TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING:

AN INVESTIGATION OF APPROACHES USED IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

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A Capstone

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Doctor of Education

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By

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Teacher Professional Growth and Instructional Coaching: An Investigation of Approaches Used in Independent Schools

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Abstract

This Capstone project explored the conceptualization and facilitation of teacher professional growth in independent schools to address the need for a professional growth process at The Dreyfus School (pseudonym), a college-preparatory independent school in the Mid-Atlantic. Recognizing the role of high-quality instruction in student learning, the study investigated professional growth processes at 17 of Dreyfus's peer schools through survey methods and the implementation of an instructional coaching program at one of Dreyfus's peer schools, Cooper Academy (pseudonym), through case study methods. Findings revealed varying conceptualizations of and facilitation approaches to professional growth, underscoring the multifaceted nature of professional growth and professional development in independent schools generally and at Cooper. Additionally, findings illustrate that instructional coaching at Cooper is implemented differently between the Middle and Upper Schools, and stakeholders articulated varying assessments of its impact on professional growth.

Stemming from the findings, relevant literature, and theoretical and conceptual foundations for the study, recommendations for Dreyfus include: defining a clear vision of professional growth; aligning the professional growth processes with student outcomes; and adopting a structured, mission-aligned approach to instructional coaching. This study offers specific, practical guidance to Dreyfus stakeholders and contributes to a growing body of literature on independent schools.

Keywords: independent schools, professional development, professional growth, instructional coaching

Dedication

To my mother and her mother, two fierce academics who paved the way. I wish you were here.

To my father, who instilled in me an indefatigable love of learning.

And to my students, this is for you.

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With unending gratitude to:

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Jen, whose deeply thoughtful, inquisitive, and kind feedback not only helped this project to be a million times better, but also helped me learn so intensely about myself. It would be worth it to get another Ed.D. just to continue working with you.

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My family, for always showing up. If only everyone could be so lucky. I love you more than words can express.

And, finally, thank you to my students at Dreyfus, and particularly to the Class of 2024. You started this journey with me when you were in 7th grade, and we're all graduating together. Your questions about, concerns for, and celebrations of my work mean more to me than anything.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Of all the complex facets of school life, high-quality teaching has the most significant impact on student achievement (Berg, 2010; Daley & Kim, 2010; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Quinn, 2014; Robertson-Kraft & Zhang, 2018). High-quality teaching is now more important than ever as students need increasingly complex skills and knowledge to navigate the 21st-century global landscape (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Teachers must engage in consistent professional development and learning to promote professional growth, especially as teaching and learning become increasingly more complicated due to "demands for deeper and more complex student learning" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 1). By growing their professional practice, teachers can improve their teaching quality (Guskey, 2002a; Slepkov, 2008), stay updated on best practices in pedagogy (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), and enhance student academic outcomes (Guskey, 2002a; Muir et al., 2021; Yoon et al., 2007). However, most traditional approaches to teacher professional development, such as short-term, one-off workshops, sessions, or conferences, are ineffective in changing teacher practice and leading to professional growth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Sprott, 2019; Stetcher et al., 2018; Walker & Edstam, 2013). Recent evidence suggests that teachers grow their professional practice more effectively when they engage in mission-aligned high-quality, job-embedded professional development that is content-focused, active, collaborative, sustained, and offers opportunities for expert support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015).

One high-quality, job-embedded professional development approach which has been shown to facilitate professional growth is instructional coaching, which a non-evaluative, collaborative partnership between an instructional expert and a teacher to enhance teaching practice (Knight, 2006). Experts in the field of instructional coaching (Aguilar, 2013; Joyce &

Showers, 1996; Knight, 2022) and empirical research (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016) have demonstrated the effectiveness of instructional coaching in enhancing teacher professional growth. Instructional coaching directly influences teacher practices, aiding educators in identifying effective teaching strategies that improve student outcomes. This process enables lasting changes in teaching practices, leading to sustained professional growth (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016).

Introduction to the Problem of Practice

Although the importance of teacher professional development to facilitate professional growth cannot be understated, not all school administrators know how to identify or provide the professional growth opportunities that align with the specific needs of their teachers. The Dreyfus School (pseudonym), colloquially known as Dreyfus, is an independent, college-preparatory school located in a metropolitan area in the Mid-Atlantic. Stakeholders at the school strive to facilitate teacher professional growth to ensure high-quality teaching and learning (Employee Handbook, 2023) but there is not currently a systematic approach to doing so. This is not the case for all independent schools, as some have structured systems to promote teacher professional growth within the unique contexts of their institutions. Understanding the structures through which Dreyfus's peer institutions facilitate teacher professional development and professional growth is critical to informing efforts to implement a professional growth process at Dreyfus. Additionally, because instructional coaching can have an impact on teacher professional growth, understanding how peer institutions effectively implement this particular professional development process could help Dreyfus stakeholders to determine the most effective ways to support the teacher professional growth process. In the following sections, I

will define key terms, discuss the context of independent schools, delve deeper into the problem of practice, and identify the goals of this study to address the problem of practice.

The Context of Independent Schools

Because Dreyfus is an independent school and this study will focus on independent schools, it is necessary to discuss the unique contextual characteristics of these institutions when it comes to teaching and professional growth.

Characteristics of Independent Schools

Independent schools are a specific type of school under the umbrella of private schools. Private schools are any schools that are not part of a public school system. Whereas many private schools are run by outside organizations, such as a diocese or a Montessori association, independent schools are private schools that are free from outside organizational oversight, government or non-government (Pierce & Claybourn, 2023). According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Private School Universe Survey (2021), in 2020 there were 30,492 private schools in the United States, but only 1,614 were members of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), a nonprofit membership organization that provides services and guidance to independent schools across the country (About NAIS, 2023).

NAIS is the largest association of independent schools in the United States (About NAIS, 2023). It serves as a hub for independent schools and supports its member schools by providing resources and fostering collaboration between schools. In order to become a member of NAIS, independent schools must undergo a rigorous accreditation process (International Council, 2023). This process includes a school-level self-study, where the applicant school engages in a comprehensive self-assessment of its education program, governance, leadership, and facilities to determine strengths and areas for improvement. Then, a team of accreditors, most often made up

of educators and administrators from other independent schools, conducts a site visit to validate the findings of the self-study. Based on the results of the self-study and accompanying site visit, NAIS determines whether the school is eligible for accreditation as a member school (International Council, 2023). The NAIS website states:

> The accreditation process rests on comprehensive standards which schools must meet. The standards address all areas of school life, including the following: mission, governance, finance, program, community of the school, administration, development, admissions, personnel, health and safety, facilities, student services, school culture, and residential life (where applicable) (International Council, 2023).

NAIS accreditation serves as a mark of quality assurance for member schools, providing a valuable benchmark for parents, students, and the broader community. Accreditation emphasizes a commitment to continuous improvement and the pursuit of excellence in independent school education, including in regard to high-quality teaching (International Council, 2023).

Independent schools can be any combination of grade levels, day or boarding, single gender, military, religious or secular, or schools for special needs (Pierce & Claybourn, 2023). They receive no government funding and instead are supported through tuition, school endowments, and charitable donations gained through capital campaigns (Flanagan, 2021). Independent schools are run by boards of trustees that are responsible for the life of the school and ensure that the school remains true to its mission (Pierce & Claybourn, 2023). Because independent schools are run by their own independent boards, the schools are contextually unique. Although there can be similarities between schools, no two independent schools are exactly the same. Because the schools are so contextually unique, it is challenging to transfer research findings from one institution to another. That, combined with the small number of

independent schools across the country, contributes to a dearth of empirical literature on independent schools. More research on these individual school contexts could help stakeholders in independent schools and NAIS to better understand the educational landscape of these unique institutions in a broad sense. Table 1.1 summarizes the information found in the following sections.

Table 1.1

Differences Between Public and Private and/or Independent Schools

	Public Schools	Private and/or Independent Schools
Number in US	Approx. 98,000	Approx. 1,600 (I)
Funding	Federal, state, local funds	Tuition, donations, endowment
Oversight	State and local government	Boards of Trustees (I)
Teacher licensure/certification	98% of students taught by licensed teachers	56% of students taught by licensed teachers (P)
Standards of high-quality teaching	Published state and local standards	Depends on school, mostly undefined

Teaching and Teachers in Independent Schools

Although independent schools are a specific subset of private schools, most data collected on private schools do not distinguish between the many types. The literature discussed below includes information about both independent schools and private schools; in each case, I have maintained the original authors' framing.

The nature of independent schools as institutions free from government oversight means that in each school, stakeholders make decisions regarding admissions, curriculum, and staffing. The vast majority of independent schools do not require that teachers have a state teaching

license (Basset, 2011). During the 2011-2012 school, the last year for which data from the NCES Schools and Staffing Survey are available, only 54% of students in private schools were taught by licensed teachers, as opposed to 98% of students in public schools (SASS, 2013). According to data from the 2020-2021 NCES National Teacher and Principal Survey (2022), 77% of public school teachers took classes in lesson planning and learning assessment, but only 66% of private school teachers did. Additionally, 98% of private school teachers reported that they had some control over selecting content, topics, and skills to be taught, as well as instructional materials, compared to 84% of public school teachers. The combination of lower licensure rates and lower rates of undergraduate and graduate coursework in the field of education suggests a possibility that private school teachers, including independent school teachers, may not be as consistently well-versed in educational methods as public school teachers. Additionally, the higher degree of autonomy that private school teachers have over their classrooms implies that they may not be beholden to similar institutional standards of high-quality instruction as public school teachers, which may signal a need for more professional growth regarding educational best practices among independent school teachers. Although NCES data suggest that the vast majority of public and private school teachers do participate in professional development (Tie et al., 2022), there is limited empirical evidence regarding how professional development opportunities in private and specifically independent schools are implemented and whether or not they impact professional growth to encourage high-quality teaching.

According to the available metrics, such as SAT scores and college matriculation rates for individual schools (Pierce & Claybourn, 2023), independent school teachers may be effective at teaching their students, but research is lacking in this area. Almost all 12th grade students from independent schools attend four-year colleges (Basset, 2011) and often prestigious universities.

