INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING IN ONE MIDDLE SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study examines a model of instructional coaching in a middle school using interviews and observations of both teachers and their coaches. During the 2012-2013 school year, Creekside Middle School implemented a new model of instructional coaching that differed from the traditional model of coaching; it focused on student learning in addition to teacher practice. In this study, I seek to understand Creekside's coaching model, as well as teachers' perceptions of how the instructional coaching improved their teaching practice and their students' learning. Data patterns suggest that teachers perceived this particular model of coaching, which focused on analysis of student data, as beneficial to refining their teaching practice as well as to improving student learning in their classrooms. Teachers noted the coaching support was influential to their practice due to its focus on student learning and understanding, as well as teacher goals.

Creekside's coaching model is significant because it offers teachers a new vehicle to study their teaching practice: student learning. Teachers (even those who are experienced in the classroom) responded to this model of coaching. Those developing coaching experiences for teachers can use this model to help inform their decisions about the structure, activities, and focus of the coaching they hope to implement. Not only does this model have the potential to improve the practice of teachers, but it also could help to improve student learning since the central focus engages coaches and teachers to work together in a partnership, to help meet the needs of all learners in classrooms.

To Masesi - though you are not here to share in my accomplishment, you have been an inspiration.

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Introduction

In the current era of accountability, schools face pressure to implement mechanisms to improve student achievement (Campbell & Malkus, 2011). These mechanisms include changes in materials, programs, or teachers' instructional practices (Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen, & Zigmond, 2010). In hopes of improving teaching and learning, a mechanism schools often use is professional learning opportunities for teachers. Professional learning opportunities for teachers are used as one method to improve the quality of instruction in classrooms, with the possibility that teachers' understanding and use of research-based instructional practices would be enhanced and thus too would student achievement (Campbell & Malkus, 2011).

One professional learning opportunity schools offer to teachers is professional development (PD). Early forms of PD opportunities (often referred to as traditional in the literature (Wilson & Berne, 1999)) emphasized one-stop workshops meant to engage teachers in a new instructional practice or program, which teachers felt were disjointed from their practice. As scholarship has advanced our understanding of teacher knowledge and learning, PD has developed (Wilson & Berne, 1999) to reflect the advancements. No longer is PD an event happening to teachers, but now it is often a process that is complex and involves teachers in a way that is embedded in the work of the school and teachers (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Newer forms of PD (often referred to as job-embedded) began to provide opportunities for teachers to learn to teach in new ways, thus equipping teachers, at least conceivably, to improve the learning opportunities of students in classrooms (Borko, Jacobs, & Koeliner, 2010; Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Instructional coaching is a form of job-embedded PD where a knowledgeable individual (coach) works closely with a teacher to refine and enhance the teacher's classroom practice (Borman & Feger, 2006). A typical instructional coaching model incorporates a process that includes a teacher and coach engaging in observations, reflection, and feedback centered on teaching (Knight, 2007). The goal of instructional coaching is twofold: to improve a teacher's practice, and to improve student achievement. Instructional coaching holds promising outcomes for learning that is likely to change practice (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Research on the benefits of instructional coaching regarding teacher practice and knowledge has shown positive effects (Armstrong et al., 2008; Garet et al., 2008; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). However, research on the effectiveness of instructional coaching regarding student achievement is mixed (Bean et al., 2010, Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Campbell & Malkus, 2011; Garet et al., 2008; Matsumara et al., 2010; Marsh, et al., 2008). More research needs to be conducted to better understand what makes instructional coaching effective and the impact of coaching on both teacher practice and student outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

Instructional coaching is a type of PD that schools are using with greater frequency around the nation (Russo, 2004). Schools implemented instructional coaching to assist with growing accountability measures, without an adequate research base to draw from (Sailors & Shanklin, 2010). In recent years, researchers have studied the effect instructional coaching has on both teachers' practice and student learning. It is problematic that large numbers of schools implement coaching models of various forms without knowing the impact it may have on teachers or students. Researchers have called

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for more research on particular models of instructional coaching to better understand what coaches do that contributes to improved outcomes for teachers and students (Scott, Cortina, & Carlisle, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to examine a particular coaching model: its goals, its implementation, coaches' perceptions of it, and teachers' perceptions of it. Results of this analysis could help school leadership and PD personnel who make decisions about job-embedded PD such as instructional coaching. This study offers an in-depth look at a model of coaching that is student-driven, describing how a math coach and literacy coach engage with teachers over the course of six months. Teachers offered their perceptions on the coaching model and its impact on their instructional practice and student learning.

I used a case study research design for this study. Case studies offer the opportunity to look closely at a phenomenon—in this case, instructional coaching in a middle school in its actual context (Yin, 2003) and allows for characteristics of the phenomenon to be discovered (Merriam, 1998). Through this research design the process of an event can be made visible through understanding, interpreting, and describing the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). By using the case study method, I examine instructional coaching in a middle school to understand, interpret, and describe this particular coaching model and also understand how teachers perceive coaching at this school. Case study methodology allows me to describe this model in a manner that schools and researchers could draw on to use or adapt the model to meet their particular needs.

Instructional Coaching in One Middle School

In order to examine this particular model of coaching in this middle school, two data sources were collected and analyzed: structured interviews and observations. For six months (January to June, 2013) I collected data on how coaches were offering support to teachers. Through initial and final interviews, I was able to understand how teachers perceived the support of the coaches and how the coaches described the work they were doing with teachers. I observed and documented the interactions of the two coaches and their teachers during weekly one-on-one meetings. Observing the teacher and coach in their weekly coaching meetings (once per month from February to May), offered the opportunity to see the support given in action to better understand how the coaches offered support to teachers. To analyze these data sources, I followed the constant comparative method outlined by Glaser and Strauss (2009) wherein data was analyzed initially by allowing themes to emerge, then analyzed and coded with specific and revised codes.

This study examines a model of instructional coaching used at Creekside Middle School. Instructional coaches (one ELA coach and one math coach) worked with fifth- and sixth-grade ELA and math teachers throughout the 2012-2013 school year. In this coaching model, coaches had many different types of responsibilities with various stakeholders. Coaches made it clear that their first priority in their role as coach was to help support their teachers in the task of improving student learning in their classrooms, particularly in math and ELA.

Coaches supported teachers by engaging with them in weekly one-on-one coaching sessions for 20-30 minutes each week during teachers' scheduled planning

periods. At that time, coach and teacher would engage in work that focused upon student learning and teacher goals, both being accomplished using student data and observations. It was during this time that coaches offered support to teachers by making coaching moves such as, using reflective questioning, offering suggestions to teachers, and encouraging and recognizing teachers for their effort and initiative. Coaching meetings were a productive time for both coaches and teachers, as they left the meetings with actionable steps in their continued to work together to improve student learning.

To support their teachers, coaches also engaged in another important role: providing interventions to students. Coaches worked closely with teachers to understand the needs of particular individuals or groups of students and then conducted various levels of intervention. Typically, coaches worked in the classrooms while teachers were instructing, providing support to targeted students. Coaches also engaged in pullout intervention or co-teaching where need was greater. Working with students gave coaches knowledge of students they could exchange with their teachers so when weekly meetings occurred had clearer insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the student(s). In this model of coaching, both parties had accountability for improving student learning and worked closely together in this work.

This model is significant because it offers teachers an alternative vehicle with which to study their practice. Instead of revolving coaching around the teachers' classroom practice, coaches instead focused upon *students* and their understanding of content. Through discussions about student learning, they were able to engage teachers in a model of coaching that had a partner relationship. Both coach and teacher had shared accountability of the work they engaged in together. It offers a model that teachers (even

those who are experienced in the classroom) responded to. Teachers perceived that this model of coaching helped them refine their own practice and helped them to improve student learning in their classroom because they had support to meet the needs of all children in their room. Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen, and Zigmond (2010), offered the idea that focusing on students in coaching may be a key characteristic to changing teaching practice and this study both builds upon this idea while also expanding upon it as well.

Summary

This study examines a coaching model at Creekside Middle School. I specifically answer the following two questions to describe one coaching model: 1) How is instructional coaching conducted at this middle school? and 2) What support does an instructional coach provide teachers in this model? In addition to describing the model itself, I also examine teachers' perceptions of this model. I specifically answer these two questions related to teachers' perceptions: 3) What activities with coaches, do teachers find most valuable? and 4) Do teachers believe instructional coaching improves their practice? Student learning? If so, how?

This dissertation provides answers to these research questions using a qualitative case study of one middle school with two instructional coaches, and six teachers as part of the study. In Chapter Two, I review the literature on teacher learning, PD, instructional coaching, and student-focused coaching to describe how the coaching model at Creekside fits into the research on teacher learning. In Chapter Three, I describe in detail the context of my study, my participants, and the qualitative case study methodology, data sources, and data analysis process I used in the study.

In Chapter Four, I begin to describe and analyze my research findings related to my first two research questions about the particular coaching model. I describe how the model looked in this context, noting the school environment in which coaching took place. I also explain how support was given to the teachers at Creekside Middle School by their coaches. The data used in this chapter comes from interviews with teachers and coaches, as well as observations of the weekly coaching meetings.

In Chapter Five, I describe and analyze my research findings related to my last two research questions. First, I focus on what specific activities of coaches that teachers found to be most valuable. Then, I discuss teachers' perspectives of the impact of this coaching model on their practice and student learning. Chapter Five offers data from initial and final interviews with the six teachers.

In Chapter Six, I assess the importance of this coaching model for teacher learning and student achievement. I argue that a coaching model that is individualized, while focused upon students, has many benefits for both teachers and students. This study can contribute to the development of coaching models in schools as it offers a way to conduct job-embedded PD in a middle school.

CHAPTER TWO

A Review of the Literature

This study draws on research from three areas: teacher learning, professional development (PD), and instructional coaching. In this chapter I begin by reviewing the literature on teacher learning to examine its importance and discuss how the understanding of teacher learning has developed. Next, I examine the literature on PD, as it is one of the major initiatives meant to engage teachers in new and enhanced professional learning. Then, instructional coaching is examined, as it is one form of job-embedded PD teachers experience in schools. Last, I review on particular model of instructional coaching, Student-Focused Coaching, as it is a model of coaching that is closely related to the coaching model found in this study.

Teacher Learning

In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future challenged the nation in their report, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, with the goal that every student should have "access to competent, caring and qualified teaching" (1996, p.10). The growing body of knowledge that the report drew on indicated that teacher expertise was an important factor in determining student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Researchers agreed that teachers influenced student learning in school. This report established the teacher as one mechanism for change in schools, a change that could help tackle the inequalities in schools.

Supporting teachers and teacher learning would be necessary to attain the goal established by the commission. Expertise in teaching required high levels of skill and knowledge; to be an effective, teachers needed knowledge of subject matter, student

learning, and teaching methods (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Teachers (both preservice and in-service) then, needed to be trained and prepared to do their job in a manner that would develop their level of expertise to improve student achievement. Increased investments in teacher learning began and have continued since the release of the commission's report. In this dissertation, I define teacher learning as "…changes in the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of teachers that lead to the acquisition of new skills, new concepts, and new processes related to the work of teaching" (Fishman et al., 2003, p. 645).

In recent years, moves to new student learning standards such as the Common Core State Standards and new assessments to measure these standards have also influenced the continued discussion of improving teacher learning for student success. As the bar is raised for students with more complex standards, teachers need to learn new knowledge and skills to teach curriculum that aligns with the standards. New ways of teaching become required when students are measured in new ways. (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 173).

Teacher learning is important, but what exactly are teachers supposed to be learning? Teacher learning is complex and the stance one takes on the purpose of teacher learning can influence the opportunities developed for teachers. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that the conception of teacher learning used in various initiatives have consequences for teachers and students. Teacher learning opportunities and programs are constructed differently and hold differing "…images of knowledge, practice, and teachers' roles" (p. 252).

There are three conceptions of teacher learning outlined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999): knowledge *for* practice, knowledge *in* practice, and knowledge *of* practice. They believe these three conceptions of teacher learning, "…drive many of the most prominent and widespread initiatives intended to promote teacher learning" (p. 251). Knowledge *for* practice is founded on "formal knowledge and theory *for* teachers to use in order to improve practice" (p. 250), and is based on the idea that more knowledge should lead to more effective teaching. Teachers are the ones using knowledge, not generating the knowledge themselves. This knowledge is gained over time to help teachers know what is already "known" about good teaching, the "state-of-the-art knowledge" (p. 259).

 Secondly is knowledge *in* practice, the practical knowledge acquired as teachers engage in practice. Teachers deepen their own knowledge as they teach and reflect on their teaching. Teaching is "…understood primarily as a process of acting and thinking wisely in the immediacy of classroom life" (p. 266). Knowledge *in* practice relies on experience to develop teachers' knowledge. The teachers reflect upon previous experiences and actions in the classroom to develop expertise. Teachers are the generators of knowledge in this conception.

Lastly, is knowledge *of* practice which occurs when teachers engage in inquiry in their own work, connecting that inquiry to larger issues (social, cultural, and political). The teacher is the agent in the classroom and in larger contexts and engages teachers in inquiring about established ideas of knowledge and teaching, "…challenging their own assumptions" (p. 278). This conception of knowledge is seen as transformative for teachers as they engage in society, schools, and classrooms. Each conception of teacher

learning influences the experiences that are offered to both preservice and in-service teachers.

Two types of learning experiences in particular, are seen as integral in the development of teachers: educator preparation programs and PD (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Educator preparation (teacher education) programs engage pre-service teachers in extensive programs to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become teachers. Educator preparation programs vary in structure and content where preservice educators take assorted courses and have various field experiences (Wilson & Berne, 1999). PD occurs for practicing teachers to continue development as they enter and stay in their teaching career. PD can be experiences such as school-based experiences to coursework beyond initial degree programs.

Both educator preparation programs and PD are well-established mechanisms where teachers should learn about teaching, however teachers experience a wide variety (and quality) of learning opportunities often "due to the scattered and serendipitous nature of teachers' learning" (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p.173). Teacher learning can occur in different aspects of teachers' practice and in various contexts (Borko, 2004). Learning could occur in the classroom in an unplanned situation while working with a student or in planned classes or workshops. Typically, learning opportunities are provided to teachers over their careers, though teachers feel these opportunities are often too far removed from their actual work in the classrooms (Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Teacher learning opportunities exist in environments, and those environments can influence the type of learning that occurs. For the quality of teacher learning to improve, it is critical to understand the environment that should be promoted in teacher learning

experiences. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) provide a guideline in the How People Learn (HPL) framework. The HPL framework is comprised of four components of environments that promote learning (Bransford, et al., 2000; Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005; Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999):

1. Learner-centered: the learners' needs, strengths, and weaknesses are built upon;

2. Knowledge-centered: rethinking both disciplinary knowledge and teaching strategies;

3. Assessment-centered: receiving feedback after testing and trying new things; reflecting on practice; and

4. Community-centered: valued community where learning is done together, learning from one another where there is respect for learning of the community.

These four components, when balanced and integrated, promote an environment for teacher learning (Bransford et al., 2005). The HPL framework also offers the benefit of being effective for student learning as well; learning in a way you are expected to teach can be a powerful experience for teachers (Bransford et al., 2001). Opportunities for teacher learning can develop from a framework such as HPL, that take into account the needs of the learners, in this case, teachers.

There are challenges to engaging teachers in learning. Often teachers bring their own prior experiences, beliefs, and knowledge to their work (Cohen, 1988). Teacher learning can be impacted by prior influences. Teachers' prior beliefs and experiences can affect what they learn, making it difficult for new understandings to be built and

implemented. Teachers come to the profession already having spent years in the classroom as students themselves, developing a vision of what teaching and learning should be based on their own experiences observing teachers as students in classrooms (Lortie, 1975).

Teachers also face challenges as they learn to teach newer, higher content standards (Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999). First, teachers' prior beliefs and experiences can affect what the teachers are learning, making it difficult for new understandings to be built and implemented. It takes a great amount of time and effort to unlearn previous ways and learn new ones (Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1998). Second, an understanding of both content knowledge (how to teach the subject matter for understanding) and knowledge of children (their thinking about ideas) are crucial as well. Lastly, learning to teach to these new standards requires opportunities for reflection and analysis, in order to apply new knowledge to practice (Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999).

As new standards are put in place and new accountability measures (student achievement) for teachers are implemented, planned learning opportunities for teachers are continually offered. One popular mechanism for teacher learning is school-based PD. PD engages teachers in learning about topics such as understanding their learners, various teaching methods, as well as their understanding of subject matter (Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999). Next, I review the literature on PD.

Professional Development (PD)

Educators define PD in various ways. In this study, I use the following definition: the support given to teachers in which they reexamine their practice, conduct ongoing

experimentation and critical reflection to, "…develop the beliefs, knowledge, and habits of practice that undergird the complex forms of teaching" (Stein, Smith, & Silver, 1999, p. 239). PD is one key attempt found in K-12 schools to address teacher learning (Desimone, 2009). PD opportunities are often focused on areas such as, (a) subject matter teaching, (b) student equity, (c) uses of student assessment, (d) the organization of schooling, and (e) the professionalization of teaching (Little, 1993), as well as others. Educational reformers often rely on PD to provide opportunities for teacher learning in hopes that the learning will lead to improved instruction in the classroom, and then in turn have the potential to increase student learning.

PD is not a new or recent initiative. Historically, PD has been a one-shot workshop where teachers were "talked at" and the focus was often on one small portion of teachers' overarching practice. Activities typically involved presenting new knowledge to teachers in a neat package (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Feiman-Nemser (2001) stated that this training "…connotes a deficit model of teacher learning in which outside experts supply teachers with knowledge they lack…evokes images of teachers implementing new programs in response to external mandates" (p. 1038). PD was an external experience, done to teachers. Knowledge came from the outside, causing disconnect from one's classroom. This disconnect from the classroom did not allow for teachers to bring their newly acquired knowledge effectively to their practice and was ineffective at preparing teachers to meet new learning standards and requirements (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). This conventional form of PD was focused upon traditional modes of teaching and learning.

As scholarship has advanced our understanding of teacher knowledge and learning, PD has developed (Wilson & Berne, 1999) to reflect the advancements. The key

shift in this advancement comes from agency, where teachers are "…active learners shaping their professional growth through reflective participation in professional development programs and in practice" (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002, p. 948). No longer is PD an event happening to teachers, but instead it can be a process that is complex and involves teachers in a way that is embedded in the work of the school and teachers (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

PD features. Since large numbers of teachers engage in PD each school year, research developed to understand if there are specific features of PD that make it effective and influential in teacher learning. Some consensus has developed about PD features that can increase the skills and knowledge of a teacher and have promise to increase student learning (Desimone, 2009; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Features of effective PD include content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation.

Content focus. PD should engage teachers in the various content areas of their teaching assignments. This includes developing a better understanding of the content area itself as well as better understanding how students learn the content areas. Content focused PD is driven by the teachers' work with their students. Content focused PD is most influential in effective PD (Garet et al., 2001; Kennedy, 1998).

Active learning. PD should engage teachers in an active manner that is relevant to the daily work of teaching. The traditional "sit and get" learning situations do not allow teachers to actively engage with new learning material and information. Instead, teachers are seen as professionals who are engaged in inquiry, reflection, and problem solving around their own teaching practice.

Coherence. PD should align closely with the initiatives being implemented at various levels (e.g., school, district, state). Instead of having PD that is random and not well connected, coherent PD offers a clear vision for learning opportunities that teachers can engage in and buy into.

Duration. Sufficient time should be spent when engaging in PD. Opportunities should be ongoing and sustained for some length of time and some amount of time. This allows teachers to further refine their learning over time.

Collective participation. Arranging situations where teachers engage with others can be powerful. Collective participation can include working with others and can take form in many different ways. Knowledge is shared between and amongst each other in the learning community.

These features of effective PD have been agreed on, yet the number of features of effective PD continues to grow as more studies are conducted (Borko, Jacobs, & Koeliner, 2010). Researchers have called for studies of PD programs that use these established features of effective PD (Desimone, 2009) as well as called for studies that investigate scaled up models of PD (Borko, 2004) in order to better understand the influence of the outline features of effective PD on teachers and students.

One study (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001) of PD surveyed a nationally representative sample of teachers who participated in the Eisenhower Professional Development Program. Researchers noted that the Eisenhower Program was "a source of funding for professional development activities, not a specific approach to professional development" (p. 919), therefore the PD programs teachers participated in varied widely. 1,027 teachers were surveyed and represented 358 districts. Teachers' self-

reported features of PD they perceived as increasing their knowledge and skills as well as changes in classroom practice, due to PD programs they participated in. Garet et al., (2001) analyzed three "structural features" (structure or design) as well as three "core features" (substance) in their survey. Researchers found that PD that is intensive and sustained will have a greater impact than shorter PD. PD that was focused on content and engaged teachers in active learning was more likely to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills. The findings from Garet et al., (2001) support the notion that PD opportunities that include features of effective PD, can influence teachers' knowledge and skills, though caution must be used as this was self-reported by teachers and not something that was observable (Borko, Jacobs, & Koeliner, 2010).

Newer forms of PD (often referred to as job-embedded) provide opportunities for teachers to learn to teach in new ways, thus equipping teachers, at least conceivably, to improve the learning opportunities of students in classrooms (Borko, Jacobs, & Koeliner, 2010; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Job-embedded PD is built into (i.e., embedded) in the on-going, regular work of the teacher. It is centered on the genuine questioning and curiosities of improving one's practice (Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993). When teachers engage in job-embedded PD, teacher discourse is "…grounded in the content and tasks of teaching and learning can deepen knowledge of subject matter and curriculum, refine their instructional repertoire, hone their inquiry skills, and become critical colleagues" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1042). Job-embedded PD holds promising outcomes for teacher learning that is likely to change their practice (Garet et al., 2001).

High-quality PD is called for, but remains in short supply (Yoon et al., 2007).

High-quality PD is meant to provide teachers with opportunities to increase their knowledge and utilize that knowledge to improve teaching in the classroom (Hung, 2012). There is little evidence to support which characteristics relate to positive teacher and student outcomes (Garet et al., 2001). All teachers should experience powerful learning through their PD, but it is also seen as crucial that the learning from PD has an impact on their classroom practice and, hopefully, student learning. However, little research on PD has studied the connection between PD and student learning (Borko, 2004; Yoon et al., 2007), even though improved student learning is one of the purposes of PD. Yoon et al. (2007), in a review of studies that researched the impact of PD on student learning, found that "…providing PD to teachers had a moderate effect on student achievement" (p. 2). The studies were limited in amount (nine) but offer a glimpse of hope as we continue to question how much impact, if any, PD can have on both teacher learning and student achievement.

What is undeniable is that we need to consider alternative approaches to PD (Black, 2012). More schools are moving to alternative PD models in hopes of higher-quality teacher learning. One example of PD that is job-embedded and has great potential for better teacher learning is instructional coaching, described next.

Instructional Coaching

Coaching is not new to education, and literature on coaching dates back many decades (Gallucci et al., 2010). Coaching, a form of job-embedded, sustained, and individualized PD for teachers has recently become popular in schools as a model of PD (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004; Hasbrouck & Denton, 2007). Various forms (e.g., peer, instructional, cognitive, content, data, literacy) of coaching have been

applied to schools (Black, 2012; Knight, 2007). For example, one type of coaching is literacy coaching. Literacy coaching became most used when Reading First, an initiative under No Child Left Behind, called for more teacher learning of effective literacy practices in classrooms (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). As teachers had to implement new reading programs and research-based practices in their classrooms, development and learning also had to take place and this came in the form of literacy coaches (Scott, Cortina, & Carlisle, 2012). Literacy coaches worked with grade level teams to broaden and develop their knowledge of research-based literacy practices. The actions of the coach varied by state (Scott, et al., 2012;Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010) but in general it involved intensive PD with the literacy coaches, who engaged teachers in constant review and reflection of the research-based practices, and modeling of the practices in the classrooms. Other instructional coaching models are used in schools as well.

