Characteristics of Effective Instructional Coaches

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**Abstract**

Recent findings in the field of education have shown that some forms of traditional professional development, including workshops without follow-up support, have been determined to be ineffective because teachers do not consistently implement strategies that have been taught. Response to these findings has spawned an increase in the practice of employing instructional coaches to support teachers. Confusion over coaching roles and responsibilities and structuring the work and training of these coaches are a few of the issues currently being worked through in school districts nationwide. In this paper, characteristics of effective instructional coaches are identified and a model for training instructional coaches is proposed.

Traditional professional development for teachers has typically been delivered through workshops without substantial follow-up support.  This practice has not been found to consistently bring about desired changes in teacher practice or student achievement (Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000,  Knight, 2007, Showers, Joyce, & Bennet, 1987, Walker & Statt, 2000, Swafford, 1998).  Annual costs for professional development as reported by the Education Development Center for four large school districts ranged between $1,755.00  to  $3,529.00  per teacher (Corcoran, 1995).  In the current climate of limited budgets and generally stagnant student achievement results, it is critical that available funds are spent on professional development that is effective.

The Eisenhower Professional Development Program, also known as Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, is "the federal government's largest investment that is solely focused on developing the knowledge and skills of classroom teachers" (Garet & Porter, 2001, p. 918).  Longitudinal data from roughly 300 teachers were examined with the goal of identifying and implementing effective professional development practices.  Andy Porter summarizes the results as follows:

> Large-scale change in teaching practice would require districts and schools to specify the areas of teaching in which change is desired.  Then, districts and schools would need to plan and provide professional development activities that focus on these areas, that are aligned with other reforms, and that have the 6 characteristics of effective professional development:  longer, reform type, school-based activities that focus on content, provide opportunities for active learning and are coherent with teachers' goals, standards and assessments and professional community.  (Porter, 2004, p. 34)

Instructional coaching, considered a reform type of professional development, is currently being used to address each of the identified characteristics for successful professional development as defined by the Eisenhower project. The time of the exposure to new strategies can be expanded through coaching. Coaching is typically conducted within schools and is often focused on content. Active learning opportunities including observations, co-teaching, modeling, collaborative goal setting, and lesson planning are frequently part of the coaching experience. "The IC (Instructional Coach)…collaborates with teachers so they can choose and implement research-based interventions to help students learn more effectively" (Knight, 2007, p. 13).

The title "Instructional Coach" is often confused with or used interchangeably with terms such as mentor, teaching and learning consultant, learning resource teacher, teacher leader, literacy coach, advisor, leadership coach, math coach, specialist, teacher supervisor, data coach, learning facilitator, school growth teacher, peer coach, curriculum specialist, and classroom supporter, to name a few (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). "Sadly, many of the terms and titles have become muddled with a wide variety of uses and purposes…there is only one role that can enhance all roles--that of the coach" (Kee, et al., 2010, p. 9). Determining what instructional coaches will be called, and defining how they will use their time becomes an important administrative decision. For the purpose of this paper, all roles and names will be incorporated into the term, "instructional coach."

In his book, *Coaching: Approaches and Perspectives*, Jim Knight (2009) addresses how to help coaches understand their roles. "When asking the question about balancing the roles, coaches first look to their clear job descriptions and role expectations" (p. 14). Though

instructional coaches may be asked to support a variety of initiatives and activities, their

effectiveness is determined, in part, by how clearly district and building goals are defined, and

how their job is designed to fit within district-wide systems, specific building areas of focus, and

the individual needs of teachers and students.  "Sadly, too many coaching programs have been

launched with an insufficient program framework designed to maximize the impact of coaching

on teaching and learning" (Knight, 2009, p. 14 ).

The purpose of this paper is to describe characteristics of effective instructional coaches.

There is a need to find some common ground as to what effective instructional coaching is.

> …it is suggested that nationally or internationally agreed guidance concerning good
>
> practices in coaching, mentoring and peer-networking in schools would be of use to
>
> teachers, management teams, trainers and others concerned with the raising of standards
>
> and attainment in schools.  Further research and development should address this
>
> problem as a matter of urgency.  (Rhodes & Beneicke, p. 306)

In the words of  Denton & Hasbrouck (2009),

> There appears to be a general assumption that "everyone knows" what coaching consists
>
> of, with vague notions of observing teachers in classrooms and providing them with
>
> feedback about their teaching.  Unfortunately, the rush to implement coaching before
>
> strong theoretical models, or even well-defined job descriptions, were in place has caused
>
> a good deal of confusion related to the role and focus of coaching  (pp. 154-155).

This paper was written to determine what the most important characteristics are that instructional

coaches need to possess to be effective.  This knowledge could serve as a basis for determining

appropriate professional development for coaches and could aid administrators to be strategic about purchasing professional development resource designed to support coaches.  Knowing what characteristics coaches need to possess to be effective could also be a powerful guide to be used in the hiring process.  Coaching models need to be developed (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). There is an urgent need for stakeholders to come to an agreement about what effective instructional coaching is, which could be accomplished through the development of coaching models such as the one presented in this paper.

 Most of the raw data for this paper were collected from teachers who have experienced instructional coaching as a traditional classroom teacher, coaches' personal experiences on the job, the sharing of instructional knowledge coaches possess, and the personal traits and actions of coaches.  However, school districts and building principals certainly play a role in supporting the environment and work of developing effective instructional coaches.

> Principals must work to establish new norms that reward collegial planning, public
> teaching, constructive feedback, and experimentation…Organization of peer coaching
> systems will need to be arranged cooperatively between district administrators and school
> site personnel.  (Showers, 1985, pp. 24-25).

By providing clear job descriptions, coaching frameworks, and funding for training, school districts can provide clarity and support to improve the effectiveness of instructional coaches.

### What Makes an Effective Instructional Coach?

Instructional coaches are becoming an integral part of professional development for educators.  Choosing coaches that would be effective (defined as impacting teacher practice to

the extent that student learning becomes positively affected), becomes the task of administrators. What should they look for?  This is not a simple question.  Leadership is an essential component of coaching.  "Over the past 60 years, 65 classification systems have been developed to define the dimensions of leadership" (Fleishman et al., 1991).  If we cannot definitively figure out what a leader is after 60 years of trying, we might assume that deciding what makes an effective instructional coach may be near to impossible because of the wide variety of contexts, geographical differences, areas of focus and goals set by building and district leadership, the myriad number of roles that could be incorporated into the title of "instructional coach," and the individual needs of students and teachers.

In the book *Leadership, Theory and Practice* by Peter Northouse (2010), leadership is defined as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 12).  Since coaching can be in group settings, but often occurs one on one, I am using but adapting Northouse's definition of leadership with this change, "a process whereby an individual influences <u>another individual</u>, or group of individuals, to achieve a common goal." When defining leadership this way, and examining how leadership relates to coaching, it is necessary for coaches to know what school district and building goals are, what students need in the particular context the coach is working in, and what individual teachers' goals are.

Leaders hold lives and destinies in their hands; this is why leadership can be a sacred calling.  That calling is best honored when the leader sets the highest example of personal and professional behavior, then enlists others to take this challenging path as well. To accomplish both of these tasks, nothing is more vital than coaching.  (Cashman, 2008, p. 178)

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

We need teachers who are not just good, but exceptional, teachers that can create successful student learning outcomes (Hattie, 2003). "Of all the things successful people do to accelerate their trip down the path to success, participating in some kind of coaching program is at the top of the list" (Canfield, 2005, p. 304). How do we find and train exceptional coaches to help create exceptional teachers? This is the core focus of this study. There is, to some extent, a gap in current coaching research related to what qualities an effective instructional coach would possess. Some coaching authors have identified characteristics of quality coaches, and their thoughts are referenced in Table 1 as the paper progresses. To add to the body of research in this area, two research questions are addressed in this mixed methods study. They are:

1) What makes an effective instructional coach?

