School Principals and Instructional Coaches: an Examination of Their Working Relationships in Maine Schools

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SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES:
AN EXAMINATION OF THEIR WORKING RELATIONSHIPS
IN MAINE SCHOOLS

By

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School principals are charged with being instructional leaders and yet they are tasked with obligations and face daily challenges that often make this an unrealistic expectation. According to the Maine Department of Education, 225 instructional coaches work in 53 Maine school districts. Instructional coaches provide feedback and support for teachers geared towards professional growth. This study will explore how instructional coaches and school principals can work together to support teaching and learning. While both school principals and instructional coaches “share the ultimate goal of effecting positive change” (Hall & Simeral, 2008, p. 23) their relationships may not always promote this way of thinking.

This study consisted of 32 interviews (16 instructional coaches and 16 school principals) held over Zoom. The interview questions were created to gain information as to what affects the relationships between a school principal and the instructional coach as well as the conditions within the schools that have an impact on these relationships. The participants were asked to define instructional leadership and their responses point to a collective responsibility with both instructional coaches and school principals working together to support teachers. The findings from this study illustrate the ways in which coaches, administrators and teachers can benefit from these professional relationships.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, John and Linda Gillis, for always believing in me. Dad, you were alive when I began this doctorate program. And I still have felt your presence on days when I was ready to quit. I could hear your voice, and feel that look, pushing me onward. While I miss you every day, I know you are still with me. Mum, thanks for your unwavering support and wonderful hugs. I love you both so very much. And to my children, Molly and Ethan, I am so very proud of the adults you have become. To my grandson Abraham, you light up my life every day, but especially on the darkest of days; your smile and antics are infectious. I am so thankful for the joy that being your mother and grandmother has brought and I am forever grateful for the three of you. I love you more than words can express.
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Thank you to Cat Biddle for guiding me through this process, and for suggesting I join the EdD cohort and for serving as my advisor. And mostly for not giving up on me, even when I was ready to give up on myself. To Ian Mette, thank you for your willingness to serve on my committee even when on sabbatical. Your thinking and guidance have been instrumental to getting me to where I am today. Thank you to Debra Hogate, Tammy Mills and Paul Knowles for serving on my dissertation committee. I am so very appreciative for your encouragement and input and willingness to provide both on a very tight timeline! And to Laura, Susan, Mia, David, Dan, Brian, Rad, Glen, Ryan, Scott, Josh and Paul, thank you for welcoming me into Alpha Delta, and providing support in the final stages of this long dissertation journey. I don’t get the jokes about pork rinds, but I have felt welcome, nonetheless!

I would also like to acknowledge MSAD 52 for its financial support through this doctoral program as well as my master’s program. Thank you to MSAD 52’s first instructional coaches-Elaine Gammon, Mallory Murphy and Julie Schmidt, you have inspired me with your belief in the power of coaching. Special thanks to my superintendent Kim Brandt for encouraging me along the way and reminding me to celebrate the milestones.
Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support, especially during the past 10 years. To my sisters, Kathleen and Colleen, thank you for the advice, the encouragement, the food, the wine, the Facetimes, thank you for it all! And to my brothers-in-law, Dennis and Scott, thanks for putting up with the sister shenanigans, and supporting our family through a wild decade! To my nephews, Dylan, Evan, Owen and Alex-you have earned degrees during the time it has taken me to start and finish one-thanks for not quitting and setting the bar high! To my nieces, “the Slaydies”, Anna, Lindsay, Madison, Haley, Hannah and Eliza-I did it! Thanks for being a great cheering section and showing up as the next generation of strong women! Lastly, thank you to my brother, Timothy, for having strength in the face of near constant adversity. I’m not sure that you know it, but your bravery sustains me-you are my hero.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Instructional coaches are becoming more and more prevalent in schools in the United States. Schools are hiring coaches to support teachers in varied areas of teaching including literacy, math and technology. The popularity of coaching in education is spreading, with Matsumura et al. (2009) suggesting “School district leaders and principals in nearly every urban district in the country are hiring coaches to help meet ambitious reform goals for instruction and learning” (p.656). This national trend is mirrored in Maine schools. The Maine Department of Education NEO database lists 225 instructional coaches across 53 school districts (Maine Department of Education, May 2020). And while they are identified as instructional coaches within the NEO database, these instructional coaches may be called Literacy Coaches, Math Coaches, EL Coaches, School Coaches, or Technology Coaches within their school or district. Regardless of their title, these coaches are hired to support teachers. Eisenberg et al., 2017 noted that “A coach's role is to help teachers, in non-evaluative and confidential ways, to implement effective instructional strategies. Coaches help teachers identify their strengths and, working together, strategize ways to bolster practice” (p. 3). Coaching can take many forms, however. It may look like a teacher and coach sitting together and reviewing content standards to plan a unit; it may be designing pre-and post-assessments to measure the effectiveness of instruction or it may look like reviewing classroom assessments to evaluate the success of their teaching and planning for reteaching of unlearned concepts. Coaching also can be the delivery of whole school professional development, or support for the implementation of new instructional materials. Coaches may work directly with students as part of a school’s Response to Intervention (RTI) process.
While teachers hold the primary responsibility, they are not the only ones responsible for teaching and learning. School principals are called to be instructional leaders, responsible for the improvement of teachers and the instructional practices they utilize within their classrooms (Fink & Resnick, 2001). The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) stress the importance of the school principal as a party responsible for the “academic success and well-being” (p.10) of students. In addition to the responsibility for the students, these professional standards also highlight the responsibility that school leaders hold for the support and growth of the teachers within their schools.

School principals are required to possess knowledge, poise and passion. They must be able to perform tasks that are both diverse and complex. However, their principal preparation programs may not have provided them with the knowledge and expertise to successfully do their job. Additionally, once a principal is leading a school, the leadership role is ever changing, requiring updated skills. Instructional coaches may provide this needed support to school principals. Aguilar (2013) suggests, “Coaching offers a model for professional development that can support teachers and principals in making immediate and long-term changes and becoming artful masters in our profession…” (p.16).

Problem Statement

School principals are faced with a myriad of responsibilities each day. Principals are required to handle tasks related to the management of the school facilities; the supervision of staff and students; the evaluation of staff; communication with various parties including families, school board members, parent organizations, businesses and the media. With the increased focus on accountability and student performance resulting from the 2001 No Child Left Behind
legislation and more recently Every Student Succeeds Act, signed into law in 2015, principals are charged with leading school improvement and creating a culture of continuous improvement for both students and staff (Portin et al., 2009 as cited in Mendels & Migang, 2013).

This expectation for principals to create schools where learning and student achievement is front and center (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013) has given rise to the term instructional leader. In his book, Visible Learning, Hattie’s synthesis of research on school leaders has found instructional leadership (leadership focusing on high expectations for both students and teachers as well as clear objectives for learning) to have a mean effect of $d = 0.57$ or higher with the implementation of specific instructional leadership characteristics (Hattie, 2009, p. 83). Danielson (2007) indicated that given the amount of knowledge expected of a principal, it is important to consider that “principals have limited expertise” (p.16) and cannot possess a deep understanding of all content knowledge that is taught within their school. Hallinger (2005) noted, “one of the major impediments to effective school leadership is trying to carry the burden alone” (p. 234) and suggests that other school personnel including teachers be brought into the equation.

Instructional coaches can help to carry this burden. Marks and Printy (2003) indicate that instructional leadership is most effective when it is shared and emphasized “the principal’s interactive role with teachers in the central areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment” (p. 392). School principals are considered to hold the highest leadership role in schools. And while schools may implement leadership roles and assign various titles to these teacher leaders, nevertheless, the principal remains in the highest ranked position. By rethinking the traditional view of leadership whereby one person is the lone leader, Boylan (2013) suggests consideration be given to what he describes as system leadership, defined as “the practices of those who extend
their arenas of leadership from within a school or organization to interschool or wider networks” (p.1). Instructional coaches are part of this core network within schools. Expanding the definition of instructional leadership beyond the principalship to include those who work directly with students and with the curriculum, makes sense given the responsibilities of the school principal. Instructional coaches and teachers are natural choices to work alongside principals to embody shared instructional leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Very little is known about the relationships between principals and instructional coaches. Matsumura and colleagues (2009) indicated, “to our knowledge, no studies have directly linked or examined the relations between principal leadership and the successful implementation of a coaching program” (p. 661). Thirteen years later, the relationship between principals and instructional coaches is still under researched. Knight (2007), a prominent figure in the field of instructional coaching, noted that skilled coaches will have a big impact, but if a skilled coach is partnered with a skilled school administrator, the impact is much greater. Knight concluded that instructional coaches must truly be in a partnership with their principals in order to be efficacious. While this is all well and good, it is important to research what this partnership looks like in real world application.

**Justification for the Study**

The idea of instructional coaches supporting school principals in the form of instructional leadership, building “will, skill, knowledge and capacity” (Aguilar, 2013, p. 8) is worth considering. Instructional coaches provide support to teachers; and they may also provide support to principals. If schools are going to focus on teaching and learning, “Nobody needs to be isolated. Not the principal, the coach, the teachers, or the students” (Sweeney and Mausbach,
This study is needed to examine current relationships between instructional coaches and school principals and determine how instructional coaches may provide support to principals who are inundated with the demands of their job. Also worthy of consideration is the role of the supervision and evaluation in the coaching-administrator relationship.

Neumerski (2012) notes that rather than researching the roles of school principals and instructional coaches in isolation, studying what transpires in schools between principals, coaches and teachers as a holistic approach, rather than an atomistic one is necessary (p.311). Dewitt (2020) writes that instructional coaching is “not about one person knowing more than the other person, as much as it is about diving into a deep learning partnership together and learning from one another” (p.3). Sweeny and Mausbach (2018) believe that coaches are “critical in helping school principals meet the teaching and learning demands in their school” (p. 1).

Kraft et al. (2018) write that “teacher coaching has a deep history in educational practice” (p. 549). Their meta-analysis of 60 studies of teacher-coaching programs found “large positive effects on instruction and smaller positive effects on achievement” (p. 577). Guiney (2001) wrote that coaching is not just for athletes and indicated

the ongoing, in-house professional development that these coaches provide teachers-modeling classroom teaching strategies, spearheading collaborative engagement in evaluating student work, connecting staff to the most recent research on best practice-turns out to be an invaluable tool in the district’s commitment to improving student achievement (p. 743).

As my district considered adding coaching positions, the focus was very much on the implementation of and communication around coaching. Three of the district schools were gaining a coach, and the remaining three schools would have to wait for a coach and the budget to be able to fund them. Principals were excited to have a coach with whom to discuss teaching and learning. Someone with whom they could plan professional development for staff, work
beside to analyze data, and discuss curriculum and standards. The positions were put in place to support teachers, and shortly after implementation began, it appeared that in addition to teachers, principals were also receiving the benefits of coaching. Only able to see how three principals and three coaches operated together, I wondered if what I was observing in these partnerships was also taking place across Maine schools. Furthermore, I hypothesized that there were specific conditions that made some relationships flourish, while others floundered.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between instructional coaches and school principals to determine the impact of these relationships on the work of the school principal. Research has shown that teachers benefit from coaching support (Guiney, 2001; Kraft et al., 2018). However, the relationship that school principals have with their instructional coaches may vary depending on conditions within the school. These conditions include school culture, the implementation of coaching, the personalities of the school principals and instructional coaches as well as communication, support and training. It is important to consider the conditions and their impact on the relationships as well as how the relationships are portrayed. If we have a clear understanding of the elements present with a successful relationship that benefits both the instructional coaches and school principals, it would be of value to share this information within the education community in hopes of replicating it in other schools. By having a better understanding of the conditions, it will be more likely that replication can occur. It is also possible that in schools where there are instructional coaches, school principals may feel less isolated, by having a person with whom the responsibility for teaching and learning can be shared. This study explored the beliefs of, the relationships
between, and the conditions that support or undermine, school principals and instructional coaches in Maine public schools.

This study concentrated on the relationships between instructional coaches and school principals by considering the beliefs that instructional coaches and school principals hold about their work in schools, the manner in which roles and responsibilities of each position come into play as instructional coaches and school principals work with their staff, and the conditions that hinder or help these relationships. Principals were asked to describe the qualities of their instructional coaches, as well as speculate as to what might improve their relationship. Instructional coaches were asked the same questions. All participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences with instructional coaching and consider additional information to be considered during this study.

Research Questions

This study focused on these two questions:

1. How do school principals and instructional coaches work together and support each other as instructional leaders?

2. How does school culture, implementation of coaching, communication, and training and support impact the professional relationships of instructional coaches and school principals?

Methods

This study consisted of a series of interviews with school principals and instructional coaches. The interviews were conducted on Zoom, recorded, and transcribed. Transcripts were
then sent to each participant for a final review. Open, axial and selective coding was done initially by hand and then with NVIVO. As the data began to tell the story, categories were formed, and aligned with the interview questions and conceptual framework.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In schools across the country, as well as in Maine, school principals and instructional coaches are working together. While a school principal is a familiar position within the education system, an instructional coach is less understood. Confusion as to their role with both teachers and administrators is prevalent. In some instances, the instructional coach may be viewed as a quasi-administrator. This literature review provides a historical perspective of the roles and responsibilities of school principals and instructional coaches including supervision and evaluation of staff; the expansion of instructional coaching in education; and the relationships of the principal and coach as well as the conditions within schools that impact these relationships. The theoretical framework provides context for the conceptual framework drawing from the theories of andragogy and transformative learning.

Historical Perspective: The School Principal

The position of principal has evolved since its early beginnings in the early 1800s when a “principal teacher” (Kafka, 2009, p.321) was created to help support the growth of schools from one room school houses to schools with several classrooms. As “communities grew and stabilized, they expanded…to employ a lead administrator…called a preceptor, schoolmaster, head teacher, or principal” (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 9). Features of the early principalship include grading of students, the size of the school, the separation of boys and girls, and lastly, that principals spend part of their day teaching (Pierce, 1935, p. 2). “This structure of a practicing teacher functioning as the head of the school was satisfactory when schools were small, non-graded, and directly supervised by local persons” (Goodwin, Cunningham & Eagle, 2005, p.2); when the role of the principal expanded, it became one focused on management of the school,
teachers and students (Hallinger, 1992, p.35; Goodwin et al, 2005, p.6). This role transition for the school principal from teacher to manager of the school, with a focus on teaching adults, not children, “slowly emerged as the primary instructional role for principals” (Cuban, 1985, p. 113).

While the expectations for principals morphed, there is little indication that principals were prepared. Bush (2009) noted that “this focus on principals as head teachers underpins the view that a teaching qualification and teaching experience are the only necessary requirements for school leadership” (p.376). As the focus for principals shifted from teaching students, to teaching teachers, Cuban (1985) pointed out that principals were not necessarily prepared to teach adults (p. 113). By the end of the nineteenth century, the expectations for principals were still unclear, “the public school principal was….with no perceptible or permanent job description, holding multiple job responsibilities and no clear directive for improving children’s education” (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 28).

In his book Cultivating Leadership in School, Donaldson wrote that during the first half of the 1900s, “a good school leader….met the requirements of the central office and community board” (p. 5). Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, principals had the additional responsibility for the oversight of federally mandated programs including bilingual education and specialized education for students with special needs (Hallinger, 1992, p. 36). Compliance towards these mandates tended to be the general focus of principals rather than on the impact that these programs made for their schools. Additionally, “relatively few American principals could avoid the responsibilities that came with program and curriculum management” (Hallinger, 1992, p. 36).
Bush (2009) attributed the expanded role of school leadership to two external and opposing forces. The “accountability pressures” come from several sources including parents, government and the general public and the “devolution of powers from local, regional or national bureaucracies to the school level” (p. 376). These forces have caused a greater expansion of the role of the school principal without relinquishing other responsibilities. Cuban (1985) added an extra element to the tension between management and instruction when he added politics. He describes it in this way, “by their decisions and actions, by their uses of formal and informal power, by interpersonal skills, by their core values, principals determine the degree to which a policy is implemented faithfully, converted to fit the school, or ignored” (p. 115).

