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# Instructional Coaching: A Way to Improve Teacher Pedagogy and Students' Achievements

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Instructional Coaching: A Way to Improve Teacher Pedagogy and Students' Achievements

by
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Abstract

As students' assessment scores in the United States continue on a downward trend, school districts across the nation seek ways to improve the quality of instruction. A proven strategy to enhance teacher quality, and subsequently student achievement, is to provide educators with professional development opportunities.  A teacher training approach gaining momentum in schools involves instructional coaching as a practice with promise to increase students' achievement.  This study examined the Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school where students made significant academic gains to explicitly define the instructional coaching model that improved teacher pedagogy and increased students' achievement.  In addition, this single-site qualitative study aimed to outline how the Instructional Coaching Program was sustained.  Education leaders identified having a vision and goals to provide purpose, defining system guidelines and roles, and integrating multiple support systems as essential components of an effective instructional coaching program.  The educational leaders identified continuous collaboration and communication, ongoing financial investment, and success as important factors that sustain an instructional coaching program. The Minnesota Department of Education Quality Compensation plan was found to provide guidance for education leaders to design and implement an instructional coaching program that meets the needs of their teacher and student populations.

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**Chapter I: Introduction**

**Introduction to the Problem**

A high-quality education prepares students to enter a post-secondary setting, join the workforce, and be productive and contributing citizens (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018). Education provides opportunities for students to learn and achieve at high levels. Unfortunately, many students in the United States have not made significant academic progress, and their academic achievement rates are low (Serino, 2017). Since 2003, American high school students' performance has not improved on international assessments, and high school students in the United States of America fall behind students in other countries (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018). According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), in 2015, 15-year-olds from the United States tested lower than 14 countries in reading literacy scores and lower than 36 countries in mathematics literacy scores (McFarland et al., 2019). Notably, the achievement gap in high-performing countries is significantly smaller than the achievement gap in the United States: Countries that outscore the United States on international exams have more low-income students who achieve higher test scores (Gurría, 2016). For a country to thrive and compete globally, the government must provide a competitive education for all citizens (Grossman, 2009).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows the average reading scores of 12th-grade students have lowered since 1992. In 2015, 37% of 12th-grade students performed at or above proficient reading skills, which was lower than the scores reported in 1992 when 40% of 12th-graders scored at or above proficient (NAEP Report Card: 2019 NAEP Reading Assessment, 2019). The NAEP math achievement of 12th-grade students has not measurably changed since 2005 (NAEP Report Card: 2019 NAEP Mathematics Assessment,

2019).  According to the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), in 2019, 37% of twelfth-grade students in the United States were academically prepared to attend college (NAEP Report Card: 2019 NAEP Mathematics Assessment, 2019).

In summary, PISA and NAEP test results of American students are evidence that students' achievement is not improving.  Educational leaders need to shift the academic focus to produce master teachers and educational systems of excellence that will compete nationally and internationally (Grossman, 2009).  Educational reform in the United States has been initiated in efforts to improve the quality of secondary education (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018).

**Educational reform.** The federal government signed The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law on January 8, 2002.  Under NCLB, the federal government established laws to guide education reform so that all children had the opportunity to receive a superior education (Tokic, 2006).  During this time in U.S. history, federal funding for schools was directly linked to schools' performance.  To meet the federal regulations and earn federal funding, educators felt pressure to focus their attention on preparing students to achieve high scores on standardized tests (Guilfoyle, 2006) and principals noted decreased levels of teachers' planning and presentation of professional development during NCLB implementation (Wiezorek, 2017).  Under the NCLB testing and accountability structure, teachers' professional growth and innovation were stifled as they felt compelled to teach to the test (Guilfoyle, 2006).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) passed in 2015 (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016) giving individual states more responsibility to design and implement accountability systems in public education.  Under the ESSA, educational leaders continued focused efforts to develop professionally skilled teachers who provided a thorough education to prepare students for college, career, and life (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).  Unfortunately, these efforts

frequently aligned with historical practices of delivering teacher professional development through large group conferences and workshops (Lieberman, 1995). After decades of national education reform focusing on traditional professional development to improve teachers' capacity, students' achievement has not improved (Serino, 2017).

**Statement of the Problem**

Students' academic achievement in the United States has declined in the past decades (NAEP Report Card: 2019 NAEP Reading Assessment, 2019), and America is rapidly losing its globally-competitive edge (National Academies, National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering National Academies, and Institute of Medicine National Academies, 2010). Consequently, educational researchers have profusely invested in determining how to halt the downward trend, finding that the quality of teaching is the school factor with the most considerable effect on student achievement (Hattie, 2015; Weglinsky, 2002).

A proven strategy to improve teacher quality, and subsequently student achievement, is to provide educators with professional development opportunities. A meta-analysis study conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) showed a positive effect on students' achievement from teacher professional development (Blank & De las Alas, 2009). Researchers concluded that professional development is essential to deepen teachers' content knowledge and develop their teaching practices (Porter, Garet, Yoon, Desimone, & Birman, 2000). Teachers who received high-quality professional development with ongoing support were found to have students achieving at higher levels in their classrooms (Klinger, Vaughn, Hughes, & Arguelles, 1999).

The most common form of teacher professional development is training conducted in one day without any follow-up support (Kretlow, Wood, & Cooke, 2011; Kretlow &

Bartholomew, 2010).  Educators use the traditional staff development approach because this method shares information with many teachers and is seen as economical (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002).  While administrators have looked to traditional professional development practices as a means of improving students' achievement (Mizell, 2010), those professional development opportunities have proven ineffective in increasing students' achievement rates (NAEP Report Card: 2019 NAEP Reading Assessment, 2019).

An alternate professional development approach gaining momentum in schools involves instructional coaching as a practice with promise to increase students' achievement.  Studies have found instructional coaching to significantly impact teachers' knowledge, skills, and practice (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

**Traditional professional development.** Robust professional development opportunities can result in students receiving a high-quality education (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018); however, traditional professional development opportunities have many limitations.  For instance, educational leaders frequently conduct professional development workshops in large group settings.  These inservice sessions do not allow teachers to ask questions and practice the new teaching strategy taught during the session.  In large group professional development settings, teachers' in-depth comprehension of new teaching and learning strategies becomes disconnected; therefore, the teachers do not implement new practices with fidelity in their classrooms.  Studies show a research-to-practice gap when educational leaders provide traditional large group staff development without a personalized follow-up to the training (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Odom et al., 2005).  According to Owen (2020), when educational leaders deliver staff development in a traditional "sit and get" model, teachers only apply 5%-15% of the new practices in their classrooms.

**Professional development with coaches**. Instructional coaches work one-on-one or in small groups with teachers to identify problem areas in the educational setting, establish specific goals, engage in professional discussions, implement new strategies in the classroom, and reflect on the progress (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Lotter, Yow, & Peters, 2014; Pürçek, 2014). The coaching process, which provides extra support and guidance for teachers through year-round, real-time, and personalized training, has improved instructors' capacity (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Lotter et al., 2014). The personalized approach allows adult learners to choose and have a voice in which direction to focus their attention during an academic year. As teachers and coaches work together, coaches encourage personal reflection and adjustments in teaching practices, with students' improvement as an overarching goal to achieve as the academic year progresses (Lotter et al., 2014; Pürçek, 2014).

Establishing a personalized approach to professional development with instructional coaches has proven to increase the implementation of newly learned teaching practices in the classroom (Owen, 2020). When instructional coaches deliver and support professional development efforts in a school, teachers apply 80%-90% of their classrooms' new skills (Owen, 2020, p. 24). However, the vast majority of research on instructional coaching has occurred at the elementary level, and there is a lack of research to document a specific instructional coaching model that produces significant academic achievement for secondary students (Kretlow et al., 2011; Stichter, Lewis, Richter, Johnson, & Bradley, 2006). Researchers have not investigated how instructional coaching models have proven effective in helping teachers achieve significant academic gains among high school students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school where students made significant academic gains to explicitly define an instructional coaching model promising in the improvement of teacher pedagogy and increasing students' achievement. In addition, this study aimed to outline how the Instructional Coaching Program is sustained.

Students attending a large suburban high school in Minnesota have made significant academic gains over the past decade. The students' state-level reading, math, and science scores have improved, while the state's student average test scores have lowered or not significantly improved. Based on the 2018-2019 MCA-III Reading, MCA-III Math, and MCA-III Science test scores released by the Minnesota Department of Education, this school is recognized as one of the top public high schools in the state (Minnesota High School Rankings, 2019). This school climbed over 50 spots from the 2018 ranking (Minnesota High School Rankings, 2019). The district started its Instructional Coaching Program in the 2014-2015 school year. Five years after the initial implementation of personalized professional development, students' achievement significantly increased. Improved teacher pedagogy may have been a contributing factor to students' improvement. It was informative to study this educational setting in more depth to identify the Instructional Coaching Program's specific characteristics that improved teacher pedagogy and increased students' achievement. This knowledge might lead to successful implementation and sustainment of professional development at other schools.

**Research Questions**

To gain knowledge about an Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school that made significant academic student gains and to understand the initiatives that aid in the sustainability of the program, two questions were addressed:

RQ1 What components of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement?

RQ2 How do educational leaders sustain an Instructional Coaching Program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

**Significance of this Study**

**Contribution to practice.** This study aimed to provide school leaders with information to guide the implementation of a high-quality coaching program, with professional development opportunities that meet adult learners' unique needs. Findings may provide insight into the urgency of providing job-embedded professional development with instructional coaches to improve teaching and learning practices and raise students' achievement. New knowledge from this study may aid teachers and instructional coaches to work more effectively together in the complex classroom environment to implement, monitor, and adjust instructional practices and implement new methods with fidelity.

It is essential teachers participate in meaningful professional development opportunities to enhance classroom instruction and student achievement (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Researchers found positive relationships between teachers' professional development opportunities, their teaching and learning practices, and students' increased test scores (Cohen & Hill, 2000). Teachers need professional development

opportunities that inspire them to change what they do in the classroom (Cohen & Hill, 2000).

Simply providing facts, information, or a new curriculum will not give teachers adequate tools to

make changes in their classrooms and improve student learning.

When teachers improve their teaching and learning practices, they are more equipped to

meet individual student's learning needs (Blank & De las Alas, 2009; Borko, 2004).  Meeting the

needs of individual learners has been found to increase students' achievement (Mizell, 2010).

Teachers make instructional gains when they have the opportunity to participate in job-

embedded professional development opportunities that partner with instructional coaches

(Camburn & Han, 2017; Knight, 2006).  If experts identify specific characteristics of a secondary

instructional coaching program where students made significant academic gains, this information

can help guide the implementation of instructional coaching programs in other high schools

(Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2009).

**Resource allocation.**  Educational leaders desire to increase students' achievement, and

they will channel their resources in ways that will improve the teaching and learning processes in

classrooms.  With a limited amount of resources to provide high-quality education, educational

leaders need to know the best practices to invest time and money.  This case study examined a

district that spends less than the state average educating each student.  The financial restrictions

parallel the larger, global perspective, as some countries spend less money on education, and

their students score higher than American students on achievement exams (McFarland et al.,

2019).  This study aimed to identify the characteristics and ways of sustaining a secondary

Instructional Coaching Program.  This study's empirical evidence may guide instructional

leaders to channel their resources and invest in meaningful professional development

opportunities.

**Contribution to research.** Student achievement rates in the United States are low in comparison to other developed countries (McFarland et al., 2019). Previous research has concluded that more empirical studies need to be conducted in instructional coaching, explicitly examining the coaching factors that impact students' achievement (Cabak, 2017; Garcia et al., 2013). Study findings ascertained a need to identify a coaching program's specific components that produce enhanced teacher and students' learning behaviors (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Reddy, Dudek, & Lewka, 2017). Traits of an effective instructional coaching program need to be identified because there is a gap in research about the particular characteristics of a secondary instructional coaching program where students have made significant academic gains (Reddy et al., 2017). Future research could help define effective coaching models for this specific learning context (Blamey et al., 2009). Denton and Hasbrouck (2009) stated:

> There is a need to develop fully-articulated models of instructional coaching based on cohesive theories, and to validate these models. In a very real sense, practice has preceded theory in this area. Until coaching models are clearly defined, it will be impossible to determine whether specific coaching approaches result in improved teacher practices and, most importantly, in improved student outcomes. (p.172)

Many questions remain about the appropriate instructional coaching model in the secondary educational setting. Few studies focus on secondary education and instructional coaching. Specific practices used to sustain an instructional coaching program that improves teacher pedagogy and increases students' achievement need to be identified.

Educational leaders find it challenging to demonstrate how professional development directly leads to students' achievement (Borko, 2004). There is not enough research that profoundly examines the effects of coaching (Cornett & Knight, 2009). Researchers have

recommended further study of professional development's impact on teachers and students to prove useful to design and implement purposeful staff development opportunities (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

Empirical research focused on identifying a secondary instructional coaching program's specific characteristics expands the knowledge in the education field, provides educational leaders with information to guide their professional development opportunities, and has the potential to improve students' achievement.  A case study of a high school in a district that spends less than the state average per student, yet where students made significant academic gains provides insight into the characteristics of an Instructional Coaching Program that provided professional development opportunities in ways that allowed teachers to improve their teaching and learning practices.  This study may contribute new knowledge to education by defining components of an Instructional Coaching Program at a high school where the state of Minnesota reported significant students' achievement gains.

**Definitions**

*Instructional Coach* is an on-site professional developer who uses effective instructional practices to collaborate with teachers, identify strategies that effectively meet teachers' needs, and help teachers implement new teaching and learning practices (Knight, 2004).

*Teaching and Learning* is when an educator assesses learning needs, establishes learning objectives, develops instructional strategies, implements the instructional plan, monitors student learning, and makes adjustments to the process to meet students' needs ("What is the Teaching-Learning Process?," n.d.).

*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* focused on improving the academic achievement of disadvantaged students by preparing, training, and recruiting high-quality teachers and

principals, by providing safe, 21st-century schools, holding districts accountable for student

improvement, and promoting informed parental choice, and innovative programs (Congressional

Research Service [CRS], 2001).

*Every Student Succeeds Act* was signed into law in 2015 and holds public schools

accountable for all students in the United States receiving a high-quality education that prepares

them to succeed in college and career. This act replaced No Child Left Behind and provides

individual states more say in measuring student achievement (Every Student Succeeds Act,

2015).