Of Yale and Princeton's 2024 graduating class, 24% of students attended independent schools (Flanagan, 2021). This number is even higher for Brown and Dartmouth at 29% of students for the same graduation year (Flanagan, 2021). While it might be tempting to draw a relationship between high rates of college graduation at prestigious universities and effective teaching in independent schools, there is a multitude of outside factors that could also influence independent school students' academic achievement. These factors could include the independent school's reputation in the college admissions process, the social capital of a student's family, or the fact that many independent school families can afford tutors, standardized test prep, or private college counselors. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as "The Nation's Report Card," shows that private school students, including those in independent schools, score better in almost all standardized test subjects across grade levels (The Nation's Report Card, 2023), which researchers have attributed to family attributes like college-educated parents (Pierce & Claybourn, 2023). Thus, although most independent school students achieve academic success, that success may or may not be due to effective, high-quality teaching.

The disparities between public and independent school teachers regarding teacher preparation raise essential questions regarding the efficacy of independent school teachers in the classroom and their ability to implement the teaching strategies that public school teachers may have been more likely to learn through participating in education-related coursework. Although independent school teachers do participate in professional development on part with their public school counterparts (Taie et al., 2022), it is unclear whether this professional development leads to effective changes in professional practice. The absence of evidence on the landscape of professional development and professional growth in independent schools suggests a need for more research into this topic.

High-Quality Teaching in Independent Schools

Educational best practices in independent schools are context-specific, although NAIS addresses some of the required practices for teachers in independent schools through its list of "Principles of Good Practice" (Appendix A) the purpose of which is to:

> define high standards and ethical behavior in key areas of school operations to guide
>
> schools in becoming the best education communities they can be, to embed the
>
> expectation of professionalism, and to further our sector's core values of transparency,
>
> excellence, and inclusivity" (Principles of Good Practice, 2023).

Member organizations must agree to abide by the principles to join the organization. The NAIS "Principles of Good Practice" for teachers (Appendix A) include high-level descriptions of teacher knowledge and behavior. It is also expected that teachers engage in consistent professional growth: "The teacher initiates growth and change in his or her own intellectual and professional development, seeking out conferences, courses, and other opportunities to learn" (Principles of Good Practice, 2023, #5). Although each school may approach the content and modality of professional development differently, given its context and mission, the overall goal appears to be to help teachers grow professionally in their field.

Only one peer-reviewed study describes independent school stakeholders' conceptualizations of what high-quality teaching looks like. Balossi and Hernandez (2016) conducted a survey of administrators at 744 NAIS schools in which they asked participants to define high-quality teaching in independent schools. They found that independent school stakeholders define high-quality teaching as teaching where educators establish relationships with their students, have a growth mindset, fit well into the school culture, and demonstrate significant pedagogical knowledge (Balossi & Hernandez, 2016). These findings are consistent

with the NAIS "Principles of Good Practice" for teachers. This study is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Professional Development and Growth in Independent Schools

More information is needed on how independent schools approach professional development to ensure teacher growth, as little empirical research on the subject exists. However, articles on the NAIS website suggest that independent school teachers, much like public school teachers, engage in a variety of PD practices (Professional Development in Private Education, 2015; The Power of In-House Professional Development, 2017). Finding information on systems of professional development and growth in independent schools proves challenging due to the absence of data on state or district-wide initiatives, as these schools operate independently of government oversight. Independent schools generally provide opportunities for professional development for teachers to grow their professional skills (Pierce & Claybourn, 2023), but those opportunities are contextually specific for each institution. Professional development is approached similarly in independent schools and public schools, with similar rates of teacher PD completion in both (Taie et al., 2022), but the skills that teachers develop in the professional growth process in all schools may differ based on context. Additionally, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that professional development in independent schools is implemented with fidelity to the institution's goals to promote professional growth, and even more limited evidence of what those goals are.

An example of this is evident in the findings of Balossi and Hernandez's (2016) study. The researchers distributed a survey to all NAIS member schools to determine how independent school stakeholders conceptualize high quality teachers. The survey was completed by 744 heads of school or other administrators related to the school's hiring process. The researchers then

conducted interviews with five heads of school, one assistant head of school, 18 division heads, and 51 teachers to discover how stakeholders in independent schools conceptualize high-quality teaching,

When asked what the term "high-quality teacher" means to them, the survey participants generated the following: teachers who build meaningful relationships with students, teachers who have a growth mindset and strong pedagogical knowledge, and teachers who fit the school's culture (Balossi & Hernandez, 2016). Among these attributes, administrators particularly stressed the importance of engaging in professional growth as a characteristic of high-quality teachers: "Heads of school and division heads all referred to great teachers as having the interest, ability, and motivation to learn and improve" (p. 678). Of the administrator respondents, 99% said that their schools "financially support professional development opportunities" to develop high-quality teachers. Additionally, the vast majority of school administrators in the independent schools they surveyed (93%) also indicated that they "evaluate teachers using a formal process" and provide teachers "with the criteria upon which their performance is evaluated" in order to determine if teachers are engaging in high-quality teaching (Balossi & Hernandez, 2016, p. 682).

However, despite this reported commitment to providing professional development opportunities and the administrators' claim that they evaluate teachers to ensure they are engaging in high-quality teaching, the study revealed a significant gap in understanding the specific nature of the professional development opportunities and how exactly those opportunities contribute to professional growth and teacher quality. Administrators acknowledged that they were unsure of how professional development actually affects teacher quality. Additionally, a notable discrepancy emerged when comparing administrators' understanding of teacher professional development and evaluation processes to teachers'

perceptions. Although several administrators identified specific evaluation processes to determine teacher quality, most teachers who were surveyed could not recall ever being evaluated (Balossi & Hernandez, 2016). This suggests that although there could be a baseline shared understanding of what high-quality teaching means in independent schools, it is less clear how teachers are supported in achieving it.

Additionally, these findings suggest that there are discrepancies in the ways that professional development and growth are conceptualized in independent schools and how the processes are actually implemented. Much more research is needed to determine how stakeholders in independent schools approach the professional development process in order to grow teachers' ability to implement high-quality teaching.

Instructional Coaching in Independent Schools

Instructional coaching has been shown to be an effective tool for teacher professional growth (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016), although it is unknown whether instructional coaching is a common process employed in independent schools. Only three articles on the NAIS website feature schools that use or have used instructional coaching to encourage professional growth (Cetroni et al., 2013; Developing Talent Through Instructional Coaching, 2017; Dunbar et al., 2013). The articles were written by instructional coaches or teachers in three different independent schools and detail how the instructional coaching processes were chosen and implemented in their context. These independent school stakeholders chose to use instructional coaching because they thought that effective professional development should be teacher-focused, formative, sustained and ongoing; should normalize non-evaluative feedback; and should be focused on professional growth

(Cetroni et al., 2013; Developing Talent Through Instructional Coaching, 2017; Dunbar et al., 2023). Additionally, stakeholders in the schools identified a need to enhance teacher practice.

Dunbar et al. described a scenario with an instructional coach at Georgetown Day School who was "certain there was a real need for trained coaching at her school that extended beyond [teachers'] casual requests" for feedback (2023, introduction). At Sacred Heart, school stakeholders realized that traditional approaches to PD were not working, and they needed instructional coaching because "ongoing coaching that occurs over several months offers sustained, personalized professional learning" (Developing Talent, 2017). At St. Anne's-Belfield School, teachers shared positive feedback on the instructional coaching program. One Lower School teacher said that their school's instructional coach "has been a firm supporter of my efforts to differentiate my math instruction in my classroom. She then went so far as to organize three days where teachers could visit my classroom and observe a differentiated math lesson in action" (Cetroni et al., 2013, Lower School para. 3). Although there is not yet empirical evidence to support why, how, or how many independent schools use instructional coaching to facilitate teacher professional growth, these anecdotal accounts can provide some insight into the process.

Elena Aguilar, a thought leader in the field of instructional coaching, suggested that independent school teachers may benefit from instructional coaching even more than public school teachers (2018). She asserted that independent school teachers need instructional coaching to help them prepare lessons, navigate school culture, promote equity in their classrooms, and support their own lifelong learning (Aguilar, 2018). Stakes for independent school teachers can feel high when they are trying to meet the individual goals of the school and the demand of working in a school that is funded by tuition, which means they can be subject to feedback and requests from students and their families as consumers of the school's product. As

a result, independent school teachers may need more support in their teaching. Finally, instructional coaching can benefit independent school teachers by ensuring that they have support to meet the diverse needs of their student populations (Aguilar, 2018), which they might not have learned given that many do not have a teaching license or coursework in educational methods.

Although this information provides a baseline for understanding how a few independent schools approach the instructional coaching process to facilitate professional growth, more research is necessary to determine how independent schools conceptualize professional growth and how stakeholders perceive the instructional coaching process.

The Context of Dreyfus

Dreyfus is a 3rd-12th grade, all-girls college-preparatory independent school located in a major metropolitan area in the Mid-Atlantic. The school employs approximately 120 teachers, about 85% of whom hold advanced degrees in a variety of fields. The school has approximately 700 students enrolled, 100% of whom historically have gone to four-year colleges and universities after graduation. The mission of the school, which is paraphrased for confidentiality, is to nurture the distinct capabilities of young women by providing an education that enriches not just the student's intellect but also their soul and spirit. The school is deeply committed to its three institutional priorities as of the 2023-2024 school year: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB), community member health and wellbeing, and global education. Dreyfus requires that teachers engage in frequent professional development in the hopes of ensuring alignment with the school's mission and institutional priorities, although there is no system through which teachers demonstrate their professional growth as educators.

Professional Development at Dreyfus

The scope of professional development (PD) at Dreyfus is expansive and there are many opportunities for teachers to learn new skills or new ways of approaching their teaching practice. The desired outcomes, or goals, of the professional development process at Dreyfus are not written anywhere, nor are they shared with teachers in a systematic way. A Dreyfus senior administrator shared in conversation that the main goal for all teacher PD is to inspire teachers to be the best version of themselves in the classroom and the community and to encourage teachers to engage in professional growth (personal communication, January 18, 2024). Ideally, all PD would eventually benefit students and the community as a whole, but PD is not necessarily always directed at improving student academic outcomes (personal communication, January 18, 2024). Dreyfus's professional development priorities for the 2023-2024 school year, identified by administrators, are to continue the school's commitment to DEIB work and also give teachers opportunities to learn about differentiation of instruction.