Even considering managerial and political functions, the 1980s saw a renewed focus on instructional leadership as the primary responsibility of principals. Dewitt (2017) writes that “Instructional leaders focus conversations around the learning that is happening in class” (p.21). He goes on to describe other tasks linked to instructional leadership, including spending time in classrooms with teachers and students and conversations around feedback. While Dewitt (2017) urged those in schools to partake in this collaborative nature of leadership, he pointed out that “teaching, instruction, unions, prep time and common planning time” (p.29) are distractions that face those in education and focus more on the adults than on the students. Hallinger (2015) contends that “the school principal has always been expected to perform a variety of roles” (p. 222). “There are simply not enough hours in the school day for a conscientious principal to fulfill the many responsibilities of an administrator and an instructional leader” (Ferrandino, 2001, p. 440). There is little dispute that school principals have a great deal of responsibilities. At the center of these responsibilities, is teaching and learning. Kafka (2009) asserts that “the call for principals to accomplish great things with little support, and to be all things to all people”
remains consistent (p. 328). Despite a general understanding in the education community that principals aspire to be the instructional leaders within their schools, the reality is that they are often caught up in tasks that are more about management than about instruction. Rigby (2014) states that “current research has a renewed focus on principals as evidence builds that their actions as instructional leaders matter for what happens in classrooms” (p.612). Try as they might, principals spend relatively little time observing teaching and learning; and less time still supporting the instructional practices taking place in the classrooms (Fink & Resnick, 2001). In order to determine how instructional leadership plays into the role of the principalship and the relationship between school principals and instructional coaches, it is necessary to unpack both the meaning and the importance of instructional leadership.

*From Manager to Instructional Leader*

School principals may be viewed as administrators, managers, instructional leaders or the person in charge of the school. “School leaders matter for school success” (Grissom & Loeb, 2011, p. 1091) and are ultimately responsible for all that happens within their school. King (2002) writes that administrative roles have expanded over the past twenty years, with the focus on instructional leadership which she describes as “anything that leaders do to improve teaching and learning in their schools and districts” (p.62). Ferrandino (2001) contends that given the changes within public schools, “21st-century principals will need to develop skills and strategies that aren’t taught in graduate school” (p. 441). King (2002) noted that while the specifics may vary due to the nature of each individual school and district needs, the framework for instructional leaders includes: focusing on teaching and learning, developing leadership capacity, creating conditions for professional learning, using data to inform decisions and using resources creatively (pp.62-63). Preston and Barnes (2017) examined leadership in rural schools. They
focused on the traits, actions and behaviors of successful leaders. Among the findings from their literature review was that “the effective rural principal is a strong instructional leader” (p.11).

The roles of school principals and the accompanying tasks remain in the overlapping realms of management and leadership. The expectation for principals to be both an instructional leader and a school manager is spelled out in the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). These professional standards compiled in Table 1 were developed with guidance from The National Association of Elementary school principals (NAESP), National Association of Secondary school principals (NASSP), and American Association of School Administrators (AASA). The public was invited to provide input while the standards were being developed and the National Policy Board for Education Administration (NPBEA) currently oversees these standards, noting their significance to the profession of educational leadership.
### Table 1

**Professional Standards for Educational Leaders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEL Standard</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1: Mission, Vision and Core Values</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 9: Operations and Management</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 10: School Improvement</td>
<td>Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These standards organize what the literature has been indicating—that the roles of school principals have been and continue to be a collection of expansive and eclectic expectations (Cuban, 1985; King, 2002; Rousmaniere, 2013: Whitaker, 2003). Murphy et al. (2016) used the term “instructional management” to describe the past 40 years of the principalship and noted that “with the start of the school effectiveness movement, time devoted to instructional work has changed very little” (p. 455). While the focus may have moved from management to instructional leadership, the reality of school principals’ work has not shifted with the focus. Instead principals shoulder all the responsibilities, from “being able to balance a budget, load children on buses safely and on time, maintain a safe learning environment, and recruit and support the best faculty possible” (Brazer & Bauer, 2013, p. 646). “Today’s school leaders are expected to be informed, organized, and maintain focus on instructional improvement and classroom practice” (Fuentes and Jimerson, 2020, p. 7) while balancing the other responsibilities of the job. Instructional leadership “requires leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions that move schools to an inquiry footing and a path of continuous improvement with respect to teaching and learning” (Brazer & Bauer, 2013, pp. 646-647) and is not replacing the role of school management, but adding additional expectations onto the principal. And principals in the field “increasingly see themselves as accountable for instructional leadership, regardless of whether or not they feel competent to perform it” (Hallinger, 2005, p. 233).

While researchers write about the importance of instructional leadership and principals aspire to be an instructional leader, it is necessary to have a clear definition of instructional leadership. Additionally, responsibilities for instructional leadership must come into play. Who are these instructional leaders, must they only be principals, if not principals, then who else can fit into this role, and how does supervision and evaluation come into play? Leithwood et al.
(2008) claim that nearly all successful leaders share similar practices and behaviors. These practices and related behaviors are outlined in Table 2. Managing staff, fostering positive cultures, attention to organizational matters and staffing and providing support are the ways in which “principals have an important role in supporting teachers to effect systemic instructional change” (Steele et al., 2015, p. 128).
Table 2

Leadership Practices and Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Practice</th>
<th>Associated Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Building vision and setting directions    | Building a shared vision  
Fostering the acceptance of group goals  
Demonstrating high-performance expectations                      |
| Redesigning the organization              | Building collaborative cultures  
Restructuring and reculturing the organization  
Building productive relationships with parents and the community  
Connecting the school to its wider environment |
| Understanding and developing people       | Providing individualized support and consideration  
Fostering intellectual stimulation  
Modeling appropriate values and behaviors                                      |
| Managing the teaching and learning program| Staffing the teaching program  
Providing teacher support  
Monitoring school activity  
Buffering staff against distractions from their work                                                                 |

As outlined in this table, principals set the direction for the school by setting high expectations while working with staff to build a shared vision and set goals in the first leadership practice (Preston & Barnes, 2017). In the second practice, this work continues with the principal building collaborative cultures, and fostering productive relationships with the school stakeholders including parents and the community (Whitaker, 2003). These two leadership practices are ones in which the school principal can and should take the initiative. Under their guidance, school staff, students, families and the community can come together under a collective organizational umbrella. In the leadership practice of developing and understanding people, Leithwood et al. (2008), contend that the two final leadership practices are understanding and developing people and managing the teaching and learning. These practices translate into behaviors including teacher support and intellectual stimulation.
While mostly falling to principals, the behaviors outlined in Table 2 are expansive and require constant diligence to accomplish. What is not specifically spelled out by Leithwood et al. (2008) in these leadership practices is the supervision and evaluation of staff, a huge component of principals’ work. The Maine Legislature implemented legislation in 2012 on the evaluation systems for educators through the passage of LD 1858. A Maine Education Policy Research Institute report prepared by Fairman & Mette (2017), provides recommendations in response to the PE/PG (Performance Evaluation and Professional Growth) System. One recommendation is to “place a primary focus on supporting professional practice and growth instead of on evaluation, ratings, and consequences”(p.iv). Mette et al., (2017) delineated the differences between these terms, “supervision is ongoing support for professional growth purposes while evaluation is primarily an assessment of performance (p. 710). An evaluation is a summative report, completed to meet requirements of LD 1858. Supervision, however, can be ongoing and come from a variety of sources. Mette & Riegelal (2018) note that “instructional coaches….can also provide teacher supervision” (p. 43). Furthermore, both of these practices fall into the realm of instructional leadership.

As illustrated in Table 3, Reitzug et al. (2008) assert that “instructional leadership….is not only about skill but also about purpose” (p.709) and that instructional leadership can be viewed as four different conceptions, or purposes; they compiled these Instructional Leadership Conceptions to explain the purposes of these types of leadership.
## Table 3

*Overview and Comparison of Instructional Leadership Conceptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conception</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples of Actions</th>
<th>Primary Goal(s)</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relational</strong></td>
<td>Taking actions focused on building relationships</td>
<td>Spending time with students</td>
<td>Caring school culture</td>
<td>When people feel connected and cared for, they feel better about themselves, and in turn learn more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making sure teachers are “OK”</td>
<td>Advocating for disenfranchised students</td>
<td>Higher test scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linear</strong></td>
<td>Taking actions that presume linear causal linkages between curricular/instructional components and student test achievement</td>
<td>Implementing formal curriculum document through pacing guides</td>
<td>Higher test scores</td>
<td>When curriculum, testing, teaching, etc. are aligned, test scores will improve and students will have learned more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using data to drive instruction</td>
<td>Monitoring lesson plans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organic</strong></td>
<td>Taking actions that stimulate inquiry and discourse about teaching and learning</td>
<td>Peer walk-throughs</td>
<td>Greater understanding of students, teaching, learning</td>
<td>When we study and discuss issues of practice, we learn from each other and our individual and collective practice improves and students learn more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzing and discussing data</td>
<td>Grade-level curriculum discussions</td>
<td>Higher test scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of interest is that only one of the conceptions, Prophetic, does not include “higher test scores” as a primary goal. All other conceptions, Relational, Linear and Organic, do have higher test scores as a primary goal (pp. 710-711). Relationship instructional leadership is centered around the relationships the school principal has with the teachers and the students. The idea is that positive relationships lead to a caring community where people thrive because they feel connected (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 29). Linear instructional leadership assumes “that systems can be designed so that one action, process, structure, or intervention will lead to a subsequent desired outcome, which will then lead to the next desired outcome and so on down a causal chain” (Reitzug et al., 2008, p. 699). “Organic instructional leadership presumes that instructional components cannot be addressed in isolation from the larger whole” (Reitzug et al., 2008, p. 702) and that principals emulating this type of instructional leadership embrace collaboration and inquiry. In the prophetic instructional leadership conception, the principal leads the school to a higher level of purpose and considers the question, “what does it mean to be educated” (Reitzug et al., 2008, p. 708). These four types of instructional leadership define for us the varied characteristics and beliefs that can be embodied in instructional leaders. Rigby (2016) summarized these ideas of instructional leadership in this way, “beyond this simple notion that a
school leader must be focused on instruction, there is not one universally accepted idea of what it means to be an ‘instructional leader’” (pp. 433-444). Glanz (2001) summed up the definition when he wrote, “the term instructional leadership is a generic term to indicate a school leader’s overall responsibility to lead overall instructional improvement” (p. 69). The definitions truly remain as broad as the scope of responsibilities that fall under the role of the school principal. “Many aspects of the principalship make the exercise of instructional leadership difficult” (Murphy et al., 2015, p.463) with the varied tasks, multiple and sometimes competing stakeholders and sheer volume of work for principals. As principals “remain responsible for managing and running the day to day functions of the school in addition to the new aspects of instructional management...principals will have little time to successfully take on more instructionally focused work” (Murphy et al., 2015, p.465) as they are expected to do.

There are options for school principals to utilize others within the organization to support instructional leadership. Instructional coaches can serve as the experts and work with school principals to support the teachers rather than continuing the idea that school principals must know everything and go it alone. School principals must know what they know and acknowledge what they don’t, connecting “teachers with resources (human and material) to address areas in need of further development” (Fuentes and Jimerson, 2020, p. 26). Instructional coaches may provide this resource, allowing principals to stretch their instructional leadership role to include others. Glanz (2021) extended instructional leadership into the realm of supervision. As shown in Figure 1, instructional supervision that supports student learning consists of teaching, curriculum and professional development.
Instructional supervision that supports student learning is aligned to a main tenet of this study: school principals are not the only ones who can provide support for their teachers. And my premise that instructional coaches not only bolster the work of teachers, but also school principals in their work with their teachers.

Instructional coaches are able to work with curriculum and teaching and provide professional development. This does not mean that school principals are excluded from this work. However, given the research on the job responsibilities of school principals and instructional coaches, coaches may be better positioned to provide the instructional supervision outlined by Glanz (2021). It is certainly worth consideration, as the next section will provide an overview of instructional coaching.
Historical Perspective: The Instructional Coach

The term instructional coach may be used interchangeably with literacy coach, math coach, technology coach or English Language coach. The focus of the coaching role may or may not appear in the title of the position. For the purposes of this research, instructional coaches will refer to all coaching positions unless otherwise indicated.

The position of instructional coach has been in vogue for just under a quarter of a century, a relatively new phenomenon in education. Thomas Guskey (1986) reports that staff development is important for educators and that the concept of staff development is not new—in fact it can be traced back to the early 19th century (p. 5). While staff development evolved to professional development, questions arose as to the value of attending conferences, workshops and courses as one-time events. “The idea of providing sustained, job-embedded professional development” (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009, p. 154) to support teachers has gained momentum and has had many districts hiring instructional coaches to support their teachers. Coaching may exist in several forms, however, “there appears to be a consensus that coaching is a form of sustained, job-embedded professional development….that includes some form of teacher observation” (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009, p. 155). If these instructional coaches are observing teachers, it would seem natural that feedback would also follow. This process lines up with Glanz’s tripod view. Zeng and Lo (2021) address this crossover of instructional coaching into instructional supervision. They use the phrase “participative leadership” and go on to elaborate that this type of leadership occurs if “teacher leaders assisting colleagues to work together for certain developmental work, or foster a more collaborative way of working” (p.3). If the positions of “teacher leaders” are substituted with the positions “instructional coaches” in this description, it is easy to realize the close connection that instructional coaches have to leadership.
roles. Zeng and Lo (2021) explain that teacher leaders have a “dual membership” (p.3) and this “affords teacher leaders a unique position to initiate and facilitate changes in the structure of their schools” (Wieczorek & Lear, 2018, in Zeng & Lo, 2021, p. 3). This tension of positionality experienced by instructional coaches, and school principals for that matter, will be explored further when the research findings and implications are discussed.

In some coaching models, the role of the school principal and the role of the instructional coach is clearly defined as a result of the particular coaching model. School districts may choose to adopt a specific model for their coaches to implement, create their own way of doing coaching, or hire coaches with no specific model in mind. Leaders in the coaching world include Knight, Aguilar and Sweeney. Each has written extensively on the specifics of both coaching models and instructional coaching practices. These models of coaching will be described in the section that follows in order to provide the background information regarding the types of coaching that may be present in Maine schools.

Models of Coaching

The literature provided varied models of coaching and a host of experts in the coaching field. For the purposes of this study, the models that were selected appeared most frequently in the literature collected. The greatest differences uncovered within the coaching models lie with the premise of coaching, the objectives and the outcomes. Models of coaching typically focus on the teacher or the student and utilize varied approaches and methods to support the process. Cognitive Coaching, Student Centered Coaching, IMPACT Coaching, Transformational Coaching, Facilitative Coaching, and Directive Coaching will be explored further throughout this section.
Cognitive Coaching is a model that maintains that “teacher practices [are modified] through direct instruction by coach to teacher and then application of the learning in real time in the classroom” (Wang, 2017, p. 24). According to Wang (2017) and Shindler (2009), this coaching model focuses on the coaches consulted with teachers, providing them with direct instruction on content and instructional practices as well as modeling of these techniques. Costa & Garmston (1992) note that “Cognitive Coaching is based upon some fundamental beliefs about teaching and human growth and learning” (p.91). This all takes place through time spent working together-just the coach and the teacher. “Because the ultimate goal of Cognitive Coaching is self-modification, teachers need to develop the ability to monitor their own and their students’ behaviors and to recall what happened in the lesson” (Costa & Garmston, 1992, p.93). This model may sometimes be referred to as “teacher centered coaching” because of the focus on the teacher. Content coaches may also utilize this particular model as they are primarily focused on working with teachers to improve their practices in a particular content area.

