and instructional coaching, each was conducted using different methodology with the same intention of informing the urban school. De Jong and Campoli (2018) accessed nation-wide data to study 1,440 novice teachers in their first three years of teaching using data from the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). Their findings noted a positive correlation in the number of novice teachers who stayed in the same school for the following year when there was an instructional coach present in the school. A study that viewed teacher retention as an additional and tangential benefit to coaching, Shernoff et al. (2015) used SASS data from 2007-2008 in addition to personal interactions with novice teachers and instructional coaches. Although their methodology was in contrast to the De Jong's study, Shernoff and their team were intentional in basing the work in, and to the benefit of, the urban schools.

When teachers and instructional coaches collaborate in the common purpose of improving their instruction, the expectation is that both will form a partnership that stimulates personal growth and commitment to the profession. A command of the discipline without a healthy working relationship is insufficient to affect any lasting change in a teacher's practice (Hunt & Handsfield, 2013; Patti et al., 2015). So that both teacher and coach feel the freedom to be openly creative while they plan academic interventions, it is important they maintain a non-hierarchical relationship in which each are understood to be equal partners (Haneda et al., 2017; Knight, 2005). Relationships between teachers and instructional coaches that are based on mutual trust afford the opportunity for both parties to develop an understanding of each other's

perspective (Lotter et al., 2014; Patti et al., 2015). A school that allows the collaborative teacher/coach relationship to prosper serves the human need for fulfillment, and the needs of the organization to preserve a dedicated teaching force.

Summary and Analysis of Instructional Coaching Literature

As an educational strategy that is still evolving, many questions remain as to how instructional coaching will be incorporated into the regular business of school and the potential benefits that it will serve. The foundational researchers, Drs. Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, proposed and first defined the role of the instructional coach without conducting any rigorous studies to determine if the process would improve the quality of instruction. Later educational leaders developed the roles of instructional coaches and rushed their production to comply with federal mandate.

An in-depth analysis of research on instructional coaching reveals a federally funded intervention that has received an intense amount of attention without an equal amount of scrutiny. Numerous studies in the literature review relate the history and status of instructional coaching in the contemporary educational setting, most of them have been conducted via survey in urban settings. There is a subsection that outlines the benefits of the practice; however, the studies cited here are representative of the extant literature, which seldom makes the connection between instructional coaching and its positive outcome on instruction. Qualitative studies that voice the findings of classroom teachers claim the instructional coach is insignificant in their school or in their classrooms despite the resources expended to place one there.

Existing scholarship illustrates the clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the instructional coach, the building principal, and the teacher. Practical applications for coaching are established and multiple benefits have been attributed to the practice. Even though

instructional coaching holds many benefits for school communities, as noted above, there is yet to be established a convincing body of evidence that instructional coaching is universally advantageous in the context of novice teacher retention, especially through the lens of qualitative research.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

In the following sections, I outline the research design that was used in the course of this study, provide a rationale for participant selection and research settings, describe approaches to data collection and analysis, and explain how a high level of research quality was ensured throughout the process. The purpose of this study was to understand novice elementary teachers' perceptions on retention and how instructional coaching influences it within the context of schools as interconnected organizations. Teachers' spoken responses about their career choices are analyzed within the context of colleagues and place.

Research Design

A teacher's choice to leave a school or the field of education is solely a decision of the one person who resides within an organization, a time, and a place. To comprehend that decision, this study was designed as a bounded case study to provide contextual depth to the lives and to the places described in later analyses. Case study research is described as "a set of qualitative procedures used to explore a bounded system in depth. *Bounded* means that the researcher separates out the case in terms of time, place or some physical boundaries for the purposes of the research study" (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 292). This bounded case study engaged novice teachers and instructional coaches who work in four elementary schools in one school district using a semi-structured type of interview that allowed for open-ended exploration of a topic within a framework of the research problem and questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The lives and careers of the participants were studied and analyzed within the context of their environments to fulfill the aspiration of a comprehensive case study as "holistic and context-sensitive" (Patton, 2015, p. 535). Elementary classroom teachers and instructional coaches were

able to provide multiple perspectives concerning teacher retention as well (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015).

To apply a philosophical underpinning, the design of this study is interpretivist, or constructivist based on the assertion that individuals construct subjective meaning in their lives within social, historical, and cultural experiences (Lapan et al., 2012; Patton, 2015). A constructivist would state that in this study “There is no single, observable reality. Rather there are multiple realities, or interpretations of a single event. Researchers do not find the truth, they construct it” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). It is the researcher in a qualitative study who serves as the primary instrument for gathering research data from the site and the participants and in turn constructs a meaningful and logical interpretation of the experiences through inductive reasoning.

Research Site

This study was conducted in a K-12, Kansas public school district that educates students at multiple neighborhood school sites located within one city. County Seat School District serves a diverse student population of approximately 2,900, of whom 67% are considered to be economically disadvantaged, and 36% of the students identify as Hispanic (Kansas State Department of Education, 2021). Teachers and instructional coaches who offered to participate were from Stony Brook Elementary, Blue River Elementary, Shady Creek Elementary, and Field Stream Elementary schools.

County Seat is located in a region of Kansas where geographic isolation and student demographics are known to be contributing factors in a lower than national average rate of teacher retention (Bailey et al., 2020; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Culbreath & Hart, 2019; Guarino et al., 2006; Hanushek et al., 2004; Lankford et al., 2002; Marinell & Coca, 2013;

Nguyen, 2020). As a study location with unique student demographics, County Seat reports a higher number of teacher vacancies due to their low levels of retention and out-migration from rural regions of Kansas where teachers are substantially more likely to leave (Kansas Department of Education, 2016; Nguyen, 2020). This trend is reflected in the disproportionate number of new teachers in County Seat. According to the Kansas State Department of Education, 24% of the elementary teachers in County Seat are classified as “inexperienced,” or having less than three full years of experience as a teacher (Kansas State Department of Education, 2021).

In addition to the unique intersection of culture, geography, and low teacher retention, County Seat is supported by numerous instructional coaches who worked with novice elementary teachers provided an ideal location. In each of the four elementary buildings represented by study participants, two full-time instructional coaches primarily worked with teachers on literacy. The other coaches assisted teachers with math. The duties of the instructional coaches included serving the academic needs of all teachers in their schools; however, they were assigned to guide teachers new to the district in the various mandated programs, according to the accounts of participant teachers and instructional coaches (Kansas State Department of Education, 2021).

As the central point of High Plains County, the city of County Seat had a higher level of poverty, a lower level of household income, and a lower level of education among the adult population compared to state and national averages. The high percentage of people living below the poverty line in County Seat, 19% compared to the national average of 10%, depressed the local economy to a point at which the median value of owner-occupied housing was valued at only \$95,800 compared to \$151,900 as an average in the same state and \$217,500 at a national level. On an average, the household income was significantly lower in County Seat than it was at a state level, \$47,500 compared to \$59,000. Only one in five adults who lived in County Seat

held a bachelor's degree while one on three adults in the same state was a college graduate. According to census data, 22% of the residents of County Seat identified as Hispanic, a number higher than the state average of 12%. People identifying as African American were notably absent in County Seat with only 1% of the population, compared to 6% in the state and 13% on a national level. Between 2010 and 2019 the population of the city had decreased 6% while a simultaneous, yet modest rise in the population of 2% was experienced in the same state (U. S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Stony Brook Elementary School

Of the four elementary schools in the County Seat School District that were represented by the study participants, Stony Brook was similar to the others in the composition of a kindergarten through sixth grade school with 14 homeroom classes. As with all of the elementary schools in the County Seat School District, Stony Brook was designated as a Title I school due to the high level of students who receive federally subsidized meals. At Stony Brook 70% of the students lived in families with incomes low enough to receive free or reduced meals, 71% of the students identified as White (Kansas State Department of Education, 2021). Stony Brook is located in an area immediately surrounded by low-cost housing; however, the main thoroughfare and business district were within one block of the school. A typical house located behind the school held a tax-appraised value of \$73,000 for the lot and residence (Kansas Data Access & Support Center, 2021).

Blue River Elementary School

Blue River Elementary held the distinction among the other schools in County Seat in grade configuration, demographic diversity, and location. As the only elementary school in the district to hold classes for prekindergarten students, there were 16 homeroom classes instead of

the 14 homerooms found in the other two-section kindergarten through sixth grade schools. In contrast to other area schools, Blue River was markedly dissimilar in the ethnicity of the student body. Only 13% of the students identified as White, the balance being largely Hispanic. Blue River also had the highest level of students in the district who received free and reduced meals at 92% (Kansas State Department of Education, 2021). The physical location of the school was directly on the main highway that traverses the city. Businesses on the highway surrounded the school on two sides; low-cost housing was located behind and to one side of the playground. A typical house behind the school had a value of \$52,000 for the lot and the building (Kansas Data Access & Support Center, 2021). Interspersed in the neighborhood away from the highway were salvage yards, railroad tracks, businesses that cater to the Spanish-speaking population, and a small city park. The sewage treatment plant was located closer to Blue River than other schools in the area. Much of the local housing where Blue River students lived is across railroad tracks on unpaved streets.

Shady Creek Elementary School

Even though Shady Creek Elementary held a similar grade level configuration as most other elementary schools in County Seat, there were distinctions in the vicinity and clientele. Bounded by a real estate mixture of middle-class community, an upscale housing area, apartments, a convenience store, enclosed storage units, and a church, this school was located far from heavy industrial sites or busy thoroughfares. Although most of the homes adjacent to the school were valued in the \$150,000 price range, an exceptional single-family home located behind Stony Creek was valued at \$368,000 (Kansas Data Access & Support Center, 2021). Occupying a space that creates an income and diversity gap when compared to other schools in the town, Shady Creek served a student body that identifies as 81% White, a number higher than

other schools in County Seat. The level of students who received free and reduced meals was at 60%, also unique in the school district as the lowest (Kansas State Department of Education, 2021).

Field Stream Elementary School

A defining characteristic of Field Stream Elementary was the area of town in which it was located and the consequent relation the area has on the economic prospects of the students who attended there. Located in an older section of town close to the downtown area, this school building was the closest to the local high school, near a large city park and zoo, and flanked by some of the oldest real estate with the lowest property value. Although there was moderate housing adjacent to the school, one of the small houses behind the playground, built in 1910, had a property value of just \$8,600 (Kansas Data Access & Support Center, 2021). As with other elementary schools in County Seat, there were a high proportion of students who received free and reduced meals at Field Stream due to the income level of their families. At 85%, the majority of the students at Field Stream were considered economically disadvantaged, according to Federal guidelines. A distinction at this school was that the student body was evenly divided with approximately 45% of the students identifying as White and 45% of the students as Hispanic (Kansas State Department of Education, 2021). The ethnic identities and relative percentage of students who received subsidized meals at Field Stream Elementary, as well as the other elementary schools in County Seat, indicated that poverty was prevalent across the demographic spectrum for these school-age children.

Participants and Their Recruitment

To provide rich data relevant to the purpose of this study, the participants were intentionally selected based on their proximity to the topic of teacher retention and instructional

coaching. On the subject of selecting participants for a qualitative case study Yin (2016) concluded:

In qualitative research, the instances (or samples) are likely to be chosen in a deliberate manner known as purposive sampling. The goal or purpose for selecting the specific instances is to have those that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data” (p. 93).

A primary consideration in purposive sampling for this study was to select participants from an elementary school where there were site-based instructional coaches who were in regular contact with teachers. The purpose for this was to analyze the research topic of teacher retention and the resulting influence of instructional coaching in a location that offers programmatic uniformity implemented by an internal member of the organization.

Referred to as “targeted sampling” by Lapan et al. (2012), certain teachers and instructional coaches were selected on the criteria of their positions and years of service. The first contact for the purpose of recruiting participants in the County School District was with the school superintendent, who recommended additional communication with elementary building principals. Direct contact with the principals yielded the names of 28 teachers who were in their first five years of continuous employment in regular education classrooms. Contact with the teachers was aided by the availability of their names and email addresses that were posted on each school website. There were two attempts made, via email, to contact those teachers who did not respond to the original message. Nine novice elementary classroom teachers out of the pool of 28 candidates volunteered to take part in the study. These teachers were selected because they were:

- in regular contact with an on-site instructional coach;

- from one of the demographically and socioeconomically diverse elementary schools in the County Seat School District;
- in the first five years of their teaching career.

Novice teachers were of particular interest for this study since they are at a high risk of exiting schools, especially those that serve high numbers of minority, low-income, and lower-performing students (Guarino et al., 2006).

To provide rich context to this case study, I invited instructional coaches to accompany the perspectives of novice teacher participants. Similar to the teachers, communication with, and recruitment of instructional coaches was aided by the availability of their names, positions, and email addresses that were listed on each school website. So that there could be a closer examination of the processes found in each school, coaches were chosen from schools where teachers had first volunteered. Of the 10 potential instructional coaches who could have participated in the study, there were four of them from three different elementary schools who accepted. All communication with participant teachers and instructional coaches was exclusively through email until time of the mutually agreed videoconference interviews. All participants were offered one gift certificate for the value of \$40 that was mailed to them following each interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The four frames of structure, human resources, politics, and symbolism were applied inductively to organize insights, to find patterns and interpretations, not as individual and separate constructs,

but as a collective comprehension to illuminate the central tenets of this study and to inform educational decision makers in their perception of the problem (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004).