Instructional coaching works to refine and enhance teachers' classroom practice (Borman & Feger, 2006) through sustained and ongoing PD. Instructional coaching relies on a knowledgeable individual (e.g., peer, internal provider, external provider) in the learning community to work with teachers, giving job-embedded support that aligns with their practice and school-based reforms. In this literature review, I draw on the following definition of instructional coaching: the "…embedded and situated work that includes observations of, and feedback on, classroom teaching, with demonstrations of model practices, and cycles that includes pre- and post-conferences with practitioners" (Gallucci et al., 2010, p. 922) conducted alongside a knowledgeable individual. Instructional coaching is embedded work that engages coaches and teachers in supportive activities intended to develop teachers and their practices through activities such as modeling and

conferencing.

There are various types of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are associated with successful coaches and tend to fall in three areas: instructional expertise, interpersonal skills, and communicative ability (Borman & Feger, 2006). Instructional expertise includes having content knowledge as well as pedagogical knowledge, and having an understanding of how children learn and develop understanding of content using various practices and strategies that are following the curriculum of the school (Borman & Feger, 2006; Feger, Woleck, & Hickman, 2004; Knight, 2011; West & Staub, 2003).

Along with having knowledge of teaching, coaches also need to have interpersonal skills where they are relationship builders with their teachers, developing trust and credibility (Knight, 2011) so teachers want to engage and work with their coach. Coaches engage with teachers in work that is sensitive, changing or improving teachers' practice. Work like this requires a coach who can engage with teachers in a respectful, collaborative manner (Feger, Woleck, Hickman, 2004). It has been found that teachers value coaches with interpersonal skills (Poglinco et al., 2003).

Communicative skills are also necessary (Borman & Feger, 2006) and require knowledge about coaching as a practice, knowing how to do things such as conferencing, debriefing, and the like. It is with this knowledge and skill base that an instructional coach builds capacity with teachers, and can help them better the practice of each individual teacher they work with. Developing these areas of knowledge and skills in instructional coaches is not easy or simple work. Scholars recognize the need for careful and thorough training of coaches (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco et al., 2003) so they

are successful in their endeavors with teachers. Standards have also been created to help develop coaches as they do their work in schools. For example, the International Reading Association has developed standards (both leadership and content focused) for middle and high school literacy coaches, outlining what literacy coaches should know and be able to do (International Reading Association, 2006). The standards provide a guide to those hoping to implement and develop coaching at their schools.

On any given day there are components of the work of an instructional coach that can foster teacher growth. These components are observing, exploring, supporting, reflecting, and modeling (Black, 2012; Knight 2007). These components can engage teachers in studying and refining their practice (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Part of the work of the instructional coach relies on observations of teachers in action (Poglinco et al., 2003). Observations provide the teacher and the instructional coach a place for the coach to provide feedback, response by the teacher, and further discussion. Often times, it is imperative for the coach to model in the classroom various best practices for teachers (Knight, 2006). Seeing the research-based strategies and teaching in action by the teacher can open a dialogue between the teacher and coach and can help the teacher develop understanding of new ideas and/or a refinement of his or her practice (Black, 2012; Feger, Woleck, & Hickman, 2004).

Analyzing student data is another integral component of instructional coaching. Gathering and analyzing student evidence together helps the teacher and coach question whether the teaching in the classroom is "working," and what they can do together to improve teacher practice to enhance student learning. In their time with teachers, a coach might conference, model lessons, observe teachers, and administer assessments, which

they would later use for data-oriented conversations with teachers (Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamitina, 2010). Depending on the needs of the school, teacher, or group, the focus of the coach's work could vary and change day-to-day and week-to-week.

The structure of coaches' work also varies depending on the nature of their roles (Borman & Feger, 2006). Time is one structural variation. Coaches can be part time or full time in their work, and their time could also be split among various school buildings. Also, time can be allocated in various ways when it comes to the length of time and how frequently they meet with individual teachers. The second variation in structure is that coaching can be mandatory or voluntary (Borman & Feger, 2006; Knight, 2004) which could influence the ways coaches and teachers engage with each other. For example, teacher resistance may occur in situations where participation with a coach is mandatory. Lastly, the content of coaching can vary. Particular curriculums, subject matter, and pedagogical practices are examples of content that could be addressed in coaching situations (Borman & Feger, 2006). The content of coaching is important as it shapes not only the activities that coaches and teachers engage in, it also influences the conditions in which coaching occurs. For instance, if coaching is focused upon a particular new instructional practice a teacher is required to implement, the coaching activities and conditions will differ from other coaching content. Coaching based on an instructional practice will require more activities revolving around how the teacher is preparing to and implementing the new instructional practice. This may require a coach to do planning activities and observations of the teacher, which may not be the case if the coaching content differed.

Coaching is complex and challenging work for both teachers and coaches (Feger, Woleck & Hickman, 2004; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). This role requires working with teachers in ways that go against the nature of teaching. Learning requires, "…making oneself vulnerable and taking risks, and this is not how teachers often see their role" (Bransford, et al., 2000). Teaching has long been a career where the work is isolated and private (Lortie, 1975). Instructional coaching requires teachers to open their doors and be open to learning more about teaching and the refinement of their own practice through a guided experience with a knowledgeable person (Russo, 2004). Being coached places teachers in a vulnerable position, making the work of the coach complex. Due to its complexity, coaching requires the coach to be a knowledgeable individual with various skill sets. Because coaching covers many facets of work, it requires the coach to have interpersonal skills, as well as knowledge of teaching, content, and pedagogy, among other requirements depending upon the coaching model being used.

Finding and developing coaches can present a challenge for schools (Russo, 2004). Typically teachers move into coaching roles, thus draining schools of their much-needed high performing teachers. Many large school districts (e.g., Boston, New York) need more coaches than they can often find (Russo, 2004). Once coaches are found, they also need continued PD of their own (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Districts can create their own PD opportunities for their coaches, which is not easy for districts to do. Districts need to provide their coaches with the "depth and breadth of knowledge they need" (Neufeld & Roper, 2003, p. 14). This requires them to find people with the knowledge and skills available to develop the coaches, and would also require them to expand that

learning over time as stakeholders' capacity (potentially) will grow as coaching is implemented.

The impact of coaching. Schools across the country have introduced various coaching initiatives, however, it is unclear just how effective they are. As Gallucci et al., (2010) state, "empirical studies have yet to catch up with the recent proliferation of the role in the context of district-wide reform efforts" (p. 921). Many districts have embraced coaching as a support to improve teaching and learning (Neufeld & Roper, 2003) and researchers have begun to delve into understanding the impact of coaching on teacher knowledge and practice. Next, I will review research that has addressed the influence of coaching on teachers' knowledge and practice.

Impact of coaching on teachers. Since the purpose of PD opportunities is to engage teachers in learning, thus hopefully influencing changes to their practice, it is important to understand if coaching can actually change teacher knowledge and/or instructional practice. Five studies in particular (Armstrong et al., 2008; Garet et al., 2008; Neuman & Wright, 2010; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamitina, 2010) look at the impact of literacy coaching on teachers.

The first set of studies (Armstrong et al., 2008; Garet et al., 2008; Neuman & Wright, 2010), examine the impact of literacy PD initiatives that included the use of one-on-one coaching on early childhood educator's beliefs, skills, and instructional practices. In the three studies, teachers were assigned to treatment groups or a control group. The treatment was divided into two groups: one group engaged in a course on a particular research-based literacy curriculum program and had a coach, while the other group engaged in only the course. The control group in both studies received no course or

coaching. In one of the studies, teachers engaged in coursework for 15 weeks (amount of hours was not specified in study) in a satellite learning program (Armstrong, et al., 2008), in another teachers engaged in eight seminars for 48 hours of PD (Garet et al., 2008), and in the last study (Neuman & Wright, 2010) teachers had weekly courses for three hours over ten weeks at a local community college. The amount of time teachers engaged with coaches varied as well: seven occurrences of one-hour sessions, a total of seven hours of coaching (Armstrong et al., 2008), an average of 60 hours of coaching during the school year (Garet et al., 2008), and weekly for three hours over 10 weeks (Neuman & Wright, 2010), a total of 30 hours of coaching.

Armstrong et al. (2008), found that both treatment groups benefited from participating in the coursework, noting changes in their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes when it came to implementing the literacy program. Those who received coaching (in addition to the coursework) "…showed a slight advantage in skill implementation as compared to those without coaching" (p. 307). Participants believed that their involvement in the coursework and coaching helped them grow and resulted in changes in their classrooms. Treatment groups exceeded the control group in all areas.

Neuman and Wright (2010) instead found that neither treatment condition improved teacher knowledge of early language and literacy. They did find, similar to Armstrong et al., (2008) that coaching significantly improved the use of features of early language and literacy environments and modestly improved teaching strategies for teachers in the coaching treatment group, which they believe was influenced by the amount of time coaches spent with teachers on particular topics. Improved features of early language and literacy and improved teaching strategies held true for both the

immediate and delayed five-month timeframe (Neuman & Wright, 2010). They also examined teachers' perceptions of their PD intervention. Teachers believed the coaching offered them "…ideas and the *whys* of literacy not in a vacuum but in the context of practice" (p. 81). Teachers also noted that coaching held them accountable (informally) for making changes in their practice (Neuman & Wright, 2010).

Last, Garet et al., (2008) found that teacher knowledge improved for both treatment groups at a similar rate. It was also found that teachers in treatment groups used explicit instruction at a higher rate than the control group, with the treatment group including coaching using it at a greater extent than all groups. Garet et al., (2008) extended their research further to see if coaching had an impact on student outcomes, finding that there were no significant impacts on measured outcomes (reading achievement) for treatment or control groups.

Findings in these three studies varied. In two studies, there was a change in teacher knowledge for both treatment groups (Armstrong et al., 2008; Garet et al., 2008), while the other found no change in teacher knowledge for either treatment group (Neuman & Wright, 2010). This finding is noteworthy as the courses had similar objectives and slightly varying methods of delivery. All studies did find that instructional practice in the classroom did change either slightly or modestly more for those who had coaching as a treatment in comparison to the other groups in the studies, confirming the benefits of coaching, particularly on changes in teachers' instructional practice.

In the next set of studies (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010; Walpole et al., 2010) researchers examined literacy coaches in depth to see if there are particular components of coaches' work with teachers that influence change of beliefs and/or practices.

Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) studied the Statewide Reading Initiative in South Carolina; a PD program where coaches held study groups with K-5 teachers and principals on research-based practices. Coaches also spent four days a week in the teachers' classrooms helping teachers to implement those practices from study group. In this study, researchers gathered data to better understand what coaches do that is not only helpful to teachers but also what teachers change because of their coach. To do this they interviewed 35 teachers who participated in the coaching.

Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) found three reasons teachers considered their time with coaches as effective. First, 77% of teachers commented that coaches created ways for teachers to collaborate. Collaboration included study groups where teachers could learn about one another developing community and common understandings. Teachers also noted that they were able to share thoughts and strategies in study groups, as well as learn more about their current and past students. Second, more than two-thirds of teachers commented that coaching provided teachers with ongoing support by encouraging them, and helping facilitate and guide them in reflection. Coaches were accessible to teachers and demonstrated lessons in classrooms. Last, teachers reported that coaches taught them about research-based practices. Teachers in this study also discussed how they changed their beliefs and practices because of their coach. Four types of change were identified by the researchers: feeling empowered to try new teaching practices, using more authentic assessments, expanding their use of research and theory, and more often basing instruction on needs of students (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). Through this model of coaching, teachers reported a sense of agency that helped them to take risks and try new practices.

Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamitina (2010) set out to understand if there are aspects of coaching that predict certain aspects of instructional practices in the classroom, as identified in observational protocols. In Reading First schools in Georgia, researchers studied 123 coaches and 2,108 K-3 teachers by utilizing observation protocols for both coaches and teachers. Data collected included both teacher and coach observation protocols. The protocols were analyzed separately and then together to find the relationship between the teaching and coaching factors using structural equation modeling.

Walpole et al., (2010) identified three coaching factors (collaboration with teachers, coaching for differentiation, and leadership support) that were significant predictors of at least one instructional factor, and those predictors varied by grade level. For example, they found that in third grade, coaches who focused on collaboration for teachers had a significant relationship with small-group work, effective instruction, and management. In first grade they found that coaching for differentiation predicted effective instruction (Walpole et al., 2010). When the three aspects of coaching (coaching for differentiation in classroom instruction, collaboration with teachers, and support from leadership) occurred with frequency, there was an association with various aspects of teaching occurring in different grade levels. The change in instructional practice was not studied.

Looking across these two research studies, which attempt to describe what it is coaches do that influence change or the use of various instructional practices in teachers, one pattern does emerge. In both studies, collaboration was of importance. Teachers perceived coaches who create ways for teachers to collaborate as effective and helped

them to improve their own learning and practice (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010), while it was also found that when a component of coaching is collaboration, it can predict certain teaching practices such as small-group work, effective instruction, and management, depending on the grade level (Walpole, et al., 2010). When coaches engaged teachers in collaboration with coaches and with other teachers, there was some level of influence either in how the teachers' perceived the coaching or on predicting various practices in classrooms. More research can help to uncover the components of coaching that influence teachers.

These five studies shed some light on the impact of coaching on teachers. It was indicated that coaching was a beneficial influence on teachers, whether it was an actual observable or measureable change in their knowledge and/or teaching practice, or teachers' perceived improvements of knowledge and practice. Coaching seems to have a beneficial impact on teachers. I will review literature that looks at the impact of coaching on student learning next.

Impact of coaching on student learning. Since the goal of teaching is to support student learning and development, it is understandable that teaching is often the focus of how to improve student learning. Improved student learning through teaching is one of the goals of PD initiatives, including coaching. It is important to understand if coaching impacts student learning, and I will now look at five studies that address this very issue.

The first study (Matsumara, Garnier, Correnti, Junker, & Bickel, 2010) looks at the impact of Content-Focused Coaching (CFC) on both teacher practice (reading comprehension instruction) and student learning (reading achievement). CFC coaching developed to "support literacy instruction and learning" (p. 39) in classrooms, and has a

heavy emphasis on PD for coaches to develop their knowledge of effective instruction in reading comprehension. The study on CFC coaching took place in elementary schools in a large urban district with high teacher mobility where teachers were placed into treatment (15 schools) or comparison (14) schools randomly, and taught fourth or fifth grade. Over a three-year period, researchers collected data that included students' reading achievement results, observed instruction of teachers, and self-reported information (i.e., teacher's participation in coaching, content of coaching activities, usefulness of coaching in improving practice, quality of school's professional community) from a survey taken twice each year.

Matsumara et al., (2010) found that various coaching activities were seen by CFC coached teachers as beneficial to their instructional practice: coaches held grade-level meetings, individual meetings, modeled lessons, observed teaching, and co-taught lessons. In self-reports, teachers indicated they used higher-quality reading comprehension instruction in their classroom, showing growth from fall to spring at a higher rate than the comparison group. This finding was supported by observational data, and the quality of instruction in CFC schools was higher than in comparison schools. Lastly, researchers found "significant average gains on the state standardized test for the CFC schools" (p. 53), particularly for the English Language Learners (ELL) in the CFC schools. A significant effect was not found for all students.

Two more studies (Bean et al., 2010; Marsh et al., 2008;) offer insight on how various coaching structures (i.e., time allocation and focus) can impact change in instructional practice and student outcomes. Marsh et al., (2008) studied reading coaches many of whom engaged in data-driven decision making (DDDM), where various types of

data are collected and analyzed in schools to guide the improvement of students and schools. Data was gathered from eight random Florida school districts where a statewide reading coach program was being implemented in middle schools. Data collected included: surveys, visits to case study schools, interviews, observations, documents, and student achievement data.

Marsh et al., 2008, found that coaches devoted time to data analysis support for teachers, as it was one of the many activities coaches devoted time to; experienced coaches and coaches in low-performing schools were more likely to spend time supporting DDDM. Interestingly, teachers (who received data support from coaches) were more likely to attribute making changes to their instruction to working with a coach. Marsh et al., (2008) also found that one of the program features that had a small but significant and positive on reading scores was the frequency with which teachers reported coaches reviewed assessment data either individually or in a group of teachers. This finding held true for mathematics as well. Marsh et al., (2008) findings indicate that the content of coaching may be influential for improved teacher and student outcomes, especially when the focus of coaching is on data analysis support such as DDDM.

Bean, Draper, and Hall (2010) offer the second study looking at another coaching structure, time distribution, and the impact on teachers' perceptions of the coaches as well as the "relationship between what coaches do and student achievement" (p. 87). Twenty Reading First coaches in under-achieving schools in Pennsylvania were studied to understand how coaches' time was distributed and variability with how individual coaches allocated their time was found using interviews, and questionnaires. In general coaches spent the most time (23.6% of their time) supporting individual teachers. Bean et

al., (2010) also found that coaches in the Reading First schools, focused on students and student learning, and noted this finding as an important factor in the conversation about what focus is important when engaging in coaching with teachers as a different type of partnership developed among the coaches and teachers.

Last, Bean et al., (2010) found when examining student achievement data that school groups who had teachers with more coaching time versus a school group with teachers who had less coaching time, had a "significant relationship between the amount of coaching performed in schools and student achievement" (p. 106). A larger percentage of students were deemed proficient on the Terra Nova test in the first and second grade, in schools where coaches spent more time coaching. The amount of time spent coaching had an impact on student achievement.

The last two studies look specifically at coaching and the impact on student achievement in literacy (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010), and math (Campbell & Malkus; 2011). Biancarosa, Bryk, and Dexter (2010) report on a four-year longitudinal study on the Literacy Collaborative (LC), a reform model (for reading, writing, and language) using one-on-one coaching to improve elementary students' literacy learning. In this coaching model, coaches are trained intensively before beginning their coaching role. When they begin work with teachers, they engage in courses with teachers, along with one-on-one time with teachers in their classrooms doing activities such as modeling or observing. In this study, researchers used student data (literacy assessments) from a baseline year in 17 schools. Students were tested twice annually (fall and spring) throughout the study.

In a three-year longitudinal, randomized study, Campbell & Malkus, (2011) study the effect of math coaching on student achievement. Coaches in this study were participating in a funded "teacher-enhancement effort addressing the development and refinement of mathematics content, pedagogy, and leadership" (p. 434) where courses for coaches were offered and became the treatment. 24 coaches were assigned cohorts, cohort 1 schools received treatment for three years, cohort 2 schools had control status for two years and one year of treatment, and then there was also a control group, which had control throughout the three years. Coaches engaged with teachers in activities such as, co-teaching, modeling, debriefing, and the like. The data included math standardized achievement tests for grades 3-5, which were administered annually by the state (Virginia).

In these two longitudinal studies, it was found in schools with coaching, there was a positive impact on student learning. Biancarosa, Bryk, and Dexter (2010) found that gains in literacy learning increased significantly from the baseline (the year before the coaching program began), and continued over the subsequent years, growing in magnitude. Researchers noted, "Findings warrant a claim of substantial effects on student learning for the LC coaching model" (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010, p. 7). Similarly, Campbell and Malkus (2011) found that students in schools with math coaches scored significantly higher on standardized math tests, compared to those students in control schools, though the effect was not significant in the first year placement of the coach. In the second year, treatment schools consistently scored higher, with the impact either increasing or staying the same the third year.

Six studies reviewed here (Bean et al., 2010, Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Campbell & Malkus, 2011; Garet et al., 2008; Matsumara et al., 2010; Marsh, et al., 2008) inform us of the influence of coaching on student outcomes (typically student achievement tests in various grade levels and subjects) and those results varied. Two studies focused on literacy coaching and found no (Garet et al., 2008) or minimal impact (Marsh, et al., 2008) on student achievement. It has been noted that these two studies looked at coaching models that lacked training for coaches (only offering a week or less), and were not established (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010), which may be factors influencing the particular findings. Four other studies (Bean et al., 2010, Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Campbell & Malkus, 2011; Marsh, et al., 2008) offer findings that yielded positive effects on student achievement in schools with coaching. Those models provide key insights such as, the coaching was focused on students (Bean et al., 2010), coaches were trained for their work (Bean et al., 2010; Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010), and when more time was spent coaching it had a greater impact (Bean et al., 2010).

Coaching has been found to benefit teachers and students. As research on coaching continues it will be beneficial to look particularly at coaching models that include a focus on students and/or data analysis. Understanding whether or not the particular focus of coaching models impacts teachers and students, can help us determine what focus coaches could use in their work with teachers as they offer job-embedded PD to teachers. New insights could be made into understanding if looking at something other than a teacher's actual practice (through an observation of teaching/feedback on teaching model) could help a teacher improve their teaching, thus possibly improving student

learning as well. Next, I will discuss a relevant model of instructional coaching that has a focus on students.

A Relevant Model of Instructional Coaching

Various models of instructional coaching have been developed in schools. One model in particular, Student-Focused Coaching (Denton, Swanson, & Mathes, 2007), is relevant to this study as this particular model of coaching focuses on students, rather than the teacher, using student data to design individualized interventions for students, similar to the model of coaching found in this study.

Student-focused coaching (SFC). SFC is one model of instructional coaching that uses student assessment data as a key component (Denton, Swanson, & Mathes, 2007). The SFC model has a primary goal of improving students' reading skills and competence (Denton, Swanson, & Mathes, 2007). The coach and teacher work in a collaborative manner "…to increase teachers' understanding of how to address their students' behavior and academic difficulties (p. 691)." Teacher and coach make a plan of action, which the teacher then implements with the coach providing support and guidance. Through this collaboration, teachers learn and grow aware of their own instructional decisions and the impact those decisions have on the success of students (Denton, Swanson, & Mathes, 2007).

In student-focused coaching, instructional coaches have three roles: facilitator, collaborative problem solver, and teacher-learner (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). As facilitator, a coach assists and supports the work of the teacher. An example of this would be helping teachers identify the appropriate diagnostic assessment for their students. In their role as collaborative problem solver, a coach leads a teacher or group of teachers in

a Collaborative Planning process (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). In the Collaborative

Planning process, teachers and coach examine student issues, collect and analyze data on

the student(s), develop goals together, which the teacher then enacts in the classroom.

Next steps are then determined after reviewing the effects of the plan. Coaches observe

teacher and student behaviors, focusing on elements of instruction laid out in the action

plan and not how students' respond to the instruction. Lastly in student-focused coaching,

a coach can take the role of the teacher-learner. In this role, the coach provides PD where

coaches bring in ideas from research and best practice to share with colleagues and bring

the ideas into successful implementation in the classrooms (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009).

Student-focused coaching has an emerging evidence base (Hasbrouck & Denton,

2007). One particular study on student-focused coaching looked at the effects of coaching

support to intervention teachers through three different mechanisms: on-site coaching,

technology-based, or on-demand (combination of the other two) coaching (Denton,

Swanson, & Mathes, 2007). In all three coaching models, SFC coaching was provided.

Researchers found that teachers made use of the data and made instructional decisions

based on data after discussions about that data with the SFC coaches (Denton, Swanson,

& Mathes, 2007). The study was the first report on year one results in a four-year

intervention. Denton, Swanson, and Mathes (2007) call for more research to understand

the impact that student-focused coaching has on teacher and student outcomes (Denton,

Swanson, & Mathes, 2007).

This Study's Contribution to the Literature

The review of the literature indicates the importance of effective PD, which is

ongoing, sustained, and embedded in the work of the teacher. Instructional coaching is

one type of PD that can encompass those features of effective PD and can support some instructional change (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Matsumara et al., 2010; Scott et al., 2012). As design issues of PD have become a focal point of research (Borko, Jacobs, & Koeliner, 2010), there have been continued calls for research on instructional coaching (in its many forms). This study will contribute to the literature in multiple ways.

First, an understanding of the structure of the work of a coach needs to be better understood for both teachers and students to benefit from this type of PD (Scott et al., 2012). This study will provide details about how coaches structure the work in their school and how the work of the coach is situated around the context and initiatives of the school. It will also provide detail about how that structure was determined.

Second, there is a need to understand what factors may contribute to the effectiveness of coaching (Neuman & Cunningham, 2008) and also what activities coaches engage in with teachers that they find most valuable (Borman & Feger, 2006). By utilizing interviews and observations of both coaches and teachers, this study will outline factors that play a role in the coaching model at Creekside that may or may not make it effective and what activities teachers believed were most valuable.