Student Centered Coaching has been popularized by Sweeney and her associates. Sweeney and Harris (2020) wrote that guiding principles of Student Centered Coaching serve to “hold practitioners accountable in staying student centered” (p. 2). These principles are as follows: “coaching is not about ‘fixing’ teachers, is a partnership focused on student learning, is about continual professional growth and is part of a robust ecosystem of professional learning” (Sweeney and Harris, 2020, p. 2). At the core of student centered coaching is coaching cycles, a 4-6 week period of time in which the coach and teacher work together. Figure 2 illustrates the components of a student centered coaching cycle as specified by Sweeney & Harris (2020).
This chapter reviewed the history of school principals, instructional coaches and described school culture, models of coaching and This literature review provided a historical perspective of the roles and responsibilities of school principals and instructional coaches including supervision and evaluation of staff; the expansion of instructional coaching in education; and the relationships of the principal and coach as well as the conditions within schools that impact these relationships. The theoretical framework provides context for the conceptual framework drawing from the theories of andragogy and transformative learning.
At the onset of this cycle (1), the coach guides the teacher to set a goal based on standards. Then together (2) the instructional coach and the teacher create learning targets from that goal and administer pre-assessments (3) to capture the students’ baseline proficiency levels. Together the instructional coach and the teacher, co-teach and hold at least one weekly planning session (4 & 5) before administering post-assessments in order to measure the effectiveness of the cycle (6). In addition to the components outlined in Figure 2, coaches and teachers reflect on...
their work together, continuing with the premise of reflective practice to conclude the coaching cycle.

At the core of IMPACT coaching, is the idea that coaches will work with teachers to guide them through a reflective process to make changes to their practice. In this type of coaching, the teacher is the focal point. Knight (2022) identified three stages in his focus for coaching: identify, learn, and improve. In the first stage, he asks that the teacher identify their current reality. Knight believes that coaches help teachers to do this by “video-recording so teachers can watch lessons, interview students, review student work and gather observation data” (Knight, 2022, p. 88). For the second stage, teachers are asked to set a goal. Knight stresses these be what he calls “PEERS goals-goals that are powerful, easy, emotionally compelling, reachable, and student focused” (Knight, 2022, p. 91). Coaches help in this stage by asking the teacher questions that can support teacher thinking. In the final stage, coaches help the teacher to identify four to six teaching strategies in order to meet their identified goal. (Knight, 2022, pp. 94-95).

In her 2013 book, *The Art of Coaching: Effective Strategies for School Transformation*, Aguilar suggests that coaching models are identified through two lenses-one model which focuses on changing the behaviors of the teacher and leaders, the other model which focuses on changing the beliefs of the teacher and leader. Table 4 illustrates these two coaching models described by Aguilar and a third, proposed model, Transformational Coaching. Aguilar recognized that this is a crossover model from the business world, attributing Robert Hargrove, Peter Senge and Margaret Wheatley works as a catalyst for this model.
Aguilar’s Models of Coaching and Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Coach’s Actions</th>
<th>Focus on Changing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directive or Instructive</td>
<td>Model lessons for teachers</td>
<td>Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>Make suggestions for teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide resources for teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitative Coaching</td>
<td>Builds upon teacher’s skills</td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflects with teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helps to construct new knowledge and skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Coaching</td>
<td>Model lessons for teachers</td>
<td>Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make suggestions for teachers</td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide resources for teachers</td>
<td>Being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Builds upon teacher’s skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflects with teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helps to construct new knowledge and skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aligns beliefs and behaviors to “transform”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aguilar (2013) describes transformational coaching as incorporating “strategies from directive and facilitative coaching, as well as cognitive and ontological coaching” and that the difference in this model is “the scope that it attempts to affect and the processes used” (p. 25). This table provides clarification on the coaching actions within each of these coaching models, as well as the coaches’ focus to change either beliefs, behaviors or both. It also illustrates the behaviors of instructional leadership, although perhaps that is not intentional. Again, the models described by Aguilar target the teachers, with a focus on changing teacher beliefs, behaviors or both.
Other literature finds Bean and Ippolito (2016), suggesting that coaching is more of an “activity than a role” (p. 2). They included four elements in their framework for coaching: “individuals and systems, mindsets, differentiating and culture” (Bean and Ippolitio, 2016, p. 6). Within each of these elements, coaching activities that vary in levels of intensity provide support for the practice of coaching. They explained the least intense level of coaching as building relationships through a variety of ways including gathering materials for teachers, assisting with assessment of students, and participating in professional development together. The next, more intense level of coaching is where practices are analyzed by co-planning lessons, holding team meetings where student work is discussed or presenting during professional development sessions. The third and most intense level of coaching is what Bean and Ippolito term as “transforming practice and making teaching public” (p. 10). During this level, coaches are modeling and co-teaching lessons and providing direct support to teachers and their teaching. (p.10).

**Roles and Responsibilities**

The responsibilities of both the school principal and the instructional coach are eerily similar. Hall and Simeral (2008) have outlined these responsibilities as illustrated in Table 5 and they appear more alike than different. Both the school principal and the instructional coach work to develop relationships with their teachers, provide resources and support and serve as a mentor.
Table 5

Responsibilities of instructional coaches and school principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Coach</th>
<th>School Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observes teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzes assessments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors/challenges teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthens the community of learners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinct Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not an administrator</td>
<td>IS an administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides constructive feedback</td>
<td>Provides summative feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models lessons</td>
<td>Evaluates lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overlapping Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant leadership</td>
<td>Visible leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative goal setting</td>
<td>Directive goal setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides professional development</td>
<td>Coordinates professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsels teachers</td>
<td>Directs teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Inspiration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationships are critical, regardless of the position. In order to work effectively in a school, attention must be given to the relationships between school principals, instructional coaches and teachers. Goal setting with teachers, mentoring of teachers, and strengthening the community of learners by supporting teachers is paramount. Yet, these are tasks may be completed by either the school principal or the instructional coach. Mette et al.(2017) found an overlap between supervision and evaluation, the definitions, the practices and those who performed the roles. Table 5 is a beginning point for these role definitions, but the nuances that are found in practice still exist. The differences between the positions of instructional coach and school principal have more to do with positional authority. Instructional coaches provide
feedback and work collaboratively to support goal setting. School principals provide feedback and may also be collaborative in the goal setting process, although Hall and Simeral (2008) believe the goal setting is a more directive act. Both groups, school principals and instructional coaches, can be supportive and provide help with goal setting and instructional practices. Costa & Garmston (1985) noted that the goal of supervision should be to help teachers become better instructors. If this is indeed the goal of the work of both instructional coaches and school principals, the role confusion is something that must be addressed. The instructional coaches are not teachers and they are not administrators. Yet there may be times when school staff question the role of an instructional coach, perhaps even viewing coaches as administrator-like figures. Ultimately, however, school principals make decisions as part of the evaluation process that will allow teachers to remain in their positions, or be forced to leave. The role of school culture will be explored later in this chapter as it contributes to the role confusion or role clarity.

**Theoretical Framework**

Malcolm Knowles’ (1980) Andragogical Model of Learning or andragogy, centers around adult learners and the ways they differ from learners who are children. Andragogy is a constructivist approach to learning that draws on the idea that adults use their experiences and understandings to create new learning. According to Knowles and his colleagues (1980), there are six assumptions that comprise andragogy, depicted here in Figure 3. These six assumptions are the need to know; the self-concept of the adult learner; the role of experiences for the learner; the learners’ readiness to learn; the learners’ orientation to learning and the learners’ motivation (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005, pp. 64-69; Cox, 2015, pp.29-30.)
Adults are motivated if they believe they need the information, thus the need to know. This aligns with an adult’s motivation and readiness to learn. The experiences come into play in that adults have had more experiences than young learners, they may base their design to learn on these experiences, their own self-concept and their orientation to the learning to take place. These assumptions clarify the identity of the adult learner as a learner with experiences and a certain level of maturity and autonomy. Nevertheless, adult learners are not necessarily internally motivated, as one might believe. Knowles et al. ascertain that adults are “typically
motivated toward learning something that will help them solve problems with an ‘internal payoff’” (Knowles et al., p.30). An example of this is often seen as achievement of “practical, short-term objectives-to be able to qualify for a driver’s license, (or) get a job or promotion” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 8). New learning has a specific purpose in these examples, and therefore the adult learners are highly motivated. Even once these achievements are accomplished, the skills learned are continuously used and the adult learner is changed or transformed.

If these six assumptions of andragogy are applied to the school principal, it might play out in this manner. The school principal is planning to work with the first grade teaching team about the recently updated Maine Department of Education (DOE) Learning Results for English Language Arts (ELA). The principal is able to easily access the new standards, however, is stymied when it comes to what to do next. Her need to know, the readiness to learn and her role of experiences, cause her to seek out the instructional coach. By reviewing the standards, and talking through the changes, the instructional coach is able to highlight the principal’s orientation to learning; because the meeting is soon approaching, the principal’s motivation for discovering the new standards is high. In this scenario, the school principal meets most of the six assumptions of andragogy, and seeks out the instructional coach for support. Whether the principal and the instructional coach are aware of this or not, the school principal has just modeled the transformative nature of learning, but her engagement with the ELA standards and her reflective conversations with the instructional coach.

Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning developed from his study of adult women students in the early 1970s, highlights this idea that “the process of making meaning from our experiences” (Dirks, 1998, p.4) is a result of the learner’s reflection. Another component of this theory is that “every individual has a particular view of the world” (Christie et al., 2015, p. 11).
If an individual has formed their particular viewpoint by the time they are an adult, what would transpire in order for this viewpoint to transform? Mezirow states that “particular points of view can become so ingrained that it takes a powerful human catalyst, a forceful argument or what he calls a disorienting dilemma to shake them” (Christie et al., 2015, p. 11). When engaged in learning, the teachers, instructional coaches and principals can be transformed as a result of their work with each other and their “acquisition of skills and other forms of instrumental knowledge can be and often is associated with broader processes through which adults name, reflect on, and reconstruct aspects of their experiences” (Dirks, 1998, p. 9). Mezirow would encourage the inclusion of an essential element and that is “the need to develop communicative skills so that internal and external conflicts, which result from changes in perspective can be resolved via rational discourse, rather than force (Christie et al., 2015, p. 12). As instructional coaches and school principals work together, they may both be transformed as a result of making meaning of their experiences through rational discourse. This claim is illustrated in the conceptual framework-as the arrows go both ways to symbolize the relationships. This relationship is not just a one-way relationship, but is reciprocal in nature and will be proven as a result of this study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 4, was based on adult learning theory, transformative learning theory and the premise that specific conditions support or impede implementation of instructional coaching in schools. While these conditions serve as the backdrop for this conceptual framework, the relationships are important too. Arrows are used to depict the push and pull between instructional coaches and teachers; teachers and school
principals; and school principals and instructional coaches. Within these relationships, the adult
learners bring their own set of beliefs and experiences. As a result of my work as a school
principal for fourteen years, as well as additional years within education as a classroom teacher,
and now as an assistant superintendent and interim principal, I have observed firsthand the
impact of these school culture as well as training and support of an initiative and
communication of the initiative to stakeholders.
The conditions are at the core of this framework, with the relationships between the teachers, school principals and instructional coaches on the periphery. School culture, communication, implementation as well as support and training are conditions that impact the relationships between the adult learners, instructional coaches and school principals. Adult learning frames the conceptual framework in that it captures both the relationships and the conditions within its theoretical boundaries. The next sections will provide information related to the conditions of school culture, implementation and communication.
Conditions

For the purpose of this study, conditions are defined as school culture, communication, support and training and implementation model of coaching. The models of coaching were explored earlier in this chapter. The research around school culture provided the bulk of information on school conditions, particularly as communication, support and training relate to school culture. Communication is key in all areas of education, but I have found that with the introduction of a new initiative, or change to the school structure, it is imperative to involve all of the stakeholders. The means by which information will be shared is also critical, and while it may vary from school to school, consideration for the manner of sharing is crucial. So too is the support and training given to stakeholders during the implementation and beyond. Schools often purchase or adopt a particular set of materials or practices, and fall short on providing even adequate training to those who are responsible for the implementation. I believe that the communication, support and training and implementation model selected are a result of the school culture.

School Culture

The term school culture has been relatively new to education. Van Houtte (2005) compared climate and culture, terming climate the “property of individuals” and culture the “property of the social system” (p.77). Prior to the 1980s, school climate was the term used to describe this phenomenon; from the late 1980s to the present, the term most often used is school culture-although the two may often be used interchangeably (Van Houtte, 2005). “Culture has been studied for a long time by anthropologists and sociologists, resulting in many models and definitions of culture” (Shein & Shein, 2007, p. 3). For the purposes of this study, the term and accompanying definitions for school culture will be utilized.
Defining school culture is not always easy because it focuses on values and beliefs and even customs, intangible elements, that are less easily observed. (Maxwell & Thomas, 1991). School culture has been referred to as “the social glue that holds people together, deeply embedded beliefs and assumptions and the unwritten rules” (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p.6). “School culture is conceptualized as shared beliefs about how the school should operate, core values reflecting what the school wants for its students, and behavioral norms reflecting teacher perceptions of the school environment” (Maslowski, 2005, p.14). The Great Schools Partnership (2013) defines school culture as “the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions” (https://www.edglossary.org/school-culture/).

Van Houtte (2005) draws from the research of others (Parsons, 1951, 1952; Rousseau, 1990; Schein, 1984, 1985) to describe culture as having three levels as outlined in Table 6. This model illustrates the multi-dimensional properties of school culture. And while what may be visible is not the full picture of school culture, the people who are part of the organization will add the pieces that are missing.
Table 6
*Three Levels of School Culture*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Visible</th>
<th>Artifacts (building, employee clothing, behavior patterns)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>More Abstract</td>
<td>Values (what employees want)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Most Abstract</td>
<td>Underlying assumptions and beliefs (of the employees)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The visible culture is the way in which the school building looks, how the employees are dressed as well as the behavior of staff and as a result of their behavior, the students. The more abstract level of school culture encompasses the values of the staff. What is important to them—the number of duties they have to perform each week, or the well-being of their students. The most abstract level of school culture is the underlying assumptions and beliefs. The “that’s what we’ve always done” response to change or the means in which staff approach their communication. Communication runs on a continuum, of course—from open communication with positive intention and assumptions to stilted or angry communication with defensiveness the norm.

The Great Schools Partnership (2013) divides school culture into negative and positive and observes that “positive school cultures are conducive to professional satisfaction, morale and effectiveness, as well as to student learning, fulfillment, and well-being” ([https://www.edglossary.org/school-culture/](https://www.edglossary.org/school-culture/)). These elements come from the people within the organization, and in schools the people in the organization are the staff and the students. The culture within a school impacts the relationships that are developed between the school principals and instructional coaches. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) created a list of 12 elements within organizational culture into twelve elements, outlined in Table 7 (p.96). They note that
while there are many elements that could go into an organization’s culture, these 12 are common within school cultures.
In his 2019 blog, Garrick names five characteristics of a healthy school culture that are listed here: consideration for culture is everywhere; a nurturing environment with students being supported as individuals; engaged staff and students; a commitment to lifelong learning; and finally, a holistic sense of responsibility (Garrick, 2019, para. 6-19). According to Shafer (2018), culture relies on the intercommunication between those in the school. She indicated that communication is key—and without it a culture will be weak. “Beliefs, values, and actions will spread the farthest and be tightly reinforced when everyone is communicating with everyone” (Shafer, 2018, para. 7).