Interviewing

Questions posed to participants were aligned to the purpose of the study and conducted in individual semi-structured interviews in a conversational style to encourage participants to share their interpretations, differences, and commonalities with respect toward the manner in which they structure their responses (Lapan et al., 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2016). Semi-structured interviews with novice elementary teachers and instructional coaches were conducted remotely via Zoom. The participants provided valuable responses “to understand the range of perceptions of an issue to key people in the community” (Lapan et al., 2012). Specifically, I asked novice teachers probing questions about their perceptions of instructional coach roles, reasoning behind their choice to stay in a particular school location, and experiences with an instructional coach to support their learning of the organizational structure found within a school. Questions asked of instructional coaches were reflections of those posed to novice teachers in such a way that the perspectives of the two groups could be later juxtaposed.

So that the words of the participants could be recorded accurately, interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of each participant. The use of audio recording preserved the verbal communicative exchanges verbatim and recorded the time elapsed for each of the speakers, which enhanced the authenticity of the data (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Audio recording is considered to be one of the best methods for reproducing and repeating the spoken word for later retrieval and transcription into databases (Lapan et al., 2012).

Analysis and Interpretation

A process of analyzing data for a qualitative study follows seven phases: “organizing the data, immersion in the data, generating categories and themes, coding the data, offering interpretations through analytic memos, searching for alternative understanding, and writing the report” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 217). The process of data transcription, organization, and categorization occurred simultaneously with the data collection as I continued to interview more participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed using the web-based voice to text transcription tool Temi® that accepts electronically recorded audio files and converts them into a textual document. Categorizing the incoming data was an inductive process in which I classified the raw data into codes and categories that were at first general categories aligned to the two research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Later, focused coding was used to arrive at the finer informational details gathered from the primary sources of interview transcripts. The fluid and iterative nature of qualitative studies function most efficiently when the constant comparative method, “a fluid process that allows researchers to compare codes to incoming data and to make adjustments,” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 46) was employed at all phases of the gathering and analysis of data.

While simultaneously gathering and classifying incoming responses from participants, I began to enter the data into the computer-based data analysis software program Dedoose® to organize codes and categories emerging from the data and manage the changing interpretations as new information was revealed through interviews. At the end of this undertaking, as the major themes began to emerge from the data, the findings section was written as a descriptive representation of all that was gathered from the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Final interpretation of the findings was presented through the theoretical perspective of four frames

guiding this study, which views institutions as irregularly portrayed amalgams of organizational structure, human resources, political affiliations, or symbolic representations (Thompson, 2000).

Research Quality

A credible qualitative study is described as “one that provides assurance that you have properly collected and interpreted the data, so that the findings and the conclusions accurately reflect and represent that world that was studied” (Yin, 2016, p. 85). Creswell and Creswell (2018) discuss eight strategies that a researcher should use to create a valid study: triangulate different data (Credibility), use member-checking (Dependability), use rich thick description to convey findings (Transferability), clarify the bias that the researcher brings to the study (Positionality), present negative or discrepant information (Credibility), spend prolonged time in the field (Credibility), use peer reviewing (Confirmability), and use an external auditor (Dependability). To ensure that this study was conducted with a high standard of research quality, the previously mentioned strategies were implemented with fidelity in the execution of this project.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research supposes to isolate the personal bias of the researcher who is tasked with identify emerging themes solely from the data. Parallel to the concept of objectivity in quantitative studies, confirmability relates to the expected absence of personal bias; however, in qualitative studies the data must support the researcher’s conclusion inductively (Lapan et al., 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The essence of confirmability in qualitative research is found in the researcher’s ability to conclusively describe the line of evidence that begins in collected data and evolves into thematic findings (Cope, 2014).

Research confirmability methods are rooted in foundational structures of qualitative research and are applicable to the site and participants. In order to demonstrate how the emerging themes have originated in the words and reactions from the participants, I included the “thick, rich quotes” (Cope, 2014, p. 2) that personify the findings separate from my conclusions. Referred to as the “critical friend” by Marshall and Rossman (2016), I periodically requested assistance from a peer-reviewer to discuss the collected data and their further analysis. Finally, in the draft of the findings section, I methodically connected the research questions with the actual words of the participants to provide an account of how common themes arose from the data.

Transferability

In order for a qualitative study to be practical beyond the original context, it must be transferable or generalizable across similar populations in other settings (Lapan et al., 2012). Transferability is considered to be a weakness in qualitative studies due to the variability of the human subjects and their environments; however, the application of a theoretical framework that is generalizable across other settings is considered to be effective in this area (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A qualitative study is considered to have a high degree of transferability “if the results have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and readers can associate the results with their own experiences” (Cope, 2014, p. 1). So that readers unfamiliar with the context can relate to the study, “rich thick” descriptions of the places, the people, and the analysis procedures are included so that the study is generalizable in other settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Practitioners far removed from the study can apply the conclusions to their fields, due to the construction of the report as descriptive and recognizable to the readers across other sciences.

To develop this study with a level of transferability, I reported the findings and the conclusions from a theoretical vantage accessible to outside practitioners. Through the intentional incorporation of Bolman and Deal's four frames model that allow for viewing schools as interconnected organizations, educational practitioners will be able to recognize issues related to structure, human resources, political systems, and symbolic meaning within their organizations. By conceptualizing the findings, based upon the concepts of the theoretical framework, this study is generalizable in other school organizations where novice elementary teachers are in regular contact with instructional coaches (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In contrast to the abstractions of theory, a thorough description of the research context including the community, the school, and the people in this case study may allow other researchers the possibility of applying the findings in other settings under similar conditions (Cope, 2014; Watkins, 2012). Finally, to provide clarity to the reader, I explained my assumptions made in relation to the study participants, the study locations, and their interactions with the scope of the research problem.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative studies, as compared to reliability in the field of quantitative studies, strives for a constancy in replicating answers to research questions. Due to the inconsistencies of studying human reactions and the organizations they create, it can be problematic to achieve dependability in qualitative studies. Dependability in qualitative research challenges the researcher to arrive at similar conclusions under changing conditions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Watkins, 2012). Researchers are able to overcome the complexities of dependability by conferring with one another in an "audit trail" to determine the rationale for the decisions made in assessing the importance of participant data (Cope, 2014).

Strategies to ensure dependability of this study began with developing solid interviewing skills by practicing the predetermined questions in pilot interviews with trusted colleagues. An external auditor, familiar with the study and this field of research, was consulted to align interview practices with the overall scope of the study. As a case study, it was crucial to include and accurately record the authentic voices of teacher participants and instructional coaches in all of their verbal responses to the interview questions, accordingly audio recordings were used for the duration of each interview with written consent of the participants. To enhance the accuracy of the data collected, member checking was implemented post-interview to allow the teachers involved the opportunity to review what was recorded and approve their continued participation (Lapan et al., 2012).

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research “focuses on confidence in truth of findings, including accurate understanding of context,” (Watkins, 2012, p. 4) which places the researcher in the difficult position of being both the instrument and the reporter of perceived reality. The only argument the researcher has to instill a sense that the study is credible is in providing an accurate depiction of the research experiences and methods used to arrive at the findings (Cope, 2014). To present a qualitative study as credible, the researcher must develop an attitude of trust in the reader by infusing an attitude throughout the design of the project (Yin, 2016). The reliability of the research design is especially important in qualitative studies for the reason that “being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied fields because practitioners intervene in people’s lives” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 237). Researchers employ multiple strategies to convey to the reader that the study was conducted ethically and with fidelity.

To develop a sense of credibility in this case study, I attempted to accurately depict the participants, the context of the schools, the school district, the characteristics of the students, and the challenges of conducting a qualitative study with as much transparency as is possible (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Yin, 2016). In addition to conducting numerous interviews, I researched ancillary documentation on the community and I spent many hours immersed in collected data (Cope, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I employed the strategy of triangulation to increase the credibility of this study by interviewing instructional coaches in addition to novice teachers so that multiple sources could be considered in pursuit of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Discrepant information relevant to the research questions was included in the participant responses to present the findings as realistic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Practices employed in the execution of the study followed high ethical standards that were in keeping with professional practices codified in the Wichita State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Special accommodations that were offered to study respondents, as addressed in consent forms including member checking, gave them complete autonomy over their participation.

Ethics

Procedural practices were implemented in the course of this inquiry to make certain ethical conduct was observed during interaction with study participants, and later when the collected data was analyzed. Each doctoral candidate at Wichita State University is required to be proficient in Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) modules that are based upon the central tenets of “respect for persons, beneficence, and justice” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 51). The application of these principles was carried out with fidelity, as stipulated by the IRB of Wichita State University, the department charged with adherence of ethical protocols to

ensure protection of human rights for study participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Tracy, 2019).

The procedures implemented in this study were practical strategies aligned with the procedural ethics of “Do no harm, avoid deception, get informed consent, and ensure privacy and confidentiality” (Tracy, 2019, p. 243). In accordance with the IRB, participants were given an opportunity of consenting to the study, they were informed of their right to refuse participation, and an agreement on privacy was explained (Kilbourn, 2006). Participants’ personal identifying information was eliminated from written and audio files by changing names, titles, specific positions, and locations of employment and residence. All names of participants and locations are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Electronic files containing participant data were stored in password-protected devices not shared with the public through networks, social media, or by other means. Physical notes or papers generated during data collection were safeguarded and then destroyed after they were transcribed into electronic format. By designing this study on teacher retention and instructional coaching, I was fully aware of the ethical implications caused by asking novice teachers about their careers. An obligation in carrying out this study was to act ethically in the interests of participant anonymity (Kilbourn, 2006).

In order to protect the personal and professional reputations of the participants of this study, they were offered an informed consent and confidentiality statement. This written and signed agreement informed the participants of the purpose of the information that was about to be given, how it was to be used, what would be asked in the interview, how confidentiality was to be handled, and the risks or benefits involved with being in a study interview (Patton, 2015). There were also confidentiality safeguards required by the University that included a documented IRB approval for any study to proceed (Appendix E). Any records maintained by

the University and its appointees were de-identified, stored in secure software, and destroyed one year after the study had been completed.

In addition to the legal safeguards to assure confidentiality through the IRB agreement, there were procedural practices implemented to assuage participants' concerns. To ensure confidentiality I conducted private Zoom® meetings in locations that prevented disruptions. Each meeting was password-protected and shared with participants on an individual basis. Each of the initial semi-structured interviews began with a briefing on the purpose of the study and a review of the confidentiality agreement. A final layer of confidentiality was provided to the participants by referring to them in writing only by a pseudonym (Tracy, 2019).

Positionality

In this subsection I define the concept of positionality, “clarify the bias the researcher brings to the study,” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200) and detail strategies that mitigated the effects of researcher bias during field work and later data analysis. A qualitative study in which the participants and the researcher hold similar backgrounds and different levels of authority in elementary education creates a situation where positionality, “the identity of the researcher in relation to the participants and the data,” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 380) especially important to identify. As an experienced elementary building principal who witnessed various career paths of novice elementary teachers, I was cautious to avoid any issues of power and privilege that could have adversely affected perspectives of study participants (Kilbourn, 2006).

As a person and a professional, I can situate the characteristics of my life in the context of this study by assessing who I am and how my experiences are relevant to study volunteers. To reveal personal attributes of race, nationality, and gender, it requires textual disclosure as these characteristics most certainly affect the data to varying degrees (Chiseri-Strater, 1996).

Accordingly, I describe myself as a White, middle-class, native-born male who has spent the majority of my adult life in diverse educational settings surrounded by students who are from backgrounds unlike my own. Even though I may be described as middle-class now, I am from a working-class background. During my early years as a teacher, I faced the financial struggles that are typical of novice teachers who balance the expenses of home and family. The familiarity that I hold for the life of a novice elementary teacher made it easy to gain their trust as an insider; however, I was cautious to maintain emotional distance as to not sympathize with a “common wound” narrative (Cousin, 2010).

As a result of being in elementary education over the last 23 years, my professional experiences on the topics of teacher retention and instructional coaching were extensive in relation to the purpose of this study. My first teaching position was in a high-needs, inner-city elementary school where most of the novices viewed their tenure as transitory, a site that was to be endured until a better offer was procured, preferably in a suburban school. Later as a new principal in a different high-needs school, my immediate task was to fill vacant teaching positions with newly licensed teachers. Over the course of the last 11 years as a principal, I have seen the trend in teacher availability decrease to a level at which vacancies are now typically filled with long-term substitutes who are not licensed as educators.

During the 11 years that I have served as a principal, multiple instructional coaches have been assigned to my building to assist in the professional development of novice and veteran teachers. In that time, I have observed coaches as they served the needs of teachers, specifically novices, as they learn the structure of the school as an organization embedded in a larger community of educators. It is my belief, formed by informal observation, the work of instructional coaches contributes to a cohesive environment in which new teachers are more

likely to remain and prosper. This is a pre-existing bias that I carried into this study to which I must acknowledge yet not allow to interfere in my interactions with participants and how I considered their responses. My view is that the experiences I have had as an educator will enhance discovery, not jeopardize it, for “the self is not some kind of virus which contaminates the research. On the contrary, the self is the research tool, and thus intimately connected to the methods we deploy” (Cousin, 2010, p. 10).