Teachers at Dreyfus participate in frequent professional development. The school holds weekly 75-minute meetings for teachers and staff, and at least one of these monthly meetings consists entirely of professional development, with shorter PD sessions sprinkled into other meetings. The school also provides multiple full-day PD sessions throughout the year. The PD opportunities offered at Dreyfus most closely align with what scholars refer to as traditional professional development, or short-term, one-off workshops, sessions, or conferences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Sprott, 2019; Stetcher et al., 2018; Walker & Edstam, 2013). For example, teachers take turns leading short sessions on differentiated instruction for the rest of the faculty. Additionally, the school has had two guest speakers so far during the 2023-2024 school

year to engage in talks on Antisemitism and gender identity, and one consultant who led a workshop on how to teach controversial topics.

Additionally, teachers can engage in outside PD opportunities such as conferences or classes by applying for funding through the school, which is almost always granted due to the institution's generous PD budget. The school also supports teachers in earning advanced degrees, offering 80% tuition reimbursement as long as teachers work there for at least two years after degree completion. Other than the mandatory monthly workshops offered to all teachers in the school and the occasional full-day PD sessions, there are no official job-embedded, school-sponsored PD opportunities to promote professional growth.

Professional Growth at Dreyfus

On the surface, Dreyfus is committed to teacher professional growth. The employment section on the school's website indicates that the school encourages lifelong learning and provides opportunities for teachers to engage in a variety of PD opportunities ("Employment," 2023). The school's Employee Handbook includes the following about professional growth:

> Our goal is for every employee to receive feedback on their performance. The professional growth and evaluation process consists of a series of interactive meetings around annual goals that might include both projects and targeted areas of growth and professional development, discussion and review of progress towards those goals, and an annual reflection on goals and performance (p. 25).

Although teachers do set a minimum of one goal for their professional practice at the beginning of each school year, teachers report that there is no consistent follow-up on those goals as it states in the school's handbook. In conversations with ten teachers, each identified that although they had set a professional goal in August as was required by the school, as of late October they

had not met with a supervisor about that goal, nor did they have plans to (personal communications, October 18, 2023).

Dreyfus does not have a formalized system of evaluation for teachers and professional growth is not measured in a systematic way. Anecdotal information gathered from conversations with teachers suggests that teachers in the school rarely have an opportunity to discuss or receive feedback on goals and growth in a formalized way with a trained administrator (personal communications, October 18, 2023). Thus, although the school is committed to offering professional development for its teachers, there is no way to ensure that teachers are growing their professional practice as a result. It seems reasonable to assume that a formalized system of professional growth could provide opportunities to determine whether the PD in which teachers engage actually impacts their professional practice. Given that traditional approaches to PD, which is what Dreyfus currently offers, are rarely effective for changing teacher practice, it may also be necessary for the school to adopt other approaches to facilitating professional growth to ensure that growth occurs. By studying how peer schools implement professional development specifically to facilitate professional growth, stakeholders at Dreyfus can gain a better understanding of how this process might be implemented.

Evidence to Support the Problem of Practice

In the fall of 2022, Dreyfus senior administrators initiated plans for a professional growth and evaluation system aligned with the school's goals. By winter 2023, they formed the Teacher Professional Growth and Evaluation Committee (TPGEC) made up of volunteer employees to design the system. As a Dreyfus community member who is eager to contribute to teachers' process of professional growth, I joined the TPGEC and attended six meetings throughout the winter and spring of 2023.

According to the committee chair, the committee's goal is to develop a systematic approach to professional growth in the school, specifically focusing on instruction, as that is where the most significant need for growth has been identified by school stakeholders (personal communication, September 17, 2023). This will be discussed in further detail below. The committee hopes to create and roll out a system of professional growth and evaluation before the start of the 2024-2025 school year.

In spring 2023, the TPGEC began this process by developing a list of Dreyfus-specific teaching competencies (Appendix B). The Dreyfus teaching competencies are meant to undergird the professional growth process by serving as standards of what high-quality teaching should look like at Dreyfus. The competencies were informed by the school's mission and institutional priorities, as well as other high-quality teaching standards such as Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Growth (Danielson, 2022) and the Interstate Assessment and Support Consortium's Model Core Teaching Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). The committee intends to use these competencies as benchmarks to drive professional growth for teachers at Dreyfus through a formative evaluation process.

Although administrators at Dreyfus identified a need for a system of teacher professional growth, and made their intentions clear to teachers by convening the TPGEC, it was unclear whether other stakeholders in the school, such as teachers, were in agreement. Through informal conversations with a senior administrator, a Department Chair, another member of the TPGEC, and several teachers from various divisions and departments, I gathered that stakeholders in the school generally support the creation of a professional growth and evaluation system for teachers (personal communications, September 17 and October 18, 2023). One teacher identified that because teachers at the school mostly do not have degrees in education, and much of the PD

offered focuses on theory, it would be helpful to have support with the practical implementation of instructional strategies (personal communication, October 18, 2023). Another articulated that if teachers are "left to their own devices," they do not have the time or willingness to engage in professional growth, and thus a built-in system would be helpful (personal communication, September 17, 2023). This evidence, as well as the evidence presented in the following paragraphs, can be seen in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

Evidence to Support the Problem of Practice at Dreyfus
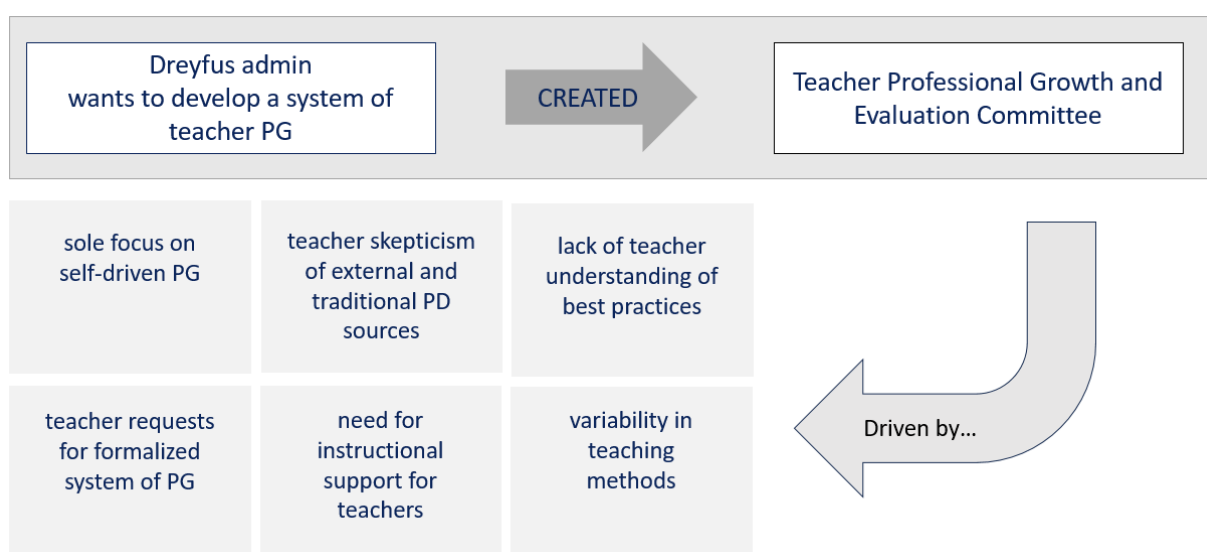
Overall, stakeholders identified a need for structured and proactive support for teachers' professional growth in terms of their instructional practice. Stakeholders discussed the variability in teaching methods, both within and across divisions (the three levels of the school: Lower, Middle, and Upper) and departments, and the presence of teachers' outdated instructional practices. One department chair shared concerns that teachers within their department teach the same course, but focus on different concepts and content. Thus, the students have an entirely different educational experience depending on who their teachers are (personal communication,

September 18, 2023). A senior administrator noted the lack of systematic support for teachers needing instructional help, currently only addressed due to parent or student complaints, and observed insufficient use of differentiation, reassessment, and student-centered teaching to enhance student learning (personal communication, September 17, 2023).

Additionally, several teachers expressed skepticism about the school's emphasis on external professional development and expert sources (personal communications, September 17 and 18, 2023). They articulated that traditional PD sessions are ineffective and believe that the school's resources could be better utilized for more practical and classroom-applicable learning experiences (personal communications, September 17 and 18, 2023) Teachers indicated a preference for a system of professional development and growth where their growth as educators is not reliant on outside sources and is more job-embedded in nature (personal communications, September 17 and 18, 2023).

Finally, teachers indicated that professional growth at Dreyfus mainly occurs informally and organically and expressed a need for more structured support beyond self-directed efforts. They emphasized the importance of a built-in professional growth system to allow meaningful engagement and a structured framework to clarify their professional standing and align with workplace expectations (personal communications, September 17 and 18, 2023).

Although Dreyfus administrators had already determined the school's need for a structured system of professional growth that is aligned with the school's goals, the insights from these discussions underscore that necessity through the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders. Given the unique needs of independent schools, it is critical to examine peer schools' approaches to professional growth to identify potential best practices for teacher development. This study aims to determine how Dreyfus's peer schools approach professional development and growth

and, because instructional coaching has been proven to be an effective method for growing teachers' professional practice, research how Dreyfus's peer schools implement the instructional coaching process.

<div align="center">**Theoretical Foundations**</div>

In order to better understand the current situation of teacher professional development and professional growth at Dreyfus and its peer schools, it is necessary to explore the existing theoretical foundations of teachers' professional growth. Teacher professional development (PD) aims to motivate professional growth and refers to the activities in which teachers engage in order to learn new skills and ideas (Fullan, 2016). Within this study, professional growth is defined as ongoing, long-term change in teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices that leads to desired outcomes. The phrase "desired outcomes" refers to the context-specific desired outcomes for the institution and the individual participating in the professional growth process.