2) How is effective instructional coaching defined by those involved?

After analyzing and synthesizing information and data from seven coaching authors' thoughts, responses from qualitative interviews conducted with 15 instructional coaches, and conducting a statistical analysis of a survey evaluating instructional coaches, a proposed model that could be used to support the training and hiring of instructional coaches is presented near the end of this paper. In Table 1, the opinions of seven authors regarding what characteristics effective coaches need to possess are summarized.

Table 1

*Characteristics of Effective Instructional Coaches by Author*

| Author(s) | Characteristics | Resource(s) |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------|
| **Jean Boreen & Donna Niday** | Content Competence<br>Successful Classroom Management<br>Organizational Abilities | Mentoring Across Boundaries, pp. 9-15. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Flexibility<br>Acceptance of a Variety of Styles<br>Lack of possessiveness<br>Willing to Confront Troublesome Situations<br>Professional Vision Beyond Classroom | |
| **John C. Daresh** | Experienced<br>Regarded as an effective Classroom Teacher<br>Asks the right questions<br>Accepts alternative ways of doing things<br>Desires to see people go beyond present performance<br>Models continuous learning and reflection<br>Aware of political and social realities<br>Knowledge of content<br>Enthusiastic<br>Clearly communicates personal attitudes, values, and ethics<br>Gives feedback sensitively regarding progress<br>Listens to colleagues' ideas, doubts, concerns and questions<br>Caring attitude and a belief in colleagues' potential<br>Confidence in personal abilities<br>High standards and expectations of self and colleagues<br>Willing to invest time and energy into mentoring<br>Believes that mentoring is mutually beneficial | Teachers Mentoring Teachers, pp. 24-25. |
| **Beth Tatum & Patti McWhorter** | Makes colleagues feel welcome<br>Establishes roles<br>Shares materials and files<br>Encourages extracurricular involvement<br>Forges trust and friendship | Teacher/Mentor a Dialogue for Collaborative Learning Chapter 2, "Maybe Not Everything, but a Whole Lot You Always Wanted to Know About Mentoring," pp. 21-33. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Becomes a partner in research and discovery<br>Models teacher thinking and behavior<br>Videotapes self<br>Examines multiple perspectives<br>Willing to say the hard things<br>Able to let go | |
| **Jane A. G. Kise** | Understand teacher beliefs and needs<br>Use personality type and learning style info to differentiate coaching<br>Coach needs to be like a chameleon: coach as a useful resource, have a bag of tricks, multiple methods, ability to tailor them<br>Coach as encouraging sage-direct classroom help, on the spot suggestions, help to see what's going well<br>Coach as collegial mentor-patience, listening skills<br>Coach as expert-depth of knowledge, and objectivity<br>Build trust<br>Seek teacher input<br>Clarify goals and objectives | Differentiated Coaching:  A Framework for Helping Teachers Change, pp. 34-37, 40. |
| **Kathryn Kee et. al** | Committed listener<br>Use of intentional language<br>Asks powerful questions<br>Plans for action with timelines<br>Ability to brainstorm and then prioritize<br>Offer options<br>Teach<br>Ethical standards<br>Trust<br>Integrity<br>Coaching agreements-defined roles and work<br>Communicates effectively in a positive, clear, and direct manner<br>Manages progress | Results Coaching: The New Essential for School Leaders, pp. 56-68. |

| | Presumes positive intent | |
|---|---|---|
| **Paula Rutherford** | Available<br>Patient<br>Open, welcoming<br>Checks in frequently<br>Is a role model, leads by example<br>Uses humor<br>Notes, encourages, and validates efforts<br>Maintains confidentiality<br>Models analytical and reflective practice<br>Implements guidelines established by district and school<br>Collaborative<br>Serves as an advocate and a resource<br>Listens | The 21st Century Mentor's Handbook:<br>Creating a Culture for Learning, pp. 9, 43, 45. |
| **Karla Reiss** | Active listener-listens for what is beneath the words<br>Trust<br>A possibility thinker<br>Compassionate<br>Empowers others<br>Nonjudgmental<br>Aligns coachee with personal goals and passions<br>Focused on success and results the coachee wishes to achieve<br>A continuous learner<br>Curious<br>An inspirational thinker<br>Focused on action<br>Courageous<br>Believes anything's possible | Coaching Approaches & Perspectives<br>Jim Knight-Editor, pp. 178, 180. |

It would seem that to be an effective instructional coach, a person would need to be all

things to all people!  Some of the resources referenced in the previous table were written for

coaches of new teachers, some for coaches of all levels and types of teachers, some for coaching

educational leaders, and a number of the books addressed different types of instructional

coaching along with a variety of suggestions for each type of coaching. The chameleon analogy

used by Kise (2006) is a good one because of the wide variety of situations and people that an

instructional coach may be asked to positively impact. The effort here is to clarify basic

characteristics for the general term "instructional coach" no matter how the job of coaching is

defined or named within schools and districts therefore, all resources noted in the previous table

would be germane to this analysis.

The following table is the attempt to organize the previous seven authors' views into a

more manageable list. Liberties have been taken to combine words and vocabulary as deemed

appropriate. Characteristics with three or more occurrences were included. The result is a list of

10 characteristics that make an effective instructional coach.

Table 2

*Characteristics of Instructional Coaches from Seven Authors Combined and Sorted*

| Order of Frequency/Importance | Characteristics of Effective Instructional Coaches | Words used by Authors | Number of Times Noted |
|:---:|:---:|:---|:---:|
| 1 | **Caring** | welcoming, encouraging, patient, sensitive, open, unselfish, compassionate | 13 |
| 2 | **Competent** | competent with content, behavior, & organization, experienced, respected by peers | 11 |
| 3 | **Quality Communicator** | establishes roles, understands teacher needs, seeks teacher input, uses intentional language, defines roles and work, | 9 |

| | | communicates in a positive, clear and direct manner, collaborative | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **4** | **Inspiring** | enthusiastic, desire to see people go beyond present performance, confident, videotapes self, a possibility and inspirational thinker, a continuous learner, believes anything's possible | **9** |
| **5** | **Collaboratively Plans, Prioritizes, Checks on Progress** | plans for action with timelines, clarifies goals and objectives, manages progress, checks in frequently, aligns coachee with personal goals and passions, focuses on success and results the coachee wishes to achieve | **8** |
| **6** | **Flexible** | acceptance of a variety of styles, accepts alternative ways of doing things, examines multiple perspectives, tailors methods to meet teacher needs, ability to brainstorm | **7** |
| **7** | **Ethical** | forges trust, ethical standards, maintains confidentiality, integrity | **7** |
| **8** | **Listens** | listens to colleagues' ideas, doubts, concerns and questions, listening skills, committed listener, active listener | **5** |
| **9** | **Models** | models continuous learning and reflection, models teacher thinking and behavior, is a role model, leads by example, models analytical and reflective practice | **4** |

| 10 | Courageous | willing to confront troublesome situations, willing to say hard things | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|

It is interesting to note that most of the characteristics from Table 2 are personal traits that have been developed over time.  For instance, caring and competence, the two most frequently mentioned characteristics, are traits an instructional coach would need to bring to the table when working with teachers.  A person who wants to be an instructional coach could not run to a quick training and immediately possess these traits.  Whether a person's innate personality leads them to naturally have these characteristics, or whether they are the result of effort and/or experience, the characteristics of caring and competence play a major role when describing what an effective coach would desire "To Be."  Cashman (2008), poetically explains how effective coaching incorporates elements of leadership that are needed for coaches to become effective guides.