*Quality Compensation (Q-Comp)* is a program passed by the Minnesota Legislature that

allows local districts to design a plan that addresses four components of the law: Career

Ladder/Advancement Options, Job-embedded Professional Development, Teacher Evaluation,

Performance Pay, and Alternative Salary Schedule. Districts participating in Q-Comp receive

compensation money from the state to award to teachers for demonstrated student and teacher

performance (Minnesota Department of Education Q-Comp, n.d.)

*Professional Learning Community (PLC)* is a systemic process in which teachers

collaboratively work in teams to analyze and improve teaching and learning practices (DuFour,

2004).

**Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Chapter Two reviews the literature that guides this study. The chapter begins with

literature related to professional development, a description of instructional coaches and different

instructional coaching models, and concludes with research about the principles of andragogy

and the Social Learning Theory. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study.

Chapter Four shares the research findings while Chapter Five discusses the research findings'

implications and shares suggestions for further research.

**Chapter II: Review of Literature**

Many factors influence students' academic achievements, such as the organization of the school leadership, standards and curriculum alignment, and schools' infrastructure (Reichardt, 2001). This study aimed to investigate the most effective components of an instructional coaching model and the sustainability of a program that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement.

**Professional Development**

**Ineffective professional development.** Historically, staff development opportunities have consisted of group instruction "sit and get" sessions (Matherson & Windle, 2017). Approximately 90% of U.S. teachers participate in whole group workshops, which show little to no improvement in teacher pedagogical practices or students' learning (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). In-service workshops saw a low implementation rate of 10% of the participants incorporating newly learned strategies in their practice (Showers & Joyce, 1996). Eisenberg, Eisenberg, Medrich, and Charner (2017) concluded,

> Traditional in-service professional development does not serve teachers well. It is
> directed at groups of teachers, provided a few times during the school year with no
> follow-up or connection, and focused on generalized knowledge rather than the specific
> learning needs of individuals. (p. 19)

Kretlow and Bartholomew (2010) found that large cohort trainings during faculty workshops did not provide enough structure to produce instructional changes within the classroom. Often professional development opportunities do not administer training in a personal and meaningful way that encourages teachers to improve their work (Coggins et al., 2003). Traditional professional development workshops do not meet adult learners' needs, and

most often, teachers do not implement new teaching practices in their classrooms (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Odom et al., 2005; Owen, 2020).

**Effective professional development.** To identify the features of effective professional development, Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 35 studies that showed a positive connection between teacher professional development, teaching practices, and students' achievement. They defined effective professional development as "structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 7). Researchers identified seven elements of effective professional development models: content focus, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, offers feedback and reflection, and is of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017). Other researchers concluded that for staff development to improve the teaching and learning practices in a classroom, education leaders need to provide teachers with learning opportunities that are engaging and interactive (Matherson & Windle, 2017). Researchers shared meaningful professional development opportunities allow teachers to develop new teaching and learning practices with their colleagues (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Coburn & Turner, 2011). This time of collaboration brings new instructional strategies to the repertoire of teachers. It encourages them to take risks in their classrooms, knowing they will have support, feedback, time to reflect, and adjust their teaching practices (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Pürçek, 2014). Opportunities to connect with other colleagues satisfy the teachers' need to work in collaborative networks and support each other when a new initiative is implemented (Gorozidis & Papaioanno, 2014). Professional development can be a powerful tool to build teacher agency and improve student learning (Eisenberg et al., 2017).

***Collaborative.*** One example of a collaborative professional structure is Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).  Researchers found that when educators respected the PLCs work, learning goals were achieved, teacher pedagogy was better, students performed at higher levels, and students and teachers set higher expectations (Louis & Marks, 1998).  Schools implement PLCs to establish collaborative professional growth teams that focus on improving student learning.  Roy and Hord (2006) described "schools as PLCs where educators collectively engage in continual inquiry on behalf of student learning and where staff and students gain from this way of working" (p. 499). The work of an effective PLC focuses on four essential questions written by DuFour and DuFour (2012):

- What do we want our students to learn?

- How will we know if they are learning?

- How will we respond when individual students do not learn?

- How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient? (p. 16)

As teachers establish the essential information, they want their students to know, they work in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions all students must learn as a course outcome.  They establish teaching and learning processes that provide all students with equal opportunities to engage with a viable curriculum regardless of the assigned teacher. Time spent focusing on this question as a group provides teachers with a shared understanding of the curriculum and a commitment to teaching it with fidelity (DuFour & DuFour, 2012).

To gather data that enables teachers in understanding student comprehension, PLCs provide the platform for teachers to collaborate and create common assessments. Instructors

work together to outline the indicators used to assess the quality of student work. Teachers work together to create a common understanding about the use of assessments, and these learning checks are continuously used to gather evidence of student learning. Roy and Hord (2006) described a core characteristic of PLCs as data collection and analysis. They stated, "The emphasis is on data that emanate from frequent, common classroom assessment because data are a powerful and timely form of feedback that helps educators determine the efficacy of their classroom practices with regard to student learning" (Roy & Hord, 2006, p. 493). The data collected from the assessments provide evidence of students' achievements and exposes learning gaps (DuFour & DuFour, 2012).

When students do not meet learning outcomes, teachers work in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to establish a systematic approach to provide more time and instructional support to meet the needs of the slower learners. By working together, teachers create multiple ways for students to show evidence of learning. Instructors work together to improve the collective practice of the collaborative team (DuFour & DuFour, 2012).

In PLCs, teachers have time to work collectively to establish a process to extend the learning for students who have met the outcomes to ensure that all students learn at high levels (Roy & Hord, 2006). Teachers work together to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students. DuFour and DuFour (2012) stated, "Having a plan to provide students with additional time and support for learning in a way that is timely, directive, fluid, precise, and systematic is an essential characteristic of any school that functions as a PLC" (p. 72).

Educators are organized into meaningful PLCs to address the four questions to meet students' needs and provide a rich learning experience for all students. An influential PLC is not viewed as a weekly meeting or a book club. Instead, it is a collaborative process that

incorporates every aspect of the school system to provide accountability, improve teachers' practices, and provide opportunities for all students to learn at high levels (DuFour & DuFour, 2012).

*Purposeful.* In addition to providing adequate time for collaborative work in teacher training, professional development needs to be purposeful and driven by specific building or district goals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Gorozidis & Papaioanno, 2014).  Providing professional development aligned with a specific purpose makes it a rewarding and effective process for improving teacher efficacy (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Pürçek, 2014).  When teachers have positive attitudes about what they are learning and who they are as professionals, it is more likely the new learning will be implemented in the classroom (Ismail, Yahya, Sofian, Hussin, & Raman, 2017).

Professional development opportunities need to be provided over a duration of time for teachers to implement the practices.  A study conducted by Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) found that when teachers participated 14 hours or less in professional development opportunities, there was no impact on student learning. To improve instructional practices and students' learning, teachers need 50 hours of professional development (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).  To make lasting instructional changes, the training should be sustained over a long period of time (Matherson & Windle, 2017).

**Teacher improvement.**  Professional development provided with guidance and support will lead teachers to feel more satisfaction in their job and motivate them to improve continuously (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Pürçek, 2014). Carlisle et al. (2011) found that teachers who were provided with seminars, assistance for teachers' evaluations of their instruction, and a literacy coach (KEC model) displayed improved instructional practices

compared to teachers that only participated in seminars (K model) and teachers that participated in seminars and were provided with assistance for teachers' evaluations of their instruction (KE model). Students of teachers participating in the three-component professional development model made more significant reading gains on some measures of reading than students in the control teachers' classrooms (Carlisle et al., 2011). When adults collaborate and take ownership in the learning process, they will be motivated to implement new practices (Almuhammadi, 2017; Gorozidis & Papaioanno, 2014). Teachers are also motivated to improve their teaching and learning practices when given specific feedback about their performance and challenged with ways to improve their methods (Ismail et al., 2017). When teachers have thorough training and ongoing support, they are more confident in their teaching abilities and are motivated to improve their educational practices (Matherson & Windle, 2017).

**Coaching Models**

Reviewing the published literature about instructional coaching reveals a need for more research to be conducted to understand and refine this form of professional development (Cabak, 2017). There are multiple approaches to instructional coaching as a form of professional learning and teacher support. It can be challenging to determine the most effective coaching model as literature uses various terms to describe various coaching approaches (Cornett & Knight, 2009). Four common coaching practices in the education setting are peer coaching, cognitive coaching, literacy coaching, and instructional coaching (Cornett & Knight, 2009). There are many similarities to the coaching approaches and noteworthy differences that set them apart (Cornett & Knight, 2009).

Peer coaching is one of the earliest models of coaching. It is usually a site-based, informal, and collaborative approach to coaching where two colleagues serve as coaches to each

other. This partnership works to reflect, learn, problem-solve, and develop new teaching strategies (Robbins, 1991). While engaged in peer coaching, teachers discuss planning, instruction, and content development. A peer coaching model provides the opportunity for teachers to follow up with one another after in-service training to provide mutual support and encouragement while improving teaching practices (Showers & Joyce, 1996). After a professional development session, peer support was found to increase teacher implementation of newly learned strategies by 80% compared to teachers that attended only the professional development session (Showers & Joyce, 1996). The peer coaching model is based on mutual respect and reciprocal relationships between teachers to improve the school's teaching and learning processes (Robbins, 1991).

Cognitive coaching emphasizes deep thinking and reflection as the coach and teacher work together to improve teaching and learning practices (Cornett & Knight, 2009). "The mission of cognitive coaching is to produce self-directed persons with the cognitive capacity for high performance, both independently and as members of a community" (Costa & Garmston, 2002, p.16). Coaches and teachers develop the cognitive understanding needed for teachers to present lessons to meet the learning objectives effectively. This coaching method helps teachers develop the cognitive capacity to reflect on their practices and improve the quality of their practice. The reflective process developed during cognitive coaching provides teachers with the awareness to monitor and adjust their practices to improve student outcomes (Costa & Garmston, 2002).

Literacy coaching develops teachers' capacity to improve students' writing and reading abilities (Cornett & Knight, 2009). Literacy coaches are aware of the specific reading and language demands at each level and content area. They work with teachers to develop teaching

strategies to help students continuously improve their literacy skills. Literacy coaches and teachers partner to examine student and teacher data. Using this information, the literacy coaches and teachers identify students' achievement gaps, collaborate to improve instructional practices, and build teachers' capacity to meet students' literacy learning needs (Shanklin, 2007). Literacy coaches work side-by-side with teachers to provide professional development within the teachers' context (Shanklin, 2007). A literacy coach's role is to develop the teachers' awareness of students' literacy skills and then implement teaching strategies to improve students' outcomes regarding reading and writing. Like peer coaching and cognitive coaching, the literacy coaching model is supportive instead of evaluative and provides opportunities for ongoing job-embedded learning (Shanklin, 2007).

Instructional coaching focuses on supporting teachers to implement research-based teaching and learning strategies (Cornett & Knight, 2009). This coaching model highlights a trusting relationship between the instructional coach and the teacher as both work and learn to improve instruction and student achievement (Knight, 2006). This approach is individualized and non-evaluative. Instructional coaching focuses on meeting the teachers' needs. Instructional coaches provide teachers with ongoing support, feedback, and personalized professional learning opportunities. The support provided through instructional coaching offers an opportunity for teachers to make lasting changes to their practices (Knight, 2006).

Peer coaching, cognitive coaching, literacy coaching, and instructional coaching have different components that set them apart. Ultimately, a coaching program's primary focus is to increase teacher capacity and, eventually, student achievement. By listening, engaging in reflective practices, data collection and analysis, questioning, and providing ongoing support, all coaching models support teachers to improve continuously (Knight, 2006).

**Instructional Coaching**

Instructional coaching, as a form of teacher professional development, began appearing in the 1980s (Showers & Joyce, 1980). The early research showed teachers collaborating every week enabled them to practice and implement new teaching strategies (Showers & Joyce, 1996). Districts across the nation have implemented instructional coaching programs to improve teaching and learning practices (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). Instructional coaching provides teachers with the opportunity to explore and implement new practices, professionally grow through job-embedded experiences, and provide better instruction to their students (Eisenberg et al., 2017). McLeod, Hardy, and Grifenhagen, (2019) defined coaching as:

> A partnership between two or more people designed to help one or more members of the
> partnership implement and sustain the use of evidence-based, recommended practices
> through the use of goal setting and action planning, observation, conversation, reflection,
> problem-solving, and performance-based feedback. (p. 176)

Instructional coaches work with principals and leadership teams to develop a school vision about teaching and learning strategies based on district-wide goals (Coggins et al., 2003; Knight, 2006). With this vision in mind, coaches work with teachers individually and in small groups to develop their knowledge and skills, improve instruction, and meet the established goals (Coggins et al., 2003; Shanklin, 2007). An instructional coach's role is to consistently keep best-practice instructional strategies as a central focus during staff discussions, leadership meetings, and training (Coggins et al, 2003). Through this organization of staff development, all trainings are focused and purposeful as all educators in the district strive to meet the same goals. This collaboration and organization of staff development bring unity and consistency to a district as

students experience consistent teaching and learning strategies throughout their pk-12 school experience.

In addition to creating a vision for the school system, instructional coaches provide follow-up professional development training to help individual teachers implement new teaching and learning strategies. Kretlow and Bartholomew (2010) found that when coaches revisit teachers after the initial training session to give feedback on practice implementation, more teachers follow through with trying new practices. Research shows teachers who have the opportunity to collaborate with instructional coaches, over more extended periods, accurately apply the best-practice skills and strategies they have learned, continually reflect on their practices, and grow in their role as educators (Coggins et al., 2003; Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). Through coaching, teachers are provided with positive and beneficial experiences to mature as instructors (McLeod et al., 2019). Shanklin (2007) stated, "This process embodies important features of adult learning and fits the lives of today's teachers. It helps to nurture a climate of continuous professional learning" (p. 2).

Coggins et al. (2003) stated there is an in-depth professional development process between the instructional vision of the district and authentic teaching strategies applied in the classroom. Well-designed and executed staff development procedures are evident in school districts where teachers acquire the skills and confidence to implement desired practices with fidelity. Instructional coaches help maintain professional development focused on best-practice teaching strategies aligned with the district vision (Knight, 2006). In addition, teachers can accelerate their understanding of best-practice instructional strategies and be more effective in the classroom by working with an instructional coach. Through this collaborative and personalized approach to professional development, teachers can gain more knowledge and fine-

tune their instruction.  This vision-focused, purposeful, and customized attention to teachers'

instructional improvement provides a positive learning environment that can improve student

outcomes.