This chapter focused heavily on the history of school principals and instructional coaches, their roles and responsibilities as well as the culture of schools. These are critical pieces that form the foundation of my conceptual framework. It also helped me to determine that

### Table 7

*Gruenert and Whitaker’s Twelve Elements of Organizational Culture*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VISION: what do people look forward to?</th>
<th>MISSION: why we are here</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RITUALS: habitual activities</td>
<td>LANGUAGE: local jargon, humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEREMONIES: glorified rituals</td>
<td>SYMBOL: tangible stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALUES &amp; BELIEFS: what’s really important</td>
<td>HERO: who we are proud of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLIMATE: the mood we are usually in</td>
<td>NORMS: unwritten rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOOLS: what we use to get our work done</td>
<td>STORY: myths passed on to the rookies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
interviews with school principals and instructional coaches would tell the current story of the work and these relationships within public schools in Maine.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study was designed to explore the relationships between instructional coaches and school principals in Maine schools. This chapter on methodology outlines the design of the study, the population selected for participation in this study as well as the procedures for data collection and analysis. Potential limitations, validity and reliability concerns and ethical issues will also be addressed in this chapter.

Design

After careful consideration, a qualitative research design was determined to be the most effective and practical given the nature of the study, the impact that COVID-19 has had and continues to have on schools in Maine, and the interactive nature of the design. Maxwell (2013) describes qualitative research as a way “understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engage in” (p.30). This understanding of the relationships between instructional coaches and school principals is at the heart of this study.

Seidman (2013) explores the reasons for interviewing as a means of research, noting that interviewing “is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues” (p.13). Interviews provide an opportunity for two people, the interviewer and the interviewee, to have a conversation directed by the specific questions in the interview protocol, yet open enough to allow for unforeseen responses. Semi-structured interviewing allows for “specified questions you know you want to ask; open-you are prepared to develop new questions to follow unexpected leads...and depth-probing-you pursue all points of interest with variant expressions that mean
‘tell me more’ and ‘explain’” (Glesne, 2011, p. 134). The first series of questions were used in order to capture some background information from the participants by beginning each interview with “broad questions.... then moving to semi-structured questions and then finally structured ones” (Krathwohl, 2009, p. 299). Questions included the educational background of the participant, experience with varied coaching models and any specific preparation they had for their current position. The second series of questions narrowed the focus to the implementation of instructional coaching within the participant’s school or district. These questions available in Appendix A, provide the historical background for instructional coaching as a practice. The third and final series of questions dove deeper into the practices in place and the respondent's perspectives and beliefs regarding instructional coaching. Each participant was asked to describe their School Principal or Instructional Coach as well as provide details about their professional relationship. All interviews occurred via Zoom and were recorded and transcribed via Zoom. Although the Zoom transcriptions provided were somewhat accurate, due to limitations in capturing proper nouns as well as other nuances shared during the interview, it was necessary for me to spend time re-configuring and transcribing each interview transcript. Edits were made using hand notes taken during the interview and by replaying each recording in order to have accurate transcripts of each interview.

**Population and Sample**

The Maine Department of Education maintains a database that contains the names of school principals and instructional coaches and the schools where they are employed. Emails were sent to all principals and coaches on the database inviting them to participate in the interview. This “maximum variation sampling” was intended to be used to “increase the
likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives” (Creswell, 2013, pp.156-157). After the initial email, 31 respondents (15 school principals and 16 instructional coaches) had agreed to participate in my study. A second email targeted only to those who had expressed an interest in participating in the study, but did not schedule an interview time, yielded one additional school principal. Although some of the participants were from the same school district, no two participants were from the same school. The 16 school principals represent 13 school districts; the 16 instructional coaches represent 12 school districts.

Participants

Of the school principals interviewed, nine of them, or 56%, identified as female and seven, or 44%, identified as male. The gender split between instructional coaches was more pronounced, with two identifying as male (12.5%) and 14 identifying as female (87.5%). Table 8 shows the variation in grade levels served by the participants. School principals were assigned to elementary schools (9) or middle schools (4) or high schools (3). Instructional coaches were assigned to elementary schools (7), middle and/or high schools (5) or multiple schools (4).
Table 8

Participants by School Grade Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Grades K-6</th>
<th>Grades 6-8</th>
<th>Grades 9-12</th>
<th>Grades K-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Principal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Coach</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of identifying grade level spans was to identify differences in responses of principals and instructional coaches at varied grade levels. Of note was that instructional coaches were assigned to multiple schools more often than school principals. In addition to gaining information about participants’ current grade level assignments, I wanted to see what other roles in education they had held prior to their current one. Figure 5 shows that five school principals (13.2%) have held a district level leadership role of Assistant Special Education Director, Athletic Director, Curriculum Coordinator or RTI Coordinator; nine school principals (23.7%) have served at a school level leadership position as Assistant Principal; 16 school principals (42.1%) had previously taught at the in either a general education or special education role; six school principals (15.8%) had been in a specialized role as a Health/PE Teacher, Interventionist, Reading Recovery Teacher or Instructional Coach; and two participants (5.3%) had serviced in a support staff role as an Educational Technician.
This previous experience for school principals mattered—it gave them a perspective that they carry with them into their role as a principal. Three participants had actually served as an instructional coach, and they noted they felt this experience helped them in working with their own coaches. Of those that held a district level position, 1 recognized the “bigger picture view” that it gave her as she entered the principalship. School principals who had served as assistant principals acknowledged that this leadership experience helped them as they stepped into the role of school principal because they had dealt with some administrative issues such as student discipline.
Figure 6 shows that prior to their current role, two instructional coaches (6.5%) held a district leadership position of Distance Learning Director or RTI Coordinator; one instructional coach (3.2%) held the school level leadership role of Assistant Principal; 18 instructional coaches (51.6%) held had previously taught at the in either a general education or special education role; eight instructional coaches (25.8%) had been in a specialized role as an ELL Teacher, Title I Teacher, Interventionist, Instructional Strategist or Adjunct Professor; and three participants (9.7%) had serviced in a support staff role as an Educational Technician. One participant (3.2%) had not previously held a position in education prior to becoming an instructional coach.
This experience also mattered for instructional coaches. Given that not all were able to be trained and provided support in their position, several noted that they relied on previous experiences to help them in their role as instructional coach. Others were grateful for even a short stint as an administrator, as they believed this helped them see the supportive side of coaching. Instructional coaches who had spent time in the classroom as teachers, felt that their knowledge of curriculum and the work of teaching helped them to have a shared experience and
understanding of teaching with those with whom they worked with in their current coaching role.

Data Collection Procedures

The 32 semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom. The interviews lasted from 20 minutes to just over 90 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed using features of Zoom designed for this purpose. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was developed to collect demographic information to begin the interview. During this time the interviewee was able to answer the questions that required factual responses rather than personal beliefs or opinions. The questions in the next part of the interview focused on the implementation of instructional coaching within the school or district. The interview concludes with questions related to the school culture and the relationship between the school principal and the instructional coach. Field notes were kept for each interview to provide additional information related to the interviews. These notes included my personal thoughts and reflections that occurred during or just after the interview and served as a reminder of observations made during the interview.

Analytical Methods

Creswell (2013) describes a “data analysis spiral” (p. 182) that moves in a cyclical fashion, from data collection to the visual representation of the data. Using Creswell’s model, I have crafted my own to represent the data analysis process. Each of these procedures and corresponding examples are illustrated with an example in Figure 7.
This model depicts the process I went through as I began conducting interviews. The interviews were done in a compacted timeframe, between February 3, 2021 and March 4, 2021 with multiple interviews taking place on one day. As I was interviewing, I was reviewing the responses, and beginning to form hypotheses. Field note and post interview surveys were
providing additional information and helping me form findings. After the interviews were fully transcribed and participants had reviewed their responses, I was able to begin coding in earnest and at that point, my early presuppositions began to take shape as findings.

The data for this study were collected as interviews are collected via Zoom. Each interview was recorded and transcribed using features within the Zoom program. After these interviews were transcribed via Zoom, I assessed them for accuracy using my notes and the Zoom recording for each interview. During this portion of the data analysis, the interview transcriptions were shared with the participants in order to ensure that their words and meaning have been captured. A Google Form was utilized to help me keep track of the date the transcript had been reviewed and transcribed again by me, the date the transcript was sent to the participant for review and the date the participant confirmed the interview was accurate.

A post-interview survey was completed to capture the overall interview information in a succinct manner. Again, using a Google Form, I answered the following questions: role of participant, grade level, background, implementation of coaching, type of coaching (student centered or not student centered), relationship between coach and principal, adjectives used to describe either the coach or the principal, and additional information provided by the participant. Field notes and memos were taken as the recording of the interviews were viewed. The first round of coding I tried was coding by hand. I did this because I wanted to be as close as possible to my data, and “really know it”. After going through all of the interviews once to search for types of coaching and implementation, I realized that I needed to utilize NVIVO. After learning enough about NVIVO to begin, I started by creating categories that matched the conceptual framework, such as “implementation” and “support and training”. After coming up with interviews that were coded, but not necessarily connected, I did a second cycle of Pattern Coding
in order to organize the data “into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts” (Saldana, 2016, p.236). At this point I was able to see that the findings were lining up in most cases with my hypotheses. Throughout this data analysis cycle, I kept going back to the interview questions, and to the conceptual framework. During this stage, I revised the conceptual framework, as the conditions in my initial attempts were too narrow in scope. The findings of this analysis are outlined in this chapter.

**Ethical Issues**

Maine is a relatively small state and the school principals may belong to professional organizations, attend trainings together and collaborate on projects. The same applies to instructional coaches. It is critical that I preserve the anonymity of the participants in this study by using pseudonyms and protecting identifying factors such as school names and communities. After each of the interviews, each participant was allowed to read the accompanying transcript, to ensure that it accurately reflected the intended responses.

An additional consideration is that I work in a Maine public school district that employs instructional coaches. During the planning phase of district implementation, I took the lead in creating a structure that involved training of both instructional coaches and principals, communication to the school staff and the Board of Directors. I am the primary evaluator for all three instructional coaches. Therefore, MSAD 52 principals and instructional coaches were not eligible to participate in this study. They did however have the opportunity to participate in a small field study and provide feedback regarding the interview questions and overall process.
Validity, Trustworthiness and Reliability

At times, qualitative research has come under fire for its validity and reliability (Creswell, 2013, pp. 244-250). Strategies were put in place to avoid such criticism. First, participants were made aware of my role in the implementation of district implementation of instructional coaching in MSAD 52. Secondly, care was taken to establish and maintain open communication between myself and the participants in this study. All means of communication including emails, and the recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were maintained for the duration of the study. Participants were allowed access to their interview and had the opportunity to clarify their responses before the transcript was finalized. Participants were given the opportunity to remove themselves from the study at any time. No one chose to do so.

Potential Limitations

The design of this study and the timing of conducting research during a global pandemic did present some limitations. One limitation was the willingness of principals and school coaches to participate. At the time the research was conducted, there were 225 instructional coaches across the state of Maine. Given the extreme adjustments that had been made in school systems due to COVID-19, reports of low staff morale and lack of time continued to sweep across Maine, I worried that anyone would even respond. The interviews were designed with this in mind and the study was conducted to elicit as much information as possible within the confines of a Zoom interview. Flexibility was provided as to the day and time of the interviews. Travel time will be negated as interviews will be conducted via Zoom. I believe that COVID-19 actually was a help in my research, while there were respondents to the recruitment email who told me they were overwhelmed, exhausted and just couldn’t take anything else on, there were
32 school principals and instructional coaches who agreed to participate. I think the fact that participants could be interviewed from their home or school, during varying hours of the day and days of the week, was helpful. And given the isolation caused by the pandemic, those that I interviewed seemed more than willing to tell their stories.

**Positionality Statement**

As a school administrator who has become a strong advocate for instructional coaching in schools, I was quite sure that I had an idea of what others would have to say about coaching in their schools. During the year of preparation our district invested in preparing for implementation and the past three years working with the instructional coaches, I have learned of the value they provide our teachers and our principals. This idea of the relationship between our coaches and principals fascinated me. I knew that we had hired coaches because of the benefit they provided teachers, but I realized that the principals were benefiting as well. As I reviewed the data, I became entrenched in the stories being told by other principals and coaches. At times the data seemed just too much, while other times, I wondered why I had not pushed further in my questioning. I tried to maintain an open mind while reviewing the data and summarizing my findings.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The results of this qualitative study will be examined using my conceptual framework as a guide. This framework, based on Knowles et al. (2005) model of andragogy and Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning (1997), provides insight to the relationships between school principals and instructional coaches. Mezirow believed that clear communication and a process of reflection play a role in making meaning of our experiences (Dirks, 1998, p.4). Relationships, the culture of the school and communication, all have a part in the success of coaching as it plays out in schools.

Through the interviews, I discovered support for my conceptual framework, gained insights into the conditions that advance coaching, as well as those that impede coaching within Maine public schools. Additionally, each of the participants were asked to define the term instructional leadership. Their definitions provided a look into the actual beliefs and practices surrounding instructional leadership, rather than the textbook definitions. This chapter will explore the findings as they relate to the conceptual framework, and share the collective definitions of instructional leadership as described by Maine school principals and instructional coaches.

Finding 1: Implementation Variables of Instructional Coaching

The implementation of instructional coaching matters. Instructional coaching may be implemented as the result of a system audit; championed by a group of district educators, or perhaps just one individual; created as positions to hold onto staff when enrollment reductions lead to potential reduction in force situations or a combination of these reasons. Coaching may
be seen as a positive support for teachers with a groundswell of excitement about onsite professional development, support for curriculum and instruction and on-the-ground reinforcement for the solid instructional work taking place. Conversely, coaching may be seen as a punitive tactic to “fix broken teachers”, put spies in place to report back to administration, or to ensure that a new program is implemented.

Schools have defined the term coach in a variety of ways and implemented coaching on a continuum with support and training ranging from no support and training to affiliation with a university or curriculum group and a multi-year plan for support and training. Often coaches are assigned a variety of tasks with little communication about the roles and responsibilities of coaches. This irregularity can cause confusion as stakeholders wonder, just what do coaches do? Additionally, a variety of coaching models exist, including no model.

Instructional coaching is a phenomenon that has found its way into Maine public schools over the past three decades. Initiatives such as Reading First and TIF, brought literacy coaches into schools identified in need of improvement or support. Along with these coaches, specific criteria were put into place. These criteria included who was coached and when along with the types of instructional materials and structure of lessons. Denton and Hasbrouck (2009) ascertain that coaching can support teachers in their efforts to provide high quality teaching in academic areas. And while some schools may have seen these grants as supportive in terms of money and coaching, not all saw it in such a positive light. After all, in order to qualify for the support, a school was deemed to be failing; and the support put in place was to help fix the school.

Other schools and districts have implemented coaching in a much more supportive manner, likening coaching to athletics. Athletes have coaches to help them improve their performance; teachers with coaches will have help to improve their performance and will be
much more likely to implement suggestions due to the nature of the coaching model. Coaching is a way to support a professionals that is supported by evidence (Eisenberg & al, 2017). Just as athletes may be coached using a variety of models, a variety of coaching models may be used with teachers. While there are models of coaching that are recognized, not all schools use a specific approach or model. And because there is not a clear model, as well as a clear understanding of instructional coaching in schools, this lack of clarity, irregular job expectations and varied implementation models creates confusion and misunderstandings for stakeholders. Of the thirty two respondents in this study, 15 reported using a model called student centered coaching while 17 reported using an alternate model, or no model. Coaching models may be implemented with support from a university or curriculum organization or may have no external support.

In schools and districts with a clear implementation process, participants reported coaching as well-received by most. “Our district has had instructional coaches since 2000; that the overall commitment to coaching was already here when I came on board” (Principal Jasmine). Coach Blake shared that in his district, “coaching was established, basically, at the same time, the district adopted the Reading and Writing Units of Study, and so, for that sort of first year coaches were the default like all things Reading and Writing Units of Study.” Both of these districts reported a university connection for support with implementation. “I know that coaching was established, basically, at the same time, the district adopted the Reading and Writing Units of Study” (Coach Pierce). Principal Ava, also experienced the implementation of coaching for a specific purpose, “I have a feeling that it coincided with the move to bring Teachers College, several years ago”. In Principal Rowan’s district it was a similar experience. The implementation of coaching “was in parallel with the district investing in the workshop
approach and Teachers College Reading and Writing Project”. The intent of coaching was clearly communicated to stakeholders in these districts.

