Veteran Teachers and Novice Coaches: A Case Study of Content Focused Coaching in Three Persistently Failing Midwestern Middle Schools

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VETERAN TEACHERS AND NOVICE COACHES: A CASE STUDY OF CONTENT-FOCUSED COACHING IN THREE PERSISTENTLY FAILING MIDWESTERN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

by

Brian E. Gamm

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Educational Leadership, Research and Technology April 2013

Doctoral Committee:

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VETERAN TEACHERS AND NOVICE COACHES: A CASE STUDY OF CONTENT-FOCUSED COACHING IN THREE PERSISTENTLY FAILING MIDWESTERN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Brian E. Gamm, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 2013

This research is a qualitative case study analysis of the experiences of six, veteran, English Language Arts teachers, and three, first-year, English Language Arts instructional coaches all of whom are implementing a district-mandated reform strategy called Content-Focused Coaching. The settings for this research study were three Persistently Lowest Achieving middle schools. The researcher began the data collection process with the organization of Professional Learning Community agendas and minutes. Following the organization of PLC meeting agendas and minutes, four categories were identified that were used as criteria for classroom observations as well as in assisting in organizing responses collected during the interview process. The one-on-one interviews consisted of open-ended questions with follow-up questions designed to unveil experiences that the teachers had while being coached as well as the experiences they had implementing the strategies with students. This process of subsuming particulars into more general classes lead to discoveries of five larger themes.

Findings from this study provided evidence that the actual amount of coaching time veteran teachers receive varies across buildings; veteran teachers receive less overall coaching time than the more novice teachers do. As reported by both teachers and coaches, this study also found the overall application of coaching as a reform strategy at these schools...
to be essentially voluntary in nature for the veteran teachers in terms of the amount of coaching they received as well as their implementation of instructional strategies. Furthermore, this study found patterns in both one-on-one interviews and classroom observations suggesting veteran teachers and coaches had different expectations for students, especially related to designing and implementing rigorous tasks for students. Additionally, although both veteran teachers and coaches claimed to value Content-Focused Coaching as a reform strategy, neither group could point to an increase in student achievement data after one year of implementation. Finally, this study discovered that the veteran teachers felt that the most significant barrier to effective coaching involved the coach’s level of experience working in an at-risk, urban environment while the coaches in this study felt the most significant barrier to successful implementation of Content-Focused Coaching was the lack of administrative support involving resistant teachers. This study recommends three areas for future research and one recommendation for future practice.
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Brian E. Gamm
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the spring of 2010, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) communicated its response to President Obama’s call for improving the nation’s Persistently Lowest Achieving schools (PLA). Michigan now mandates any district that contains a PLA school to adopt one of the four school reform models as outlined in the School Improvement Grant (SIG) under section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. The required intervention models for SIG schools include: Closing the school; Restarting the school as a charter; Turning around the school by replacing no less than fifty percent of the school staff; or Transforming the school by replacing the principal (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These last two intervention models, Turnaround and Transformation, contain several other required components including adopting new instructional programs and intense professional development for teachers.

To support schools in the reform implementation process outlined in section 1003(g), specifically the aspects related to the implementation of new instructional programming and professional development, many school districts adopted the strategy of instructional coaching. Instructional coaching as a K-12 reform strategy has increased in popularity in recent years due to its frequent recommendations by many school reform researchers and publications on turning around failing schools (Knight, 2004; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). For
PLA schools, instructional coaching is an especially attractive option because in addition to being identified as a successful reform strategy for struggling schools, it also fulfills the professional development requirements of both the Turnaround and Transformation Intervention Models listed in the federal government’s School Improvement Grant (SIG). This specific SIG requirement states that all professional development for any school adopting either the Turnaround or Transformation Intervention Models must be sustained, job-embedded, collaborative, data-driven, and focused on the needs of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

While there are many variations of instructional coaching, one model that is becoming increasingly popular with both elementary and secondary schools across the country is called Content-Focused Coaching (CFC). Content-Focused Coaching is a professional development model designed to promote student learning and achievement by having an instructional coach and a teacher work jointly in specific settings, guided by conceptual tools (Staub, West, & Bickel, 2003). The coach and teacher collaboratively plan, enact, and reflect on specific lessons, acting as resources for each other. In Content-Focused Coaching, theory-based conceptual tools assist coaches and teachers in deciding what to teach, how to deliver the content, as well as why the material should be presented in the manner chosen. The ultimate goal of Content-Focused Coaching, therefore, is to influence and shape a teacher’s practice as a means of increasing their students’ academic achievement.

Research findings suggest that influencing teacher behavior in the classroom is complex and multifaceted (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992). Research has also clearly indicated that in order to establish change at the classroom level, a teacher’s professional development must address his or her beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices (Beck,
Czerniak, & Lumpe, 2000; Cohen & Ball, 1999; Reimer, Reiser, & Spillane, 2002). Many instructional coaching models, including Content-Focused Coaching, incorporate protocols and processes for addressing the beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices of both teachers and coaches as they relate to instructional practice and student learning. These coaching models all fail, however, to address the beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices of teachers and coaches as they relate to the coaching process itself.

This failure to flush out any deeply held beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices a teacher may hold regarding the actual experience of instructional coaching could prove critical in determining the strategy’s ultimate effectiveness in changing his or her practice. Coaching, of any type, is not part of a teacher’s normal professional experience on an ongoing basis; thus, the experience of coaching is likely to be new and foreign to the professional norms of the school and the teachers in that school. Since persistently low performing schools must submit to significant, sustained interventions (like coaching); teachers in those schools are likely to experience a significant change in the norms of their work for a prolonged period as their school works its way out of the federally imposed sanctions for persistently poor academic progress.

This study examined the experiences of teachers in schools that are receiving the intervention of Content-Focused Coaching through the federally mandated section 1003(g) under the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, and the revised provisions of Race to The Top requirements of 2010. The specific teachers identified for this study have been working with students for no less than ten years and have never received an unsatisfactory evaluation from any administrator in terms of their professional performance. The coaches for this study, although highly trained in CFC, were new to their role as a Content-Focused Coach.
The dynamics between the veteran teachers and novice coaches, working together within the context of three Persistently Lowest Achieving schools, provided a rich opportunity to examine how these individuals experienced Content-Focused Coaching. The insights gained because of this study could be used to influence how other districts and schools utilize Content-Focused Coaching as well as other forms of instructional coaching in future reform efforts.

Key Concepts of Study

According to President Obama’s *Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* that was presented to the public in March of 2010, teachers will be one of the key factors in reforming our nation’s lowest performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Specific priorities of the reauthorization will attempt to reform core elements of the teaching profession by holding teachers more accountable through rigorous curriculum standards and assessments used to measure student progress in achieving those standards. Additionally, results of these assessments will be used as part of each teacher’s evaluation in an attempt to quantify a teacher’s effectiveness. The President’s educational reform agenda, therefore, will address the nation’s lowest performing schools by attempting to increase the effectiveness of teachers in their classrooms through greater accountability for student achievement outcomes.

“To ensure the success of our children, we must do better to recruit, develop, support, retain, and reward outstanding teachers in America’s classrooms” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The factors that are involved in changing and developing the instructional practice of teachers have been studied for decades. Research has consistently indicated that a
teacher’s beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices play a major role in determining whether a school reform initiative will actually impact their instructional practice (Reimer, Reiser, & Spillane, 2002). It is reasonable to expect that these findings apply to reforms that involve both changes in teacher practice and the work norms in which they carry out those practices.

Few would argue that understanding the belief structures of teachers is essential to improving professional preparation and teaching practices (Pajares, 1992). Guskey and Sparks (1996) described the content characteristics of professional development in terms of the new knowledge, skills, and understandings participants acquire; however, reviews of professional development research often show that most programs are ineffective in bringing about changes in teachers’ beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices. Consequently, knowledge acquired during professional development programs is not necessarily implemented (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Fullan, 2001). To better develop and support teachers, recent reforms under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), have emphasized the need for reforming the professional development models used to develop and change teacher practice so as to help teachers more effectively work through ways in which a reform initiative challenges long-held and culturally embedded norms of thinking and practice.

In order to increase teacher effectiveness in PLAs the United States Department of Education has called for a redesign of teacher professional development so that teacher-learning opportunities are, “sustained, job-embedded, collaborative, data-driven, and focused on student instructional needs” (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p. 21). Support for this type of professional development came, in part, from a comprehensive study of turnaround schools. According to the study guide titled, Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing
Schools, published by the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) in May of 2008, the approaches to professional development used by these turnaround schools varied, but all of the schools incorporated high levels of collaboration along with a narrow focus on instructional goals. “Teachers shared common planning time, participated in workshops on using data to guide instructional decision-making, and received regular support from a designated staff member, such as a lead teacher, instructional facilitator, or reading or mathematics coach” (p. 22).

To satisfy the elements of a sustained, job-embedded, data-driven, and student focused professional development model, many districts and schools are turning to instructional coaching for their teachers. Research has suggested that introducing new teaching strategies are more successful if in-class coaching is part of the training (Knight, 2004; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). There is, however, no generally accepted coaching model: specific structures, scripts, and procedures vary greatly (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Honig, 2006; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). For the purposes of this study, Content-Focused Coaching will be the model of coaching examined. Content-Focused Coaching’s main objective is to help teachers design and implement successful lessons and to engage with and reflect on the issues that are relevant to student learning in the teacher’s content (Staub, West, & Bickel; 2003).

Content-Focused Coaching is a form of instructional coaching based on a unique set of Principles of Learning and teaching that include Core Issues of Lesson Design. These Principles of Learning provide a lens for planning, enacting, as well as reflecting upon individual teaching lessons. These Principles are partially designed to unpack and influence the beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices of both teachers and coaches as they work to
plan rigorous and coherent lessons for students of various needs and backgrounds. Content-Focused Coaching deconstructs and analyzes teacher’s beliefs about the teaching and learning of specific subject matter so that teachers can better understand how they behave in the classroom in an attempt to increase student achievement (Staub, West, & Bickel; 2003).

While Content-Focused Coaching takes into consideration teacher and coach beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices as they relate to teaching and learning, Content-Focused Coaching does not take into consideration the beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices of teachers and coaches as they relate to the act of coaching and being coached. Examining teacher and coach beliefs, values, assumptions and practices as they relate to Content-Focused Coaching will provide particular insights because of this framework’s unique assumption about the role of the teacher and the coach. In contrast to other forms of instructional coaching, such as collegial or peer coaching, the principle associated with Content-Focused Coaching expects coaches to have more teaching expertise than the teachers being coached (Staub, West, & Bickel; 2003). Ideally, according to the Content-Focused Coaching framework, coaches should have real-life experience with the content and be very familiar with its official curricular standards, required teaching materials, teaching methods, as well as any theories of learning and teaching. According to West and Staub (2006), the founders of Content-Focused Coaching, “Because of their respective levels of professional knowledge, the interaction between teacher and coach will not be symmetrical” (p.12). This creates a different dynamic for teachers working together; one that, by itself, may be in direct conflict with the norms of teacher-to-teacher interaction that both the coach and the teacher receiving the coaching have experienced. Thus, there is an opportunity for the
coaching interaction to create a conflict with each teacher’s beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices.

Another aspect related to this study involves the dynamic between veteran teachers and novice coaches. According to the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), during the 2007-08 School Year, slightly over 53% of teachers in the United States were identified as teaching for ten or more years. This study will follow in the tradition of a number of studies investigating the role of years of teaching experience in teachers’ instructional practices and their understandings of these practices (Almozlino & Rich, 1999; Strauss, Ravid, Magen, & Berliner, 1998). In order to achieve widespread improvement in teaching and learning, school reform efforts must help experienced teachers in the work of changing long-established roles and patterns of practice. This study will explore the dynamic between veteran teachers and less experienced, but (presumably) more knowledgeable content coaches as the latter works with the former to effect changes in teaching beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices. This asymmetrical relationship between coach and teacher, combined with the urgency of the mandates associated with being identified as PLA schools, will provide the context for understanding how veteran teachers and novice coaches experience Content-Focused Coaching as a framework for changing teacher practice.

Purposes of Study

The purposes of this study were to: (1) better understand how veteran teachers and novice coaches experience Content-Focused Coaching as a reform initiative; (2) describe how expectations outlined as part of Content-Focused Coaching conflict with the existing
beliefs, practices, values, and assumptions held by these same veteran teachers and novice coaches; and (3) discover insights and ideas embedded in the experiences and perspectives of veteran teachers and novice coaches who work together through the Content-Focused Coaching process to further improve and/or inform future instructional coaching reforms and the implementation of those reforms.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act has helped to provide the context for this study when it called for future professional development to be sustained, job-embedded, collaborative, data-driven, and focused on student instructional needs. Many schools and districts are utilizing instructional coaching as a strategy for reforming their professional development of teachers to meet the requirements under the ARRA. While research has been conducted around instructional coaching, including Content-Focused Coaching, there has been no information gathered to help examine how veteran teachers, or novice coaches, experience changes in their work norms related to Content-Focused Coaching. While examining the experiences of veteran teachers and novice coaches, this study also described how these same teachers and coaches worked through any conflict between their deeply held beliefs, values, assumptions and practices and the changes in practice, roles, and responsibilities that unfold as they experienced Content-Focused Coaching. Finally, this study sought to discover insights and ideas embedded in the experiences and perspectives of veteran teachers and novice coaches who worked together through the Content-Focused Coaching process to further improve and/or inform future instructional coaching reforms and the implementation of those reforms.
Problem Statement

The problem this study investigated was to describe the lived experiences of veteran teachers and novice coaches to Content-Focused Coaching as a reform initiative designed to increase student achievement. Additionally, this study examined the perception of veteran teachers and novice coaches to determine the extent to which they understood how changing the teacher work norms from principle autonomy to shared and collaborative decision-making guided their day-to-day instructional practices.

A study of this nature is extremely important as demonstrated by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s recent declaration in May 2010 that approximately 5,000 schools in the United States were currently identified as “Chronically underperforming” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In response to the current plight of schools, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act called for Turnaround and Transformation Model schools to redesign professional development to ensure that teacher learning opportunities are sustained, job-embedded, collaborative, data-driven, and focused on student instructional needs. Targeted schools are being required to implement professional development over three years and provide additional training to highly effective teachers who will be able to serve as expert instructional leaders and coaches in the future.

Research Questions

This qualitative study provided answers to the following four research questions. They are:
1. How do veteran teachers describe their response to and experience with Content-Focused Coaching after one year of instruction?

2. How do novice coaches describe the way veteran teachers are responding to the Content-Focused Coaching experience and their coach after one year of instruction?

3. Where do the teachers and their coaches experience conflict related to changes in the norms of professional teacher-to-teacher interaction, i.e. the coaching relationship?

4. Moving forward, how do these veteran teachers see Content-Focused Coaching as a part of their future teaching experience?

Methodology of Study

This study involved collecting qualitative data from six English Language Arts teachers and three instructional coaches from a large Midwestern school district that, as of June 2011, served approximately 17,800 students. The methodology for this research was a multi-case study with each of the teachers and coaches bound by their engagement in the same school reform initiative, namely Content-Focused Coaching. In particular, this study described the experiences of veteran teachers and novice coaches relative to Content-Focused Coaching as collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews (Appendix B), agendas, and minutes of professional learning community meetings, and classroom observations (Appendix C). The study also explored how veteran teachers and coaches experienced any conflicts between their deeply held beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices and how these same teachers responded to any of these conflicts, especially when
the conflict related to changes in the professional work norms, teacher-to-teacher interactions, as well as teacher-to-student interactions.