In order to preserve my positionality during data collection and later analysis, I entered as a neutral researcher, attentive to considerations of insider/outsider stances and reflective about my place as a researcher in a field that is familiar. To avoid any perception of an alliance with the power structure of the school system and related conflicts of interest, my introduction to potential participants was that of an unrelated researcher on assignment. It was to my advantage to hold a command of inside knowledge common to elementary teachers in the state of Kansas, common knowledge that aided me in understanding issues mentioned by participants. However, I was mindful in considering my positionality in Kansas elementary schools so as to not unduly interpret data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, to record thoughts concerning positionality for later processing, I recorded my observations and notes following each interaction with a study participant to self-monitor the integrity of the study in terms of positionality (Chiseri-Strater, 1996).

CHAPTER 4

Findings

In the following chapter, I present research findings pertaining to the role of instructional coaching in novice elementary teacher retention. The chapter begins with an overview of participants' backgrounds followed by analyses of a practitioner perception of instructional coaching and the function of instructional coaching within the structure of an organization. Teachers viewed the work carried out by instructional coaches to assist with curricula and materials, develop trusting relationships, serve as a functionary in the school hierarchy, and fulfill a mentorship role particular to the County Seat School District. The instructional coach, as one who exerts force on the careers of new teachers, is expected to be competent, present, and approachable in order to be influential. The two major findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that novice elementary teachers are more likely to stay in a school and in their careers if they experience a sense of belonging to a school family, and that differences in age and community ties are important factors in teacher retention. Furthermore, it was found that the instructional coach has a positive influence on teacher retention when they act to promote an inclusive community for novices.

Participant Description Summary

In the following subsection, I situate the participants in the context of a time and a place. Table 2 displays categorical information on the nine novice teachers who participated in this study, including school placement, grade level assignment at the time of the study, years of experience as teachers, their approximate age, whether they were in their first careers in education, and if they considered County Seat to be their hometown.

Table 2

Teacher Participant Affiliation and Background

Name	Elementary School	Grade Level	Years of Experience	Age Range	First Career	Hometown
Vanessa Smith	Stony Brook	1 st	1	20-29	Yes	Yes
Kimberly Jones	Stony Brook	1 st	3	20-29	Yes	Yes
Cali Reyes	Stony Brook	4 th	4	20-29	Yes	Yes
Zoey Miller	Stony Brook	6 th	1	20-29	Yes	No
Ruby Anderson	Blue River	3 rd	4	20-29	Yes	Yes
Heidy Wilson	Blue River	5 th	3	40-49	No	No
Briana Johnson	Shady Creek	4 th	2	30-39	No	Yes
Jazmin Carpenter	Shady Creek	6 th	2	20-29	Yes	No
Sylvana Wood	Field Stream	5 th	2	40-49	No	No

Characteristics of nine elementary teacher participants were found to be significant in their responses to the central theme of the study, which are presented in the following sections. Common traits most notable among the teachers were their years of experience in the classroom, as still novices, none having yet completed four years. All of them had studied to become elementary teachers. Each participant who called County Seat his or her hometown had graduated from the local high school. Only one of the teachers was Hispanic, the rest were White, monolingual women. There was an age division between the teachers who had held previous careers and those who began their college studies immediately following high school. Younger teachers had followed uninterrupted trajectories from high school to college to the workplace, while the second career teachers had work experiences in and out of the home.

Table 3 displays information relevant to the instructional coaches who took part in this study, including their name, school, subject area, and previous professional roles. Considering the length of experience coaches had in education, compared to the novice teachers, a brief description of their career paths is included in Table 3 to give the reader a sense of their background. To clarify the participants and ease readability, teachers and instructional coaches

will be referred to by first name in most passages in Chapter 4. They are also referred as “teacher,” “instructional coach,” or simply “coach.”

Table 3

Instructional Coach Participant Affiliation and Background

Name	Elementary School	Position	Previous Positions
William Stone	Stony Brook	Math	Teacher and principal
Kayleigh Harris	Blue River	Math	Elementary teacher
Ivy Brown	Blue River	Reading	Special education teacher
Ariana Lewis	Shady Creek	Reading	Elementary teacher

The four instructional coaches provided a valuable behind-the-scenes view of the issues and perspectives concerning teacher retention in the County Seat School District. Their common experiences of professionals who had worked in the same community for a number of years were mentioned many times as formative in shaping the careers of novice teachers with whom they served. Each of them described their duties as a complex array of serving the needs of not only the teachers, but of the school organization as a whole. Although the individual coaches defined their professions in differing terms, they were very familiar with the condition of their schools and the particular stories of the teachers who worked there.

Description of Teachers and Coaches from Stony Brook Elementary

The four novice teacher participants from Stony Brook held the common trait of having entered the field of teaching immediately following high school and college. *Vanessa*, a 1st grade teacher in the first year of her teaching career, was able to speak genuinely from the viewpoint of a novice elementary teacher. She left County Seat High School to attend nearest state university to earn her degree in elementary education, upon which she returned to County Seat to accept a teaching position at Stony Brook.

Another teacher in her first career at Stony Brook is *Kimberly*, a 1st grade teacher in her third year. Similar to Vanessa, Kimberly graduated from County Seat High School and went directly to college. Her studies took her to the local community college first and then to a distant university in the same state under an athletic scholarship. The location of the university afforded Kimberly the opportunity to complete her teaching practicums in inner-city schools, experiences she would have unlikely had in her hometown. Kimberly expressed no misgivings about the choices she had made in either becoming an elementary teacher or in deciding to exercise her career at Stony Brook. Her perception of the community was internal to the school, which she described as a “big family.”

As the only Hispanic and non-White person in an ethnically divided community, *Cali* was the only teacher to express frustration about her position as an elementary teacher in County Seat. Like other novice teachers at Stony Brook, Cali graduated from County Seat High School and went directly to the nearest university to complete her degree in elementary education. Unique among the participants, Cali had begun in another elementary school where she taught for two years, to be later transferred to Stony Brook, seemingly a move that was not entirely her decision. In her fourth year of teaching, Cali was sensitive about the details concerning her transfer from another school. When asked about the decisions that led her to Stony Brook, Cali became visibly upset and relayed that in her first teaching position she felt “hated” and “unwanted.” When offered the opportunity to provide a perspective on the community in terms of her unique identity as a Hispanic teacher, she instead described the students as “a large population of kids who have a lot of trauma in them.”

The fourth teacher participant from Stony Brook, *Zoey* was different from her school colleagues in that she came from a more affluent area of the same state. She described her

decision to move to County Seat to accept a teaching position as a “blind move” with no family or friends in the area. Her challenges as a 6th grade teacher began in the fall semester of 2019 when, as a first year teacher, she expected to have a partner teacher for the first two weeks, which resulted in only one day with a partner due to shortages in staff. To cope with the many layers of difficulty, she turned to the guidance of the math instructional coach at her school and her grade-level colleague for support. Curiously, Zoey was attracted to this study from her own interest in instructional coaching and her involvement in graduate level courses on the same topic. Zoey’s strategy to integrate into the community was to accept after-hours coaching positions in the local middle school where she could relate to students and their families.

An instructional coach who had the opportunity to work with more novice teachers than any other in this study, *William*, the only participating coach from Stony Creek. His work in instructional coaching was supported by the experience gained through former teaching positions in second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. He had also served as principal in a different district and had held his current instructional coach position for three years. William was distinct in this study in that he was one of very few men in County Seat elementary schools and he was the only man to participate in this study. He had also worked in a number of school districts in and out of the state.

Description of Teachers and Coaches from Blue River Elementary

Teachers who participated in this study from Blue River Elementary, Ruby and Heidy, relayed common experiences in having taught in other school districts, and were consequently more aware of community factors than other teachers were. *Ruby* was in her third year of teaching 3rd grade at Blue River; however, she started her career as a teacher in a very small school district along the northern border of the same state. She described her feelings of

alienation when she moved to a small and isolated town to teach for one year, and equally her feelings of relief when she was able to move back to her hometown of County Seat to assume an elementary teaching position. Coincidentally, another teacher at Blue River had moved to the same small town to teach for two years, yet “came back home” to County Seat. Ruby appeared earnestly satisfied in her career as an elementary teacher at Blue River even though her observations about the students and their families would indicate some separation between her and the immediate community.

As a self-described older teacher who finished college and entered teaching after her children were grown, *Heidy* was able to provide a perspective gained from experiences in and out of schools. Speaking as a first-year teacher, Heidy’s teaching career included another position that lasted two years in a comparable size district. She also had a management position before finishing a college degree. She used this experience to support her colleagues who were a generation younger yet held the same level of professional experience. In a revealing set of comments that Heidy provided about the condition of the school in the greater community, she described County Seat as “divided” along ethnic lines. Heidy recounted an event that occurred recently while shopping at a store in County Seat when a well-intended local citizen expressed concern for Heidy’s safety as a teacher at Blue River Elementary.

The two instructional coach participants assigned to Blue River, Kayleigh and Ivy, had decades of experience as elementary homeroom teachers in the County Seat School District. With their collective experience in one school district, Kayleigh and Ivy were able to provide the novice teachers of Blue River with the academic and cultural knowledge to integrate as educators in the school community. Each of them expressed their roles in introducing new teachers to the culture particular to their institution.

Kayleigh had spent all of her 19 years as teacher and coach at Blue River. After six years as a math instructional coach, she was working on a master's degree in educational leadership. Her lengthy experience in one school location placed *Kayleigh* in a position to serve as an informal cultural liaison in addition to her other responsibilities as a coach.

Ivy had spent 25 years in the County Seat School District as an elementary homeroom teacher, a special education teacher, and was in her second year as an ELA instructional coach at the time of the study. Similar to the self-perceived role of cultural liaison expressed by *Kayleigh*, *Ivy* also defined her role in the school as a guide for new teachers as they attempted to communicate with the families of their students.

Description of Teachers and Coaches from Shady Creek Elementary

Two teachers from Shady Creek Elementary school, *Briana* and *Jazmin*, volunteered to participate in the study. *Briana* described her career path as personally fulfilling and a fit for the needs of her family. *Briana* was the only teacher participant to have held a professional career outside of the home before entering the field of education. She had studied and worked in veterinary medicine for eight years before deciding that the hours and the manual labor involved in working with animals were no longer satisfying to her. Seeking other opportunities that would allow her to stay in County Seat, she discovered an online master's degree in education that she could complete in a year while teaching at the same time. In her second year as a 4th grade teacher, she expressed relief at not having to manage simultaneously career and graduate-level classes. *Briana* presented herself as a secure and confident adult. She had a home, a family, children, a professional career, and longstanding connections to the community she referred to by stating, "I grew up in County Seat, so there are a lot of connections just to the community and to the people." Some of her students were the children of people she knew while in high school.

Jazmin, in contrast, was not native to County Seat and was in her first career as a novice teacher. She was originally from a major metropolitan area outside of the state who found her way to County Seat Community College on an athletic scholarship. She later left the County Seat area to complete a four-year degree in elementary education at another in-state university. While still in the process of finishing the degree, she received and accepted an offer from the County Seat School District for a teaching position, persuaded by the familiarity she had had with the school system from previously living in the area. Jazmin viewed her identity as apart from those around her who considered County Seat to be home. She explained her viewpoint by stating, “I feel like my perspective here in a smaller town is still very diverse. I feel like it gives me a different mindset than people that grew up in this area.” Although she considered her students to be of diverse backgrounds, Jazmin longed for what she had known before moving to County Seat. “There's not the same type of diversity in the students that I'm working with as there would have been if I was back in my hometown. Part of me wishes I could teach in an area like that.”

The one instructional coach from Shady Creek Elementary, *Ariana*, was the least experienced of the four instructional coaches in the study. Ariana described her career in education as the vocation she pursued after completing high school and four years at a small in-state private college. Overall, she had spent eight years as an educator at Shady Creek. Ariana made rapid progress through the first years in her career by beginning a reading specialist degree after only three years as a homeroom teacher. At the time of the study, she was in her fourth year as an ELA instructional coach. Her efforts to engage the community outside of the school involved organizing afterschool events and offering advice to new teachers who requested assistance. According to her limited comments on the topic, Arianna did not directly engage with the community outside of the school.

Description of Teacher from Field Stream Elementary

The sole participant from Field Stream Elementary, *Sylvana*, offered background on her journey to become a teacher. She described how her interactions with the school community had influenced a belief she held about the students and families there. Sylvana was a 4th grade homeroom teacher in her second year at Field Stream after having served as a substitute teacher the previous year. She shared that in the past she and her family were originally from another part of the state and that she has been a homemaker in County Seat for the years she was raising her children. Her assessment of the school community was that most students were from low-income families, a condition that was appealing to Sylvana due to the eager nature of her students and their motivation to learn. Sylvana shared, “Actually it is kind of nice because we are blessed with having a student body that wants to be at school, wants to improve their lives. They have families that want to improve. It's a wonderful little community.” Although Sylvana considered the work of the instructional coach to be at times obtrusive, she respected the role of the coach as a person whom she perceived as an ally.