Without a clear manner of the implementation for coaching, confusion abounded. One Instructional Coach phrased it like this, “Principals… may not necessarily feel that they are actual stakeholders …. it's been five to eight years, and I feel like I'm still trying to explain how or what I do and it's definitely not clear”. (Coach Angela) When asked about the implementation of coaching, Principal Ava described it this way, “There is not a clear district vision [for coaching]”. For Coach Angela, it was the vision of the superintendent to implement coaching within her district. “It was the superintendent that kind of put it forward and then he was able to get the support of the Board to get those positions. I do not know how much support he had from principals at that time.” Coach Angela reported that she was familiar with varied coaching models, but did not identify as utilizing one model and she shared, “I'm not really sure how much prep work was done for the whole implementation for coaches in the district.” Another district also had coaching in place because “The superintendent…. has been the strongest advocate of coaching in the district. If it wasn't for the superintendent's support and faith in coaching it wouldn't exist in the district” (Coach Penelope).

Principal Krista felt like the implementation in her current district could have been done more thoughtfully and “it would have been received much better than it was”. She has observed “a lot of resentment here because they [the instructional coaches] were just plopped into schools and thrown into rooms and expected to ‘coach’….the teachers thought they were there to spy on them”. Teachers got the message that the coaches were hired to fix them; something Principal Krista acknowledges was not fair to the teachers nor to the coaches. “We did it all wrong, we
just said here they are here they are and relationships were not built” (Principal Krista).

Stakeholders were not involved in the process creating anger and resentment.

Coach Bella recounted how an outside group’s audit praised the impact of coaching, but also noted that the district was not using coaches appropriately. She continued by sharing that the report indicated that coaches should not be pulled to do duties, and should instead be using their time to work with teachers. While the district seemed to understand the importance of coaching in this case, the ability to allocate their time to coaching tasks was not successful. Examples like this can contribute to role confusion and cause frustration for stakeholders.

Principal Kaden’s experience with coaching implementation was also the result of an audit. “It was done by an outside consultant from the University of Massachusetts. And one of the determined recommendations was the implementation of math coaches.”

The implementation of instructional coaching to serve a specific purpose such as training for use of a specific program or as the result of an audit, is one common way in which coaching has found its way into Maine schools. Often this approach starts with upper administration, but requires school principals and teachers to work together with instructional coaches to meet a determined purpose or recommendation. When implementation of coaching emanates from one or two people, even if it is the superintendent of schools, it is worth considering the chances that the implementation will stick. As seen in Principal Krista’s school, when principals were told that five instructional coaches had been hired and they would work in each of the schools, the process did not go smoothly. When the positions opened as coaches moved on, Principal Krista chose not to fill the coaching positions in her school, due to the toxicity created by the lack of a well-planned implementation.
An alternative model of being told to implement coaching, is the more collaborative implementation which includes the acknowledgement of the importance of relationships. Relationships between the instructional coach and the school principal, between the teachers and the instructional coach as well as relationships between the teachers and the school principal. Taking the time to build relationships between stakeholders was mentioned by several participants as a critical (and sometimes overlooked) piece of successful coaching. Coach Saada Tannus reflected, “my first several years should have been about building relationships”. She expanded upon this, noting that at first coaching was less accepted and that now she has developed relationships with the teachers and believes that she is more widely received and respected as a coach because of the time and energy invested in developing relationships with her teachers. She shared that teachers even attend School Board Meetings during budget season to support the coaching positions because they are [now] so valued. Principal Emily concurred, sharing, “we felt it was very important for our coaches to have one foot in the classroom still to give some of that credibility. So, we required both of our coaches to teach at least one subject.” Principal Walker shared what he termed a mixed model, with the instructional coach teaching a full load while at the same time coaching the entire department of teachers. While he admits this model is not sustainable, he believes that the instructional coach has had successful coaching interactions within the department because she is actually still teaching alongside those with whom she is supporting through coaching. In these examples, shared by participants, coaches remained directly involved in teaching, creating less of a divide between coaches and teachers. Interestingly enough, both coaches and principals acknowledged the benefits of having coaches also teach in some capacity. Principals viewed this as less sustainable, while coaches pointed out the value of what was termed, “street cred’. Coach Saada Tannus attributes her credibility with
staff as a direct result of the fact that she still teaches classes. Not all coaches interviewed were also teaching in some capacity, in fact, the majority of coaches were not teaching. In these instances, participants noted the importance of clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The next section will provide information regarding specific models adopted during an implementation.

**Coaching Models**

When asked to share what models of coaching they were familiar with, and whether or not they believed that there was a “best model”, participants had widely varied responses. While some were able to clearly articulate coaching models and the practitioners who promoted these models, others were confused by the question. Coach Ashley noted that she has had “some minimal instruction on what the different coaching models are”. She continued by adding that while her district “looked at different coaching practices, none of those really fit my particular position which made it difficult for me to remember the terms that they taught me…because I wasn't really sticking with one of them.”

Principal Connor shared, “I'm not familiar with many models to be honest. And until about three years ago my experience with instructional coaches was limited and relied mostly on my own experience as a Reading Recovery Teacher Leader.” Principal Michael noted, “That is one area that I don't have a lot of experience with.” And Principal Elizabeth said that, “I don't know if I know a lot of coaching models by name.” While maintaining that she was “very used to what they [coaches] do” she disclosed that she was not able to link the work to a particular model or author.
These experiences were found to be more typical than not. While the number of participants who identified a model totaled 15; the remaining 17 were not able to clearly identify a model by name or practice. Of the 15 who articulated the use of a model, some were not fully able to define the model or the practices associated with it. Principal Jessica, with experience as an Instructional Coach, recognized that when she was a coach, there was no specific model or approach, rather “a lot more of best practices”. Now a principal in a different district, she noted, “our district has played around with a lot of models. I'm not even exactly sure if I know what we've landed on”. Principal Jessica continued, “Our instructional coaches do a lot of full coaching cycles. They work through the University of Maine; they trained through the University of Maine system, a combination of modeling and co-teaching through a complete coaching cycle”. While Principal Jessica may not have been able to name the model, the University of Maine Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy has worked closely with Sweeney and colleagues to teach enrollees in the partnership, the Student Centered model of coaching. Coach Gillian noted that when she joined her current district, “I learned about Sweeney’s model, which is more of a student centered approach where we're not looking to fix the teacher…”. Student Centered Coaching, “makes it feel more about the student than it does about the teacher [being] inadequate”.

Coach Kamila also named the Student Centered Coaching model. She explained, “I’ve done a lot of job research on my own to figure this position out”. Coach Kasey noted that “when we started, we started with the University of Maine Farmington program” [Maine Mathematics Coaching Project] and they were really focusing more on a teacher directed program.” She went on to say that as a district, coaching has “kind of evolved over the years to have more student centered and Sweeney's work is what our district really focuses on”. Coach Linda
maintained, “I think anything that kind of coaching that connects to student-focused [coaching]. Because that's where we want the change to really have the impact“ . She went on to add that teachers can teach a lesson, but “if you don't know where your students are and there's no feedback loop going on there's going to be no impact”. Coach Saada Tannus concurred and praised the Student Centered Model, “it's based on student data, it's based on genuine reflection, it is standards referenced. It's like all the good stuff and you can really see if there was any kind of impact”.

Another participant who reported that her district has adopted Sweeney’s Student Centered Coaching model is Principal Theresa. Since joining the district as principal, she reports a change in a predominant perspective from “bad teachers get coaches” to “this is just how we do business here. Everyone has coaching, including administrators.” Principal Theresa continued by explaining that even administrators are in classrooms teaching and being coached as part of the coaching protocols. “And I think that's part of the beauty of …clinical days, is to have teachers watch coaches coaching us, while we're teaching so it's not it's not about who's good and who isn't.” She added that this model illustrates the partnership between the coach and the teacher (or administrator) being coached. Clinical days also are a means of ongoing training and support which will be addressed in the next section.

In addition to Diane Sweeney, Principal Gabe also included “the Knight model” of coaching as well as “just a grassroots effort of just getting together with teachers and a peer to peer approach”. He asserted, “I think all three have lots of possibilities, if you could sort of mix all three of them together, that is our current model …with our instructional coaches. Coach John agreed with multiple approaches, “I really think that flexibility is the most important model to follow if you will”. He shared that he tries to make the options for coaching “much more open”
and teacher directed by asking questions such as “what would serve you best?” followed by specific examples of options - a modeled lesson, co-teaching, observing another teacher, all provided with support and flexibility. Principal Julie identified the teacher centered model as the model with which she is most familiar. She described it, “about really forming tight relationships with teachers, so that they trust you to experiment, learn about new strategies, implement them and reflect on them”.

**Training and Support**

Some participants identified a specific training or organization that supported the implementation of instructional coaching. Elizabeth Principal shared “ours was all developed through the Maine Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy (MPCL) with the University of Maine”. Principal Emily noted experience with the MPCL and work with the Maine Curriculum Leaders Association (MCLA). In addition to MCLA, Coach Penelope attended Southern Maine Literacy meetings. Other coaches and principals mentioned their work with the Maine Mathematics Coaching Project (MMCP) at the University of Maine Farmington. All participants associated with an organization or university, reported the value in the supportive structure that sustained their work as either a coach or a principal. Principal Jasmine called the MPCL training “lifechanging”, adding, “I think it changes the way you think about yourself and about other people and I am so grateful that I’ve had that both as a coach and as a principal”. Coach Pierce believed he was prepared for his job as an instructional coach because of his connection to MPCL. Through this partnership, he received training in the Student Centered Coaching model. Coach Bella admitted she was not prepared for her coaching position when she was hired, but was prepared after her first year of training with MPCL. An outside support structure was not provided in Principal Rowan’s district. He shared, “I hope we establish that clarity and
communication, because, it’s just not clear, of how these roles break down and how teachers are going to be supported”. Coach Penelope believes she was “prepared by accident” and because she is an avid reader, she managed to gain an understanding of coaching. Her district did not have a job description nor outcomes for her work as an instructional coach. These scenarios of unpreparedness are not that uncommon.

When asked about their training and ongoing support for instructional coaching, participants shared a variety of answers from belonging to Facebook support groups, participating in book studies, and attending conferences. Participants also identified professional networks of which they were members. These networks ranged from local organizations such as the Southern Maine Literacy Leaders to more formalized organizations such as the Maine Principals Association or the Maine Curriculum Leaders Association.

Principal participants reflected on a lack of knowledge about coaching. Principal Kelsie had attended training through the University of Maine at Farmington, but didn’t feel she had had much training overall. Principal Michael admitted that he had not had a lot of training around coaching, and “needed to look for more”. Coach Kamilla concurred, noting that she had taken a class to be a mentor and a course on curriculum and leadership, but did not note additional training or support for her role. When asked what types of professional development related to instructional coaching he had participated in, Principal Connor referred to his Reading Recovery training. Overwhelmingly, principal participants reported less training, even if their school was affiliated with a coaching program. A few admitted time constraints and conflicting priorities for reasons as barriers to training.

Of the 16 instructional coaches who took part in this study, seven of them reported enrollment in formal training through either the University of Maine or the University of Maine
at Farmington. Maine Partnerships for Comprehensive Literacy (MPCL) has undergone some program revisions since its inception at the University of Maine. According to its website, “MPCL is a K-12 continuous school improvement model dedicated to increasing student achievement through on-going professional development for educators and leadership teams”. The University of Maine at Farmington began implementing a program for math coaches in 2015. Now titled the Maine Math Coaches Project (MMCP), UMF’s website notes that this program is designed “to support districts and educators seeking to improve the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics”.

The coaches were positive about the training and support they received as part of either MPCL or MMCP. Coach Bella answered that she was not prepared for her position when she was hired, but felt much more confident after a year of MPCL training. Coach Emelia shared that all of her classes as part of MMCP were “valuable”. Coach Chelsea agreed that the coaching program at UMF “honed [her] practice, and then solidified her work as a coach focused on math”. Although they had both been part of specialized training in teacher literacy and ELL instruction, Coaches Gillian and Coach Pierce felt that they were prepared for their positions as coaches specifically because of the training through the University of Maine. They referenced “clinical days” where coaches work together to observe and provide feedback to each other as invaluable experiences that began in their first year of training through the Maine Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy.

There were 7 school principals who were connected to either the MMCP or MPCL training programs. Of the 7 principals, 3 had actually served as an Instructional Coach prior to becoming a principal. While principals are encouraged to join the coaches, from what I can ascertain, it is not a requirement. The principals spoke of the trainings that they had attended, and
the framework in place for regular coach-principal meetings. During the summer months, MMCP holds a two-day training for administrators to attend. MPCL encourages principals to participate in training offered throughout the year. Although having formalized training through MMCP or MPCL is not a requirement for instructional coaches and school principals in Maine, those who had not been afforded these opportunities mused that training on coaching would be helpful in their role as principals. And coaches reflected that if principals were more knowledgeable, they would be better equipped to support coaching in their schools. Both groups agreed that working with adults requires attention to relationships and clear communication.

**Instructional Leadership**

School principals are called upon to support the practices of teaching and learning within their schools as instructional leaders. Although one of their primary responsibilities is to focus on teaching and learning, principals bear many responsibilities. Coach Angela shared her belief that one person cannot do it all. “To me an instructional leader is really someone who can inspire and focus the energy of the group….” and that someone does not need to only be the principal. Fuentes and Jimerson (2020) note that instructional improvement is a piece of the responsibility of leaders in schools. What if the team “leader” included both school principals and instructional coaches? Coach Bella defined instructional leadership as “A leader who is skilled in best instructional practices". She continued, “I haven’t met very many leaders as administrators that are instructional leaders”.

For Coach Bella, and other participants, the responsibility of instructional leadership being part of an administrator’s role wasn’t always feasible. Fink & Resnick (2001, Murphy (2015), and Rigby (2014) emphasize that principals hold a great deal of responsibility and must juggle many tasks. Being an instructional leader was often overshadowed by the day to day management of a school. Although a few of the participants
appeared to envision an instructional leader as the principal, numerous others took a more inclusive approach and included teachers and instructional coaches as sharing the responsibility for instructional leadership with school principals.

This idea that principals are not the only experts in a school also has been reflected in the research. Danielson (2007) acknowledges, “principals have limited expertise….the school administrator cannot be an expert in everything” (p.16). Principal Walker expressed it this way, “My understanding is that you still lean on your content area experts to be able to help drive the curriculum. But as an instructional leader, I am the one who gets to push.” instructional coaches are often trained in working with adults, have specific content knowledge and have experiences working in school as teachers. By stepping out of their teaching roles, and into the roles of coaches, they are equipped to support the instruction within the school. Coach Chelsea also noted that an instructional coach is “invested in learning and honing their practice as a leader”. She continued, “they’re extremely well-versed in what’s going on in education and how to help teachers help kids.” By working together, instructional coaches provide the support and strategies, while school principals provide the support and the pressure for improvement.

Instructional Coach Emelia believes that there are three levels of instructional leadership from three sources-a classroom teacher, an instructional coach and from administration. From the teachers’ standpoint, Coach Emelia said, “instructional leadership is being proactive with your instruction-modeling, letting others see what you’re doing in your classroom and getting into other people’s classrooms-constantly perfecting your craft”. From the coaching standpoint, Emelia maintains that “instructional leadership is knowing the curriculum and being able to model the curriculum and support the teachers”. Finally, from the administrative perspective, instructional leadership is “being open to learning about the curriculum and to working with
others to understand what is happening in the classroom”. Coach Emelia holds that instructional leadership is not just practiced by one individual within a school. Instead it is a combination of people taking different roles within the school, yet all working towards the same purpose. This is important because school principals are often considered solely responsible for being the instructional leader and supporting their teachers. “The factors working against principals ‘getting into classrooms’ are many, varied, and difficult to overcome.” (Hallinger, 2005, p.232). If Coach Emelia’s definition is applied, then instructional leadership becomes a shared practice, expanding the definition to include other educators.