The criteria used for participant sampling was based on the teacher’s school location, the content areas the teachers would be teaching during the 2011-12 school year, the teacher’s number of years teaching, and the evaluations received by the teacher during their tenure up through 2010-11. The schools that were selected as sites were identified based on the state of Michigan’s initial Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA) list as published in May of 2010. The PLA list is based on reading and math data collected during the 2008-2010 school years, consequently English Language Arts (ELA) was identified as the primary content area to draw teachers. To determine the appropriate number of years needed to identify a teacher as “veteran,” the researcher utilized the Career/Technical Education (CTE) statistics as reported by the United States Department of Education. Once veteran ELA teachers were identified, evaluation records became accessible to the researcher and those teachers that had received unsatisfactory evaluations during their ten-year experience were determined.

Regarding confidentiality of data, the researcher complied with all components of the HSIRB process to protect each subject’s identity (Appendix A). This involved the use of pseudonyms for each participant such as “Teacher 1,” “Teacher 2,” and so on. Each teacher was educated about the fact that he or she was free to depart from the study at any point, and an explanation of the data collection and storage process was provided. The transcripts were taken straight to the researcher’s home each day and locked in a secure office. Upon conclusion of the study, the data will be stored on an electronic file and transported from the school to WMU via the researcher. Federal regulations require that data be maintained in a
locked file in the Primary Investigator’s office or in the University Archive for at least three years after the study closes.

Including “satisfactory” and “veteran” teachers as variables is important to this study for several reasons. First, this group of teachers represents the majority (54%) of teachers in the United States (CTE, 2008). Secondly, other than the external reforms being imposed on the school by the district and state, veteran and satisfactory teachers would have little or no reason to change their teaching practices, therefore creating a dynamic between the veteran, satisfactory teacher and the reform-oriented coach worthy of studying. Finally, based on the research around veteran teachers and their potential for resistance to change, this variable provided a rich source of context as well as need for further exploration.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study builds from the research previously conducted around the implementation of school reform initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and, more recently, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. Evidence indicating whether these reform initiatives have actually improved teaching and learning has been inconsistent (Cuban & Tyack, 1995; Lee, 2006; Ravitch, 2000).

An additional significance of this study stems from research conducted by Ball and Cohen (1999), as well as Reimer, Reiser, and Spillane (2002). These researchers conducted studies that examined the significance of teacher beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices as they relate to the implementation of reform initiatives such as NCLB and ARRA and how these initiatives changed or fail to change classroom practice among teachers. Building upon the research conducted by these individuals, this study hypothesized that if we understand
more about how veteran teachers and novice coaches experience instructional coaching models like Content-Focused Coaching, then school reformers can better understand how to engage these teachers and coaches in either one or more of the following practices: (a) helping to validate, commit to, and implement the changes in instructional practice associated with Content-Focused Coaching; or (b) taking initiative to investigate, propose, and implement new evidence-based school reform strategies related to instructional coaching and the Content-Focused Coaching framework. The reality is that most comprehensive school reform will require both alternatives, and learning more about how veteran teachers and novice coaches experienced Content-Focused Coaching provided insight for future school reformers as they consider instructional coaching as a reform strategy (Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Knight, 2004).

There is a paucity of research pertaining to veteran teachers receiving instructional coaching. For example, this researcher found three relevant studies that included information about teachers’ perceptions of their coaches as they related to instructional coaching. In the Alvermann and Phelps (2005) study, researchers reported that most of the coached teachers felt they received specific and constructive feedback from the coach after classroom observations. Most of the teachers thought the coaches were useful when they provided demonstration lessons and when they helped administer tests and interpret assessment data. Marsh et al. (2005) concluded that teachers generally felt their coaches were knowledgeable and found it helpful when the coach focused on the individual school or teacher’s needs. In the Cantrell and Hughes (2008) study, teachers reported that coaching and collaboration helped increase their sense of efficacy and implementation of elementary literacy strategies.
While the above research helps provide context and understanding of how teachers perceive some aspects of instructional coaching, the research has failed to describe how instructional coaching, specifically Content-Focused Coaching, is experienced by veteran teachers (Greenberg & Baron, 2000; Staub, West & Bickel, 2003). We know very little about what coaches do with veteran teachers, how their work impacts the work norms of veteran teachers, how veteran teachers view their coaches, and virtually nothing about what it is that, from a veteran teacher’s perspective, coaches specifically do that is helpful (Hillkirk & Nolan, 1991; Knight, 2004; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). In addition, we know little about what veteran teachers decide to change because of their coach.

Limitations of Study

This study was limited to Content-Focused Coaching teachers in secondary schools and did not include teachers who were trained in other coaching models. This study was limited to teachers who participated in this study and no inferences were made about teacher-coaches who did not participate in this study. Finally, of necessity, this study assumed that the responses provided by the participants were accurate and provided a direct reflection of their perception (Creswell, 2003).

Delimitations of Study

Several delimitations provided a framework for guiding this research study. Delimitations to the research design for this study were put in place to provide parameters for the study. The first delimitation pertained to the use of criterion sampling used for the study,
both in terms of the study sites and the informants within them. Using criteria to identify teachers and locations for the study provided opportunities for more focused themes to emerge. Another delimitation of the study included making sure the role of the researcher was explicitly revealed to all participants. In this regard, the researcher served in the capacity of providing leadership in the implementation of Content-Focused Instruction while simultaneously collecting data for this dissertation study. A final delimitation included ensuring that the data collected from participants was short but frequent in number (Creswell, 2003).

Definitions of Terms

Instructional Coaching is a non-supervisory, content-based (e.g., math coaching or literacy coaching) form of sustained, job-embedded professional development intended to support teachers in meeting the aims of school or district-based instructional reform that includes observations of classroom teaching, demonstrations of model practices, and cycles that include pre- and post-conferences with practitioners (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Neufeld & Roper, 2003).

Content-Focused Coaching is a type of instructional coaching aimed at improving teachers’ knowledge base of academic content, instructional skills, and ability to work effectively with students through observation and feedback (Staub, West & Bickel, 2003).

Persistently Lowest Achieving is any Title I school that has been identified among the lowest-achieving five percent of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the State (or the lowest-achieving five such schools) or is a Title I high
school that has had a graduation rate that is less than 60 percent over a number of years (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Top to Bottom Ranking is a school ranking based on a formula specific to a state. It considers student achievement over two years, academic improvement over three or four years; whether a school made Adequate Yearly Progress status over the past two years; and whether a school had a graduation rate below 60 percent for three years in a row (Michigan Department of Education, 2010).

A Turnaround Schools is any K-12 school that began as chronically poor performers—with a high proportion of their students (generally 20 percent or more) failing to meet state standards of proficiency in mathematics or reading as defined under No Child Left Behind over two or more consecutive years. In addition, these schools showed substantial gains in student achievement in a short time (no more than three years). Examples of substantial gains in achievement are reducing by at least 10 percentage points the proportion of students failing to meet state standards for proficiency in mathematics or reading, showing similarly large improvements in other measures of academic performance (such as lowering the dropout rate by 10 percentage points or more), or improving overall performance on standardized mathematics or reading tests by an average of 10 percentage points (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Veteran teacher is a teacher who has ten or more years of teaching experience in the classroom (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

School districts across the country have engaged in many and varied types of educational reforms during the past few decades. These districts have been both active participants as well as reluctant patients to the various institutions that wish to assist their struggling schools. Reform strategies such as restructuring the school day, providing more professional development for teachers, and decentralizing district functions are just a few of the initiatives launched during the past 20 years (Elmore, 2003; Fullan, 2001). Most, if not all of these reforms, have been designed with the sole purpose of improving teaching and learning in a systemic manner. Evidence indicating whether many of these reform initiatives have actually improved teaching and learning, however, has been inconsistent (Cuban & Tyack, 1995; Fullan, 2003; Hess, 1998; Lee, 2006; Ravitch, 2000).

The assumptions in this study are an extension of the research previously conducted around the implementation of school reform initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and, more recently, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. One of the key assumptions in this study is built from researchers such as Ball and Cohen, as well as Reimer, Reiser, and Spillane that explore the significance of teacher beliefs, values, assumptions and practices as they relate to the implementation of reform initiatives such as NCLB and ARRA and how these initiatives change or fail to change classroom practice among teachers. Related to influencing teacher practice at the instructional level, this study
will focus on the professional development strategy of instructional coaching, specifically Content-Focused Coaching (CFC). Content-Focused Coaching is a form of instructional coaching designed to reform teachers’ instructional practice through lesson design, observation, feedback, and reflection protocols utilized between a teacher and coach. The focus of CFC is to incorporate research-based strategies into the teacher’s instructional practice as a means of increasing academic performance among all the students in that teacher’s classroom. Specific assumptions involving Content-Focused Coaching stem from the fact that while this professional development framework does include processes and protocols for addressing the beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices of teachers as they relate to teaching and learning, this framework does not address the beliefs, values, assumptions or practices of either teachers or coaches as they relate to the act of coaching itself.

Another assumption that this study will explore involves the dynamics between veteran teachers and novice coaches as they both experience implementing the same school reform initiative, Content-Focused Coaching. According to recent U.S. Department of Education studies, veteran teachers make up the majority of staff required to engage in mandated reforms. The interplay between these veteran teachers and their novice coaches will provide valuable insights into how to further refine Content-Focused Coaching as a reform strategy.

An outline for the review of literature starts with the examination of the research around school reform initiatives such as NCLB and ARRA. Specifically this review of literature will identify any researched characteristics of the professional development utilized while implementing the reform strategies associated with initiatives associated with NCLB
and ARRA. The second step in the literature process involves summarizing the research conducted by Ball & Cohen, Pajares, Reimer, Reiser, & Spillane, and Datnow & Stringfield in understanding the significance of teachers’ beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices when discussing change. Instructional coaching will then be reviewed, including a cross examination of collegial or peer coaching and Content-Focused Coaching. Finally, the role of veteran teachers in the implementation of reform initiatives will be reviewed including unique challenges that may result from working with this specific and important population essential for successful reform.

Recent K-12 School Reform Initiatives

The emphasis on collecting data around school reform initiatives and their impact on student achievement has intensified since the introduction of No Child Left Behind in 2001. This particular initiative took an unwavering approach that schools across the country needed to subscribe to certain mandates or face penalties connected to federal funding. In recent years, researchers have begun to measure the impact of No Child Left Behind in terms of improving student achievement, increasing graduation rates, and closing the achievement gaps among minorities. According to a study conducted in 2006 by Harvard University’s Civil Rights Project, NCLB has not had a significant impact on improving reading and math achievement across the nation and states. Using the NAEP results since 2001, the national average achievement remains flat in reading and grows at the same pace in math after NCLB than before. In fourth grade math, there was a temporary improvement right after NCLB, but it was followed by a return to the pre-reform growth rate (Berger, 2000).
What about NCLB’s impact on closing the gap among minority students? Based on this same Harvard study, the racial and socioeconomic achievement gap in the NAEP reading and math achievement persists after NCLB. Despite some improvement in reducing the gap in math right after NCLB, the progress was not sustained. If the current trend continues, the proficiency gap between advantaged White and disadvantaged minority students will hardly close by 2014. This study predicted that by 2014, less than twenty-five percent of Poor and Black students will achieve NAEP proficiency in reading, and less than fifty percent will achieve proficiency in math.

While NCLB was designed to improve student achievement and close the gap among minority students, this reform has also focused on improving the instructional practice of teachers. Because NCLB was designed at the federal level, the reform was intended to impact teacher practice systemically, both across states as well as within individual districts and schools. In a 2006 study conducted by the University of Iowa in cooperation with the Iowa Department of Education involving more than 125 schools indicated that despite the professional development in the areas of alignment, use of data to inform instruction that took place as a result of NCLB, there was little to no effect of this professional development on teacher practice across all subject areas. No Child Left Behind and its assumptions regarding how districts, schools, and classrooms should operate provided the backdrop for more recent reform initiatives such as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the impending reauthorization of ESEA in upcoming months.

In February of 2009, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The ARRA was designed to provide a jolt to the US economy by supporting job creation and investing in critical sectors such as education. The ARRA claims
to provide a foundation for education reform by, “supporting investments in innovative strategies that are most likely to lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The ARRA provides over four billion dollars for the reform initiative, Race to the Top (RTTP), a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform. The conditions that the U.S. Department of Education have outlined include implementing several required components such as new standards and assessments, data systems that measure student growth, merit-based pay for teachers and principals, and turning around a state’s lowest-achieving schools. Race to the Top, therefore, offers both a carrot and stick approach for schools by rewarding those that have already demonstrated success in raising student achievement and denying funds to those states and school districts that have failed to adopt federal guidelines.

Starting in 2010 and continuing over the next three years, states will receive an unprecedented amount of federal funding to support school improvement efforts at approximately 5,000 of the nation’s lowest achieving schools. The $100 billion for education appropriated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), included an additional $3 billion for school improvement grants (SIGs) to help reform low-performing schools. This amount was in addition to the $546 million provided by the regular fiscal year 2009 appropriations bill for school improvement grants authorized by Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This 2009 total of more than $3.5 billion for Persistently Lowest Achieving schools represents a massive increase of funds compared with the $491 million

In order to receive any of the funds associated with the school improvement grant schools identified on each state’s PLA list will be forced to adopt one of four intervention models. The models include: Closing the school; Restarting the school as a charter; Turning the school around by replacing no less than fifty percent of its staff; or Transforming the school by replacing its principal. The first two models, Closure and Restart, are fairly self explanatory. The latter two, Transformation and Turnaround, include required components such as adopting a new governing body, implementing new instructional programs, and providing job-embedded and sustained professional development for staff. Even schools that are identified by their state as a Persistently Failing School and that fail to receive funds will be required to implement one of these four intervention models.

Change and Teacher Beliefs, Values, Assumptions, and Practices

The ultimate success of these Turnaround and Transformation intervention models, however, will depend in large part on whether or not the reform strategies and mandates embedded in the initiative will impact individual classrooms and increase student achievement (Fullan, 2000; Reeves, 2009). While district administrators and principals may play a role in determining the success of an initiative, there can be little argument that the role of the classroom teacher is essential (Fullan, 2007). The classroom is where the vast majority of student learning occurs, and the teacher is the facilitator for that learning. “The vision of practice that underlies the nation’s reform agenda requires most teachers to rethink their own practice, to construct new classroom roles and expectations about student
outcomes, and to teach in ways they have never taught before—and probably never experienced as students” (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Teachers, therefore, could be portrayed as being on the front line of school reform.

A central challenge for districts in the midst of implementing reform initiatives such as the Turnaround and Transformation intervention models involves penetrating classrooms across the entire system, a concept described by Michael Fullan (2005) as, bringing an initiative “to scale.” Implementing school reform policy has often failed to bring initiatives to scale at the classroom level, in part, because of the failure to take into account teacher beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices (Ball & Cohen, 1990). A key dimension of the reform process, therefore, is whether, and in what ways, teachers come to understand their practice, potentially changing their beliefs and attitudes in the process (Reimer, Reiser, & Spillane, 2002).