Perceptions on the Role of Instructional Coaching

To varying degrees, teachers considered instructional coaches vital to their professional success as they confronted various demands of their profession. Their perceptions of instructional coaches reflected the relative lack of experience of the new teachers as they first sought assistance in matters of curricula, instructional resources and data management, and later looked to the coaches as trusted supporters and mentors. Found in the responses of the teachers was the view that instructional coaches were a part of the school hierarchy, the persons responsible for adherence to expected norms across grade levels and schools. Specific to the County Seat School District is a duality that instructional coaches fulfill as they also serve as

mentors for the purposes of licensure, a practice perceived to be a convenience for teachers who are assigned one person for both roles. Responses from instructional coaches concerning their responsibilities made known their dedication in the support of new teachers through intensive assistance with instructional materials and strategies. Coaches also stressed the importance of establishing trusting, non-evaluative working relationships with the novice teachers in their charge. Although the teachers did not universally hold the appraisal of instructional coaching as influential in retention, there were patterns found in the positive responses of the younger teachers, especially those who were not connected to the larger community.

Responsibilities of Instructional Coaches

The responsibilities of the instructional coach, as recounted by teachers and coaches, reflect the duties pertaining to the presentation of academic material to students as well as the internal motivation of the educators. Teachers detailed the responsibilities of the instructional coaches according to their interactions with them in matters of curricula, adherence to academic programs such as RtI, and instructional feedback. Support provided by instructional coaches was considered vital to the novice teacher, who often voiced the need for a trusting environment. Coaches who were asked to describe their responsibilities also listed academic support as their primary function in the service of teachers, whom they consider to be on an equal level of authority. The perceived duties of instructional coaches, according to teachers and instructional coaches as summarized in Table 4, demonstrate a parallel understanding of coach responsibilities with the exception that coaches do not view their positions integral to the organization hierarchy.

Table 4

Perceived Responsibilities of Instructional Coaches

Responsibility Categories	Teacher Perceptions	Coach Perceptions
Academic and Data Support	Locate instructional materials Provide assistance with the instructional plan Assure fidelity to the approved materials and plans of study Assessment data management	Curricular support Provide professional development
Building a Trusting Environment	Provide emotional support Give non-evaluative feedback	Provide a support system Introduce teachers to the community Develop a familial atmosphere
Organizational Hierarchy	Serve in a co-equal role with teachers. Serve as intermediaries between teachers and administration. Serve in a capacity superior to teachers. Monitor adherence to protocol. Provide structure for new teachers.	Instructional coaches did not consider their responsibilities related to the hierarchy of the school system.
Mentorship	Serve as mentors to provide non-instructional assistance.	Provide procedural advice not related to instruction. Fulfill a licensure mandate.

Academic and Data Support

Several teachers described their first encounter with the County Seat School District when the instructional coaches introduced them to the curriculum and instructional materials they were to use in their classrooms. Ruby described her experiences at the new teacher orientation, “When I came to the district, we had a new teacher orientation, and they have the instructional coaches come in and then the instructional coaches will go over what I'm going to help you on. Or this is what I'm available for if you ever need me.” From these early contacts, teachers began to discern the duties of the coaches. Briana explained, “They help us get any

materials we might need other than just our textbooks. If there are any questions, we have on the programs we use or anything like that, they help us out.” Curricular and material support was mentioned frequently by participants to be the area in which instructional coaches dedicated the most effort in assisting them.

One of the challenges that first beset a number of the novice teachers was to master a predetermined plan of studies for their discipline and grade level. Kimberly was reflective about the assistance that the coaches had given her in understanding an instructional plan, “We prioritized our standards. They helped with learning about the targets and setting up the success criteria.” One of the teachers in her first year, Zoey, relayed that the instructional coach provided the necessary guidance to assure instruction aligned to accepted standards. “She’ll make sure that the projects that I assign or plan out are following the curriculum and not going away from what they need.” In addition to curricular direction, coaches are involved with providing instructional materials, as explained by Briana, “They make sure we have our books, they make sure we have everything we need. If we need extra resources, I contact my instructional coach and they help me find any resources.” As novices in demanding positions, the teachers depended on their instructional coaches to guide them successfully in learning the academic material and programs.

A few of the teachers recounted the events of the orientation; however, the application of content covered during this time was dependent on the actions of the instructional coaches following the orientation. Briana recalled the orientation the previous August, “I think it was about four or five days. I can’t remember for sure. A lot of it was just; our instructional coaches did help us through what was expected of us.” A similar report of the orientation by Jazmin concluded that the instructional coach was present and later followed through with guidance at the school; however, the involvement was not considered to be pivotal in shaping the career of a

novice, “When I first started my new teacher orientation at the school the coaches were there to help. They were in my classroom when I was getting settled in. We kind of had a checklist that we went through.” When Zoey was asked how a coach had helped her understand the functioning of the school and district since the time of the orientation, her answer indicated that she had not received comprehensive guidance from a coach.

According to participants, the County Seat School District promoted the use of approved instructional materials by directing instructional coaches to support all teachers, especially novices. Comments from the teachers indicated their school district had purchased a common standard of teaching resources that they were expected to be used with fidelity. Accordingly, the instructional coaches were assigned the duty of ensuring compliance to the instructional materials through specific professional development and monitoring. New teachers who were most in need of support provided by an instructional coach and materials offered differing appraisals of the assistance. Referring to the protocol as the regimented schedule and instructional materials, Kimberly commented, “I guess the main thing that I talked to them about is sticking to the protocol. I think that that has been one thing that I like with the coaches because it's just structured.” In a parallel response on the direction she had received from the coach, Jazmin commented, “The reading coach came in and kind of told me all of the things that I am supposed to be doing during reading curriculum times.” An expected duty of the instructional coaches was to ensure building-level compliance with the District in academic and regulatory matters.

As recounted by the teachers, a fundamental responsibility of the instructional coach was to facilitate academic programs and data management common to County Seat elementary schools. A program that had been formally adopted in the County Seat School District was

Response to Intervention (RtI), which called for an extensive system of assessing students to determine their needs and align resources to ensure that educators were equipped to meet those needs. According to six teachers, the math and ELA instructional coaches dedicated their efforts towards the compliance and data management necessary to maintain the RtI system. For example, Ruby offered, “She [The instructional coach] does all the math side of testing and all that and gets us our data and our students.” Similarly, Cali suggested, “They [Instructional coaches] look at the data. They test our kids to see where and what tier they fall into, and then they share the data with us.” Instructional coaches were largely responsible for “benchmarking” the students or placing them into one of three tiers based upon student performance data. Jazmin commented on the duties of the math instructional coach at her school, “I know that they do a lot of work on benchmarking. They're [Instructional coaches] kind of in charge of honing in on those tier two and three kids.” Teachers defined their perceptions of the academic responsibilities performed by instructional coaches based upon their frequent observations.

When the instructional coaches were asked to explain the work they do with new teachers, there were multiple responses given in relation to the curricular support they provide. In what would seem to be a primary function of an instructional coach, only two of the four coaches included curricular support, and the description of how they supported the novice teachers who were most in need of such assistance. Kayleigh mentioned her position involved introducing novice teachers to the adopted resources from the first days of their orientation, “One of the first things I do at the beginning of the year is provide a training on the current curriculum and the resources that we have for them to use.” The term “curriculum” was commonly used within the nomenclature of the County Seat School District to describe curricula and resources. Another

instructional coach, Ivy described her responsibility as “just helping with the curriculum,” especially with first year teachers.

Responses taken from the instructional coaches when asked to describe the importance of their work for new teachers were understandably academic, considering a primary function of their role is to inculcate the novice in the instructional resources. Ivy compared the complexities veteran teachers experience with the cyclical plan of rotating instructional materials to the daunting tasks given to novices as they attempt to comprehend an entire curricular system. She stated that her position was important to the novice teachers in the academic realm as she attempted “Different ways for professional development and curriculum to support them [Teachers] in the classroom.” Extending her influence beyond the limitations of the new teachers Kaleigh made the broad statement “We truly are trying to support those teachers new or veteran any way we can to make their day run more smoothly,” signaling the ideal belief that the work of the coach was beneficial to teachers who accepted assistance in matters academic and non-academic.

Building a Trusting and Emotionally Supportive Environment

In addition to the specific duties related to academic support, teachers described instructional coaches as trusted resources they could depend on for advice and feedback. Ruby stated that from the time of the new teacher orientation, instructional coaches offered their help whenever there was a need, “In general, having them in the building, we can always come up to them about anything,” Vanessa also viewed the instructional coaches as valuable assets who were placed in the schools to assist even though she was not completely sure of their assigned duties. She stated, “They're here to help us teachers from what I understand.” For Cali, instructional coaches were considered trusted colleagues who provided emotional support, “If we

need anything, or we really need help with just someone to talk to, she's just always there and willing to listen to us.” In a frank admission of the challenges that beset teachers even in the fourth year, Ruby rated the work that coaches do for her as “very helpful because sometimes I don't know what I'm doing, or I don't know enough strategies to help them [Students] or things like that.” By request, the instructional coaches provided non-evaluative advice on teacher instruction to improve their performance. Cali shared “Our math coach has done a really great job of going into the classroom and watching us teach and giving us feedback so that we can grow. It helps me to know that I can trust them with whatever questions I have.” Citing difficulties with behavior management, sixth grade teacher Heidi relayed that she depended on the experience of coaches to “give guidance” and suggestions on how to maintain a positive learning environment.

According to their comments, instructional coaches also considered their work with new teachers to be similarly important in non-academic matters as in the academic. Coaches explained their support of new teachers in the areas of emotional support, an introduction to community mores, and the enduring value of collegial partnerships. Two of the coaches described their positions as non-evaluative support to new teachers as they first confronted the demands of their careers. Kayleigh referred to “problems” in the following statement as those difficulties outside of classroom instruction. “ I hope the new teacher would see a coach as another support system, a person to go to with problems they're having.” Another coach viewed his role as important in introducing new teachers to the local community, especially in instances when he saw the community values as distinct from those of the new teachers, “They come from a different area, and then they get a job here in County Seat. We have low socioeconomic kids that we serve mostly. So where they were at for their student teaching has been much different.”

In contrast to the responses from novice teachers, only one of the coaches expressly mentioned relationships as an important element in their work. Describing a longstanding friendship that she held with a past mentor, Ariana shared the belief, “I think that having that good relationship with a new teacher can make them feel a little bit more comfortable throughout their whole career.” The described partnership with community and staff, according to the beliefs of the participants, contributed to a sense of belonging in the organization.

The establishment of a trusting and supportive school environment, as described by instructional coaches, is one in which there is unity among the staff. An instructional coach, Arianna, was not able to offer an in-depth response in how she assisted teachers in relating to the community outside of the school building, did provide several examples of her involvement in unifying instructional staff. Her appraisal of the school personnel and the role that she fulfilled was “family, we just care about each other and if you need anything you can come to any of us. We will help you.” Striving to develop a sense of unity influential in teacher retention, Kayleigh related to the inclusion of newer teachers outside of the context of their professional capacity, “I try to touch base with staff on a personal level.” Ivy, a coach who saw her support for the novice teacher as collegial, summarized her role in creating unity by stating, “Our role isn't to evaluate. Just building that rapport and trust with them makes a huge difference.” Building that trust and familial environment also places the instructional coach in the occasional role of negotiator.

Responsibilities Pertaining to Organizational Hierarchy

Teachers considered the instructional coach to be a part of the school hierarchy and consequently defined the responsibilities of the coach based upon that perception. Sylvana considered the instructional coaches to be nearer to the level of teachers than to the principal and should therefore be accessible to a novice who is on need of support. According to her

observation, “They were teachers. They tend to interact more with the teachers.” Even though there was a considerable difference in the level of experience held by a novice teacher and an instructional coach, remarks offered by two new teachers defined their positions of power to be equal to that of their more experienced colleagues. Explaining that teachers interpret the position of the instructional coach as more closely related to them than the principal due to a perceived co-equal role, Vanessa commented, “They're closely related to the teachers because they work alongside with the teachers to help them with the curriculum.” Kimberly also considered all certified staff, including the instructional coaches, in her school to be of an equal level of authority, with the exception of the building principal, “I know that, of course our principal is higher up, but then I feel like everyone else is kind of on the same playing field. I don't feel like anybody is higher than the other in our building.” To understand the teachers’ perspective on a coach’s responsibilities, as influenced by the perceived level of authority, was relative to the physical and social proximity between the two professionals.