Literature has also called for more understanding of how coaches enact their role in schools (McGatha, 2008). This study will offer perspectives of two coaches and observations of their work over the course of six months, which will provide an understanding of how these coaches enacted their role at Creekside Middle School and the impact that role may or may not have on teachers and students.

Lastly, more work in middle and secondary environments is necessary as much of the research on coaching focuses specifically at the elementary setting (Shanklin &

Moore, 2010). This study is situated in a middle school, focusing on fifth and sixth grade teachers in math and ELA. Insights into how a coaching model is structured in a middle school setting will be shared. This study offers a coaching model that could be used for application in other middle and secondary settings.

Research Questions

This study seeks to describe the coaching model at Creekside Middle School. The study will examine the support provided to teachers by their coaches, the activities with coaches teachers found most valuable, and the teachers' perspectives on if and how coaching improved their teaching practice and/or student learning. Specifically, the study addresses these questions:

1. How is instructional coaching conducted in this middle school?

2. What support do instructional coaches provide teachers in this coaching model?

3. What activities with coaches do teachers find most valuable?

4. Do teachers believe coaching improves their practice and/or student learning? If so, how?

CHAPTER THREE

Method

The purpose of this study is to investigate a coaching model used to support teacher and student learning in a middle school. In addition, I examine how teachers perceive the influence of this support on their instruction in the classroom and on student learning. This chapter describes the methods of investigation used in this study.

This chapter is organized in several sections. First, I discuss the research design for the study. Next, I discuss the research site. Then, I provide an overview of the participants in the study. Finally, I describe my data collection methods and describe my analysis of that data.

Research Design

A case study research design was used for this study. Case studies offer the opportunity to look closely at a phenomenon—in this case, instructional coaching in a middle school—in its actual context (Yin, 2003). Case study research design allows for characteristics of the phenomenon to be discovered by the researcher (Merriam, 1998). Through this research design the process of an event can be made visible through understanding, interpreting, and describing the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In this study, I aim to examine instructional coaching in a middle school through case method research to understand, interpret, and describe coaching and understand how teachers' perceive its usefulness.

It is important to closely study the practice of instructional coaches to help us better understand how coaches use their knowledge and skills to support teachers (Obara

& Sloan, 2009), and how the support coaches provide may influence the practice of teachers (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). By studying two coaches and their coaching interactions with six teachers, this research study examines a particular phenomenon of coaching in a middle school to understand how two instructional coaches use their knowledge and skills to provide support and how that support is perceived by teachers they work with.

In this qualitative research study I observed and documented the interactions of the two coaches and their teachers during weekly one-on-one meetings and held interviews with all study participants at different periods of time throughout the study. For six months (January to June) data was collected and analyzed to describe how coaches were offering support to teachers. Looking at two different coaches allowed me to compare to better see similarities and differences of the coaching phenomenon at this school. Through interviews, I was able to understand how teachers' perceived the support of the coaches, and how the coaches described the work they were doing with teachers. Through the observations of weekly meetings, I was able to see coaching in action at Creekside.

This study investigates the support given by instructional coaches to teachers and how teachers' perceived this support. The focus of this study is to respond to the following questions:

1. How is instructional coaching conducted in this middle school?

2. What support do instructional coaches provide teachers in this coaching model?

3. What activities with coaches do teachers find most valuable

4. Do teachers believe coaching improves their practice and/or student learning? If so, how?

Site

The research site is an urban, traditional public middle school in western Michigan. In 2012-2013, the school had 1,182 students in fifth through eighth grades when this study took place. It is a 40% free and reduced lunch rate school building, which is close to the state average. Minority students comprised around 23% of the school population: 111 Hispanic students, 110 African-American students, and 67 Asian students. There were 33 English Language Learner students, 152 students with disabilities, and 632 students who were economically disadvantaged (as measured by Free and Reduced Lunch Rates). The school has one principal and two assistant principals.

Teachers at Creekside Middle School were assigned to a particular grade level. In that grade level a teacher was responsible for teaching two subject areas. The typical pairings were math and science, ELA and social studies. Teachers were teaching two classes of each subject area during the school day.

School achievement data for Creekside Middle School show that fifth and sixth-grade students scored either at or below state average on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) 2012 results. In math, fifth graders scored below state average (46% proficient or above), and sixth graders also scored below state average (41% proficient or above). In reading, fifth grade scored below state average (71% proficient or above), and sixth grade scored at the state average (69% proficient or

above). Many fifth and sixth-grade students at Creekside Middle School fell below the level of proficiency in either or both, math and reading.

Given the results of the data analysis, that a large number of students were below proficiency particularly in math and ELA, the coaches and administration determined that interventions needed to be provided to students by coaches in addition to their responsibilities to teachers as instructional coaches. The coaches worked in the classrooms typically once or twice a week where they observed student learning and student engagement with the lesson content, assisted students and asked prompting questions, while providing interventions in an inclusion setting. Coaches also would work individually or in small groups with students outside of the classroom. Coaches and teachers worked together to determine the services students would receive.

Participants

As approval was received to conduct research at Creekside Middle School, recruitment for participants began. The first point of contact was through email with the math coach Tim. Not only did he agree to participate in the study, but also he believed that his colleague an ELA coach (Tracy) in the building would be interested. I corresponded with Tracy over email after Tim had talked to her about the study and she agreed to participate. Since the coaches only worked with fifth and sixth-grade teachers, recruitment was limited to those grade level teachers, both general and special education teachers as they were all being coached by either or both of the coaches. Teachers were emailed and offered the opportunity to participate in the study. The coaches helped me to secure consent forms from the teachers and discussed the study with their teachers and had consent forms that teachers could fill out if they agreed to participate. The

recruitment process ended and I had two coaches participating as well as six teachers. One coach was a female, English-Language Arts (ELA) coach, who coached three ELA teachers: one female, fifth grade ELA teacher, one female, sixth grade ELA teacher, and one female, fifth and sixth grade ELA special education teacher. The other coach was a male Math coach who coached three math teachers: one male, fifth grade math teacher, and two female, sixth grade math teachers.

The ELA coach. Tracy Book (pseudonym) is the fifth and sixth-grade ELA coach, responsible for coaching 16 teachers. Tracy received her bachelor's degree in elementary education and had just recently completed an Educational Administration certificate program. Tracy has spent her entire teaching and coaching career in this same school district. She began in the district as an intern teacher in a first and second-grade multi-age room. Tracy completed her intern year and was offered a job in the district as a second grade teacher and continued teaching in this grade for three years. Tracy then moved to first grade and looped with many of those same students until they completed fourth grade. Tracy then moved to the middle school building after eight years of teaching in the elementary schools. She began teaching sixth and seventh-grade ELA at Creekside Middle School. Tracy noted that she "enjoys the journey of the different grades" and wanted to one day become an elementary principal and felt that having experience in the various grade levels would help her in such a position.

As Tracy began the year as an ELA teacher in the middle school in 2011, her position morphed into one where she was also providing intervention to students in ELA for 90 minutes of her day by the second semester. As the school saw success with this, they determined to move her into the ELA coach position for the 2012-2013 year, as she

had already began taking over some of that role as she transitioned to the school, since no formal ELA coach was in place at the time. This role was not new to Tracy who had been a coach in her elementary school for seven years in both ELA and math. Tracy herself had been coached and became interested in becoming a coach and quickly moved into training to become a coach; some of the trainings provided by the district and others sought out on her own.

The ELA teachers. Emily (pseudonym) is a fifth-grade ELA teacher who has eight years of teaching experience. Emily was responsible for teaching ELA and social studies, and had been doing so for two years prior. She began her teaching career in fifth grade teaching math and social studies but moved to teach third grade for three years. Emily has spent her whole teaching career in the same district. Emily obtained a Master's degree in Curriculum and Teaching and is also working towards an Educational Administration certificate. Emily had also been a literacy coach in the district for five years, and noted frequently that she missed being a coach and hoped future opportunities would allow her to coach in the district.

Lauren (pseudonym) is a sixth grade ELA and social studies teacher who has eight years of teaching experience. Lauren has spent her whole teaching career at Creekside Middle School. She received a Master's degree in the Practice of Teaching with a focus on Curriculum Development. Lauren felt that she had one of the most challenging groups of her teaching career, given she had a large number of students in her class (around 31) and that she had a large number of students on IEPs (14).

Kate (pseudonym) is a fifth and sixth-grade ELA resource room teacher and has been teaching for 11 years. Kate began teaching in a juvenile detention center for two

years, and then moved to teaching in an elementary resource room for four years before coming to Creekside. She had been at this middle school for five years. She has received a Master's degree in the Art of Teaching. During the previous 2011 school year, Kate was able to co-teach with Tracy as they provided sixth-grade students with ELA intervention, and during that time Kate noted they developed not only a good working relationship but also a friendship.

The math coach. Tim Calc (pseudonym) is the fifth and sixth-grade Math coach, responsible for 12 math teachers. Tim received his bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and began teaching in the district in 2001. For his first four years, Tim taught all subjects in fifth grade, and as the district moved grades into new buildings, fifth grade moved to Creekside where Tim then became a math and social studies teacher for fifth grade and did this for three years.

After teaching seven years, Tim became an employee on loan, as the local ISD had received federal funds to implement coaching programs in the local school districts and he was hired on first as a technology coach and then moved into the position of a math coach, as more of a need was present for a math coach. He traveled to various types of schools (traditional and charter) around the county, and worked with various grade levels (K-8) as a math coach. Tim did this work for two years until the funds ran out. Tim received significant amounts of training as a coach at the ISD and after he completed his role as coach at the ISD, he was able to bring all of this experience back to Creekside.

When Tim arrived back at Creekside, administration wanted to take advantage of all the training Tim had experienced and decided to put him into a classroom teaching half time and then coaching the other half of his time. He worked only with fifth grade as

a coach during that year, as he stated "even that was too much" as the work of a coach required a position that was more than half time. He shared this concern with administration and they moved him to a full-time coaching position the following school year, and added the ELA coach as well that same year.

The math teachers. Ethan (pseudonym) is a fifth-grade math and science teacher and has been teaching for 15 years, the most veteran participant (in terms of experience) in this study. Ethan holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in Educational Leadership. He has spent his 15 years of teaching in both fifth and sixth grades, teaching all subjects during those 15 years. He has been teaching at Creekside for seven years.

Jane (pseudonym) is a sixth grade math and science teacher and has been teaching for five years. Jane holds a Bachelor's degree in elementary education and a Master's degree in Educational Leadership and is applying to Ph.D. programs and hopes to begin a program in the upcoming year. Jane has taught math and science each year of her career, her first year in fifth, second year in sixth, and third year as a moving instructor in an elementary school in grades 1,2, and 4. She arrived back at Creekside last year in fifth grade and is beginning this year as the sixth grade teacher. Jane works with both instructional coaches, and is the only participant to do this. Jane and Tracy work together on purely a volunteer basis to help with an informational text program Jane was working on incorporating into her science class.

Gina (pseudonym) is a sixth-grade math and science teacher and has been teaching for 12 years. Gina has received her Bachelor's degree in elementary education with an additional endorsement in math education. Gina has spent her career teaching in

both fifth and sixth grades, with the most time being spent in sixth. This school year is her first year back to teaching math after having not taught it for three years, making her feel like she had a bit of new material to learn.

Participants in this study were protected under the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures. Participants received a copy of their own signed consent form that had my contact information as well as contact information for IRB if issues or questions arose. I use pseudonyms for the participant names and locations to maintain privacy and confidentiality of participants in this research study.

Researcher Information

My career in education began as an elementary teacher in grades 1, 2, and 4. I was a classroom teacher for four years before beginning my Ph.D. program. In my Ph.D. program, I instructed pre-service and intern teachers in various education courses as a teaching assistant at the university and did this for five years. In 2006, I became a Dean of Instruction for grades K-2 and held this position for three years. In this position, I coached up to 20 teachers each school year. My role included going into classrooms for up to 15 minutes each week to observe teachers and also meet to debrief with teachers each week about their observations. It was in my position as an instructional coach where I developed curiosity about the role of a coach and the impact of a coach on teachers and students. This experience as an instructional coach led me to explore coaching models to understand how teachers' perceive the influence of coaching.

I had not done coaching at this school or school district, and the model of coaching found at this site varied significantly from the model of coaching used where I received my experience as a coach. I do acknowledge that my experience as a coach

could cause issues of subjectivity within a study about coaching. Throughout the process, I had to acknowledge this issue and always questioned the perspectives and interpretations I was bringing to the data collection and analysis process.

At this research site, I was an outsider. I was there to observe coaching in its natural setting. Observations were a time where a coach and teacher worked closely together in very personal work—discussing teaching and students. I sat very closely to the participants, typically at a table alongside them but stayed uninvolved as often as possible, and was very clear that I was there only to observe. There were times where a question or comment was directed towards me and I made sure to respond quickly or not at all, to not interrupt the nature flow and occurrence of the coaching meeting and not influence the direction of the coaching work. My role was only to observe and describe what I was seeing in the coaching meetings. When I was doing observations I ran audio recording on my laptop and took field notes, trying to maintain my role as an observer.

Data Collection

The data collected came from three sources: initial interviews with coaches and teachers, observational data of weekly coaching meetings between coaches and teachers, and final interviews with coaches and teachers. These three data sources were used in tandem to answer the research questions of this study, providing both a narrative description of a coaching model, but also an understanding of how teachers' perceived that coaching model.

Interviews. Structured interviews with coaches and teachers are one of the sources of data in this study. Interviews are a data collection tool that helps a researcher

understand the participants' interpretations and views of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Initial and final interviews were conducted with all participants.

To conduct a structured interview, protocols were developed and used. Protocols were aligned to the study's research questions. I developed initial interview protocols for coaches (Appendix A) and teachers (Appendix B), as well as final interview protocols for coaches (Appendix C) and teachers (Appendix D). The initial interview protocols are divided into focused sections. The first section contains informational questions about participants' educational history and career experiences to better understand the various learning experiences they have engaged in. In the protocol for coaches, they were also asked specific questions about their history as a coach and training to be a coach. The next section has questions addressing the structure of the coaching, also asking participants to describe the experience of being coached. Last were a section of questions to illustrate participants' perceptions of coaching.

Final interview protocols were also used. The final interview protocol did not include an informational section about participants' as it was not necessary at that point in the study, but did include the other questions to see how responses of participants evolved over the course of the study, for example teachers were asked: "Can you describe for me an example of your teaching practice before coaching and after coaching?" I kept two of the same sections that were in the initial protocol: the structure of coaching as well as the experience of being coach, and perceptions of coaching. Coaches debriefed on each of their individual teachers and how they felt that particular teacher had evolved and the support they had provided to that teacher over the course of the year.

The final protocol also was revised after the initial interviews occurred. Some of the questions I had anticipated being valuable to this study turned out to be inapplicable. One of those questions was: "Please describe the experience of being observed by your coach." I quickly realized after my first few interviews, that this coaching model did not include formal observations of the teachers' instructional practice. Though this did inform my understanding of the structure of the coaching model, I did not feel that this question would be valuable for my final interviews with teachers and for this reason it was not included in the final interview.

Interviews occurred at two different points in the study: initial in January and February, and final in May and June. Interviews were conducted with coaches and teachers. Coaches notified me of the teachers who returned signed consent forms, once I knew a teacher was willing to participate, I sent an email introducing myself once again and asked for the best dates/times for the initial interview and scheduled them over email. Interviews were scheduled with all participants before the observations of one-on-ones began, as I did not want experience of watching the pairs of coaches and teachers interacting to influence the questions asked in the interviews. Six initial interviews were carried out in the school building (typically the teacher's classroom or an office space) during a participant's planning period giving me around 45 minutes to conduct the interviews. I had about one hour with each of the coaches, as their time was a bit more flexible. At times carrying out interviews in the school came with distractions as can be expected as the school day is in session—other teachers coming in to ask a question, students needing something from the teacher, or parent calls coming in. Two interviews occurred over the phone using Call Recorder Software, as those teachers could not fit in

an interview in the window of time we had available to us to conduct the interviews. The eight final interviews were conducted in the school building during teachers' planning periods. Though it would have been more ideal to carry out the interviews before or after school, all teachers and coaches had very full schedules during those time periods as well, so in order to accommodate their schedules, I was flexible with scheduling time in during the school day to meet with everyone.

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed afterwards. Recordings allowed for a more accurate and precise collection of interview data (Merriam, 1998) and were used to transcribe. I also had taken notes during the interviews in my research log. Those were not transcribed but were kept in my research log and used when necessary in data analysis.

Interviews were used to answer or inform all four of my research questions. In the interviews, I asked specific questions about the coaching model, how it was enacted, and the perceptions of participants. Interviews offered valuable perspectives of teachers and coaches and added a personal account and detail to the observations I also used as a data source.

Observations. Observations of coach and teacher weekly meetings are my other data source for this study. A firsthand account can be captured through an observation (Merriam, 1998). Observations provided a vivid picture of how coaching was conducted at Creekside Middle School, as it was the heart of the coaches and teachers work together.

Coaching meetings at Creekside are held on a weekly basis and run for 20-30 minutes during a teacher's planning time during the school day once a week. They are

held on a consistent schedule (the day of the week and time stay the same). Coaching meetings are held in teachers' classrooms—coaches come to them and bring any materials necessary to the meeting.

From February to May, on a monthly basis, I observed each teacher's one-on-one meeting with his or her instructional coach. These meetings were scheduled ahead of time through the coach and teacher, and typically I knew one to two weeks in advance of sessions I would be observing. There was no criteria used to determine which coaching sessions were best to observe, it was typically determined purely by what scheduled time each month worked best for all parties. I tried to keep the number of observations between all participants at an equal number, but that was difficult given the varied issues that would arise, for example, teacher illness or an impromptu parent meeting hindered my ability to keep some of my scheduled observations. I made up as many of the missed observations as possible, but not all participants have the same amount of observations as others, though each teacher has at least two observations to compare with when analyzing the data sources. Nineteen observations of coaching meetings occurred from February to May.

All observations were audio recorded and transcribed. I also took notes in my research log to ensure I was able to record information that could not necessarily be noted by listening to an audio recording. During the observations many types of materials were used to engage coach and teacher in their work and it was key to make note of what the items were to provide context for the audio recordings and transcriptions. I gathered some of the materials from observations when I felt they were necessary to analyze closer after the observation had finished.

Originally in my research proposal, I had planned on conducting semi-structured interviews with participants to follow-up on observations that had occurred. Participants had limited availability and since the observations occurred during the school day (teachers taught directly before and after these sessions), it made holding semi-structured interviews difficult to conduct. Coaches often had students, teachers, parents, or some other instructional duty to attend to immediately following observations of coaching meetings. I had to re-evaluate conducting semi-structured interviews, and determined to not use them.

Instead of conducting semi-structured interviews after coaching meetings, I kept record of any questions I had as they arose, in my research log. Then, I could compile questions and address them in my final interview in addition to my final protocol, or at another time that the teachers or coaches had a moment to answer the questions. Mostly this occurred when the coach and teacher were discussing an activity or reading they had done together and I was curious to know more about the specifics and purpose of the items they were mentioning in the meetings, for example Tim and Jane (one of his sixth-grade math teachers) had read a research article together and were discussing it at length during a coaching meeting and it was being applied to their conversations of particular students. I later asked Tim to elaborate on what the article was, why he chose the article, and how that article helped to support the teacher, among other questions; by keeping the research log I was able to later ask Tim to elaborate on those questions. The use of the research log was maintained throughout the data collection process and it was closely attended to as I collected and analyzed my data.

Observations were used to help me answer two research questions: 1) How is instructional coaching conducted in this middle school? and 2) What support do instructional coaches provide teachers in this coaching model? I was able to look closely at how support was provided to teachers in the weekly coaching meetings and had insight into how coaching was being conducted at Creekside by sitting with coaches and teachers in their one-on-one coaching meetings. Observations offered a look into heart of coaching at Creekside Middle School.

Analysis

The constant comparative method outlined by Glaser and Strauss (2009) was utilized to analyze my data. I analyzed data continuously and did multiple examinations of data, comparing different sources. Doing this allowed me to not only think more clearly about my data as time went on, but also helped me to plan strategies that would allow me to collect newer, often better data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A variety of techniques were used to analyze data including reading transcriptions multiple times, reviewing coaching literature to compare findings, creating tables, keeping notes in my research log, and discussing data with my advisor. In the sections that follow, I describe the data analysis in more detail to capture the steps I have taken to make sense of my data.

Observations. The main purpose of observations was to see coaching interactions as they occurred, to provide a descriptive account of the coaching model at Creekside. A total of 19 observations occurred from the months of February to May and I transcribed all observations for analysis.

Since I collected all observational data over the course of four months, I found it important to begin data analysis as I collected the data. I analyzed data individually, and across all six teachers on a monthly basis. In February, I developed an initial, observation analytic memo that outlined themes I was noticing as I sat in on observations and transcribed the audio-recordings. The memo was broken down into four sections: ELA, math, differences, and similarities. In each section I made brief notes about the trends that were emerging with the ELA coach and her teachers, the math coach and his teachers, as well as the similarities and differences between the two coaches as they engaged in coaching with their teachers. This analytic memo became my foundation for analyzing observational data, as I continued to use it to see, as I gathered more data as months passed, how coaching was implemented. I continued to question if what I was seeing was staying consistent across individuals, and if I did see changes, thinking about why they may be occurring. Themes developed such as "provided resources" and "asking questions" from the February memo, which later turned into codes such as " offering suggestions" and "reflective questioning" to describe the coaching moves used by coaches in the weekly meetings. Once all observational data was gathered, I was also able to look across each individual to see how their coaching meetings evolved over the four months. I looked for patterns and trends in each teacher's coaching meetings to see how the meetings developed over the four months.

Interviews. The main purpose to the interviews was to gather participants' understanding of the coaching model as well as their perceptions of the coaching model on their teaching and on their students' learning. When interview data is used to form

conclusions, it is important that a researcher does a systematic analysis (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). Next, I will describe my systematic analysis of interview data.

Initial interviews. I began the data analysis process of initial interviews by creating a table, which would show me how each participant, responded to the individual, initial interview questions. I created a table where the x-axis would indicate each individual participant and on the y-axis would indicate each individual interview question. Once the table was created, I took the transcripts and placed the responses into the correct section of the table.

When the table was complete I was able to analyze responses to each question and similar sections (the sections that aligned to those on the protocol) of questions more closely. I read and re-read the table multiple times, and patterns or themes developed and were made note of. For example, after looking at responses to the interview question, "What specific aspects of the work with your coach has been most effective for you and why?" I was able to see two themes arising in the responses, one was "expertise in intervening with struggling students" and the other was "resourceful". The initial themes were noted and used in triangulation later in the data analysis process, as more data was made available.

Final interviews. Final interview data were also analyzed. I began the data analysis process of final interviews, differently than I did with initial interviews since I had a significant amount of data and analysis done by that point. Each interview transcript was read multiple times and I looked for key ideas or terms that were emerging, placing them into a table instead of the actual final interview questions as I had done previously with initial interviews. The table had participants' names on the x-axis, where

quotes would be placed that aligned to the codes. On the y-axis I placed the emerging

codes: push, supportive, safe, trust/respect, partnership, available, quality of instruction,

innovative, knowledgeable, reliable, focus, tasks, authentic, actions, and monitoring.

Codes were revised, as I looked closer at how respondents' aligned in their responses.

For example the initial code of "supportive" got revised into more specific codes:

"teacher goals" and "student data and observation".

Once data analysis was complete on all data sources, I then worked to triangulate

my findings from each data source, when applicable. I did this by looking at my research

questions and looking across the various data analyses tables that I had created. Through

observational data analysis, I was able to produce a description of this coaching model in

action, which others can use to implement. This description was informed as well by

interview responses and themes that arose in participant responses. For instance, I

observed coaches engage teachers on their particular goals, which were, coded "teacher

goals" and this aligned with codes from interviews also revised to become "teacher

goals". Not only was I able to observe the coach support a teacher on their goals, but also

it was affirmed in interviews that teachers felt coaches supported them in their individual

goals.