Principal Krista shared her beliefs on instructional leadership as it applies to coaching, “I think it all works together, I think your relationship with your instructional coach absolutely has to do with the instructional leadership and philosophy that you're going on as the leader of a building.” She continued,

I’ve had some really good instructional coaches and I've had some not so good instructional coaches and the effect they have on the climate of the building is huge. So, I’m, I would say, I would say I'm more of a leader of instruction. I'm not an instructional leader, because what I'm doing is overseeing what's going on in the classrooms and helping coach teachers get better at their craft. But I’m not necessarily in there, doing the instruction I'm not modeling anymore. I’ve been out of the classroom too long to model, I guess, I could, if I, if I needed to but I don't think that I'm the expert in that way anymore. That's not my strength (Principal Krista).

Principal Krista admitted that as a principal, she would rely on the experts, the instructional coaches for the content knowledge and the modeling of instructional practices. The "not so good instructional coaches” were described as being out of touch with teachers, in some cases being knowledgeable of best practices but having poor communication skills, and in other cases, just not aware of the best practices while trying to “fake it”. It is crucial that school principals and
instructional coaches have strong interpersonal skills and knowledge of working with adult learners. This balance of content knowledge, supportive practices and relationships is supported by Coach Mary who defined instructional leadership in this way,

I feel pretty strongly that that instructional leadership is really when someone both knows instruction really well, knows data really well and knows how those two fit together but also knows how those two things fit together in the reality of a classroom. And so, to be an instructional leader, I think you have to have that really solidly as your background, but also have to be a people person and have to be able to approach all of that knowledge with teachers in a way, where they trust you, respect you and do see you as a leader (Coach Mary).

Principal Jasmine defined instructional leadership in this way, “knowing and promoting and looking for and expecting best practices in teaching and learning…. It's not just the running of a school, it's how you put all the pieces together, so the running of the school is efficient for learning.”

Several instructional coaches described instructional leadership as the actions performed rather than the assigned job title of a leader, or in the case of schools, principals or administrators. When Coach Gillian described instructional leadership, she used the team leader, not referencing a particular job title.

A true instructional leader is someone who models learning and models the desire to grow. And that instructional leader inspires teachers and tries to find ways to motivate teachers to try new instructional strategies or to reflect on their own practice and really lead teachers to being able to help students achieve at a higher level (Coach Gillian).

Similarly, Coach John shared that “instructional leadership is giving teachers opportunities to improve their practice, and we do that in a lot of ways, observations or interactions in the classroom with the teacher and the students”. Coach Kara believes that instructional leadership “is a series of persons who don't necessarily know all of the answers, but are willing to problem
solve …willing to try things out and give honest feedback about what could or couldn’t work in terms of instruction”.

Principal Blake shared a similar sentiment, when he shared that for him instructional leadership is “really being able to help coach teachers and implement really high impact strategies that will, you know, help move the bar for kids”. This description could most certainly apply to the role that instructional coaches play in schools. Coaches help teachers, provide high impact strategies that will support student growth. Principal Connor said, “You have to understand how students are as learners but you also have to understand adults as learners….Sometimes we kind of clump them together, but there is a maturity factor that’s involved.”

These school principals and instructional coaches agreed that instructional leadership does not need to be assigned to the School Principal, and is not limited to a job title. When asked to define instructional leadership, Principal Elizabeth shared, “I really look at it as a support. You know, how do we help the teachers reflect and grow their skills in order to best support their students?” She added, “I really look at my role as helping them … unveil what their strengths are that they can grow upon and also what are they interested in learning more about?”

Overwhelmingly the answers did not assign instructional leadership to the position of the school principal. Fourteen instructional coaches and twelve school principals defined instructional leadership to involve more than just one person. Instead, these 26 participants viewed a team of leaders supporting the instruction as their vision of instructional leadership. Responses conveyed the idea that school principals benefit from not working in isolation and not being the sole individual to impart leadership to their staff.

Coach Linda believes that both instructional coaches and administrators play a role in instructional leadership and that it is not limited to one individual with one job title. “The way I
look at instructional leadership is not just from the principal. I feel it should be a team effort… whether it's through a specific position, like a coaching position…. working in classrooms side by side or coaching.” (Principal Kelsie) Instructional Leadership is often used to describe one of the primary functions of the School Principal. Study participants thought differently however, and described instructional leadership as a shared responsibility between school staff. This team effort helps all involved—students, teachers, instructional coaches and school principals. A shared approach to support benefits the teachers and therefore the students. The definitions of instructional leadership provided by the participants in this study does align with the researchers, and makes a case for the value of instructional coaches. Not only can they provide content knowledge and access to best practices, coaches and share the instructional leadership responsibilities. If done well, this partnership will serve to benefit both the coach and the principal as well as the teachers, and ultimately the students.

Finding 2: The Phenomena of School Culture as it Relates to Instructional Practices within Schools

School culture is one of the components of the conceptual framework; a condition that impacts the relationships between school principals and instructional coaches. When asked to describe their school culture and without being given specific guidance or a definition, participants were able to quickly describe their school culture. This is where the emotions came to the surface in several interviews. Even through Zoom, body language was visibly changed for some respondents. Some participants began to slouch; others straightened up and their facial expressions hardened; still others smiled and became more animated. Although Shein & Shein (2017) noted that assumptions of culture are often unconscious and therefore less visible, I was
observing a visible change in the participant body language when addressing this question of culture.

Most always participants began by sharing the characteristics of the staff in their school; sometimes describing the students and in a few cases reporting on the physical school building. School culture is the setting in the story; it directly impacts the happenings within a school. Schools have their own culture and these cultures differ from each other in a variety of ways as evidenced through the interviews. Waller (1932) wrote in *The Sociology of Teaching*, “there are in school, complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores and irrational sanctions….” (p. 103). The culture of schools and their impacts on instructional coaching will be addressed with this finding.

When asked to characterize their school culture, school principals and instructional coaches frequently characterized the staff in their school, and noted that they were willing to go above and beyond what was expected for them when it came to students and each other. “We have huge hearts” (Coach Linda); “people I work with would do anything for anybody” (Coach Kara); “we try to meet kids' needs, not just educationally but physically and emotionally” (Coach Kamila). School principals concurred, “our teachers are really, really focused on students, especially students with lower socioeconomic status and students with special needs” (Principal Blake). “Our core values really reflect what we do daily and our core values are teamwork, growth, acceptance, creativity and learning.” (Principal Kaden).

While participants noted that there were a few negative staff within their school, they identified most staff as really hard working and dedicated to their students. They went on to describe the closeness of staff and “their willingness to do whatever it takes to support students”. Even those described as “grumpy old men” (Coach Saada Tannus), were given an excuse for
their behavior-”high school teachers are just like that”. One Instructional Coach put it this way, “I think we try to meet kids' needs, not just educationally but physically and emotionally”. Principal Jasmine shared, “The best way to describe our school is they're like a family and they really do a good job of taking care of each other and having fun together and working hard together.”

… Our school is a really pleasant place to work. I think the current leadership within the building is strong and fair and compassionate which I think is really important…. grade level teams, for the most part, are really tight…. teachers are clearly hard workers so there's a culture of hard work. There is a culture of collaboration. Teachers have no problem going into classrooms to observe and …. people come into their classroom to observe so that's a really nice and welcoming aspect of our work (Coach Emelia).

In schools where staff were described as friendly and hardworking, coaching was often seen as a positive element of the school culture. Coach Saada Tanous views her staff as “taking a learners’ stance” and willing to engage in coaching. Coach John described his school culture by noting the level of dedication among his teachers. He sees the coaching position as one that is valued. “We talk a lot about being curious; I see it as my job to find value in what people are doing and understand why”. Interestingly, Principal Connor saw this family-like environment as a potential barrier to coaching. “While we are very student centered I don't think it has been, in hindsight now, the best setting for coaches to help shift some staff members.” He went on to say that rather than digging into the work of data review and reflection on instructional practices; teachers might revert to giving students “the gift of time” by slowing down the expectations and instruction. And that this potentially avoids addressing the true issues around teaching and learning. Hargreaves (2019) concurred and found that “close friends don’t always make the most productive colleagues” (p.617).
In a school culture that is described as “tender” due to high administrative turnover and a Literacy Coach who was let go due to incompetence, the current coach credits the Covid 19 Pandemic with steering staff towards coaching support.

I think actually COVID has been something that puts everybody on a more even playing field. And I think that teachers realize there's a lot that they have to learn in order to teach in this hybrid model and they are more willing to open their doors and more willing to share what works and what doesn't work (Coach Gillian).

Coach Kasey described her school as having many families whose children need support from the staff. “You can just tell when the students come through the door that they need a hug”. In her school she believes that even with the high poverty level, and transient population, the teachers have a growth mindset and seek out coaching. “Especially this year, as we’ve launched a new math program as well…and it meshes with the coaching I’ve done in the past” (Coach Kasey).

Not all respondents described the culture of their schools in this friendly, familiar way. Coach Pierce characterized the culture in his school in this way, “the culture is tepid at best; it is siloed and fractured.” He went on to attribute this to the changes in upper administration, including the superintendent, and the attitude from these individuals that it is “every man for himself”. Even given the current culture, Coach Pierce shared that many teachers had positive experiences with coaching because coaching had been such an integral part of the school system for so long. He went on to describe a current assistant principal, and former coach, as a huge support system to coaching. These two elements seemed to counter the negatively described culture and bolster coaching within the school and district. Others noted that the collegial culture was not always inclusive of all.
Another thing I want to say is strong about the culture, and this is true of the whole district, and also the building I'm in, is that people have been there their whole career, or you know, most people either went to school here as a student or became you know, got there early teaching job here and have chosen to stay so it's a very tight community in that people know each other very well, and you know, many have worked with colleagues for very long time, everybody knows everybody: it's like a village. The downside of that is that I was not a member of that village. I did not go to school in this district and I did not teach here before I became a coach and ….five years in, I mean someone described to me as still new two months ago….So the downside is that I feel like I'm an outsider (Coach Penelope).

Coach Ashley affirmed this idea that staff who were new to the organization might be viewed as not belonging to the school community. She encountered this in her work and shared, “.... that was really tricky because people didn't really want to open up to an outsider. I wouldn't say they were rude, but they were very protective. And they wanted to keep their problems to just them.”

What the findings show is that there really is not a link between a positive culture and a robust coaching program. In Coach Pierce’s school, he described a fractured culture, yet sees teachers turn to coaching to support their work. Principal Connor characterized his school culture as student centered, yet speculated that this could sometimes backfire, and cause teachers to create excuses for lack of student engagement and progress. He wondered if this might create a less than supportive environment for coaching where a focus on student growth would be deterred by teacher beliefs.

Given that there was no true alignment as I had suspected, and maybe even hoped, between a school culture described positively and a powerful coaching program, and similarly between a negative school culture and a floundering coaching program, I wanted to delve deeper. While school culture does have an impact, even an inconsistent impact, I wanted to explore the idea that the people in the positions also mattered. I wondered if there was
something about the school principals and instructional coaches that contributed to coaching and wanted to dig into this idea by asking instructional coaches to describe their School Principal and in turn have school principals describe their Instructional Coach. The next section explores this idea further.

Finding 3: Relational Exchanges of Trust and Vulnerability to Support Successful Practices within Schools

Communication between the principal and teachers, the teachers and the coaches, and the coaches and the principal is critical. Communication about coaching, the roles of the coach and the principal in supporting teachers, and the way in which coaching is a means of on-site professional development in place to support teaching and learning.

Principal Julie communicated her beliefs this way,

You know the best way that we can support kids in a school is to have strong instruction that reaches every single student and it's our job as a leader to prioritize that. The highest leverage thing that we can do in a school is to get into classrooms and give teachers feedback and help them to be self-reflective and have an open mindset to learning (Principal Julie).

These beliefs were echoed by other principal participants as well. And they stressed that this purpose of coaching must be communicated clearly and frequently. Principal Rowan stressed the need for “a trusting relationship” with frequent communication and clearly defined roles. Principal Emily felt that a visual with two columns spelling out the roles of both the school principal and the instructional coach would help all see that the roles are both supportive of teachers, but have a different focus. Principal Jessica, who has served as an Instructional Coach, shared the challenge that “you’re not an administrator, you’re not an evaluator and the lines may
get blurred if coaches want to make us aware of something [important going on with a teacher]”. And Principal Jasmine cautioned that coaches “need to be careful not to act or think like a quasi-administrator”. This is where I believe that specialized training and support helps both coaches and administrators to see the value in defining the roles and responsibilities, not only for themselves, but for teachers and stakeholders as well. Even with roles clearly defined, some teachers may not believe that they are not being “ratted on” by the coaches. Principal Krista shared that her teachers insisted she had coaches coming to her to report on them. She described this as a “delicate relationship”. “Teachers would see me meeting with the coaches and they thought they were tattling on them; we were just meeting to discuss coaching” (Principal Krista).

The instructional coaches agreed that the relationships and communication was critical. Coach Bella stressed that coaches must be able to trust their principals; and that principals must trust their coaches and follow through. “Two hearts beating as one” was how Coach Ashley described the relationship between a coach and a principal. She went on to add that she doesn’t believe that a coach can be successful without the support of a principal, a sentiment echoed by most of the instructional coaches. Coach Chelsea described her relationship with her principal as “superficial” due to a “lack of trust”. Principals weighed in as well. Principal Jasmine put it this way, “we have a really trusting relationship… she can bring up the hard things…she's really good at raising issues… then giving me the time and space to just think on it and process it and start to make a plan”. She continued, “ she's really aware human, so she's easy to work with”. Principal Kelsie shared, “I feel very fortunate that way, I mean I can't even imagine not having them, they're like my saving grace really”.

Coach Penelope doesn’t believe that coaches are able to be successful without the support of their principal, “without [communication and support], the coach is unable to do her
job”. One coach emphasized this point by saying, “the coaching roles must be clearly defined and the principal must be passionate, almost aggressive about selling it [coaching] as a non-negotiable. (Coach Emelia) She continued by saying that while her first principal was “a nice guy”, he “didn’t know what to do with me and teachers wanted to use me as a glorified ed tech”. Clearly defined roles as well as consistent messaging about coaching is important for all stakeholders within the school.

The personalities of the instructional coaches as well as school principals have an impact the school culture and the success of a coaching program within a school. “A leader can help to create a culture by bringing a cause to the attention of a group of people, developing a following….imposing rules, and recruiting more members” (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p.26)

Coach Ashley works in four different schools and was able to contrast both the culture and the administration as seen in Table 9. I begin by sharing her descriptions of the schools she works in because of the variation between schools within the district. In School A and School D, terms like “nice” and “friendly” describe both the administrators and the culture. In School C, there is a disconnect between the principal and the assistant principal, and while the culture is described as welcoming, it was noted that the staff are looking to administration for guidance. School B is described as close knit. Are the staff this way because of the strong “she gets what she wants” principal?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Culture</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tight knot</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took a while to infiltrate into the culture and not feel like an outsider</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close knit</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
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<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking to administration for support</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff are very kind</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>School Principal</th>
<th>School Principal</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Principal &amp; Assistant Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Super friendly</td>
<td>• Nice</td>
<td>• Nice</td>
<td>• Responds quickly, then changes decision</td>
<td>• Cool, calm and easy going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice guy</td>
<td>• Scary</td>
<td>• Scary</td>
<td>• Assistant Principal</td>
<td>• Walk the halls and talk to kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nostrils flare showing displeasure</td>
<td>• Nostrils flare showing displeasure</td>
<td>• Going for popularity points</td>
<td>• Work very well together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A force to be reckoned with</td>
<td>• A force to be reckoned with</td>
<td>• Gets what she wants</td>
<td>• Work very well together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Don’t work well together</td>
<td>• Don’t work well together</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coach Angela, like Coach Ashley, also provided descriptors of the school administrators and seems to link the culture with the administration. She compared the two schools within which she worked, “At First School our school culture is not good. The teachers are not happy with administration and this administration isn't happy with teachers.” She went on to provide this reason, “teachers are being asked to do things but not really truly being asked to do them because there isn't much follow through.” The principal was described as aloof and carefree; often asking Coach Angela to provide professional development with less than two days’ notice. The lack of follow through made it difficult for Coach Angela to do her job, no one felt that they were supported by the principal. However, she reported that Second School has a much better culture, “A much more positive culture and supportive culture where people
feel listened to and decisions are sometimes made from top down, but definitely leaders, like department leaders, are heard and there is a discussion when things have to be decided.” Coach Angela described the administration at this school as supportive and trusting. She went on to describe meetings where her ideas would be shared and listened to; a real collaboration.