Beliefs about student learning and instructional practice can affect a teacher’s approaches to teaching and their behaviors toward students (Gatt, 2009; Song, 2006). Considerable evidence exists supporting the contention that teacher’s beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices exert powerful influences on teaching practice as well as the learning process (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992). In a study conducted by the University of Delaware, it was found that teacher’s beliefs about a reform designed to impact science instruction influenced not only explicit lessons about the nature of science, but also shaped an implicit curriculum concerning the nature of scientific knowledge (Brickhouse, 1990). Further studies by Michael Battista (1999) also found that teacher beliefs in mathematics played a critical role in both what teachers taught as well as how they presented material to students.
Few would argue that teaching is based on both explicit and implicit personal beliefs, values, and assumptions. According to Horowitz (1994), to better understand the role of a teacher in the classroom, the teacher’s belief system should be conceived as a series of behavior snapshots, thus suggesting that beliefs are a precursor to actions. This assumption was restated by Cooney (2001) when he suggested that what teachers do in their classrooms is ultimately a product of their beliefs. Further evidence of the significance of teacher beliefs resides in the greater than twenty years of research studies that suggest that misleading beliefs about the role of school and home culture, in addition to the relationships between teachers and students, have prevented the success of minority students in the American educational system (Grant & Sleeter, 1986; Spindler, 1987). The teacher belief system, therefore, could be described as an organizing framework that establishes the patterns of meaning, informs evaluations, determines views of right and wrong, and guides teacher decisions regarding curriculum and instruction (Romanowski, 1997).

Researchers have examined the relationship between beliefs and practices by examining the consistency between teachers’ beliefs and their practices. Research conducted by Harste and Burke (1977) suggest that teachers make decisions about reading instruction based on their beliefs about how reading and learning occur. Other researchers have suggested that teachers’ instructional decisions also can be affected by expectations of district, state, or federal policy and guidelines, leading teachers to use instructional practices which differ from what they believe is best to do (Wilson, Konopak & Readance, 1991).

Research also suggests that what teachers know and believe seemingly can change over time, depending on the experiences they encounter. In a review of literature, Hall (2005) discussed studies that focused on learning experiences of teachers and how these experiences
matter in terms of beliefs about what instructional practices to employ. In one of these studies, Stieglitz (1983) found that teachers held more positive beliefs about teaching reading in their content area upon completing a graduate course in content-area reading. Wedman and Robinson (1988) also found that teachers held more positive views of teaching reading in a content area through in-service programs where teachers were shown instructional strategies, were able to implement them in their classrooms, and then discussed their teaching at in-service meetings. Hall pointed out that an important difference in these studies is that the teachers that were part of the research of Wedman and Robinson also implemented ideas whereas the teachers of Stieglitz’s research did not necessarily use what they had learned. These findings suggest that teachers can benefit from ongoing collaboration and support as they actually implement teaching practices. Even if teachers have a positive view toward a particular practice, they may not necessarily feel able to incorporate the practice.

**Instructional Coaching**

Researchers now recognize that teacher education in not merely a matter of training. Rather, teacher professional development is a complex process of adult learning (Gallucci, DeVoogt, Lare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010; Theriot & Tice, 2009). To improve the practice of teachers, many school districts have utilized instructional coaching as a professional development strategy. As part of NCLB, as well as part of more recent reforms such as ARRA, some form of instructional coaching has been adopted by nearly every urban district in the country and widely endorsed by policymakers at both the state and federal levels as a strategy for improving student achievement (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay, & Unlu, 2008; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). The goal of instructional coaching is to
create the types of embedded, practice-based learning opportunities for teachers that research indicates are effective for improving the quality of instructional practice and student learning (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

A synthesis of the literature tells us that instructional coaching consists of several key elements. First, instructional coaching is non-supervisory. In other words, instructional coaches do not typically have the responsibility of evaluating the teachers they are coaching (Taylor, 2008). Instructional coaching is often content specific (e.g., math or literacy) and intended to support teachers in meeting the aims of increasing student achievement through examining and revising the coached teacher’s instructional practice (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Another core element to instructional coaching is that it is job-embedded and includes cyclical protocols around observations of classroom teaching and the modeling of instructional practices (Neufeld & Roper, 2002). Additional descriptors of instructional coaching taken from the literature suggests that instructional coaches identify appropriate interventions for teacher learning, gather data in classrooms, and engage teachers in dialogue about student learning (Knight, 2004).

The research describes several variations of instructional coaching used to professionally develop teachers, each with their own unique characteristics and approaches. These variations of instructional coaching include: Peer Coaching, Cognitive Coaching, Technical Coaching, and Content-Focused Coaching. The literature suggests that these variations can be grouped into two general categories based on the professional development strategies used. Technical coaching and Content-Focused Coaching focus on incorporating new curriculum and instructional techniques into teachers’ routines (Ackland, 1991; Becker, 1996; Showers & Joyce, 1996). Collegial coaching and Cognitive Coaching seek to improve
existing teacher practices by refining techniques, developing collegiality, increasing professional dialogue, and assisting teachers to reflect on their teaching (Ackland, 1991; Becker, 1996; Showers & Joyce, 1996).

Cognitive Coaching is based upon some fundamental beliefs about teaching and human growth and learning. According to Robert Garmston, one of the founders of Cognitive Coaching, all human beings are capable of change, and adults continue to grow cognitively throughout their lifetime through their decision making. Cognitive Coaching utilizes a four-phase cycle of instructional decision making in which teachers engage before, during, and after classroom instruction. The first phase, called the planning phase, comprises all the thought processes which teachers perform prior to classroom instruction. The second phase, called the interactive phase, includes those mental functions performed during the teaching act. The third is the reflective phase in which teachers look back to compare, analyze, and evaluate the decisions that were made during the planning and teaching phases. Finally, there is an application phase in which teachers abstract from what has been learned during self-reflection and then project what has been learned to future lessons. This cycle then repeats itself as the teacher and coach progress through the curriculum.

According to Cognitive Coaching, teaching cannot be reduced to a formula or a recipe. Garmston claims that while there is an enormous amount of information today about specific instructional behaviors which produce certain student outcomes, these instructional behaviors are based on a multitude of factors and nearly impossible to duplicate. Thus, according to Cognitive Coaching, while teachers and coaches may have knowledge about teaching, no one has certainty about teaching. Another related assumption is that a teacher’s observable classroom performance is based upon internal, invisible skills that drive the overt
skills of teaching. A final assumption is that enlightened, skillful colleagues can significantly enhance (mediate) a teacher’s cognitive processes and therefore the teacher’s perceptions and decisions which produce the resulting teaching behaviors (Garmston, 1987).

Content-Focused Coaching is a form of instructional coaching that is theory-based, and uses conceptual tools to assist coaches and teachers in deciding how best to direct instructional practice (Staub, West, and Bickel, 2003). A framework for lesson design and analysis is used, as well as a set of principles of learning and a set of core issues in lesson design. These tools help coaches guide teachers’ thinking in relation to lesson design and classroom teaching, and about the issues surrounding student learning. In addition, goals and coaching moves provide concepts for reflecting on, guiding, and developing coaching conversations.

Content-Focused Coaching focuses on the students’ learning in the lessons but is also concerned with unpacking the teachers’ learning from the process. In the short term, teachers refine how they teach particular lessons to specific groups of students. In the long term, they develop professional habits of mind and general teaching expertise. Expert teachers know both their subject and the best pedagogical practices by which to bring the subject to their students. Content-Focused Coaching zeroes in on the daily tasks of planning, teaching, and reflecting on lessons by suggesting a framework and tools for addressing standards, curriculum, principles of learning, and lesson design and assessment.

Content-Focused Coaching does not prescribe to particular teaching methods or techniques. CFC has, therefore, been designed to work in relation to and coordinated with other elements of professional development. The challenge in onsite coaching is to help teachers design and implement successful lessons and to engage with and reflect on the
issues that are relevant to student learning. Prerequisites include establishing trusting working relationships among principal, coach, and teacher and building organizational structures within schools so that coaching can take place.

While Content-Focused Coaching does not prescribe to any specific instructional pedagogy or methods, it does have a specific framework that includes an emphasis on lesson design. Teaching can be looked at from many perspectives and discussed at different levels, depending on the knowledge, theories, and beliefs of participants (Resnick, 1995). CFC wants teachers and coaches to use deliberate reasoning in choosing and prioritizing lesson goals and designing lessons that enable a given group of students to reach given standards. At the core of this kind of reasoning are two basic questions:

1. *What is the curricular content to be learned by the students?*

2. *How is this content to be taught?*

Lesson design, according to Staub and West (2006) takes place at the junction between these two questions. While state curriculum often outline standards that contain what students should learn and how this content should be taught, a competent teacher still needs to adapt a given lesson to the context of the particular classroom and to the individual characteristics, needs, and backgrounds of the learners in it. According to the CFC framework, teachers should be encouraged to be thoughtful professionals who do not make decisions exclusively on experience and traditions. To assist teachers in making deliberate and thoughtful choices about lessons, there are two additional basic questions at the core of the CFC process:

3. *Why is this specific content to be taught?*

4. *Why will it be taught in this particular way?*
In addressing these four basic questions, teachers are pushed to choose the subject matter, transform it into lesson content, and design lessons that help students reach standards. In addressing these questions, the CFC process provides opportunity for the coach and teacher to draw on available research about which strategies and methods work effectively for specific purposes. Posing these four generic questions alone, however, provides only the foundation for CFC. In order to address more abstract questions such as why a particular method is useful for teaching specific content to a given group of students, coaches must address the teacher’s beliefs and theories about learning and teaching, as well as their knowledge about research on effective practices and about the particular learners to be taught (Staub, West, & Bickel, 2003; Staub, 1999).

What teachers believe about the learning and teaching of selected content matters not only to how they behave in the classroom but also to student achievement (Staub & Stern 2002). While districts can mandate particular instructional programs and approaches, a change in teaching practice will only be sustained over time if it is supported by coherent underlying beliefs. CFC is grounded in a set of research-based principles of learning proposed by Lauren Resnick (Resnick, 1995) and further developed by the Institute for Learning (Resnick & Hall, 2001). For these Principles of Learning to be of practical use in lesson design, they need to be related to the kind of reasoning teachers use daily in the classroom. Therefore, the coach participates on the job, helping the teacher deliberately plan and teach lessons that produce student learning.

Content-Focused Coaching further separates itself from Cognitive or peer coaching by its emphasis on Principles of Learning. These Principles of Learning represent fundamental practices that must be present in a teacher’s classroom in order for student
learning to occur. The Principles of Learning include concepts such as *Clear Expectations*, *Academic Rigor in a Thinking Curriculum*, and *Accountable Talk*. Clear Expectations involves the purposeful use of descriptive criteria and models of work that meet standards. Students should refer to these models to help them analyze and discuss their work. With visible accomplishment targets to aim toward at each stage of learning, students can participate in evaluating their own work and setting goals for their own effort (Resnick, 1995). *Academic Rigor in a Thinking Curriculum* claims that knowledge and thinking are intimately joined. This implies a curriculum organized around major concepts that students are expected to know deeply. Teaching must engage students in active reasoning about these concepts. In every subject, at every grade level, instruction and learning must include commitment to a knowledge core, high thinking demand, and active use of knowledge (Resnick, 1995).

*Accountable Talk* involves the teacher’s ability to orchestrate talk amongst and between students about ideas and work related to their learning. Accountable talk uses evidence appropriate to the discipline (e.g., proofs in mathematics, data from investigations in science, textual details in literature, and documentary sources in history) and follows established norms of good reasoning. Teachers should intentionally create the norms and skills of Accountable Talk in their classrooms (Resnick, 1995).

Content-Focused Coaches assist the teachers they coach by way of *coaching moves*. A *move* is “any action that is accomplished with the intention of bringing about a state of affairs that directly or indirectly will (probably) lead to a desired global goal” (van Dish & Kitsch 1983, p. 66). In Content-Focused Coaching, all actions that a coach undertakes to work toward any of the two global goals of fostering student learning and developing teacher
expertise are coaching moves. They may include observing a lesson, giving feedback, teaching a lesson, co-teaching a lesson, intervening in classroom talk, suggesting lesson designs, assessing student learning, presenting a new teaching method, or explaining content, to name a few. In particular, a coach may help a teacher by raising questions, making suggestions, and refining the teacher’s plans with respect to what to teach and how to teach it. Coaches get teachers started and support them in making lesson goals explicit. Coaches also facilitate thinking through the design of the lesson in a content-focused way from theory-based points of view that are pivotal for student learning.

Coaches not only help teachers deliver successful lessons, they also create opportunities for teachers to refine and develop their teaching expertise. Coaches may therefore also offer explanations relative to any of the knowledge areas depicted in what CFC refers to as the Framework for Lesson Design and Analysis. Coaches may even argue for certain designs. The teacher and coach can, in the post-conference, discuss the extent to which the course of action chosen produced the desired outcome.

The most important power of coaching is the potential for collaboration and the ability to focus on the needs of students, which allow the coach to fine tune the help being offered to the teacher being coached. Such highly customized assistance, however, is only possible if coaches respect and take into account teachers’ knowledge and underlying beliefs about learning and teaching by encouraging them to share and discuss their own ideas, suggestions, and reflections. Coaches also need to check their own understanding by paraphrasing and summarizing what the teacher has said. The pivotal aspects of coaching are accomplished through two basic kinds of coaching moves: Moves that invite teacher contributions such as statements or questions by the coach that initiate and invite the teacher
to verbalize perceptions, thoughts, plans, deliberations, and arguments; and moves that provide direct assistance with lesson design such as statements by the coach that provide guidance and explanations for specific designs and ways of implementing a lesson (Staub, West & Bickel, 2003).

The last move discussed highlights a contrast to collegial and cognitive coaching. Content-Focused Coaching expects coaches to have more teaching expertise than the teachers being coached do. Ideally, coaches should have hands-on knowledge in the discipline and be very familiar with official standards, teaching materials, teaching methods, students at the corresponding grade levels, and theories of learning and teaching. (There are, of course, many exceptions to this ideal.) Because of their respective levels of professional knowledge, the interaction between teacher and coach will not be symmetrical.

Veteran Teachers and Resistance

According to the Title II, Part A section of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a veteran teacher is defined as one who is not new to the profession and has been working in a public school for a total of three or more complete school years. Using this definition in conjunction with the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), in 2008, approximately eighty-nine percent of teachers in the United States would fall into the category of veteran teacher. While three years may be the NCLB definition of veteran, this study has chosen to use a minimum of ten years working as a teacher in a public school as its criterion. According to the SASS, again using data collected in 2007-08, just over fifty-three percent of teachers in the United States were identified as teaching for ten or more years.
Ten years of teaching experience was chosen as a benchmark for exploring teacher experiences in large part because of the research gathered by Greenberg and Baron in 2000. According to Greenberg and Baron, teachers establish instructional routines or habits over time. These habits represent barriers to a teacher’s changing his or her practices. Rather than working to develop new skills or strategies, it is simply easier to continue teaching in the same ways. Greenberg and Baron identify another barrier to both individual and organizational change that involves a failure from veteran teachers to recognize the need for change (2000). Unless teachers understand and appreciate the need for change in their schools, their interest in maintaining the status quo will undoubtedly take precedence over their willingness to accept change (Greenberg & Baron, 2000). A teacher of ten years will have had more time to establish instructional habits and, therefore, provide a richer source of experiences related to instructional coaching than a teacher who is three years into their profession.