Data from initial interviews, observations, and final interviews described how

coaches and teachers engaged in a coaching model at Creekside Middle School. I was

able to use rich descriptions from my data to provide a narrative about what coaching

looked like at this school, and how teachers' perceived this coaching model to influence

their teaching and student learning in their classrooms.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Different Kind of Coaching

This chapter reports on instructional coaching conducted at Creekside Middle School. Specifically, it describes the coaching model and explains the supports offered to teachers by coaches in this model. The chapter answers two research questions: (1) How is instructional coaching conducted in this middle school? and (2) What support do instructional coaches provide teachers in this coaching model? The findings for this chapter draw on the initial and final interviews held with teachers and coaches, along with the observations of coaching meetings once a month for four months (February to May). I argue that this kind of coaching is a coaching model that engages teachers and coaches in a common goal: improved student learning. I also show that this coaching model produced a different kind of relationship between teacher and coach, in which the locus of study was student learning, not teacher instruction.

Context of Coaching at Creekside Middle School

In this section, I describe the context of coaching at Creekside Middle School. I begin by describing coaching models in previous years at the school. I then give background information on the various coaching initiatives that took place during the 2012 - 2013 school year, in order to provide a complete, thorough picture of how this coaching model is "a different kind of coaching."

Coaching was not new to Creekside Middle School in 2012 - 2013. From 2003 to 2008, coaching had been implemented following a model provided by The Learning Network. Coaching through The Learning Network developed from the notion that it is *adult learning* that is key to student achievement and systemic change (Brown, Stroh,

Fouts, & Baker, 2005). Coaches observed teachers and engaged with teachers on action plans to help in training teachers to use effective teaching practices. Teachers in this study stated that The Learning Network model of coaching created a division between teachers and coaches. Coaches reported their observations of teachers to administration—and these observations often included instructional problems (e.g., a math teacher teaching a unit behind schedule), which created distrust by the teachers. Ethan shared that with coaches in that model, "... was like they were assessing you and telling on you." Teachers reported they became wary of this model of coaching. One coach, Tim, had been a math teacher in this coaching model and understood teachers' distrust of coaching. Tim stated, "there were several that were nervous to have me in there, they thought they would be judged or whatever and I was very aware because I have been in that position before." The other coach, Tracy, had not been in the building during that time, but she knew about teachers' wariness about being coached. Tracy explained impression coming into Creekside as a coach,

> Having been told it was a place coaching hadn't worked and the model had stopped, for me it has always been let's take it to the data and the kids and work side by side…. by using the students as this vehicle for our conversations for our work together, for me getting into classrooms, people were responsive.

Eventually The Learning Network coaching model stopped, and had left Creekside teachers wary of coaching.

In the 2012-2013 school year, Creekside Middle School implemented a new coaching model. Unlike the past years' coaching models, the focus of this new model targeted *student* learning. Coaching centered on supporting teachers to improve student

learning. It is this stance that makes this model distinctive from traditional coaching models, which focused on adult (i.e., teacher) learning. A distinctive coaching model took place at Creekside Middle School that removed the focus from the teacher's instruction to the ways students learned or struggled with content and skills. As I show in this chapter, shifting the focus created a completely different relationship between teacher and coach.

At the same time the new coaching model began, the school district was responding to student learning needs that district and school administrators had deemed a priority after reviewing state proficiency testing results (discussed in Chapter 3). A leadership team comprised of the coaches, principals, and other district leadership members made decisions about how the school would respond to these student-learning needs. Tim stated in his initial interview that after analyzing data from state assessments, they found 125 students in fifth grade scored "not proficient" on the state proficiency exams in math and ELA. To address this need, the focus of the coaches' work became the fifth- and sixth-grade students and teachers in math and English Language Arts (ELA).

Response to Intervention (RTI). The coaches were an instrumental piece of the new Response to Intervention (RTI) framework the school began to use in 2012-2013. RTI is a multi-tiered (pyramid) framework that schools use to maximize both student learning and to reduce behavioral incidents. RTI integrates many types of assessments and interventions to achieve those goals.

There are three tiers in the RTI framework. Tier 1, is the foundation. It is at this foundation, where all students are to be receiving high-quality instruction differentiated for their needs in a positive school culture. Tier 2, the next level up, is where a small

percentage of identified students need support (Delisle & Shelby, 2009). At this level, targeted interventions for small groups of students are used as an extra support to accelerate progress. If improvement is not adequate, students may move to Tier 3, the most intensive level. Individualized interventions are offered at this level. In all tiers, staff members monitor student learning using assessments, and progress is tracked closely to determine the right tier of intervention for the students.

The RTI framework is implemented at a school level. It requires all staff to have a common knowledge of the framework and to understand the structures in place to support the framework. It is not unusual to have support staff for academic and behavioral interventions in an RTI framework, provide direct support to students in Tier 2 and Tier 3.

The RTI framework also requires a school to have a system in place to identify students who may fall into Tier 2 and 3 interventions for behavior and/or academics. Communication between teachers and support staff are necessary to help in identification of students, as well as in determining the type and length of intervention that will be necessary, and in monitoring the progress of students once they are receiving intervention. Each school creates a system that will work for their students and staff.

What makes Creekside Middle School's implementation of RTI framework unique is that the coaches, Tracy and Tim, were integral in not only providing intervention support in Tier 2 and Tier 3 with students, but also helping teachers with Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction that met the needs of all the students. Tim stated that "…we added the responsibility to our role of working with teachers and talking with teachers about what good instruction is and offering them a lot of time and ways to think about

math concepts…keeping in mind how kids need to think about them [math concepts] and how they [kids] develop that thinking." Both coaches noted that many of the teachers were already attempting to differentiate Tier 1 instruction in their classrooms and wanted more knowledge and support to differentiate for their students.

Professional Learning Community (PLC) questions. RTI was not the only initiative focused on student learning at Creekside Middle School. During the 2012-2013 year the district had a contract with an outside vendor to involve teachers in Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Tracy stated that there were four PLC questions that the district had asked all schools to use: (1) What are students to learn? (2) How do we know when they learned it? (3) What will we do for those who don't get it? and (4) What will we do for students who come with knowledge already? Tracy noted that many conversations with teachers could be framed through these four questions. The questions were focused on students and student learning, and this drove much of the work that the coaches did with their fifth- and sixth-grade teachers. The coaches were able to connect and blend the RTI framework with the four PLC questions that the district had implemented, in their coaching practice and did so intentionally.

Coaching Responsibilities

In this coaching model, Tracy and Tim had responsibilities related to students, school administration, and teachers. Each of these responsibilities described next, all served to support student learning.

Working with students. Coaches worked with students who were identified as struggling learners (based on achievement scores, diagnostic assessment results, and observations) in either or both of the content areas. Tracy and Tim initially worked with

teachers and administration at the beginning of the year to identify potential students for various RTI interventions. Students were identified and given diagnostic assessments to determine if they needed interventions, and if so, at what level. Once students were identified for Tier 2 and 3, Tracy and Tim provided interventions to students throughout the week and monitored the students' progress. The interventions provided were differentiated depending on each student's level of need. Students with the highest level of needs received Tier 3, individual one-on-one pullout, while other students received Tier 2 interventions directly in the classrooms from the coach in small groups of four to six, while their class was in session.

Coaches' work with students varied. Tracy and Tim responded to the needs of the students, the teachers, and schedules. This often meant the actual logistics of their work might change (composition of groups, scheduling), or the substance of their work might change (differentiation of instruction, unit topics). Both coaches were flexible and changed their work with students, as necessary.

Monitoring student learning and progress. Coaches worked closely with teachers in gathering and analyzing student data. They indicated that this work was a high priority, which distinguishes this model of coaching from other forms of coaching, which are focused on adult learning. Data included diagnostic tests, progress monitoring tools, and formative and summative assessments from the classrooms and/or from intervention sessions, as well as the coaches' and teachers' observations of students. Both coaches and teachers gathered and analyzed data. Analysis happened at three different points. First, it happened with the initial identification of students where screeners would be given to children and results would be analyzed. Second, it happened as a check-in during the

intervention to see the progress being made. Lastly, it occurred at later points in the intervention to determine how much growth was made and how to continue to support the student(s). Using the results, the teacher and coach worked together to determine how to best meet students' needs. The coach and teacher monitored student progress and learning on an ongoing basis during the weekly coaching meetings, which will be described in more detail later in this chapter.

Communicating with administration. Coaches worked as intermediaries between the teachers and the administration (principal and assistant principals) on a frequent basis. Coaches and administrators had common time together to meet and discuss topics like the implementation of the RTI framework and the progress of intervention and coaching, which in a large school like Creekside was important. Administrators were not often able to get out into classrooms and engage with teachers and students on topics of student learning. Teachers and the administration did not view the coaches as administrators; instead, teachers and administrators viewed the coaches as instructional leaders. In particular, the administration valued coaches' ideas about instruction, RTI, their content areas, and the like. Typically coaches and an administrator (mainly the principal) met weekly.

The weekly meetings with administration were a time for coaches to communicate with administration and share ideas to improve the coaching model, to improve the RTI program, and to become a voice for teachers and students. For example, coaches were instrumental in the continuing development of the RTI model. At the beginning of the year, the RTI model for the coaches was more focused upon Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Within a few months of the start of school, the coaches were open

with administration about needing to address Tier 1 instruction in the building and supporting all faculty members to develop a common understanding of RTI. Tim stated in his initial interview, "…let's make sure everyone understands what a complete full implementation of RTI looks like…looking at common levels on how to maintain or ensure we are doing quality Tier 1 teaching." Administration supported the coaches' decisions about how to move the model forward and continually met with the coaches to discuss the development of the RTI framework. Coaches even connected with administrators on engaging with all staff on professional development about the RTI framework, and administrators gradually led some of the PD sessions as well.

Teachers did not view the coaches as evaluators who reported their observations of teachers to the principals; instead, teachers valued that coaches were communicating with administration. Coaches were seen by their teachers as advocates, the link between the reality of the classroom with administration. Emily discussed the important role of the coaches in her final interview,

> We would bring concerns to her [Tracy] about different issues and she would advocate. She is in the classroom and directly involved with students, sometimes administration is out of touch with the classroom and she was our advocate and kept feelings out of it…there was trust and advocating for you, working with administration but working for you.

Teachers' perspectives of coaches changed dramatically between the year before and this year. In the past, teachers had been wary of coaching due to the fact that coaches reported to the administration and did not support teachers in those conversations. This year, teachers viewed coaches as their advocates. Emily, as well as other teachers, viewed the

coaches as working *for* teachers, and working *with* administration, quite the opposite

view of coaches the teachers previously had at Creekside.

Conducting PD. Tracy and Tim were directly involved with professional

development (PD) at Creekside Middle School. The coaches often planned and conducted

many of the PD sessions based on the patterns of student learning and student challenges

they were seeing in their observations and discussing in their coaching meetings. If they

were not planning and conducting the PD experiences, they attended the PD sessions and

were engaged in the PD along with teachers.

PD happened in many forms at Creekside Middle School. PD ranged from whole

school PD on RTI to small groups of teachers in PLC book clubs. Coaches met weekly to

plan PD experiences for the staff and for their groups of teachers. During this time, they

discussed their goals for PD.

For instance, Tracy and Tim saw a need for the staff to follow a similar

philosophy about students' capacities to learn. Undergirding RTI is the belief that all

children can learn, and to help children learn teachers need to differentiate instruction and

intervene when necessary; every student needs varying levels of support. As the coaches

got deeper into their work with teachers, they noticed teachers verbalized this philosophy

but when doing the work of meeting all students' needs, the coaches questioned if

teachers truly believed it. So, they chose the book, *Opening Minds: Using Language to*

Change Lives by Peter Johnston, for a book club with a group of teachers who played a

role in RTI at the school. In this book, Johnston discusses how the words we use in the

classroom are influential in how children perceive themselves as learners. He explains

how students often see intelligence as fixed or dynamic, and it is in how you view

intelligence that can impact how you take on challenge. He shares how teachers can help (by the words they use with children) children develop a dynamic learning frame, where learning takes time and can be challenging and trying hard is valued. The book was a vehicle to engage teachers in thinking about their own students and the learning and language that occurs in their classrooms.

Tracy discussed how the teachers in the book club were open and receptive to the ideas in the book. Tracy used reflection sheets with the teachers as they engaged in the book and she noted that teachers had taken away important points from the book. She shared, "they will say [in their reflection sheets] this is challenging me in the best way, it seems to shine through." In coaching meetings, teachers who were part of the book club discussed the book with their coach. For example, Jane discussed it with Tim when they were talking about a student's motivational issues in the classroom, and discussed his learning frame and how to approach this student knowing the information about him. Jane was able to take the reading from the book club and apply it to a situation with a student.

Lauren also brought up the book in a coaching meeting with Tracy. Lauren brought up that she had been thinking about a student and how she believed he fell into the fixed performance realm, "Not avoiding failure…but he just this is what he has always done and gotten by." She shared that in the past he has been below average and gotten by, therefore does as little work as possible in class. Lauren then continued to make the connection to her own mindset noting when working with him she will "…continuously try over and over again to get him help and he doesn't try", and how this at times, impacts her decision to help him or help others that actually want the help and

try. Not only did Lauren connect the book to the student, but to her own mindset as she engaged or chose not to engage with the student. Lauren was made more aware of her own thoughts and actions after engaging in the book club, which was a goal of this particular PD experience at Creekside.

Meeting with grade level and/or content area teams. Each coach had responsibilities among his or her assigned grade levels and content area teams. Coaches were frequently involved in meetings with the fifth- and sixth-grade teams (the grades they coached), as well as school wide in their content area (i.e., Tracy in English/language arts and Tim in math). In these teams, they engaged with teachers in activities such as long range planning, assessment creation, and alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The coaches also created items and tools to guide instruction and assessment in these meetings with teachers. For example, Tracy, the ELA sixth-grade teachers and a special education teacher created a fourth quarter student menu for the sixth-grade ELA classes. Creating this menu helped to guide the teachers in their teaching for the fourth quarter of the year. This type of work also kept the sixth grade teachers in alignment with each other and the curriculum. Although these meetings were a separate responsibility from her weekly coaching meetings, Tracy used the student menu in coaching meetings to discuss student learning and data. For example, Lauren asked Tracy if she wanted to talk about some specific kids in their coaching meeting, and Tracy said, "I brought a sixth grade reading menu, but at least for Tom, Keith...We had talked about looking together at where their strengths lie and more specifically trying to get from so this is still a detriment for them how can we get to the get higher level questioning and get to these

things too." Tracy and Lauren debriefed on a few students and discussed where those students fell on the menu (both strengths and struggles), and how to progress them further through the menu in the upcoming weeks. Lauren shared which items on the menu she was focusing on with particular students. The student menu became a tool to stimulate discussion about individual students as well as a standard for a teacher to gauge their progress of teaching reading in the fourth quarter of the school year.

Co-teaching. Tracy also took on the responsibility of co-teaching with a special education teacher in the building. Tracy and Kate were concerned about several sixth-grade students who had severe learning needs in ELA. They discussed the concerns in their coaching meetings and had arrived at a plan for how schedules could be adjusted to help these students receive more support. Tracy and Kate asked for and received approval by the administration to begin co-teaching students outside of ELA classroom time. On average the group consisted of 10-12 students in sixth grade. Some of the students had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and others' performance had been assessed, as significantly below grade level but those students did not receive special education services. Co-teaching allowed Tracy and Kate to work side by side with each other. They planned their lessons for the week, monitored student progress and understanding, co-taught, and analyzed assessments together. They worked together on making sure students were exposed to sixth grade standards and content at an accessible level. Tracy and Kate taught the lessons together and moved around the room working with students to later compare and discuss what they had observed.

One co-teaching session was focused on helping students write persuasive essays. All sixth-grade students were working on persuasive essay writing in their ELA

classrooms at that time. Tracy and Kate also were focusing on persuasive essay writing in their co-teaching time in order to support students in the sixth-grade standards, but making it more accessible to them at their levels. For example, in one of the coaching meetings they discussed how students were struggling to grasp counter-arguments and position, discussing this may be hard because many of the students are still self-centered developmentally. So in the co-teaching time, they modeled writing a position about Facebook and had students contribute to the model they were writing. Then students started writing their own position after a significant amount of modeling (more then they would have received in their regular ELA classroom).

Lauren felt they were able to "…clue in on the kids individual needs and adjusted immediately for that." During the co-teaching session, one teacher would teach a mini-lesson, while the other was walking around the room checking student engagement and understanding. After the short mini-lesson, both teachers engaged with small groups of students or individuals and often debriefed with each other to make adjustments as needed.

Coaching Meetings

The coaches supported the fifth- and sixth-grade math and ELA teachers in weekly coaching meetings, especially teachers who had students receiving intervention from the coaches. This responsibility became a large part of the coaches' work as well as a top priority. Coaches consistently held their weekly coaching meetings with the fifth- and sixth-grade teachers. Tim and Tracy met with each of their teachers once per week for 20 to 30 minutes. The coaches viewed this time with teachers as a forum for the

teachers to recognize that the coaches were there to help and provide answers to questions or concerns teachers had.
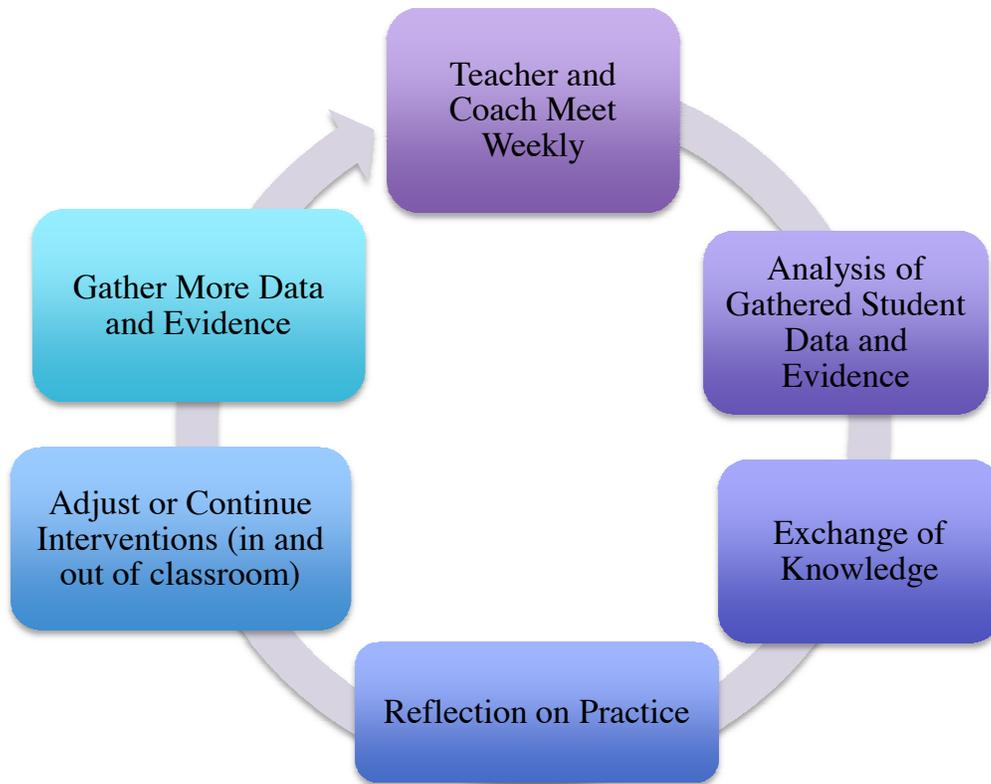
Figure 1. Coaching Meetings in Action. For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation.

Coaching meetings in action. *Figure 1* shows an overview of the cycle of coaching meetings at Creekside Middle School. Every week, each coach met with each of his or her assigned teachers. During these meetings, the coach and teacher worked together to analyze gathered student data and evidence collected over the past week. When they discussed and analyzed the data, an exchange of knowledge occurred. Knowledge flowed back and forth between coach and teacher. Both were able to reflect upon their practice with the students, whether it was a teacher providing instruction or a coach providing interventions. As they worked together and shared knowledge about the

students, they planned and worked together to adjust or continue the interventions both in and out of the classroom to address student-learning needs. By the end of their meeting, they left prepared to move forward and gather more data and evidence as they engaged with students. This process continued from week to week.

For example, in a coaching meeting with Tim and Jane, they worked together to discuss how well students understood subtracting and multiplying decimals, the concept Jane had taught that day,

Jane: How did you think things went today Tim?

Tim: Well the kids I worked with, you know I saw a common thing which was specifically when they subtracting the decimal numbers…Hope, when I helped her and sat with her for a few of them, after the second one she said I can't subtract decimals. I said well here, I took the problem and rewrote it without the decimals instead of 1.74 it was 174 and she could borrow it and everything and transferred the decimal in the spot without me telling her to even do it. I asked her what does the decimal do? The girl next to her said it changes the value. I discussed how it doesn't change what the number does.

Jane: If I am looking at my monitoring notes today, I still have many students who haven't solidified that mastery.

Tim: Same with Ron, when I took decimals out he could do it. Same with other kids.

Jane: For multiplication?

Tim: Yes.

Jane: Amy wasn't here but she was struggling with subtraction but multiplying was ok, but subtraction was killing her…Do you have any other feedback from today?

Tim: That was the glaring trend, without decimals it made sense to them.

Jane: So is what we were doing the right way? We are at so many different levels here they just need the skill practice, they need to take it out of the context of problem and focus on practicing the skill and move forward from there.

Tim: Yah exactly, they know what to do they need practice to do it correctly, constantly.

In the first four minutes of the coaching meeting, Jane was able to gain knowledge from Tim, about student data and evidence from his time working with the students. Jane was able to reflect upon her teaching and asked Tim if how she was approaching this concept was the correct way to do it, given some of the struggles children were having. Tim assured her to continue the way she was going in her classroom with the concept. This example is just one short piece of a coaching meeting, but highlights how quickly an exchange of knowledge can occur between the two to help a teacher (or coach) make future instructional decisions that will meet student needs.

Preparing for the coaching meetings. Coaching meetings were the main opportunity the coach worked one-on-one with a teacher. In order to make the meetings productive, the coaches prepared ahead of time, even if they only had a few minutes to prepare (as this was all their schedule would allow). Tracy and Tim made sure they had the appropriate materials for the teachers and came ready with anything (e.g., books, articles, student data) that they wanted to share in their coaching meeting or promised a

teacher they would bring. Coaches reviewed notes from earlier coaching meetings, rereading previous topics covered in order to prepare and ensure they would be moving the conversation forward from where it was previously left in the last coaching meeting.

Both coaches took notes in various ways to keep track of their work and discussions with teachers. The coaches took notes during the coaching meetings and when they were working with students in and out of the classrooms. Tim kept his notes on his iPad, which he carried around to each meeting with any other documents he was going to use for that specific meeting. Tracy had a binder for each of her teachers where she kept loose-leaf paper and continually wrote down notes that were key to each meeting. Tracy stated that the notes were essential, "…they helped me manage specific students they asked me about, alongside something bigger, something that is weighing on your mind, something you are trying, something I need to check in on, or where are we at with levels of support, observe, model…I had consistency." Notes helped to track the work they were doing with teachers and helped them in directing the coaching meetings. The coaches reviewed the notes briefly before beginning the meeting with a teacher and took additional notes during the meetings to keep track of key ideas, follow ups, or data that came from their conversations. Note taking allowed the coaches to keep focused on the topics, students, and goals they were discussing in their meetings.

In preparation for the meetings, the coaches often found or created resources that they brought to the meetings. These resources included items such as diagnostic assessment printouts, handouts from meetings or PD experiences, activities for students, and research articles. They prepared these resources for coaching meetings after seeing a need, whether it was a student, teacher, or school need.