All of the participants were asked to describe either their School Principal or their Instructional Coach. While these descriptors are based on opinions in a sense, in some cases, a connection could be made between the personality of the principal or the school coach and the school culture as well as the success of coaching. Table 10 outlines the adjectives and phrases given by the participant to describe their counterpart. The check marks indicate more than one respondent used that term. While some of the descriptors such as “kind” can be found on both sides of the table, phrases like “super intelligent or smart” were reserved for instructional coaches with four school principals describing their coaches this way. One coach did describe her principal as “knowledgeable”, but this was not directly related to intelligence, rather as one who was aware of their school and curriculum. “Kind”, “caring”, and “supportive” were terms used to describe both coaches and principals. These terms helped to provide a context for the relationships. When a counterpart was described as supportive or smart, the relationship tended to be a positive one; one that was valued as a benefit to either the School Principal or Instructional Coach.
Table 10

*Descriptions of school principals and instructional coaches*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Principals as described by Instructional Coaches</th>
<th>Instructional Coaches as described by School Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Kind ✔</td>
<td>• Kind ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Caring</td>
<td>• Very caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledgeable</td>
<td>• Super intelligent/Smart ✔✔✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A nice human</td>
<td>• Energetic ✔✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lazy</td>
<td>• Respectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aloof</td>
<td>• Passionate ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Carefree</td>
<td>• Intuitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack understanding of education</td>
<td>• Inviting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Honest ✔</td>
<td>• Supportive ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fair</td>
<td>• Well-researched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commands respect</td>
<td>• Hardworking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supportive ✔✔</td>
<td>• Poor communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trusting</td>
<td>• Savvy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Controlling</td>
<td>• Patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overconfident</td>
<td>• Organized ✔✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quick to react</td>
<td>• Skilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analyze then respond</td>
<td>• Effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loves kids</td>
<td>• Aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Super tolerant</td>
<td>• Data driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No follow through ✔</td>
<td>• Eager to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive ✔</td>
<td>• Dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Outgoing</td>
<td>• Enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fosters growth</td>
<td>• Charismatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Neutral</td>
<td>• Intuitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More aware of pedagogy</td>
<td>• Wonderful resource ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lacks confidence</td>
<td>• Respected</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Cautious</td>
<td>• Driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflective</td>
<td>• Friendly ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Snarky</td>
<td>• Standoffish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Huffy</td>
<td>• Knowledgeable ✔✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consistently presumes positive</td>
<td>• Trusted ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interested in facilitating growth</td>
<td>• One of us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dependable</td>
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Coach Emelia explained her principal and the relationship she has with her this way, “because of her hard work and her attitude, it's like she commands respect” She continued, “I don't always see eye to eye with her ….but she does not hold those pieces against you….it means we can have tough conversations and not worry about recourse [from her]”. Coach Nancy agreed with the importance of knowing your administrator, “When things come up in these sticky situations or anything like that, it's nice to know their temperament”. She went on to say that she approached the administration differently, depending on their personality.

“Lazy”, “aloof”, “controlling”, “snarky” and “overconfident” are not terms that one would view positively, nor create confidence in the ability of the individual, and yet these are how some school principals were described. Coach Chelsea used the term lazy and then went on to add, “they lack an understanding of education.” She acknowledged that even though the staff was described as hardworking and committed to students, “the teachers are really stressed, they feel unsupported by the administration, they feel like that the administration doesn't really know what they're doing.” Coach Chelsea connected these feelings with the fact that she saw very little communication from administration and very little understanding about her role as an Instructional Coach. “Classroom teachers and more so, our unified arts, are very discouraged by the lack of support and respect that they get…Our administration has a tendency to pit groups against each other. It doesn't work so well, but they try.” (Coach Chelsea)

Two phrases used by a Principal Walker to negatively describe the instructional coaches were “standoffish and having poor communication”. He attributed this to lack of time spent in his school. Other principals agreed. Coaches were sometimes assigned to multiple schools across several towns, and without a relationship, teachers did not always view them as a viable and trusted resource. Gonser (2021) notes that by giving teachers time to work together, and
have achievable goals, culture can thrive. When coaches are split between schools, and are not able to build relationships, the coaching culture suffers. Principal Michael felt very fortunate, “She is just an outstanding, tremendous resource that is to be celebrated on every level of what she's been able to offer our students and staff”. Principal Rowan described the coaches within his school as trusted resources, “They were seen as resources, when teachers had a question about what to try with a student, how to look at this lesson, [they would reach out to a coach].”

Coach Nancy summarized this idea that personalities varied, when she said, “I want to say it’s like all educators, they each have different temperaments.” With just a few exceptions as noted above, most instructional coaches could identify positive traits within their School Principal and vice versa. Principal Walker captured the overall feeling expressed by principals and coaches about their counterparts, “they are always willing to step in and help”. The idea of stepping in to help as well as the notion of a trusted resource, will be further explored as the term “instructional leadership” is examined.

Motivation is a key factor in Knowles’ work: if new learning has a specific purpose, the adult learners are more likely to be more motivated. Following this line of reasoning, if teachers believe that the work with instructional coaches has a specific purpose, then they are more likely to be motivated to partner with the coach. And if school principals communicate the purpose of coaching clearly, and demonstrate support for utilization of coaching, they are more likely to expect coaching to be one of the ways they can support their teachers. Yet, “coaching requires complex negotiations….of the nature of teacher learning…it requires coaches and teachers to work together to establish the possibilities and limits of coaching within local contexts” (Hunt & Handsfield, 2013, pp.72-73). Likewise, if principals and coaches work together as partners, each assuming a slightly different focus with the same end in mind, the teachers will benefit from this
partnership. “Coaching can enhance professional development and school culture when administrators select a model appropriate to school goals and take steps to show that they value and support it” (Garmston, 1987). School principals may also reap the gains of this collaboration in that they can share the responsibility for instructional leadership with their instructional coaches.

The local school’s culture, the manner in which coaching is implemented, communication and clearly defined roles, as well as support and training comprise the conditions that either support or impede the work of instructional coaches in Maine schools. Participants in this study were asked to reflect on the type of implementation they experienced when coaching was first introduced to their school; communication between and among stakeholders related to coaching; the type of training they received related to coaching as well as any on-going support that is provided; they were also questioned about their school culture. School principals were asked to characterize their instructional coaches; and instructional coaches were asked to describe their school principals. Participants were questioned about their understanding of the roles of coaches and principals. The definition and delineation of positional roles were clearly identified by some participants, while others admitted that this was not something that existed within their work, but would be welcomed.

Through the interview process, participants described how school culture, implementation of coaching, training and support, and communication impacted the success of instructional coaching from their perspective. While school culture mattered, there was not a direct link from a positive culture with a successful coaching program. And the same with a negative culture which did not always inhibit coaching from being effective. The implementation of coaching, training and support and communication consistently mattered. In schools where
there was communication about roles and responsibilities of coaches, principals and teachers, as well as clear and consistent messaging, coaching was more successful.

Overwhelmingly, the benefits of having a coach to work with far outweighed the challenges. The challenges were reported to be role confusion, a coach who seemed unsure or disconnected from the work, and time to meet with coaches. Those who did have set meetings with coaches reported that this time was held “sacred” and that these regular meetings aided in communication and relationship building. Additionally, principals were able to get ideas to help support their teachers. Principals reported utilizing their coaches to support their own work, support new teachers as well as veteran teachers, and to provide professional development whether it be in the implementation of a new program or curriculum work. Principal Jessica finds having a coach beneficial because, “it is easy [for a principal] to get bogged down” with other work. In her district, coaches were held in high regard by teaching staff. Principal Theresa praised coaches as “such a gift to principals and teachers” but cautioned that coaches must have the correct skill set and that relationships with the teachers and principal must be built and not rushed. When attention is paid to the conditions for implementation, training and support and communication, solid relationships can be built between teachers and coaches, coaches and principals and principals and teachers. These relationships will then provide support for all parties and allow them to flourish in their role.

The variables at play during implementation of coaching, the school culture, and the relationships within school were at the crux of my conceptual framework. Participants shared their stories, and in many cases, their stories echoed what I had expected to learn based on my own leadership experiences, and the literature. However, that was not always the case. The final chapter will discuss these findings and the implications for stakeholders.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships between school principals and instructional coaches. The idea for this study came about because of my interest in the coaching-principal partnerships in my own district and my experiences of isolation as the principal of an elementary school. As my district launched a multi-year implementation to bring instructional coaching to each of our district schools, I began to observe that school principals were benefiting from working with the instructional coach. These observations were made during my quarterly meetings with the instructional coaching team composed of the instructional coaches and school principals, the superintendent and me as well as my conversations with both the coaches and the principals.

As a principal for 14 years, I often felt stretched beyond my capacity. The thought of implementing what now are termed the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders was overwhelming. This push and pull between instructional leader and manager was real. It is true that these professional standards include just one standard dedicated to operations and management. This management standard, along with the standards related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional and caring communities for staff and students, meaningful engagement of all stakeholders, equity and cultural responsiveness as well as school improvement may seem miniscule in comparison to the other nine standards. However, anyone who has served as a school principal knows firsthand that the management role takes precedence simply because of the nature of the unwritten tasks that are associated with this standard-safety drills, plumbing issues, student behavior, staff absenteeism and staff shortages. These days
management also includes additional pressure from the external school community including the public and school boards.

For me, the principalship was extremely isolating at times, with no one else in the school with whom to discuss the nuanced challenges of instruction and assessment. The principals in my district who had an instructional coach in their school, appeared more confident when planning professional development, discussing assessments and curriculum and instructional practices within their schools. During a meeting with our Maine Partnership for Comprehensive Literacy trainer, the idea for this study really started to come together. I wondered what role instructional coaches could play in supporting school principals in their work. A search for research related to “relationships between school principals and instructional coaches” yielded a few studies and dissertations, but did not provide me with the specific information for which I was searching. This study was a chance for me to discover what was happening in other Maine schools and compare findings with the research.

I designed my qualitative study in order to explore the relationships between instructional coaches and school principals in Maine public schools. As part of this study, information regarding conditions within these schools was collected and examined to determine if the school culture, the model of coaching, communication, training and support made coaching work in schools; and conversely, did any of these conditions lead to unsuccessful coaching in schools. Chapter Five begins with a look at the research questions and the themes that emerged from the findings outlined in Chapter Four.

My study focused on these two questions:
• How do school principals and instructional coaches work together and support each other as instructional leaders?
• How does school culture, implementation of coaching, school-wide training and support and building communication impact the professional relationships of instructional coaches and school principals?

The first theme that emerged from the findings is that school principals and instructional coaches work together with relationships falling somewhere on a continuum from positive to negative partnerships. The positive partnerships were ones with clearly defined roles and boundaries that were followed consistently. The negative partnerships where there is lack of collaboration, undefined roles and even animosity. Most principals recognized that coaches were a source of support for them. Only one principal of the sixteen interviewed was less than enthusiastic about coaching. While she believed that coaching could be a positive, she felt that money would be better spent elsewhere. She (Principal Krista) acknowledged that “we did it all wrong” in terms of implementation, but acknowledged that it would be difficult to get her staff to rally around the idea of hiring a coach. She believed that they would choose to hire support staff, specifically educational technicians to work with students, rather than a coach.

Overall, coaches were optimistic about their school principal, feeling supported in their work. Others wished that their principal would be more aware and involved with coaching. Coach Gillian emphasized that “administrators need to understand the role of the coach-they need to see it in action.” For the most part, principals were unanimous in their praise for coaches. A few admitted that there were times when their coaches were not viewed as effective and used negative descriptors. Most however praised their coaches, noting that “having
a coach makes being a principal less lonely” (Principal Jasmine). Principal Elizabeth commented that instructional coaches “ground everybody to the essence of the work”.

Training and support helped both coaches and principals. Established training programs such as Maine Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy (MPCL) and Maine Mathematics Coaching Project (MMCP) were only utilized by 7 of the 16 instructional coaches with 3 principals having been coaches prior to becoming an administrator, and 4 additional principals reporting connections to MMCP or MPCL. Coach Angela shared that she wished her principals “understood coaching better and how coaching can lead to more effective teaching”. Whether this understanding would come from a specific program or training was not specified, however the sentiment was echoed by others including Coach Kasey who noted “it is the hardest to work for an administrator who does not know about coaching”.

Instructional coaches may often be assigned to multiple schools or grade levels and this was true for one-third of the coaches interviewed. As a result of restrictions and recommendations of the Pandemic, coaches were reassigned to just one school. These coaches noted an improvement in relationship building when coaches had one staff to work with rather than multiple teachers and administrators in several schools. Having to juggle multiple staff, varied schedules and different administrators does not benefit instructional coaches. Being able to work with one school, learning the teachers and administrators and being part of one culture benefits instructional coaches. While none of the principals interviewed were split between multiple schools, a few had held positions requiring them to split their time and they voiced the challenges of being required to learn the nuances of multiple school.

Principals need to have an understanding of what coaching is, how they can support their coaches, how they can use coaching to support their teachers and their own practice. Coaches
asked for actionable feedback on their work, wished that administrators knew what coaching was all about and provided overall support. Coach Bella shared, “coaches have quit because of their ‘not trusting’ their principals”. Coach Penelope had a similar feeling, noting that “the principal and the staff are the most important relationships a coach has, without this, they are unable to do their job.” Principal Jasmine felt that “coaches make being an administrator less lonely”. She cautioned, “but you have to be careful….so the coach isn’t thought of as a ‘quasi-administrator’”.

The second theme that emerged was that a school’s culture did have an impact on coaching. However, this theme came with surprises—whether or not the culture was deemed positive or negative did not necessarily coincide with the success of coaching. Sometimes a negative school culture actually pushed teachers towards coaching rather than away from it. This was attributed to the fact that teachers were looking for support, and they found it in their school coach. When participants reported a positive school culture, there were times when coaching also was not successful. In these schools, it was described as family-like, with everyone getting along, and working well together, yet there was little focus on improvement, and therefore coaching became less effective. The ideas that school culture and relationships play into the implementation and utilization of coaching programs leads me to the implications.

Implications

Implications for Practice

Instructional coaches are hired to support teachers in school districts, and that certainly is their primary role regardless of the type of implementation, model or training. Not a supervisor, nor an evaluator, the instructional coach may provide immediate feedback and support, pose
reflective questions and model exemplary practices. School principals are supervisors and evaluators of teachers. As part of the formal evaluation process and daily supervision, principals may provide feedback and support and pose reflective questions to their teachers. The difference between these two sets of interactions, or relationships, is the positional authority held by school principals over their teachers. It is crucial that systems implement clearly defined expectations and roles for both school principals and instructional coaches and clearly communicate these to all stakeholders. It is equally important that school districts work together to tease apart the definitions of supervision and evaluation that have been welded together. An instructional coach can provide frequent, individualized feedback and support to a teacher with greater fidelity than a school principal.