Another reason ten years of teaching in a public school was selected is because recent studies have suggested that the length of time spent teaching in the classroom is not linked conclusively to improved teaching practices or increases in student achievement (Braun, 2005; Goe, 2008). Experience provides teachers the opportunity to develop expertise, but experience by itself does not guarantee expertise. This claim is supported by the considerable literature on career stage in general (Super, 1957, 1984) and specifically for teachers (Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1993) but also because career stage is an indicator of development within schools and classrooms. As a result, it is likely to have significant and unique effects on teachers’ responses to instructional coaching. In fact, this study will follow in the tradition of a number of studies investigating the role of years of teaching experience
in teachers’ instructional practices and their understandings of these practices (Levine, 2011; Rich & Almozlino, 1999; Strauss, Ravid, Magen, & Berliner, 1998).

A summary of research conducted by Drake in 2002 involving veteran teachers and the implementation of a math reform initiative indicated that teachers from different career stages differed in two key ways: in their goals for their students, and in their integration of reform teaching practices with more traditional teaching practices (Drake, 2002). In each of these two areas, teachers at more advanced career stages focused to different degrees on the theoretical, as opposed to the procedural content of the reform curriculum when compared to novice teachers.

The research also suggests that veteran teachers become more cynical about reform over time. This is due, in part, because in recent decades they have witnessed numerous reform efforts that have come and gone (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Hess, Maranto, & Milliman, 2000; Hill, Pierce, & Guthrie, 1997). Veteran teachers who have watched educational reform come and go lose interest in changes that promise to yet again remake education. Veteran teachers also have more time, energy, and self-regard invested in the current state of affairs. Consequently, it is hypothesized that veteran teachers are less likely to support reform, regardless of any district, state or federal mandate (Bushnell, 2003).

Because the success of an initiative is correlated to the educator’s acceptance of the change associated to the reform, school leaders and change agents should consider the possibility of facing resistance of veteran teachers. Resistance, according to Higginbotham (1996), has been defined as any oppositional behavior demonstrated by an individual or group of individuals to another individual, idea, or action. Higginbotham goes on to explain that these oppositional behaviors usually occur in an interactive environment involving
power relationships. Other change resistance characteristics exhibited by teachers might be a result of their past experiences. For example, schools’ previously unsuccessful efforts at change could leave teachers extremely wary about accepting further attempts (Greenberg & Baron, 2000).

Moreover, because many teachers feel a sense of security from doing things in familiar ways, disrupting teachers’ well-established professional and instructional patterns could result in a fear of the unknown (Fullan, 2001; Greenberg & Baron, 2000). Furthermore, if teachers feel that the school environment for change is unsafe, as they might in a Persistently Lowest Achieving environment, they not only are unlikely to embrace new practices but might also become defensive and resort to their old habits (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002).

Similarly, teachers might actually feel threatened in a number of ways by the prospect of change. Their acceptance of change could be affected by perceived threats to their expertise and proven abilities, and their belief that they lack the knowledge or skills to implement the change successfully (Fullan, 2001; Greenberg & Baron, 2000). Changes in long-established decision-making responsibilities could also affect those veteran educators who perceive threats to their power relationships (Robbins, 2000). Moreover, structural and organizational changes in schools could represent threats to social relationships of veteran teachers who have formed strong friendships with their colleagues (Greenberg & Baron, 2000). Finally, veteran teachers and others who benefit from the current distribution and control of scarce resources might perceive threats to their resource allocations brought about by changes in the school (Robbins, 2000).
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purposes of this study were to: (1) better understand the experiences of veteran teachers and novice coaches involved in Content-Focused Coaching as a reform initiative; (2) describe how expectations outlined as part of Content-Focused Coaching conflict with the existing beliefs, practices, values, assumptions and practices held by these same veteran teachers; and (3) discover insights and ideas embedded in the experiences and perspectives of veteran teachers and novice coaches who worked together through the Content-Focused Coaching process to further improve and/or inform future instructional coaching reforms as well as the implementation of those reforms.

To address the purposes in this study, the researcher chose a comparative, multi-case study design. In this regards, the term case study is defined as, “the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p. 120). Furthermore, Creswell describes a case study as a, “qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2003, p. 163).

The case study design was particularly appropriate for this inquiry because it “offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 46). The design for the
case was an embedded analysis in that it focused on a specific phenomenon with a detailed history and chronology of the case. The use of an embedded design helps to illustrate the complexities of the school reform initiative and the way teachers understood the initiative.

The case was interpretive and emergent, using descriptive data to explore the concepts of teacher beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices as they related to Content-Focused Coaching.

The cases for this study included both the individual teachers and their instructional coaches; thus, each case will be a teacher/coach pairing. The multiple cases approach was utilized because the researcher wants to demonstrate different perspectives around the same issue in a bounded context, in the case of this study, the teacher and coach interaction and experience over the first year of the coaching process.

Methodology

Methodology procedures for this study were approved in the spring of 2012 through Western Michigan University’s HSIRB Application process. HSIRB requirements included subject recruitment, informed consent to all participants, risks and costs for participants, as well as confidentiality of data. The HSIRB approval letter is found in Appendix A. This methodology section will start with the identification of all subjects who participated in the study including the sampling procedures utilized to identify them. Following this, the researcher will explain the setting for the study, his access to the subjects and setting, the data collection procedures utilized, as well as his role as a researcher in this qualitative design. Finally, this section will detail the instruments used in this study, the data analysis process, and conclude with the validity of responses collected from the participants.
Subjects

This study involved collecting qualitative data from six English Language Arts teachers and three instructional coaches who are all bound by their engagement in the same school reform initiative, namely Content-Focused Coaching. In particular, this study described the experiences of veteran teachers and novice coaches relative to Content-Focused Coaching as collected through agendas and minutes of Professional Learning Community meetings, one-on-one interviews, and classroom observations.

To determine the appropriate number of years needed to identify a teacher as veteran, the researcher utilized statistics collected from the Career/Technical Education (CTE) consortium as reported by the United States Department of Education (USDE, 2009). Using the ranges developed by CTE as the foundation for determining veteran teacher status, the researcher identified all English Language Arts teachers for the study who would be engaged in Content-Focused Coaching at one of the three identified schools and who had 10 or more years of teaching experience. Once veteran ELA teachers were identified, the researcher then was able to access teacher evaluation records to determine which of the teachers had received unsatisfactory evaluations during their 10 or more years of teaching experience.

The coaches for this study had each engaged in over one hundred hours of professional development led by instructors from the University of Pittsburgh’s Institute for Learning (IFL). The professional development sessions focused on deepening the coaches’ knowledge of the theory and research underlying effective instruction with a special
emphasis on the role of classroom discourse in supporting students’ understanding of essential concepts related to the content being taught (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).

Sampling

The researcher used a purposeful sampling strategy by selecting “individuals and sites for study that can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 122). The primary sampling unit for this multiple case study research was three middle schools that have implemented and are bound by parameters associated with the Content-Focused Coaching initiative. By studying these three schools, the researcher uncovered helpful points of comparison, which added to the collective knowledge of how school reform initiatives like Content-Focused Coaching have been experienced by veteran teachers and coaches.

The six teachers for this study were also selected using a purposeful sampling approach (Creswell, 2007). Purposeful sampling was utilized because, as Creswell describes, “The inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). The criteria used for sampling was based on the teacher’s school location, the content area the teachers would be teaching during the 2011-12 school year, their number of years teaching, and the evaluations the teacher’s had received during their tenure up through 2010-11. Purposeful sampling was used to select teachers who had at least ten or more years of teaching experience and had participated in less than 2 cycles of Content-Focused Coaching. This sampling design was also used to select the coaches for the study, focusing
on coaches who have had a minimum of one hundred hours of professional development in Content-Focused Coaching but had never actually coached a teacher independently.

Setting

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), an effective setting for research is one where:

- Entry is possible; there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest is present; the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relationships with the participants in the study; the study can be conducted and reported ethically; and data quality and credibility are reasonably assured (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 221).

The three middle schools for this study were identified from the remaining three other middle schools in the district because they have all been identified by the Michigan Department of Education as a Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA) school with all ELA and math staff in these schools forcibly engaged in the same reform initiative, Content-Focused Coaching. The research setting, therefore, represents homogenous sampling of sites by providing strong similarities among the three schools. Using homogenous sampling allowed the researcher to, “focus, reduce, simplify, and facilitate” individual interviews (Creswell, 2007, p. 103). The use of purposeful, homogenous sampling allowed the researcher to identify common themes among teachers who participated in the study from these three different sites relative to their individual and collective understanding of this particular school reform initiative.

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Middle schools A and B are located about 5 miles apart from each other while School C is located approximately 15 miles away. All three schools are located in Southwestern Michigan and are a part of the same school district. All three of the schools have a principal who has been at their respective school for just under 1 year with a superintendent who had been with the district exactly 5 years.

School A serves approximately 290 students, the majority (90 percent) of whom are African American with 90 percent qualifying for Free or Reduced-Price meals. Just under half (47 percent) of sixth grade students scored proficient on the Reading portion of the fall 2008, Michigan Educational Assessment Program. The average teacher tenure in the school district is 18.6 years, with a range in years between the lowest and highest tenured teacher being 8 years. There are two non-tenured teachers at School A. These two teachers do not teach ELA or Math, and consequently, did not have an impact on the study. Teachers in the school first became aware of the Content-Focused Coaching initiative in the fall of 2010. They have since dedicated over 20 hours of their professional development time to exploring reform concepts such as lesson design, student engagement through academic talk, measurable learning targets, and student choice. Teachers were first asked to volunteer to participate in the three stages of Content-Focused Coaching in the spring of 2011. As of May 2011, only two of the eighteen classroom teachers have engaged in at least two full cycles of coaching, specifically in the content areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics.

School B serves approximately 360 students with 93 percent of the students being African American, and the remaining 7 percent of students being Hispanic. Nearly all of School B’s students (98 percent) qualify for Free or Reduced-Price meals. Forty-nine percent of School B’s sixth graders passed the Reading portion of the Michigan Education
Assessment Program. The teachers at School B, unlike School A, are a less veteran group with an average tenure at just under 10 years and ten teachers being non-tenured. There is one teacher in ELA who has less than 10 years teaching experience and will not be identified for this study. Like School A, only two of School B’s twenty teachers have participated in at least two full cycles of coaching.

School C is the largest of the three middle schools with an enrollment of 550 students. Based on data collected in 2010, nearly fifty percent of students are Hispanic with another 30 percent identified as African-American. The remaining 20 percent of the student population is Caucasian and multi-racial. According to district records, eighty eight percent of students qualified for free and reduced lunch. Fifty-six percent of School C’s sixth graders passed the Reading portion of the Michigan Education Assessment Program. The teachers at School C represent a mixture of veteran and non-tenured teachers with an average tenure at over 13 years and four teachers being non-tenured. There is one teacher in ELA who had less than 10 years of teaching experience. Like School A and B, only two of the thirty-two School C’s teachers have participated in at least two full cycles of coaching.

Access

The researcher had access to each of the schools and teachers because he had been assigned the responsibility from the district office to collect data on teachers’ understanding of Content-Focused Coaching as part of a larger plan to evaluate the overall implementation and effectiveness of coaching as a school reform initiative utilized by the district. The fact that the researcher was also an employee of the district aids in establishing access for the study, but it could be a liability in terms of bias while collecting and analyzing data gathered
from the teachers. This aspect of the research was addressed in the limitations portion of Chapter 1.

Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study were collected using Professional Learning Community meeting agendas and minutes, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The reader is referred to Appendix B for the Interview Protocol and to Appendix C for the Observation and Feedback Tool used to collect classroom observation data. Each of these data points was collected to assist the researcher to better understand veteran teachers’ experiences about Content-Focused Coaching.

The researcher began this study in the fall of 2011 with three middle schools (School A, School B, and School C) new to implementing a district determined school reform initiative – in this case, Content-Focused Coaching. Data collection for this case study started with the collection and organization of Professional Learning Community (PLC) agenda data.

The purpose of starting the data collection process with PLC agendas was to establish instructional categories for classroom observations and broad questions for the semi-structured interviews. Following the organization of PLC agendas and the establishment of categories, classroom observations and interviews were scheduled to occur on consecutive days within the same school. For example, day 1 at school A focused on one-on-one interviews, with day 2 focusing on classroom observations using the Observation and Feedback Tool. The researcher replicated the sequence of data collection procedures at the second (school B) and third (school C) middle schools utilizing the same tools and processes.
Data collection days were alternated between the three schools, so that data from the School A teachers, the School B teachers, and the School C teachers were on rotating days with the same pattern repeated for coaches. This rotation between schools allowed the researcher to focus on the same aspects of the case for each teacher and coach as well as serving as a means of facilitating a more comparative and emergent description of teachers' and coaches embedded cases from each school.

Data collected from one-on-one interviews were recorded and then transcribed using the transcription software called Dragonspeak. The researcher conducted one interview per person, lasting approximately one hour each, using a semi-structured interview strategy. The researcher prepared questions in advance, but the semi-structured format allowed the researcher to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 124) by improvising additional questions. The questions were worded as neutrally as possible, which allowed the respondent to guide the discussion according to his or her view of the reform. The researcher audio recorded all of the interviews using an iPad equipped with the transcription software called, Dragonspeak.

For each round of classroom observations, the researcher visited each school on back-to-back days to observe classroom instruction using the prescribed observation tool referred to as the Observation and Feedback Protocol. During all observations, the researcher looked for implementation of strategies discussed during Professional Learning Communities. As a non-participant observer, the researcher was able to transcribe much of the observation via computer, including direct quotations and researcher comments. The researcher needed to establish his role as a non-participant observer to each of the participants to help ensure teachers will not become uncomfortable with the researcher’s presence. The researcher
reviewed documents that were utilized during the Professional Learning Community sessions prior to the observations taking place.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation for this study involved a researcher-developed protocol used for teacher interviews as well as classroom observation tool developed with District curriculum staff in cooperation with the University of Pittsburgh referred to as the Observation and Feedback Tool (see Appendices B and C).

The researcher-developed interview protocol included a number of questions designed to collect responses related to experiences the teachers had while being coached as well as the experiences they had implementing the strategies with students. Rather than ask coaches to describe the specific support they provided to their teachers, interview questions were designed to be broad and open-ended in nature. The purpose of asking broad, general questions related to teacher experiences was to compare and contrast the content of PLC agendas with the categories connected to classroom observations. Aspects of data collection that served as sources of contrast among PLC agendas, classroom observations, and responses to interview questions served as potential sources of conflict between the teacher’s beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices and the Content Focus Coaching process. Follow up questions addressed how these support activities coincided, or conflicted, with existing norms within the building as well as with beliefs, assumptions, values, and practices held by the individual being interviewed. Interview questions included the following:

1. How often do you meet with your coach/teacher?

2. What do you meet about?
3. (To coach) Have you observed the teacher implementing lessons in their classroom?

(To teacher) Have you been observed by the coach implementing lessons?

4. How would you describe the effectiveness of these lessons?

5. (To coach) What changes in teacher practice have you witnessed as a result of coaching?

(To teacher) What changes in practice have you experienced as a result of being coached?

6. (To coach) How do these changes align with observed previous practices?

(To teacher) How do these changes align with your previous practices?