Throughout history, traditional PD initiatives have often fallen short of effecting meaningful changes in teaching practices and, consequently, student academic outcomes (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Davies, 1967; Guskey, 1986; Sprott, 2019). This section explores the theories that explain how high-quality, job-embedded teacher professional development can facilitate teacher growth.

Guskey's Model of Teacher Change

Guskey's Model of Teacher Change, identified in Figure 1.2, illustrates teachers' professional growth process. Guskey (1986) argued that the failure of many PD initiatives to facilitate professional growth stems from a failure to consider what motivates teachers, how teachers learn, and the realistic timeframes for change. He posited that most teachers engage in PD to become better educators, i.e., to engage in professional growth. According to Guskey, the

traditional models of teacher professional growth tend to approach changing teacher attitudes and beliefs first, with the goal of changing classroom practice, which would eventually lead to changes in student academic outcomes. In his later work, Guskey defined student academic or learning outcomes as positive changes in the cognitive, affective, or psychomotor domains that show evidence of student learning (Guskey, 2002b).

Guskey challenged this conventional approach of addressing teachers' attitudes and beliefs first, suggesting that the sequence should prioritize changing practice, which would then impact student academic outcomes and eventually lead to changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs surrounding the efficacy of PD to facilitate professional growth. Guskey posited that because "change is a learning process for teachers that is developmental and primarily experientially based" (1986, p.7), teachers will continue to use strategies that work to increase student academic outcomes and jettison those that do not, which contributes to long-term change in their attitudes and beliefs about their professional growth.

Figure 1.2

Guskey (1986) Model of Teacher Change
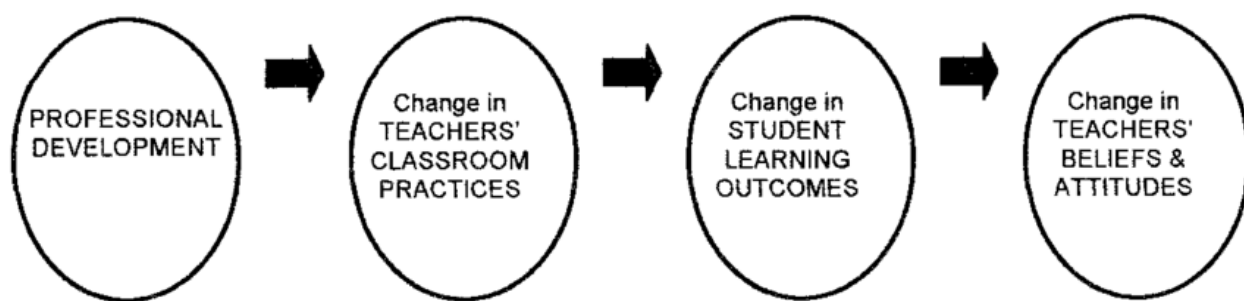
Note. This image is reprinted from "Staff Development and the Process of Teacher Change" by T.R. Guskey, 1986, *Educational Researcher*, *15*(5), p. 7.

The implications of Guskey's model for teacher PD and professional growth are profound. The model suggests that teachers should start the change process by immediately

changing practices to determine what works to support change in student academic outcomes in their context. This is in contrast to the traditional way in which PD is presented to teachers, as it often attempts to prompt changes in teacher attitudes and beliefs as theoretical underpinnings for changes in practice (Guskey, 1986).

Because change is difficult, Guskey argued (1986) that teachers need significant support to grow professionally in their practice. His model argues that in order for PD to lead to professional growth, teachers need continued support and training over time. PD follow-up is a mandatory element and should include coaching or collaboration with colleagues in order to meaningfully transfer the acquisition of new skills to the classroom context. Guskey suggested that any PD must be presented clearly, using concrete terms, and be aimed at specific teaching skills. Teachers must also respect the person responsible for providing the PD. He wrote, "the purveyor of the new practices must be seen as a credible person by those responsible for implementation" (Guskey, 1986, p. 9). Importantly, Guskey's model also stressed that changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes typically follow evidence of effectiveness in student academic outcomes. Therefore, the provision of data-driven evidence of change is also critical in motivating teachers to adapt their practices. If independent schools were to implement Guskey's model to ensure that PD leads to teacher professional growth, many might need to change how they approach teacher PD in order to ensure that it has a significant impact on teacher practice.

Although Guskey's model is straightforward in its approach to describing the process of teacher change, it is also possibly limited by its simplistic nature. The model implies a linear progression through the three stages of teacher change, but teaching and teacher learning is a more dynamic process. This suggests a need for a more complex model that illustrates how teachers might have multiple pathways through the various stages of change that lead to

professional growth. Next, I discuss Clark and Hollingsworth's (2002) Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth, which adapts Guskey's model into a non-linear form.

The Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth

Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) offer a complementary perspective on teacher change, moving from Guskey's linear model to a more dynamic model (Figure 1.3). They identified six distinct perspectives on teacher change: as training, as adaptation, as personal development, as local reform, as systemic restructuring, and as growth or learning (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 1994). They argued that teacher PD most closely aligns with the "change as growth or learning" perspective (p. 948), illustrating that the goal of teacher PD is to lead to professional growth. This perspective represents a shift from viewing PD as an external event "done to teachers" to recognizing it as a complex learning process that is a catalyst for teacher change (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002, p. 948).

Figure 1.3

Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth
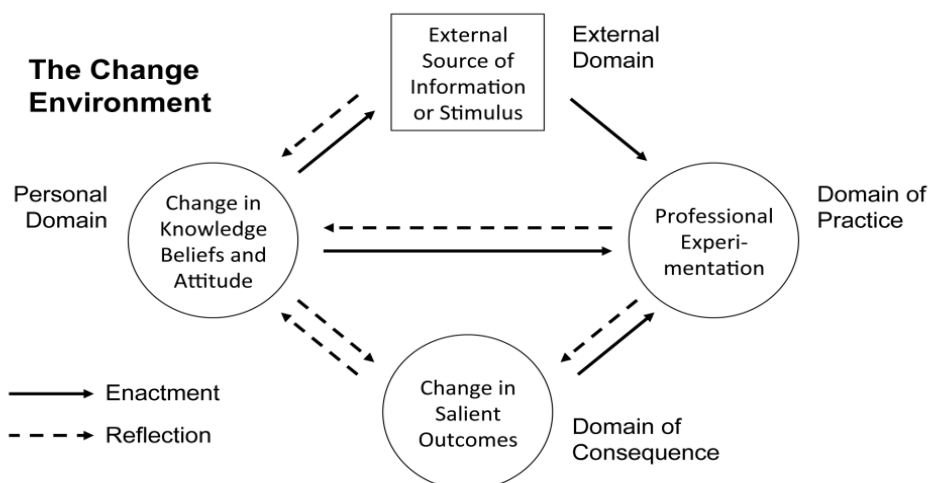
Note. This image is reprinted from "Elaborating a Model of Teacher Professional Growth" by D. Clarke and H. Hollingsworth, 2002, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *18*(8), p. 951.

Because professional growth is so complex, the authors argued that Guskey's linear model is too simplistic. The authors drew on Clarke and Peter's (1993) Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth to provide a more nuanced view of teacher change, emphasizing four interrelated domains: personal (teacher knowledge, skills, and attitudes), practice (professional experimentation), consequence (student outcomes), and external (sources of information, PD stimuli, etc.), all within the context of the school environment. This model illustrates that teacher change is a cyclical and non-linear process, with changes in one domain influencing others. The concept of "growth networks" emerges from these interrelated changes, where ongoing changes lead to professional growth. This model challenges Guskey's linear approach to teacher development and acknowledges the importance of the school context, the ways in which PD can be experienced and with whom, and the implementation of PD in terms of teacher practice in the classroom. The Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth also suggests that teachers must see a relationship between changes in practice and changes in student outcomes in order to change their attitudes and beliefs, but that the process can be more dynamic with multiple entry points.

Implications for the Framing of This Study

The implications drawn from these models emphasize the need to prioritize changes in classroom practices as a precursor to changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs. According to both models, change is experiential and involves a process of learning for teachers that necessitates systematic support on various levels. Guskey's (1986) Model of Teacher Change and the Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002) contend that change in attitudes and beliefs stemming from effective change in practice is considered professional growth. In conclusion, these theoretical foundations present a structured

framework for examining teacher professional growth and meaningful changes in teaching practices.

These theories serve as underpinnings for this study's conceptual framework, which suggests a model for how teachers in independent schools engage in professional growth and how instructional coaching, which seeks to directly change teacher instructional practice, can facilitate ongoing, long-term change.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the theoretical foundations of Guskey's (1986) Teacher Change Model and Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth, this study's proposed framework, The Professional Growth Model for Independent School Teachers, serves as a framework for this inquiry and outlines how I envision interconnected constructs that ultimately lead to teacher growth. This conceptual framework, represented through connected, color-coded elements, illustrates the unique context of independent schools when it comes to teacher professional growth and, more specifically, instructional coaching. A visual model of the conceptual framework can be found below in Figure 1.4 and again in Appendix C.

Items in blue represent features adapted from Guskey's (1986) Teacher Change Model and Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth, which are the overall theoretical foundations on which the study is based. The accompanying black text is illustrative of the tacit theories or assumptions underlying my adaptation of the Teacher Change Model and the Interconnected Model as they relate to the specific context of instructional coaching in independent schools. Finally, the red text refers to the stakeholders in the teacher professional growth process which will be studied as part of this inquiry process.