**Characteristics of Instructional Coaches**

An effective coach demonstrates well-developed interpersonal skills; other people must

enjoy being around this person (Knight, 2005; McLeod et al., 2019).  Instructional coaches

clearly communicate and engage in discussions built on mutual trust and respect (Knight, 2005).

They master the art of asking questions.  Through clearly crafted questions, instructional coaches

guide teachers by examining collected data, reflecting on their teaching practices, and exploring

areas needing improvement (Coggins et al., 2003; Shanklin, 2007).  The role calls for empathetic

listening and taking the necessary time to make the teachers feel encouraged and valued (Cornett

& Knight, 2009; Lia, 2016).  Coaches also have a solid command of their nonverbal

communication and an understanding of how their actions affect the people they work with

(McLeod et al., 2019).  They are experts at building and maintaining positive relationships

(Knight, 2006).

Instructional coaches are leaders in education.  Fullan (2001) wrote, "Moral purpose

cannot just be stated, it must be accompanied by strategies for realizing it, and those strategies

are the leadership actions that energize people to pursue a desired goal" (p. 19).  An effective

coach will provide the strategies and support that motivate teachers to improve their practices

and pursue the common goal of improving student achievement.  As leaders in education,

instructional coaches approach professional development with confidence and humility; they are

confident in the best-practice teaching and learning strategies they bring to teachers, yet

conscientious of the unique experiences that teachers contribute to the learning process (Knight, 2006).

Instructional coaches consistently reflect on their practices as coaches and participate in professional development opportunities to deepen their knowledge about coaching skills and instructional practices (Knight, 2006). Effective coaches engage in professional learning opportunities to improve their skills in communication, relationship building, change management, and leadership (Knight, 2006). Examples include instructional coaching, professional learning communities, reading research articles, and other learning tasks to stay current with up-to-date teaching strategies (Knight, 2006). It is essential coaches continuously develop their professional skills to meet the needs of the teachers.

Instructional coaches are knowledgeable in best-practice teaching and learning strategies (Knight, 2006) and feel comfortable going into any classroom (Knight, 2005). As experts in new teaching practices, they provide personalized support and encouragement to teachers (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). Teachers value the wealth of knowledge, resources, and examples from their classrooms that coaches share as they implement researched-based teaching strategies (Coggins et al., 2003; Lia, 2016; McLeod et al., 2019). Teachers appreciate the opportunity to work with someone who understands their learning community's culture and can share their expertise on what beneficial strategies would work specific to their teaching context (Coggins et al., 2003).

Instructional coaches understand the unique approach to working with adults (McLeod, et al., 2019). Adult learners value being actively engaged when learning new teaching processes (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010; Matherson & Windle, 2017). An effective coach provides this hands-on experience for learning while collaborating with a coachee in the classroom. Coaching

offers the adult learner time to work with an expert and address their individual needs. Working with an instructional coach helps teachers implement new teaching practices with higher fidelity (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010; Shanklin, 2007). The adult learner also appreciates having a choice in the direction of their professional development (Matherson & Windle, 2017). An instructional coach understands this principle and allows teachers to establish their own goals and have a say in the areas they would like to focus their attention on improvement (Knight, 2005).

Instructional coaches play a supportive rather than evaluative role in teachers' lives (Shanklin, 2007). Coaches present themselves to teachers as collaborators in education, striving to meet the same goal, providing a learning experience that improves student achievement. Through this open and honest atmosphere, coaches and teachers problem-solve together, try new teaching strategies, assess the latest practices' effectiveness, and make adjustments (Lia, 2016; McLeod, et al., 2019). Teachers feel empowered to take risks knowing the coaches will provide support and will not formally evaluate teachers in the process (Knight et al., 2018). Eisenberg et al. (2017) stated, "The coaches all want to help their teaching colleagues go from good to great- that is, to help them refine their practices" (p. 1).

**Instructional Coaching Cycle**

Research shows instructional coaches build teacher capacity when they present new information and engage in a collaborative process with their teachers (McLeod et al., 2019). One way that instructional coaches disseminate current teaching and learning strategies is through highly interactive, small-group introductory sessions (Coggins et al., 2003; Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). Eisenberg et al. (2017) named this time of collaboration and goal setting as the *before* conversation. This staff development structure allows all teachers to hear the same

message and receive proper instructional practice training.  In this intimate setting, teachers have the opportunity to ask clarifying questions for deeper understanding, practice the new strategies with colleagues and receive constructive feedback from the trainer (Coggins et al., 2003).  After a training session, coaches expect teachers to implement the instructional practices in their classrooms.

Then time is allowed for coaches to observe the teachers implementing the new strategies in their classroom setting.  The *during* phase provides the instructional coach and teacher an opportunity to gather data and take notes for the later reflection and conversation (Eisenberg et al., 2017).  Knowing they will be observed helps hold teachers accountable.  This accountability encourages teachers to implement the newly learned teaching strategies every day in their classrooms.  This focused awareness of implementation secures new instruction methods as part of teachers' systematic teaching strategies (Lia, 2016; Shanklin, 2007).  While visiting the class, the instructional coach focuses on making observations about the teaching technique learned during the small-group training (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010).  During a class observation, the data collected serves as concrete evidence of the teaching and learning practices during instruction time.  This information drives the reflective discussion after the observation.

After the classroom visit, the coach and coachee engage in a one-on-one professional discussion.  The *after* meeting allows the coach and coachee the opportunity to review the non-evaluative feedback and reflect on the teaching practices observed during the classroom visit (Eisenberg et al., 2017). The teacher and instructional coach celebrate the lesson's strengths and identify areas needing more concentrated improvement efforts (Coggins et al., 2003; Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010; Lia, 2016; Shanklin, 2007).  Time dedicated to analyzing collected data, self-reflection, and collaborative discussions provides teachers with support for professional

growth.  Teachers working with instructional coaches have the opportunity to ask clarifying

questions, personalize the content and implement new teaching strategies that meet their

students' specific needs.  Teachers value constructive feedback as they strive to improve their

practice (McLeod, et al., 2019).  Individualized support sessions are an essential part of the

support system as teachers strive for instructional improvement.  In addition, professional

discussions foster a teaching and learning community for continuous improvement (Kretlow et

al., 2011).

## Meeting Students' Needs

Instructional coaches assist teachers in analyzing student data and identifying student

learning challenges from this information.  Teachers and instructional coaches problem solve to

develop and apply instructional strategies that address specific student needs and improve

teacher capacity (Wolpert-Gawron, 2016).  Teachers and coaches reflect and analyze the new

instructional approach's effectiveness while working with students and establish instructional

adjustments through collaborative discussions (Coggins et al., 2003; Lia, 2016; McLeod et al.,

2019).  This job-embedded approach to professional development improves teacher pedagogy

and helps teachers meet students' needs in real-time.

When students' individual needs are identified and adjustments are made to strengthen

instruction quality, students perform at higher levels.  Multiple studies found that teacher quality

is an essential factor contributing to students' achievement (Mizell, 2010).  Examined data from

numerous studies found that teacher training accompanied by individual follow-up support

improved instructional practices and increased student achievement (Yoon et al., 2007).  A three-

year study conducted by Eisenberg et al. (2017) found that when instructional coaches were used

to introduce new instructional practices to teachers, student achievement improved.  Another

meta-analysis study conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) showed a positive effect on students' achievement from teacher professional development (Blank & De las Alas, 2009).

**Sustainability of Professional Development**

An instructional coaching program that plays a vital role in making a difference in the teachers' instructional practices needs to have the active support of the building principal (Eisenberg et al., 2017; Klinger et al., 1999). Without the expectation that teachers continuously improve their practices by working with instructional coaches, a program may lose credibility with teachers. DuFour and DuFour (2012) articulated, "Rather than flit from initiative to initiative, effective principals push in a constant direction over an extended period of time and maintain a laser-like focus on the few key factors that have the greatest impact on student learning" (p. 83). Principal involvement and support were found to be salient factors in long-lasting change (Desimone et al., 2002).

Educators desire professional development that is sustained over time (Roy & Hord, 2017). Instructional coaches help provide job-embedded ongoing teacher training that helps teachers change practice (Eisenberg et al., 2017). Teachers lose trust in the system when education leaders quickly and frequently change professional development initiatives (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). Teachers feel more confident and secure in a system that slowly and intentionally establishes the professional development foundation on which they will grow and purposefully connects one session to another over time (Roy & Hord, 2017). Teacher motivation increases when they see and celebrate evidence of improved teaching practices and students' achievements (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). Lasting changes in instructional practices are evident when professional development opportunities are continuously presented during the school year

(Desimone & Pak, 2017). High impact professional development that improves teacher practices and students' achievements should be presented in a consistent manner over the course of a semester or an academic year (Roy & Hord, 2017). Eisenberg et al. (2017) stated, "As big players in the process that helps to change the climate and culture of the school, they [instructional coaches] become a driving force for sustainable professional development" (p. 141).

**Minnesota Department of Education Quality Compensation (Q-Comp)**

In July 2005, the Minnesota Legislature passed the Quality Compensation (Q-Comp) law. The legislation was supported with a sizable financial allotment to be distributed to school districts choosing to design and implement a plan that addresses the four components of the law. Q-Comp components include: Career Ladder/Advancement Options, Job-embedded Professional Development, Teacher Evaluation, and Performance Pay and Alternative Salary Schedule (Minnesota Department of Education Q-Comp, n.d.). The Minnesota Quality Compensation plan (Q-Comp) provides charter schools and districts a structure that could support instructional coaching programs (Minnesota Department of Education Q- Comp Requirements and Guiding Principles, n.d.).

The Minnesota Department of Education stated the purpose of the Q-Comp program is to improve student learning through recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers. The program is designed to encourage expert teachers to move into leadership roles to support teacher development and improve students' achievement. The Q-Comp program also provides compensation to motivate teachers to improve their knowledge and instructional practices (Minnesota Department of Education Q- Comp Requirements and Guiding Principles, n.d.).

To be a part of Q-Comp and receive money from the state, districts apply to the Minnesota Department of Education by using a Q-Comp program template and creating a Q-Comp plan that meets the Q-Comp requirements.  Districts whose plans are approved receive additional state aid.  Minnesota Department of Education Q-Comp website states,

> Approved school districts receive up to $260 per student ($169 per student in aid and $91 per student in board-approved levy) for the program. Charter schools and the Perpich Center for the Arts receive approximately $245 per student in state aid through an equalized levy, since these entities do not have authority to impose local tax levies. Intermediate, Education and Cooperative Districts receive $3,000 per teacher in state aid (n.d.).

To date, 105 school districts, 77 charter schools, one intermediate district, and one education district have been approved by the Minnesota Department of Education to implement a Q-Comp program.  Participating schools educate approximately half of the students in Minnesota public schools.  An additional 25 school districts, charter schools, and education districts are on a waitlist for Q-Comp funding as there is no available funding for additional districts to establish Q-Comp programs (Minnesota Department of Education Q-Comp, n.d.).

**Theoretical Considerations**

**Andragogy.** Andragogy is the art and science of teaching adult learners (Knowles, 1980). The core principles of andragogy state that adults are motivated and learn when the provided content meets immediate life and internal needs (Knowles et al., 2005).  When adults can collaborate and take ownership of the learning process, they will be motivated to implement new practices (Almuhammadi, 2017; Knowles et al.).  It is imperative to tailor the learning experiences to be more effective with adults (Holton et al., 2001).

Andragogy has six core principles that guide adult learning: learner's need to know, self-care concept of the learner, prior experience of the learner, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn (Knowles et al., 2005). Knowles designed the andragogical principles to address adult students' specific characteristics and learning needs (Queen, 2015). When instructors effectively apply andragogical principles to their learning environment, they tailor the learning to the learner and learning situation (Queen, 2015). Andragogical principles recognize that adults take responsibility for their learning. Because of this, they need a learning environment that recognizes the unique needs of an adult learner (Knowles et al., 2005). The principles help establish a supportive, cooperative, accepting, informal, and respectful environment for adults to learn (Queen, 2015).

The first core principle of andragogy establishes that adults need to understand why they need to learn something before they are prepared to learn it (Knowles et al., 2005). Adults need to understand the advantages of learning something and the unfavorable effects of not learning a new concept (Knowles et al., 2005). The educator's responsibility is to present the ideas in a meaningful way that gives value to the information and shows the learner the new information will improve the learners' performance and personal wellbeing (Knowles et al., 2005).

The second core principle of andragogy recognizes adults as responsible for their learning (Knowles et al., 2005). Adults are self-directed and make their own decisions (Matherson & Windle, 2017). Using andragogical principles as a guide, instructors of adult learners recognize their need for independence and provide learning experiences for adults to be self-directed learners (Knowles et al., 2005).

An adult instructor must also be mindful of the role of the learner's experiences, the third core principle of andragogy (Knowles et al., 2005). Adult learners come to the learning

experience with a wide variety of quantity and quality of experiences that they will draw upon while attempting to master the new concepts (Knowles et al., 2005). Educators of adults value and recognize the differences and individualize the teaching and learning strategies to meet the wide variety of learning needs (Knowles et al.). The most effective instruction is provided through active learning, such as discussions and problem-solving methods, where the adults share information from their personal experiences (Desimone et al., 2002; Desimone & Pak, 2017; Knight, 2006; Knowles et al., 2005). To identify the mental habits, biases, and presuppositions of adult learners, which could have a negative effect on learning, instructors help adults reflect on their tendencies and patterns to try and open their minds to new strategies (Knowles et al., 2005).

The fourth andragogical principle, readiness to learn, recognizes that adults learn when the information is necessary to help them succeed in their real-life situation (Knight, 2006; Knowles et al., 2005; Matherson & Windle, 2017). Eisenberg et al. (2017) stated, "Adults want their learning to be relevant to the work they are doing- goal-oriented and designed to meet their needs" (p. 6). Adults desire to learn what they can use in their current situations (Knowles, 1984). Instructors can stimulate readiness by highlighting a standard of work above and beyond the expected standard (Knowles et al., 2005).