> Coaching is the art of drawing forth potential onto the canvas of high performance.
> It's the gentle yet firm hand of leadership guiding the way like a caring friend, helping
> the "coachee" to steer clear of danger or set a more positive course. (p. 178)

Becoming a quality instructional coach takes more than a good resume as noted by Daresh, 2003 below.

> Mentors should have experience as classroom teachers, and their peers and
> others should generally regard them as effective in the classroom (however)…it takes
> more than a long record of accomplishments as a recognized effective

teacher to make someone a good mentor.  It is a spirit that comes from

within special people.  (pp. 24, 27)

Other characteristics that fit well into the "To Be" category, and could be pieces of that "spirit"

that exists within an effective instructional coach include; quality communicator, inspiring,

flexible, ethical, and courageous.

The remaining three characteristics from Table 2 are activities that effective instructional

coaches are "To Do."  Collaboratively planning, prioritizing and checking on progress may seem

like too many skills to combine, but instructional coaches often have tools or processes provided

to them to support the acquisition of these skills.  Such tools have been created or put in place by

districts or specific programs, and are processes that support coaches as they document and work

through the necessary steps to goal completion.

Listening and modeling could probably be organized as "To Be" categories, but these

characteristics of quality instructional coaching are used with such frequency in the life of a

coach that classifying them as "To Do" clarifies them as daily activities that need to be

incorporated into almost every coaching interaction.  Surprisingly, "collaborative" did not come

up on its own as one of the most frequently occurring characteristics of an effective instructional

coach by the seven authors.  Perhaps this is because it is self-evident since instructional coaching

is in its very nature and structure collaborative.

**Research Results on the Efficacy of Coaching**

The research cited above effectively describes the characteristics of coaching.  What

follows is a review of studies on the efficacy of coaching.  In general, results indicate that

through coaching, teachers were able to effectively implement instructional practices.  Missing

from these examples are plentiful direct links to student achievement.  These results are difficult

to locate and indicate a research need in this field.  There are positive student achievement

results for The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) program.  An independent

study (Hudson, 2010) of all TAP schools in the United Sates found that in Math, TAP schools

outperformed similar schools each year by 0.15 standard deviations. Similarly, in Louisiana

during school year 2008-2009, TAP schools outperformed state student achievement results even

with significantly greater numbers of minority and lower socioeconomic students. TAP uses

instructional coaching as an integral part of their teacher development.  Both the quantitative and

qualitative portions of this paper make use of data from TAP instructional coaches.

In a five-year longitudinal study in California conducted in approximately 80 schools

from 1979 to 1983, the question of whether coaching would boost the implementation of new

skills was explored.  Bush (1984) and his research team discovered that if the components of

workshop, modeling, practice and feedback were used to help teachers gain new skills, there was

an approximate 20% chance that the skills would actually be implemented in classroom practice.

However, with the addition of peer coaching, that number grew to roughly 95%.

Similarly, Beverly Showers (1983) conducted an experiment where 17 teachers were

taught three models of teaching in a workshop setting.  Eight of the teachers were not coached

and nine worked with a coach for six weeks.  Through teacher observations, it was found that the

teachers that had been coached were more likely to use the new teaching models taught to them

in the workshop, and the teachers who were not coached used the new ideas much less

frequently.  Showers continued her research by seeing how the 256 students that were being

taught by the 17 teachers performed on essay and recall tests.  Students in the classes of the

teachers that had implemented the new instructional practices scored better on recall tests than

the students of teachers who had not implemented the new strategies.  Though more research

needs to be done, coaching can be considered an effective way to improve implementation of

instructional strategies shared in traditional workshop settings into classroom practice and can

lead, in some cases, to higher student achievement.

Although these studies provide valuable information about the efficacy of coaching, more

research remains to be done.  In particular, missing in the research is statistical data to indicate

what an effective instructional coach looks like, acts like, what he/she does, etc.  This practical

dimension, the core of whether an instructional coach will be effective or not, though often

discussed, is not regularly taken on as a topic that could be statistically researched.  This study

seeks to address this need.  The reality is that coaching is typically a one-to-one experience and

whether a teacher accepts or rejects new strategies that could lead them to higher levels of

student achievement often depends upon who is giving the advice.

The 10 categories previously noted that were synthesized from researchers in the field of

instructional coaching were used to organize the analysis of 15 qualitative interviews with

instructional coaches during school year  2011-2012.  Quantitative survey data  were also used

as an evaluation tool for 43 coaches at the end of the same school year.  These two data sources,

qualitative and quantitative, are used in this paper, along with the synthesis of current coaching

researchers' ideas, to determine characteristics of effective instructional coaches and to propose a

model for the training of instructional coaches.   I begin first with the qualitative research and

then proceed to the quantitative.

**Qualitative Methods**

The overall research question was:  What Makes an Effective Instructional Coach?  To answer this question I interviewed, after school year 2011-2012 was completed, 15 mentor and master teachers about their experiences as instructional coaches.  The "mentor" and "master" teacher designations came from the instructional program used in 10 schools in the school district studied─the Teacher and Student Advancement Program (TAP).

Managed by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), TAP seeks to attract talented people to become teachers and find ways to retain them by providing professional growth opportunities, time for collaboration, evaluations that specifically identify areas of improvement, professional development that is school based, and opportunities for advancement within the teaching profession similar to other professions.  To accomplish this, TAP, among other things, includes structured coaching as part of its instructional design.  Embedded within the TAP system are instructional coaches who have been given the titles of *mentor teacher* and *master teacher*.  Master teachers provide coaching and support for mentor and *career* or traditional classroom teachers.  They analyze school data, determine students' instructional needs, and organize weekly embedded professional development meetings.  These meetings are focused on using research based strategies that have been field tested to address deficiencies found during the data analysis.  Mentor teachers also provide support and coaching in targeted areas.  During the school day, teachers are provided time to collaborate and plan with other teachers in order to create continuous improvement in their instructional delivery and student achievement.  Master and mentor teachers provide coaching support to teachers as they learn

specific instructional strategies that have been shown to positively affect student achievement in their school.

## Participants

Eight mentor and seven master teachers in the TAP program participated in the interviews.  Six were from elementary schools, three from middle schools, and six were high school coaches.  All were female.  When the research study was approved, the school district sent out an e-mail asking for volunteers to participate.  A small incentive of a $10.00 gift card was provided.  Coaches who wished to participate contacted the researcher, and interviews were then held.  The participants' teaching experiences represented all major subject areas, including language arts, primary and intermediate elementary, math, science, and history.  Also represented were English as a second language and family and consumer science. Years of experience ranged from nine to 42 years. The average number of years of experience was 21.5 years.  Thirteen out of the 15 coaches had master's degrees, two had bachelor's degrees.

## Interview Protocol and Analysis

The coaches answered ten questions during the interviews (see Figure 1 below), and time for discussion was allowed following the last question.  The typical interview lasted between 20-30 minutes.  The interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and coded to note the number of times the 10 characteristics (synthesized from the seven authors) were mentioned and to also document any other patterns or themes.

*What Makes an Effective Instructional Coach?*

- *How is effective instructional coaching defined by those involved?*
- *What actions can contribute to effective instructional coaching?*
- *What leadership traits are exhibited by effective instructional coaches?*

*1. What have you enjoyed most about being a mentor/master teacher/instructional coach?*

*2. What specific actions did you take as a mentor/master teacher/instructional coach that you felt were most effective?*

*3. What does being an effective mentor/master teacher/instructional coach mean to you?*

*4. What leadership traits do you feel are most beneficial for an instructional coach to possess?*

*5. Could you share your most memorable success story as a mentor/master teacher/instructional coach?*

*6. What was the most frustrating situation you experienced as a mentor/master teacher/ instructional coach and how did you deal with it?*

*7. What was the most frequently occurring problem you needed to address as a master teacher/instructional coach?*

*8. Were you able to connect your successful coaching interactions to student learning? How?*

*9. What would be the most important advice you could give to someone striving to be an effective instructional coach?*

*10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a mentor/master teacher/instructional coach?*

*Figure 1.* Research form used during interviews with general research questions identified and specific questions asked of TAP instructional coaches-Summer 2012.