Figure 1.4

Conceptual Framework: Professional Growth Model for Independent School Teachers
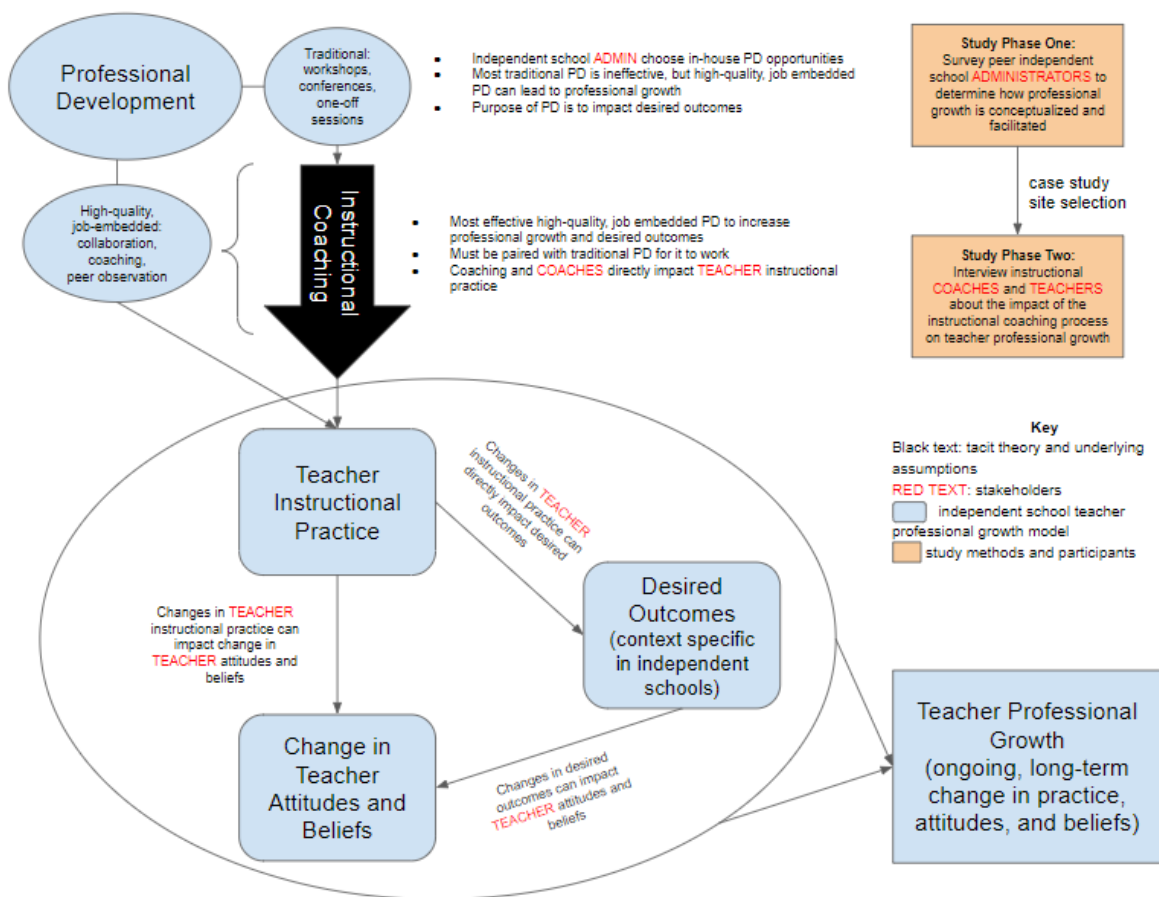
Professional Development as a Stimulus for Professional Growth

Guskey's (1986) Teacher Change Model and Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth posit that when teachers change their practice through enacting different teaching strategies and see evidence of enhanced student academic outcomes, they will then change their attitudes and beliefs about teaching, which leads to professional growth. The conceptual framework on which this study is based adapts both models to align with the landscape of independent schools since independent school teachers do not use the same metrics to measure student academic outcomes as public school teachers do. This concept is discussed in depth later in this explanation.

Both Guskey (1986) and Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) models state that an external professional development stimulus is necessary to catalyze teacher professional growth. In this conceptual framework, the PD stimulus is located at the top of the conceptual framework diagram to signify its importance in leading to teacher professional growth. In the literature, professional development is conceptualized in various ways, although most teacher PD falls into one of two categories: the traditional approach and the high-quality, job-embedded approach. This conceptual framework includes two separate categories of PD, as they have different implications for teacher professional growth. Minimal information is available regarding how independent school stakeholders approach PD for teachers, so more information is needed on the overall status of all types of PD in independent schools.

In independent schools, the in-house school-sponsored PD opportunities offered to teachers are most often determined by administrators. This suggests that these administrators have a significant role in determining whether PD is offered through a traditional approach or a high-quality, job-embedded approach. For example, at Dreyfus the senior administrative team chooses not only what PD content teachers will learn through school-sponsored PD activities, but also how that content will be delivered. Because there is limited empirical evidence regarding what kinds of PD opportunities are most prevalent in independent schools, surveying independent school administrators can help to determine how teachers may engage in the professional development and growth process.

Additionally, PD is often offered to teachers in order to develop their practice to positively impact student academic outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015). Because independent school educators often do not collect data on student academic outcomes, especially not in a standardized way, these outcomes are highly contextual.

Within the framework of this study, the phrase "desired outcomes" captures the unique contextual goals school stakeholders have identified for teacher PD and PG. It is possible that in independent schools, the goal of PD is not always to directly enhance student academic outcomes, which differs from the assumptions of Guskey's (1986) and Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) models.

Instructional Coaching

Instructional coaching, seen in the black arrow, is one of the high-quality, job-embedded PD approaches that can be used to support teacher uptake of new skills and lead to professional growth. The literature illustrates that not only is instructional coaching an effective job-embedded PD approach for teacher professional growth (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016), but that it also must be paired with traditional PD in order for traditional PD to have a significant effect on teacher practice and professional growth (Joyce & Showers, 1984; Joyce & Showers, 1996; Korthagen, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018). High-quality, job-embedded approaches to PD, such as teacher collaboration, communities of practice, and peer observation, can lead to teacher professional growth without being paired with instructional coaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015). In this conceptual framework, instructional coaching is represented as an arrow connecting the traditional PD stimulus to the adapted teacher professional growth model to illustrate this concept. The instructional coaching arrow symbolizes that instructional coaching could be an effective mechanism through which PD can improve teachers' professional practice in independent schools. It is possible that instructional coaching could ensure that traditional teacher PD leads to teacher professional growth for independent school teachers.

Desired Outcomes

The phrase "desired outcomes" considers the various ways in which independent school stakeholders might approach how they understand teacher professional development and growth - a concept on which much more information is needed. Additionally, the desired outcomes of a school's PD and PG processes may not be clearly articulated for school stakeholders. While one of the primary aims of professional development is to enhance student academic achievement (Guskey, 2002a; Muir et al., 2021; Yoon et al., 2007), the lack of consistent, valid, and reliable measurement of student academic outcomes by independent school teachers makes it nearly impossible to establish a direct link between teacher PD and student success. For example, teachers in independent schools do not necessarily adhere to standardized assessment methods or grading practices. As is the case at Dreyfus, according to school stakeholders, teachers teaching the same class to the same grade level could be using completely different instructional methods and assessments, making it impossible to connect student achievement to changes in teacher practice in a consistent way. Even within or across lessons given by a specific teacher, there may not be any consistent, reliable, or valid measurements of student achievement. Additionally, because of its unique mission and institutional priorities, each independent school might have different PD or professional growth goals for teachers, so the desired outcomes for each school are unique to the school context.

Stakeholders in one independent school may see teacher professional growth as a teacher continuously using new instructional strategies to enhance a student's writing capability, while stakeholders in another may see teacher professional growth as teachers being more willing to interrogate the various aspects of their identities and how they impact their curricular and instructional choices in the classroom. These two outcomes are quite different, but I argue that

both could be considered professional growth depending on the goals of the institution. And, although ideally all teacher professional growth has a positive impact on a student's success and experience in school, in independent schools that may not be the primary purpose of teacher growth. Hence, it is necessary to determine how stakeholders in independent schools conceptualize professional growth and its desired outcomes in addition to determining how instructional coaching may help teachers achieve it.

For example, the Dreyfus School culture does not require that teachers measure longitudinal student academic outcomes to determine educators' strengths or areas of growth. Additionally, teachers at Dreyfus could measure their success as educators against the benchmarks that the school has set in terms of its institutional priorities, such as whether or not teachers implement strategies to increase a student's sense of belonging in the classroom. The teacher may never ask students whether they feel a sense of belonging in the classroom setting, but the teacher may measure their own use of strategies to increase a sense of belonging. Although the use of these strategies may, and ideally would, have a positive impact on student academic or other outcomes, this impact may not be the driving force for teacher PD or PG.

According to a Dreyfus senior administrator, the main focus of professional development for the 2023-2024 school is teacher training in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), specifically through the lenses of antiracism and antisemitism (personal communication, January 18th, 2024). Dreyfus teachers have spent upwards of 20 PD hours over the last four years learning how to incorporate DEIB into their classroom practice. However, the desired outcome of that PD has never been framed as enhancing student academic achievement, but instead enhancing community members' sense of belonging at the school. Much of the DEIB training has even focused on teachers' own personal identities so that they can be better equipped

to engage in DEIB work with students. A Dreyfus senior administrator acknowledged that although ideally students who feel a deeper sense of belonging in the school community as a result of teacher training in DEIB may be more academically successful, student academic outcomes are not the driving force behind this type of professional development (personal communication, January 18, 2024).

As a result of these hours of training, many teachers have changed their teaching practices and their attitudes and beliefs toward teaching (personal communication, January 18th, 2024), despite a lack of evidence that student academic outcomes also changed. For example, the senior administrator I spoke with acknowledged that some members of the English department had been reluctant to change the traditional "canon" that they had been teaching at Dreyfus for many years. After engaging in PD which suggested that offering books with non-White characters could increase students' sense of belonging, the English department decided to incorporate more diverse books. The senior administrator, herself an English teacher, was unsure of how these books might be received and if replacing the traditional literature with new, more diverse books was good for student learning. However, when she heard one of her students exclaim, "Wow! It's just so nice to finally read a book about Asians!," she changed her beliefs and attitudes about teaching diverse books.

Thus, it is possible that teachers do not need to see evidence of student academic outcomes in order to change their teaching practices or attitudes and beliefs about teaching. However, it is unclear what independent school teachers do need to see evidence of in order to engage in professional growth. Much more information is needed on the goals, or desired outcomes, of independent schools when it comes to professional development and professional growth, which is a focus of this study.