Adult learning is life-centered, and this is recognized in the fifth principle of andragogy; orientation to learning. Adults are motivated to learn new knowledge when presented in real-life situations (Knight, 2006; Knowles et al., 2005). When adults are given information that will help them solve their problems, they are more in tune with the instruction (Knowles et al., 2005).

The sixth andragogical principle, motivation, recognizes the adults' external and internal pressures (Knowles et al., 2005). External factors are situations that are out of the individual's

control.  Examples of external learning barriers include physical and health conditions, changes in societal roles, major life events, and choice in participating in the training (Merriam, 2006). Internal factors are personal attitudes that an adult learner has while learning.  Dispositional barriers prevent learning when adults have negative attitudes about acquiring the new information because they do not see the purpose (Merriam, 2006).  Instructors mindful of this principle help adults identify and break down the barriers that hold them back from growing and developing (Knowles et al., 2005).

One approach to instructional coaching, the Educator-Centered Instructional Coaching Model (ECIC), is embedded in adult-learning theory (Eisenberg et al., 2017). This coaching model highlights four important areas of focus (Eisenberg et al., 2017):

- Applying evidence-based literacy practices

- Focusing on data collection and analysis

- Promoting non evaluative, confidential collaboration and reflection

- Supporting coaches through mentoring (p. x).

To be effective, coaches understand how adults learn and apply this knowledge as they collaborate with teachers.  To build relationships, instructional coaches must be skilled in asking questions to gain understanding.  They need to show that they are active learners and are open to different opinions and perspectives. Coaches must provide opportunities for teachers to be self-directed, collaboratively problem solve, establish their own learning goals, and allow for teachers to make mistakes as they make adjustments to their instructional practices (Eisenberg et al., 2017).

**Social Learning Theory.**  The social learning theory recognizes the importance of modeling, observing, and imitating others' actions, feelings, and reactions when acquiring new

knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors.  As people observe their surroundings, environmental influences play a significant role in learning and behavior development (Bandura, 1977). Environmental and cognitive factors influence how people choose to conduct themselves (McLeod, 2016).  As people watch others' conduct, they take time to process this information and decide to imitate the behavior or not (Bandura, 1977).

As instructional coaches strive to provide teachers with active learning experiences through modeling, coaches show best practice teaching and learning strategies that teachers potentially imitate.  When teachers express depth and reflection during a professional discussion, colleagues may be motivated to examine their teaching processes in greater detail (Williams, 2017).  As teachers receive external reinforcements, such as encouragement from an instructional coach or higher student achievement, this may drive the teachers to persevere and adjust their teaching practices.  Instructional coaches need to be mindful of the learning setting they provide while working with teachers.  If this setting is distracting, this may deter adults from focusing and digesting the new information (Williams, 2017).  The Social Learning Theory outlines important guidelines to engage adults in rich discussions and learning experiences that can encourage critical thinking and improved teaching and learning strategies.

**Chapter III: Methodology**

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school where students made significant academic gains to explicitly define an instructional coaching model that played a role in improving teacher pedagogy and increasing students' achievement.  In addition, this study aimed to outline how the Instructional Coaching Program is sustained.  This chapter explains the theoretical framework utilized to build and support the study, followed by a review of the research method chosen and an explanation for the selection. Descriptions of the research setting and participants are included.  This chapter also discusses the instrumentation used and how the data will be analyzed.  Finally, research limitations and ethical considerations are discussed.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study aimed to define an instructional coaching program that plays a role in improving teacher pedagogy and increasing students' achievement and explored initiatives that aid in the sustainability of the program. Teachers are adult learners, and andragogy identifies adults' unique learning needs (Knowles et al., 2005).  The Social Learning Theory indicates adults need opportunities to collaborate and take ownership of the learning process (Bandura, 1977).  Teachers with the option of choice and voice in the learning process will be motivated to implement new practices (Almuhammadi, 2017).

**Research Design**

A qualitative case study design guided the research of this study.  A qualitative approach helped explain the participants' lived experiences working with a successful coaching model and measures they took to sustain an effective Instructional Coaching Program at the secondary

school level.  Qualitative researchers employ inductive reasoning to build patterns and categories and organize the collected data into commonly observed themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).  Qualitative study data is gathered through interviews and observations to explore their study topic and draw conclusions from their findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patten & Newhart, 2018).  An inductive approach used during qualitative research generates an understanding of a phenomenon from the gathered materials (Roberts, 2010).

This qualitative study employed a single site case study approach.  Case study research allows researchers to concentrate on a single site and collect data in real-time and real-life scenarios.  This data may describe a particular phenomenon holistically (Patten & Newhart, 2018).  The case study approach allows for an in-depth examination of a single site, a single subject, a single occurrence, or a single collection of documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).  The information collected explains the authentic behavior of participants (Patten & Newhart, 2018).  This study focused on a secondary school where students made significant academic gains.  The single site case study allowed the researcher to gain more information about the practices, people, and environment with the aim to understand the participants' experiences.  Data was collected from a suburban school district through personal interviews with educational leaders and the procurement of related documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative research involves personal relationships as the researchers collect empirical data in the participants' natural environment as they conduct face to face interviews and observations with smaller numbers of people (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Orcher, 2014).  During qualitative research, the collected data describes situations, conversations, observations, and interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).  This study involved multiple methods of data collection.

Using various data sources allows the researcher to cross-check the collected information and leads to a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon.

**Research Questions**

To gain more knowledge about an Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school that made significant academic student gains and to understand the initiatives that aided in the sustainability of the program, two questions were addressed:

RQ1 What components of a secondary level instructional coaching program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement?

RQ2 How do educational leaders sustain an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

**Sampling Design**

The study employed a qualitative case study approach that allowed for an in-depth examination of a single site (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined a qualitative case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 39). A case study provides an opportunity to study a system in-depth and gain more understanding by studying the people, practices, and environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Setting.** This case study took place at Grandview district (pseudonym), a large school district outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Grandview High School's first academic year was 1978. The staff, comprised of 100 licensed teachers, at Grandview High School served a student population of 2,156 during the 2019-2020 academic year (Minnesota Report Card, n.d.).

Grandview district was selected as the site for this study because there has been a significant increase in student achievement in a small-time frame. In 2012, the Grandview

District School Board set a goal of achieving academic rankings in the top 15% in the state by 2016 (Newspaper Article A). The district started their Instructional Coaching Program in the 2014-2015 school year. By 2016 the Grandview district was recognized as one of the top 10% in the state (Newspaper Article B). The former superintendent of the district attributed the academic gains to aligning the curriculum with state standards and training teachers on highly effective teaching strategies that improve students' achievement (Newspaper Article B).

The test scores of Grandview district have increased when national test scores have plateaued or even decreased (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018). Students at Grandview district scored significantly higher on the state standardized tests between 2018 and 2019. Grandview High School climbed over 50 spots on the Minnesota State High School rankings, making it one of the top public high schools in the state ("Minnesota High School Rankings," 2019).

**Participant selection.** The researcher used purposive sampling and selected participants who had knowledge about the Instructional Coaching Program at Grandview High School and the initiatives that aided in the sustainability of the program. Researchers use purposive sampling when they know a population has experience in the area of study and is a good source of information (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Different from a random sample, purposive sampling requires that specific criteria be met when selecting participants (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Education leaders from Grandview district who had a direct administrative role and knowledge about the Instructional Coaching Program were invited to participate in the study. District Administrators were chosen to participate in the study because as the instructional leaders of the district, they have an in-depth understanding about the Instructional Coaching Program and because of the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty accessibility was not an option.

**Protocol**

This study employed semi-structured individual interviews and document collection. The semi-structured format provides the researcher with the flexibility to make adjustments to the questions while the discussion progresses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During a semi-structured interview, the researcher prompts a richer respondent narrative with probes that clarify what a participant is saying or encourage elaboration of a response to obtain more details. Probes are used with sensitivity, so the participants do not feel interrogated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In qualitative case studies, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument and can make adjustments as different themes emerge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The interview protocol was constructed based on the review of current research literature about instructional coaching, andragogy, and Social Learning Theory. Themes from the literature guided the design of questions that helped examine an Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school that made significant academic gains to identify this program's specific components and explore initiatives that aid in its sustainability.

The interview protocol was created based on the review of current literature about instructional coaching, andragogy, and Social Learning Theory. Six questions were written using andragogy as a guide. These questions were designed to see if teachers participating in the coaching program:

- Understood why they were learning something new
- Were responsible for their learning
- Were involved in active learning that drew on personal experience
- Were able to immediately apply new knowledge
- Learned in job-embedded situations,

- Were able to identify motivators and barriers to learning.

One question was written using the Social Learning Theory as a guide. The researcher wanted to see if modeling, observing, and imitating others' actions, feelings, and reactions when acquiring new knowledge was a part of the professional development opportunities provided through the Instructional Coaching Program. Defining a secondary school Instructional Coaching Program's specific characteristics that have played a role in improving teacher pedagogy and increasing students' achievement may help design professional development opportunities that meet adult learners' unique needs. Teachers will only grow as professionals when educational leaders recognize and meet adults' individual learning needs (Almuhammadi, 2017).

Qualitative research can start with broad statements and allow the observations and interviews to guide the study's course (Orcher, 2014). The following questions were used during the interviews to gain a better understanding of this specific school's Instructional Coaching Program:

Table 1

*Interview Questions and Their Relation to Research Objectives*

| Research Question | Literature Review | **Interview Question** |
|---|---|---|
| Opening | | Please tell me the positions you have held in your district and years in each role. |
| RQ1-What components of a secondary level instructional coaching program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? | Coaching practices that lead to high-quality instruction and significant academic gains. | The high school has made significant academic gains; some people would say it's due to the coaching program. What do you think? |

| | | What are the key roles or positions in your district's coaching program? Follow-up: Please explain the responsibilities of these positions. |
|---|---|---|
| RQ1-What components of a secondary level instructional coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? | Andragogy Principles<br><br>Need to know<br>Learner's self-concept<br>The role of the learners' experiences<br>Readiness to learn<br>Orientation<br>Motivation | If an administrator in another district wanted to replicate the success you've had with instructional coaching, what would you tell them?<br><br>Follow up: How do you determine what structures need to be in place for an effective coaching program?<br><br>Please explain how you know the areas teachers need more professional development?<br>Follow up: Are coaching goals building-wide or individual?<br><br>Do all teachers participate in your Instructional Coaching Program?<br><br>How frequently do teachers participate in coaching sessions for professional development?<br><br>Follow up: Do all teachers participate in the same number of sessions each year? |
| RQ1-What are the components of a secondary level instructional coaching Program that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement? | Social Learning Theory | Please explain how group discussion and reflection are a part of your Instructional Coaching Program. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| RQ2 How do educational leaders sustain an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement? | Instructional Coach Development<br><br>Ongoing Professional Development | How are instructional coaches trained?<br><br>How are consistent instructional practices maintained?<br><br>How do program leaders monitor and adjust to improve the coaching program continuously?<br>Follow up: What data do you use to measure program success? |
| RQ2 How do educational leaders sustain an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement? | Professional Development Funding | Do you view coaching as a worthy investment? |
| RQ2 How do educational leaders sustain an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement? | Leadership/Principal Support | What is the role of the principal in supporting the instructional coaching program?<br><br>How do coaches communicate coaching goals with principals? |
| Closing | | Is there any other information you would share with an administrator seeking to implement an instructional coaching program? |

  **Field tests.** The researcher, committee members, dissertation peer group, teachers, and

district leaders not involved in the study field-tested the interview questions to ensure the

questions were concise and straightforward. During the field test, dissertation peer group members stated there were too many questions. Teachers and district leaders not involved in the study found some of the wording of the questions to be confusing. The dissertation advisor suggested the questions needed to align closer with the principles of andragogy and the Social Learning Theory. The protocol was revised multiple times to address these shortcomings. The modified protocol contains fewer questions, the wording of the questions is more precise, and questions closely align to the principles of andragogy and the Social Learning Theory. Solicitation of multiple perspectives and the time investment in the reiterative process were founded in Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) contention that researchers must ask good questions to get useful data.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The superintendent of Grandview district approved the educational leaders' participation and review of documents as data collection sources (Appendix A). An email was sent to the district leaders, highlighting the overarching purpose of the study and inviting them to participate in the study (Appendix B). They had the opportunity to express interest in study participation through an email reply. In the initial invitation to participate and repeated in a follow-up email, the high-quality teaching and learning practices at Grandview district were recognized. Participants were informed that this study's results may help other secondary schools improve their practices and students' achievement.

After expressing interest in participating in the study, district leaders were asked for an optimal date and time to participate in the interview. An email invitation was sent to participants stating the date and time of the interview and Google Meet code. The informed consent form

was attached to the invitation email (Appendix C).  A confirmation email was sent to participants reviewing the date, time, and informed consent document.

At the beginning of each interview, the consent form was reviewed, and a brief explanation of the study was shared.  Participants acknowledged they signed the consent form before the researcher began to ask questions and record the interview.  After each interview, a reflection was written to identify common themes, attitudes, values, and patterns that emerged during the discussion.

In addition to personal interviews, a variety of documents were gathered.  To improve instruction and students' achievement, Grandview district has a committee of employees who writes district staff development goals that support the district's mission and vision.  Using these goals as a guide, individual building leadership teams personalize staff development opportunities for their buildings.  The Grandview website stated, "Individual site teams draft school improvement plans, write SMART goals and prepare building staff development action plans in a concerted effort to carry out the district's mission of graduating students who are self-directed learners, purposeful and effective thinkers, and responsible citizens" (Document 11). Documents such as the Grandview District Mission and Vision, Instructional Coaching Job Description and Coach Responsibilities, district Q-Comp plan, and 2019 test reports were collected.

**Discussion of the Sample and Document Collection**

In March and April 2021, four interviews were conducted at Grandview district (pseudonym) and 12 district documents were procured for analysis. All participants worked in the same district and to protect confidentiality, limited demographic information was collected. A summary of participant information is included in Table 2 and is sorted by the date the

interview was conducted.  Each interview lasted 45 minutes.  The interviews were recorded and transcribed using Rev.com transcription service.  A summary of collected district documents is included in Table 3.  Various data sources were used to allow the researcher to cross-check the collected information and led to a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon.