The following example describes how a coach prepared for a meeting and engaged with a teacher using a specific resource thoughtfully brought to the meeting. Tracy used a Depth of Knowledge (the cognitive demand of the Common Core Standards and the assessments used to determine the proficiency of the standards) packet with her teachers during coaching meetings I observed. The packet addressed the four levels of cognitive demand in Depth of Knowledge. Tracy had received this packet at a district meeting a few days beforehand. Tracy and the Creekside Middle School ELA team felt that the Depth of Knowledge packet was imperative for ELA teachers across the building to engage with. Tracy brought and used the packet with Lauren in her coaching meeting, as Tracy realized that it applied specifically to Lauren's goal. One of Lauren's goals was to have more effective reading conferences with her students, and Tracy used the packet to support and enhance the reading conference discussion they had in their coaching meeting. They addressed questions such as, "How are you making sure that your lower-level learners aren't only being asked level-one questions?" The Depth of Knowledge packet stimulated discussion and review of the types of questions Lauren had been asking previously in her reading conferences with students. Tracy explained to Lauren why she brought the packet to their coaching meeting. She explained, "…too often with lower kids, if they don't have the recall we all pause them on recall. Something for us to have a good conversation about." In response, Lauren stated, "I do think that…with someone who is stuck on comprehension, I don't know how to get the child to think deeper." Lauren and Tracy then discussed how to use the different levels of questioning to make sure students are receiving all scales of cognitive demand found within the Depth of Knowledge levels. By preparing for the meeting and bringing the handout, Lauren and

Tracy were able to discuss the level of questioning occurring in Lauren's classroom, and also aligned their work to the district effort using Depth of Knowledge.

In order to have coaching meetings relevant to teachers and purposeful in engaging teachers in discussions about student learning and the practice of teaching, coaches needed to prepare ahead of time. This preparation included taking time to gather and review the materials as well as taking time to plan an agenda for the coaching meeting. It is important that coaches were provided time to prepare for their coaching meetings. Since coaches had limited time with teachers in a one-on-one setting, such as a coaching meeting, it was critical for coaches to have an agenda that kept the teacher and coach focused on the ongoing goals they have set, whether it be focusing specifically upon student data, teacher goals, or both.

Structure of coaching meetings. Coaching meetings were conducted weekly for 20-30 minutes during planning time built into the daily schedule by building administration. The coaches met with the teachers in their classrooms. Often their coaching meetings occurred directly following the coaches' scheduled intervention time in the classrooms or after coaches' pullout work with smaller groups of students.

Meetings began with the coach doing a quick check on how the teacher was doing and inquiring about problems that may have arose for the teacher over the past week. A typical question the coach asked during this time would be, "Has anything bubbled up for you this week?" A question such as this opened the floor to the teacher to address with their coach any topics of conversation that were pertinent to them. This question also shows that coaches were there to support the teachers as things arose and that the teachers' needs were the first priority, not those of the coach.

If there were a need, the teachers often began right away with a question for the coach. For example, Jane the fifth-grade math teacher, opened up her coaching meeting in March with Tim by eagerly asking, "Can we talk about how today went?" Jane wanted information about how well her students had understood her lesson on graphing and analyzing data from a table. That morning, Tim had just finished working in her class with a small group of students receiving intervention and thus had insight into what students understood. Jane frequently used this information accordingly to adjust and plan her instruction the rest of the week for the students. Jane wanted Tim to exchange the knowledge he held about the students with her. Tim and Jane spent the first few minutes discussing how the children approached the problems they were working on in class. The focus of the week's unit was on interpreting data in tables and graphs, where students had to understand and apply concepts such as rate. First, Tim shared with Jane what he thought the students did understand immediately in the lesson–they knew how to put the data into a line graph. When he checked to see if they could interpret the line graph for rate, however, he found that the students did not grasp this skill. As he explained to Jane, "…we started talking about rate…and the question that I asked they weren't prepared to answer." Tim then explained that he had students revisit and retell him the lesson from the prior day when two students performed jumping jacks, one at a constant rate and another trying to do them quickly and then tiring and having to do a slower rate. In having students remind him what they saw, Tim helped students connect the jumping jacks activity to the current day's lesson on line graphs, specifically, what it meant when the line on the graph stayed the same for a certain amount of time. Tim was able to explain to Jane how he helped students understand an abstract concept by drawing on a

concrete experience. Exchanging knowledge in this way provided Jane with detailed information about her students' understanding, as well as how to approach the problem with them the following day and in the future.

Tim mentioned to Jane that he liked how she had also used a concrete experience in whole class instruction when talking about a graph they had done previously on riding a bike. Jane acknowledged that she appreciated this information from Tim and now knew that she needed to slow down the pace of her unit for them and spend more time on the concept of rate stating, "…they will need a lot of guidance here and I will make sure to do that tomorrow." Tim not only provided Jane with knowledge about how students understood the class work for that day so she knew how to move on in the future lessons in the unit, but he also provided her with insights into how he prompted the students to help them better understand the concept of rate, even recognizing that the teacher herself had done this in her own lesson that morning and praising her for it.

Teachers eagerly brought specific questions to the coach and took the initiative in the coaching meeting to have their question(s) answered. The coaches had knowledge of the students and knowledge of the content that helped them to provide insightful, useful, and well-informed suggestions for the teachers. Setting up coaching meetings, where teachers are given time to air their questions and do so in a safe space with their coach who was not judging them, provided a time for teachers to receive answers to things that they believed were pertinent to the success of their class instruction. Teachers sought coaches out for suggestions and the suggestions were applied to their teaching.

The coaches were prepared to drive the coaching meetings when teachers did not first raise issues or questions, or following the discussion of the teachers' issues or

questions. Tim and Tracy typically guided the meeting conversations in the following ways. First, they focused on students (typically five to seven) in the classroom and used their observational notes and data (both formative and summative assessments) to guide the conversation. These students were usually receiving interventions from the coach or were struggling enough that they were being closely monitored and were soon going to receive some level of intervention. Secondly, Tracy and Tim also focused on teacher goals to guide the conversation. Classroom teachers established goals driven by their desires to change or refine a part of their teaching practice. Examples are provided for each in more detail next.

Student data and observations. Student data and observations were central to the work of coach and teacher in the coaching meetings, as student learning was a priority for both coaches and teachers. The use of the data and observations provided evidence of student learning in each classroom and this evidence guided coaching meetings. During the coaching meetings, the coach and teacher discussed between three to five students in detail, basing their conversations on data and observations the coach and teacher had gathered. Data included diagnostic tests, progress monitoring tools, and formative and summative assessments from the classrooms and/or from intervention time. Tim stated that starting with the students and the data was key to the work they were doing. Both coaches believed using student data helped the teachers process how to change or adapt what they were doing in their classrooms. Teachers' use of student data became second nature by the end of the year.

For example, during a February coaching meeting, Lauren and Tracy discussed a student who was new to the class and had low reading levels. Lauren shared with Tracy

that the student had a large amount (25) of errors on a running record (a kind of reading fluency assessment) Lauren had administered to the student. For nearly seven minutes, Lauren and Tracy discussed the types of errors the student had made and what these errors might mean about his reading level. They both used the running record to point out several patterns and issues the student had when doing the assessment, while also noting some of his strengths. They determined that they did not have enough data on his reading skills to know how to move forward and decided that the student needed to be administered another assessment to better understand what kind of intervention he needed in and out of the classroom. Together the coach and teacher analyzed data on a student to better inform their work with him—and in that relationship there was no power dynamic; instead, Tracy and Lauren worked collaboratively toward a common goal. Tracy and Lauren used this time to share knowledge and ideas about the student and about the data collection process and analysis. This coaching meeting is an example of how a coach and teacher at Creekside worked side by side during coaching time to focus on student learning needs as well as better understanding the assessment process that guided the instructional decision in the classroom and during intervention time.

Observations of students were another important piece of information discussed during coaching meetings. Teachers observed their students in their classrooms, while coaches observed students as they engaged with students during intervention time. The coach and teacher each had observational data essential to the other. All teachers were clearly able to state how well students engaged in learning and activities in their classrooms. Some of the teachers also kept monitoring notes on their students while they worked with them in the classroom, and wrote down their observations of students in

monitoring notes and refer to them in their coaching meetings. Coaches also kept monitoring notes on students and were able to clearly communicate their observations of students as they engaged during intervention time. Observations of students focused on better understanding what activities and content children were struggling or successful with, and why.

A February coaching meeting between Lauren and Tracy highlights how observations of students were critical opportunities to advance each other's understanding of the students and informed them of how to adjust or continue their work with the students. Fifteen minutes into the coaching meeting Tracy asked Lauren, "Who is bubbling up and tell me where you want my biggest focus to be?" In asking this question, Tracy gave Lauren the authority to direct the kind of coaching support Lauren wanted.

Immediately Lauren responded with a student stating she thinks he is "fake" (her words) reading. Tracy asked Lauren how she knew. Lauren explained, referring to her observations of the student in class and during a one-on-one reading conference, that he was unable to answer questions about characters with any depth. It seemed as if he was not really reading the books. Lauren also observed that he was reading a different book each day.

Lauren reported that the student had just begun a new book, and asked Tracy what she should do next. By detailing her observations of the student with monitoring notes, Lauren was able to provide sufficient details in order to specific support and suggestions from her coach. Tracy offered suggestions about how to address the student and guide him through the new book and how to detect if he had similar behaviors as he did when reading previous books. Tracy offered the suggestions of having the student "evidence

the text" when he talked about the book in a reading conference with Lauren. Tracy suggested that Lauren try to get in two more conferences with the student and then they can see if this is a continuing pattern, and then Tracy would begin working with him the following week as well. The observation helped to guide both Lauren and Tracy in working with this student in a way that would address his learning needs.

Teacher goals. In addition to coaches' observations and teachers' questions, teacher goals often drove the discussions of the meetings. Four of the teachers in this study set a goal to improve/try an instructional practice that could help improve student learning in their classroom. The other two teachers set a goal of improving student learning in their classroom but were focused less on a specific instructional practice to improve. Teachers set goals driven by their own aspirations (rather than the aspirations of their administrators or coaches) to change or refine a part of their teaching practice they felt could be improved upon. The teachers expressed that having ownership of their goals motivated them to reach the goals. Jane stated the following in her final interview,

> Tracy helped me reach my vision. She never tried to make it her vision. She asked
>
> me what my expected outcomes were, and why I was doing what I was doing.
>
> Then, she showed me ways to reach that vision. I really appreciated that.

Tracy and Tim were there to offer each teacher support in meeting his or her goals—and not to try to change the goals.

Coaches gave support to teachers in meeting their goals, in weekly coaching meetings. For example, Emily, set a goal to improve students' spelling ability and the transfer of the spelling ability to other content areas. When examining the data on students' spelling assessments, she noticed three problems. First, her high students

plateaued. They often seemed disengaged during spelling time even though she was attempting to do a "challenge" word list with them. Second, there was a lack of transfer between all students' spelling and their writing. Emily was disappointed that students' writing still had many spelling errors, even after the words had been covered in previous spelling units. Lastly, she felt there was little room to individualize instruction for her students successfully in the current spelling program. Emily discussed her concerns with Tracy during their coaching meetings and set a goal to improve the quality of spelling instruction in her classroom in the hopes of seeing greater levels of learning and transfer for all students.

Tracy and Emily worked side by side in coaching meetings to plan and implement the new program in Emily's classroom, helping Emily (in her words) with the "practical application of the program." For example in one meeting, Emily chose to focus the time with Tracy on figuring out the practical application of the program for one group she would attempt it with that Friday. First, she asked Tracy for more data on students, to make sure she had chosen the right students for the group. They looked at the program assessment that helped teachers determine the appropriate list, and saw that the same student lists aligned. By beginning the conversation with student data, Tracy helped Emily determine the group that would be set up.

Emily and Tracy then moved to discussing how to plan for the group. It was evident that Emily was hesitant to do too much planning, stating "I think Friday might almost be like flying by the seats of our pants and adjust as we go because I am not sure what they are coming in with or what they will pick up fast." Emily could not yet envision how students would respond to this program. Tracy, knowing Emily's hesitation

offered, "Because this is the first group school wide that we've tried the above and beyond *Words Their Way* stuff maybe we need to see it in action Friday meet Tuesday and then chunk out what is next, is that comfortable for you?" Emily agreed that this would work for her and continued her conversation on the practical application, wanting to know how to prepare the materials for Friday. Tracy pointed out in one of the manuals, where to find instructions that may be helpful to her. She then explained Emily could "…set out the headings for them in this case the prefixes, as the categories…and do an example of each and say how is this changing the word? What do you notice about what the prefixes have in common? But I will do it Friday because I remember you saying last week I need to see it." The coaching meeting continued on in this way. Tracy answered and offered ideas for practical application. The teacher goal became the central focus of this coaching meeting with Emily. Tracy was able to offer support and encouragement to Emily so she would continue to move forward in attempting her instructional goal.

The other coach, Tim, also supported the teachers he was assigned. Gina had just moved to teaching sixth-grade math and wanted to learn the content, verify the way she was teaching math in her class, and learn more about being a math teacher. Gina most often wanted questions answered in her coaching meetings. Tim shared that "…she [Gina] always had questions for me, she knew I was coming, and she would say perfect here is what I am trying to figure out, she always knew what she needed." It had been three years since Gina had taught math and she felt that there was a lot of new material to learn and teach well. Having a coach with a strong knowledge of content helped Gina develop her own knowledge to teach math and do it in a manner that met the needs of her students. Gina felt that Tim did not judge her when she misunderstood something, noting

that in the past "…they [coaches] would go back to the administration and tell them things like she doesn't understand this how can she be teaching and not know this?" Tim helped Gina when she had questions about teaching math and did it in a manner where she felt open to share her struggles as she learned to teach new math content and programs. Instead of judging Gina, Tim fully supported her desire to develop her own knowledge of teaching math and would sit with her in coaching meetings pouring over one math problem that she wanted to understand at a deeper level in order to teach it more successfully. Gina knew what she needed and set her goals. Tim supported her no matter what she needed to develop her teaching practice.

In sum, during coaching meetings, the coaches and teachers focused on either analyzing student data or discussing teaching goals (and sometimes both). Often, both topics were covered in a coaching session or were even intertwined.

Coaching meetings at Creekside Middle School were structured in a manner that supported teachers and coaches as they worked to improve student learning. Time was used to engage in conversation about student data as well as how teachers were progressing on goals they had set. This structure is different than traditional coaching meetings, which generally focus coaches' observations of on teachers' instruction. In the Creekside model, teachers' concerns or questions took precedence over coaches' observations of teachers' instruction because the questions related directly to student learning in their classroom. Whether the activities were receiving guidance from the coach on how to use a specific math problem in whole group instruction or having the coach assist teacher the in analyzing a running record, the structure of the coaching meetings allowed the teacher and coach to tackle the concerns together.

Coaching Moves Made In Coaching Meetings

During the coaching meetings, Tracy and Tim used various moves to engage in productive conversations with their teachers. Although the coaches had distinct styles of engaging with their teachers, they used these moves in very similar ways and had the same purpose when working with the teachers: to support the teachers to improve student learning. The moves were reflective questioning, offering suggestions, and encouraging and recognizing.

Reflective questioning. Teachers often began coaching meetings with a scenario about a particular student or group of students whom they were concerned about. After giving the coach a quick picture of the problem with the student(s), the coach began to question the teacher to elaborate and clarify in more detail, trying to get to the root of the issue and to help the teacher problem solve and make instructional decisions to help those students succeed. As the teacher and coach engaged in conversations and analyzed data, they addressed some key questions, such as (1) What does the student's work tell us about what he/she knows or is struggling with? (2) What has been observed when working with this student? (3) What has or has not worked with this student so far?

In one instance, Lauren (sixth-grade ELA teacher) presented a problem to Tracy about conducting reading conferences with a struggling student. Lauren felt she needed to conduct reading conferences daily for him to comprehend the stories at his reading level. She saw progress with this student, and would try to begin easing up on the amount of times she met with him during the week. But, without the daily meeting, she saw the growth slow and had to resume the daily conferences with the student.

After Lauren described the problem, Tracy asked the following questions, "What kinds of things mentioned in the conferences have worked? What has worked best with him or others so far?" Lauren explained that giving him sticky notes and index cards to summarize after reading had helped as he continues through stories, and Tracy asked further, "Is he still doing the summaries, chunking, and sticky notes when he doesn't have an expected time?" Lauren responded that he was no longer doing the summaries. Tracy questioned her yet again, "Using the tools that have worked, how do you think they might be able to use those with an anticipated longer period of time?" Lauren then suggested she could give him a specific date and let him know she expects him to keep sticky notes or use some method to summarize as he makes progress through the book.

Throughout this exchange, Tracy used questioning as a way to help Lauren reflect on this situation with her student. Tracy first asked Lauren to think about what worked with the student before, since some progress had been made. Following Lauren's response, Tracy was able to help Lauren think about how she used that successful strategy to solve her problem with this student. Questioning allowed Tracy to get a clearer picture of what happened with the student and also gave the teacher opportunity to reflect on techniques she had used with the student that had worked. Questioning helped the two have a productive conversation in which a possible solution was determined.

By using questioning as a device for the coaching meeting, Tracy allowed Lauren to come to her own solutions. Instead of simply telling Lauren that she should use sticky notes to help this student, Tracy helped guide Lauren to that conclusion on her own. Lauren had to reflect on how this student and other students were or were not successful with the strategies she was using in her classroom. Tracy helped to generate those ideas

by asking her reflective questions. Instead of telling a teacher what to do, the coach questioned the teacher on a regular basis, attempting to develop the teacher's capacity for solving similar problems such as this on her own in the future, or maybe even in the moment of teaching the next time this issue arises as she is teaching.

Offering suggestions. Constant dialogue occurred between coach and teacher in coaching meetings. Dialogue included the offering of suggestions to the teacher from his or her coach. Coaches offered teachers suggestions and teachers also felt comfortable directly asking for suggestions during coaching meetings.

For example, in a March coaching meeting between Kate and Tracy, Tracy spent the first ten minutes suggesting how to go about using and planning for *Words Their Way*, a program Kate had begun using. Tracy suggested some ways to go about determining which word sort list to choose for students after the group of students had done progress-monitoring assessments provided in the program. Tracy suggested to first look at all six sorts (word lists that had a particular pattern, an example would be long –i patterns) Kate could use at his stage. Then, she suggested to Kate to review the teacher instructions to determine how to use and teach it with the student. Lastly, Tracy recommended that Kate begin with just one individual student assessment and use that data to determine which sort would best fit his level of understanding. Kate took the suggestion and began working on the task. Kate was able to take one child's initial assessment to determine what level of sort she needed to begin with. Tracy asked Kate to explain why she chose the sort that she did and noted to Kate that the sort she chose "made good sense." Tracy's suggestions helped Kate to better understand how to use a program that was new to her. Tracy also used the opportunity to have Kate apply the

approach to one of her students during the coaching meeting to see if Kate could analyze and find the appropriate sort.

Teachers also asked their coach for suggestions. For example, in a February coaching meeting, Gina began by sharing her frustrations with Tim about her students' level of understanding after a lesson she had taught on decimals. After Gina walked through how she presented the concept to the students, stating she "thought she had a great explanation for this," Tim asked her to share specifically what portions the students had struggled with by asking, "what kind of wrong answers are they getting?" By doing this, Tim detected the students' misconceptions since he was not in the classroom to observe them. Gina said that they were struggling with the placement of the decimal, though they could multiply the numbers if the decimal was not in the problem. Tim then collaborated with Gina on different possibilities for re-teaching the concept the following day. Together they continued to look at a problem and Tim offered the suggestion of using a picture to represent the part of the problem the children were struggling with, understanding decimal placement. He showed Gina an Application on his iPad called *Teaching Table*, and showed the problem through a visual. They then together discussed how Gina could present it to the students to clear up the confusion. Gina used Tim as a resource after experiencing frustration in her students' understanding of a math concept. She even stated that after some of the children came up to her confused, that she knew she had to address the misunderstanding the next day and that she knew "Tim was coming in today to meet with her" and she could prepare something with him. Gina was very open to Tim's suggestions and they worked together to find a solution that would

not only help students better understand decimal placement but would also help Gina teach the concept to her students now and in the future.

Encouraging and recognizing. The coaching meetings also were a time where a coach engaged with a teacher and offered encouragement in meeting his or her goals and aspirations, as well as recognizing his or her accomplishments.

Coaches offered encouragement to teachers in coaching meetings on teachers' goals and/or their work with student learning and progress. Encouragement was an important piece of support, as many of the teachers were attempting new or refined instructional practices in which they sometimes felt uneasy about implementing. Coaches encouraged, and offered support, for the teachers to take risks. Whenever a teacher tried a new practice, the coach was there next to him or her, guiding them and supporting them when any questions or uncertainties arose The coaches provided a safety net for the teachers, who relied on coaches to be there even if the new practice was not going as well as planned.

For example, in February, Tracy offered encouragement to Emily who was beginning a new spelling/word work program in her classroom (this example is referred to earlier in this chapter, but is now being used to highlight another finding). Throughout the first five minutes of the coaching meeting, Emily shared with Tracy why she wanted to do this program and also shared her hesitation with some pieces of the program she had chosen. Tracy first encouraged her by offering how another teacher was using the program in her classroom, giving an example of how is the teacher was successful in implementing it. Tracy then followed up by explicitly encouraging Emily saying, "You are diving into unchartered territory, and you should be proud of that!" She then referred

to the PLC question 4: What will we do for students who come with knowledge already? It is this PLC question that the teacher was addressing by implementing this program. In asking this question, Tracy offered encouragement to Emily by reminding her of what was motivating her to do this task in the first place. At the conclusion of the meeting, Tracy encouraged her with words once more stating, "You have fantastic, exciting and lofty goals!"

Teachers also received recognition from their coaches for the various tasks they were undertaking in their classrooms. Lauren had been working on reading conferences, holding them more frequently for her struggling students, and in her February coaching meeting, she and Tracy discussed the progress being made with some students. Tracy asked for an update on a few of the students and Lauren was able to share new findings that showed a large amount of student growth. Tracy asked Lauren what had changed and Lauren recounted for her coach what she had been doing specifically with each of those students. Tracy responded to her with great excitement, telling Lauren to be proud of that accomplishment. Tracy then gave more recognition, "…you invoked change in them" and then asks, "What would you repeat in the future?"

Not only was Tracy able to use this moment to recognize the significant accomplishment made by Lauren, but also she was able to help Lauren reflect on what she had done and what she would do again in the future. At one point in the meeting Lauren stated that it was luck that the kids did so well, but Tracy was quick to point out that is was not luck, that Lauren had done multiple things to help them, and listed them all off to Lauren. Not only does this type of recognition probably make a teacher feel accomplished in a task, but it also has the potential of encouraging the teacher to continue

to use the successful practice(s). Lauren summed up the value of this kind of encouragement in her final interview when she stated, "[Tracy] gave me a ton of confidence this year. If she noticed I was doing something well or something going well in my class she would point those out…it felt like our work had a positive tone all year"

Encouragement and recognition were powerful moves made by coaches at Creekside Middle School. Both moves allowed teachers to take risks. The teachers wanted to continue doing the work that they were doing in their classrooms, as well as continue to work with their coach. Encouragement and recognition helped the coaches build a partnership with the teachers and creative a positive environment for the work they were partaking in together. Emily shared in her final interview that having Tracy come in would help to revitalize her, stating that, "…sometimes you need a cheerleader".

Tracy and Tim frequently made these moves in coaching meetings. Teachers responded to these coaching moves. Teachers were not only reflecting on their teaching practice and student learning in their classrooms, but teachers also were open to new suggestions and ways to approach situations when they arose. Tracy and Tim did these moves in a manner that was encouraging to the teachers, keeping them revitalized in the work that they were undertaking and provided recognition for the hard work that was being done by the teachers. Having coaches in the building who engaged in this manner was important to teachers because in such a large building, administrators could not get out and do these things. Having coaches who worked in this manner potentially helped teachers to continue to improve both their practice and student learning over the school year.

Closing the Meeting

As the meetings wrapped up, both the teacher and coach seemed clear about next steps. The coaches tended to restate the various topics covered and the next steps that both parties were responsible for following the meeting. Lauren noted in her final interview that the meetings were productive and she, "…always felt like when we are done with our meetings, I always left with the next steps, what I am going to try, what I am going to do, what we will talk about and look at next time."