The perception of the instructional coach as one who holds the responsibility of serving the needs of the school as an intermediary between teachers and administration, or as a superior to teachers was also found in the responses. Jazmin considered the instructional coaches to be intercessors who were able to represent the needs of the teachers to the principal. She believed the presence of the instructional coaches in the Building Leadership Team to be evidence that “They help just with the building as a whole.” Briana described the existing hierarchy in the school system as one in which authority flows from the district level management to the building principals, later through the instructional coaches and then on to the teachers. Accepting the relational order of authority, her summation, “They [Instructional coaches] are told what to do and then they tell us what to do,” places the instructional coach in a position in which they have

the authority to relay orders from either building-level or district-level administration. The perceived extreme of the hierarchical spectrum for the instructional coaches was conveyed by Ruby who considered her position as inferior to that of the coaches, “They're like the ‘higher up’”. So, you have your teachers on the bottom, and then you have your instructional coaches, which are also part of the leadership team, and then your principals.” The responsibilities of the instructional coaches were defined by teachers according to their interactions, and therefore provided an incomplete understanding.

While some participants were clear about the organizational responsibilities of instructional coaches, others, especially among those in their first teaching year, were either unaware of coaches’ duties or could only define the duties based upon their observations. For instance, Sylvana responded, “Not really. I know they handle all the benchmark testing or the progress monitoring. They are in charge of all the data. Other than that, I'm not really sure what else they do.” Kimberly was only able to give a vague answer to the question based on her understanding that the instructional coach was there to help. She responded by saying, “I'm not sure what they are told to do for new teachers. I think they're just supposed to be there if we need help.” There were responses from teachers about some of the routine duties coaches carry out, duties that could be assigned to other staff less qualified. Heidi listed some of the coach responsibilities as, “lunch duty or recess duty if possible, or after school or before school. You know, those types of things.” Cali commented that her coach would help with anything, “whether it's just a break or we really need help with just someone to talk to.” In the absence of a defined set of expectations, teachers based their perceptions of the of the instructional coaches’ responsibilities on what was shown to be common practice in their schools.

A recurring theme when asked to report on the work instructional coaches with new teachers was that of the organizational structure they provide, and the acceptance of that structure. Sylvana shared the instructional coaches created a “district-wide schedule” and sequenced units of study so that all teachers across grade levels could follow a uniform plan. The concept of protocol was used by Kimberly to describe the expected standardization of instruction in all area schools. Kimberly stated that the instructional coach was the person who monitors the adherence to protocol. “She’ll [instructional coach] let us know if it is and if it is not. That way, we’re not doing something the district doesn’t want.” One of the few teachers who was able to compare instructional coaching in two districts due to a recent move, Heidi reported a reflective ‘here-and-there’ narrative that extolled the benefits of the structure that she has been given at Blue River Elementary, “So here I felt like because they offer a ton of support and even resources, or even some guidelines for the day, I feel extra relieved that I was given a structure.” As evidenced by the presence of two instructional coaches in each elementary building, the school district had invested heavily in support personnel so that new teachers could learn the expected protocol and exigencies of their profession.

Mentorship

Both teachers and instructional coaches considered the process of mentoring as a valuable necessity to guide novices in the many procedural tasks needed to manage the daily business of school. According to the teachers, a responsibility of some of the instructional coaches was to serve as mentors to fulfill a requirement in order for new teachers to earn their professional licenses. This practice created, for a few, an arrangement in which teachers were assigned a mentor and a coach, while others were assigned one person to serve in the capacity of both roles. Specifically, teacher participants expressed that they were fortunate to have the one person fulfill

dual roles. For example, “I was kind of fortunate enough to have my coach also as my mentor, which was nice,” stated Jazmin. Likewise, Vanessa, who spent a significant amount of time with her instructional coach reflected, “She's my mentor teacher, so I just spend more time with her. Because she's the one that I go to for anything teaching related pretty much just because she's my mentor teacher.” Sylvana made the distinction between the roles of instructional coach and mentor in her answer about the role of the instructional coach as a guide to the organizational structure of her school district, “That's what the mentor teacher is for. They are your go-to person.” Comments given by two different novice teachers such as “Even though the math instructional coach is not my mentor,” and “The math coach, he's not one of my mentor teachers, but he's helped me a lot too” indicate an unintended barrier to communication as a result of this dual responsibility held by some of the instructional coaches.

In what was described as a necessity due to the imbalance of available veteran teachers to mentor the growing number of novices, instructional coaches had been routinely assigned to the task. An example of how coaches adapt to the changing needs and expectations of the school organization, William described the plan, “Mainly with new teachers we are their mentors. We have to do that for teachers that have less than one-year experience.” Even though mentoring was an expectation for the coaches according to their comments, they still referred to it as an additional duty, separate and apart from their regular duties as coaches. Ariana considered her assignment as mentor to be clerical rather than pedagogical, “So a lot of things that we talk about aren't necessarily instruction, it's more, how to put grades in or contacting parents, or how to get seating charts ready. Things like that.” Ariana viewed her position as clearly divided between the distinct purposes of mentor and as instructional coach. For example, when she was asked about her role in guiding new teachers as they learned their function in the community, her response

was, “So my mentees have come to me to talk about parent involvement and how to reach parents. But a new teacher who is not my mentee would not reach out to me as an instructional coach for that.” Despite the duality of roles, instructional coaches viewed their duties in the service of new teachers as beneficial to the organization as a whole.

Perceptions of Instructional Coaching as Influential in Teacher Retention

According to the teacher participants, the role of instructional coaching continues to remain an ambiguous factor in novice teacher retention. While some teachers believed instructional coaching was influential in their decisions to remain in a school, especially the younger teachers and those who were not from the area, others considered coaching to be a benefit additional to the other supports that were in place. A few of the teachers stated that either a non-supportive coach might cause them to leave a school or the work of the instructional coach was not a decisive factor in their career paths, especially the older teachers and those who were entrenched in the life of the community. Instructional coaches recounted experiences, related to their influence on retention, in which the school environment had been determinative in career decisions made by teachers, novice and veteran.

As recounted by the participants, some factors that could potentially influence teacher retention were the limited knowledge of resources held by the instructional coach, a lack of support, and coach’s weak communication skills. Among the possible descriptions of non-supportive coaches, teachers stressed the importance of being knowledgeable in the resources, having solid people skills, and a general willingness to assist when so requested. Briana expressed concern that an instructional coach who is not knowledgeable in approved resources and strategies might jeopardize her standing in the school, “So if they weren't teaching us correctly, then that probably would be another cause for why I wouldn't want to stick around if I

was getting in trouble.” Emphasizing the importance of communication skills, first grade teacher Kimberly shared that “for a coach to not be approachable and not let you come talk to them” might cause her to leave her school. When asked to describe how the work of the coach would be of sufficient importance to cause her to leave a school, Vanessa, described a non-supportive coach as “Someone that I don't feel support from and someone that doesn't know what they're doing or doesn't want to help. Like I'm big on support. And if I don't have someone's support, I don't want to work with them.” Teachers were earnest in their ambitions to grow and succeed in their professions, and therefore expected competence from the support staff.

Other insights shared by teacher participants highlighted the belief that coaching is of insufficient importance to alter their career path. When Zoey was asked if she could be persuaded to stay in her school even if she were offered the services of exemplary instructional coaches, her responses indicated that she was appreciative of the work coaches do for new teachers; however, the answer to the question was a simple “Not really.” In response to the possibility that any level of coaching services could influence her place in a career or in a school, Ruby answered “Probably not. I mean, it helps.” Her further comments indicated that if she was not able to receive assistance from an instructional coach, she could rely on support from other colleagues.

Specifically, the relationships that new teachers developed with supportive colleagues and the lived experiences figured prominently in participants' career decisions. Zoey cited her partner teacher as being more influential than the coaches were, “I wouldn't say it's been the coaches necessarily. What influenced me to stay is my partner teacher. She's a new teacher too. This is her second or third year, and she's been wonderful.” Other teachers provided testimony about the level of investment they had in their teaching careers. After waiting until her own

children were grown to pursue a degree in elementary education, Heidi considered the possibility that a coach could influence her life decisions. She said, “I think I’m in a unique enough situation, just how I came into teaching that I don’t look to leave it.” With a similar background, Sylvana expressed her commitment to the profession and to the years she worked to get to her present position, “I personally don’t think one person can, would cause me to want to leave.” Both Heidi and Sylvana were resolute in their decisions to stay in the classroom despite the presence of an instructional coach, a pattern that was noted from the older novice teachers.

Although some teachers found the contribution of the instructional coach to be a minor factor in their retention, four of the novice teachers emphasized that the coaches did indeed influence them to stay at their present schools because of the positive school atmosphere the coaches created. Kimberly reported, “I think the coaches here make it easier for me to stay here. Like it makes me not want to leave Stony Brook Elementary because I love the relationship I have with them.” Speaking on a similar note of positivity on the school environment, Jazmin expressed her willingness to stay at Shady Creek Elementary due to the influence the coaches had had school-wide, “I definitely would say that the coaches are a huge part of the atmosphere at our school.” Vanessa reiterated the thoughts of other teachers at her school in stating the supportive nature of the professional staff encouraged her to stay at Stony Brook, “I think that just the support from them helps me want to stay here. I love the school because of all the support that the teachers have from the administration, which is the coaches along with the principal.” Even though she placed the instructional coaches in the same category as the building principal, her intent was to communicate the importance of unity across all staff levels in promoting an environment in which she wanted to remain.

To further explore the possibility that instructional coaching has an influence on retention, teachers were asked to explain how the work of coaches was important to them. Their responses raised the concern that new teachers must quickly master the programs and resources with which they are to instruct, and coaches were viewed as vital to their survival as beginners. Emphasizing inadequate professional preparation, Vanessa shared that her coach was perhaps one of the few outlets for the continuation of her training by stating, “They can only teach you so much in college. My first year is pretty much dedicated to learning the curriculum and how to teach that.” A difficulty expressed by Jazmin in her assignment as a sixth-grade math teacher was that she had not been through a full academic year and was consequently finding it difficult to sequence lesson plans. She found the instructional coach’s experience was “very helpful for me in my first year, because she helped me see things in advance before it would maybe happen.” Two teachers relayed a sense of relief that the instructional coaches frequently generated required assessment data for the RtI system and occasionally proctored assessments by the scheduled due dates.

Other than the strictly academic guidance provided by instructional coaches, new teachers defined the importance of the coach as a personal assistant who was available to support them through the formative years of their careers. A first-grade teacher, Kimberly, who captured this sentiment, stated succinctly “It's so stressful being a first-year teacher. Having someone else there to help you with things, so that way you have an idea. You are not just thrown to the wolves. They make sure that you're not going to sink.” A perception devoid of reference to programmatic regimen offered by Briana on the value she held for coaching was that “It is especially important to help me become a better teacher and make me successful to help my students become successful.” Teachers’ opinions suggested the contributions made by

instructional coaches were beyond what was expected through a structured protocol of programs and procedures, and perhaps embody a defining mission of the profession.

A question posed to the instructional coaches, which proved to be a delicate matter, elicited responses about how they viewed their roles as important enough to cause a new teacher to stay or leave a school. A few of the responses related to the question caused the coaches to relate past events in which intimidating environments created by coaches and principals had led novice teachers to leave. Describing the condition of a County Seat elementary school that experienced low levels of teacher retention, Ivy stated, “We used to have school-wide reform programs. You had facilitators that would come in and watch you teach. If you didn't do it exactly the way you were trained, you would get sat down and talked to.” Another such story, recounted by William, portrayed a situation in which an instructional coach supposedly reported to the principal about the perceived ineptitude of the teachers who sought advice. He later attempted to repair the damage by telling one of the accused novice teachers, “If you have any questions about math, come talk to me. I'm not going to go to the principal for simple questions.” At the positive end of the same question related to the coaches' actions causing new teachers to make career decisions, Ariana shared “I think that when you have an instructional coach that gives you the help that you need to become successful, that's going to make you feel like you are a successful teacher and can stay and do this job.” When asked if she had influenced any new teachers to stay, Ariana responded, “I really do, but I think it goes past instructional coaching. We have a great, great building. We have a very good family vibe and we're very family oriented,” accrediting a system of supportive staff and community members. By similarly phrasing her response in the collective, Ivy also stated, “In the last couple of years, we haven't had the turnover rate that we'd had in the past. So I think some of the supports that we have in place have help,” thus reiterating

the belief that instructional coaching has a positive effect on novice teacher retention within the structure of her school. Although instructional coaches rarely accepted the credit for teacher retention, they viewed their efforts as integral to a system responsive to the needs of newer teachers.

Instructional Coaching and Teacher Retention in a School Organization

The following sections emphasize the contribution of instructional coaching to novice teacher retention in the structure of a school system. Instructional coaches reportedly adopted the role of caretakers as they guided new teachers in building relationships in and out of the confines of the school building. From the perspective of the novice teachers, schools were represented symbolically as families in which the most proximal colleagues hold the greatest influence. In the organizational realm, coaches were viewed as the providers of instructional support, rules, and policies. Responses relevant to the internal politics of schools underlined the role of the instructional coach as an intermediary and a negotiator between novice teachers and site-based administration.

Instructional Coaching, Teacher Retention and Relationships

Participant teachers repeated the sense of belonging to a school community as a necessity for them to continue in their careers. Instructional coaches were a part of the supportive community and could serve as bridges between the new teacher and local citizens. The active engagement that instructional coaches took on behalf of the novice teachers was especially important for those who were not from the County Seat area, and therefore held no previous ties to the larger community. Reportedly, the instructional coaches made intentional efforts to unite novice teachers with the social fabric in and out of the school.