Table 2

*Data Collection Overview*

| Leadership Role | Gender | Number of Years at the District | Date of Interview |
|---|---|---|---|
| Instructional Coaching Team | M | 8 years | March 31, 2021 |
| Teaching and Learning Department | F | 16 years | March 31. 2021 |
| Administrator | M | 1 year | March 31, 2021 |
| Q-Comp Governing Board | M | 16 years | April 6, 2021 |

Table 3

*Document Analysis Overview*

| Document Number | Document Name | Document Purpose |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Q-Comp Advisor Job Description | Defines the position |
| 2 | Q-Comp Advisor Responsibilities | Explains what the Q-Comp advisor does each month |
| 3 | Q-Comp Instructional Coach Job Description | Defines the position |
| 4 | Q-Comp Coach Responsibilities | Explains what the Q-Comp coach does each month |
| 5 | Q-Comp Plan | Outlines the program and aligns district programming with MDE guidelines |

| 6 | Q-Comp MOU 2018-2019 | Establishes an agreement between the district and the union |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | Instructional Coach's High Cycle Observations Protocol | Outlines the action steps in the observation process |
| 8 | Evaluation Rubrics | Used to evaluate all staff and establish personal goals |
| 9 | Spring Survey 2020: All Responses | Staff shares feedback about the Q-Comp program |
| 10 | Grandview's World's Best Workforce Plan (WBWP) 2017-2018 | Outlines a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan to support and improve teaching and learning within the district |
| 11 | Grandview Staff Development, Vision, and Strategic Direction | Explains the purpose of the district staff development, vision, and strategic direction. |
| 12 | Website- https://www.thinkingcollaborative.com/about | Provides more information about the training (cognitive coaching and Adaptive Schools) Grandview uses to prepare district leaders |
| 13 | District Assessment Results-2019 | Summarizes the district test results |

**Data Analysis**

The data from the interviews and collected documents were compiled in a case study record to organize and manage the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each research step was documented in a journal. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using the professional transcription service, Rev.com. The researcher read through transcripts while listening to the participants' original recordings to confirm the transcription's accuracy. Confidential

information, such as names, were removed from the transcripts, and copies of the transcripts were sent to participants to verify accuracy.

After receiving verification of the accuracy of the transcripts from the participants, the transcripts were read three times to gain an overall sense of the data. Next, a reading of the transcript included identifying meaning units, sentences, or phrases related to the research questions. The researcher repeated this process and wrote thoughts and notes in the margin.

A list of possible codes was created per research question that represented meaning units. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) referred to this process as naming the different categories. Codes were documented with key words in a code journal.

To identify common themes and patterns, code frequency was reviewed. Codes that appeared minimally in the transcripts and documents were noted. Codes that crossed over or seemed to overlap were combined. Through this process, themes emerged, and a detailed definition of each theme was developed. Each step of the analysis was reviewed by a qualitative methodologist.

The code journal and two interview transcripts were shared with an outside coder to strengthen the coding process's reliability. Inter-rater reliability meetings were held to determine the percent consistent coding between the outside coder and the original coding. Inconsistent coding was discussed with outcomes that included agreeing to disagree, changes made to the code journal to make it more accurate, and changes made to the coded transcript. The researcher aimed to reach 80% coding consistency. A summary of this process was documented.

The researcher and outside coder reached 82.7% coding consistency on the first transcript. The researcher had a narrower definition of collaboration, by identifying formal meeting times as collaboration. Whereas the outside coder identified more instances that

collaboration was mentioned in the interview during informal conversations, which was noted as being very important with working relationships.  The outside coder helped the researcher see more collaboration situations emerge from the transcript and changes were made to the code journal and coded transcript.  The outside coder also felt there should be an added code that identified when the participant talked about measures taken to sustain the program.  This was an area the researcher and outside coder agreed to disagree.  The researcher and outside coder reached 85.2 % coding consistency on the second transcript. The outside coder suggested the "goals" and "vision" codes be combined. This adjustment was made to make the code journal more accurate.  The outside coder suggested a code "job-embedded" be used in place of "structures" to be more transparent. The outside coder suggested "shared folders" be a code that identified program organization. These were areas the researcher and outside coder agreed to disagree.

This single-site case study aimed to expand the understanding of a secondary school Instructional Coaching Program's characteristics by triangulating participant interviews and document analysis.  Permission to review district documents about the Instructional Coaching Program was requested.  A list of reviewed documents can be found in Table 3.  Documents were examined to identify themes, relationships, and patterns related to the research questions and interview responses.  Triangulation is used in research to ensure the findings are credible and valid.  The researcher triangulated the results to report consistent and reliable data that reflected the educational leaders' reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness**

Qualitative studies need to communicate the specific procedures completed that ensure accuracy and credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).  The study was conducted with integrity.

Each interview began by clearly defining the purpose of the research and used self-disclosures to build rapport and trust with the participants (Orcher, 2104).  Furthermore, the accuracy of the findings was verified by triangulating data collected through the interviews and school documents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).  The measures produced a credible and trustworthy study that attempts to share new knowledge in the field of instructional coaching (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Awareness of researcher bias.** The researcher reflected on personal background and experiences to identify ways these biases and values could shape the study's direction and data interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).  Throughout the data gathering and analysis, the researcher focused on interpreting the meaning the participants gave to gain more knowledge about an Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school that made significant academic student gains and to understand the initiatives that aid in the program's sustainability. Participation in a bracketing interview documented preconceptions and biases (Appendix E). This information helped the researcher consciously set aside personal beliefs about instructional coaching practices to authentically interpret the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).  In this qualitative study, the researcher objectively reviewed the interview transcripts and collected documents, so as to limit the prejudices and attitudes that might bias the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The researcher has experience with instructional coaching.  The researcher believes instructional coaching is effective and advocates on behalf of this professional development. Because of a professional connection, participants may feel free to share their lived experiences at a deeper level.  Regardless of challenges, beliefs, or practices the participants shared, it was important that the researcher not share personal experience that could alter the participants'

answers. The researcher maintained neutrality throughout the interview and interpretation of the data.

**Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

This research aimed to gain more knowledge about an Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school that made significant academic student gains and to understand the initiatives that aid in the sustainability of the program in a single site case study. The qualitative study was conducted in a single district in a western suburb in Minnesota, so this study's results may or may not be transferred to other school settings. The goal of qualitative research is not to generalize findings but to provide an understanding of a phenomenon at a specific site (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Limitations.** One limitation of this study was that a limited number of education leaders participated in the interviews. A more thorough investigation would have involved the perspectives of instructional coaches, teachers, and students. These key stakeholders in the teaching and learning process would have provided more depth to the findings. In addition, consumers of the research findings are limited to school leaders.

A second limitation of this study was the people that were selected to participate in the interviews were not a random sample. The pandemic provided limited access to participants. A more thorough study would have examined the perspectives of multiple leaders in education.

Another limitation of this study was the inability to visit the site in-person to conduct observation and face-to-face interviews. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty accessibility was not an option. A researcher who can physically see the teacher-coach, teacher-teacher, teacher-student, and building principal-coach relationships would have the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the coaching program.

**Delimitations.** A delimitation of this study was the setting. Grandview district is located in an affluent community in a western suburb of Minneapolis. The location was chosen as a suitable site because students have made significant academic gains on standardized test scores over the past nine years. Data collected from a district in a different location may present distinct findings.

Another delimitation of this study was the narrow focus of gaining more knowledge about an Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school that made significant academic student gains and to understand the initiatives that aided in the sustainability of the program. Many factors within an educational system contribute to high students' achievements, such as curriculum development, administration leadership, mission and vision of the school, parent and community involvement, and other professional development. A more robust study would have examined many factors to explain the academic excellence found at Grandview district.

**Assumptions.** Students' achievements are influenced by many factors such as school leadership, standards and curriculum alignment, and schools' infrastructure (Reichardt, 2001). A robust instructional coaching program may be one contributing factor to high student achievement. There are other factors that one needs to consider when educating students.

It is assumed participants will answer the questions honestly. Measures were taken to protect the participants' identity, and they interviewed in their natural setting. These steps provided a platform to maximize truthfulness in their responses.

## Ethical Considerations

Researchers must conduct their study in a way that produces valid and reliable information and closely follows ethical guidelines (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ethical

considerations were held in the highest regard to protect the participants from any harm and to maintain the study's integrity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Protecting human participants.** When conducting a study, it is of utmost importance to protect the people participating in the study. The *Belmont Report* described three concepts of ethical research: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The participants in this study had the right to think, act, and answer the questions independently while participating in the interview. The principle of beneficence was held in constant view as the study was designed and prepared. This study aimed to do no harm and maximize benefits (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Under the justice principle, study participants had the right to be treated equally; any benefits resulting from the study were shared equitably (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

Before conducting research in the field, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Bethel University approved the study. As part of the approval process, the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program in ethics was completed. The participating district's Superintendent gave permission to interview education leaders and collect documents (Appendix A). Furthermore, the participants signed a consent form. The form defined the participants' rights and assured confidentiality as pseudonyms were used, and personal information was removed from the transcripts. All electronic transcripts were stored on a password-protected laptop, and a backup copy of the transcripts were saved on a flash drive that was stored in a locked file.

## Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school where students made significant academic gains to define an instructional coaching model that played a role in improving teacher pedagogy and increasing students' achievement as well as explore initiatives that aided in the sustainability of the program. District level and school level leaders who had knowledge of the district's Instructional Coaching Program participated in the interviews. This chapter includes a rich description of the sample. The research questions and themes that emerged from interviews are articulated in great detail. The intersectionality of the interviews and document analysis are described. The depth of the alignment in the instructional coaching model within the district resulted in interconnectedness between themes. Finally, a summary of the findings is presented.

### Research Questions

To understand an Instructional Coaching Program that educational leaders attributed to improved teacher pedagogy and increased students' achievement as well as the initiatives that aided in the sustainability of the program, this study explored two research questions:

RQ1 What components of a secondary level instructional coaching program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement?

RQ2 How do educational leaders sustain an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases students' achievement?

### Introduction to the Themes

A careful analysis of the interview transcripts and documents identified three themes that explained the components of an Instructional Coaching Program educational leaders attributed to

improved teacher pedagogy. Another three themes emerged to describe how educational leaders

sustained an Instructional Coaching Program that improved teacher pedagogy and increased

students' achievements.

Table 4

*Research Questions and Their Relation to Discovered Themes*

| Research Question | Themes |
|---|---|
| **RQ1-** What components of a secondary level instructional coaching program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? | Theme 1- Vision and Goals Provide Purpose and Effective Measures for the Instructional Coaching Program |
| | Theme 2- System Guidelines and Roles are Clearly Defined in an Effective Instructional Coaching Program |
| | Theme 3- Multiple Support Systems are Integrated into the Instructional Coaching Program |
| RQ2- How do educational leaders sustain an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement? | Theme 1- Continuous Collaboration and Communication Maintain an Instructional Coaching Program |
| | Theme 2- Effective Instructional Coaching Programs Require Ongoing Financial Investment |
| | Theme 3- Success Keeps the Instructional Coaching Program Moving Forward |

**Components of an Effective Instructional Coaching Program**

What are the components of a secondary level instructional coaching program that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement? The components that leaders in education mentioned as important aspects of an effective instructional coaching program

included vision and goals, system guidelines and clearly defined roles, and multiple support systems.

**Theme 1- vision and goals provide purpose and effective measures for the instructional coaching program.** This theme consisted of the vision and goals codes which can be more clearly defined by stating the vision was the narrative, and the goals were the measures that showed the accomplishment of the vision. Three out of four participants discussed vision as an essential component of an instructional coaching program, and all four participants mentioned goals as an essential aspect of the program.

*Vision.* The district has a three to five-year strategic plan that guides their decision-making processes. Through a collaborative approach and careful analysis of district functions, a committee identifies three or four initiatives that drive the strategic plan. One participant stated,

> First of all, I think you as a district have to have a vision of where you're going, a strategic plan, a district improvement plan, something like that. You have to have that vision and make sure that as you're steering that ship, that you're taking all programming, all components along with you, and that they know what the vision is. I think that's the core foundation.

When asked about the significant academic gains shown by students at Grandview High School, one leader stated, "I think it has to do with the vision, it has to do with constant goals being in front of staff." Another participant acknowledged, "We're very intentional to think big picture."

*Goals.* Goals were identified as helping the district work together for a common purpose. The instructional coaching team uses the big picture ideas and narrows them down to help write building goals, PLC goals, and individual teacher goals that help teachers and administrators

continuously make improvements.  The building goals are created each spring for the following school year, and teachers write personal goals by October.  Instructional coaches provide consistent reminders of the goals and collaboratively work with teachers to achieve the goals. One participant summarized the goal-setting process by saying,

> The building goal already has been determined, that's from the previous year.  We always have that right away in the fall, so we know.  But then each team or each grade level, each department has to come up with their goal and communicate with the coach.

Another participant shared the same information by stating,

We have three goals through Q-Comp. There's the individual growth goal, we have PLC goals, and then we have our site goals. Actually, we have four because we also have district goals as well. So there are some different levels of goals.

**Theme 2- system guidelines and roles are clearly defined in an effective instructional coaching program.** This theme consisted of multiple codes. First, the program guidelines code identified the rules in place to guide the Instructional Coaching Program. The key roles or positions in the Coaching Program and terms of these positions code identified the essential positions needed to run an effective coaching program. Finally, the structures code identified the program systems required to build an effective coaching program. All participants shared responses that aligned to each code.

*Program guidelines.*  Grandview district is a Quality Compensation (Q-Comp) district. The Minnesota Department of Education established specific guidelines schools need to adhere to when participating in the Q-Comp program; however, they allow for districts to personalize plans to meet their specific teaching and learning needs. Grandview meets the requirements of the four Q-Comp components of Career Ladder/Advancement Options, Job-Embedded

Professional Development, Teacher Evaluation, and Performance Pay and Alternative Salary Schedule through their Instructional Coaching Program.  A participant stated, "We got together just to essentially take all the requirements and recommendations from MDE and essentially create the [Grandview] Q-Comp plan.  We followed all the criteria MDE has given us to continue that work."  Grandview Q-Comp plan states, "The career ladder provides two career advancement opportunities for teachers- Q-Comp advisor and instructional coach" (Document 5).