Also, worth considering is that teacher evaluation is mandated by statute in Maine. School principals are required to evaluate their teachers using the model approved by the Teacher Performance Evaluation and Professional Growth (TPEPG) Committee and Board of Directors. While school principals must follow the prescribed methods, instructional coaches can provide feedback and not be bound by the same requirements of school principals. Mette et al. (2017) define the purpose of supervision as “focused on ongoing support, teacher improvement, and teacher professional growth” (p.710). Feedback and support are both part of the evaluation process. When formal evaluations happen once a year, maybe more for teachers who are still considered on probationary status, it is hard to believe that any follow up conversations related to the evaluation would make an impact on the teacher’s performance. “How the principal delivers the feedback and support is important to teachers” (Carreiro, 2020, p.100); also, of importance is the frequency with which feedback is given. I believe that instructional coaches are a missing piece of the required teacher evaluation system. The caution
here is that instructional coaches are not evaluators. And this point would need to be clearly
defined and communicated. However, instructional coaches can be utilized as supervisors
providing support to all teachers within the school system.

The nature of the relationships between school principals and instructional coaches are
congruent with the common goal of improved instructional practices. The approaches taken by
the school principals and instructional coaches may be very different. My conceptual framework
shows the interconnectedness of the relationships between the school principals and teachers,
instructional coaches and teachers, and school principals and instructional coaches. The
relationships that exist between the principals, instructional coaches and teachers can cause
functional tension. Through feedback, coaches are building upon teachers’ skills, making
suggestions and providing resources; these may be actions that are performed by school
 principals during their work with teachers. The feedback given by the school principal is
oftentimes required feedback; the feedback given by instructional coaches is feedback given
within the coaching relationship, with no stipulations of employment.

This interconnectedness of roles may be the result of lack of role definition,
misunderstanding or assumptions regarding the instructional coach’s role, or it may be that the
school principal chooses to use the instructional coach as a pseudo-administrator. Adding to the
role confusion and congruent responsibilities of school principals and instructional coaches is the
“overlap between the theoretical definitions of teacher supervision and evaluation, namely that
both are intended to support and monitor instruction, target areas of ongoing improvement, and
develop a collective building conscious of instruction” (Mette et al., 2017, p. 713). As a result of
this study, the relationships between instructional coaches and school principals must be
considered along with the expectations of supervision and evaluation as well as the varied conditions which do impact these relationships.

Instructional coaching works best when the coaching program is well thought out, provides training for both the instructional coach and the school principal, and includes stakeholders in communication. In order to do this, school districts must commit both time and resources to allow for stakeholders to meet and for coaches and principals to be trained. Principal Jessica noted that there are challenges that must be addressed that can help the coaching program be successful. Instructional coaches must know that they are not administrators; and principals must avoid putting them in that role. One participant suggested that “clearly defined roles and responsibilities” be shared with the principals and the coaches as well as the staff.

School culture, communication, implementation, support and training are all conditions that impact the relationships between instructional coaches and school principals. The effect that these conditions make on the implementation of instructional coaching, school leadership and teaching, in turn influences the formation of these relationships between the school principals and instructional coaches. The model of coaching selected by the school, the communication to all stakeholders and the role definition are critical conditions that must be considered as part of the implementation. Ongoing support and training for the teachers, instructional coaches and school principals is essential.

As an educator with over 30 years of experience, I believe that the culture within a school including the staff and their interactions with one another, their beliefs and values all come into play as factors. If change is embraced within a school culture, the staff are more likely to welcome new positions, be open to working with instructional coaches and value the input from
colleagues. If change is feared, the staff are more likely to block new positions, be closed minded about the initiative of instructional coaching and choose to avoid the instructional coach or be downright aggressive in hindering the work.

Instructional coaching has varied models, and I believe that the model that is selected, along with the role definition will provide stakeholders with a clear picture of what coaching is as well as what it is not. Without a model and role definition, all sorts of problems can arise. Lastly, ongoing support and training is critical for all educators. As more is learned in the field of coaching, supervision and support of teachers, this information must be disseminated within the school. Having coaches and principals stay up to date with the latest findings regarding coaching and supervision is a part of this support and training. And within a district, it is important to consider what support would benefit both coaches and principals.

Implications for Policy

The findings from this study have policy implications for Maine. The current statute regarding supervision and evaluation must be reviewed and must consider research studies in order that policy makers can make informed decisions. The current evaluation system must be reevaluated to determine its impact on educator effectiveness. Is the current system simply ticking the boxes of compliance or is it supporting meaningful growth for our Maine teachers? I suspect that the answer is heavily linked to compliance based on my own work as an evaluator. While I provide what I consider to be feedback to help the teacher improve their practice, I do not believe that the feedback I provide, albeit good feedback, yields the intense, in the moment wrap-around support that an instructional coach can provide. The impact of supervisory feedback-feedback that is ongoing and part of either a coaching cycle, or the
supervision provided by a school principal should be researched further. This would provide current findings to guide the practices that are mandated for schools in Maine.

Organizations such as the Maine Curriculum Leaders Association (MCLA) will want to consider the findings from this study as they make decisions related to training and support for instructional coaches. Currently MCLA provides curriculum leaders and instructional coaches a network with other coaches and leaders, training, research and voice in educational policy making. MCLA is a vehicle for change, allowing Maine educators a venue to share and explore the practices in our schools. One of its core features is the desire to develop practices that impact curriculum leaders and instructional coaches, making it a preeminent organization to review my findings and partner with others including the Maine Department of Education to promote change.

Universities with coaching training such as the University of Maine at Farmington and the University of Maine will want to review current coaching programs and consider ways to include administrators in their training of coaches. While school principals are encouraged, or even expected to attend some training sessions, participants often noted that principals may attend one or two sessions, if any at all, and then just stop attending. It was not clear if this was due to lack of interest, or competing priorities, but the sense I got from instructional coaches was that non-participation signaled disinterest. These training programs must review their program design and consider the impact of the relationships that can support instructional coaching when coaches and principals work together.

Educational Leadership programs will also want to consider the impact of the relationship between administrators and coaches in their schools. Additionally, I find that the push for instructional leadership to lie solely with the school principal an outdated idea that must be
reconsidered given the current conditions in Maine schools. If the leadership programming does not adapt to the current conditions and needs of Maine educators, students are going to suffer. It is not feasible for school principals to continue to work alone and handle all the daily tasks and challenges. Teachers deserve the one on one attention that an instructional coach can afford them. Teachers have the right to job embedded professional development that happens in their classrooms to support them and their students. It is time to consider how to bring more coaching into schools; and how to ensure that the coaching programs have a high quality implementation to become part of the school culture.

**Implications for Future Research**

This qualitative focused exclusively on Maine principals and instructional coaches in order to learn about their relationships with one another as well as the conditions that allowed them to flourish in their work, or caused inefficacious circumstances. Through interviews, participants were asked to answer a series of questions detailing their background, the implementation of coaching, communication, ongoing support and training and school culture. Each participant was also asked to share any additional thoughts about these principal and coach relationships. This research study was intentionally designed to gather the stories of those individuals who are school principals or instructional coaches. The stories that were gathered do tell of the relationships, and of the conditions in the schools. The stories do not provide specific quantitative data that measures the success of the coaching program. Future research could be centered around specific skills gained by teachers who are being coached in order to measure teacher growth; it could also explore the models of coaching as well as implementation practices. Of particular interest for additional research is the continued exploration between supervision and evaluation. These terms are quite often used
interchangeably. Studies to explore the meaning of supervision and evaluation as well as the ways in which principals and coaches balance these roles. Supervision needs to be separated from evaluation. And evaluation as a means to provide support needs a closer look.

Coaching in its current iteration is a relatively new practice for Maine schools. While some participants report having a coach for over two decades, many more schools are in the early implementation stage. There are many nuances to the relationships between instructional coaches and school principals. I do believe that continued research is necessary to measure the effectiveness and impact of coaching on school principals, as well as teachers and even students.

This study was conducted to gain insights into the relationships between school principals and instructional coaches. Thirty-two school principals and instructional coaches shared their perceptions, realities and recommendations about their relationships, their school culture, communication, coaching implementation, support and training. As a result of this study, all Maine school districts must take a look at how current coaches are being utilized and what benefits districts without coaches could gain by adding these positions. School districts are spending money on coaching, and it is essential that they pause to evaluate the effectiveness of their coaching programming. These questions provide a starting point for evaluating the coaching: What structures are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of this coaching? What are the reasons that not all school districts employ coaches? How can system changes be made to support schools with their efforts to implement coaching?

School Boards often don’t understand coaching, and school communities may view instructional coaches as unnecessary due to a lack of understanding. This ignorance leads to frustration as groups advocate for positions that are incomparable. Frequently this might look like a support staff position, such as an ed tech. Principal Krista admitted that her teachers
wanted educational technicians to be hired instead of coaches. This line of thinking is
unfortunate as the two positions serve different purposes, and school staff understand what an ed
tech can do, while often do not understand the role of an instructional coach.

Teachers deserve the support that instructional coaches can bring. School principals
benefit from working with instructional coaches. Given the current state of education at what is
hoped to be the end of a global pandemic and what continues to be political and social unrest,
public schools need to seriously consider the benefits that instructional coaching positions bring
to both teachers and school principals. It is also time that the definitions of supervision and
evaluation be clearly defined through the Maine Department of Education. Supervision must be
expanded to include instructional coaches.

With the proper conditions in place, instructional coaches and school principals can
thrive in their work together. Without these conditions, their relationships can become toxic and
unproductive. The role and purpose of instructional coaching must be clearly defined and
communicated to school staff, school boards and the entire school community. The time is now,
the benefits are clear. Stakeholders and policy makers must work together to bring instructional
coaching to all Maine schools. School principals and instructional coaches can and should
benefit from their work with each other. When the right conditions exist, these relationships can
contribute to the growth and development of both the coaches and the principals, as well as the
teachers and students.

Conclusions

This study began because of my personal experiences with coaching and my interest in
learning more about the benefits of coaching. As I finish this dissertation, my current district will
have six Instructional Coaches—one for each of our schools. This is exciting and scary all at the same time. Exciting, because I firmly believe as a result of my research in the benefits of coaching for teachers and principals. Scary because instructional coaching is something that is misunderstood by many, and several community members have sought to eliminate these positions. And yet, these stories were echoed in the voices of my participants. While this study was relatively small, just 32 participants, I am excited to have learned the stories of 32 Maine educators as it connects to their roles as school principals and instructional coaches in public schools. The implications for Maine are present in this study—our educators need the support of instructional coaches. The work that needs to be done to make this happen is daunting. It will require further research, funding, policy changes and qualified educators ready to fill the roles. It will require change at the college level; it will require training, money and time. As I reflect on my research, I imagine the benefits that the teachers and principals in my own district have seen as a result of their work with our first instructional coaches; and I want that for all educators, not just in my district, and not just in Maine. The benefits of coaching are essential for all educators, because in turn, the more supported our teachers and principals are, the better conditions will be for our students.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Appendix A: Recruitment Email for instructional coaches and school principals

Dear [name],

My name is Theresa Gillis and I am a PhD Candidate in Education with a concentration in Educational Leadership at the University of Maine. I am reaching out to you because I am conducting research on the relationship between instructional coaches and school principals in Maine schools. You have been identified as a [school principal/instructional coach]. I have contacted you through an email provided by the Maine Department of Education database. Specifically, this study will explore the relationships between instructional coaches and school principals as well as the conditions that help or hinder these relationships.

I invite you to participate in this study to help me learn more about your relationship with your [instructional coach/school principal], what conditions are present in your school to support and/or hinder this relationship and the coaching model and structure within your school. This interview will take place via Zoom and will last approximately one hour. The interview will be scheduled for a day and time that is mutually convenient.

A full description of the study is provided as part of the informed consent information. I realize that this school year has presented varied challenges and that your time is a precious commodity. However, I am hopeful that you will consider participating in this study.

Regards,

Theresa J Gillis, PhD Candidate University of Maine
Appendix B: Interview Protocol for School Principals and Instructional Coaches

History of Participant

Describe your educational background, including years of experience and positions held.

What drew you to your current position as ____________(principal/instructional coach)?

Do you believe that you were prepared for this position?

If so, what specifically helped with your preparation?

If not, what would have better prepared you?

How long have you and your _______________ (principal/instructional coach) worked together?

What is the supervisory structure for instructional coaches in your school district?

What model or practice do you believe to be best suited for instructional coaching?

Describe your understanding of instructional leadership.

What professional networks do you belong to?

Background of Implementation

Describe the implementation of instructional coaches within your school or district

What preparation was done for the addition of these positions within your school/district?

Who were the people in your district involved with the implementation?

How were stakeholders given information about this implementation?

How long was the process pre-implementation?

Current Status

What does instructional coaching look like at your school? What does this look like at the district level?

What structures exist for ongoing communication with the stakeholders?

What are some of the hurdles that you have encountered?
What are some of the celebrations that you have experienced?

Describe your school culture.

Does the school culture support the work of the instructional coach? Why or Why not?

Describe your relationship with the _________ (principal/instructional coach)

What systems are in place to support you in your work?

Has working with the _________(principal/instructional coach) been a help or a hindrance? Why?

What would improve your working relationship with the _________(principal/coach)?

What types of professional development related to instructional coaching have you participated in within the past?
Appendix C: Informed Consent

Appendix C: Informed Consent Information

My name is Theresa Gillis and I am a PhD Candidate in Educational Leadership at the University of Maine. As part of my requirements for completion of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership, I am conducting a study on the relationship between school principals and instructional coaches within Maine schools. Specifically, this study will examine these relationships, the conditions that help or hinder these relationships and the models and structures for instructional coaching within the participant’s school and district. Information from this study may be shared with the educational community through presentations or published reports.

What will you be asked to do? If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in a confidential interview via Zoom that will ask you to describe the relationship you have with your [school principal/instructional coach], the elements of your school culture and the impact these conditions have on your relationship with your [school principal/instructional coach], and the model of coaching that has been implemented within your school and/or district. The interview will be scheduled for a mutually agreed upon time between January and April, 2021. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be recorded and transcribed for research purposes. Sample questions include:

- Describe your educational background, including years of experience and positions held.

- Describe the implementation of instructional coaches within your school or district

- Does the school culture support the work of the instructional coach? Why or why not?

Risks: Other than your time and inconvenience for participation in the interview, there is minimal risk associated with participation in this study.

Benefits: While there is no direct benefit to you, the data gathered will provide insights into the relationships between school principals and instructional coaches within Maine schools and the conditions within which these relationships thrive or struggle. This information will be helpful to schools with instructional coaches, and those considering adding instructional coaches.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality: Interviews will be conducted, recorded and transcribed via Zoom video conferencing. All identifiable information will be changed, including names and schools. Video recordings and transcriptions will be kept on a password protected computer. Findings of the study will be part of a dissertation, and may be shared with the educational community through presentations or published reports.

Voluntary: Participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate in the interview, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.
Contact Information: If you have any questions about this study, please contact, Dr. Catharine Biddle, at catherine.biddle@maine.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, 207-581-2657 or email umric@maine.edu.
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Theresa Gillis was born in Portland, Maine in September of 1964 to John and Linda Gillis. The oldest of four children, her family traveled for her father’s assignments in the Air Force to Texas, England, Ohio. In the mid-1970s, they settled back in Maine. Theresa graduated from Westbrook High School in 1982. She attended St. Michael’s College in Winooski, Vermont, graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education. She taught grades six, first and Kindergarten before becoming a school principal after earning her Master’s degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Southern Maine. After fourteen years as a school principal, she was hired as Assistant Superintendent for MSAD 52, a position she still holds. Theresa has two adult children, Molly and Ethan and a grandson, Abraham. She currently resides in Turner with her two dogs Poppy and Tipper and Madeline, her cat. She is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education from the University of Maine in August 2022.