Summarizing the coaching meeting at the close helped both the teacher and coach to restate key topics from their meeting. Teachers and coaches alike verbalized and took note of their next steps. For example, in a coaching meeting between Jane and Tim, the meeting closed with Jane restating what would be happening over the next week: "So we discussed Dawn and Justine and we will continue testing." She clarified with Tim that as he worked with these intervention students, he would continue to test them to better inform Jane as to what she could do in the classroom.

At the end of coaching meetings, coaches also asked if there was anything else that the teacher felt needed to be addressed before the meeting was over. Coaches gave the teachers one last opportunity in that one-on-one time to share any final pieces of information or questions that were weighing on their minds. For example, Tracy asked Kate, "I wanted to make sure I asked you…where might you or they [students] still need some help or some support?" Teachers had the opportunity to ask one more clarifying question. For example, Lauren used this time to receive clarification from her coach. Earlier in the coaching meeting, Lauren and Tracy had discussed the level of questioning Lauren should be asking her students, as she and Tracy had discussed the Depths of

Knowledge handout. Lauren asked Tracy, "In every conference should we be pushing the students to that level?" Tracy responded and offered clarification, which Lauren took note of.

Concluding the meeting with actionable steps and clear understandings was an important step in making sure both the coach and teacher were on the same page, especially after discussing up to five to seven students in a 20-30 minute time span. The coaches provided an opportunity to teachers at the close of the meetings to clarify their thoughts or talk about any lingering issues. This allowed both parties to be able to follow through on what they had discussed in their coaching meetings, making them a productive time for both coach and teacher.

<h1 style="text-align:center">CHAPTER FIVE</h1>

<p style="text-align:center">Teachers' Perceptions of Student-Driven Coaching</p>

In Chapter Four I introduced the coaching model at Creekside first describing the responsibilities of coaches and the structure of coaching meetings, as well as explaining the coaching moves made by Tim and Tracy that supported teachers. I explained how the strategies reflected a collaborative kind of coaching, whereby coaches acted as partners with teachers, rather than instructors or critics. In this chapter, I report on teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of this kind of coaching at Creekside Middle School. I answer the following two research questions: 1) What activities with coaches do teachers find most valuable? 2) Do teachers believe coaching improves their practice and/or student learning? If so, how? The data analyzed in this section come from the initial and final interviews with participants (six teachers and two coaches).

Valuable Coaching Activities

Teachers reported that the following activities with coaches were valuable: modeling, on-going, collaborative conversations driven by student data, offering various resources, and relationship building. Teachers at Creekside perceived these coaching activities as valuable, and their insights can help us better understand activities that could be included in similar coaching models.

Modeling. Modeling, introduced in Chapter Four, again is defined as "…providing a model lesson in a teacher's classroom with that teacher's students" (Knight, 2007, p. 109). Teachers found two forms of modeling by coaches as valuable: authentic modeling and planned, whole-class modeling. All six teachers expressed that modeling (in either form it appeared), helped them to improve their instruction.

Authentic modeling occurred as coaches worked in the classroom with the students in small groups or individually. Authentic modeling is a term I use in this study to describe the intervention work coaches did with students in small groups or individually, that teachers were able to observe when the opportunity arose in classrooms. Teachers observed the coach working with the intervention groups or with individual students in the classroom while guided and/or independent work occurred. This form of modeling occurred informally and was not always planned.

Teachers believed that watching the coach engage in intervention practices with students and observing how coaches questioned students to develop students' understanding of the concept(s) was a valuable experience. For example, Lauren shared,

When she [Tracy] is in here with the kids, her small group, I sit down quite a bit and listen as to how she conferences with the students, what she does. I sat down last week with a *Words Their Way* activity just to watch. I do think that is very valuable, to see it in action is way different than to hear someone say go try it.

When a coach worked with an intervention group, he or she adjusted instruction to meet those students' needs, and teachers were able to see just how a coach would do this in an authentic setting. Coaches were in classrooms multiple times a week, so a teacher could observe the coach modeling for various groups of students with varied content. Lauren stated that authentic modeling "…was the single biggest thing that helped me, when I watched her talk one on one or in small groups with students." Authentic modeling allowed Lauren to see programs in action, after which she could then implement them in her own classroom. Because Tracy was highly skilled at asking deep, higher-level

questions of students, authentic modeling also helped Lauren develop better questioning techniques when she conferenced with her students.

Kate also felt that authentic modeling was valuable. She described at length the times where she observed Tracy engaged with students in small groups, and allowed space for Kate to just jump in and ask her questions so Kate could see and understand Tracy's thoughts as she was guiding the students. At times, coaches were able to conference with teachers as part of the authentic modeling to explain the rationale behind the moves the coaches made. Kate stated,

> [Tracy] would do something and let me stop and ask why she did it…she would stop and explain it and then ask, what do you think the next thing should be, where do we need to go with that? I would jump in and the kids would follow what I was doing…it worked very well.

This form of modeling is similar to a "think-aloud" (where a teacher models out loud her thinking and reasoning) and allowed Kate to gain insight into how Tracy thought through her work with students and why she made particular instructional moves with the students. Authentic modeling provided Kate an insight into Tracy's decision-making as she engaged with students and gave Kate the opportunity to learn from and ask questions in the moment, to develop her own practice, which she could then use in the future.

The second form of modeling teachers found valuable was planned, whole class modeling. Unlike authentic modeling, planned modeling occurred in a formal manner after teacher and coach discussed the implementation of a new activity or program. A coach modeled the activity or program for the teacher to the whole class. Both a coach and a teacher initiated planned modeling. The coaches initiated planned modeling when

they would see a pattern or trend in the data or observations of students that they wanted to address in the Tier 1 instruction in the classroom. Coaches reviewed the evidence (i.e., student data) with the teachers and explain their rationale for wanting to model a specific instructional activity. For example, Ethan and Tim reviewed student data and Tim expressed that the majority of the students were still struggling with decimals, percentages, and equivalents. Ethan stated,

> He [Tim] came in and actually offered up the idea of doing math baseball with decimals, percentages, and equivalents. He came in and taught it to my first class and he modeled it for me and I taught it to my second. It was an awesome experience. We used it for weeks.

Planned modeling allowed Ethan to become comfortable with a new activity that he then continuously used throughout the math unit to target the needs of the students.

Teachers also took the opportunity to partake in planned modeling when they were uncomfortable beginning a new program on their own. Teachers, though they had set their own goals, were often hesitant in implementing something new, not able to envision what a new program would look like in their classroom. Coaches were able to offer planned modeling as a support to ease the apprehension of the teachers. Emily shared that watching Tracy model something that was new for her allowed her to "…facilitate that change with your class as a whole" to improve student learning. Tracy modeled for both Kate and Emily as they implemented *Words Their Way* in their classrooms. Tracy was comfortable with the program and had used it before therefore was comfortable presenting it in the teachers' classrooms. Emily stated, "She modeled for me…it was beneficial, watching others is so beneficial." Teachers appreciated the

opportunity to see a new program effectively in action with their students, which built

their confidence that the program would work in their classroom.

Teachers learned from the modeling done by their coaches. Modeling offered

teachers various examples of ways one could engage with students to help promote

students' understanding of various content being taught. Typically modeling occurred in

conjunction with conversations about student needs in the classroom, and ways teachers

could address those needs. Teachers were open to modifying their instruction after seeing

something in practice, especially when they knew it benefitted their students, helped

address gaps in student knowledge, and helped them in meeting their own goals.

Ongoing, collaborative conversations driven by student data. Ongoing,

collaborative conversations driven by student data and evidence occurred during weekly

coaching meetings. The teacher and coach explored student data and conversed in an

ongoing manner (i.e., more than simply in one debriefing session) from week to week.

Students were the main focus of the conversations. Lauren noted that the conversations

would revolve around things she had tried with students, struggles she had with them, and

success that had occurred with them. Lauren shared that, " … each meeting was …a

quick check in on all the kids, then move to who we were focusing on for the time period,

and then talk about next step intervention strategies for those kids." Lauren found this

support to be valuable. She stated that she felt that often teachers work alone in the

classroom, especially when students are struggling, so having collaborative conversations

about specific students helped her to adjust her instruction to meet individual needs.

Emily stated in her final interview that having ongoing, collaborative

conversations not only helped her with individual student needs but also with decisions

she made about her whole classroom. She noted that, "Those conversations involved going into more individuals, what is working with this student, what are you seeing with this student, which also impacted classroom decisions…it impacted decisions in working small group and also whole class too." Emily explained that some students who were receiving intervention with Tracy struggled with decoding and comprehension skills. After examining at the data with Tracy to understand the students' challenges, Emily found she was better able to run her ELA time with the particular group of students as well as her other groups in class. These conversations with Tracy helped Emily determine appropriate ability groupings for students and target the instruction within those groupings during ELA instruction. Emily got to know her students' strengths and challenges better through the ongoing, collaborative conversations and could make better instructional decisions for her whole class and individual students due to the conversations with Tracy.

Gina shared in her final interview that having ongoing, collaborative conversations not only helped her with a specific group or class of students, but with every class of students she taught in the middle school. In the middle school, each teacher had multiple classes in his or her subject area (rather than a homeroom class like the elementary teachers have). The high number of students makes coaching more challenging because the coach doesn't see each student regularly (unless the coach comes to the same class each visit). At Creekside Middle School, collaborative conversations did not just occur for one class of students. Gina discussed how the conversations with Tim helped her with both of her math classes. She noted that, "…he helped me tailor more to each of the kids' needs, and even in both my classes. I can see one thing works

for this class and not the next class, and this class has a different group of kids so this might be more beneficial, and this group is verbal so why don't we do this kind of activity with them." Gina took her collaborative coaching conversations with Tim and reflected on the information learned, and she also applied that learning to her other classes.

Ongoing, collaborative conversations also helped the teacher and coach decide how to intervene with RTI student(s) the coach was assisting in the teacher's classroom. Jane discussed that during collaborative conversations, "over the course of the year, we were able to look at some of our data and find specific students for Tim to focus working with during his time in the classroom." Not only did collaborative conversations allow the teachers to deliver instruction in a manner that met individual needs of students, it also guided the Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention time between students and coach. Coaches alone did not decide what interventions should be given to students, but it was a collaborative decision that was closely tied to what students were doing in their classrooms. Often, RTI interventions are not done in tandem with what is happening in the classroom, but at Creekside they were closely connected. Coaches provided instruction to the students and that instruction aligned with classroom content. Ongoing, collaborative conversations between teacher and coach were a key time for instructional decisions to be made.

The collaborative conversations occurred on a weekly basis and were driven by student data. All teachers in this study reported the conversations as valuable. This is a powerful finding, given that teachers in this school did not value earlier models of coaching. Earlier models of coaching had a top-down approach (Knight, 2007) to the

work between a coach and a teacher. Top-down feedback comes from a coach and is used to shape the teacher, so that the coach is seen as the expert in the relationship (Knight, 2007). In the current model at Creekside, collaborative conversations were a partnership between a coach and teacher. Lauren, for example, believed that this focus allowed the conversations to be more authentic and thus explained why teachers were more receptive to being coached. By focusing conversations on student data, the work between coach and teacher was authentic and relevant to the work of a teacher: to help all students learn.

Offering various resources. Tim and Tracy frequently offered various resources to teachers. Coaches offered themselves (e.g., their time) as a resource for teachers, as well as offering other resources (e.g., research articles, iPad Applications, instructional programs) to teachers, which they could then use, and implement at their own will.

Coaches frequently offered themselves as a resource for teachers. For example, Jane wanted to improve literacy instruction in her science classes and worked with Tracy closely to do this. Jane stated that she was no expert in teaching literacy and that Tracy was a "key resource" for her. Tracy voluntarily offered to work with Jane, which was outside of her stated duties of working with fifth- and sixth-grade ELA teachers. Tracy not only met weekly with Jane in a coaching meetings, offering her knowledge of teaching using informational text, but she also went into her classroom twice a week to model and work with students in one of her science classes. Jane noted that Tracy "…brought a lot of expertise to my classroom, and helped me to develop the program to meet my vision." Jane valued the ideas and resources Tracy offered her. Jane watched Tracy work in groups with her students, engaging them in reading and interpreting

informational text and took the ideas she gathered and implemented them in a way that met her own vision for what she wanted literacy to look like in her science classroom.

Tim also offered himself as a resource. Gina explained that Tim offered support when she struggled with new a student who would not complete work in her classroom and was often off task. In a coaching meeting, the two had discussed that they believed the student was capable of the work but would not complete it in class. After this discussion, Tim worked with Gina to better understand this student's behavior. Tim came to the classroom and completed a *Direct Behavioral Rating*, an observational data collection tool that tracked a student engagement over time in a class period. Gina noted that Tim came in the classroom, "…trying to help me monitor and take notes, and when he came in and can monitor…it was so eye opening…someone observing gave me more detail for how many seconds he was doing something." Tim then met with Gina and discussed the results and findings, which Gina then took and used with the student. Gina shared with her student how often he was off-task and discussed with him how they could work to improve his behavior. Gina valued this support from her coach and it helped her develop a new understanding of her student that helped her make decisions to engage him in learning.

Teachers also valued that coaches presented them with various instructional resources with their students. Teachers appreciated this gesture because they understood how time-consuming find these materials on their own was. Ethan noted that Tim was "constantly looking for new things" that engaged students and got them excited about learning, as well as met the instructional goals. Ethan appreciated that Tim always shared things he found with him, especially iPad Applications for math activities for students to

engage in or for the teacher to use in instruction. Gina noted that Tim had a breadth of knowledge and knew where to find information when she asked for resources. Gina explained, "When I wouldn't have access to or know where to get information, he would tap it out and get it back to me, and it would be right there."

Coaches also presented teachers with resources that would develop their own professional knowledge. Emily noted that Tracy was a reader and "…she [Tracy] introduced me to books I didn't know had even existed." By offering alternative resources than the ones the teachers were using or aware of, the coaches were building teachers' repertoire to help improve student learning and enhancing the teachers' knowledge. Jane discussed how Tim provided her readings about teaching mathematics, which "…forced me to break down every aspect of my instruction on specific concepts" and noted the specific work on fractions and decimal values, thereby helping students understand the true meaning of those concepts. Teachers welcomed the wide variety of resources that coaches provided for them, as it left more time for teachers to focus on instruction. Additionally, in providing these kinds of professional resources, the coaches modeled a commitment to deepening professional knowledge.

Beyond locating and sharing resources, coaches followed through by modeling how to use the resources or explaining to teachers how to use them. Lauren stated, "You know when you ask her for something or you ask her for help, for anything, she is more than willing to go out of her way to do it. She always does what she says she will do." Coaches went the next step by not only offering various resources, but also finding them or implementing them for teachers in a timely manner. Helping teachers understand and even see the resources in use alleviates the uncertainties of new resources, as a teacher

can see something in action and ask questions to develop their own understanding and comfort, hopefully leading to them engaging and using new resources themselves.

Teachers frequently were open to and used the various resources that the coaches offered. It is important to note that in final interviews, all participants stated that there was never a time where they disagreed with coaches when coaches presented various resources or suggestions to teachers. As Jane reflected,

> There are not any major circumstances that I can think of where I disagreed with the coaches. I know that we had many ideas along the way that evolved after discussing them. I do not really see this as a disagreement, but more of a bridging of ideas.

Ethan also discussed how Tim approached him with suggestions: "…have you tried it this way? You can't really disagree with someone who does it that way." Ethan felt that this approach was more effective in the way he took suggestions, instead of it being a time where he is being told, "…you should be doing this." The coaches offered support for resources and ideas but never forced them upon their teachers. Instead, they worked together to discuss the different resources or suggestions and bridge their ideas to determine what was best for teachers and students.

Relationship building. Teachers valued that the coaches took the time to build a relationship with them. Often coaches are viewed as the experts in a coach/teacher relationship (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). However, at Creekside, both coaches made it clear that they did not view themselves as experts and did not want their teachers viewing them as such. Instead, the coaches perceived themselves as a knowledgeable other whose role was to support teachers in meeting their goals.

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Teachers valued the fact that their relationship with their coaches resembled a partnership. By establishing a partnership, the coaches built a safe and trusting coaching environment, an accomplishment particularly impressive given that in this school teachers had been wary of coaching, based on their negative experiences with it in years prior. Establishing a partnership became influential in how teachers viewed being coached. Instead of resenting being coached, they valued it. Lauren noted that she never once actually felt that she was being coached:

> She [Tracy] did a good job at making it feel like we were on equal ground. Obviously she taught me a lot, she has so much knowledge, but she also made me feel like I was helping her to learn things too. It was like we were learning together and figuring things out together.

Lauren made it clear that she learned from her coach but never felt like she was being *told* what she needed learn. Instead, the partnership gave Lauren an opportunity to learn while, at the same time, feeling like she also had something to offer her coach. The relationship offered something to both individuals; it was not one-sided. Engaging in a relationship like this with a coach empowered Lauren, she noted "…it [relationship] built up my confidence and it made me want to keep going and work with her."

Teachers valued a relationship built upon a common goal: student learning. Ethan shared that he and Tim "…would hold ongoing conversations about strengths and weaknesses of the kids, it has been a good situation, and it is night and day as to what we saw coaching a few years ago." This sentiment was echoed by many of the teachers. Jane noted that both coaches "…committed to working collaboratively with students" and "…I had a strong relationship with both coaches. I believe this is true because we all have the

same goal for our students, and we are willing to work at a collaborative level, and not a competitive level." A coach and teacher working collaboratively together for a common goal of student learning helped to develop a strong partnership.

Teachers also valued that the partnership was based on the belief that teachers were professionals and were knowledgeable about their practice. Emily discussed how Tracy was never under the assumption that the teachers were starting at "ground zero" but instead built upon their strengths and desires to build their own practice, often allowing teachers to pick the direction of the coaching support. This belief was observed in coaching meetings when coaches began the interaction with questions like, "What is bubbling up for you this week?" Coaches offered teachers' space on a weekly basis to share concerns and get support on what teachers felt was necessary. Many of the teachers were even able to work on their own teaching goals, while engaging in collaborative work driven by student data. Jane noted this as important: "Both coaches offered their support and offered to change their support based on what I felt was needed." The support offered was individualized for the teachers based on what teachers felt they needed as a professional.

Last, teachers valued that the relationship between teacher and coach was safe. Rather than being evaluated by a coach, they were being supported by their coach. For example, Kate shared that Tracy was there to support her as opposed to "tell me how to do my job…she is coming from a good place." She followed this comment sharing that Tracy "didn't make people feel like they weren't doing the right thing." The coaches never critiqued teachers' practice. For example, Gina shared in her final interview that,

At the beginning of the year I was not very trusting of coaches. I had some

trouble with coaches in the past, they would go back to administration and tell

them things like "she doesn't understand this, how can she be teaching and not

know this?" Maybe it was a misconception and I didn't know it. He [Tim] was

always very polite and would give me information and help me with

misconceptions.

If and when a teacher was struggling, support instead of evaluation was offered to that

teacher. Support such as this helped teachers develop a safe relationship with the coaches

at Creekside.

Improving Teaching Practice with Student-Driven Coaching

Even though this model of coaching specifically focused on student learning, all

teachers in the study perceived this coaching model as something that helped to improve

their teaching practice. Teachers noted three areas in which improvement occurred with

student-driven coaching: improved quality of instruction, attempted something new, and

increased ability to adapt practice to meet the needs of individual learners.

Improved quality of instruction. Prior to this academic year, teachers in the

study were implementing many research-based strategies in their classrooms, which

coaches alluded to in initial interviews. The teachers in this study were already teachers

who had quality instruction occurring in their rooms (according to the coaches) however

continued to work to refine their own practice in some way. Since they did not see

themselves as experts in the areas they were trying to refine, teachers found it beneficial

to work with coaches on their goals. Teachers believed that their quality of instruction

improved because of the work they did alongside their coach.

For example, Lauren stated in her initial interview that she knew she was not an expert and still felt that she had much she learned through coaching. She felt she didn't have a "great grasp" on conferencing with students and had a hard time with what questions to ask students, wondering if the questions she was asking was pulling the right information from her students. In her final interview, she discussed how coaching improved the quality of two teaching strategies she had already been using in her classroom: (1) student conferencing with progress monitoring notes and (2) meeting with students in small groups.

Lauren described how these strategies improved as a result of coaching: "I always conferenced with students, always met with small groups…but the quality is way better. I could more quickly diagnose what they were struggling with and I had better strategies to help them with." Coaching was key to this improvement, as she noted how working with Tracy and watching Tracy model in small groups or in conferences with students gave her more strategies to use as she continued her small groups and conferences. She and Tracy also worked together on progress monitoring notes, which Lauren believed helped her work more efficiently with her students in the reading conferences because she had better monitoring notes that she kept up with weekly. She stated, "I do have a lot of monitoring notes, I have always done. I took more detailed notes this year on some of the kids, I definitely focused on it as a result of coaching." Lauren used monitoring notes with more depth than in previous years, and this could be the result of focusing so specifically on students in coaching meetings. By having more detailed notes, she was able to share more knowledge with her coach and get more individualized support for her teaching and for her students' learning.

Attempted something new. One aspect of coaching is to introduce teachers to a new technique (e.g., an instructional strategy, resource, means of student communication) to improve their practice and student learning. Coaches can encourage teachers to take risks while offering them a safety net in case teachers struggle. Three teachers attempted something new over the course of the year. All three felt that their new venture was either outside their comfort zone or something they felt they had little knowledge about, but with the help of their coach attempted and successfully implemented something new into their classroom.

Tried new strategies/programs. Three teachers, Emily, Jane, and Kate, began the year with a desire to address areas they felt needed improvement. Jane noted a desire to integrate literacy (specifically informational text, or text that contains information about the world) in her science classes. Emily had a goal to improve spelling and word work in her ELA classes. Kate wanted to more effectively utilize her time with her special education students when she was providing support in an inclusion model for ELA. Each teacher discussed how coaching helped her try new strategies/programs in her classes.

Emily discussed that with coaching, "…there was a level of accountability for myself to try something new." Not only did having a coach encourage her to try something new, but it also kept her revitalized to continue the work. Emily noted that,

> …Sometimes it is easier to do what you always do…there were times I wanted to go back to old ways because it would be easier, that level of accountability and having that support…she [Tracy] would come in and it would revitalize me, it was the right thing with the kids, the data is showing a positive impact.

Coaching provided her a support to not only begin a new program in her classroom but sustain its continuation throughout the school year while also helping the program to grow. Emily began the program with one small group of students, and by the end of the school year she was doing it with multiple groups in two different classes. Emily believed that instructional coaching improved her practice because she felt accountable for her work when meeting with Tracy and stated, "…you have to stick to it knowing she [Tracy] is coming in and stick to a plan."

Emily discussed how the *Words Their Way* program started small (one group), with the intention of trying it on a larger scale next school year. So, she began with her high spellers whose grades were plateauing and were unable to apply their spelling skills to their writing in all content areas. Tracy gave her multiple word study programs to choose from, and Emily picked one she felt worked best with her students. However, Emily was uncomfortable implementing it, and so Tracy first modeled for her with the students. After observing Tracy use the resource *Words Their Way*, and discussing with Tracy at more length how to manage the implementation of the program (e.g., creating and using the word sort cards), Emily began the program with the high group and was pleased with the results. She stated that she had never seen her high group "…really challenged…they didn't even know what to say!" Emily noted that after reviewing data, she was able to see "…it is powerful with one group, and got the feeling how am I not doing this with others?"

Tracy offered support to help her continue growing the program in her classroom. With Tracy's coaching, she was "pushed" to try it with another group and she stated that Tracy "…helped support the process…helping it evolve." Pushing, in this scenario,

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involved Tracy engaging Emily in conversation about why it was working with one group and encouraging Emily to consider what it might look like on a larger scale. She provided a space where they discussed options and problem-solved any issues that arose in taking it to a larger scale. Emily decided it was working and she should keep moving with it, thanks to Tracy's support and involvement with the implementation of this new program. Instead of staying inside her comfort zone, Emily expanded her teaching practice and recognized the benefit it had on her students' learning.