In addition to guiding teachers through curricula, novice teachers indicated the likelihood that at least some of the time with coaches would include relationship building. One of the teachers who was not from the County Seat area, Jazmin, described a time when an instructional coach invited her to join with two other teachers from Shady Creek Elementary for a social gathering outside of the school. In her words, “She was probably one of the first ones that said you should come out with us after school, which was definitely nice.” The same teacher described appreciation dinners and Christmas parties that had been planned by the instructional coaches at her school. Inversely, a third-year teacher, Kimberly, who was raised in the local community, expressed her satisfaction in having improved a working relationship with her first year partner-teacher with the guidance of the instructional coach, “I think the reading coach has made me build a relationship with my co-teacher. She's new this year.” Connecting new teachers to collegial contacts within the same school, or across other professional groups, enabled teachers to create social bonds to their colleagues and community.

As well as serving in the capacity of an intermediary in forming relationships within the individual schools, instructional coaches connected novice teachers with other professionals outside of their immediate group of colleagues. In what was described as a regular event, instructional coaches planned and presented cross-grade level meetings that served as venues for a number of teachers to work with others outside of their regular circles. Kimberly believed that the instructional coach made her feel connected to the school community by being included in this group of more experienced teachers, “I didn't know really any of the teachers coming in, so my instructional coach took me around and introduced me to everybody.” A first-year teacher from outside of the area, Zoey, who recalled that she first knew no one in County Seat, explained that the instructional coaches arranged for her to join a local group of young professionals. Her

accounting of monthly meetings as an opportunity for young people to form bonds and the efforts of the instructional coaches who “introduced me to a community group.” Teachers who were able to integrate into the life of the school and of the community expressed a lasting feeling of loyalty toward the people in their surroundings.

Reflecting on the connections to the school community and how the instructional coach had been a part of forming those connections, a few teachers reported a positive influence. Although not all participants were universal in their optimistic assessment of instructional coaching, Kimberly stated, “I think the coaches here make it easier for me to stay. It makes me not want to leave Stony Brook Elementary because I love the relationship I have with them.” Describing her first impression of the instructional coaches when introduced at new teacher orientation, Sylvana spoke reverently of her colleagues in the phrase, “They were there for us. They were always willing to help us or answer any questions or anything like that. We knew that they were there for us,” implying a sense of unity from the onset.

To provide more contextual depth pertaining to the question of how instructional coaching contributes to novice elementary teacher retention, coaches were asked to describe the work they do with the newly hired teachers. Coach participants emphasized their self-identified obligation as caretakers who were responsible for guiding new teachers in cultures in the external and internal cultures of the school. Against the backdrop of a diverse student body and a contrasting homogenous teaching staff, coaches shared a sense of alienation from the unknown culture of the students and of belonging to the known and familiar school culture. They also spoke to the reported ethnic divisions between the teaching staff of the County Seat elementary schools and the families they served. Drawing the distinction between school and community by using phrases such as, “They are a Spanish speaking family,” and “I can’t talk to the parents

because I don't speak Spanish,” Ivy paraphrased some of the conversations she had had with new teachers. Coaches reported their familiarity with the divisions while they simultaneously described their methods for assisting novice teachers in overcoming them to the benefit of the school organization as a whole. Aware of the predominant teacher culture and that of the students, coaches attempted to equip novices with strategies they could use to bridge the gap. Kaleigh explained, “When new teachers start sometimes, we have to explain some of the cultural differences that maybe they're not familiar with.” The instructional coaches’ efforts to build community, or at least minimize divisions with school families, were attempts to familiarize novice teachers with a culture that is unknown to many in the organization.

Instructional Coaching, Teacher Retention and School Culture

Portrayed by the novice teacher participants, the culture of their schools was centered on a dedication to students and the view that school is analogous to family. Perceptions from the novice teachers related to a symbolic meaning of their respective institutions reflected the relatively short duration of their tenure in that they were not able to define symbolism based on a historical perspective of past events. Their comments were more closely aligned with what could be considered a value system, an unwritten code of conduct for members of the organization. Although teachers were able to include instructional coaches as contributors to the identity of the school when prompted, they did not consider their roles to be defining in the foundation of an identity.

To separate the contributions of the instructional coach from the novice teacher’s perception of school identity and mission, the complementary question that asked the teachers to detail if the coaches had been instrumental in learning the symbolism of their school yielded few results. An emblematic story that did emerge from an interview with one teacher gives evidence

that coaches are capable of defining a shared sense of values through their actions. Recalling the events, Heidi explained that the principal's father had recently taken ill and passed away, causing an extended absence for the building principal. During this time the two instructional coaches worked together to fulfill the duties of the principal until she could return. With some relief and admiration in the retelling, it was relayed, "They just took care of it. So, the principal never had to worry one bit when she was gone those two weeks." Although the actions of the two instructional coaches in this episode may have been altruistic, their contributions were viewed as the embodiment of school identity.

When asked to describe the shared values and beliefs of their schools, and most importantly how that sense of spirit is passed on to the newest members of their organizations, instructional coaches referenced either the cohesive culture inside the school building or the contrast of that school culture to the outside community. Attributing the building principal for establishing a supportive environment, William described a sense of mission in his school as, "It's kind of felt throughout. A big component of us is trying to make sure that we're establishing positive relationships with the new teachers so that positivity can grow and not negativity." Ariana defined the sense of identity of her school as a place where "I just feel like the vibe here. It kind of draws people in. We've had teachers say that as soon as they walked in for an interview. We just love this place." As told by Ivy, the community of Blue River Elementary is seen as distinct among the other elementary schools in County Seat due to the predominant linguistic and ethnic diversity of the students. Consequently, the sense of identity shared by the school staff was that they are "Separate from everybody else because of the cultural differences," when compared to other elementary schools in County Seat.

Instructional Coaching, Teacher Retention, and School Organizational Structure

Instructional coaches in the County Seat School District were described by teachers as professionals who were responsible for ensuring a level of conformity to the expected academic programs that had been implemented by school administration. Their direct involvement with classroom teachers, specifically in the area of professional development was in response to the organization's call to bring about an adherence to standards. Kimberly described an example of this imposed order from a teacher's perspective, "We have 90 minutes of a reading block. When I started, the coaches helped to make sure that I was able to follow those time limits." Cali had conflicting perceptions about the role of instructional coaching. She indicated that despite her placement in two schools, instructional coaches had not introduced her to school policies, rules, or processes, nor had they influenced her decision to stay or leave a school. Her memories of any guidance in the area of organizational structure offered by instructional coaches were, "I don't think there really has been any. I think a lot of it has come more from the principal than from coaches." Despite her claim of not being influenced or guided by coaches, her comments to a separate question demonstrated that she had been exposed to commonly held expectations. When speaking of the new-teacher orientation, she recalled, "A lot of it was just introducing us to the curriculum that we were going to be teaching and showing us the online portions, as well as being able to find all the resources." Teachers and coaches were able to elaborate on the details and functions of a prescribed regimen of professional development, although their estimation of the efficacy was not a strong endorsement.

To reinforce organizational fidelity across the elementary schools in the County Seat School District, instructional coaches were tasked with the duty of introducing new teachers to established policies and procedures. Comments received from the coaches confirmed their

agreement on the importance of adhering to accepted standards within the organization; however, they described the efficacy of introducing policy to teachers as problematic to ascertain. Reflecting on the amount of time that she had spent with new teachers during orientation when “a lot of the district policies and procedures are covered,” Kayleigh was not able to elaborate on any effect it had on new employees. Another instructional coach, William, expressed doubts about the efficacy of forcing so much emphasis on policies and procedures on new teachers during their initial period of employment, “We, as the coaching team wish that they would do that throughout the school year because a lot of times the teachers’ minds are on getting their stuff ready for the classroom.” The instructional coach who was clear to delineate her responsibilities as either instructional coach or mentor, Ariana was most articulate in describing adherence to approved programs, “I work with all teachers, new and veteran, on how to follow all of those protocols that we need to follow for core, for intervention, for grouping children, SEL rooms and everything.” Instructional coaches offered differing opinions on their influence in providing a standard set of expectations, consequently the influence they exerted on teacher retention through the structure, and organization of the schools was indeterminate.

Instructional Coaching, Teacher Retention, and School Politics

The instructional coach was predominantly viewed by participants as an intermediary between teachers and school administration, an associate who was familiar with the bases of power in the organization. Teachers situated instructional coaches as allies to represent novice teachers when they requested assistance in managing conflict in their schools. Briana described an example of this alliance when she sought the assistance of an instructional coach in resolving conflict with a parent. She reflected, “I had the math instructional coach in here and she backed me up,” This was exemplary of a coach acting as part of a coalition to sustain the school

organization. Overall, the accessibility of instructional coaches who held knowledge in the organizational power structures was viewed as supportive to the novice teachers.

Instructional coaches were often cited in being present in the schools and consequently sought as intermediaries between teaching staff and administration. Referred to as a “go between,” the instructional coach was usually the first person a novice teacher would speak with when there was a need for advice due to the “flexibility” of the coach and the distance of the principal. According to Ruby, a method for seeking advice within the power structure of the school was to “feel it out with my instructional coaches first, and then if I need to, I’ll go to my principal.” In another example of how the availability of instructional coaches assisted in communication between differing levels authority of the school system, Jazmin shared “I also see them communicating a lot with our principal and kind of the go between, because obviously if we’re teaching, we don’t have a lot of time for us to personally go communicate with the principal.” One of the few examples of a teacher contacting district level administration was offered by Ruby, who asked an instructional coach to intervene in requesting a leave of absence, “I went to the reading coach, and she helped me line out and send an email to the superintendent asking about what I need to do.” The availability of instructional coaches at the school sites to resolve conflict was considered essential for new teachers who were in need of the support critical to the continuation of their positions in the schools.

Teachers reported to feel especially supported by the instructional coaches when in need to resolve conflict with staff. Their presence in the neutral role of mediator who negotiates between employees or as an experienced guide assisted novice teachers as they learned methods to manage conflict productively. A specific example of a coach resolving conflict between employees was recounted by Cali concerning an event that happened in her first two years of

teaching before she was transferred to another school, “There have been some times where they've [Instructional coaches] been the mediator where they've had to mediate a conversation between myself and another staff member.” Ruby explained her dependence on the instructional coach to manage the demands of supervising other adults who work in her classroom, “If I am frustrated about somebody in the school and how they are doing something in my room I can go to my instructional coaches and they will help me figure it out.” The only teacher in the study who had worked with instructional coaches in two districts retold her experience in a former position when she followed the advice of a seasoned coach after being assigned to a discordant team of teachers, “When I first started at my previous school there were a couple of teachers that were really hard. The instructional coach was very helpful in supporting me, gave me some advice on how I can approach the team.” Novice teachers considered the support provided by the instructional coaches in times of conflict to be an indication that the school as a whole was supportive of their positions.

The conflict resolution skills that instructional coaches had gained in their many years in the field were also viewed as beneficial to the teachers who requested guidance with school families. Jazmin described a scenario in which the coach took a guiding role in conflict resolution by modeling communication with concerned parents, “Any time I have a dispute with this parent, she [Instructional coach] seems to be really good at helping me find a creative way to communicate with the parent without upsetting her.” Contrastingly, another teacher described a situation in which the coach imposed a resolution to a problem with a parent rather than act as negotiator. As relayed by Kimberly, “If there's a conflict with the family that I don't feel comfortable talking to, they'll call and they'll handle it.” The relative inexperience of the novice

teacher and the many conflict management strategies held by instructional coaches explains the tendency for new teachers to seek assistance in this area.

Instructional coaches served many functions in support of novice teachers as they learn how to resolve conflict in a school organization. Coaches described situations in which they acted in the dual capacity of negotiators and guides as they worked to ameliorate conflicts on behalf of new teachers. In the retelling of a situation in which the novice teacher was expected to report to an adversarial parent the complexities of conversation held during a student intervention meeting, the coach, William, intervened, “The teacher did not feel like she was adequate enough to explain that. We just talked about it. After we explained the process to that parent, it helped quite a bit in giving some information.” Another example of an instructional coach fulfilling the dual role of negotiator and instructor in a conflict between a parent and new teacher, described by Arianna, was one in which there was a potential scenario acted out prior to an expected conference with the parent, “We did, my principal myself and this fourth-grade teacher sat down and did like a practice conference.” The results of the teacher’s performance at a later meeting with the parent were described as, “She did a really nice job. The conferences went well, and mom understood.” In addition to resolving conflicts with parents, another instructional coach described a time she helped a new teacher define boundaries for a teacher’s assistant who had previously been a long-term substitute teacher in the same school. Kaleigh recounted the process she had engaged in with the new teacher as, “We kind of walked through how she could approach the teaching assistant in a non-hostile way. I actually sat down with her and we listed out the things you would like her to do while she's in your room.” In each of these cases, the collegial relationships established by instructional coaches facilitated earnest conversations.