The results of the number of occurrences of the ten characteristics synthesized from the

previously discussed authors' views are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3

*TAP Mentor/Master Teachers' Interview Responses Coded into Categories*

| Instructional Coach (TAP Mentor or Master Teacher) | Caring | Competent | Quality Com-municator | Inspiring | Collaboratively Plans, Prioritizes, Checks on Progress, TAP Strategies & Systems | Flexible | Ethical | Listens | Models | Courageous |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 |  | 2 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 3 |  | 2 |  | 1 |
| 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 |  | 4 | 3 |  |
| 3 | 7 | 11 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 4 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 14 | 10 |  |  | 6 | 4 |
| 5 | 11 | 8 | 8 | 4 | 26 |  | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| 6 |  | 9 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 7 | 3 | 2 |  | 1 |
| 7 | 15 | 19 | 14 | 7 | 18 | 3 |  | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 8 | 9 | 7 |  | 13 | 20 | 2 | 1 |  | 1 | 2 |
| 9 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 15 | 2 |  | 5 | 11 | 2 |
| 10 |  | 4 | 5 | 10 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| 11 | 9 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 16 | 5 |  | 4 | 1 |  |
| 12 | 2 | 2 | 8 |  | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 13 | 18 | 11 | 6 | 5 | 12 | 8 |  | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| 14 | 7 | 7 | 9 | 18 | 15 | 7 |  |  | 3 | 3 |
| 15 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 1 |  | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| **Totals** | **93** | **105** | **79** | **85** | **178** | **62** | **13** | **31** | **39** | **25** |
| Rank Order | **3** | **2** | **5** | **4** | **1** | **6** | **10** | **8** | **7** | **9** |

During the analysis and coding process, six other patterns were noted as items to consider

relevant to the study.  These were:  TAP Strategies and Systems (25 responses), Field Testing

(3), Lifelong Learner (3), Humble (2), Reflective (6), Lack of Planning, (7) and Data Collection

(5).  It was determined to add the Strategies and Systems data to the Collaboratively Plans,

Prioritizes, and Checks on Progress category because the TAP processes noted in the interviews

included these components, and in addition, provided specific tools for coaches and references to a collaborative "cluster" time when all the teachers met together. The other categories had seven or less tallies and were not included in the final table due to the low number of responses.

The now larger category of Collaboratively Plans, Prioritizes, Checks on progress and Specific Strategies and Systems, was the most frequently referenced area during the interviews. The TAP program, which offers a systematic approach to improving instruction using a rubric and training protocols to meet building goals, follows the previously discussed idea that specific coaching programs typically organize and provide tools, strategies, and systems of implementation related to this category. What follows are characteristic responses from the instructional coaches during the interviews regarding collaboration and systems.

## Qualitative Results

In response to Question 1: What have you most enjoyed about being a mentor teacher/instructional coach? – respondent 8 replied,

> The thing that I've enjoyed the most is getting to know people and having the opportunity to help people improve in their practice and to come alongside people, not just professionally but personally when they struggle to just be a person that is a go-to person for someone else and to be an encourager.

In response to question 2 ─What three specific actions did you take as a mentor/instructional coach that you felt were most effective? ─ respondent 12 noted, "I was more collaborative cross curricularly."  Similarly, respondent 14 described,

> I think having an attitude of acceptance was huge and like wherever somebody is, is where they're at and that's not right or wrong, it simply is.  And then saying, what can we do? What can you do? How can I help you? And opening up to that instead of just going, you need to do this, this, and this, 'cause I don't think that's ever the approach…getting people talking so that you can see where they're coming from and you can help guide them…talking to them, and allowing them to talk.

In response to question 8 ─Were you able to connect your successful coaching interactions to student learning? And if so, how? ─respondent 12 said,

> Whatever we talked about in pre and post conversations or whatever we talked about with colleagues in our cluster or in leadership meetings was tied to student data and our over-arching school goal was driven by student data. So, yes.

Major  take-away points synthesized from the responses in this category include:  Plan collaboratively to ensure common understandings and equal opportunities for student learning incorporating most needed content, incorporate pre and post assessments to determine growth, decide on building and individual class areas of focus using data, check on progress frequently, design or incorporate useful tools to set goals, conduct observations, and collect meaningful data to support the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

The second most frequently referenced coaching characteristic was Competency, and the third ranked characteristic of an effective instructional coach by TAP mentor teachers was Caring. Many of the coaches interviewed referenced the need to be competent themselves and to help teachers feel confident and successful in their teaching practice. Coach responses to question 3 (What does being an effective mentor teacher or instructional coach mean to you? What does effective mean?) and 4 often mentioned the attributes of caring and competency in almost the same breath. Responses for question 3 included,

> Effective means I'm human enough to understand what's happening with them and empathize with that. I'm professional enough to have the expertise to offer them help, whatever the help might be, and I'm student-centered enough to understand that out of my coaching and out of their good practice will come improvement for our kids. (Respondent 11)

> I think the top part of it is the trust building with teachers where they understand that you're not here in the "gotcha mode," (but) you're here to help and support them. Building that trust is really important and can be very difficult to get…then, it's working with teachers to improve academics and student achievement and getting teachers to look at their classrooms in a different way than maybe they are used to. (Respondent 2)

> I think empathy, I believe, is important, just as a human quality when you're trying to work with others so they recognize you see them as a person and I think empathy can do that. I think you have to have some knowledge otherwise…nobody wants to listen to you. (Respondent 14)

Effectiveness is defined by these instructional coaches as both a holistic type of concern and professional competence. Question 4 was designed to have coaches to identify what leadership traits are most beneficial for an instructional coach to possess. Respondent 13 described, "So I think that compassion and empathy (and) really knowing your stuff " and respondent 15 noted, "Recognizing areas of need and being able to gently guide and direct people into that area without making them feel like they're failures." Respondent 7 said at length,

> Wow. I think you have to start with a foundation of trust. If you don't build
> relationships with those teachers then anything you say will fall on deaf ears…I think a
> second one would be, gosh I don't know! That's a hard one. Having a strong
> instructional background yourself. I mean, you've got to be a good teacher if you're
> going to coach others into effective teaching.

As is evident, trust, gentleness, relationships, knowledge and being competent were recurring themes in the interview responses. Some responders felt elements of trust included ethical components as indicated by Respondent 3, "Integrity, which would include the honesty, the confidentiality, being sincere. Lump it in. Competency, I think you have to be knowledgeable about your craft." Caring, competency and collaborative attitudes can be considered important characteristics for instructional coaches to possess. From interview responses, we can see that opportunities for collaboration can be enhanced through systemic design to allow time for teachers to meet for a variety of purposes (field testing, one-on-one coaching sessions, team planning, curriculum mapping, etc.). More explanation about how the final effective instructional coaching characteristics model was determined and how the other characteristics not discussed as yet (quality communicator, inspiring, ethical, models, courageous, flexible, and

listens) were incorporated into the final model, including quotes from the coaches interviewed, will be included in the Effective Instructional Coaching Characteristics Model section of this paper.  This section is located after Table 4 and the quantitative analyses are presented.