Hence, the phrase "desired outcomes" refers to the idea that teachers could, ostensibly, conceptualize their own professional growth as separate from their impact on student academic outcomes. The limited amount of empirical evidence on how teacher quality and growth are measured in independent schools prevents these ideas from being more than just conjecture, but findings from this study may shed more light on how teachers in independent schools conceptualize their own professional growth and its potential impact on students. This conceptual framework approach seeks to provide insight into how teachers in independent schools conceptualize their own professional growth and determine how instructional coaching may impact teacher professional growth.

The Professional Growth Model for Independent School Teachers

This conceptual framework uses Guskey's (1986) linear model as the overall foundation, but the multiple entry points to teacher professional growth are reminiscent of Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) interconnected model. The framework is entitled the Professional Growth Model for Independent School Teachers.

Both Guskey's (1986) and Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) models of teacher professional growth assume that teachers must see evidence of positive change in student academic outcomes in order for teachers to grow their professional practice. This conceptual framework challenges that assumption. Although ideally all change in teacher practice positively impacts students, in independent schools teachers do not measure student academic outcomes in the same way in which they are measured in public schools. There are no state or district-wide standardized assessments to measure student academic progress against a particular set of benchmarks. Independent school teachers also have a significant degree of autonomy over their classrooms, which suggests that they may not be using standardized assessments even within the

school to determine student academic progress. Thus, student academic outcomes are not at the heart of teacher PD for independent school teachers.

As shown by the black arrow, instructional coaching has a direct impact on teacher practice by providing targeted support and feedback to teachers where they need it most in their instructional practice (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016). This is represented by the arrow connecting "teacher instructional practice" to "desired outcomes." The arrow connecting "desired outcomes" to "change in teacher attitudes and beliefs" represents the concept, grounded in Guskey (1986) and Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) work, that once teachers see evidence of desired outcomes resulting from their change in practice, they will feel affirmed by that change and change their attitudes and beliefs about teaching long-term, which again leads to professional growth.

Additionally, I posit that there is a possibility that, for independent school teachers, they may not need to see a connection between their changes in practices and desired outcomes for a change in attitudes and beliefs to occur, which is represented by the arrow connecting "teacher instructional practice" to "change in teacher attitudes and beliefs."

Summary and Implications

In conclusion, the Professional Growth Model for Independent School Teachers emerges as a comprehensive conceptual framework that reimagines assumptions about how teachers engage in professional growth in independent schools. By adapting two of the existing theoretical models of teacher professional growth specifically for independent school teachers, this conceptual framework seeks to provide a roadmap for how instructional coaching may impact teacher practice, attitudes, and beliefs, leading to teacher professional growth. The exploration of the phrase "desired outcomes" underscores the diverse nature of independent

schools and specifically how they conceptualize professional growth and facilitate professional development to encourage professional growth. The nuances captured here provide a foundation for inquiry for this study.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to explore independent school-specific approaches to teacher professional development that facilitates professional growth. I strive to understand how stakeholders in independent schools conceptualize professional growth and how they implement professional development opportunities to facilitate professional growth. Additionally, I aim to explore how the instructional coaching process in independent schools may lead to teacher professional growth. Finally, data gathered from this study will be used to make recommendations to the Teacher Professional Growth and Evaluation Committee at Dreyfus in order to help enhance the creation of a system of professional growth at the school.

Research Questions

In order to determine how Dreyfus' peer schools approach professional development to facilitate professional growth, and specifically how they use instructional coaching to do so, this study will explore the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do Dreyfus's peer schools conceptualize and facilitate teacher professional growth?

- RQ2: At a peer school that utilizes instructional coaching, how does instructional coaching facilitate teacher professional growth?

  - RQ2a: How do stakeholders at the school conceptualize teacher professional growth?

  - RQ2b: How is instructional coaching implemented at the school?

○ RQ2c: How do stakeholders at the school perceive the instructional coaching
process?

<div align="center">**Key Terms**</div>

In this section, I briefly define key terms relevant to this study. The definitions for some of these terms will be explained in more detail in later sections. The terms are presented in the order in which they are discussed in the following chapters.

Professional Development: The activities in which teachers engage in order to learn new skills and ideas (Fullan, 2016)

Professional Learning: The learning that occurs from engaging in professional development activities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Professional Growth: Ongoing, long-term change in teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices that leads to desired outcomes.

Desired Outcomes: The context-specific desired outcomes for the institution and the individual participating in the professional growth process.

Traditional Professional Development: Short-term, one-off workshops, sessions, or conferences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Sprott, 2019; Stetcher et al., 2018; Walker & Edstam, 2013)

High-Quality, Job-Embedded Professional Development: Teacher learning grounded in the day-to-day context of teaching and situated in the actual practice of teaching and learning (Croft et al., 2010), such as instructional coaching.

Instructional Coaching: A multifaceted professional development strategy that involves a non-evaluative, collaborative partnership between a knowledgeable instructional expert and a

teacher, both committed to shared learning goals designed to enhance instruction and elevate student achievement (Knight, 2006).

Private School: Schools that are not administered or funded by the government.

Independent School: Private schools that are free from outside organizational oversight, government or non-government (Pierce & Claybourn, 2023).

Peer School: Independent schools deemed comparable to each other based on a particular metric, such as academic performance, athletic programs, geographic location, or tuition.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the problem of practice that motivates this study, along with the unique context of independent schools that stimulated the need for this inquiry project. Additionally, I discussed the context of the Dreyfus School and its desire for a system of teacher professional growth. Finally, I articulated the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform this study. In Chapter 2, I will discuss the themes inherent in the literature surrounding professional growth, professional development, and instructional coaching. In Chapter 3, I will discuss how a two-phase, qualitative case study research design will be applied as the data collection approach and the plans for analyzing the data to address the research questions. In Chapter 4, I will describe the findings of this research, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Because teachers have the most notable impact on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Quinn, 2014; Robertson-Kraft & Zhang, 2018), understanding how and why teachers engage in professional growth is essential for strengthening teaching practice, and by extension, student outcomes. In this literature review, I aim to define the concept of professional growth for teachers and illustrate how teachers engage in professional development to make effective, long-term changes in their professional practice. I start by defining professional development, professional learning, and professional growth for the purposes of this review and related inquiry. Subsequently, I delve into the characteristics of high-quality professional development that lead to teacher professional growth, focusing specifically on the benefits of instructional coaching. Additionally, I identify the limitations of the literature reviewed and the gaps within the literature that require further study.

The literature surveyed in this review adheres to rigorous criteria and is primarily sourced from peer-reviewed academic journals and books by leading scholars in the field, except for statistical data from the U.S. Department of Education and other organizations. The majority of the reviewed literature postdates 2013, barring seminal theoretical works and frequently cited studies. Due to a dearth of peer-reviewed research on independent schools, almost all of the literature discussed in this review illuminates issues solely within public education. However, when relevant, I will discuss the possible implications of the research for independent school contexts if they differ from those for public schools. Keywords used to search for the literature below include teacher professional growth, teacher professional development, staff professional development, teacher feedback, teacher evaluation, instructional coaching, independent school,

private school, high-quality professional development, job-embedded professional development, perceptions of instructional coaching, and attitudes toward instructional coaching, among others.

Professional Development, Professional Learning, and Professional Growth

Professional development, professional learning, and professional growth are ubiquitous terms in the field of education. Although interrelated, each is a distinct concept. Scholarly definitions of these terms are plentiful and differ depending on the study. However, several themes emerge for each concept based on the research reviewed here. In addition to framing the subsequent research methods and discussion of findings, the explanations below serve as evidence for the definitions of these terms presented in Chapter 1 of this study.

Professional Development

According to the Harvard University Division of Continuing Education, a leading organization in the field of professional development, professional development (PD) in its most basic form, means to "gain new skills through continuing education and career training after entering the workforce. It can include taking classes or workshops, attending professional or industry conferences, or earning a certificate to expand your knowledge in your chosen field" (Parsons, 2022, para. 2). In an educational setting, PD refers to workshops, courses, programs, and activities that provide teachers with new ideas and skills (Fullan, 2016), or, in short, "activities arranged for teachers" (Durksen et al., 2017, p. 53). The purpose of PD is to "alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understandings of school persons toward an articulated end" (Griffin, 1983, p.2). Fred Korthagen, a scholar in the field of educational professional development, defined PD as "the process of working toward teaching competence" (2017, p. 397) but acknowledged that teacher competence is defined differently depending on institutional context. Michael Fullan (2016), an expert in educational change, argued that PD is an antiquated

term and, as the Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002) suggests, the terminology should evolve to describe activities in which teachers are genuinely engaging in learning, as opposed to activities that are "done to teachers." Fullan also posited that PD should be called professional learning, as it should focus more on the teacher's learning and professional growth (Fullan, 2016), which is a desired outcome of PD (Yoon et al., 2007).

Professional Learning

The use of the term professional learning (PL) is becoming increasingly common in the literature on teacher growth and development (Appova & Arbaugh, 2018), which suggests a shift in the way researchers think about teacher learning. Durksen et al. (2017) argued that the term PL, as opposed to PD, shifts the focus and responsibility of the learning onto the teachers and their changing needs as educators, in contrast to focusing on the activities that the institution provides. Avalos (2011), in a review of all of the literature published in *Teaching and Teacher Education* over ten years, defined teacher PL as,

> A complex process, which requires cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers, individually and collectively, the capacity and willingness to examine where each one stands in terms of convictions and beliefs and the perusal and enactment of appropriate alternatives for improvement or change…[within] particular educational policy environments or school sculptures (p. 10)

Studying how teachers learn both formally and informally, Richter et al. (2014) took a similar stance, defining PL as "formal and informal learning opportunities that deepen and extend teachers' professional competence, including knowledge, beliefs, motivation, and self-regulatory skills" (p. 116). Finally, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) defined PL as "a product of both

externally provided and job-embedded activities that increase teachers' knowledge and help them change their instructional practice in ways that support student learning" (p. 2). So, if PD is the activities in which teachers engage, PL is the act of learning that stems from those activities. However, this learning that takes place could be short or long-term and could apply to any type of minute change in teacher practice. Fullan (2016) again argued that PL is still not enough to define what ideally occurs as a result of engaging in PD and suggests that PD and PL both need to be implemented to facilitate teacher professional growth that genuinely changes teacher practice.