According to the instructional coaches, an understanding of the power structure in this school district depended upon the authority they held, relative to that of the new teacher. Stating, “Our contracts are no different than teachers,” William and other instructional coaches defined their positions as equal to that of even the first-year teacher; despite the vast difference they held in professional experiences. Instructional coach Kaleigh insisted that being an equal to a novice was essential in maintaining a trusting relationship with teachers whom, she believes, must not consider her a supervisor, “We’re not evaluators. We keep driving that in to help with that hierarchy of the school system. We make the same money as if I was teaching back in my fourth-grade classroom.” The instructional coaches, who operated as extensions of the school district, were capable of fulfilling the dual roles of functionary and colleague to the novice teacher in service of the organization.

There were situations described by instructional coaches in which they had assisted novice teachers with the organizational structure of the school system to their benefit. Referring to growth opportunities that he had recommended, William noted a change in a new teacher’s level of confidence, “Once we started offering those opportunities with leadership, and with district office, and with our building leadership team as well, she’s started to turn those things around. She’s really done pretty well at this this year.” A similar comment by Ivy suggested that professional growth opportunities with other levels of the organization, such as involving new teachers in instructional resource selection, had a self-serving effect on the organization, “They get to pilot it and then they go to the meetings and that kind of gives them more of a leadership role instead of just always kind of sitting back.” The described maneuvering within the power structures by the novice teachers enabled them to develop a deeper level of commitment to their school system.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion, Discussion, and Implications

In the following chapter, I summarize major findings under the broad categories of the perceived role of the instructional coach overall and in teacher retention, and instructional coaching and teacher retention in the school as an organization. Emerged findings are then interpreted through the lens of existing literature. Bolman and Deal's four frames theoretical model is applied to analyze the findings of instructional coaching's contribution to teacher retention within schools as organizations. Implications for theory, policy, and practice, as well as recommendations specific to instructional coaching, study limitations, and the overall significance of the study end the chapter.

Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to understand how instructional coaching influences elementary novice teacher retention within the structure of schools as interconnected organizations. The study was guided by two research questions: What are novice elementary teachers' perceptions about the role of the instructional coach, and how does instructional coaching contribute to teacher retention within the structure of a school as a system with its relationships, culture, and politics? Conclusion statements following are syntheses of findings unique to this study.

In addition to the commonly perceived duties of the instructional coach as one who supports teachers with instructional material and data management, new teachers regarded the role of the coach as equally important in the area of emotional support and peer feedback. As the stresses of being a new teacher were insurmountable for some, novice teachers often turned to

the instructional coach for emotive guidance beyond the curricular. Positive and trusting relationships with instructional coaches considered essential in the continuation of their employment, especially among the younger teachers.

In serving as the first contact above the level of teacher, instructional coaches served as intermediaries between the inexperienced teachers and school administration. This unofficial role of a trusted interceder helped teachers navigate the occasional conflict with school staff and parents. Instructional coaches had adopted the role of caretaker for the younger teachers, largely in the area of relating to the community outside of the school.

In some cases, instructional coaches were identified as critically important to the survival of new teachers in their beginning years and teacher retention. In addition, instructional coaches contributed to the overall ambience of the organization by creating a workplace in which new teachers could find success in their profession and a sense of belonging with the people in their surroundings. Other colleagues, such as teachers in the same grade level or principals, held significant influence in whether a novice teacher was to remain in the school another year.

Younger teachers and those who did not have longstanding ties to the community were especially susceptible to leaving the profession if they had not associated with a strong and supportive alliance at the school site. Teachers professionally benefitted from working with an instructional coach; however, they more often cited the interpersonal skills and knowledge of the coach as being pertinent in making a long-term commitment to staying in a school. Teachers considered the concept of family amongst the internal members of the organization to be essential in finding a school where they wanted to remain.

The instructional coaches considered their positions to be on an equal level of authority as even the most inexperienced teachers. Coaches might have intentionally minimized their roles as authority figures within the structure of the school district to minimize the perception that they represented the organizational hierarchy. They possibly used this perceived status of equality to form alliances with teachers in support of the organization. Even though the coaches spent the majority of their time in the schools, their duties included the implementation of a common set of district mandated academic expectations at the classroom level. Instructional coaches in this study were successful in acting as emissaries of the organization while maintaining close relationships with novice teachers. Whether it was through an altruistic purpose of preparing the next generation of educators, or to fulfill the needs of their organizations, instructional coaches assumed a role of caretaker over novice teachers in their charge to ensure growth and permanence in their professions. Coaches expressed frustration over their perceived inefficacy in providing a standard body of knowledge to new teachers, the purpose for which their positions were originally conceived.

Discussion

Current study supports previous research suggesting the influential role of a positive work environment and gratitude to the teacher colleagues in novice teacher retention. The duty of the instructional coach as an in-house professional developer who works in the service of the school was found to be parallel in the study and in the research alike. Discoveries from the study, but not found in research literature, included the idea that instructional coaches consider their roles custodial in the care of new teachers. Differences were noted in the commitment and disposition of young novice teachers and middle-age novice teachers.

Results from the teacher participants in terms of belonging to a community were reflective of what was found in numerous associated studies. Similar to research conducted in elementary schools by Boyd et al. (2011), Li and Allen (2020), De Jong and Campoli (2018), and Pogodzinski (2013), the novice teachers in this study frequently cited the requisite importance of working in schools communities where there was a positive and collegial environment. Opinions of their coworkers and the consequent decision to remain in a particular school were also linked to job satisfaction as was found in research pertaining to elementary teacher retention by Queyrel-Bryan et al. (2019). Teacher participants reported their need to work in a community of educators where they could access emotional support from either instructional coaches or other teachers who could relate to their experiences. A study by Fitchett (2017) on first year teachers' occupational stress resulted in a similar finding that novices seek emotional support from proximal colleagues.

There was alignment between the findings of this study and current research pertaining to the roles of instructional coaches. Descriptions of their work centered on the dual roles of curricula implementation and guide to the internal and external cultures associated with their home schools. Since the beginning of instructional coaching as a process to facilitate new resources such as Reading First, the role of the coach has been characterized, by Coburn and Woulfin (2012), and Neufeld and Roper, as one who is the extension of the implementation plan (2003). Comments from instructional coaches suggested they were primarily responsible for the professional development of teachers in their assigned schools, following what was documented in a study by Reddy on the effectiveness and interactions of instructional coaches (2019). In a parallel study over the importance of coaching in urban schools (Warren & Kelsen, 2013), it was shown that the coach who is familiar with the context of the school acts as a cultural liaison to

the newest members of the organization. Repeatedly, coaches in this study referred to their responsibilities of introducing the novice teachers to the cultures of the school families and to the quality of instruction they are responsible for improving.

A result from the study in contrast to research literature on teacher retention and instructional coaching was found in the perspective of the instructional coaches who adopted the human resource role of caretaker in valuing the relationships and feelings of new teachers (Sypawka, 2008). In numerous responses, the instructional coaches expressed how they accepted the responsibilities of guiding and representing the interests of new teachers as they became familiar with the school community and the district hierarchy. Even though there was a generational age difference between coaches and teachers, in most situations, the novices were referred to respectfully as equals in the profession who were deserving of the time invested in their success. The support for new teachers was, to some degree, politically motivated in that the coaches assisted novices so that they would remain in their positions to the benefit of the school as an organization; however, the inclusion of novices in the social fabric of the community suggested a concern beyond the confines of coaching duties (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Although the teacher participants were relatively new to the profession, the opinions they expressed differed according to their age and past life experiences. There is ample statistical information about teachers' ages and years of experience; however, a gap exists in qualitative studies that would expose the differences between young new teachers and middle-age new teachers. This study revealed the two groups showed significant distinctions. Middle-age new teachers who had already raised, or were still raising their own children, were more likely to have longstanding social and economic ties to the community. They had worked for many years in other positions and had made sacrifices to earn teaching degrees. The middle-age teachers

requested less academic, emotional, and systemic support from instructional coaches, and did not consider them to be decisive in their careers. All of the young new teachers began college immediately after high school and accepted teaching positions within a year of completion. The young new teachers from the local community expressed a sense of satisfaction at being home, while those who were from outside of the area were still trying to find their places in the community. The younger teachers expressed a strong dependence on instructional coaches for academic and emotional support.

Personal Reflections of the Researcher about the Meaning of the Research

What was most significant to me as a researcher and a practitioner in conducting this study was the perception of a school community as family, and how the condition of that family influences novice teachers in the decisions they make. Responses from novice teachers and instructional coaches repeatedly cited the importance of belonging to a harmonious professional family in their schools. My interpretation of their concept of family, as the respondents portrayed it, is that it is symbolic to elementary educators, a prerequisite for their continued participation. Central to the purpose of the study is the question of whether the instructional coaches are influential in the careers of novice teachers. The answer to that question at the conclusion of this study is dependent upon the conditions that exist within the school as a community and the lived experiences of the novice teachers who begin their careers there.

Implications for Practice, Theory, and Policy

Recommendations for practice based upon the findings of this study address actions that schools and school districts should do to improve novice elementary teacher retention with the assistance of instructional coaches. The proposed recommendations are rooted in Bolman and Deal's (2017) theoretical framework that analyzes organizational structures as interwoven

systems, interdependent and holistic. References to the managerial perspectives of organizing specific roles and resources are offered to improve formal and informal partnerships that improve teacher retention, while the less tangible concepts of unity and symbolic representation appeal to the emotional realm in maintaining a professional cadre of new teachers.

Specifically, this study enhances the application of the four frames model by categorizing research and participant responses into discrete classifications for analysis and exploration. Future application of the study findings defined explicitly as facets of the theory would enable educational practitioners to comprehend their organizations as interconnected and holistic. To be effective, the findings should be implemented with full knowledge of how the four frames are to be viewed as one unit, not divided into constituent units.

A position developed in the course of this study is that Bolman and Deal's four frames theory is applicable to the diagnosis of challenges found in school as organizations; however, the applicability of the frames should be altered according to the fundamental characteristics of school as places where humans strive and prosper. As was conceived in the formation of the problem statement, teacher retention is essential in elementary schools due to the young child's need for stable adults to lead them in their social development. Accordingly, the application of the four frames model to schools as organizations should focus more heavily on the human resource frame that identifies the stability of family and unity, and the symbolic frame, which has revealed in this study to be found in the intangible spirit of the organization where the human element is the defining symbol.

School administrators who will apply the four frames model to understand their organizations should place an emphasis on the human resource and symbolic frames as their organizations are organic, living, and changing continuously. Structural systems and the political

machinations of the school hierarchy may serve to ensure the continuation the organization as a viable entity, but they do not inspire the loyalty of the novice elementary educator. Formal actions to follow would be for school systems to assess incoming novice teachers for the risk factors associated with early leavers and create systems to appeal to their specific needs, especially in their need to belong to a positive and welcoming community. The applicability of the four frames model in school organizations is most effective when it is used to uncover the dispositions of the people who consider the school to be both home and family.

Specific interventions for schools and school districts are based on the central finding of this study, the concept of the school as family, was critical for new teachers. In order to retain novice educators at the elementary level, school organizations are urged to identify each school as a family in terms specific to the localized community and implement plans to maintain a sense of belonging for all members. To explicitly address the purpose of this study as retaining novice elementary teachers, a proposal is that school decision makers consider the concept of school as a metaphorical family from the perspective of the novice teacher, one in which those in closest proximity hold the greatest influence. Partner teachers, grade level colleagues, instructional coaches, classified employees, and principals figured prominently in the overall career satisfaction for the novice teacher. Consequently, a comprehensive policy designed to promote the human resource elements, as cited in the four frames model, of belonging, unity, and the organization as a family for those organization members who are in regular contact with novice teachers would influence a continuation of their employment. Specific interventions to promote unity, according to previously cited research, include the cultivation of supportive building principals, teacher autonomy in curricular decisions, and the maintenance of a positive and collegial climate.

A finding of this study that pertains to the question of teacher retention is there are distinctions among new teachers, which affect the possibility of them staying in a location and in the vocation. Novice teachers who were younger or who did not have longstanding ties to the community were less committed to staying in the area. An implication for schools and school decision makers is they first identify novice teachers who are at risk for leaving the school in the formative years of their careers and analyze the system through the lens of theory to find appropriate solutions. Coaches who intentionally introduce new teachers to social groups internal to the school and in the larger community provide new teachers with a support group, as is posited in the human resource frame of the four frame model, especially for those who do not have longstanding ties to the area. Instructional coaches, as professionals who are often entrenched in the life of the community, are well positioned to serve as cultural liaisons to guide new teachers as they seek a sense of belonging in an unknown place.

Notable differences in the four schools of this case study revealed the perception of one school, Blue River Elementary, as a location to be avoided. In the well-intended words of the citizenry, teachers who were stationed there were to be “prayed for.” A recommendation for school districts is to recognize the enduring symbolic power that a school embodies as a representation of what is beneficial in the community, in the staff, and in the families who depend on public education. Diverse and low-income schools, such as the four elementary schools represented in this study, offer opportunities for practitioners to recognize and guide the symbolic power of their institutions. Instead of allowing the narrative to develop as one in which a certain school is undesirable, develop that school as an emblem, a location where the level of instruction is exemplary, a place where veteran and novice alike aspire to be.