Per the Grandview Q-Comp plan, all certified teachers participate in a pre-observation conference, classroom observation, and post-observation conference with an instructional coach as job-embedded training.  Self-analysis and reflection are components of the evaluation/observation cycle. The observations are conducted three times a year using an objective performance evaluation rubric. Teachers also participate in weekly 50- minute PLC Meetings.  The Grandview Q-Comp plan requires individual teachers to write goals and work with instructional coaches to improve their teaching and learning practices and accomplish the goals. Through Q-Comp, teachers may earn performance pay for meeting school-wide student achievement goals, for showing progress towards the student learning goals and PLC engagement, and by showing progress towards an Individual Growth and Development Plan.

***Key roles and positions.*** Participants consistently mentioned three key roles and positions that need to be established for an instructional coaching program to be effective. All three positions are filled with certified staff from the district.

The first key position is the advisor of the program.  In the Grandview district, this person serves a five-year term. The advisor role includes the following duties:

- Facilitates instructional coach PLC meetings

- Assists with teacher observations

- Aids in the hiring of instructional coaches

- Collaborates with the administrators to select PLC facilitators

- Monitors budgetary expenses

- Coordinates the Q-Comp plan to ensure compliance

- Organizes and keeps records of completed Q-Comp tasks

- Analyzes data and focuses on best practices

- Prepares district and state reports

- Conducts a yearly program review and submits any needed plan changes

- Works with others to develop assessment tools to measure the impact of Q-Comp on teacher practice and student achievement

- Organizes teacher training for all teachers that supports the Q-Comp plan while supporting ongoing district staff development agenda

- Communicates with the district, teachers' union, and MDE

- Provides leadership in developing job-embedded teacher professional development as outlined in the Q-Comp plan.

One participant explained, "For instructional coaching, the [advisor] is our connection to teaching and learning and the district improvement plan, and then ensuring that he's working with his instructional coaches towards those same goals." Another leader shared, "The advisor oversees everything for Q-Comp, and he or she is in charge of meeting with the budget coordinators, meeting with the admin teams for each building, they're in charge of meeting with our Teaching and Learning Department. So, he or she, the Q-Comp advisor, has a lot of hats that they need to wear because then he or she also has to use that information with their coaches."

Another key position is the instructional coach.  These teachers on special assignments serve a three-year term and are guaranteed their position in their classroom after completing their term.  An instructional coach is assigned to a building and works with 56 to 58 staff members.  Some buildings have two coaches, depending on staff numbers.  An instructional coach conducts three observations per low cycle teacher per year at their home site,  conferences with teachers, PLC facilitators, and administrators, provides substantial feedback to teachers about the program, provides ongoing training at their home site, serves as a member of the staff development team at their home site, maintains records of observations, maintains ongoing contact with the Q-Comp advisor, acts as a resource for professional development activities for all staff that would improve the observation and evaluation process. One leader stated, "The coaches are key if we value what our teachers are doing in the classroom and if we value what's being put in front of our kids."  The Grandview Q-Comp plan stated, "Instructional coaches represent a critical component of an ongoing support system for teacher improvement" (Document 5).

Participants mentioned a governing board as a necessary component of the Instructional Coaching Program. The governing board is comprised of administrators, the advisor, superintendent, and teacher representatives. Teacher participants on the Q-Comp governing board serve a three-year term.  The governing board meets five times a year and oversees the Q-Comp plan.  They carry out an important role in hiring the advisor and instructional coaches. The governing board gives the final approval of site goals, sets parameters for and gives final approval of coach placements, approves the use of site goal money, participates in program review, and approves Q-Comp plan changes.  When asked what key roles guide the coaching program, one respondent commented, "You have the Q-Comp governance board who is then ensuring what the purpose is and the procedures and all of those things."

The Teaching and Learning Department, Staff Development Teams, and building administrators were noted as important groups that support the Instructional Coaching Program. When talking about the relationship between the Teaching and Learning Department and instructional coaches, one participant articulated, "We work very closely just because we have recognized the similarity and the support that we offer staff and how we view professional growth across the district." Another leader commented, "The role of the principal is just to support the instructional coaches within their building to allow them to be with the teachers and help them improve their practice." Instructional coaches are a part of their individual building's staff development teams. A member of the instructional coaching team explained, "The coaches and I, we're all part of our own individual building's staff development teams too, which work closely with the Teaching and Learning Department."

*Structures.* A variety of program structures, guardrails to support the program, were identified as important components of the Instructional Coaching Program. One participant articulated, "You need to have built-in parameters that allow staff to grow and be challenged." Being intentional about the structures that are in place to support an instructional coaching program makes it effective, and teacher improvement becomes second nature for everyone. A leader observed,

> If we don't have the structures there, things end up falling short because even though it sounds great or it looks good on paper or sounds great in a dialogue with someone, it falls short because the day-to-day pressure in the different roles that we have is so great. And so, you need to have dedicated time, dedicated jobs, dedicated space to really work towards having a system that is sustainable. It has to be sustainable.

When discussing the structures in place that support the instructional coaching program, all participants mentioned the Q-Comp plan. This document clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities, terms, hiring process, and rate of pay of the leaders in the program. It establishes guidelines for the evaluation process and defines other job-embedded professional development opportunities and trainings that are in place to make the Instruction Coaches successful. The Q-Comp plan lays out a teacher growth plan that utilizes instructional coaches to ensure teacher instruction improves. The plan also establishes the guidelines for the performance pay teachers and instructional coaches earn when they achieve site and personal goals.

Frequent meetings were noted as a structure that enables the instructional coaching program to maintain its integrity. Meeting times are scheduled and communicated in advance for the entire school year. One participant explained, "Part of it comes down to scheduling to be totally honest. Just ensuring that there's consistency across where PLC's are scheduled and how that's laid out, so there's some consistency for teachers throughout the school year." The instructional coaching team meets every Friday to reflect, collaborate, and review resources to deepen their understanding of best-practice strategies. Instructional coaches frequently meet with PLC facilitators to provide updates and gain insight into areas teachers need more support. PLCs meet once a week to look at forms of assessment, examine data, and discuss strategies to ensure students' needs are met. Instructional coaches meet once a month with building administrators to collaborate, plan, and discuss ways to support teachers. The advisor and Teaching and Learning Department meet once a week to collaborate and align teacher supports.

Instructional coaches are intentionally placed in specific buildings to meet the needs of those teachers. The Q-Comp advisor, administrators, and governing board work together to strategically place Instructional coaches in the right building. The governing board sets the

parameters for coach placements and gives the final approval of the placements.  To provide more consistency, teachers work with the same instructional coach all year round. Each instructional coach has a permanent office in their assigned building which allows teachers and administrators to connect with this person on a regular basis.

The observation cycle was another structure noted by all four participants. Instructional coaches meet three times a year with individual teachers, once per trimester.  Instructional coaches and teachers complete a pre-observation meeting, an observation, and a post-observation meeting where they reflect on the lesson and discuss teacher goals.  The teacher and instructional coach use an evaluation rubric to focus their reflection time.  Teachers choose a component from the rubric that they want to focus on.  The rubric outlines four domains: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professionalism. The observation cycle provides ongoing professional support for all teachers. Through the observations and discussions, teachers provide evidence that shows they are making gains towards the established goals.

**Theme 3- multiple support systems are integrated into the Instructional Coaching Program**. The support code was utilized when respondents mentioned ways the coaching program provided support for teachers to improve their practices continuously.  All four participants commented on ways the Instructional Coaching Program provided multiple levels of support for teachers.

***Support.***  The Instructional Coaching Program was designed to support individual teacher improvement in instructional strategies and promotes student achievement gains district-wide.  A participant commented,

The coaching that we try to provide for teachers is really to be responsive to what specific needs that each individual has. Individualized coaching is what we try to offer. So it's thinking about what issues are on the table for each individual teacher in the district and how can we as a team, or we as individual coaches, how can we support that professional growth?

Significant time and effort are invested in supporting teachers' professional growth in various ways such as listening, modeling, observing, collecting data, recording videos of teaching, providing feedback, and participating in professional reflections that help fill the teaching and learning gaps. An instructional coach has a non-evaluative role. The Coach goes into teachers' classrooms to observe, provides opportunities for vulnerable and honest conversations about concerns, and then helps identify instructional growth and establish professional goals with the teachers. Teachers individualize the support they need by selecting an area of the teacher evaluation rubric they want to focus on. When coaches work with teachers, they communicate to teachers,

As you're filling out your post form, be as vulnerable as you want, share your thoughts. This is just between you and me. So, whatever you share on there, it's just so I can figure out what needs you might have and how I can best support you.

In addition to the three observations each year, teachers have the opportunity to reach out to instructional coaches to ask for additional support. A respondent shared,

We do one observation per trimester, so three per year, but then just like anything, we can always go to our instructional coach for guidance and other things that we feel necessary if it's a spot open in his or her schedule and we have something that we want to bring up, they're always willing to help us out.

Additional support comes through the collaboration of the Teaching and Learning Department, Q-Comp advisor, instructional coaches, and the building principals to ensure teachers are getting the support and guidance they need to improve their practices. A leader noted, "Teachers want to feel that support. They don't want to feel like they're off on an island."

**Sustaining an Effective Instructional Coaching Program**

How do educational leaders sustain an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement? Leaders in education identified continuous collaboration and communication, ongoing financial investment, and program success as important factors that sustain an instructional coaching program.

**Theme 1- continuous collaboration and communication maintain an instructional coaching program.** A review of participants' interviews and documents identified a theme of continuous collaboration and communication to maintain an instructional coaching program. The collaboration and communication code was used to identify when participants explained ways communication was used to keep the system in place as well as when respondents described how educational leaders worked together to make program adjustments to provide continued support. Four education leaders mentioned situations that aligned with this code.

*Collaboration and communication.* The Grandview Q-Comp plan stated,

Within the low-cycle years, the instructional coach will complete one observation per trimester. Each member must identify an instructional method that they will demonstrate during the observation. This method of teacher observation will help improve instructional methods, and it will also help build a culture of collaboration.

Collaboration between instructional coaches and different departments in the district allows the coaching team to understand a broader spectrum of what is happening across the district.

The instructional coaching team meets once a week to collaborate as a group. One participant mentioned, "When we come together every week we share, what are you noticing? What common themes are happening? What conversations are you having with your teachers, your staff, and your administrators?" During these meetings, the instructional coaching team collaborates to figure out what they can do to fill the gaps and offer extra support for the teachers where it is most needed.

The Grandview Q-Comp advisor attends a monthly meeting with a cohort of other advisors. A participant shared, "I think it's extremely important to share information and to collaborate even across to other districts as well." These monthly meetings provide the opportunity for advisors to see what is happening in other districts, what changes they have made to their instructional coaching programs, to understand the conversations the advisors are having with the governing boards and share resources.

Instructional coaches consistently collaborate and communicate with building administrators; they work as a team to improve the teachers' practices. Principals and Coaches hold a formal meeting each week and informally engage in conversations daily to understand teacher needs and provide the best structure and supports for the staff they work with. Engaging in discussions and collaborating builds trust between the administrators and instructional coaches. When asked about instructional coaches and building principals collaborating, a leader shared,

There have been multiple times this year when that person [instructional coach] said, 'Well, I like where you're going. Have you thought about doing this?' or 'This is in line with what we've been doing. This is something that we've been working on with our PLCs. So maybe you want to take this angle with it.' And so, they're really a proactive part of the approach to things and coming up with solutions to solve problems.

The instructional coaching team works closely with the staff development teams, PLC facilitators, and PLCs establish synergy across the district. This collaboration has helped the instructional coaches identify specific needs and ways to address them and aided in the Instructional Coaching Program becoming more robust. A leader stated, "We're all professionals, and yes, we're all here to work hard. We all want what's best for students, but we can't do it on our own."

District-wide collaboration and communication between the Teaching and Learning Department, Q-Comp advisor, administration team, and instructional coaches help the district leaders know where teachers need more professional development. Communication allows for cross-collaboration between departments, align the initiatives, and work together toward the strategic plan. Consistent collaboration and communication between governing bodies ensure teachers are provided the support and guidance they need.

**Theme 2- instructional coaching programs require ongoing financial investment.** Participants and documents consistently acknowledged that an effective instructional coaching program has a financial aspect that helped sustain the program. The funding code was used when respondents mentioned how teachers were compensated for their work with the instructional coaching program and how the district received the funds. Four participants noted funding as an important component to sustain an instructional coaching program.

*Funding.* Districts in the state of Minnesota participating in the Q-Comp program receive compensation from the state. Integral to the district Q-Com program, the Grandview Instructional Coaching Program is funded through the state. When referring to the funding of the Grandview Q-Comp program, one respondent stated, "We are all (funded through) Q-Comp." The Grandview Q-Comp plan pays the salaries of the Q-Comp advisor and instructional coaches. When referring to the writing of the Q-Comp plan, one participant stated, "They took a look at different programming models and decided that we wanted to have put the vast majority of our Q-Comp funds, because it was the funding that came with it, into the salaries of the instructional coaches."

In the Q-Comp plan, three areas are identified for performance pay: School-wide student achievement, PLC student achievement goal and PLC engagement, and Grandview assessment Standards and Individual Growth and Development Plan. If the schoolwide student achievement goal is met, five percent of the possible performance pay is earned by each teacher. When building goals are not met, some of the money is placed in the staff development fund and can be used the following school year. The Q-Comp plan stated, "If a school does not meet its site goal, $100 per teacher for site goals will be allocated to the building's staff development budget for the following school year" (Document 5). Teachers earn 30% of the possible performance pay if attended 80% of the PLC meetings and have shown adequate progress on individual student achievement goals. 65% of possible performance pay is earned by teachers through the evaluation/observation process and Individual Growth and Development processes. The governing board approves the use of site goal money.

**Theme 3- success keeps the instructional coaching program moving forward.** The Professional Growth code was used when respondents talked about evidence of improved teacher

pedagogy and satisfaction in the program.  Three out of four leaders shared responses that aligned with this code.  A second code for this theme was program reflection.  Three out of four respondents talked about reflecting on the Instructional Coaching Program and adjusting to sustain and improve the program.  Finally, the coach training code described the training used to run the Instructional Coaching Program. All four participants mentioned training as an important component of sustaining an instructional coaching program.