Another teacher, Jane, attempted a cross-curricular improvement in her classroom. She undertook a new reading program, which she had initially created in her science class to address what she called a "…huge deficit in her students' ability to engage in/connect with informational text." Informational text is a specific genre of text written to convey information about the natural and social world (Duke, 2004). Jane explained that she had been trying to put together an informational text program for science in her classroom, due to adoption of the Common Core State Standards in English/Language Arts. Jane stated that she was not an expert in teaching literacy. After sharing what she was attempting to do in her science classroom, Tracy offered her support. Tracy offered multiple levels of support: coming in the room and working with students twice a week, holding weekly coaching meetings, and offering various resources to select the informational texts for the students available in the classroom as well as resources for Jane on teaching using informational text.

Jane noted that her she improved three skills related to integrating literacy into her science instruction due to her work with Tracy. First, Jane learned how to run literature circles (a strategy used in classrooms where students read literature, take on a

role, and then have conversations in a small group on a frequent basis) in her classroom and successfully ran them as the year went on. She also developed the ability to teach students to use text features (common features found in a text, such as bold-faced text or a table of contents). And lastly, she was able to push her students to reflect in a meaningful manner when they read informational text. Jane noted, "I feel much more confident with teaching literacy in science than I did before." Not only did Jane feel confident in her ability to teach literacy in science but she also saw student growth. Jane stated in her final interview, that she had evidence of students' growth in their ability to research and interact with informational text as she and Tracy constantly reviewed progress monitoring data on the students and had conversations about the growth they were seeing in the data and in conversations with students. For Jane, having a knowledgeable coach to help her as she implemented a new practice in her classes was beneficial to her in expanding her teaching practice in science and to her students' growth in using informational text in a content area.

Kate also tried new strategies and programs. In previous school years, Kate's position as a special education teacher had her often going into classrooms to work with students (special education inclusion model). She felt as though in the past she was going into the classrooms to just help students complete their work (just finishing what the classroom teacher was having the students do) without having the time or ability to actually teach (engage the students in new learning at their developmental level) the students. Kate wanted to be able to go into classrooms and more effectively teach reading and writing to the students but was unsure how to negotiate this with the classroom teachers of her students. This school year she had the ability to be with the students for

longer periods of time and wanted to make sure to use the time to teach and re-teach ELA content to her students, not solely help them with their unfinished work like she had done in the past.

Tracy provided Kate with different strategies and programs (e.g., reading and writing project website, *Words Their Way*) for ELA instruction. Kate used the resources to develop and expand her ELA knowledge, which she was then able to incorporate in her work with students. New ELA knowledge allowed Kate ".… to form some groups with the classes I had and work out a schedule…do some intervention things and actually teach them the process of reading and writing." No longer was she there to help children finish work; instead, she was teaching students ELA content that they needed to be successful in their classrooms. Kate noted that she saw her students' independence levels rise due to this change. Students instead had to try tasks on their own and she saw that taking risks—and succeeding—helped build her students' confidence. Kate stated that her own confidence about teaching ELA with her students improved. Working with Tracy on various strategies and programs helped to build her knowledge to teach reading and writing confidently to her students.

Tried new collaborations. Kate also tried new building-level collaborations over the year. Kate expressed that before her work with her coach, "I didn't feel like I had the confidence" to be a part of larger building teams that weren't focused solely on special education. Her coach encouraged her to be a part of other initiatives in the building and "pushed" her to be a part of meetings, an active member, to not just be there as a member of the special education team. Kate noted that Tracy told her that she was ready to engage in these new collaborations and that she had the knowledge to be on the ELA curriculum

team. Having her coach acknowledge that Kate had something to offer in the various initiatives in the building boosted her confidence and gave her the much-needed push to become active in these new collaborations. Kate noted that her work alongside Tracy as well as her desire to learn more about teaching ELA helped her develop confidence in being able to contribute in the meetings and collaborate with other professionals across the middle school building. Kate stated the encouragement by Tracy was "…huge for me, finally…to be a part of something besides special education." The work with her coach helped Kate build confidence to engage in the new collaborations. She expressed sincere interest in taking on new leadership roles in the building as the school year ended; not only did she apply for a literacy teacher leadership position for summer school but she also indicated interest in teacher leadership positions for the upcoming school year as well. By the end of the year Kate had not only engaged in new collaborations with general education teachers and joined and became an active member of the ELA curriculum team for the school, but she also accepted a role as a summer school co-coordinator for ELA.

Increased ability to adapt practice to meet the needs of individual learners. Three teachers in the study believed that their ability to adapt their practice to meet the needs of individual learners increased because of their work with a coach. Teachers often can identify leaners who need more support, but struggle when it comes to modifying practice to support those students (Tomlinson, 2000). Both coaches in this study had expertise in various intervention programs and had participated in significant amounts of professional development in their content areas. They also stayed informed on current practices in their content areas. Teachers felt they did benefit from having knowledgeable

coaches in these areas as it helped teachers to adapt their own practice after being exposed to new ways of teaching students.

Teachers valued the coaches' expertise and believed it did help improve their ability to adapt their instructional practice. For instance, Gina shared that coaching helped by enabling her to reflect on her practice and to think about how her teaching was or was not meeting student needs. Gina stated she questioned Tim about how to teach various students stating "helped me tailor more to each of the kids' needs." For example, she asked Tim for support about how to adjust her teaching for students with severe learning disabilities who were unable to keep up with the mainstream students. With his help she had ways to instruct that met their needs that she had never thought of. She noted that this happened because Tim often pushed her thinking further,

> He would just always ask, what could you do? What could be more helpful to all of the kids, not just this one child, or maybe the other way around; he just made me really think about how to help everyone on their level.

By questioning Gina in their coaching meetings directly about student learning and student needs, Tim helped Gina to reflect on her teaching and how she could instruct in ways that met her students "on their level." This is valuable to note, as Gina, at the beginning of the year, focused specifically on understanding the content of the math and how to teach the content, since much of the resources used at Creekside were new to her after having not taught math for three years. Gina felt that because of the work with her coach Tim, she grew beyond her initial desire to better understand the math content she was teaching, and further developed her practice to teach it in ways that met the varying needs of her students.

Coaches provided expertise, which teachers used to adapt their instructional practice. For example, Tim, who had been trained in *Math Recovery* (a math intervention program targeted at identifying core math problems in students and intervening accordingly to the students' struggles), had implemented the program at Creekside as a coach and as a teacher. Tim described his knowledge of *Math Recovery* in the following way: "I can describe all these things [program aspects] without looking at them because I am so deep into it." His expertise level was high and he shared this expertise with his teachers. For example, Ethan stated that coaching from Tim improved his teaching practice because it gave him "…more ideas and more tools in the toolbox."

Working alongside a coach, instead of solely on one's own, enhanced teachers' ability to adapt practice. For example, Jane discussed that when it came to meeting the needs of her learners, "…being able to sit down with someone and talk it through, have more perspective, more ideas, along with the expertise with ways we can address these issues, it has been the most valuable thing for me." Gina shared the same sentiment; she believed she was reaching more of her struggling students due to her work alongside Tim, "He might make a suggestion about a simple way to help the child" that she had not thought about on her own. Teachers did not have experience using a program like *Math Recovery*. Tim offered this expertise to his teachers, and they were able to take this knowledge to help adapt their own teaching practice.

According to all six teachers in this study, coaching at Creekside Middle School did help improve their teaching practices in some manner. All of these teachers were experienced teachers (five to twelve years' experience) and had strong teaching abilities, according to their coaches. Even though they were experienced teachers with sound

teaching practices in place, they all still perceived this coaching model as helping them improve their teaching practice. Next, I will look at teachers' perceptions of how student-driven coaching improved student learning at Creekside Middle School.

Perceived Improvement in Student Learning with Student-Driven Coaching

The six teachers in this study perceived that coaching at Creekside did improve student learning in their classrooms. Three actions in particular teachers believed influenced this student learning improvement: multiple assessments given and analyzed by coach and teacher, a partnered approach to providing tiered interventions in an RTI model, and shared knowledge of students, guiding collaborative conversations. These three actions were some of the main elements of the coaching model at Creekside, and all three elements worked synergistically to engage teachers and coaches in work that was perceived to improve student learning in the classrooms.

Multiple assessments given and analyzed by coach and teacher. In this model of coaching both teacher and coach used multiple assessments to determine student needs, as well as to monitor progress of student learning. One example of this comes from Kate who discussed how she and Tracy were using a variety of assessments like Curriculum-Based Measurements (a method of assessing student progress on a frequent basis aligned to curriculum being taught), to determine students' gaps in knowledge. She believed that the number of assessments they were able to give allowed them to "dig deeper into each of the kids" to help fill in the missing gaps as they analyzed assessment results with the Common Core State Standards. They were able to look at multiple measures for multiple students and could then determine the appropriate interventions with students. Lauren also echoed this sentiment. She believed a coaching model like this

would improve student learning, stating "I don't see how it couldn't…. we do have a lot of ways we measure students: standards based report cards, data, running records."

Lauren also believed that monitoring student progress with multiple assessments helped improve student learning. For example, Lauren shared that she did more monitoring this year as a result of coaching. Lauren engaged in more running records "…to monitor their progress a little bit better" than in previous years and noted, "…it [monitoring with assessments] was hugely beneficial. That is one of the reasons the scores improved so much, constant monitoring that was specific to them [students]." Weekly, Lauren and Tracy were able to monitor student progress in their coaching meetings and were able to discuss how to adjust instruction accordingly to the student data. Since student data was the central focus of coaching meetings, both coach and teacher gathered evidence to discuss in the meetings and then engaged in analyzing that data together to make instructional decisions that could benefit student learning.

Partnered approach to providing tiered interventions in an RTI model. All six teachers in this study believed that having a partnered (teacher and coach) approach to providing tiered interventions, improved student learning. In many models of intervention services provided to students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 are provided by a specialist outside of the classroom, and it is essential that specialists and teachers connect with each other to build on what is happening in class instruction (Howard, 2009). At the heart of this model is a partnered approach, connecting teacher and coach in ongoing conversation about students and the interventions being provided to them in and outside of the classroom, which teachers believed benefited student learning.

Teachers believe this partnered approach benefits students because it involved two adults tackling student issues together, rather than one adult working in isolation. Lauren shared that student learning improves in this model because, "…it is two teachers now focusing on one student or groups of students, instead of just one trying to come up with ways or strategies." Two people can offer additional knowledge and more ideas when planning interventions and next steps, especially when one of the partners is knowledgeable about interventions in a particular content area (i.e., Tim and his knowledge of *Math Recovery*).

According to teachers, a partnered approach also was seen as beneficial for student learning because it was another adult presenting material to children in a different way than the classroom teacher. Ethan shared that when Tim worked with kids he was able to "paint a picture…so they [students] understand what the picture means. He does a very good job and he has a small group, he is ready to try to get the kids to see it the way that they need to see it." Ethan noted that even after he taught a concept a couple of ways that it was often Tim who was able to get to the students and help them understand the concept. Coaches who had knowledge of not only the content, but also of how to intervene with students, could offer a new perspective for the students.

Tiered interventions were offered to students in various ways. Interventions provided by the coach and teacher ranged based on what they believed the student needed after they reviewed data and evidence. All teachers noted that the coaches were effective at providing fluid interventions as needs arose. Jane thought that the coaches were effective at "…going to the area of need…" about providing interventions, and she believed this helped improve student learning. Coaches offered various ways they could

help students and often worked alongside the teachers to decide appropriate interventions. Emily believed that having a coach who worked with students in multiple ways helped improve student learning.

Coaches in this model often provide Tier 2 instruction directly in the classrooms, and many of the teachers referred to this as co-teaching with their coach. Teachers believed co-teaching was improving student learning in their classrooms. Coaches would sit with targeted groups and work with them as the teacher was presenting material to the whole class, and would then continue working with students as they moved to guided and independent practice. For example, Jane had both Tracy and Tim coming into her classroom providing Tier 2 groups in both math and science. She noted in her final interview that her work with both coaches enhanced the instruction offered to students by both coach and teacher which she believes, "…leads to greater student achievement and understanding." Jane stated that when they were in the classroom co-teaching it was "seamless" and "…never feels like we are taking over for each other…it always feels like we are on the same page and picking up where the other left off. I think this has been very effective [for student learning]."

Shared knowledge of students that enhanced teaching and intervention. Teachers believed having coaches who had a shared knowledge of students was something that improved student learning at Creekside Middle School. Tracy and Tim knew students as individuals and were able to share insights with teachers about these students because they worked with the students.

Lauren found coaches' insights to be helpful for her in reaching students. Instead of receiving general interventions to try with students, she received specific, targeted

ideas from her coach that addressed her specific student needs. Lauren stated, "…she [Tracy] knows the kids and works with them. She isn't just pulling random ideas." Having Tracy work with the same kids who she saw struggle in her classroom helped them to build a shared knowledge of students, which they used to "target what to do with kids." Lauren believed that having a coach who worked with students and shared similar knowledge of the students was part of the reason that the intervention students in her classroom showed so much growth. Lauren noted in her final interview that "…pretty much all of the students we worked with together had huge amounts of growth." She talked specifically about one student whom I observed discussed in the coaching meetings over the course of the four months; at the end of the year, the student had grown 549 points on a reading assessment, which was equivalent to five years' growth. For Lauren, this "…shows that hard data proves what we are doing works." Lauren believed that shared knowledge of students with Tracy increased the growth she had observed in her classroom over the course of the year.

Teachers are often the lone instructors in a classroom (Lortie, 1975), working with many students at varying achievement levels. Often teachers do not have outside help to determine how best to meet the needs of each student in their classes. Increasingly, teachers are pressured to differentiate their instruction to meet all students' needs. This is a difficult task even for an experienced teacher. Ethan noted that "...it is almost an impossible task to differentiate" with so many varying levels of ability in classrooms. At Creekside Middle School, teachers did not feel like they were going at this task alone, thanks to the coaching of Tracy and Tim. This model of student-driven coaching was a distinctive model of coaching. This coaching model offers a coach-

teacher relationship, where both have knowledge to share and work to accomplish the same goal: improving student learning. It is a coaching model that had success in the eyes of the teachers, who before had been become cynical of coaching from previous years experiences. Teachers no longer believed a coach was there to judge them, instead coaches were there to support teachers in the most important task of improving student learning, and teachers at Creekside believed it did just that.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

"I just think if coaching is used in the right way it can be so helpful to teachers and student learning, too. And if you can get coaching focused on student learning and improving student growth, then that can be very productive" –Lauren, Creekside sixth-grade teacher

Summary of the Findings

Coaching initiatives had been supported by school and district administration for several years prior to 2012-2013, when I collected data. However, prior to the 2012-2013 school year, teachers had not had positive experiences with coaching at Creekside. Due to bad experiences in a previous model of coaching, teachers expressed feelings of distrust towards coaches. The teachers were wary of coaching and did not feel coaching supported their practice.

In 2012-2013, teachers' feelings of distrust for coaches had transformed as teachers engaged in a new model of coaching. Instead of being scrutinized by coaches, teachers were being supported in a multitude of ways by a math coach and ELA coach who shared the same goal: to improve all students' learning. Coaches at Creekside Middle School not only were able to build trusting relationships with their teachers, but they also helped teachers to refine their own teaching practice as they collaborated in student-driven coaching.

Weekly coaching meetings were a vital time for coaches and teachers to engage together in work that was relevant to both teachers and coaches. During the meetings, coaches were able to support teachers through similar coaching practices and moves (e.g.,

analyzing student data, offering encouragement) while addressing the individual needs of the teacher. Tracy, the ELA coach, offered this important insight about her role as coach, "I am supporting and trying to offer myself as an additional resource for any number of things, whether it is time with kids, time in the class, conversations, resources, trying to just consistently be there for them [teachers]." The teachers and coaches met weekly consistently and teachers noted they were productive. The teachers knew that Tracy and Tim were there to support them in their teaching practice.

A unique aspect of this coaching model is that coaches not only worked with fifth- and sixth-grade classroom teachers, but worked also with fifth- and sixth-grade students providing tiered interventions in math and ELA. Coaches and teachers each had valuable information they could share with the other, because they both worked with students and understand the students' strengths and challenges. Teachers and coaches could exchange knowledge of students and instructional practices. The teachers had many opportunities to give input during coaching meetings and they engaged with coaches reciprocally. In this coaching model, the coaches did not have more power than the teachers. This lack of power imbalance made their work together more collaborative and had the potential for improved student learning as well as improved teacher practice.

The collaborative work that coaches and teachers engaged in centered mostly on student data and evidence. Teachers and coaches kept the students the focus of the work, whether is the discussion focused on teachers seeking advice for how to clarify instruction for students, analyze running records, or try new instructional practices based on student data. The teachers felt having students the focus of coaching was vital to the success of the coaching model. The teachers believed they saw large amounts of growth

among their students and were encouraged by the progress being made in their classrooms, revitalizing the teachers to move forward with coaches. The teachers adapted their practice to meet the needs of students and to continue working towards instructional goals they had set for themselves.

Administrators often listened to coaches and allowed them to make school level changes when they saw various needs arise. The power of the coaches to make these changes is important for two reasons. First, having credibility with administrators allowed the coaches to connect the needs of the classroom to school-level initiatives. Teachers and students then had a voice because coaches were working with both of them on a daily basis; and in large buildings (like a middle school), having a voice as an individual is challenging to do. Second, having credibility with teachers allowed coaches an opportunity to engage the teachers in new practices and new learning, and the teachers were willing to take the associated risks. Coaches supported teachers and coaches continually encouraged and recognized the teachers' endeavors to improve their teaching practice.

One possible constraint (which I've also identified as an advantage) of this model such is that coaches had a large amount of responsibility in their school. As the year went on, responsibility increased as the coaches and administration decided to expand the program to try to align all school members in terms of their approaches to RTI. The coaches worked where they saw a need, but both coaches acknowledged that their first priority was working with teachers in their coaching meetings and made sure that even with added responsibility, their work with teachers would not change. Over time having a large amount of responsibility could wear thin on coaches; although the coaches at

Creekside did not struggle with balancing this added responsibility with their work with teachers.

It took four months to develop the coaching model at Creekside and required a great effort by the coaches. Tracy and Tim discussed at length their intentional focus on students, as both knew that coaches in this school were wary of coaching at the beginning of the year. Tim shared in his final interview that he had to "work to break this" fear of having a coach in the classroom, which meant going into the classroom and spending more time working with students than observing so teachers would "recognize that is my purpose." Tim knew firsthand how teachers perceived coaching, as he was coached as a teacher. By keeping in mind the teacher's perspective, he developed relationships with students and teachers, eventually building enough of a trust with teachers that they actively sought suggestions from him.

Although not the focus of my study, twas a key factor in the success of this coaching model at Creekside Middle School. During the school year, Creekside engaged in organizational change with a new RTI program involving coaching. The RTI program engaged school staff in new practices with associated risks. As staff engaged in this change, relational trust between teachers and coaches, and coaches and the principal, were influential to the success of the RTI program and coaching that occurred within that program. Relational trust, defined as the interplay of social exchanges involving respect, competence, personal regard, and integrity between various roles in a school community, has been found to be influential in the success of organizational change (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). At Creekside, coaches built trust in their exchanges with both teachers and the principal through their words and actions. That relational trust developed over

time, and organizational change in the form of a new RTI program that heavily involved coaching, took hold and flourished.

This model of coaching has potential to be powerful in helping both teachers and students learn. Two experienced coaches worked together aligning their coaching practices to the needs of the school, teachers, and students and kept a common goal with each teacher during the year. They addressed challenges as they arose and took time to develop positive relationships with administration, teachers, and students. The coaching model evolved over the year and all parties in this study were clear that the coaching model at Creekside Middle School was successful for coaches, teachers, and students. The following sections situate the findings of this study within the literature in coaching and PD, describe the implications of this study on Job-Embedded PD and Educational Leadership, describe limitations, suggest future research possibilities, and argue its educational significance.

Situating the Findings in the Literature

Many scholars have called for more research that closely examines coaching models to better understand what specifically coaches do that is helpful to teachers (Neuman & Cunningham, 2008; Russo, 2004; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). The coaching model at Creekside Middle School is one case study that describes teachers' perceptions of how the coaches were helpful to teachers' practice and the possible impact this model of coaching had on student learning. In this section, I explain how my findings confirm and extend the literature on coaching as a form of job-embedded PD.

Working with individual teachers. Coaches at Creekside met one-on-one with teachers on a weekly basis for 20-30 minutes as part of their work, which is often a

typical part of a coaching model. Bean et al., (2010) found that coaches in their study of Reading First coaching, that coaches spent more of their time working with individual teachers (almost 25% of their time) than any other activity. A main focus of coaching is to work with individual teachers, and the coaching model of this study also confirms that this individual work is valuable to teachers.

Although that the approach of coaches working individually with teachers is not new, the substance of the work offers an innovative perspective on how coaches and teachers spend that time together. Weekly coaching meetings at Creekside Middle School were often focused on *students*. Instead of spending time debriefing and discussing teachers' instruction from classroom observation, coaches and teachers engaged together to analyze student data in their classrooms and used those analyses to design curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of students.

Bean et al., (2010) concluded that coaching, when centered on students, is a powerful mechanism for improving the practice of teachers. Researchers found that with the coaches they studied it was evident that coaching discussions with individual teachers was often based on "…how to differentiate instruction for individual students" (p. 98). Improving student outcomes in literacy was a main objective of the Reading First coaches and thus became a topic of conversation for teachers and coaches in that study. Bean et al., (2010) found that by focusing on students not only were coaches able to help teachers think about how to improve their practice, but also they were able to do it in an environment that was more collegial, placing the coaches and teachers in what they termed "…a partnership relationship" (p. 110). In this relationship, teachers and coaches

problem-solve to improve student outcomes, one of the purposes of the Reading First initiative.

A partnership relationship (Bean et al., 2010) developed as well at Creekside Middle School. The coaching model that focused first and foremost on student learning, as well as teacher learning, became the vehicle with which teachers could reflect on their own practice with the help of their coaches. Teachers believed they were valued and were seen as professionals with knowledge that also helped the coaches, removing (or at least reducing) the power dynamic in their relationship with the coaches. Side by side, coaches and teachers worked to accomplish the same goal of improving instruction and intervention to better meet the needs of the students. The findings of Bean et al., (2010) are confirmed in my study. I too found that student learning as a coaching focus is a productive vehicle to engage teachers in reflecting on their own practice in a non-threatening environment.

Working with students. A unique structure of the coaching model at Creekside is that coaches worked with fifth- and sixth-grade students (in ELA and math) on a daily basis providing tiered interventions in the school's RTI program. Each day coaches worked with groups of students, co-teaching groups of students, or providing pullout interventions in groups or individually. Working with students provided coaches a knowledge base that often coaches do not have access to-- individual students' understanding of concepts.

Bean et al., (2010) also found that coaches in the Reading First program did work with students. Researchers noted that 14 out of 20 coaches engaged with children giving assessments, and 11 of 20 taught small groups in teachers' classrooms but this only

encompassed 8.2% of their work (Bean et al., 2010). Reading First coaches worked with students, but not as extensively as the coaches at Creekside. Other studies of coaches confirm what Bean found: for example, in their study of Reading First coaches in another state, Scott et al., (2012) found that less than ten percent of coaches' time was spent working with students.

Coaches at Creekside consistently met with students to provide Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions in and out of the classrooms. Although this study did not examine how much of their time coaches spent with students, I found that a substantial amount of coaches' time was spent working with students. What is key is not necessarily the amount of time coaches spent with students, but what working with students offered the coaches. Instead of just basing their work with teachers on student data, coaches developed their own understandings of how children engaged in learning in that specific content area. From their time with students they could learn more about students' interests, strengths, and challenges, which then helped inform both the coach and the teacher as they worked together.

This level of interaction between coach and students is an unusual coaching model. Most often, coaches examine student data and evidence, but do not work directly with students. Teachers at Creekside perceived that having coaches who engaged with students in this manner was beneficial because coaches were able to give more informed suggestions to them. There was a common understanding of students, helping coach and teacher adapt and target instruction and intervention.

Coaches engage in various activities as part of their role as coach. Activities tend to vary within and across schools and coaches (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009) and as more

research on coaching is undertaken, the list will more than likely continue to grow. Scott, Cortina, and Carlisle (2012) called for research on coaching that gives us "… better understanding of high leverage coaching activities" those that contribute to instructional change and improved student outcomes (p. 103). This study add to the literature as it offers a description of specific coaching activities, which teachers believed to be valuable and teachers' perceived as helping to improve their teaching practice and/or student learning in their classroom.