Directly addressing the proposition that instructional coaching is influential in the retention of elementary novice teachers, the following recommendations to practitioners suggest the redefinition of coaches as being knowledgeable in the emotional as well as the academic realms. The findings of this study detailed a supportive dependency that often developed between the new teacher and the more experienced instructional coach. New teachers were as equally likely to access the instructional coach for the emotional support they needed to manage stress, as they were to seek academic advice. Pre-employment practices for instructional coaches should include screening for personal attributes that indicate a concern for relationships and feelings, the ability to form partnerships, and effective communication skills. For these recommendations to be implemented with fidelity, school and district administration must comprehend the complexity of the many roles carried out by instructional coaches in the service of their organizations. Accordingly, a recommendation is that school districts apply the tenets of the human resource frame as they provide professional development for instructional coaches in the field of emotional support and conflict management for new teachers to help them cope with the many rigors of their careers.

It was shown in the findings that new teachers in this study were able to seek the assistance of the instructional coaches easily due to their close proximity. Each elementary school in this study had two instructional coaches located on-site. Teachers often sought the assistance of the instructional coaches to intercede when assistance was needed for conflict resolution and communication with other levels of authority, instead of the building principal due to scheduling restraints. A recommendation to schools and school districts is that they recognize the political role of the instructional coach as in-house resource and place them in locations

where they can be readily available to as many novice teachers as is possible to increase the level of interaction between the two groups.

The efforts by instructional coaches to create social bonds had a causal effect that resulted, for some teachers, in a sense of unity with the small professional class of the town. This is one of the few areas to which the four frames model, specifically the application of the human resource frame, might suggest a causation between instructional coaching and teacher retention. Teachers reported a positive family ambience in the schools that encouraged them to remain. In the words of the teachers, that positive school atmosphere had been created, to some degree, by the instructional coaches. With a brief span of time upon which they could recall past events, new teachers symbolically defined their schools not through the lens of history, but by what they most know in their surroundings, the people with whom they associated. They described their schools as families in which the employees of similar status were the most closely related.

Limitations of the Study and Areas for Future Research

The purpose for including a section on the limitations of a study is for the researcher to “provide a critical evaluation of their research by interpreting the limitations or weaknesses of the study that may have affected the results” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 469). This study has a number of limitations imposed by the low number of instructional coach participants, a study site where teachers have access to two full time in-house instructional coaches, researcher positionality, and the data collection format imposed by the COVID-19. Limitations explained below are not intended to question the validity of the study; they are written to inform the reader of any potential weaknesses as identified by the researcher.

One of the limitations of this study was the low number of instructional coaches who volunteered to participate. Only three of the schools were represented by the instructional

coaches, while there were teachers from four of the schools. The limited response from instructional coaches reduced the depth of responses that would have emerged from a sampling of all elementary schools within the school district. The small number of instructional coaches limited data saturation, defined as a point at which the researchers “begin hearing the same responses to the interview questions or seeing the same behaviors in observations” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The experiences of the four instructional coaches were diverse, yet their contributions to the study were significant. Greater participation from more instructional coaches might have uncovered themes not identified in this study.

Another limitation related to instructional coaches is that in the County Seat School District elementary teachers are in regular contact with two in-house instructional coaches. The ability of the teachers to speak to the topic of instructional coaching was extensive, likely more than what could be expected in most elementary schools. This study follows Yin’s (2016) recommendation on selecting a topic and a study site as, “Your goal is to avoid inadvertent repetition or reinvention, ” (p. 30) by being aware of the research and the locations in which parallel studies have taken place. Although this case study is bounded by specific location, the research transferability may be problematic. If this same study were conducted in schools where the contact between novice teachers and instructional coaches was infrequent, participant responses could potentially generate different results.

Another possibly limiting factor in this study might have been the unintended influence of the researcher. Even though there were attempts to conceal the occupation of the researcher, an Internet search could have revealed the researcher as an elementary principal in a comparable town, in close proximity from the study site. I suspect that knowledge of the researcher as an

elementary school principal might have influenced the number of participants and, in some cases, limited the extent of responses to questions concerning career decisions.

A critique of this case study is that it was conducted during the COVID-19 Pandemic, which severely limited contact with study participants and locations. Interviews with all 13 of the participants were conducted via teleconferences in October, November, and December of 2020 during the height of the pandemic, at a time when face-to-face contact was not safe or feasible. It would have been enlightening to interview individual teachers together with instructional coaches to analyze the interpersonal communication and non-verbal cues; however, contact with them was in a one-on-one format that did not allow for observation of context. Finally, the experiences of the novice teachers were not typical, due to the interruptions they had suffered when the schools were forced to close in March 2020, or the start of the school year was complicated by COVID-19 abatement practices in August 2020.

Based on the limitations of the study and existing literature, areas for further exploration that would advance the understanding of elementary teacher retention and the influence of instructional coaching include the contact between the two parties in the field and in the study setting and a more in-depth field exposure for the researcher. As previously mentioned, the presence of two instructional coaches in one elementary school allows a constant access for teachers who request assistance. Therefore, research that examines teacher retention should continue in locations where contact with an instructional coach is less frequent due to geographical distance, budgetary constraints, or administrative prioritization. In addition, future research that could pair teachers with their coaches during interviews would allow for an analysis of shared discussion between the two groups, as it was discovered to be a critical factor in the career decisions made by many novice teachers. Additional studies on the professional

experiences and education of instructional coaches alone could provide an in-depth understanding of their characteristics. Finally, a future study of teacher retention and instructional coaching would be more revealing if it were conducted in the field with multiple and extended visits to the study sites. Continued research on this topic that follows the principles of a bounded case study (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015), in which the researcher is physically present in the place to fulfill the purpose of the study could ultimately benefit school and school systems.

An exploration of decisions to implement instructional coaching on a larger scale would contribute to the transferability of this study. School officials generally make the decisions to place instructional coaches in the field, yet their perspectives about the efficacy and the duties of coaches were not revealed in the course of this study. As the purpose of this study was to understand how instructional coaching influences elementary novice teacher retention, an additional study that would explore the administrative rationale for placing instructional coaches in schools would find application in other settings. Additionally, a mixed-methods study conducted in a larger school district could identify the statistical trends in teacher retention not available in small districts, such as the one used in the execution of this study, while still analyzing administrative decisions and teacher motivations based upon participant responses.

The Overall Significance of the Study

This study demonstrated that instructional coaching increased the likelihood that novice elementary teachers will remain in their schools and careers when those organizations recognize and meet the teachers' basic needs of belonging. An outcome of the study showed instructional coaches were capable of influencing the longevity of a novice elementary teacher's career when the coaches contributed to the development of what was often referred to symbolically by both

groups of participants as “family.” The study also revealed there were significant differences in retention patterns for younger teachers who did not have ties to the local community when compared to their older colleagues who had lived in the area for many years. Other new knowledge generated in the completion of this study established the influence of the instructional coach, acting as cultural liaison, served as a positive force for either integrating new teachers into the social fabric of the community or adversely influence new teachers by perpetuating negative community stereotypes. Finally, this study contributes to the field of education uniquely by examining teacher retention and instructional coaching in the context of schools as organizations through a four frames theoretical model in a bounded case study design.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol for Teachers

Date of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Start time:

End time:

Name of Interviewee:

Recording Mechanism:

Introduction:

Hello, my name is John Montford. I am conducting a doctoral study from Wichita State University's Educational Leadership program. Your willingness to participate in this interview is greatly appreciated. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how instructional coaching influences the retention of beginning teachers. The name of the study is **A Study of Novice Elementary Teachers' Voices on Their Retention and the Role of Instructional Coaching.**

You have been selected to participate in the study due to your position as an elementary teacher in the first five years of a career in education. The unique knowledge that you possess will contribute to the research. Please keep in mind that I am interested in your perceptions and experiences related to teacher retention and instructional coaching.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. To ensure confidentiality, no names will be used when I report the results of the session. With your permission, I would like to audio-record our session so that I will be able to make accurate analysis directly from your comments. The digital recording of our conversation will be transcribed and for confidentiality, the recording and transcription will be kept in a secure location for the duration of, and after the conclusion of the study. This session will last no more

than 60 minutes. If at any time you no longer want to participate in this interview, just say so and we will stop.

Review the signed Informed Consent form with the participant.

Research Question 1: What are novice elementary teachers' perceptions about the role of the instructional coach?

1. Tell me about the work that the instructional coach does with you as a new teacher.
2. Do you know what the coach's responsibilities are?
3. Explain how the work of the coach is important for you.
4. Has the coach influenced you in making a decision to stay in this school? Explain.
5. In what way is the work of the coach important enough to cause you to stay or leave a school? Explain.

Research Question 2: How does instructional coaching contribute to teacher retention within the structure of a school as a system with its relationships, culture, and politics?

6. Has the instructional coach helped guide you through school district policies, rules, or processes that would influence your decision to stay or leave? Explain.
7. Describe the connections that you feel to the school community, the teachers, and the principal.
8. How has the coach helped you build these relationships?
9. How does the instructional coach help you resolve conflict? Has it influenced your decision to stay or leave?
10. Who makes the decisions in your school and how are those decisions made?
11. How has the instructional coach helped you to negotiate the power structures in your school?

12. Describe the mission and identity of this school. How is that identity passed on to new teachers?

13. How has the instructional coach helped you to learn the school's mission and identity?

Thank you for your time today. I very much appreciate your contribution to our study on teacher retention. I will take your audio taped interview and create a transcript of your comments. Using your work email, I will send you the transcript for review. I would ask that you verify the transcript as an accurate representation of our discussion today. If not, you will have the opportunity to advise me of needed changes.

May I contact you if I have any questions while I complete the transcription?

Again, I thank you for your assistance with this doctoral study. If you have any questions, you can reach me by contacting, John Montford at jcmontford@shockers.wichita.edu.

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol for Instructional Coaches

Date of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Start time:

End time:

Name of Interviewee:

Recording Mechanism:

Introduction:

Hello, my name is John Montford. I am conducting a doctoral study from Wichita State University's Educational Leadership program. Your willingness to participate in this interview is greatly appreciated. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how instructional coaching influences the retention of beginning teachers. The name of the study is **A Study of Novice Elementary Teachers' Voices on Their Retention and the Role of Instructional Coaching.**

You have been selected to participate in the study due to your position as an instructional coach who works with elementary teachers in the first five years of their careers. The unique knowledge that you possess will contribute to the research. Please keep in mind that I am interested in your perceptions and experiences related to teacher retention and instructional coaching.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. To ensure confidentiality, no names will be used when I report the results of the session. With your permission, I would like to audio-record our session so that I will be able to make accurate analysis directly from your comments. The digital recording of our conversation will be transcribed and for confidentiality, the recording and transcription will be kept in a secure

location for the duration of, and after the conclusion of the study. This session will last no more than 60 minutes. If at any time you no longer want to participate in this interview, just say so and we will stop.

Review the signed Informed Consent form with the participant.

Research Question 1: What are novice elementary teachers' perceptions about the role of the instructional coach?

1. Tell me about the work that you perform with new teachers.
2. Explain how the work of the coach is important for new teachers.
3. Do you believe that you have influenced new teachers in making a decision to stay in this school? Explain.
4. In what way is the work of the coach important enough to cause a new teacher to stay or leave a school? Explain.

Research Question 2: How does instructional coaching contribute to teacher retention within the structure of a school as a system with its relationships, culture, and politics?

5. Explain your involvement in guiding new teachers through school district policies and rules.
6. What is your role in integrating the new teacher into the school community?
7. Is it the role of the instructional coach to facilitate relationships building for new teachers? Explain.
8. Are you involved in helping new teachers resolve conflict? Describe a situation when this happened in your experience as an instructional coach.
9. How have you helped new teachers negotiate the power structures in your school? Explain.

10. Is the school's mission and identity passed on to new teachers by instructional coaches?

Explain.

Thank you for your time today. I very much appreciate your contribution to our study on teacher retention. I will take your audio taped interview and create a transcript of your comments. Using your work email, I will send you the transcript for review. I would ask that you verify the transcript as an accurate representation of our discussion today. If not, you will have the opportunity to advise me of needed changes.

May I contact you if I have any questions while I complete the transcription?

Again, I thank you for your assistance with this doctoral study. If you have any questions, you can reach me by contacting, John Montford at jcmontford@shockers.wichita.edu

APPENDIX C

IRB Approval Letter



Date: October 26, 2020

Principal Investigator: Victoria Sherif

Co- Investigators: John Montford

Department: CLES

IRB Number: 4849

Title: A Study of Novice Elementary Teachers' Voices on Their Retention and the Role of Instructional Coaching

This letter is to certify that based on the exemption categories and conditions pursuant to Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations Part 46 (45CFR46.104) the Wichita State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that your research qualifies for a Category 2 exemption. This exemption applies only to the proposal as written and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

A determination that research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research. Depending on the nature of the study, investigators performing exempt studies may need to make provisions to obtain informed consent, protect confidentiality, minimize risks, and address problems or complaints.

Please keep this letter with your protocol files as documentation of IRB exemption approval. If you have any questions, you may contact me at IRB@wichita.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Linda Steinacher'.

Linda Steinacher
IRB Administrator