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Experiences and Perceptions of Instructional Lead Teachers on Improving Teacher Quality

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Abstract

Research suggests that instructional coaching enhances a teacher's instructional quality thereby improving students' chances for academic success. Instructional Lead Teachers (ILTs) are positioned to improve instructional quality via a coaching paradigm; however, it is unclear how ILTs influence teachers' instructional practices. This study explored the perspectives of ILTs regarding their instructional support responsibilities and practices in improving instructional quality. The results of the study were used to create a coaching structure and 3-day professional development. These endeavors may contribute to positive social change by helping district administrators provide ILTs with the structure and training needed to effectively influence teacher practice thus improving the educational outcomes of students.

Doctoral Capstone

Problem

The problem was that despite the adoption of the ILT position, it was unclear how this role had influenced teacher practice. The gap in practice was the discrepancy between (a) what research constitutes as the role and practices enacted by instructional coaches and (b) what may not be happening.

Purpose

The purpose of this bounded-multisite case study was to explore the perspectives of ILTs regarding their instructional support responsibilities and practices in improving instructional quality of teachers.

Significance

Teacher quality has been considered one of the strongest factors related to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Hattie, 2008).

ILTs are one resource allocated to improve teacher effectiveness. They are situated to influence teacher practices, which will in turn influence student achievement.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was rooted in the **social cognitive theory** (Bandura, 1989).

Relevant Scholarship

Teachers are the most important factor when considering impact on student achievement. (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Goodwin et al., 2014; Hattie, 2008).

Coaching has been considered a widely accepted means of shifting teacher's instructional practices (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). However, ambiguous roles, unclear direction, and misuse of the position can create challenges to effectively shifting teacher practice (Jacobs et al., 2016).

Wenner and Campbell (2017) noted that instructional coaches must be trained. They offered that leading colleagues and enacting coaching roles and behaviors required a specific set of skills.

Carver et al. (2016) offered that because coaches were former teachers, there was a natural inclination to overlook the need for training, however they are most often unprepared.

When implemented effectively, instructional coaching can have a positive effect on the growth of the instructional practices of teachers (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Marsh et al., 2015; Neumerski, 2012).

Research Question

RQ1: What are the ILTs' perceptions of and experiences with instructional coaching of middle school teachers?

RQ2: What instructional changes do ILTs observe in the teachers' classroom practice?

RQ3: What supports do ILTs believe they need to increase their effectiveness in providing instructional support?

Participants

A homogenous sampling strategy was utilized for the study.

10 ILTs who served at the middle school level participated in semistructured interviews.

4 ILTs participated in half-day observations.

Procedures

Interviews

Interviews lasted no more than 50 minutes at a place of the participants choosing.

An interview guide was established and used in each session.

Observations

Participants were observed for 4 hours at their school site.

Analysis

Using a thematic data analysis approach an open coding strategy for both data sets .

Axial coding was used to determine important codes relevant in answering the research question.

Findings

RQ1: What are the ILTs' perceptions of and experiences with instructional coaching of middle school teachers?

- Theme 1: ILTs influence student achievement
- Theme 2: ILT is an instructional authority and teacher support
- Theme 3: Noninstructional responsibilities pose challenges to instructional coaching

RQ2: What instructional changes do ILTs observe in the teachers' classroom practice?

- Theme 4: Classroom management is the main instructional change
- Theme 5: Coaching practices used by ILTs

RQ3: What supports do ILTs believe they need to increase their effectiveness in providing instructional support?

- Theme 6: Administration support for the ILT position
- Theme 7: Clarity in structure and training for instructional coaching

Interpretation

The ILT position is a new position to the district. The responsibilities of ILTs vary from school to school, with no consistency in expectation or appropriate training for the position. The district would benefit from a quality coaching program that ensures that ILTs have the time and resources to effectively improve teacher capacity.

Limitations

One such limitation of the study is that while each participant was currently in the position of an ILT, several of the participants could not recall current examples of instructional coaching practices. Such a lapse in current examples was as a result of the position changing each year. For example, ILT H was assigned to teach a class whereas that was not the case in previous years.

Recommendations

The findings of this study support the creation of a uniform structure for coaching and ongoing professional learning for ILTs and administrators.

Another recommendation is for curriculum and instruction departments in districts employing this model to hold monthly meetings in which coaches can come together to reinforce learning, discuss practices, and affirm practices. Monthly meetings will provide continuous support for new learning and can reinforce effective coaching practices with ILTs.

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