Table 4 is a comparison of the rankings of the previously mentioned seven authors' ideas about what makes an effective instructional coach and the results of the tallying of responses of TAP mentor and master teachers in the 10 categories previously determined by synthesizing seven authors' viewpoints.  These two sets of results were compared in order to come to an eventual ranking of characteristics by relative importance as determined by current coaching authors and coaches in the field in an urban setting.  Using this information, and results of the quantitative analysis, a proposed model designed to inform the training of instructional coaches was created.

Table 4

*Comparison of Researchers' and TAP Coaches' Rankings of Effective Coach Characteristics*

| Rank Order | Researcher Rankings for Characteristics of Effective Instructional Coaches | TAP Master and Mentor Teacher Rankings for Characteristics of Effective Instructional Coaches |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Caring | Collaboratively Plans, Prioritizes, Checks on Progress, TAP Strategies and Systems |
| 2 | Competent | Competent |
| 3 | Quality Communicator | Caring |
| 4 | Inspiring | Inspiring |
| 5 | Collaboratively Plans, Prioritizes, Checks on Progress, Strategies and Systems | Quality Communicator |
| 6 | Flexible | Flexible |
| 7 | Ethical | Models |
| 8 | Listens | Listens |
| 9 | Models | Courageous |
| 10 | Courageous | Ethical |

**Quantitative Methods**

The quantitative analysis was guided by the following questions:

1) What makes an effective instructional coach?

2) How is effective instructional coaching defined by those involved?

The quantitative portion of this study was organized to consider how instructional coaches were being evaluated within a current nationwide instructional system (TAP). The survey itself was an example of how effective instructional coaching is currently being defined within a specific system. The survey contained a section defined as the Mentoring section which was used as the dependent variable in the study. This section characterized what were defined by the TAP program as components to effective mentoring, including providing opportunities and support, being a resource, guiding, and coaching. The point of the analysis was to see how other parts of the survey (staff development, instructional supervision and community involvement), related to the mentoring section of the survey in order see if those actions and characteristics defined by the survey under the other headings could be considered predictors of the mentoring section. The mentoring section referenced coaching specifically and most closely matched the adapted the Northouse (2010) definition of leadership adapted at the beginning of this paper. If the results of the analyses were found to be significant in a positive way, then the other specific characteristics of effective coaching found in the staff development, instructional supervision, and community involvement sections of the survey could be considered to be useful characteristics for mentors to possess as well as those found in the mentoring section. If the results showed that the other sections were not significant predictors of the mentoring section, there would be characteristics that could be excluded or considered not as necessary for an

instructional coach to possess.  Figure 2 includes the groupings of survey questions for each of

the survey variables (DV = Dependent Variable, IV = Independent Variable).

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The **Mentoring** section incorporated 4 statements that were rated by surveyors.  The statements were:

1) The mentor teacher provides opportunities/support for the career teacher/mentee through team planning and team teaching.

2)  The mentor teacher serves as a resource for curriculum, assessment, instructional, and classroom management strategies and resources.

3)  The mentor teacher guides and coaches career teachers/mentees in the development of their growth plans.

4)  The mentor teacher observes and coaches mentees and/or career teachers to improve their instruction and align it with the TAP rubrics.

The statements for the **Instructional Supervision** section were:

1)  The mentor teacher advances the career teacher's knowledge of state and district content standards and the TAP teaching rubrics.

2)  The mentor teacher's feedback during coaching specifically defines the areas of reinforcement and refinement.

The **Staff Development** section statements included:

1)  The mentor teacher assists the design and delivery of professional development activities for his/her cluster group as needed.

2)  The mentor teacher provides follow-up (e.g. observations, teach teaching, and/or demonstration lessons) that supports/models how to use the ideas and activities learned in the cluster.

3)  The mentor teacher is a resource, providing access to materials and research based instructional methods to his/her cluster group and/or mentee.

4)  The mentor teacher works closely with cluster team members to plan instruction and assessments during cluster development time.

**Community Involvement** statement:

1)  The mentor teacher actively supports school activities and events

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*Figure 2.*  Statements contained within the TAP survey for the subsections of Mentoring (DV), Instructional Supervision (IV), Staff Development (IV) and Community Involvement (IV).

**Participants**

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

At the end of school year 2011-2012, the TAP Teacher Responsibilities Survey was administered to acquire feedback on the coaching practice of master and mentor teachers in a Western urban school district. Ten schools in the district participated in the TAP program during the school year 2011-2012. Forty-three mentor teachers' (17 elementary, 11 middle school, and 15 high school) coaching practice was evaluated through this survey. Each mentor teacher was evaluated through these surveys by two to twelve people familiar with their work as a coach. The evaluators included career teachers, master teachers, and administrators. Descriptive statistics for survey participants are included in Table 5. Table 6 includes the scales of measurement for the survey.

Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics for TAP Survey Analysis*

| Descriptive Statistics | Numeric Amount |
|---|---|
| Schools Participating | 10 |
| Total Sample Size-Number of survey respondents evaluating mentor teachers including career teachers, master teachers and administrators | 279 |
| Elementary Mentor Teachers-Code = 0 | 17 |
| Middle School Mentor Teachers-Code = 1 | 11 |
| High School Mentor Teachers-Code = 2 | 15 |
| Total Number of Mentor Teachers (Instructional Coaches) | 43 |
| Gender of Mentor Teachers Coding: 0=Female, 1=Male | 32 Female, 11 Male |

Table 6

*Variables and Scales of Measurement*

| Variable | Scale of Measurement |
| --- | --- |
| Gender | Nominal |
| School Level (Elementary, Middle, High) | Ordinal |
| Mentoring | Ordinal |
| Staff Development | Ordinal |
| Instructional Supervision | Ordinal |
| Community Involvement | Ordinal |

**Procedure**

The surveys were designed using a one to five scale, with one being unsatisfactory

performance, three proficient performance, and five exemplary performance.  Four subsections

of the survey were analyzed:  $Mentor = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Grade Level}) + \beta_2(\text{Gender}) + \beta_3(\text{Staff Development}) + \beta_4(\text{Instructional}$

$\text{Supervision}) + \beta_5(\text{Community Involvement}) + \epsilon$.  The mentoring subsection was the dependent variable in a

linear regression and stepwise analysis.  Three other subsections of the survey staff development,

instructional supervision, and community involvement, were the independent variables in the

regression analysis.  Each subsection of the survey included a number of statements (see Figure

2).  The numeric responses of each surveyor, for each statement within the subsection, were

summed and then calculated into a grand mean that provided the average of the averages for all

coaches for each subsection.  A linear regression was used to determine if the staff development,

instructional supervision, and community involvement sections of the survey would correlate to

or could be considered predictors of the mentoring section of the survey.   Residuals were

normally distributed, collinearity was not an issue (VIF much lower than 10), and there was no

missing data.

## Quantitative Results

Regression results indicate the independent variables of staff development, instructional

supervision, and community involvement were significant predictors of the mentoring section of

the TAP survey (see Table 7).  Moreover, the coefficients indicate that as perceived skill in each

of the independent variables increases, so too do mentoring effectiveness scores. The control

variables of grade level and gender were not significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.  When combined,

these predictors accounted for 92.5% of the variance in the mentoring section of the survey.

Table 7

*Linear Regression Results for Significant Predictors of Mentoring Section of TAP Survey*

| Independent Variables | *B* | Standard Error | *t* | *p*-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instructional Supervision | 0.498 | 0.105 | 4.754 | 0.000 |
| Staff Development | 0.350 | 0.077 | 4.522 | 0.000 |
| Community Involvement | 0.222 | 0.076 | 2.902 | 0.006 |
| Grade Level | -0.051 | 0.045 | -1.143 | 0.261 |
| Coach Gender | 0.027 | 0.073 | .371 | 0.713 |
| $N = 43$ | | | | |
| $R^2 = .93$ | | | | |

## Discussion

The results indicated that the scores a TAP mentor teacher (serving as an instructional

coach) would receive from the surveyors in the mentoring section of the TAP survey would

move in the same direction (positive or negative, toward Unsatisfactory-1 or Exemplary-5), as

scores in the areas of instructional supervision, staff development, and community involvement.