7. How do these coaching experiences coincide or conflict with previous work norms?

8. How has student learning been impacted as a result of these changes?

9. What changes to the Content-Focused Coaching process would you recommend?

The protocol also contained four questions focused on the teacher’s understanding of the coaching job (Teacher only):

10. How would you describe the role of the coach?

11. What kinds of things does your coach do at your school?

12. How has the role of the coach influenced the working conditions for you as a teacher?

13. What areas, if any, have caused challenges for you and why?

The semi-structured protocol used in the coach interviews also included two questions concerning the coach’s understanding of their role (Coaches only):
14. How has your role as a coach influenced the working conditions for the teachers you work with?

15. How do you feel the teacher has received the feedback you have provided thus far and why?

Finally, the interview asked both the coaches and veteran teachers their suggestions for improvement in terms of implementation around Content-Focused Coaching.

The second instrument used in this research design was a classroom observation tool referred to as the Observation and Feedback Tool (Appendix C). The tool, which originated from the University of Pittsburgh’s Institute For Learning, was adapted by District curriculum staff to focus on specific areas that were directly connected to the instructional strategies explored by teachers and coaches during Professional Learning Community meetings. The rationale for this adaptation was to ensure a tight alignment between the observation tool and instructional strategies discussed during Professional Learning Community meetings. This tight alignment between the learned and observed instructional behaviors helped ensure authenticity, or validity, in the data collected during classroom observations.

The rating criteria for the Classroom Observation and Feedback Tool were labeled as either: Not applicable; Not observed; Observed but emergent; or Observed at an established level. The rating of “Not applicable” meant that that particular “look-for” was not applicable for the lesson being observed. In other words, it would be appropriate to not observe that particular look for based on the content or objective of that particular lesson. The rating of “Not observed” meant that the “look-for” was appropriate for the lesson, but was not observed at any point during the classroom visitation. This rating represented areas that were
integral parts of the Content-Focused Coaching process but were not observed as part of classroom visitations. Areas identified as “Not Observed,” for this study, would serve as potential areas of conflict between a teacher’s beliefs, values, assumptions and practices and what they were being coached in. Areas receiving this rating would be further explored as part of the one-on-one interviews. “Look-for’s” that had relatively larger percentages of “Not observed” ratings were coded by the researcher and used in conjunction with teacher and coach interview questions to answer the research questions addressed in this study. “Observed emergent” meant that the “look-for” was observed, but not at a high degree either by teachers or students. The final criteria, “Observed and Established” meant that the observer saw the “look-for” consistently in the lesson. For the purposes this study, this rating represented areas that were highly addressed by the instructional coaches and were incorporated by teachers in their classroom practice to a high degree.

The validity of these instruments used for this study was obtained by utilizing several different strategies and procedures (Creswell, 2003; Golafshani, 2003). First, during both interviews and classroom observations, the researcher controlled his reactions. The purpose of the interviews and observations was to find out what views teachers and coaches held and how these views were implemented in terms of execution of instructional strategies; their views and teaching behaviors were unbiased by any evaluative responses on the researcher’s part. The researcher chose the participant’s individual school as the interview and classroom observation environment. In doing so, the subjects felt comfortable, secure, and at ease enough to speak openly about their point of view. For the interviews, the researcher avoided presenting “yes” or “no” questions which tend to stifle detail. Finally, the researcher included recursive questions to the interview process to ensure responses were consistent.
Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Marshall and Rossman’s (2006) seven phases of data analysis. The seven phases included: (a) organizing the data; (b) immersion in the data; (c) generating categories and themes; (d) coding the data; (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos; (f) and searching for alternative understandings.

Data analysis began during the data collection process, starting with the organization of Professional Learning Community agendas and minutes. During the analysis of PLC agendas, instructional categories were created that were used as criteria for classroom observations as well as in assisting in organizing responses collected during the interview process. The researcher reviewed written reflections and interview notes after each day of interviews and observations with the teachers at each of the respective schools. The researcher captured the teacher and coach’s unique experiences as they related to Content-Focused Coaching, including how teachers and coaches explained the essential elements of the Principles of Learning and the Core Issues of Lesson Design.

As part of the data analysis process for the three schools, the researcher read and coded each of the transcripts taken from the audio-taped interviews. The process for coding included several steps that were designed to promote data retrieval as well as data analysis (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

The researcher began coding the interview transcripts using an emergent, intuitive analysis of all data. Specifically, even though the district had identified objectives of Content-Focused Coaching for the 2011-12 school year relative to teacher practice, these objectives were not being prefigured into themes for data analysis. Instead, the researcher
searched for data that revealed the teacher’s interpretations of the structures and processes that supported Content-Focused Coaching, and drew themes as they emerged.

Upon completion of the transcription, the researcher read through each transcript, highlighting sections that overlapped or were stated no less than three times by respondents. For additional support, the researcher wrote notes in the margins to capture thoughts, emerging themes, questions, and opposing data points. After this initial read, the researcher went back and read through the highlighted sections, refining notes into shorter labels, or codes. The researcher, using a process called “categorical aggregation” (Creswell, 2007), attempting to collect a common series of instances from the data hoping that issue-relevant meanings would emerge.

The researcher first compared within cases and then looked across the three cases, called cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2007). The within-case comparison of interviews from School A lead to initial codes, and as the researcher moved back and forth between transcripts to compare similar comments at Schools A, B, and C, assertions or interpretations of potential meanings of the case emerged. The process of identifying particulars within individual cases led to discoveries of larger themes across the three cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As new concepts and categories emerged from the data, the researcher needed to develop more abstract conceptual categories to synthesize, to explain, and to understand the disparities.

The researcher for this study is an employee of the cooperating school district selected as the context for this study. Because of previous work that I conducted in these
schools, I have relationships with some of the informants and a familiarity with the schools. Moustakas (1994) talks about *epoche* as a process by which the researcher tries to uncover his or her own assumptions regarding the phenomenon in question, and then set these experiences aside as much as possible. The researcher actively worked to identify his personal assumptions by focusing on the variety of perspectives that were collected. The researcher also employed a “holistic understanding” (Creswell, 2007) as to better capture the entire case, and not focus solely on one specific portion which could contribute to the bias.

Validity of Responses

Qualitative research is not designed to be replicable in the same manner that one would describe using a quantitative approach to research. In qualitative research, the researcher purposefully avoids controlling the research conditions and concentrates on recording the complexity of situational contexts and interrelations as they occur naturally (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This study took many extra steps in order to ensure the results from the data analysis were credible, transferable, and authentic.

Transferability provides the degree to which the results can be generalized to other situations (Mertens, 2005). The researcher kept detailed records of the research procedures so other researchers could follow the data collection and analysis process. The researcher described in detail how all data was collected, organized, analyzed, and synthesized.

To establish authenticity within the study, the researcher presented a balanced view of all perspectives, values, and beliefs in their raw form using either exact quotes from transcripts or descriptive notes taken during classroom observations. The researcher went to great length to organize all data in a truly emergent manner including the coding process that
served to identify patterns within the responses of the participants. Finally, this study had each teacher and coach subject review both the written notes and the transcripts collected during their semi-structured interviews.
CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study attempted to provide insights into how veteran teachers and novice coaches implemented Content-Focused Coaching in selected Persistently Lowest Achieving middle schools in a large Midwestern school district. Additionally, the researcher hoped to shed light on the beliefs, assumptions, values, and practices held by teachers relative to instructional coaching and whether these aspects impacted the implementation of Content-Focused Coaching at these selected sites. Finally, this study hoped to gather data on how Content-Focused Coaching could be more effectively implemented as a reform strategy. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do veteran teachers describe their response to and experience with Content-Focused Coaching after one year of instruction?

2. How do novice coaches describe the way veteran teachers are responding to the Content-Focused Coaching experience and their coach after one year of instruction?

3. Where do the teachers and their coaches experience conflict related to changes in the norms of professional teacher-to-teacher interaction, i.e. the coaching relationship?

4. Moving forward, how do these veteran teachers see Content-Focused Coaching as a part of their future teaching experience?
This chapter is organized into four sections: (1) descriptive characteristics of participants; (2) analysis of the data; (3) review the findings from each research question posed for this study; and (4) summary of findings.

Descriptive Characteristics of Participants

Table 1 provides a synopsis of each of the teachers selected to be interviewed for this study. The table communicates the individual teacher, the school they taught at during the 2011-12 school year, the content area they taught, their number of years teaching, their most recent evaluation results, as well as their race.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Most Recent Evaluations</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher 1 is a veteran Caucasian teacher with 17 years of total teaching experience. All 17 years have been spent teaching English Language Arts at either the high school or middle school level. The teacher has been in school A for 5 years. Teacher 2 is another veteran teacher with over 21 years of total teaching experience in two districts. Teacher 2 is another Caucasian staff that has spent the last 14 years in the current district, with all of these 14 years spent teaching English Language Arts at the secondary level. Teacher 2 has only
been at school A for two years. Teacher 3 is a veteran Caucasian teacher with 18 years of teaching experience. Fourteen of the years spent in teaching have been at the high school level teaching a combination of English Language Arts and courses in the Social Sciences. The last four years have been spent in school B teaching English Language Arts. Teacher 4 is another veteran Caucasian teacher with 11 years of experience all in School B and all teaching English Language Arts. Teacher 5 is a Caucasian teacher who had a previous career in business before going back to school to become a teacher. Teacher 5 has 12 years of teaching experience with the first 10 completed at the high school level with the last two years at the middle school level in school C. The final teacher 6 is also Caucasian as well as the most veteran of all the teachers interviewed with 23 total years of experience. Teacher 6 was the only teacher with experience at the elementary level as well as the secondary level. Teacher 6 spent their first 5 years teaching 4th and 5th grades and the last 18 years teaching in the middle grades. All of the years have been spent teaching English Language Arts or Health classes.

The coaches for this study have all engaged in a minimum of 100 hours of professional development led by the university professors from the University of Pittsburgh’s Institute for Learning (IFL). The professional development sessions focused on building coaches’ knowledge of the theory and research underlying effective instruction with a special emphasis on the role of classroom talk in supporting students’ understanding of essential concepts related to the content being taught (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).

Table 2 displays the three coaches selected and interviewed for this study including the schools where they coached during the 2011-12 school year, the content area they
coached, the number of hours they received in professional development, and the race of each coach.

### Table 2

#### Coach Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coach</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Professional Development Hours</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis began once PLC agendas had been collected and then again following each round of interviews and classroom observations. The researcher began by analyzing Professional Learning Community Agendas to determine the content and focus for teacher observations and interviews. Starting the process by analyzing PLC agenda data allowed the researcher to develop an objective and emergent lens for categorizing observed behaviors during classroom visits as well as a means of categorizing comments generated by the veteran teachers and novice coaches during one-on-one interviews.

The categories identified from the PLC agendas were taken directly from agenda outcomes and objectives. There were four main instructional categories of foci for teachers and coaches connected to PLC’s. These instructional categories were: Increasing student engagement; developing rigorous tasks for students; using data and assessment to drive instruction; and promoting teacher and student reflection related to learning. The data collected from PLC’s has been summarized in Table 3.
Table 3

Summary of PLC Agendas and Minutes Collected During the 2011-12 School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of:</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>PLC Topic</th>
<th>Instructional Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sep. 12, 2011 | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Establish norms  
• Review observation protocol  
• Review student pre-test data  
• Plan formative assessments for next unit | Data Analysis and Assessment                   |
| Sep. 28, 2011 | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Thinking Through Lesson Protocol                                         | Increasing Student Engagement                 |
| Oct. 10, 2011  | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Review patterned way of teaching                                          | Increasing Student Engagement                 |
| Oct. 31, 2011  | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Questions about new units                                                 | Planning to develop Rigorous Tasks            |

The items below were not covered due to PLC being cut short by an all staff meeting:

• Look at Gradebook practices  
• How can we be intentional with gradebook?  
• Facilitating academically productive talk, (planning for and leading discussion)

Nov. 14, 2011  | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Using Data: Look at class by RIT report  
  ▪ Discuss usefulness in classroom  
  ▪ Log into IGOR and look at lexile by classroom report  
  ▪ Discuss usefulness in the classroom  
  ▪ Look at IGOR report student profile and goal setting  
  ▪ Inform teachers of upcoming work with students  
  ▪ Look at MAP attack goal setting strategies | Data Analysis and Assessment                   |

• How can we apply the patterned way to day to day instruction? | Increasing Student Engagement                 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of:</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>PLC Topic</th>
<th>Instructional Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Dec. 12, 2011    | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Using Data: Look at NWEA teacher report  
• Discuss how to interpret, and it’s application  
• Teacher and staff work time with Data Binders                                                                                             | Data Analysis and Assessment               |
| Jan. 9, 2012     | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Share questions, concerns  
• Inform teachers of upcoming instructional audits  
  ▪ Time frame  
  ▪ Goal  
  ▪ Who’s coming  
• Review instructional audit look-fors  
  ▪ Review tool document  
• Discuss successes, challenges for last learning cycle  
• Discuss needed improvements to learning cycle                                                                                           | Planning to implement Rigorous Tasks/Reflection |
| Jan. 26, 2012    | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Discuss plans to incorporate technology goals for the ELA department  
• Share questions, concerns regarding student engagement in classroom  
• Progress through the studying student work protocol focusing on student understanding and engagement                                        | Increasing Student Engagement              |
| Feb. 13, 2012    | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Share out reading strategies currently being applied in ELA and reading classes  
• Instructional Strategy: Reflect and discuss based on reading                                                                                   | Teacher Reflection                         |
| Feb. 29, 2012    | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Using Data: Share and discuss MAP testing results  
• Differentiation inventory  
• Co-plan with co-teacher and map out learning targets for the next unit being taught based on pretest data                                      | Data Analysis and Assessment               |
Table 3—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>PLC Topic</th>
<th>Instructional Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mar. 2, 2012  | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Using Data: Review, MAP scores, flexible grouping and differentiation from last PLC session  
• Original Sources: Read “Declaration of Interdependence”  
• Analyze teachers’ lesson plans for rigor using the depth of knowledge academic rigor tool  
• Assist fellow teachers in rigor assessment of lesson plans | Data Analysis and Assessment/Planning to develop Rigorous Tasks |
| Mar. 28, 2012 | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Discuss SMART goal review plans and post-conference with coach  
• Studying student work protocol with intention of analyzing student work for rigor | Planning to develop Rigorous Tasks                           |
| Apr. 8, 2012  | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Moving rigor from the assignment to the student work.  
• Compare and contrast rigor in the student work and the assignment.  
• What supports do students need to produce rigorous work? | Planning to develop Rigorous Tasks                           |
| May 8, 2012   | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Why close and critical reading?  
• Common Core Standards  
• Coach’s surveys | Teacher Reflection                                            |
| May 15, 2012  | ELA          | A,B,C   | • Close and critical reading review  
• Review of goals for the year  
\  
• Rigor  
• DL implementation  
• Reading  
• Student Work  
• SIP goals from this year review  
• Develop goals for next year | Teacher Reflection                                            |
| May 30, 2012  | ELA          | A,B,C   | • ELA audit review  
• DL accomplishments and challenges  
• Look at IFL assessment task  
• Discuss plans for inclusion of Common Core State Standards assessment tasks for next year | Teacher Reflection                                            |
Table 3 provides a succinct overview of the dates teachers and coaches held meetings, the content areas included, the schools involved, and the topics covered as reported by coaches on Professional Learning Community agendas as validated by this researcher. Organizing the data by date allowed the researcher to report topics and identify areas that occurred with greater frequency than others. The most frequent topics for PLC’s included teacher’s analysis of student level formative and summative assessment data, instructional strategies designed to increase student engagement, and lesson design and observational protocols created to have teachers generate rigorous tasks for their students. In addition to these common areas, instructional coaches consistently incorporated activities into their PLC agendas that engaged teachers in on-going reflection of their lessons as well as the overall achievement of their students’ learning.