   ***Professional growth.*** The Instructional Coaching Program structures ensure that teachers continue to grow professionally. The teacher observation process is designed to improve the teaching and learning process and enhance professional growth among teachers. As part of the evaluation process, teachers select a component from the evaluation rubric most important to them and focus their attention on improving in that area. The instructional coaches provide job-embedded support for teachers to meet their professional needs and improve instructional practices in their goal area.  During a post-observation discussion, teachers share evidence of things they have done in their classrooms to work towards their goals, and instructional coaches share observations about teacher improvement. When effective coaching is provided, teachers improve their practices, and students get the best support from their teachers.  One participant commented,

>   I do think we have a very strong staff, especially just having worked in multiple buildings
>
>   across the district. But I also do think that the coaching roles that we've taken on through
>
>   Q-Comp are hopefully part of that growth as well.

   Teachers demonstrate professional growth through improvement on standardized assessments, the accomplishment of the SMART goals (results will be stated in measurable terms of academic achievement and show adequate progress) and completion of three successful

classroom-based observations annually and observable, documentable evidence of successful

implementation of the Individual Growth and Development Plan. When asked about the

compensation pay, a leader articulated, "But this work is not about the money.  The money is a

component of it. It's a compensatory bonus. But it's about professional growth."

*Program reflection.* Program reflection keeps the Instructional Coaching Program

moving forward.  The program has undergone adjustments since it in the 2014-2015 school year.

Each year in May, the advisor sends out a year-end Q-Comp survey to all certified staff to collect

program feedback.  The survey asks big-picture questions about the program and PLCs.  It will

also ask specific questions about individual coaches and the support that they provided, and what

other support teachers might want from them.  This information is shared with the coaches so

they can reflect on their practices.  Referring to the survey data, one participant shared, "We use

a lot of that to try to help gear what decisions we want to make for the following year.  How we

want to support PLC facilitators, PLCs, and teachers."

The instructional coaching team also reflects on their program as they collaborate with

the cohort of instructional coaching teams from other districts.  As the advisors and instructional

coaches from different districts share, new ways to run the program emerge.  Each year the

instructional coaching team uses information from the survey and their cohort meetings to make

program adjustment suggestions and submits Q-Comp change requests to the governing board.

*Coach training.* Grandview instructional coaches engage in multiple training

opportunities which help sustain the program.  The training sessions are thoughtfully planned to

set the coaches up for success. Three times a year, the coaches and advisor attend a training

summit that all cohort instructional coaches attend.  One participant mentioned, "The group of us

hold a summit three times a year as well. A fall, winter, and spring summit where we bring all of

our coaching staff together. We offer professional development that we all put together and just do a lot of interconnectedness."

All first-year coaches attend a cognitive coaching eight-day foundation seminar conducted throughout the academic year by training associates. This training brings consistency to the Instructional Coaching Program. Having a common foundational conceptual training makes the program successful. When explaining the cognitive coaching seminar, a member of the instructional coaching team stated, "It's a really great training, and it's really comprehensive, I would say. We use that as really just the baseline of all training." The second and third-year coaches attend two-day training sessions for ongoing skill development. The focus for these trainings, conducted by an outside provider, alter every other year. When summarizing the two-day training, a participant noted, "Those are really great. Those are just added trainings that try to help with extra support. It's extra skills, kind of like tools to add to your tool belt, essentially. They're really great just for presentation, for questioning, utilizing data, that sort of thing as well."

Another noted essential training was time dedicated to inter-rater reliability and the teacher evaluation process. The Grandview Q-Comp plan states,

> The goal of the Grandview Teacher Evaluation system is to articulate expectations, assess performance, and provide support for the development of high performing teachers capable of delivering outstanding education that improves the quality of teaching and learning. Instruction will be improved through self-assessment and reflection, individual and PLC goal setting, and peer observation conducted by instructional coaches.

During the inter-rater reliability training, members of the Teaching and Learning Department, administrators, and the instructional coaching team observe teachers as a group and

score the lessons using the evaluation rubric. To create a common understanding of the scoring of teachers, the ratings of the rubrics are discussed as a group. A participant explained the process,

> The administration team and instructional coaching team will go to a building, and we'll meet and talk, and then we will have arranged for three or four teachers to take a group of about 8 to twelve people in the room and they stand in the back, and they do an observation. Then they come back into their group, and they talk through that observation and talk through how they evaluated and the questions they had and that type of stuff. So to develop that common thought process of inter-rater reliability.

The instructional coaching team continuously works together to improve their practices. Instructional coaches and the Q-Comp advisor meet weekly in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to answer questions, engage in rich conversations, troubleshoot, receive feedback, and review resources to deepen their understanding. This group also shares a Google Drive with additional resources and spends time reviewing these resources during the PLC time. Some of the training is job-embedded as first year coaches do a lot of shadowing of experienced coaches to understand and practice the observation process, ask questions, and receive feedback. Instructional coaches and the Q-Comp advisor observe each other. The Q-Comp plan stated, "Instructional coaches will be provided extensive training on the observation and peer coaching process. Following the training, instructional coaches will be provided the opportunity to co-observe teachers and collaborate on their observations and findings" (Document 5).

**Minnesota Department of Education Quality Compensation (Q-Comp).** All four of the participants mentioned the Q-Comp plan was used to guide the implementation of the

Instructional Coaching Program. Table 5 illustrates how the Q-Comp components align with the research questions and discovered themes.

**Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine the Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school where students made significant academic gains to explicitly define an instructional coaching model that played a role in improving teacher pedagogy and increasing students' achievement. In addition, this study aimed to outline how the Instructional Coaching Program is sustained. Education leaders from a large suburban district in Minnesota participated in interviews and documents were reviewed.

Data from the research identified important components of an instructional coaching program that improves teacher pedagogy and increases students' achievements. For a coaching program to have influence there must be a clear vision and established goals. It was discovered a Q-Comp plan was influential in outlining program goals, defining key roles and positions, and outlining structures to build and sustain the program. To improve teacher pedagogy and students' achievements, job-embedded support was provided by instructional coaches. Participants and documents identified collaboration, funding, professional growth, program reflection, and training as ways to sustain an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and students' achievement.

Table 5

*Minnesota Quality Compensation Components Aligned with Discovered Themes*

| Minnesota Department of Education Quality Compensation | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Component 1: Career Ladder/Advancement Options | Component 2: Job-embedded Professional Development | Component 3: Teacher Observation and Growth Plan | Component 4: Performance Pay |
| RQ1- Theme 2- System Guidelines and Roles are Clearly Defined in an Effective Instructional Coaching Program | RQ1- Theme 1- Vision and Goals Provide Purpose and Effective Measures for the Instructional Coaching Program | RQ1- Theme 2- System Guidelines and Roles are Clearly Defined in an Effective Instructional Coaching Program | RQ1- Theme 1- Vision and Goals Provide Purpose and Effective Measures for the Instructional Coaching Program |
| RQ1- Theme 3- Multiple Support Systems are Integrated into the Instructional Coaching Program | RQ1- Theme 3- Multiple Support Systems are Integrated into the Instructional Coaching Program | RQ2- Theme 1- Continuous Collaboration and Communication Maintain an Instructional Coaching Program | RQ2- Theme 2- Effective Instructional Coaching Programs Require Ongoing Financial Investment |
| | RQ2- Theme 1- Continuous Collaboration and Communication Maintain an Instructional Coaching Program | RQ2- Theme 3- Success Keeps the Instructional Coaching Program Moving Forward | RQ2- Theme 3- Success Keeps the Instructional Coaching Program Moving Forward |

## Chapter V: Discussion

### Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the Instructional Coaching Program of a secondary school where students made significant academic gains to define an instructional coaching model that played a role in improving teacher pedagogy and increasing students' achievement, as well as explore initiatives that aided in the sustainability of the program.

Four interviews were conducted and various district documents were analyzed to gain more information about the Instructional Coaching Program of a large suburban district in Minnesota. Interview participants included education leaders who had knowledge to share about the district's Instructional Coaching Program and sustainability. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes. After numerous readings of the transcripts and feedback from the dissertation advisor and an outside coder, three themes were identified per research question.

### Research Questions

To gain more knowledge about an instructional coaching program of a secondary school that made significant academic student gains and to understand the initiatives that aid in the sustainability of the program, two questions were addressed:

RQ1 What components of a secondary level instructional coaching program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement?

RQ2 How do educational leaders sustain an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

**Conclusions**

Students in the United States have not made significant academic progress, and their academic achievement rates are low (Serino, 2017). Since 2003, American high school students' performance has not improved on international assessments, and high school students in the United States all behind students in other countries (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018). A meta-analysis study conducted by The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) showed a positive effect on students' achievement from teacher professional development (Blank & De las Alas, 2009). A professional development approach gaining momentum in schools involves instructional coaching as a practice with promise to increase students' achievement. Studies have found instructional coaching to significantly impact teachers' knowledge, skills, and practice (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Denton and Hasbrouck (2009) noted further research is needed to define the most effective coaching system for a school.

Providing meaningful professional development opportunities that meet the needs of teachers and increase students' achievement is a complex process (Desimone et al., 2002). Grandview School district (pseudonym) is an exemplary school district that has established a robust Instructional Coaching Program and students' academic achievement scores on standardized assessments have increased. Between 2018-2019, when national assessment scores continued on a downward trend, students at Grandview High School scored significantly higher on state standardized tests. Grandview High School climbed over 50 spots on the Minnesota State High School rankings, making it one of the top public high schools in the state ("Minnesota High School Rankings," 2019).

The study aimed to identify what components made up the Grandview Instructional Coaching Program, and what education leaders do to sustain the program. Desimone et al.

(2002) found that effective professional development programs are characterized by well-organized implementation, good communication, professional development to help teachers build their capacity, and strong leadership.  Cabak (2017) concluded the purpose of an instructional coaching model is to provide job-embedded, sustained guidance and support.

Consistent with the research conducted by Desimone et al. (2002), the Grandview Instructional Coaching Program is well-organized, well-communicated through intentional collaboration, provides professional development opportunities for teachers to grow professionally, and has strong leadership roles that leads the program.  Minnesota Department of Education Q-Comp guidelines explain each component districts must develop as part of a professional development plan. The structures provided in the Q-Comp application help organize the Grandview Instructional Coaching Program.  As identified in the plan, the Teaching and Learning Department, Q-Comp advisor, Q-Comp coaches, Q-Comp governing board, and building principals are strong leaders that collaborate to provide instructional support for teachers and help them grow professionally.

The Instructional Coaching Program at Grandview High School directly aligns with the findings of Cabak (2017).  Teachers in the district receive job-embedded professional opportunities to learn and grow with the support of instructional coaches. Through one-on-one meetings with the instructional coaches and identifying areas they desire to focus on and improve, professional growth is evident in teacher practices.  This success keeps the instructional coaching program moving forward.

Unlike Barkley's (2015) statement that the principal needs to define the role, the principals at Grandview High School play a collaborative role, not authoritative, when working with instructional coaches to support teachers.   This study showed the relationship between the

building principals and the instructional coach aligned with Fullan and Knight (2011). They explained that the instructional coaches must be leaders and work closely with the principals to establish and accomplish system goals.  The Grandview High School principals and instructional coaches regularly meet and engage in informal discussions to ensure both groups meet teachers' needs.

**Implications for Practice**

To develop and grow a robust instructional coaching program that increases students' achievements, districts should assemble a leadership team made up of the superintendent, representatives from the Teaching and Learning Department, building principals, and teachers. Before outlining the instructional coaching program, this team needs to establish a district educational improvement plan identifying specific teaching and learning goals that will improve students' achievement. The Minnesota Department of Education Quality Compensation Program may help establish the foundation of an instructional coaching program that aligns with the established goals. The Q-Comp application helps leaders outline the necessary structures of an effective instructional coaching program.

The first component of the Q-Comp application titled, Career Ladder/Advancement Options, requires district leaders to define the roles and responsibilities of the teacher leaders that run a program that supports individual teacher professional growth.  The application stated, "Teacher leaders are expected to retain primary roles in student instruction and facilitate site-focused professional development that helps other teachers improve their skills" (Minnesota Department of Education Q-Comp, n.d., para. 5).  Grandview's Q-Comp plan outlines the roles and responsibilities of a Q-Comp advisor, Q-Comp coaches, and the Q-Comp governing board. The Grandview Q-Comp plan clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the instructional

coaching program leaders.  The program guidelines also explain how instructional coach

program leaders collaborate with other district leaders.  This collaboration aids in aligning

district initiatives such as PLC's and a mentor program with the coaching program, which is vital

to program success. In the planning stages of an instructional coaching program, district leaders

need to establish the hiring process for the teacher leader positions and describe the evaluation

process for the teacher leader positions.

The second component of the Q-Comp application, Job-embedded Professional

Development, requires district leaders to choose a student achievement goal from the educational

improvement plan (EIP) as the achievement focus for the Q-Comp plan.  The goal needs to

connect student achievement to teacher instruction, professional development, and teacher

evaluation. Once the leaders establish district-wide student achievement goals, each building

writes a goal that is specific, measurable, attainable, results oriented, and time bound (SMART).

This goal identifies the job-embedded professional development activities that will be provided

to accomplish the site SMART goal. An effective instructional coaching program provides goal-

focused, job-embedded professional growth opportunities through the individual support of an

instructional coach and concentrated time spent working in an PLC with a PLC facilitator.

To create an effective instructional coaching program, education leaders need to develop

a teacher observation and growth plan, the third component of the Q-Comp plan. According to

the Minnesota Department of Education Q-Comp (n.d.) plan application, the teacher evaluation

system must include the following details:

Aligned with the district educational improvement plan and the staff development plan;

conducted at least three times per year using an objective performance evaluation rubric;

implemented by a locally selected and trained evaluation team; and based on classroom

observations of instructional practice (para. 2)

Instructional coaches help teachers improve instructional practices through a process of pre-observation, observation, post-observation, self-assessment and reflection, and goal setting. Education leaders need to design forms, regulations, and rubrics to define the observation expectations and guide the reflective discussions. Instructional coaches are provided with extensive training to establish program awareness and ensure a fair, equitable, and consistent observation process. Leaders of the instructional coaching team should develop ongoing opportunities for training and program reflection. The Grandview Q-Comp plan states, "Ongoing training will be a key component in ensuring understanding of the process, job-embedded professional development, performance pay, and knowledge and skills to perform at the highest levels" (Document 5).