Professional Growth

Professional development and professional learning are two pieces of a puzzle that, when put together and implemented effectively, can lead to long-term change in a teacher's practices, ideas, and beliefs. This change can be considered professional growth. There are as many definitions of teacher professional growth as there are studies about it spanning many decades of education research. In an article on teachers' continuing education, Jackson (1974) discussed the "professional growth approach" to professional development, where "the motive for learning more about teaching is not to repair a personal inadequacy as a teacher but to seek greater fulfillment as a practitioner of the art" (p. 26). Jackson's definition suggests that teacher professional growth is more than just making changes to address gaps in practice. Guskey (1986) defined professional growth as "change in the classroom practices of teachers, change in their beliefs and attitudes, and change in the learning outcomes of students" (p. 5), illustrating that professional growth encompasses multiple domains of learning. Clarke and Peter (1993) defined teacher professional growth as ongoing change that stems from professional learning and development, which is in contrast to professional development or professional learning

themselves, both of which can be identified as a moment in time. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) claimed that teachers shape their professional growth "through reflective participation in professional development programs and in practice" (p. 948) and conceptualized professional growth as lasting teacher change (p. 958).

For the purposes of this study, I propose a definition of professional growth that encompasses all of the definitions presented above: Professional growth is ongoing, long-term change in teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices that leads to desired outcomes. The term "desired outcomes" is intentionally vague due to the differences in the way schools conceptualize both teacher and student outcomes. Although Guskey (1986) and Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) identified salient outcomes as student academic outcomes (e.g., standardized test results and grades), not all schools focus on academic student outcomes as indicators of teacher performance or growth.

Independent school students, for example, do not take state- or district-mandated standardized tests, and student data are not frequently collected as evidence of teacher performance. In the absence of such indicators, the phrase "desired outcomes" refers to the context-specific desired outcomes for the institution and the individual participating in the professional growth process. A teacher's desired outcomes may be that their students are more attentive in class as a result of new teaching strategies or practices. A school's desired outcomes may be that teachers are more consistently asking higher-order thinking questions in their classrooms. As teachers change to reach these context-specific desired outcomes, they are engaging in the professional growth process.

This definition I propose acknowledges that professional growth cannot be identified at a moment in time and is an ongoing process throughout a teacher's career. It also includes

references not only to teacher practice but to teacher beliefs and attitudes, as they can impact one another to promote growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Finally, this definition suggests that professional growth needs to lead to desired outcomes, which are context-specific, to illustrate that professional growth has a purpose beyond just filling a gap in teacher practice. Additionally, because these scholars make no distinction between public and private school teachers in their discussion of teacher professional growth, and both types of teachers participate in professional development and professional learning, it is assumed that any definition of professional growth for public school teachers applies in private and independent institutions.

As discussed, professional growth is the ideal outcome of systems of professional development and professional learning. However, although most teachers frequently engage in PD and PL, not all PD or PL leads to ongoing, long-term change in teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices that lead to desired outcomes.

Structures Within Schools That Encourage Teacher Professional Growth

A multitude of systems and processes within schools can potentially encourage teacher professional growth. School-sponsored PD has been shown to be effective in facilitating teacher professional growth, but efficacy depends on the characteristics of the PD opportunities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Historically, most PD offered in schools, both public and private, does not meet recommendations for high-quality, effective PD that leads to meaningful change in teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Sprott, 2019; Stetcher et al., 2018; Walker & Edstam, 2013). However, as education professionals begin to understand more about how teachers learn and why and how they make changes to their practice, the landscape of PD in schools is changing (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

Prevalence of Professional Development in Schools

Teacher professional development is prevalent across private and public schools in the United States. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics gathers descriptive data on issues facing schools, teachers, and learners. Data collected in the 2020-2021 National Teachers and Principals Survey (Taie et al., 2022) illustrated the prevalence of PD in public and private schools. Of public school teachers, 99% reported participating in any kind of PD during the previous school year, and 90% identified that they felt capable of incorporating what they learned into their practice. However, 84% of teachers responded that they believed what they learned in PD sessions would positively affect student achievement (Taie et al., 2022), illustrating a possible gap between theory and practice.

Results for private schools (all private schools, as the survey does not designate a category for independent schools) were similar, although notable differences exist. Of the private school teachers who responded, 95% reported engaging in professional development, and 89% claimed they felt capable of incorporating what they learned from the PD into their practice (Taie et al., 2022). Similarly to public school teachers, 83% of private school respondents said that the PD they engaged in would help promote student achievement (Taie et al., 2022). Thus, data indicate that most teachers in private schools participate in PD opportunities on par with their public school counterparts.

The Department of Education also collects data on how school districts spend federal education funds. Title II, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provides funds for states and districts to improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers (Webber et al., 2022). Data from the 2020-2021 school year illustrated that 90% of districts receiving Title II-A funds for teacher professional development used the funds for short-term PD

of three days or less or sending teachers to conferences. Only 55% of districts reported using funds to support job-embedded or collaborative PD (Webber, 2022). This is consistent with data on the prevalence of various types of PD activities, discussed in further detail below.

The Rand Corporation's 2022 American Instructional Resources Survey (Zuo et al., 2022) paints a slightly different picture of PD in schools. Of the 8,063 ELA, math, and science teachers who responded to the survey, 85% reported engaging in workshops or training at least once yearly (Zuo et al., 2022). Additionally, 39% reported that they engaged in weekly collaborative learning, with 73% of respondents claiming that they engaged in collaborative learning at least six times per year (Zuo et al., 2022). Rand's data illustrate a higher percentage of teachers who engaged in collaborative PD than the data from The Department of Education. However, participants in the Rand survey differ from those in the Department of Education survey, and they opted in to respond to the survey and self-reported data on PD opportunities, which could potentially account for a difference in results.

Data show that almost all teachers, in public and private school settings, engage in learning throughout the year in order to support their professional growth. Although these high-level data shed some light on how PD is conceptualized and implemented in public schools, much less information exists about PD's role in private and, specifically, independent schools. Because independent schools differ from public schools and other private schools in how they operate, much more research is needed to determine how independent schools approach professional development to facilitate professional growth in their individual school contexts.

Characteristics of Traditional Professional Development

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) referred to traditional PD as that which has been practiced in most schools for decades. Traditional PD opportunities in schools, both public and

private, include workshops, conferences, training sessions, or lectures that almost always consist

of three hours or less of instruction in theories and concepts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009;

Smith & Gillespie, 2007). These types of sessions, referred to in the literature as "attempt, attack,

abandon" cycles (Knight, 2006), "drive-bys" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009), or "spray and

pray" (Walker & Edstam, 2013), do not consistently offer opportunities for long-term

improvement for a variety of reasons, but primarily due to their short duration and generally

theoretical nature (Korthagen, 2017). Because most PD has been modeled on the "theory to

practice" approach (Guskey, 1986; Korthagen, 2017), teachers have traditionally found it

challenging to move from intellectual understanding to classroom practice (Kennedy, 2016).

Hoekstra et al. (2007) concluded that "it is remarkable that research on teacher learning is mostly

concerned with teachers' change in cognition, as if behavioral change automatically follows

from a change in cognition" (p. 116). The Teacher Change Model (Guskey, 1986) and the

Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002) suggest

that PD opportunities should primarily aim to change teacher practice, as opposed to teachers'

attitudes and beliefs, for teachers to truly grow professionally from engaging in PD. As more

research is available on how teachers learn, schools and districts are moving away from these

one-off PD sessions in order to more effectively implement opportunities for professional

development and learning that will, ideally, lead to professional growth (Desimone, 2009;

Korthagen, 2017).

Characteristics of High-Quality, Job-Embedded Professional Development

As education professionals begin to better understand how teachers learn, districts and

schools are moving toward job-embedded PD, or what some call workplace learning (Korthagen,

2017). Job-embedded PD refers to teacher learning grounded in the day-to-day context of

teaching and situated in the actual practice of teaching and learning (Croft et al., 2010). The

Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth suggests that job-embedded PD may be

effective at changing teacher practice and encouraging long-term professional growth as teachers

have the opportunity to learn specific job-related skills that they can translate immediately to

their classroom context in the hopes of seeing specific student academic outcomes (Clarke &

Hollingsworth, 2002). In 2009, the Department of Education stated that job-embedded PD is

necessary for teachers to improve instruction: "the requirement that professional development be

'job-embedded' connotes a direct connection between a teacher's work in the classroom and the

professional development the teacher receives" (National Archives and Records Administration,

2009, p. 58479). Several studies and meta-analyses outline the characteristics of effective

professional development that leads to professional growth, all of which discuss factors that

promote job-embedded PD in school contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone &

Garet, 2015).

Desimone and Garet (2015) found five overarching best practices in their research of

various studies on the characteristics of effective PD. They outlined and tested a conceptual

framework for effective PD comprising five characteristics stemming from research grounded in

rigorous controlled trials, cross-sectional studies, qualitative studies, and quasi-experimental

studies. They found that in order to have a meaningful impact on teacher professional growth,

PD must be coherent and aligned with the school's goals and mission, be focused on how

students learn content, encourage teacher active learning, be sustained (which they qualify as 20

hours or more in duration), and encourage collective participation. Although the authors argue

that evidence is clear about what effective PD should look like, they do not provide strategies for

how the identified best practices can be translated into effective practice to promote professional

growth (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Much like the implementation of PD from theory to practice for individual teachers, there seems to be a gap between the two on a systems level.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also examined research on effective PD that leads to increased teacher learning and student outcomes. The researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 35 studies on "professional learning that has proven effective in changing teachers' practices and improving of the combined characteristics student outcomes" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 2). Their analyses of these studies suggested seven qualities of successful PD that lead to professional growth. PD should be 1) content-focused, 2) include active learning and collaboration for teachers, 3) provide models of effective practice, 4) offer coaching and expert support, 5) provide opportunities for feedback and reflection, 6) be aligned with the goals of the school, and 7) be of sustained duration (about 50 hours per skill).