Following the organization and initial description of the listed PLC data, the researcher generalized the topics to certain instructional categories which helped to narrow the questions used for the interviewing of participants as well as provide the criteria for classroom observations. These instructional categories were then used as broader headings for classroom observations and one-on-one interviews with teachers and coaches.

Table 4 represents the findings from the classroom observations using the Classroom Observation and Feedback Tool (Appendix B). As described in Chapter 3, the “look-for’s” that had higher percentages of “Not observed” ratings represented potential areas of conflict between instructional coaching and a teachers’ beliefs, values, assumptions and practices and were compared with data collected from one-on-one interviews to generate themes relative to the four research questions. As evidenced through classroom observations, the instructional category that had the highest percentage of the “Not observed” rating was Reflection with
Table 4

Classroom Observation Results 2011-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Category</th>
<th>Look-For</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>1. Teacher launches the lesson by reviewing learning goals for the lesson. This may include connecting the lesson for the day with past learning and/or reviewing essential questions.</td>
<td>Not applicable 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not observed 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Emergent 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Established 58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Students are engaged in the lesson launch as evidenced by writing and discussion.</td>
<td>Not applicable 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not observed 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Emergent 67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Established 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigorous Tasks</td>
<td>3. Students cite textual evidence to support and defend their interpretation and analysis of the text. <strong>Patterned Way</strong></td>
<td>Not applicable 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not observed 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Emergent 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Established 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Students revise, edit, and revisit concepts and content through writing and discussion. <strong>Patterned Way</strong></td>
<td>Not applicable 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not observed 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Emergent 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Established 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Students are able to articulate what they are learning, including why they use rubrics, characteristic charts, criteria charts, and Reader’s Writer’s Notebooks.</td>
<td>Not applicable 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not observed 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Emergent 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Established 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>6. Students engage in formative and summative assessment to demonstrate their knowledge of content. Examples: Quick writes (entry slips/exit slips), end of arc assessments, tests, and culminating writing projects.</td>
<td>Not applicable 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not observed 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Emergent 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Established 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>7. Students articulate their learning through the use of stepbacks.</td>
<td>Not applicable 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not observed 55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Emergent 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed/Established 6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

fifty-five percent of classrooms not having any sign of students articulating their learning through the use of a metacognitive strategy referred to as a stepback. The stepback strategy can be used as a formative assessment tool, but was most notably prescribed as a tool to increase student engagement and their reflection of learning that took place. The second and third highest percentages of “Not observed” ratings came in the category identified in PLC agendas as Rigorous Tasks. The specific “look-for’s” for the instructional category referred
to as Rigorous Tasks involved having students cite specific evidence from the text to support their thinking (forty-six percent “Not applicable”) and students being able to articulate their learning from the lesson including their utilization of any rubrics, criteria charts, or Reader’s Notebook (thirty-nine percent “Not observed.”) The researcher would use these findings as part of the coding process as a means of identifying emergent themes collected from one-on-one interviews of teachers and coaches.

Classroom observations and one-on-one interviews with teachers and coaches happened consecutively as part of the data collection process. While categories for the classroom observations had been previously established using PLC data, overall interpretation of these categories in terms of data collection during the interview process was highly emergent. By asking broad questions designed to unveil the overall experiences of teachers and coaches related to Content-Focused Coaching rather than specific questions constructed to the targeted categories of Engagement, Rigorous Tasks, Assessment, and Reflection, the researcher was able to pull more authentic responses from both coaches and teachers without leading either group toward more prescribed statements.

The researcher posed nine questions to teachers and coaches, four questions to teachers only, and two questions to coaches only, for the purpose of drawing emergent insights around the four research questions. (The reader is referred to Appendix B for a copy of these individual questions.) Table 5 demonstrates how these interview questions correlated to the research questions of this study.
## Table 5
Correlation between Interview and Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Research Question 1: How do veteran teachers describe their response to and experience with Content-Focused Coaching after one year of instruction? | • How often do you meet with your coach?  
• What do you meet about?  
• Have you been observed by the coach implementing lessons?  
• How would you describe the effectiveness of these lessons?  
• What changes in practice have you experienced as a result of being coached?  
• How has the role of the coach influenced the working conditions for you as a teacher?” |
| Research Question 2: How do novice coaches describe the way veteran teachers are responding to the Content-Focused Coaching experience and their coach after one year of instruction? | • How often do you meet with your teachers?  
• What do you meet about?  
• Have you observed the teachers implement lessons in their classroom?  
• How would you describe the effectiveness of these lessons?  
• What changes in teacher practice have you witnessed as a result of coaching?  
• How do these changes align with observed previous practices?  
• How has student learning been impacted as a result of these changes?  
• How has your role as a coach influenced the working conditions for the teachers you work with?  
• How do you feel the teacher has received the feedback you have provided thus far and why? |
| Research Question 3: Where do the teachers and their coaches experience conflict related to changes in the norms of professional teacher-to-teacher interaction, i.e. the coaching relationship? | • How do these coaching experiences coincide or conflict with previous work norms?  
• How has the role of the coach influenced the working conditions for you as a teacher?  
• What areas, if any, have caused challenges for you and why?” |
| Research Question 4: Moving forward, how do these veteran teachers see Content-Focused Coaching as a part of their future teaching experience? | • How has student learning been impacted as a result of Content-Focused Coaching?  
• What changes to the Content-Focused Coaching process would you recommend?  
• How would you describe the role of the coach?  
• What kinds of things does your coach do at your school?” |
The researcher first analyzed the interview data through transcribing the interviews using the iPad application called, Dragonspeak. Next, the researcher became familiar with the data through extensive reading and rereading of the interviews to gain understanding of the content. This involved reading through the interviews three times, writing reflections through analytic memos, and then coding recorded notes based upon the four identified categories. After all transcripts had been coded, the researcher then re-examined the transcripts looking for themes related to the categories. Table 6 describes the abbreviations used for the coding process.

Table 6
Coding Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T=</td>
<td>Teacher response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C=</td>
<td>Coach response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R=</td>
<td>Rigorous Tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E=</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF=</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A=</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO=</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The coding abbreviations enabled the researcher to identify specific statements collected during one-on-one interviews where teachers or coaches articulated the specific categories related to Engagement, Rigorous Tasks, Assessment, or Reflection in their response to interview questions as well as identify examples where conflict arose between the individual teacher and the Content-Focused Coaching process.

The researcher reviewed the transcripts first applying the codes of C or T as well as the individual category abbreviations E, R, A, or RE. The researcher went through this cycle
of transcript analysis three times to ensure consistency in the application of these codes. For example, statements made by a Teacher around the category of Rigorous Tasks would be coded as TR (Teacher + Rigorous Task = TR). Following the third cycle of coding using the categories identified through PLC agendas, the researcher examined the transcripts through the lens of conflict. Conflict, coded CO, was applied when the teacher or coach made a statement that articulated a contradiction, or opposing viewpoint, between what was part of the Content-Focused Coaching process and what was actually happening, or perceived to be happening, in practice as measured by a classroom observation conducted by the researcher or one-on-one interviews. For example, if a teacher made a statement explaining how the tasks being designed during PLC’s were not appropriate for the students being served in the classroom, this would be identified as an area of conflict between the coaching process and teacher practice and be coded as TRCO (Teacher + Rigorous Tasks + Conflict = TRCO).

For the question, “How often do you meet with your coach?” three of the teachers indicated 1 to 2 times per month, two teachers said less than 5 times during the year, and one teacher said, “only during PLC meetings.” As a follow-up question, when asked how the frequency of meetings with their coach compared to less veteran teachers, all teachers interviewed articulated that they have fewer meetings than their lesser tenured peers. When asked an additional follow-up question involving why they met less with their coach than their more novice colleagues, the following statements were made:

Teacher 1A: “If I have a problem I will go to him, and I wasn’t as needy as the other teachers.”

Teacher 2A: “Not sure really.”
Teacher 3B: “To be honest, I think they know I am a good teacher and know what I am doing. My coach left me alone.”

Teacher 4B: “(Laughing) I think my coach was afraid of me.”

Teacher 5C: “My coach met with me formally one time in the beginning of the year, gave me no feedback that I can remember, and never came back in…and for the record, I never invited her back either.”

Teacher 6C: “I don’t know, ask them.”

When asking the teachers, “What do you meet about?” the researcher focused on coding for responses that correlated to activities and discussions connected to the same categories found in Professional Learning Community meetings. The four areas were activities or strategies designed to increase student achievement, developing rigorous tasks for students, utilizing formative or summative assessments to influence instruction, and strategies designed to promote student reflection of their own learning. The following Table 7 communicates the frequency of times these four categories were brought up either directly or indirectly by teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Category Frequency and Teacher Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigorous Tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers indicated that the majority of their time was spent on developing tasks that would be rigorous for their students with time spent analyzing various forms of assessment data a close second. Examples of statements made by teachers around designing rigorous tasks included:

Teacher 1A: “We spent a lot of time using the TTL1 protocol and thinking through questions students would respond to related to the text.”

Teacher 2A: “We worked on strategies to help make student’s thinking more visible.”

Teacher 3B: “My coach wanted us to be more deliberate with using Bloom’s when thinking through activities for students.”

Teacher 4B: “All we did was look at assessment data and talk about what kids were learning and why we thought they were and others not. It was a lot of time spent talking!”

Teacher 5B: “We spent a lot of time thinking through individual lessons and the strategies we were going to use to differentiate for our lowest kids.”

Teacher 6C: “We talked about ways to get the kids more engaged and having them do more of the work…strategies like the gist and the stepback are examples.”

When asked the question, “Have you been observed by the coach implementing lessons?” all teachers indicated that they have, with one teacher adding on that the observation only happened one time at the beginning of the year. When asked, “How would you describe the effectiveness of these lessons?” the teachers either indicated the lessons were “good,” or “fine” with teacher 4B being the only variant explaining that the observations caused the kids to “act out” more than they normally would have.

When analyzing the question, “What changes in practice have you experienced as a result of being coached?” again the researcher analyzed responses and coded for specific
examples related to the four categories of Engagement, Rigorous Tasks, Assessment, and Reflection. Using the coding process outlined in the data analysis portion of this chapter, the researcher recorded activities or strategies reported by teachers related to Rigorous Tasks more than any other category. Table 8 lists the activities or strategies articulated by teachers and what category or categories the researcher felt they aligned to.

Table 8
Self-reported Teacher Activity and Strategy Implementation and Category Alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity or Strategy</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Category(ies)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stepback</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Engagement, Rigorous Tasks, Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gist</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Rigorous Tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing an Essential Question</td>
<td>1A, 2A, 3B, 6C</td>
<td>Engagement, Rigorous Tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Slips</td>
<td>2A, 3B, 4B, 5C</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citing Text as Evidence</td>
<td>1A, 3B, 5C</td>
<td>Rigorous Tasks, Assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final interview question that aligned with the first research question was, “How has the role of the coach influenced the working conditions for you as a teacher?” The teacher’s overwhelming responses involved the time spent out of their room related to Content-Focused Coaching. This response was indicated by each of the six teachers with all comments slanted as a negative outcome to the coaching process. All of the teachers except for 4B also indicated that their coach caused them to analyze their lessons more than they had previously. Additionally, all teachers except for 4B and 5C indicated that they had spent more time collaborating with their colleagues than ever before in their careers. These last two
responses were communicated as an overall positive outcome connected to Content-Focused Coaching.

When asked the question, “How often do you meet with your teachers?” the coaches indicated that they met with their teachers on a weekly, sometimes twice per week schedule. While the amount of time indicated by coaches and teachers differed, and no coach could produce a written schedule of coaching other than dates for PLC meetings, both groups recognized that veteran teachers received less overall coaching than the less tenured staff in their building. When asking both teachers and coaches the follow-up question, “Why veteran teachers met less with them then less tenured teachers?” The coaches responded as followed:

Coach 1A: “The younger teachers were much more open to coaching and my support. They came to me with questions and wanted the feedback. The other teachers didn’t come to me as much, and didn’t seem to value my suggestions as much. This was especially true for one of the teachers on our team.”

Coach 2B: “I don’t know I guess… I never really thought of it until right now… The whole coaching thing was kind of voluntary. I mean, if the teachers wanted help, they came to me. If they weren’t open to my feedback or support, then I didn’t push it.”

Coach 3C: “All the teachers I worked with were open to coaching I think. The newer teachers just needed more help than the older ones…especially those with classroom management concerns.”

Following the questions that targeted the overall frequency of coaching, the interview questions turned to the actual content of coaching sessions. Responses to the questions, “What do you meet about?” were captured using the four identified categories of Engagement, Rigorous Tasks, Assessment, and Reflection that were generated from PLC
meetings. Table 9 represents the frequency of which these four categories came up during the interview time with coaches. As with the teachers, activities related to designing rigorous tasks for students were identified more than any other category by coaches.

Table 9
Instructional Category Frequency and Coach Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigorous Tasks</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next four questions to coaches focused on the implementation of strategies and activities related to Content-Focused Coaching. The four questions designed to unearth experiences connected to implementation were, “Have you observed the teachers implement lessons in their classroom? How would you describe the effectiveness of these lessons? What changes in teacher practice have you witnessed as a result of coaching? How do these changes align with observed previous practices?” Again, the emergent themes involving the inconsistent time spent with veteran teachers as well as the self-described voluntary nature in terms of implementation of strategies connected to Content-Focused Coaching emerged from the coaches responses. All of the coaches indicated that they had spent a large amount of their overall coaching time in teacher’s classrooms, however, each coach also indicated that the time spent in classrooms was inconsistent among teachers they coached with less time spent in veteran teachers’ rooms.
Regarding questions connected to quality of implementation and overall changes in teacher practice as related to the coaching process, the researcher continued to analyze the coach’s responses through the four instructional categories of Engagement, Rigorous Tasks, Assessment, and Reflection. Following the coding of coach’s responses with the instructional categories, the researcher identified, similar to teachers, activities or strategies related to Rigorous Tasks were reported more than any other category. Table 10 lists the activities or strategies articulated by coaches and what instructional category or categories the researcher felt they aligned to. The first three activities of utilizing writing rubrics, models of student work, and conferring with students were not reported by any of the teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity or Strategy</th>
<th>Coach</th>
<th>Category(ies)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Rubrics</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Assessment, Rigorous Tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models of Student Work</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Rigorous Tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferring with Students</td>
<td>2B</td>
<td>Rigorous Tasks, Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepback</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Engagement, Rigorous Tasks, Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gist</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Rigorous Tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing an Essential Question</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Engagement, Rigorous Tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Slips</td>
<td>1A, 3C</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citing Text as Evidence</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Rigorous Tasks, Assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the questions connected to implementation, the coaches were asked questions related to overall impact of Content-Focused Coaching as a reform strategy. When asked,
“How has student learning been impacted as a result of these changes?” the researcher recorded the following response from one of the coaches:

Coach 1A: “I have thought a lot about this and I really struggle with this. I feel like we have all worked really hard this year, and we all want our kids to be successful…but when I think about what difference I have made as a coach for these kids, I am not sure at all. I think I made more of a difference when I was a teacher.”