To help sustain an instructional coaching program, a performance pay system should be established, the fourth component of the Minnesota Department of Education Quality Compensation plan. A performance pay system helps sustain an instructional coaching program as the district and teachers earn money for demonstrated student and teacher growth that aligns with the district and building goals. Teachers are eligible to earn compensation each year, and Grandview identifies three areas teachers may earn performance pay: School-wide student achievement on standardized tests; student learning goal achievement aligned with PLC goal and engagement criteria with PLC; Grandview Assessment Standards and Individual Growth and Development Plan completed during the coaching process. Education leaders designing an instructional coaching program should include a performance pay chart in their plan that outlines the percentage of money earned per identified area. This chart should also include descriptors that define how achievements will be measured and the changes of growth that must be specified

for teachers to earn compensation.  For example, Grandview teachers earn 5% of the

performance pay when school-wide student achievement goals are met through standardized

tests. Schools define building-wide SMART goals at the beginning of the year.  Teachers earn

30% of the compensation bonus for showing progress towards the student achievement PLC goal

and PLC participation.  Teachers must be engaged in 80% of the PLC meetings and show student

learning results in measurable terms of academic achievement. Teachers earn 65% of the

performance pay for proficiency in observations by meeting the evaluation standards and

demonstrating progress towards the Individual Growth and Development Plan. Teachers

participate in three classroom-based observations and produce observable, documentable

evidence of successful implementation of the Individual Growth and Development Plan to earn

this portion of the performance pay. The instructional coach and teacher meet to review evidence

of goal completion and complete a compensation form in the spring.

The findings from this study may provide districts with a guide to developing an

instructional coaching program with structures and alignment that aid in the program's success.

Minnesota Department of Education Quality Compensation (Q-Comp) may serve as a sample for

other states to improve the professional development opportunities school districts provide and

improve student achievement.

## Recommendations for Future Research

This study adds information to the knowledge of what makes up an effective instructional

coaching program and how it is sustained from the perspective of education leaders. To

understand the components of an effective coaching program in more depth, it would be

beneficial to hear the perspective of the teachers and students.  Future research could also

explore an instructional coaching program of a school in an urban or rural setting to see if the findings from this study stand true in different geographic areas of the state.

As this study was conducted in Minnesota, where districts have access to a Quality Compensation Law to help fund an instructional coaching program, further research needs to be undertaken to explore other ways a quality coaching program is funded. Research from a new study about funding would provide the means for districts in other states and districts in Minnesota that are unable to join Q-Comp because the funds are limited to implement an effective instructional coaching program as outlined in this study.

**Concluding Comments**

Establishing an instructional coaching program that improves teacher pedagogy and increases students' achievements is a complex process. Even though there are many challenges and obstacles to overcome when designing and implementing a program, job-embedded, personalized training at Grandview High School contributed to improved teachers' practices and students achieving at higher levels. Listening to the experiences of leaders in education and examining district documents gives us insight into the components of an Instructional Coaching Program that is making a difference in the lives of teachers and students.

It is recognized that each district has distinct needs. That is why the Minnesota Department of Education Quality Compensation plan is one way for districts to start an instructional coaching plan. The application process sets guidelines to be addressed but allows districts to meet these requirements in various ways. The outline provides the structure and guidance for education leaders to build a program that meets the needs of their teacher and student populations. An extensive literature review has not found a plan as comprehensive as the Minnesota Department of Education's Quality Compensation plan to guide the development of

an instructional coaching program. It may serve as a valuable template for a district starting or

re-energizing an instructional coaching program.

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November 13, 2020

Dr. *Name of Superintendent,*

Thank you for responding to my request about conducting a study at *Name of School*. I respect your commitment to protecting your staff during the pandemic.

After speaking with my advisor from Bethel University, another option would be to adjust my dissertation study and request one 30-minute interview with *Name*, *Name*, and *Name* and collect artifacts/documents that outline your Instructional Coaching Program. I would be seeking to learn about the program model, implementation, and sustainability.

I have been building my dissertation study since I heard about the significant academic gains *Name* made in 2018.  I had an informal conversation with *Name* a few years ago about your district's professional development opportunities. I was intrigued.  I have spent hours reading your website to learn more about your staff development goals, mentorship program, Q-Comp program, and examining your test scores. You have systems, programs, and supports in place to prepare "students who are self-directed learners, purposeful and effective thinkers, and responsible citizens."

If a conversation would be helpful, I would be happy to connect via Google Meet or Zoom at your convenience.  As the district leader, you may have alternate or additional options regarding my study that may be helpful, and I would appreciate your insights.

Respectfully,

Allison Coalwell

---

Hi Allison,

Absolutely! I love this idea and as long as *Name*, *Name*, and *Name* are okay with it, I am fine with it. I am so glad we can help.

Take care,

*Superintendent's Name*

***Superintendent's Name*** | **Superintendent**

<center>**Appendix B**</center>

<center>**Participant Invitation Email**</center>

Dear _____,

You are invited to participate in a study about instructional coaching. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an education leader with knowledge about your district's Instructional Coaching Program. You are uniquely positioned to provide valuable information about program characteristics and initiatives that aid in the sustainability of the program.

If you decide to participate, we will schedule a remote interview via Google Meet or phone.  The interview should take approximately 45 minutes and will be digitally recorded for transcription purposes.  Audio files will be deleted after being transcribed. You will receive a copy of the transcription to check for accuracy.

Confidentiality is highly valued in this study.  All participant names and identifiers will be deleted from transcripts, and transcripts will be identifiable only by a number.  Transcripts will be stored on a password-protected computer to which only the researchers have access.  No one will be identifiable in any written reports or publications.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate without affecting your relationship with Bethel University.  If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and your information will be destroyed. There are no anticipated risks for participating in this study and no compensation for participation.

If you are willing to participate, you will be emailed an informed consent letter to sign and the interview questions to review. We will then schedule a day and time for our interview.  Thank you for your consideration!


Sincerely,

Allison Coalwell

## Appendix C

## Informed Consent Form

Instructional Coaching Program

You are invited to participate in a study about instructional coaching. The purpose of this study is to examine the instructional coaching program of a secondary school where students made significant academic gains to explicitly define an instructional coaching model that improves teacher pedagogy and increases students' achievement. In addition, this study aims to outline how the Instructional Coaching Program is sustained. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an education leader who could provide valuable insight about your district's Instructional Coaching Program. This research is being conducted as part of my dissertation at Bethel University.

If you decide to participate, I will schedule a 45-minute interview that will be conducted via Google Meet or phone. You will be contacted again after the interview is transcribed to review interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. The estimated total time for the interview and subsequent review of the transcript should be no more than a total of one hour. There are no anticipated risks other than the possible discomfort that may be associated with being interviewed and recorded for transcription purposes. Possible benefits to participating may be time for reflecting on current practices as a school leader. You will also be provided with the research findings, if desired.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented. Audio files will be destroyed once transcription is complete. The interview transcript will be stored on a password-protected computer to which only the researchers have access.

Your decision to participate will not affect your future relations with Bethel University or the Minnesota Department of Education in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting the relationship. Should you experience discomfort, you could, for example, skip a question, stop the interview, or ask to continue the interview at a later date.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact Dr. Tracy Reimer, Bethel University, (651) 635-8502, t-reimer@bethel.edu.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

_____          _____

Signature                                                                    Date

____*Allison Coalwell*_____

Signature of Investigator

**Appendix D**

**Document Journal**

**Document 1**- Q-Comp Advisor Job Description- The two-page document clearly explains the position.

**RQ1-** What **components** of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? (Framework/structure)

>   Theme 2- System Guidelines and Roles are Clearly Defined in an Effective Instructional Coaching Program

>   4/4 Participants

>   -Key roles or positions and terms code

**Document 2**- Q-Comp Advisor Responsibilities- The five-page document explains what the Q-Comp Advisor does each month.

**RQ1-** What **components** of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? (Framework/structure)

>   Theme 1- Vision and Goals Provide Purpose and Effectiveness Measures for the Instructional Coaching Program

>   -Goals code (the measures that show the accomplishment of the vision)

**RQ1-** What **components** of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? (Framework/structure)

>   Theme 2- Clear Instructional Coaching Program Guidelines and Roles are Established and Adhered  to (or Program guidelines are written to establish a clear instructional coaching structure)

>   4/4 Participants

-Key roles or positions and terms code

-Coaches Training code

**RQ2-** How do educational leaders **sustain** an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

Theme 1- Continuous collaboration and communication maintain a coaching program.

4/4 Participants

-Collaboration code

**RQ2** -How do educational leaders **sustain** an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

Theme 2- Running an effective coaching program costs money.

4/4 Participants

-Funding code

**Document 3**- Q-Comp Instructional Coach Job Description- The two-page document clearly explains the position.

**RQ1-** What **components** of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? (Framework/structure)

Theme 2- System Guidelines and Roles are Clearly Defined in an Effective Instructional Coaching Program

4/4 Participants

-Key roles or positions and terms code

**Document 4-** Q-Comp Coach Responsibilities- The two-page document that explains what the Q-Comp Coach does each month.

**RQ1-** What **<u>components</u>** of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? (Framework/structure)

> Theme 1- Vision and Goals Provide Purpose and Effectiveness Measures for the Instructional Coaching Program

> -Goals code (the measures that show the accomplishment of the vision)

**RQ1-** What are the **<u>components</u>** of a secondary level instructional coaching program that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement? (Framework/structure)

> Theme 2- Clear Instructional Coaching Program Guidelines and Roles are Established and Adhered to (or Program guidelines are written to establish a clear instructional coaching structure)

> -Key roles or positions and terms code

> -Coaches Training code

**RQ2-** How do educational leaders **<u>sustain</u>** an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

> Theme 1- Continuous collaboration and communication maintain a coaching program.

> 4/4 Participants

> -Collaboration code

**RQ2-** How do educational leaders **<u>sustain</u>** an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

> Theme 2- Running an effective coaching program costs money.

4/4 Participants

-Funding code

**Document 5**- Q-COMP Plan- The 19-page document explains the program and aligns Grandview programming with MDE guidelines.

 **RQ1-** What <u>**components**</u> of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? (Framework/structure)

Theme 2-System Guidelines and Roles are Clearly Defined in an Effective Instructional Coaching Program

-Key roles or positions and terms code

**RQ1-** What <u>**components**</u> of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? (Framework/structure)

Theme 3-  Multiple Support Systems are Integrated into the Instructional Coaching Program

4/4 Participants

-Support code

**RQ2-** How do educational leaders <u>**sustain**</u> an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

Theme 2- Running an effective coaching program costs money.

4/4 Participants

-Funding code

**Document 6-** Q- Comp MOU 2018-2019- The five-page document establishes an agreement between the district and Union.

**RQ1-** What are the **components** of a secondary level instructional coaching program that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement? (Framework/structure)

      Theme 2- System Guidelines and Roles are Clearly Defined in an Effective Instructional Coaching Program

      -Key roles or positions and terms code

**RQ2** -How do educational leaders **sustain** an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

      Theme 2- Running an effective coaching program costs money.

      4/4 Participants

      -Funding code

**Document 7-** Coach's High Cycle Observations Protocol. This document outlines the process for evaluating Instructional Coaches.

 **RQ2-** How do educational leaders **sustain** an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

      Theme 3- Success keeps the instructional coaching program moving forward

      3/4 Participants

      Coaches Training code

**Document 8-** Instructional Coach (Rubric). This document is used to evaluate Instructional Coaches.

**RQ2-** How do educational leaders **sustain** an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

Theme 3- Success keeps the instructional coaching program moving forward

3/4 Participants

<span style="background-color:cyan">-Professional Growth code</span>

**Document 9-** 2020 Spring Survey: All Responses.  This document shares feedback from staff about how Instructional Coaches have helped them grow as professionals.

**RQ1-** What **components** of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? (Framework/structure)

Theme 3-  Multiple Support Systems are Integrated into the Instructional Coaching Program

4/4 Participants

<span style="background-color:lime">-Support code</span>

**RQ2-** How do educational leaders **sustain** an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

Theme 3- Success keeps the instructional coaching program moving forward

3/4 Participants

<span style="background-color:cyan">-Professional Growth code</span>
<span style="background-color:#d0d0e8">-Program Reflection</span>

**Document 10-** Grandview Survey, tallied results. The researcher created this doc by breaking down the survey and identifying the answers that gave more information about the instructional coaching program.

**RQ1-** What are the **components** of a secondary level instructional coaching program that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?  (Framework/structure)

Theme 3-  Multiple Support Systems are Integrated into the Instructional Coaching

Program

4/4 Participants

-Support code

**RQ2-** How do educational leaders **sustain** an instructional coaching program at a secondary level that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?

Theme 3- Success keeps the instructional coaching program moving forward

3/4 Participants

-Professional Growth code

**Document 11-** Explanation of Staff Development, Vision, and Strategic Direction.

**RQ1-** What **components** of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? (Framework/structure)

Theme 1- Vision and Goals Provide Purpose and Effectiveness Measures for the Instructional Coaching Program

3 of 4 Participants

-Vision code (Vision is the narrative)

**RQ1-** What are the **components** of a secondary level instructional coaching program that improves teacher pedagogy and increases student achievement?  (Framework/structure)

Theme 2- System Guidelines and Roles are Clearly Defined in an Effective Instructional Coaching Program

-Structures code

**Document 12- https://www.thinkingcollaborative.com/about**

This website provides more information about the Training Grandview uses to prepare district leaders. The trainings are called Cognitive Coaching and Adaptive Schools.

**RQ1-** What **components** of a secondary level Instructional Coaching Program do educational leaders attribute to improved teacher pedagogy and increased student achievement? (Framework/structure)

Theme 2- System Guidelines and Roles are Clearly Defined in an Effective Instructional Coaching Program

    4/4 Participants

    -Coaches Training code

**Appendix E**

**Bracketing Interview**

Bracketing Interview

Conducted on March 22, 2021

In addition to self-reflection and professional discussions with colleagues, a bracketing interview was conducted by an education and research professional to create awareness of personal beliefs.  The bracketing interview took place before the study participants were interviewed.  The interview was recorded and reviewed, and the researcher reflected on the results to identify potential sources of bias. Through reflective conversation after the practice interview, the researcher and independent analyst identified training, collaboration, and key roles as codes of potential bias. Being aware of potential bias aided in the validity of the data analysis process.