This indicates that we can predict with relative certainty that a coach who scores high in the area

of mentoring would score high in the other areas as well. Conversely, if someone was considered to be an unsatisfactory mentor, they would likely score low in instructional supervision, staff development, and community involvement. The independent variables of instructional supervision, staff development, and community involvement do predict the dependent variable of mentoring.

A strong indicator of the effectiveness of the differentiation of duties within the statements in the TAP survey is the lack of any problems with multi-collinearity as noted by the VIF statistics being well under the typical cut off of 10. Thus we can conclude that all of these specific coaching responsibilities do not overlap and are distinct components of quality instructional practice as defined by the TAP program.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the statements in the TAP survey incorporate the "To Do" items noted in the previously synthesized list of characteristics (collaboratively plans, prioritizes, and checks on progress, modeling) with an emphasis on the one "To Be" characteristic of competency. Other characteristics such as caring, which was noted as the number one characteristic needed to be an effective instructional coach in the analysis of current coaching authors' perspectives, is not mentioned in survey statements, with the exception of a few words such as "supports and guides." These words suggest caring, and are typically embedded near a reference to the TAP rubric that outlines specific instructional practices for teachers to implement (http://www.d11.org/TAP/Documents/TAP%20Rubric.pdf , pp. 16-24). On the TAP rubric, the environment and respectful culture sections address having a welcoming environment, caring, respect, and positive relationships. The TAP rubric is used to guide instruction in the classroom, so classroom teachers would be working toward having these
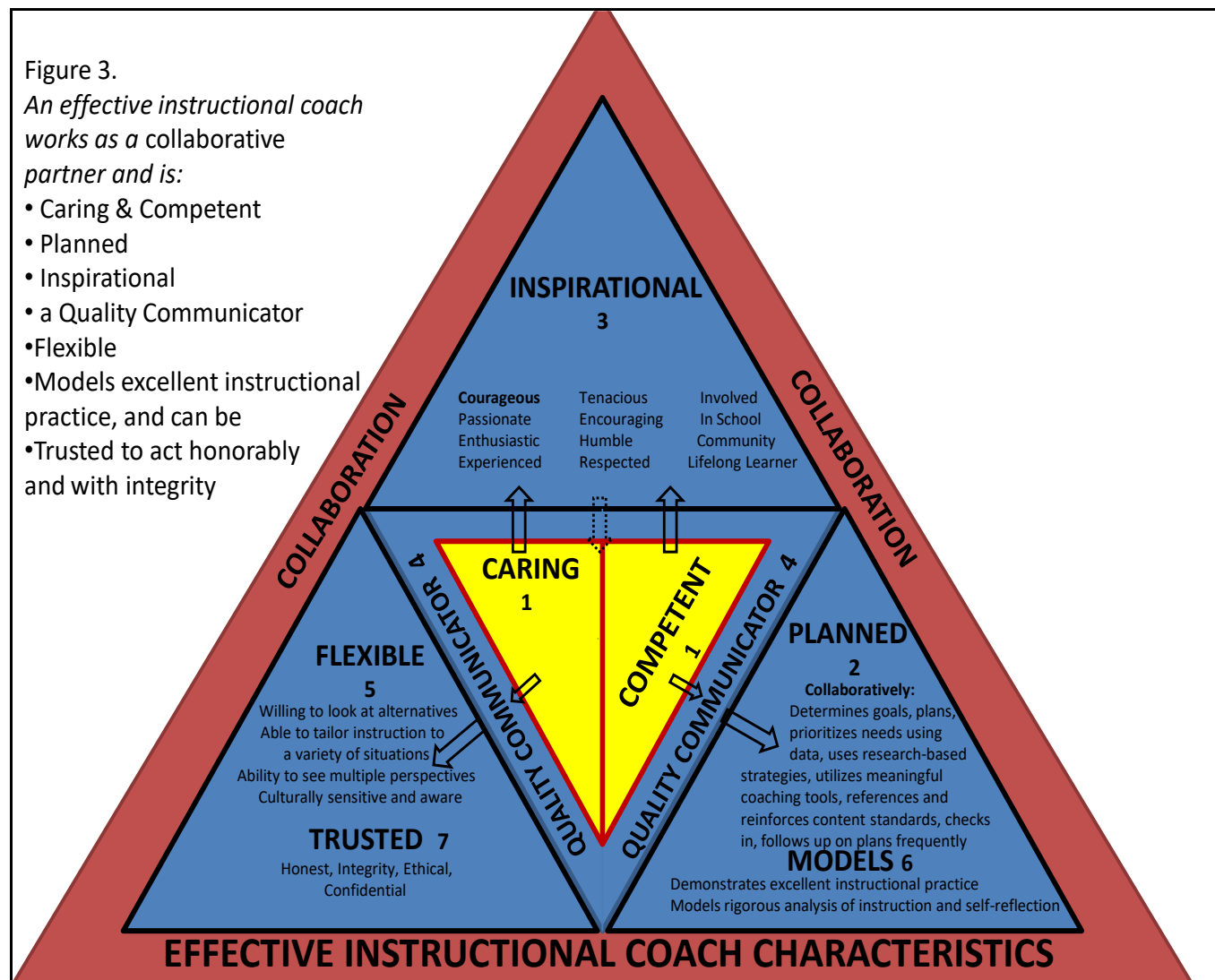
elements of caring within their classrooms.  However, the survey does not specifically note these areas to be evaluated for coaches.  This may be because the TAP program has a pay for performance structure, and deliberate efforts may have been taken to make it easy for coaches and evaluators to provide concrete evidence of whether a coach had completed each portion of each survey statement.  For example, a coach could keep track of how many times he/she attended school events or activities and prove whether or not that expectation was met.

This quantitative focus is understandable, because using the more holistic "To Be" characteristics such as inspiring and courageous, could mean different things to different people.  It would be difficult to make important decisions, such as such as how much to pay someone, if terms could be interpreted in a variety of ways.

### Effective Instructional Coach Characteristics Model

Based on the information and data accumulated and analyzed through the interviews, surveys, regression analyses, and seven authors' views, the following model (Figure 3) was designed.

Figure 3.
*An effective instructional coach works as a* collaborative *partner and is:*
• Caring & Competent
• Planned
• Inspirational
• a Quality Communicator
•Flexible
•Models excellent instructional practice, and can be
•Trusted to act honorably and with integrity

INSPIRATIONAL
3

**Courageous**    Tenacious    Involved
Passionate    Encouraging    In School
Enthusiastic    Humble    Community
Experienced    Respected    Lifelong Learner

COLLABORATION

COLLABORATION

QUALITY COMMUNICATOR 4

QUALITY COMMUNICATOR 4

CARING
1

COMPETENT
1

FLEXIBLE
5
Willing to look at alternatives
Able to tailor instruction to
a variety of situations
Ability to see multiple perspectives
Culturally sensitive and aware

PLANNED
2
**Collaboratively:**
Determines goals, plans,
prioritizes needs using
data, uses research-based
strategies, utilizes meaningful
coaching tools, references and
reinforces content standards, checks
in, follows up on plans frequently

TRUSTED 7
Honest, Integrity, Ethical,
Confidential

MODELS 6
Demonstrates excellent instructional practice
Models rigorous analysis of instruction and self-reflection

**EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL COACH CHARACTERISTICS**

The previous category of Courageous from the authors' ideas was collapsed into the

category of Inspirational (bolded in the model). The category of ethical, which throughout the

TAP interviews included the words honesty, trust, integrity, and being confidential were also

noted as being important elements of Caring as well as Inspirational. As the interviews were

conducted, and frequently throughout the author's responses, it was noted that the word trust was

recurrently mentioned, but was listed under many categories including, Ethical, Caring,

Inspirational, and Quality Communicator. Because of this, Trusted was added as a key

characteristic and incorporates the words, honesty, integrity, and confidentiality.  Because

Trusted was not tallied as a separate category, but was found in numerous places, the category

Ethical was incorporated within it and it was ranked 7th.  However, the actual level of

importance may be significantly higher.   The category of Listens (bolded in the expanded

model-see below) was grouped with Quality Communicator based on the number of responses

and areas of best fit.  Seven categories were represented in the final model:  (1) Caring &

Competent,  (2) Planned (which was an abbreviated way of naming the category-Collaboratively

plans, Prioritizes, Checks on progress, Strategies and Systems),  (3) Inspirational, (4) Quality

Communicator, (5) Flexible, (6) Models, and (7) Trusted.

Throughout this next section of the paper, quotes from the qualitative interviews will be

included as each section of the coaching model is explained (except for the Caring and

Competency sections which were previously supported by quotes from the interviews).

Though not ordered, the model is encompassed by a larger triangle of Collaboration

which is inherent in the coaching process and referenced numerous times during the TAP

interviews.  "Coaching is as much a communal activity, a relationship among seeking

professionals, as it is the exercise of a set of specific skills" (Showers, 1985,  p. 19).

Collaboration is the necessary structure to house effective coaching. Caring and Competency

were ordered both as number one priorities, because the synthesis of the seven authors' views

resulted in a ranking of caring first, the TAP coaches ranked it third and competency was second

for both the TAP coaches, so on average, they would both be ranked similarly.  Also, as noted in

the interview responses, Caring and Competency were often grouped together when coaches

were asked what does being an *effective* coach mean and what were the most important leadership traits for coaches to possess.

The right side of the model incorporates elements of Competency (Planned and Models) filtered through the skills of a Quality Communicator (see arrows), and the left side of the model contains elements of Caring (Flexible and Trusted) which are also communicated through the talents of a quality communicator (see arrows). Both Competency and Caring influence and are influenced by the top area of the triangle, Inspirational. Notice that there are arrows originating at Caring and Competent that end in the Inspirational triangle. This is because Caring and Competent coaches are often considered to have inspirational qualities. The dotted arrow originating from Inspirational and ending in the Caring and Competent triangle indicates that Inspirational coaches are typically Caring and Competent. The characteristic of Planned could have been moved into first place status based on the amount of responses given by the TAP teachers, but as will be explained, was considered a key component of competency, and as such was ordered second in level of importance.

To simplify further, and as generally explained previously, the basic characteristics needed to be an effective instructional coach would include the 3 C's: Collaboration, Caring and Competency. A Caring coach could be considered to be empathetic, welcoming, loving, understanding, supportive, encouraging, patient, sensitive, open, unselfish, respectful, kind, gentle, able to build and maintain trust (honesty, integrity) confidential, and compassionate (words used by seven authors and coaches interviewed). A Competent coach would be knowledgeable, experienced, know what to look for to determine next steps to better teachers'

instructional practice, aware of and able to share current data and research, and viewed as a respected resource.

Identified as the fourth significant characteristic for an instructional coach to possess was the importance of being a Quality Communicator, which would include the following abilities: to create a positive relationship with those being coached (including trust and confidentiality), clearly define roles and work, understand needs, listen (was its own category, so it is bolded and in larger print), to give specific feedback that clarifies instructional strategies to reinforce or refine, and use positive, clear  and intentional language.  In response to the question, What leadership traits do you feel are most beneficial for an instructional coach to possess, Respondent 10 answered, "Okay, I think listening skills. Really being able to hear the other people and empathize and put yourself in their place, and so to be able to listen from their viewpoint…I have some of that, and I've grown in it this year a lot, and I think it's been a saving grace. " Figure 4 is the center of the model expanded to include the descriptors of the categories recently discussed.
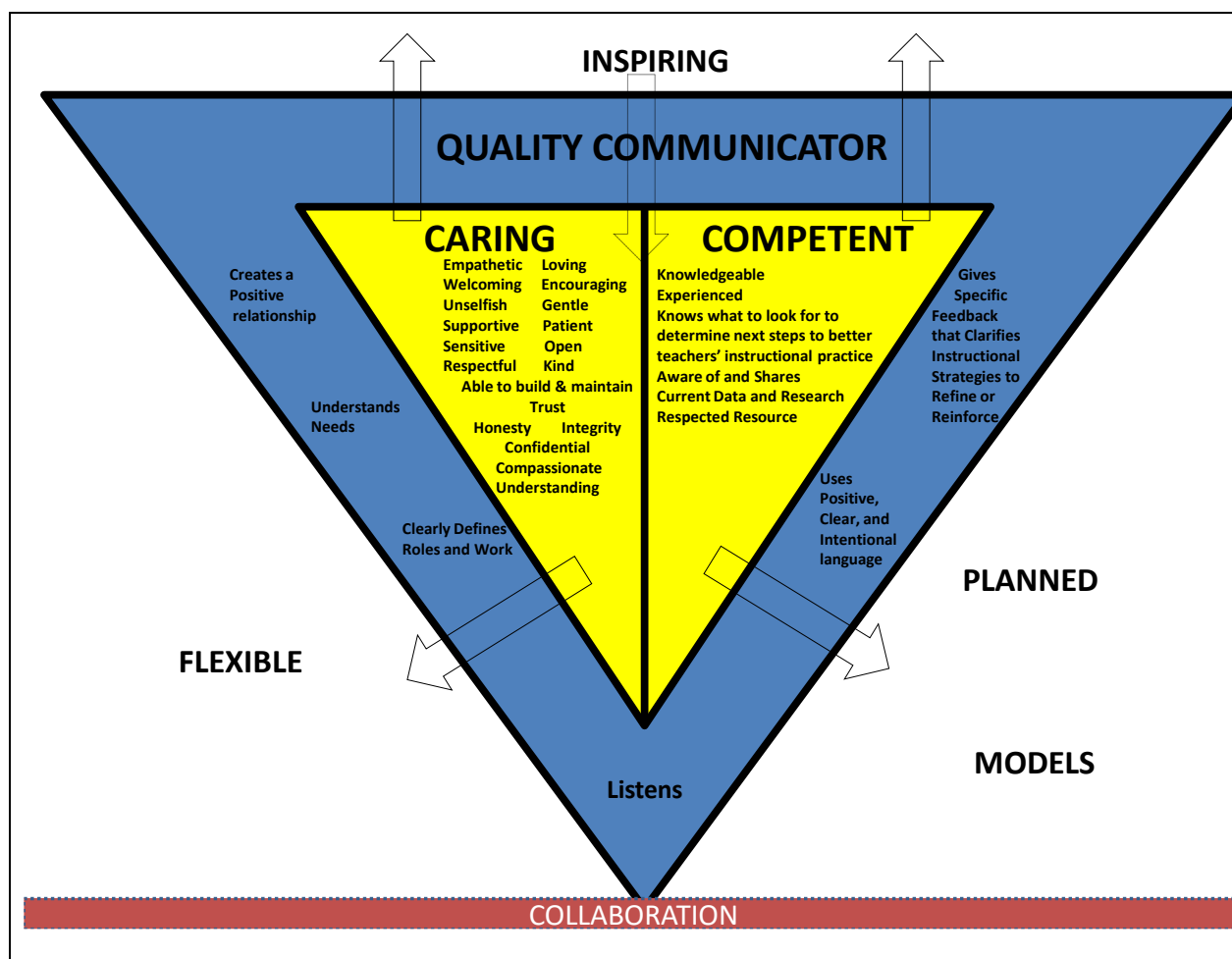
*Figure 4.* Center of Effective Instructional Coach Characteristics Model expanded to include descriptions