While the other coaches did not express such a strong opinion connected to the impact of their coaching on the teachers they worked with, no coach was able to articulate a single source of student achievement data connected to Content-Focused Coaching. This consistent response from coaches will be used to support an additional theme which emerged while analyzing the final research question.

Table 11 represents the four categories identified and the number of responses teachers and coaches related to those categories based on their individual responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Teacher Responses</th>
<th>Number of Coach Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigorous Tasks</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The numbers listed in Table 11 represent the number of times statements aligned with the identified categories. Compilation of this data indicates that Teachers and Coaches identified activities or strategies related to designing Rigorous Tasks with greater frequency.
than any other category. The instructional categories of Data Analysis and Assessment reported with the next highest frequency. The inconsistency of data collected among the amount of time spent on Rigorous Tasks during PLC’s, the frequency of times statements were made by teachers and coaches around designing Rigorous Tasks for students collected during one-on-one interviews, and the relatively high percentages of “Not Observed” ratings of Rigorous Tasks collected during classroom observations stimulated an emergent theme around teacher decision making as related to designing and implementing rigorous tasks for students relative to the coaching these teachers received.

Analysis of the classroom observation data along with the interview data highlights the contrast with the categories established as focus areas during PLC’s, especially for the category of generating rigorous tasks for students. Both coaches and teachers articulated a significant amount of time spent on designing rigorous tasks for students during both PLC’s and individual coaching sessions. Furthermore, teachers and coaches were able to articulate common and specific activities such as having students cite evidence from text and establishing rigorous questions for students during the semi-structured interviews. These areas were not, however, supported during the classroom observation portion of the data collection process, with Rigorous Tasks being observed the second and third fewest percentages of time. The gap between the articulated focus on designing rigorous tasks for students by both teachers and coaches and the actual implementation of this category during classroom observations serves as an area of possible conflict for teachers, coaches, and Content-Focused Coaching.

This conflict between teacher’s instructional practices and Content-Focused Coaching around designing rigorous tasks for students was further supported while coding responses
from teachers to the question, “What areas, if any, have caused challenges for you and why?”

Four of the six teachers made comments claiming that the activities being studied during PLC’s and Content-Focused Coaching were beyond the skill level of their students. The exact comments were as follows:

   Teacher 1A: “We spent a lot of time developing and refining lessons for students… but my kids couldn’t even read the text. The fact of the matter was that the books we selected were just too hard for these kids.”

   Teacher 3B: “In theory, the strategies might work…but the reality is that these kids are not used to thinking like this.”

   Teacher 4B: “My coach was unrealistic about these kids. I really don’t think they really ever worked with kids from the inner city like what we deal with. Just getting the kids to show up every day was a challenge.”

   Teacher 5C: “I often had to alter the lessons that we generated during PLC’s. The lessons were just too difficult for my kids.”

When teachers were asked questions related to their perceptions of coaches in their building, many of the teachers felt that the coaches took on administrative duties that separated them from themselves. Teacher responses to the questions, “How would you describe the role of the coach? What kinds of things does your coach do at your school?” generated the following:

   Teacher 1A: “They help out with all the assessment that happens around here.”

   Teacher 3B: “My coach goes to a lot of meetings with the principal.”

   Teacher 5C: “They help the administrator organize staff meetings, LearningWalks, and parent meetings.”
Teacher 6C: “The coach helps a lot with the Instructional Leadership Team and writing the School Improvement Plan for the school.”

Some of the most thoughtful responses from teachers came when they were asked questions designed to unearth input from teachers on how Content-Focused Coaching could be improved. The exact questions were, “How has student learning been impacted as a result of Content-Focused Coaching? What changes to the Content-Focused Coaching process would you recommend?” Like coaches, all teachers except teacher 4B indicated that coaching was an effective reform strategy and that they benefited from participating. Similarly to the coaches, however, none of the teachers indicated any student achievement data that was impacted as a result of Content-Focused Coaching. Similarly to the coach who questioned the influence of coaching, two teachers shared that time might be better spent on working with test prep companies rather than focusing on coaching and collaboration among teachers.

When asked the final question regarding suggestions for improving Content-Focused Coaching, veteran teachers consistently mentioned that their coach needed to have demonstrated successful experience working with at-risk, urban students as well as extensive experience within their content area. Comments from teachers included the following:

Teacher 2A: “I think the coach must have experience working with inner city adolescents. I mean, the problems my kids come with are real, and they interfere with their learning every day. The coach needs to be realistic about this.”

Teacher 3B: “Coaching was fine, but it’s an example of the difference between theory and practice…in theory the strategies may work, but in practice, our kids bring issues that blow a lesson plan up.”
Teacher 4B: “The coach needs to work more alongside the teacher and not be so top-down. I think my coach struggled because he wasn’t an administrator but had some of the same responsibilities. I also think my coach just didn’t have enough experience in the classroom and had a hard time connecting with us at times.”

Findings of Study

In this particular section, each research question is restated along with corresponding data, including a compilation of themes, to provide answers to the research questions. Themes evolved from the identification of instructional categories that were identified using an emergent process initiated from the detailed organization of data related to PLC agendas. The four instructional categories identified through PLC agendas were Engagement, Rigorous Tasks, Assessment, and Reflection. Themes were identified from instructional categories in two, emergent ways. The first way a theme was identified involved the frequency of coded responses collected during the interview process. If more than two-thirds of respondents articulated a similar response relative to an instructional category than a theme would be generated around that instructional category. The second way a theme was generated involved a discrepancy between the comments made by teachers and coaches during the interview process and observed behaviors evidenced during classroom observations. Specifically, if two-thirds or more of respondents expressed a similar comment during the interview process regarding a specific instructional category and that category was “Not Observed” in more than thirty percent of classrooms, then a theme would be generated around that instructional category.
Research Question 1: How do veteran teachers describe their response to and experience with Content-Focused Coaching after one year of instruction?

During the semi-structured interviews, all six teachers were given the opportunity to share from their experiences related to their engagement in the reform strategy, Content-Focused Coaching. The reader is reminded that respondents in this category were asked the following questions: “How often do you meet with your coach? What do you meet about? Have you been observed by the coach implementing lessons? How would you describe the effectiveness of these lessons? What changes in practice have you experienced as a result of being coached? How has the role of the coach influenced the working conditions for you as a teacher?”

In analyzing the data, the responses that emerged from this question illuminate that the actual amount of coaching received by veteran teachers tended to vary from building to building. Inclusive within this theme is the notion that less time was devoted to veteran teachers than novice teachers and that the overall application of coaching as a reform strategy was perceived as being voluntary in nature by the veteran teachers, rather than as being a district-wide reform strategy.

Research Question 2: How do novice coaches describe the way veteran teachers are responding to the Content-Focused Coaching experience and their coach after one year of instruction?

During the semi-structured interviews, all three coaches were given the opportunity to share from their experiences related to their engagement in Content-Focused Coaching. After being asked the following questions, the coaches shared their experiences from memory: “How often do you meet with your teachers? What do you meet about? Have you observed
the teachers implement lessons in their classroom? How would you describe the effectiveness of these lessons? What changes in teacher practice have you witnessed as a result of coaching? How do these changes align with observed previous practices? How has student learning been impacted as a result of these changes? How has your role as a coach influenced the working conditions for the teachers you work with? How do you feel the teacher has received the feedback you have provided thus far and why?"

The analysis of data led to the emergence of two themes. The first theme supports a finding gathered from teachers in that coaches described the overall application of coaching as a reform strategy as voluntary in nature for the veteran teachers in terms of both frequency and implementation of instructional strategies. The second theme involved the explanation from the coaches as to why the coaching experience was voluntary for the veteran teachers due to the building principal’s failure to hold these teachers accountable for implementing instructional strategies learned during PLC’s.

**Research Question 3:** Where do the teachers and their coaches experience conflict related to changes in the norms of professional teacher-to-teacher interaction, i.e. the coaching relationship?

During the same interviews, all six teachers were given the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences related to Content-Focused Coaching as it connected to changes in their previous work norms. After being asked the following questions, the teachers shared their experiences from memory: “How do these coaching experiences coincide or conflict with previous work norms? How has the role of the coach influenced the working conditions for you as a teacher? What areas, if any, have caused challenges for you and why?”
All three of the questions related to this portion of the interview structure were designed to unpack areas of conflict between teachers and their work norms related to Content-Focused Coaching, especially areas conflicting with any pre-existing beliefs, values, assumptions and practices. As stated previously in the data analysis section of this chapter, teacher and coach interviews occurred in conjunction with classroom observations, with the coding of the data collected utilizing the categories of Engagement, Rigorous Tasks, Assessment, and Reflection. The purpose of alternating between interviews and classroom observations and then coding for the four identified categories was to allow for emergent patterns to develop between coaches, teachers, and sources of possible conflict within the Content-Focused Coaching process. The analysis of data led to the emergence of the theme of veteran teachers and novice coaches having different instructional expectations for students, especially related to designing and implementing rigorous tasks for students.

Research Question 4: Moving forward, how do these veteran teachers see Content-Focused Coaching as a part of their future teaching experience?

During the same interviews, all six teachers were given the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences related to Content-Focused Coaching as a strategy designed to change teacher practice and improve student achievement. After being asked the following questions, the teachers shared their experiences from memory: “How has student learning been impacted as a result of Content-Focused Coaching? What changes to the Content-Focused Coaching process would you recommend? How would you describe the role of the coach? What kinds of things does your coach do at your school?”

The analysis of data led to the emergence of two themes. The first theme relative to this research question involved both veteran teachers and novice coaches claiming to value
Content-Focused Coaching as a reform strategy, but neither group identifying a single source of student achievement data gain after one year of implementation. The second theme involved veteran teachers feeling that the most significant barrier to effective coaching involving the coach’s lack of experience working in an at-risk, urban environment while coaches feeling the most significant barrier was the lack of administrator support involving self described resistant teachers.

Summary of Findings

This study was conducted to explore the experiences of middle school, English Language Arts teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience as well as Instructional Coaches who have less than one year of coaching experience relative to the implementation of an imposed school reform strategy, Content-Focused Coaching. As an extension of this purpose, this study identified potential areas of conflict between veteran teacher’s beliefs, assumptions, values, and practices and expectations outlined in Content-Focused Coaching. Finally, this study gathered input from participants on how Content-Focused Coaching could be implemented in a more effective manner.

Coding of data collected during classroom observations and one-on-one interviews utilizing the instructional categories of Engagement, Rigorous Tasks, Assessment, and Reflection facilitated five central themes to emerge. The first theme is that while the Content-Focused Coaching process was followed by coaches as designed, the actual amount of coaching veteran teachers received varied from building to building with all settings noting less overall time devoted to coaching veteran teachers than the building’s more novice teachers. The second theme stemmed from both coaches and teachers describing the overall
application of coaching as a reform strategy as being voluntary in nature for the veteran teachers in terms of both frequency and implementation of instructional strategies. A third theme involved the finding that veteran teachers and coaches often had different instructional expectations for students, especially related to designing and implementing rigorous tasks for students. A fourth theme emerged when both veteran teachers and novice coaches claimed to value Content-Focused Coaching as a reform strategy, but neither group able could point to any gain in student achievement after one year of implementation. The fifth and final theme evolved when veteran teachers articulated that the most significant barrier to effective coaching involved the coach’s level of experience working in an at-risk, urban environment while coaches indicated the most significant barrier was the lack of administrative support involving self-described resistant teachers.

These five themes add to the existing body of research collected on instructional coaching as well as research on the experiences of veteran teachers and novice coaches involving imposed school reform initiatives. In the proceeding Chapter 5, a comparison of these themes in relation to the existing literature will be explored.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of middle school, English Language Arts teachers with more than ten years of teaching practice, as well as Instructional Coaches who had less than one year of coaching practice as they engaged in Content-Focused Coaching. As an extension of this initial purpose, this study described areas of conflict experienced by veteran teachers among their beliefs, assumptions, values, and practices and the instructional expectations outlined in Content-Focused Coaching. Finally, this study gathered input from participants on how Content-Focused Coaching could be implemented in a more effective manner.

In this final chapter, I will use the three purposes of study as a framework for providing answers to the major questions this study originally sought to address. These new findings will serve as a basis for further inquiry as presented in the recommendations for further study and practice.

Summary of Findings

This case study relied upon minutes and agendas collected from Professional Learning Community meetings, one-on-one interviews and classroom observations of 6 English Language Arts, veteran teachers and 3 English Language Arts, instructional coaches who all work in three Midwestern, Persistently Lowest Achieving middle schools.
To guide the presentation of this final chapter, the investigator will restate each purpose statement and then address each through three different lenses. The lenses are: (1) how do the findings of this study support the existing body of research? (2) how do the findings contradict the existing body of research? In addition, (3) how do the findings in this study add to the body of research? Most importantly, the last question will help to guide future researchers that may have an interest in this line of inquiry.

**Purpose # 1:** Better understand the experiences of middle school, English Language Arts teachers with more than ten years of teaching practice, as well as Instructional Coaches who had less than one year of coaching practice as they engaged in Content-Focused Coaching.

The findings in this study support several aspects of the current literature around instructional coaching and veteran teachers. First, instructional coaching as it was implemented in this study was non-supervisory. In other words, the instructional coaches in this study did not have the responsibility of evaluating the teachers they were coaching (Taylor, 2008). Another finding from this study, as supported by the literature, was that the coaching received by teachers tended to be content specific (in this case literacy) and was intended to support the teachers in meeting the aims of increasing student achievement through examining and revising the teacher’s instructional practice (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Another core element to instructional coaching that these findings supported was the job-embedded Professional Learning Community meetings and utilization of cyclical protocols around observations of classroom teaching and the modeling of instructional practices (Neufeld & Roper, 2002).
Findings in this study, as supported by previous research findings, included a description of how instructional coaches identified appropriate interventions for teacher learning, how data were gathered in classrooms, and processes that were used to engage teachers in dialogue about student learning (Knight, 2004).

Additional findings in this study support the current literature pertaining to veteran teachers and their increased levels of cynicism regarding reform initiatives in contrast to their less-tenured peers. The literature suggests that this cynicism is due, in part, because teachers have witnessed numerous reform efforts over the past several years (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Hill, Pierce, & Guthrie, 1997; Hess, 1998). Veteran teachers that have witnessed the lackluster success of previous educational reform strategies have become increasingly suspicious of new reform initiatives and their possible impacts on student achievement. Veteran teachers also have more time, energy, and self-regard invested in the current state of affairs. Consequently, these teachers are less likely to support reform, regardless of any district, state or federal mandate (Hess, 1998).

Findings in this study suggest that veteran teachers were more resistant to Content-Focused Coaching than their less-tenured peers. According to Higginbotham (1996), resistance is characterized as any oppositional behavior demonstrated by an individual or group of individuals to another individual, idea, or action. He further suggests that these oppositional behaviors usually occur in an interactive environment involving power relationships. Other change resistance characteristics exhibited by teachers might be a result of their past experiences. For example, schools’ previously unsuccessful efforts at change could leave teachers extremely wary about accepting further attempts (Greenberg & Baron, 2000).
While findings related to this research question support the literature on instructional coaching and veteran teachers in many ways, there were findings that provided a contrast to the current literature. One contradiction involved how veteran teachers described their experiences with their coaches using very non-threatening and passive descriptions. The literature suggests that teachers might feel threatened in a number of ways by the prospect of change related to being coached (Greenberg & Baron, 2000). The literature explains that the acceptance of change could be affected by perceived threats to their expertise and proven abilities, and their belief that they lack the knowledge or skills to implement the change successfully (Fullan, 2001; Greenberg & Baron, 2000). Furthermore, the literature indicates that changes in long-established decision-making responsibilities could also affect those veteran educators who perceive threats to their power relationships (Robbins, 2000). Moreover, structural and organizational changes in schools could represent threats to social relationships of veteran teachers who have formed strong friendships with their colleagues (Greenberg & Baron, 2000). Finally, veteran teachers and others who benefit from the current distribution and control of scarce resources might perceive threats to their resource allocations brought about by changes in the school (Robbins, 2000).