Modeling. Many studies have found modeling in coaching to be valuable to teachers (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Nicometi, 2011; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). For example, in a study of 35 teachers, Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) 17 of those 35, found the coaching model of SDE (where coaches were required to demonstrate strategies) helpful. One teacher noted that during the SDE, she tried literature circles, and to having a coach come in so she could see it helped her in implementing them herself (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). Modeling offers teachers a vision of how particular activities and programs can look like in their own classroom with their students. Modeling can encourage teachers to take that next step in implementing something new they may not be comfortable with.

One coaching activity found valuable at Creekside was modeling. Modeling occurred in two different ways: planned and authentic settings. In planned settings, coaches and teachers initiated and made plans for the coach to come in and carry out an individual activity or program for a teacher. Planned modeling is a fairly typical activity of a coach (Knight, 2011) and is often found as valuable by teachers (Nicometi, 2011; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010)

Another version of modeling was occurring at Creekside. I term this type of modeling as authentic modeling, as it is not planned and happened in a natural setting. Coaches at Creekside worked with students quite frequently as part of their responsibilities as a coach, during this time they engaged in authentic work with students that teachers could observe directly in their own classroom. Teachers stated that they often just sat down and watched how the coach was working with their students. They noted that watching the coach in an authentic way was a valuable activity that not only gave them insight into how to engage with students, but that also gave them the opportunity to talk with and ask questions of the coach right "on the spot." Again, by working with students, coaches could offer authentic modeling, which coaches and teachers in other models of coaching may not have, access to. My study extends the current research on coaching because it offers a new type of modeling that teachers believed was beneficial to their practice.

Collaborative analysis of student data. Accountability for student learning has become an emphasized focus of schools and teachers. Teachers often give formative and summative assessments to gauge student learning and understanding. Schools often use data as a way to monitor progress and implement necessary interventions. As schools and teachers engage in this process, analyzing all of these types of student assessment data has become a large part of teachers' work and responsibility.

Teachers believe that coaches' help analyzing student data is a valuable activity. In their study of Reading First coaches in Michigan, Scott et al., (2012) found that teachers were more satisfied with coaches when the coaches reviewed the assessment results from DIBELS testing and helped teachers understand the results. Assessment data

were used to inform their literacy instruction and when coaches focused on this aspect of the teachers' job, teachers valued this and they were more satisfied with their coach (Scott et al., 2012).

Although this study did not measure teachers' satisfaction with their coach, teachers reported that analyzing student data with coaches was a valuable activity. First, teachers discussed how much more they were able to assess using a variety of assessments, which allowed them to gather a clearer picture of students when working with coaches. Second, teachers felt they were able to dig deeper into analyzing the data with someone who had deep levels of knowledge of assessment and intervention in a specific content area.

Encouragement and recognition. Coaching requires teachers to invite others into their classroom, in contrast to the traditional private, personal nature of teaching (Lortie, 1974). When coaches go into classrooms and begin engaging with teachers, it is important to keep in mind that the personal nature of teaching could make teachers hesitant to engage in coaching. The support coaches' offer to teachers can influence teachers' perceptions of being coached.

Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) found that coaches provided teachers with ongoing support as an "encourager" (p. 150). Coaches provided support and encouragement to their teachers and offered space that was relaxed and comfortable for both novice and veteran teachers. Teachers expressed that they did not feel judged but instead were supported to try things and not worry about the risks of failing. Encouragement was offered and valued by teachers.

The value of encouragement is confirmed by this study of coaching. Coaches created an environment where teachers felt encouraged by their coach. Coaches' encouragement was attributed to teachers' willingness to try new strategies and programs, as well as engage in new collaborations in their school. One teacher noted how easy it would have been to go back to her old ways (i.e., teaching spelling the way she had for a few years instead of using the new program), but with her coach encouraging her and holding her accountable she continued to move forward in her new endeavors. Not only did coaches encourage teachers, but they also recognized teachers for the work they were undertaking. To be recognized and encouraged mattered to teachers, empowering them to work alongside their coaches as they engaged in new efforts.

Attempting something new. One purpose of coaching is to help teachers improve their instructional practice by learning about and using research-based practices. However, teachers are often hesitant to change their practices, which can be an impediment to change. In the coaching model, I found that Creekside coaches were able to get teachers to attempt something new by providing a high degree of scaffolding and encouragement.

Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) found that all 35 teachers in their study reported that they changed their practices and took new risks in their classrooms. Out of those 35, ten teachers reported, "…because of their coach, they felt comfortable enough to risk trying new strategies" (p. 154). Teachers were more empowered in this coaching model to try new teaching practices; they were more open and willing to try things in their classrooms and were less hesitant than before coaching.

Coaching at Creekside also created the same environment, where teachers were willing to take on new initiatives. Those initiatives would range from instructional practices and programs to new collaborations within the building. Coaching provided a safety net to teachers.

This study also studies how teachers perceived coaching in relation to student learning in their classrooms. No studies to date examine teachers' perceptions of coaches' impact on student learning, but studies mentioned in earlier chapters (cite) examine on the effect of coaching on student achievement. Although this study does not measure student growth, it is worth noting that teachers did perceive this model of coaching to be beneficial to student learning. Lauren, the sixth-grade ELA teacher, noted one example of student growth when she discussed how a student whom both she and Tracy had worked with jumped five years in his reading level over the school year. Teachers noticed that this year, more than any other, they were monitoring students and giving and analyzing more assessments. Time was devoted to this work in coaching meetings, and because the meetings were held consistently on a weekly basis, there was a continual gathering of evidence and analysis of evidence. Teachers' perceived that their work with a coach influenced student learning and growth over the course of the year. Teachers were excited about the growth they saw in their students and felt that they were finally able to individualize instruction for all of their students with the help of their coaches.

Implications for Job-Embedded PD and Educational Leadership

This study shows a promising coaching model offered at Creekside Middle School, which engages teachers in job-embedded PD that not only has potential to help improve teaching practice but also has potential to help improve student learning. In this

section, I describe the implications this model of coaching could have for Job-embedded PD and school leadership.

Job-embedded PD. One implication of this study for job-embedded PD is the finding that coaching has the possibility of being effective when focused on students and their learning instead of on teachers. Coaching that focuses on students, such as Student Focused Coaching (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009), or a model like the one found at Creekside, offer a new emphasis for job-embedded PD opportunities in schools. As the shift in accountability for teachers moves to measuring student learning, job-embedded PD focused on student learning has the possibility to not only help teachers but also students. Instead of being an intermediary between the coach and the student, the teacher works directly alongside the coach to examine and improve student learning.

A second implication of this study is about the ways coaches work with students. Usually, coaches only work with teachers (i.e., observing instruction, debriefing about observations, and co-examining student data). In this study, I found that when coaches work directly with students, teachers believe their own practice improves. By observing how coaches help students grasp challenging concepts, teachers can learn these valuable techniques to use on their own. Coaches who work with students have even more responsibilities that schools would have to consider as they assign teachers, grade levels, and content areas to their coaches. For instance, coaches' time would have to be allocated differently (i.e., it would need to be expanded beyond working with teachers). Coaches and teachers would need to work closely together to schedule that instructional time in the classroom with students. Administrators would have to determine the amount of students and teachers a coach could work with and still be effective in their tasks.

One final implication from this study is about the power of shared accountability between the teacher and coach for student learning. Typically in coaching, the coach is accountable for improving teacher learning, and the teacher is accountable for improving student learning; the two parties do not share the same type of accountability. In the coaching model at Creekside, the teacher and coach share accountability to support each other in improving student learning. Teachers and coaches, by working together through a continued cycle of offering Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 support to students and then gathering evidence of the results of that support, developed shared accountability of improving practice for improved student learning. Shared accountability has the potential to change the dynamics between teachers and coaches and may even help coaches engage with teachers who are resistant to coaching. Shared accountability also has the potential to ensure that all students are receiving the intervention and support they need.

School leadership support. Research has shown that teachers who receive coaching for significant amounts of time see benefits in student achievement (Bean et al., 2010). Time is often limited for work such as coaching since many instructional hours are spent working directly with students. If school leadership use the Creekside coaching model, they will need to consider how to structure time into the school day to ensure that teachers and coaches have time to engage in valuable coaching activities. Time was set aside for weekly meetings between coach and teacher and the meetings happened during the school day during teachers' prep time. Setting coaching meetings at teachers' prep time allowed for the work of the coach to be consistent and structured around the needs of the teachers, during teachers' actual work hours, not after school when teachers are not required to be in the building which would make them have to compromise with other

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personal responsibilities. When working with a large number of teachers, like in a middle school, meeting during prep time allows the coach to meet with all teachers the coach works with and doesn't force teachers to go beyond their workday. Structuring the teachers' and coaches' time together during the workday signals that the work of the coach is directly connected to the teachers' work, not an additional requirement to do at the end of the day.

If school administrators implement this kind of coaching model, they should not only support coaching by setting up structures that sustain an effective coaching environment, but should also be active in supporting the substance of coaching. At Creekside, administration (typically the principal) met weekly with coaches. During this time coaches were the voice for teachers and students and shared with administrators their ideas for improving both the coaching model and the RTI program. Creekside administrators supported the work of the coaches and valued their ideas and suggestions, typically agreeing to the coaches' requests. The administrators also became involved in actual PD sessions with teachers on the RTI program, and coaches eventually encouraged administrators to lead PD sessions, which they did. The administrators actively supported the substance of the coaching at Creekside, helping the model succeed.

Limitations

In this study, I examine a coaching model at Creekside Middle School to understand how an innovative coaching model was conducted, to learn about the activities with coaches teachers found valuable, and to learn whether, and if so how, teachers thought this coaching model improved their teaching practice and/or student

learning. While this case study offers an in-depth view into a coaching model in a middle school, there are limitations to this study, which I discuss next.

One limitation of this study is the timeline for data collection, which occurred from January to June (2013). Since data collection began four months into the school year, I was unable to observe how the coaching model commenced and how it developed over the course of a whole school year.

To overcome this limitation, in initial interviews, coaches shared with me how the model started and how it developed and evolved from September to January. Coaches acknowledged that by January, when I began data collection, the model had evolved to a state that it would remain until the end of the year (and into the future), so I did not observe the process by which the model got to this point The data collection timeline also limited my observations of the relationship development between teachers and coaches. Even though teachers and coaches were able to discuss how they built relationships with one another, I was unable to see that development first hand.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that the sample does not reflect typical coaches and teachers. The sample of this study was six experienced teachers and two experienced coaches. The generalizability is limited, as the perceptions reported are specifically from teachers who have been in the classroom at least five years and do not represent teachers new to the field. However, some teachers were new to their position after teaching in other grade levels or other subject areas in previous years. In the recruitment stage of the study, I invited less experienced teachers to participate, but they declined. In total, there were 22 teachers (who worked with the coaches) who did not participate in the study. Their perceptions could have offered a broader, and perhaps

more representative, perspective of how teachers perceive the ways that coaching can (and perhaps cannot) influence teaching practice.

Due to the fact that this study is case-based with a small number of participants who are not representative of the country's teaching force, the ability to widely generalize findings is limited. However, generalizability was not a goal. By limiting the number of teachers I study, I was able to explore, in-depth, the affordances and constraints of instructional coaching.

This study is based on of a coaching model in a middle school that has built the capacity for the coaches to work with teachers *and* students. First, middle schools such as Creekside are departmentalized (teachers teach one or two subject areas during the school day to various groups of students) and can be more focused on their specific content areas. Applying this model to an elementary setting for example would create new challenges as those teachers typically teach each core subject area and are not departmentalized like middle and high schools are. Second, in this middle school, school and district leadership structured coaching so teachers would be able to meet with coaches during their planning periods. School leaders made decisions to set up schedules in a manner that would create a positive working environment for coaches and teachers. Not all schools or districts have the capacity to support coaching in this way. Due to the structure of this model, transferring the findings of this study to other settings may be difficult. However, because instructional coaching is being used with greater frequency, the findings of my study might resonate or have "transferability" (Cziko, 1992).

Last, this study did not have the capacity to measure actual changes in teachers' practices or improvements in student learning. Instead, it can offer teachers' perceptions

of their changes. However, examining beliefs is an important starting point—for teachers to have "buy in" to a form of PD, they need to believe the PD is effective (Richardson, 2003). "Buy in" is an important first step to changing practice.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are two main areas of future research I suggest based on my experience conducting this study: 1) examining the implementation of this coaching model in other settings, and 2) using this model of coaching to examine possible measurable changes in student learning.

Creekside Middle School offers a coaching model, which involved experienced coaches and teachers. Using this model of coaching in a new environment with teachers and coaches of various experience levels, would add to the findings about the benefits and drawbacks of this coaching model. Once applied to a new context, there may be different experiences and perspectives that prove or disprove findings in this study.

A new context would better show if this kind of model is manageable in other environments. It was evident in this study that school leadership trusted the coaches and allowed them to be instructional leaders in the school; coaches were not only able to shape the coaching model to meet the needs of students and teachers, but they were also able to provide input into the intervention model in the middle school. The trust of school leadership may not be as attainable or even existent in other environments and a new context would offer insights into the importance of school leadership in successful coaching models.

Second, studying the impact of this coaching model on student learning would be a valuable area for further research. Teachers in this study perceived that this coaching

model had an impact and improved student learning in their classrooms, especially for the struggling learners in the fifth- and sixth-grades in math and ELA. One instance of this comes from Lauren, who had an ELA student show five year's growth in his reading level over the course of the school year, and she attributed this growth to the work done between her and her coach.

To measure the relationship between coaching and student learning, collecting baseline data of student learning—which would not be difficult given coaching models collect data anyway— would be necessary. Conducting an experimental design study with a treatment group of students and teachers who experience this form of coaching, and a control group of students and teachers who receive traditional coaching, would allow us to compare the impact of coaching on student learning. Due to the fact that this coaching model was tied so closely to student data on an ongoing, weekly basis there is much potential to have multiple measures of student data to better understand the impact of coaching on student learning.

Educational Significance

Schools are in an era of accountability in which high-stakes tests are used for a variety of purposes. One of those purposes being to measure teacher effectiveness through new evaluation systems. New teacher evaluations measure teacher performance and student growth, and are being implemented in states across the country. With policies like teacher evaluation systems in place, teachers now more than ever, need even more support as they face these new measures of accountability and are held more responsible for meeting the needs of all their learners.

Creekside Middle School offers a coaching model that can possibly help teachers in this environment of accountability. This student-driven coaching model is a support system that not only can develop teachers' skills but also can help students. Instead of centering coaching on what teachers should be learning and doing, it shifts the focus to what students should be learning and doing, and how teachers and coaches can work together to ensure students learn.

As Response to Intervention (RTI) systems are being implemented in many schools around the nation, this coaching model offers a new perspective on how to support teachers as they attempt to improve Tier 1 and Tier 2 teaching and interventions in their classrooms. Student-driven coaching is an innovative way to connect instructional coaching with RTI in schools. Through this model, teachers are offered support in improving their Tier 1 instruction for all students as well as providing differentiated support in Tier 2 for identified students. A coaching model like this also offers schools and districts a model of implementation as they think about structuring RTI in their buildings. This study has provided informative details on the structure and content of coaching that was linked to RTI, which could be replicated and used in other schools, especially middle schools.

The coaching model at Creekside is also significant in that it offers perceptions of experienced teachers who recognized that a coaching model focused on students was valuable in improving their practice. All six teachers in this study noted ways in which they refined their own teaching practice because of the work they engaged in with their coach. Kate, in particular, believed that she grew more in the 2012-2013 school year than in any other year of her career, which surprised her as she came into the year with many

outside factors vying for her time and energy. A model such as this has the potential to rejuvenate even experienced teachers who may be hesitant to change or adapt practice. Studies (e.g., Knight, 2011) have found that teachers are resistant to coaching (Knight, 2011). By focusing on students, rather than teachers' practice, there was buy-in to the coaching model and teachers even acknowledged they enjoyed working with their coach.

The Creekside model is important because it offers teachers a new vehicle with which to study their practice. It offers a model that teachers (even those who are experienced in the classroom) positively responded to. Teachers perceived that this model of coaching helped them refine their own practice and helped them to improve student learning in their classroom because they had support to meet the needs of all children in their room. Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen, and Zigmond (2010) found that focusing on students may be a key characteristic to changing teaching practice, and this study expands on that idea.

Last, student-driven coaching has the potential to improve student growth. In a time when schools are seeking to improve student learning and are held more accountable for student growth, a coaching model such as Creekside's offers schools a form of job-embedded PD, which may help do just that. A coaching model focused on student data and observation in a collaborative manner where students are also receiving individualized services offers a new take on how coaching and PD can be structured in schools.

APPENDICES

Initial Interview Protocol—Instructional Coach

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. As with any part of this study, you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. As a reminder, in any papers that might result from this study, we would not use your name, the name of the school, the name of any teachers, or any student's name. The privacy of the school, parents, teachers/coaches, and children will be protected to the maximum extent allowed by law.

1. Please describe your background in education and your prior professional experience.

2. How many years have you been an instructional coach? (Both in your current placement and other experiences)

3. What grade levels do you coach?

4. Currently, how many teachers are you managing?

5. Was there (or is there currently) any training involved to prepare you for this role?

6. Please describe your current responsibilities as an instructional coach.

7. Please describe the experience of observing your teachers.
    a. Can you describe what a typical or recent observation was like? You can focus on a particular teacher, but you do not need to refer to him/her by name.
    b. How long do they last? How often do they occur?
    c. What do you do to prepare for the observation?
    d. How do you know what to focus on for the observation?

8. Please describe the experience of giving teachers feedback.
    a. Please describe what a typical or recent feedback session was like.
    b. What do you do to prepare for giving feedback?
    c. How do you know what to focus on when giving feedback?
    d. How often do you provide feedback? In what format?
    e. Do you think the teachers use this feedback, and if so, how do you know?

9. In what ways have you provided support for your teachers? (Can list individually)

10. Are there specific things you have addressed with teachers so far this year? How do you support their growth in these areas? (Can list individually)

11. Are you optimistic that instructional coaching will help your teachers improve their practice? Why or why not? Student achievement? Why or why not?

12. What, if anything, is challenging about being an instructional coach?

Anything else you'd like to offer about being an instructional coach?

Initial Interview Protocol—Teachers

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. As with any part of this study, you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. As a reminder, in any papers that might result from this study, we would not use your name, the name of the instructional coaches, the name of the school, or any student's name. The privacy of the school, parents, teachers/coaches, and children will be protected to the maximum extent allowed by law. This interview is being recorded for purposes of transcription at a later time and will be stored in a secure manner.

First, I'm going to ask you some general questions about your teaching background. Then, I'm going to ask you some questions specifically about instructional coaching.

Informational Questions
1. Where did you receive your teaching degree?

2. What was the focus?

3. How many years have you been teaching?

4. In what grades?

5. How many years have you been teaching in this school?

6. In what grades?

7. What grade level do you currently teach?

8. How long have you been teaching at this grade level?

9. How many students are in your class(es)?

10. What types of professional development experiences have you completed?

11. Have you taken any courses in education beyond your bachelors?

12. In your teaching career, have you tried to improve a particular aspect of your teaching practice? If so, can you share how you tried to address it? (does not need to be an example from this school year)

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about instructional coaching. Please feel free to talk about specific instances with coaching this year (or in previous years).
Coaching Questions:
13. What is your understanding of the role of the instructional coach?

14. What is your understanding of the work you will be doing/have done with your coach this year?

15. How long has (name of coach) been your instructional coach?

16. How often do you meet with your coach?

17. How often are you observed by your coach?

18. Please describe to me the type of work (in a typical meeting with them) you have done with your coach so far this year.

> *Do you find the one on one time to be productive?*
> *Do you find you focus more on student aspects or aspects of your own teaching practice?*

19. Please describe the experience of being observed by your coach.

20. Please describe the experience of receiving feedback from your coach.

21. Has your coach provided you support, and if so, in what ways?

22. Have there been specific things you have been working on with your coach? If so, how were those things chosen?

23. Please describe whether you are working towards improving on those goals yet, and if so, how?

24. What, if anything, is challenging about being coached?

25. What specific aspects of the work you do with your coach have been most effective for you? Why?

26. What specific aspects of the work you do with your coach have been most effective for student learning? Why?

27. Are you optimistic that instructional coaching will help you to improve in the classroom? Why or why not?

28. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not addressed in this interview?

Thank you so much for your time and energy to conduct this interview! I look forward to our continued work together.

Appendix C

Final Interview Protocol—Instructional Coach

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. As with any part of this study, you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. As a reminder, in any papers that might result from this study, we would not use your name, the name of the school, the name of any teachers, or any student's name. The privacy of the school, parents, teachers/coaches, and children will be protected to the maximum extent allowed by law.

1. Can you share how your role as a coach has transpired (or changed) over the course of the school year? (Please include what your current responsibilities are)

2. In what ways have you provided support to your teachers over the course of the year?
   a. Can you give specific examples for each teacher in the study? (Giving the specific things you felt needed to be addressed and how you supported them in this endeavor)
   b. Was there any type of support given consistently across every teacher?

3. Could you explain how your work this year addressed improving teacher practice, using specific examples?

4. Could you explain how your work this year addressed improving student learning, using specific examples?

5. What aspects of your work with teachers did you find particularly influential to student and/or teacher learning?

6. What aspects of your work with students did you find particularly influential to student and/or teacher learning?

7. What (factors) influenced the type and level of support you provided each teacher?

8. If you were to coach again next year, what types of things would you do? Were there improvements you would like to make?

9. Did any of your teachers change their teaching practices over the year? If so, do you feel the work you did with them contributed to that change? If so, how (ask for individual examples)?

10. What has been challenging about being an instructional coach this year (in

general, or specifically with individuals)?

11. Could you describe an experience with a teacher, where giving feedback was difficult?

12. Are you optimistic that instructional coaching helped your teachers improve their practice? Why or why not?

13. Are you optimistic that instructional coaching helped student achievement? Why or why not?

14. Is there anything else you'd like to offer that we haven't covered in previous questions about instructional coaching?

You chose particular articles and books to use with teachers. How and why was a book like *Opening Minds* chosen? How did you want teacher to use it?

Appendix D

Final Interview Protocol—Teachers

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. As with any part of this study, you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. As a reminder, in any papers that might result from this study, we would not use your name, the name of the instructional coaches, the name of the school, or any student's name. The privacy of the school, parents, teachers/coaches, and children will be protected to the maximum extent allowed by law. This interview is being recorded for purposes of transcription at a later time and will be stored in a secure manner.

1. Please describe how your work with the instructional coach (B and M) evolved over the course of the year? (could you describe your work with both of them)

2. Did you find that you had a strong relationship with your coach? Why or why not?

3. In what ways did your coach work on building a relationship with you?

4. Was the relationship influential in how you approached being coached?

5. Please describe the type of work (in a typical meeting with them) you have done with your coach this year.
   What kinds of topics did you discuss during coaching sessions?
   Do you find you focus most on student aspects and/or aspects of your teaching practice?
   Describe the experience of receiving feedback from your coach.
   How often did you meet with your coach over the course of the year (one on one meetings)?
   How productive was your one on one time with your coach?
   Did your coach model a lesson for you? If so, can you explain the experience?

6. In what ways were you provided support from your coach when it came to your teaching practice?

7. In what ways were you provided support from your coach when it came to helping students learn?

8. What specific practices of your coach have been most effective for your teaching practice? Why?

9. What specific practices of your coach have been most effective for student learning? Why?

10. In what ways, if any, has instructional coaching helped you with your teaching practice? Why or why not?

11. Can you describe for me an example of your teaching practice before coaching and after coaching?

12. Did you ever disagree with a suggestion made by the coach? And if so, how did you respond?

13. What, if anything, was challenging about being coached this year?

14. How did Becky influence your work with content area reading in science?

15. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not addressed in this interview?

Thank you so much for your time and energy to conduct this interview! I appreciate your participation in this study over the course of the year.

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