Competency can be further enhanced by being Planned (refer to arrows on the right side of the model). By referencing information from the TAP survey (including ideas from the Instructional Supervision section that was the best predictor of the mentoring section of the survey in the quantitative analysis), the responses from the 15 interviews, and the authors' ideas, details were specified under the heading Planned. These included: Collaboratively determines goals, plans, prioritizes needs using data, uses research-based strategies, utilizes meaningful coaching tools, references and reinforces content standards, checks in, and follows up on plans

frequently.  These are important skill sets a competent instructional coach would possess according to the research studied. In the words of one of the TAP mentor teachers (Respondent 11) when asked, What actions did you take as an instructional coach that you felt were most effective, she referenced some of her processes around being Planned:

> (I) gathered data carefully during classroom observations, made myself very familiar with the TAP rubric…developed a hierarchy in my mind of how things flow from a planning stage to classroom management, to motivating students, to classroom delivery, to formative assessment and reversing the cycle…so I could offer teachers a systematic way to look at what was going on in the classroom and interventions at each point of the cycle.

Located on the right bottom side of the model is the 6th ranked characteristic of modeling.  This quality is also heavily related to competency.  It is, in essence, a demonstration of competency when a coach can show a teacher how to teach students effectively.  "I think that in our cluster meetings when you demonstrate a strategy and you get the reaction from the peers who are sitting there, those AHAs come" (Respondent 13, Question 2).  Respondent 10 further elaborated,

> …(The topic to be modeled) was academic feedback, and this gal (this was her low point on her observation) (said), 'I don't even know what it means!' you know?  I said, 'Okay, I'll come in , and you teach the lesson, and I'll just model academic feedback.  So just listen to everything I say, 'cause I'm…just goin' to do academic feedback.'  Five minutes into it, she was picking it up, she had it.  She had the visual… and the auditory of what it meant.  And she went from a low score to a high score on her next observation!

Other components of modeling found in the research included demonstrating how to be self-reflective and showing specific ways to analyze instruction to produce higher levels of student learning.

At the top of the model is the characteristic of Inspirational. A coach who is caring and competent would have a good chance of being thought of as inspiring (arrow pointing up) and a coach who is inspiring could often be considered caring and competent. A person who is considered inspiring could be found to be that way for many different reasons. Included in the list of words found in the research and interviews for the category Inspiring was the collapsed category of courageous and some of the descriptors of Ethical found in the interviews and author's comments (incorporated into the added category of Trusted). These included: Trustworthy, honest, confidential, integrity, encouraging (also noted in Caring), passionate, enthusiastic, humble, lifelong learner, experienced, respected, and involved in community (taken from the quantitative results). Representative quotes included:

Oh, my gosh! I work with so many wonderful teachers! And they just want to do so much better all the time and that growth for me just inspires me to want to do better all the time too (Respondent 13).

…I think if you're not an encouraging person, people can't take what you have to say to them, because you're not putting them in a good frame of mind, you're putting them in that fight-or-flight frame of mind just by talking to them. So I think being really, really encouraging to people, and to yourself, too, is really important (Respondent 10).

I think the worst possible thing I can do, which I think actually is more harmful

than helpful to any teacher or the school in general, is if  I …come off at some

point during the year as being critical or…(did something that was) demoralizing

that actually took away from the confidence of the teacher…my goal is just to be

supportive, to say, 'If there is a problem, there's always a solution and I can be

part of that'  (Respondent 1).

Part of being caring is the ability to be flexible.  As Respondent 12 said,

I mean, things that have worked forever maybe aren't going to work for situations,

so you have to think a little bit bigger than that.  I think you as a coach and a

leader have to be teachable as well.  I don't think any of us have arrived.

On the left bottom side of the model, filtered again through the skills of a quality

communicator (see arrows), is Flexibility.  An effective instructional coach is willing to look at

alternatives, is able to tailor instruction to a variety of situations, and has the ability to see

multiple perspectives.  According to Respondent 2,  "… teachers can be very resistant, so it's…,

getting them to think outside the box of what they normally do."  Similarly, a coach who is

flexible and able to see multiple perspectives would be culturally sensitive and aware.  The

ethnicity of students was mentioned in the TAP interviews with coaches, but a focus on meeting

needs through understanding culture was not specifically mentioned.  It would be beneficial for

teachers and coaches to know about cultures and be culturally sensitive (Ladson-Billings, 2001,

McAllister & Irvine, 2000).   The author experienced a time when a teacher chose a signal to

gain the attention of students that was an obscene gesture in a language other than English.

These types of things can be avoided, and instructional coaches would do well to become as

culturally competent as possible.  The 7th characteristic, Trusted was determined to be important enough to include on its own because it was noted in a number of categories as explained previously.  "Trust brings out the best in people and literally changes the dynamics of interaction" (Covey, S. M. R., 2006, p. 319).

## Conclusion

An effective instructional coach works as a collaborative partner and is caring and competent, planned, inspirational, a quality communicator, flexible, models excellent instructional practice, and can be trusted to act honorably and with integrity.  Narrowing many characteristics of effective instructional coaching down to a workable number of categories based on research provides the opportunity to organize strategic trainings for instructional coaches.  Understanding what characteristics of instructional coaching are most highly valued by researchers and by those currently experiencing coaching or working in schools as instructional coaches is valuable and adds information to the body of coaching research which is just beginning to be developed.

Providing a greater awareness of what general categories to address in coach trainings and their relative levels of importance could support school districts as they determine what courses and training materials to purchase and implement.  These categories could also be used to guide professional learning community experiences, the hiring of instructional coaches, and related reform professional development opportunities for teachers and instructional coaches.

**Limitations**

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

The 15 interviews of instructional coaches in the TAP program were all conducted with female respondents. This could have biased the results toward a more feminine view of the TAP experience. The sample sizes of 43 coaches/279 surveys and 15 qualitative interviews could be expanded to provide a more generalizable interpretation of the data. The original seven researchers whose views were synthesized to determine a framework for analyzing the qualitative interviews were not chosen in any type of order. Possibly choosing coaching books with the largest number of sales, or authors who are cited most frequently, would be something that could be done to determine which researchers to reference. Including more authors in the analysis would increase the validity and reliability of the study. Researcher bias could always enter in when humans code scripted interviews.

## Future Research

As professional development continues to move toward reform types of presentation such as instructional coaching, issues including being able to finance time for collaboration and increased pay for coaches, determining how to effectively keep students learning if many "good" teachers are being pulled out of the classroom to coach, and training coaches to be effective, are problems that will continue to be addressed. Future research could include the collection and analysis of more data to confirm or disprove the accuracy of the model presented. The model could be further refined to consolidate the descriptive words within each category. The Trusted category is likely not seventh as far as importance since it was frequently mentioned as part of a number of categories, so the magnitude of this characteristic needs further study and could result in an adjustment to the Effective Instructional Coach Characteristics model (located on p. 35).

## Final Thought

The opportunity to coach is a gift and a trust given to an ever increasing number of educators.  Acquiring skills that increase effectiveness in this relatively new role can positively affect many lives.

*We mark with light in the memory the few interviews we have had with souls that made our soul wiser, that spoke what we thought, that told us what we know, that gave us leave to be what we inwardly are.* (Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1984)

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