Based on findings in this study, however, veteran teachers in this study were not threatened by their coaches or the protocols imposed by Content-Focused Coaching. On the contrary, after veteran teachers were asked six questions designed to capture open-ended responses around their experiences related to Content-Focused Coaching, including the implementation of specific instructional strategies learned during PLC meetings, the teachers’ responses coalesced around a central theme describing the overall application of Content-Focused Coaching and its expectations as voluntary in nature.
This finding suggests that it was the coaches, not the teachers, who were threatened or uneasy about the implementation of Content-Focused Coaching. This finding adds to the existing body of research involving veteran teachers and instructional coaching by providing insights into how Content-Focused Coaching was incorporated, or not incorporated, into veteran teachers’ instructional practices.

The findings in this study led to the emergence of one theme relevant to the topic of coaches overall experience with Content-Focused Coaching after one year of instruction. This theme supports the current literature on veteran teachers and reform initiatives. The theme that emerged regarding this second research question was that coaches described the overall application of coaching as a reform strategy as being voluntary in nature for the veteran teachers in this study in terms of frequency and implementation of instructional strategies.

Another finding that provided a contrast to the current literature involved the coach’s responses to questions about the overall impact of Content-Focused Coaching as a reform strategy. When asked how student learning had been impacted as a result of Content-Focused Coaching, the researcher failed to record any specific source of student achievement data mentioned by any of the coaches relative to coaching the teachers received. In fact, one of the three coaches actually mentioned that his role as a coach was less impactful than his previous role as a classroom teacher.

This finding represents a contrast to the research conducted by Lockwood, McCombs and Marsh (2010) which found that that Florida schools that received state-funded dollars to support instructional coaches showed statistically significant improvements in average annual reading achievement gains for two of the four cohorts of schools assessed.
Furthermore, the findings in this study provide an alternative to the qualitative research conducted by Vanderburg and Stephens (2010). These researchers found that teachers credited their coaches with helping them try new teaching practices, helped teachers to incorporate more authentic assessments, provided evidence that teachers’ instructional decisions were supported by the professional literature, and improved teachers’ practices on creating curriculum that was more student-centered.

This study adds to the current body of research by providing the specific insights of novice coaches and veteran teachers as they engaged in a specific instructional coaching reform that is closely aligned to Content-Focused Coaching. The experiences described by both the veteran teachers and novice coaches provided data that both support and contradict the existing body of research. The failure of coaches to connect their work to student achievement, or in changing teachers’ instructional practices, provide evidence that the influence coaching has on improving the quality of teachers’ instructional practice is somewhat ineffable.

**Purpose # 2:** Describe areas of conflict experienced by veteran teachers among their beliefs, assumptions, values, and practices and the instructional expectations outlined in Content-Focused Coaching.

The analysis of classroom observation and interview data led to the finding that the veteran teachers and novice coaches in this study had different instructional expectations for students, especially when it came to designing and implementing rigorous tasks for students.

This finding supports the current body of research around beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices of teachers, especially for students educated in urban environments. Current research indicates that a teacher’s beliefs about student learning and
instructional practice can affect their approaches to teaching and their behaviors toward students. Considerable evidence exists supporting the contention that teacher’s beliefs, values, assumptions and practices exert powerful influences on teaching practice as well as the learning process (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992).

In this study, the researcher recorded activities or strategies reported by teachers related to Rigorous Tasks more than any other category. However, there was a great degree of incongruence between what teachers reported and what this researcher observed during actual classroom observations. If teachers indicated that the majority of time spent in coaching sessions and PLC meetings focused on designing rigorous tasks for students, then it would be reasonable to assume this would be reflected in their respected classroom practices. However, after analyzing classroom observation data, two of the main descriptors connected to Rigorous Tasks (citing evidence from text and utilizing rubrics or criteria charts) received the second and third highest ratings of “Not Observed.” This gap between the instructional coaching a teacher received and that teacher’s actual implementation of this specific coached strategy into their practice suggests a possible conflict involving their beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices related to designing and implanting rigorous tasks for students.

This conflict between a teacher’s beliefs, values, assumptions and practices and Content-Focused Coaching around designing rigorous tasks for students was further supported while coding responses from teachers to the question, “What areas, if any, have caused challenges for you and why?” Four of the six teachers made comments claiming that the activities being studied during PLC’s and Content-Focused Coaching were beyond the skill level of their students.
While this study supports the research involving the significance of teacher beliefs, assumptions, values and practices on changes in instructional practice, this study provides additional insight into the length of time needed to see evidence of change in teacher’s instructional behaviors. The current research suggests that what teachers know and believe seemingly can change over time; depending on the experiences they encounter (Hall, 2005). This study suggests that one year of Content-Focused Coaching has not significantly impacted the instructional practices of veteran teachers, especially as it relates to designing and implementing rigorous activities for students.

**Purpose # 3:** Gather input from participants on how Content-Focused Coaching could be implemented in a more effective manner.

The analysis of data gathered from four interview questions asked to both teachers and coaches led to two findings relevant to the topic of teachers’ incorporating strategies learned during the Content-Focused Coaching process into their future practice. These two findings were: (1) Both veteran teachers and coaches claim to value Content-Focused Coaching as a reform strategy, but neither group could point to any gain in student improvement after one year of implementation; and (2) Veteran teachers felt that the most significant barrier to effective coaching involved the coach’s level of experience working in an at-risk, urban environment while coaches felt the most significant barrier was the lack of administrative support involving self-described resistant teachers.

Both of the above findings support much of the literature regarding reform initiatives designed to impact teacher practice. The ultimate success of reform initiatives, such as Content-Focused Coaching, will depend largely on whether or not the reform strategies and mandates embedded in the initiative will impact individual classrooms and increase student
achievement (Fullan, 2000; Reeves, 2009). Furthermore, implementing school reform policy has often failed to bring initiatives to scale at the classroom level, in part, because of the failure to take into account teacher beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices (Ball & Cohen, 1990). A key dimension of the reform process, therefore, is whether, and in what ways, teachers come to understand their practice, potentially changing their beliefs and attitudes in the process (Reimer, Reiser, & Spillane, 2002). The use of an instructional coach working with the teacher in an on-going, job-embedded, and research-based manner was utilized to address the research stated above.

The literature explains that the Content-Focused Coaching model expects the coaches to have more teaching expertise than the teachers being coached (Staub, West, & Bickel, 2003). Ideally, the coaches in this model should have “hands-on” knowledge in the discipline and be familiar with the official standards, teaching methods, teaching materials, as well as possess familiarity with the students at the corresponding grade levels. Therefore, because of their respective levels of professional knowledge, the interaction between teacher and coach is not designed to be symmetrical (Staub, West, & Bickel, 2003). The findings in this study suggest an additional factor that should be considered for the successful implementation of Content-Focused Coaching. Specifically, that Content-Focused Coaching was not as beneficial for the veteran teachers due to a lack of perceived experience the instructional coaches had working with urban, at-risk students. In other words, even though the instructional coaches in this study had expertise in the content being coached, had a thorough knowledge of instructional practices and student learning, and had experience teaching in the same school district, the veteran teachers felt the coach’s knowledge was less applicable because they had not worked with the exact students as the veteran teachers.
Another finding from this study involved the instructional coaches themselves indicating a failure to impact teacher practice due to how their roles were perceived and utilized by their building administrator. This finding suggests the need for further study in examining the relationship between the instructional coach and principal, particularly as it relates to the teacher’s actual implementation of any coached strategies.

Conclusion

Current research has provided context and understanding of how teachers perceive some aspects of instructional coaching (Knight, 2004; Staub, West, & Bickel, 2003). Existing research has failed, however, to describe how instructional coaching, specifically Content-Focused Coaching, has been experienced specifically by veteran teachers. We know very little about what instructional coaches do with veteran teachers, how their work impacts the work norms and instructional practices of veteran teachers, how veteran teachers view their coaches, and virtually little, if anything, about what it is that, from a veteran teacher’s perspective, coaches specifically do that is helpful. In addition, we know little about what veteran teachers decide to change because of their coaching experience.

This research study was designed to address this knowledge gap. As a result of this study, we now have better insights into: (1) the experiences that veteran teachers and novice coaches had in relation to implementing Content-Focused Coaching as a reform strategy; (2) what specific coach-initiated changes veteran teachers made or did not make in their instructional practices and how these changes conflicted with existing beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices about teaching English Language Arts; and (3) additional insight
from veteran teachers and novice coaches that can improve and/or inform future instructional coaching reforms.

Recommendations for Further Study

A key finding for this study involved the description of coaching as a reform strategy as being voluntary in nature for the veteran teachers in terms of both frequency and implementation of instructional strategies. Furthermore, this study found patterns in both one-on-one interviews and classroom observations suggesting veteran teachers and coaches often had different expectations for students, especially related to designing and implementing rigorous tasks for students. An additional finding found that although veteran teachers and coaches claim to value Content-Focused Coaching as a reform strategy, neither group could point to a single source of increased student achievement data after one year of implementation. Finally, this study discovered that the veteran teachers interviewed and observed felt that the most significant barrier to effective coaching involved the coach’s level of experience working in an at-risk, urban environment while the coaches in this study felt the most significant barrier was the lack of administrative support involving self described resistant teachers.

While these findings provide insight into how Content-Focused Coaching could be used to support veteran teachers change their instructional practice, there is still need for further study in this area. Therefore, this researcher provides the following recommendations:

1. First of all, it is recommended that this study be replicated to provide further evidence of the validity of findings suggested in this study. While this study utilized a case study approach and there was no attempt to suggest causality, it is
highly recommended that future studies consider both quantitative and qualitative research design methodologies. In this case, it is suggested that the sample size be increased as a measure of increasing precision of the estimates and that future samples consider a randomized approach, if applicable, to increase the generalizability of the findings.

2. It is also recommended that a study be conducted to explore the relationship between the instructional coach and the building principal, particularly as it relates to the demographic background, professional experiences, school level, personal attributes, belief systems, leadership behavior, and assumptions held of these two instructional leaders regarding the coaching experience and how it relates to the actual implementation of coaching strategies. It is further suggested that a study of this nature should consider the feelings of instructional coaches regarding their comfort level working with veteran teachers as well as what professional development they might need to improve their practice as an instructional coach.

3. It is also recommended that future studies examine the impact Content-Focused Coaching has on increasing student achievement, the amount of time teachers have been engaged in instructional coaching, and the perceived levels of expertise held by the teachers toward their assigned instructional coach.

4. Finally, as a recommendation for future practice, it is recommended that school districts ensure clear lines of communication among executive staff, building principals, teachers, and instructional coaches regarding expectations related to Content-Focused Coaching as a reform initiative. Furthermore, it is recommended
for future practice to ensure adequate time is allocated involving principals and
teachers in the hiring and placement of instructional coaches as a strategy to
engage key stakeholders and reduce resistance among impacted staff. As a final
recommendation for future practice, it is recommended that school personnel
utilize multiple data sources, including input data such as the Classroom
Observation Tool used in this study, to evaluate the impact of reform initiatives
such as Content-Focused Coaching.
REFERENCES


Vanderburg, M., & Stephens, D. (2010). What teachers say they changed because of their coach and how they think their coach helped them. *Literacy coaching clearinghouse*


Appendix A

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: March 20, 2012

To: Walter Burt, Principal Investigator
    Brian Gamm, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 12-02-74

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Veteran Teachers and Novice Coaches: A Case Study of Content Focused Coaching in Three Persistently Failing Midwestern Middle Schools” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: March 20, 2013
Appendix B

Interview Protocol
Project: Veteran Teachers and Novice Coaches: A Case Study of Content-Focused Coaching in Three Persistently Failing Midwestern Middle Schools

Time of interview: ___________________________________________________________

Date of interview: ___________________________________________________________

Location: ___________________________________________________________________

Interviewer: __________________________________________________________________

Interviewee: __________________________________________________________________

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record the interview so the study can be as accurate as possible. Please understand that you will be asked questions on interactions with other participants. Your responses will remain completely confidential at all points during and after the research process. You may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any point of the interview.

Questions that the subjects will be asked include:

1. How often do you meet with your coach/teacher?
2. What do you meet about?
3. (To coach) Have you observed the teacher implement lessons in their classroom?
   (To teacher) Have you been observed by the coach implementing lessons?
4. How would you describe the effectiveness of these lessons?
5. (To coach) What changes in teacher practice have you witnessed as a result of coaching?
   (To teacher) What changes in practice have you experienced as a result of being coached?
6. (To coach) How do these changes align with observed previous practices?
   (To teacher) How do these changes align with your previous practices?
7. How do these coaching experiences coincide or conflict with previous work norms?
8. How has student learning been impacted as a result of these changes?
9. What changes to the Content-Focused Coaching process would you recommend?

(Teacher only):

10. How would you describe the role of the coach?
11. What kinds of things does your coach do at your school?
12. How has the role of the coach influenced the working conditions for you as a teacher?
13. What areas, if any, have caused challenges for you and why?
(Coaches only):
14. How has your role as a coach influenced the working conditions for the teachers you work with?
15. How do you feel the teacher has received the feedback you have provided thus far and why?

(To both the coaches and teachers)
16. What suggestions for improvement in terms of implementation around Content-Focused Coaching do you have?

Thank you for participating in this interview. If necessary, may I contact you for a follow up interview or to clarify some of your responses?
Appendix C

Classroom Observation Tool
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Categories</th>
<th>Look-For</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>1. Teacher launches the lesson by reviewing learning goals for the lesson. This may include connecting the lesson for the day with past learning and/or reviewing essential questions.</td>
<td>Not applicable Not observed Observed/Emergent Observed/Established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Students are engaged in the lesson launch as evidenced by writing and discussion.</td>
<td>Not applicable Not observed Observed/Emergent Observed/Established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigorous Tasks</td>
<td>3. Students cite textual evidence to support and defend their interpretation and analysis of the text. <strong>Patterned Way</strong></td>
<td>Not applicable Not observed Observed/Emergent Observed/Established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Students revise, edit, and revisit concepts and content through writing and discussion. <strong>Patterned Way</strong></td>
<td>Not applicable Not observed Observed/Emergent Observed/Established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Students are able to articulate what they are learning, including why they use rubrics, characteristic charts, criteria charts, and Reader’s Writer’s Notebooks.</td>
<td>Not applicable Not observed Observed/Emergent Observed/Established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>6. Students engage in formative and summative assessment to demonstrate their knowledge of content. Examples: Quick writes (entry slips/exit slips), end of arc assessments, tests, and culminating writing projects.</td>
<td>Not applicable Not observed Observed/Emergent Observed/Established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>7. Students articulate their learning through the use of stepbacks.</td>
<td>Not applicable Not observed Observed/Emergent Observed/Established</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>