Several key similarities and differences regarding effective PD for teachers emerge in comparing the findings of Desimone and Garet (2015) with those of Darling-Hammond et al. (2017). Both studies emphasize the critical importance of sustained PD, active learning, and alignment with school goals. Additionally, they share consensus on the significance of collective participation or collaboration among teachers. Although Desimone and Garet (2015) simply called this idea collective participation, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) identified three specific ways teachers should collectively participate to grow from PD opportunities: engage in modeling, coaching, and feedback models. While Desimone and Garet (2015) expressed uncertainty about translating these best practices into effective professional growth, Darling-Hammond et al.'s study offers a more specific and comprehensive approach, addressing actionable ways in which teachers can engage in collaboration.

Muir et al. (2021) engaged in a multiple case study of seven teachers at six schools in Australia to identify the connections between professional development and professional growth. The authors found that professional development leads to professional growth when it takes place at work, provides opportunities for reflection and feedback, encourages commitment on behalf of teachers, and uses the expertise of consultants, critical friends groups, or coaches. These findings support those of Desimone and Garet (2015) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), with the critical difference of encouraging teacher commitment. Muir's (2021) findings suggest that without the conscious commitment of teachers to engage in PD to encourage professional growth, PD might not work to achieve the intended outcomes.

Overall, there appears to be agreement in the literature regarding what constitutes high-quality, job-embedded PD for teachers that leads to professional growth. PD to encourage professional growth should be sustained over time, include elements of collaboration, encourage active participation on the part of teachers, be mission-aligned, and employ the expertise of external experts or structures (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015). However, there are significant challenges in translating theory into practice regarding teacher PD (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015). So, even though research findings point to the characteristics of effective PD, both public and private schools face challenges in consistently implementing these theoretical models in their school contexts.

Additionally, although there is a tremendous amount of literature on PD and PD implementation leading to professional growth, these studies and their associated meta-analyses are limited in their scope. PD is highly context-specific, so the results of one study may not be transferable to other contexts due to the diversity of samples and the variability in how PD is conducted in institutions. Additionally, researchers do not frequently conduct follow-up studies

to determine the long-term impact of PD opportunities on teacher professional growth or student outcomes. Finally, most studies cannot connect teacher PD directly with student outcomes due to the multiple steps that need to be taken to ensure that PD opportunities create meaningful change for students. Thus, although the research illustrates how PD might impact the teaching practice of individual teachers, it may be much more challenging to measure teacher professional growth as a result of PD or the impact PD might have on students, particularly due to the context-specific nature of teacher PD and professional growth.

High-Quality, Job-Embedded Professional Development

The characteristics of high-quality, job-embedded PD suggest multiple pathways for teacher PD to encourage professional growth. Although they are not failsafe methods to facilitate long-term teacher change, collaboration and instructional coaching can potentially meet the criteria for high-quality, job-embedded PD that encourages professional growth. Additionally, engaging in PD as a result of formative evaluation and engaging in reflective practice can both offer pathways to professional growth, albeit in a slightly different manner.

Collaborative Communities of Practice. There is widespread evidence that teacher collaboration in schools leads to sustained professional growth (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020; Hill & Papay, 2022; Trust & Horrock, 2017). Engagement in collaborative communities of practice, which can be informal or formal groups like Professional Learning Communities (Smith & Gillespie, 2007), Critical Friends Groups (Sprott, 2019), or groups of teachers who conduct peer observations, leads to professional growth opportunities for teachers (Trust & Horrock, 2017).

Appova and Arbaugh (2018) studied 36 math teachers in a Midwest school district using semi-structured interviews to determine what motivated teachers to learn. The researchers found

seven major motivations that impacted teachers' desire to engage in professional learning. The primary motivator, discussed by 100% of teachers, was to influence students and their learning. The second most common answer, given by 72% of participants, was to learn with and from other teachers. These teachers said that collaborating with colleagues was motivating for professional growth and they emphasized the importance of engaging in collaborative communities of practice. "Teachers emphasized the importance of engaging in small content-specific collaborative learning groups situated around common concerns and needs," (Appova & Arbaugh, 2018, p. 11). The significant percentage of teachers who expressed that collaboration fuels motivation to learn suggests that shared learning experiences between teachers can have an impact on professional growth.

These findings are consistent with Desimone and Garet's (2015) and Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2017) claims that collaboration is a fundamental aspect of teacher professional growth. Teachers in Appova and Arbaugh's (2018) study discussed collaboration as working with other teachers to solve a problem, plan curriculum and assessment, and reflect collaboratively on practice. Teachers also voiced concern about collaboration opportunities that were mandated by their district, identifying that the time was spent mostly on topics that were important to their administrators, and not to their individual practice. Overall, participants indicated that "learning via small, content-specific and needs-based teacher collaborations is highly desirable and motivating" (p.11), suggesting that teacher to teacher collaboration on a small scale is beneficial to professional growth.

Subsequently, Sprott's (2019) qualitative study of three teachers in Texas explored how teachers described the benefits and drawbacks of professional learning experiences. Findings supported Appova and Arbaugh's (2017) results regarding teacher collaboration. In interviews,

Sprott's (2019) participants discussed collaboration as gaining feedback from learning teams, working with teachers during trainings, having structured conversations to problem-solve, engaging in Critical Friends Groups, observing other teachers, and engaging with education scholars to help push their thinking. Teachers expressed that they valued and needed time and space for collaborative processes, including engaging in collaborative PD and observing other teachers. Participants "emphasized the value of sharing ideas, concerns, and questions with their colleagues, students, and other professionals as an essential pathway to their development" (Sprott, 2019, p. 323). Additionally, in regard to peer observation, teachers suggested that visiting different education spaces not only helped them gain new teaching strategies but also "provided new lenses through which to view their own practice" (Sprott, 2019, p. 324).

The findings of these studies suggest that PD that emphasizes small scale collaboration among teachers that addresses teacher practice is highly beneficial for professional growth. However, due to the small sample sizes of both of these studies, the unique contexts, and the fact that participants self-reported data, these results may not be transferable to differing contexts. Additionally, Sprott (2019) did not delineate whether the collaborative PD that participants discussed in the study was mandated by their specific school contexts or whether it was organic and informal. This makes it difficult to determine if the collaborative behavior was formally mandated by schools or informally sought out by the teachers themselves, which could have implications for the findings of the study.

Instructional Coaching. Instructional coaching is touted as an effective, high-quality, job-embedded professional development to increase professional growth (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2022; Kraft et al., 2018). Joyce and Showers' (1984, 1996) seminal works on instructional coaching suggest that retention and implementation of PD skills is more likely when PD is paired

with weekly coaching. Korthagen (2017) claimed that "the organizing of individual or group coaching, including peer coaching, seems to be pivotal to success" (p. 400) when it comes to teacher growth. This idea is supported by Kraft et al.'s 2018 meta-analysis which showed that, when paired with traditional PD, instructional coaching had a significantly larger positive effect on teacher instruction and student academic achievement than traditional PD alone. Instructional coaching also aligns with the characteristics of high-quality professional development that leads to professional growth. The characteristics of instructional coaching and its benefits and barriers to implementation are outlined further in the next major section of this literature review.

Additional Structures Within Schools That Can Support Teacher Professional Growth

The approaches to professional development and growth discussed in the next section are not examples of traditional or high-quality, job-embedded PD, but are concepts that, when implemented, can lead to professional growth.

Formative Evaluation and Feedback. Formative evaluation and its associated feedback can be a catalyst for teachers to engage in PD to encourage professional growth. Formative evaluation for professional growth focuses on using the information gained from teacher evaluation specifically to improve teacher skills (Popham, 2013). Results of formative evaluations can encourage teachers to engage in peer observations, instructional coaching, ongoing administrator-to-teacher feedback, ongoing student-to-teacher feedback, parent-to-teacher feedback, and teacher self-reflection (Maslow & Kelley, 2012). Perhaps the most essential component of formative teacher evaluation for growth is the opportunity to receive and engage with feedback, which Goe et al. (2012) argued is what sets formative assessment for growth apart from summative evaluation for accountability: "It is through discussing and reflecting on evaluation results that evaluation becomes a system that supports professional

learning, not just accountability" (p. 14). By identifying areas where a teacher succeeds or fails, formative evaluation can enable teachers to leverage areas of strength and remediate areas of weakness (Papay, 2012). By identifying areas of growth, results of formative evaluations can shed light on teacher weaknesses. Engaging in PD, like the PD approaches discussed earlier, to address those areas of growth can ideally lead to professional growth (Papay, 2012). An effective teacher evaluation system allows teachers to set professional goals and get regular, helpful feedback to improve teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2014), which could also potentially lead to professional growth.

Maslow and Kelley (2012) studied the implementation of teacher evaluation systems in four high schools in the Midwest over three years, all of which used similar formative evaluation models that included consistent feedback in order to facilitate professional growth in terms of teacher quality. The authors used qualitative interviews to explore the research question, "What role does teacher evaluation feedback play in advancing teacher quality among experienced teachers in diverse high schools?" (p. 606). The authors found that the evaluation systems, one of the goals of which was to "create formalized opportunities…for systemic feedback to improve teaching and learning" (p. 625), encouraged some teachers to improve their pedagogical skills and engage in professional growth. "Under the right conditions, evaluation can provide meaningful formative feedback to individual teachers and useful data to inform human resource management and school improvement" (Maslow & Kelley, 2012, p. 628). The authors wrote that these conditions include a school culture committed to advancing student and teacher learning, a collaborative professional environment, and administrators who can make students and teachers feel safe in the school environment. Given that the four schools studied met these conditional requirements, it is difficult to discern whether the teacher evaluation systems themselves were

the cause of teacher professional growth in this study or whether teachers would grow in these school environments regardless, illustrating a need for more research on how formative evaluations impact teacher professional growth.

In addition to the individual study limitations identified above, there are limitations for systems of formative evaluation in general as they relate to teacher professional growth. The primary issue is that the implementation of teacher evaluation systems differs across states and districts and depends on context (Bleiberg et al., 2023; Maslow & Kelley, 2012; Robertson-Kraft & Zhang, 2018), like any system or structure related to teaching. Thus, it is possible that although some evaluation systems purport to offer robust opportunities for feedback to teachers in order to inform professional growth, this may never come to fruition. Feedback can only be implemented to impact professional growth if it is offered and valuable. Weisberg et al.'s (2009) study entitled "The Widget Effect" found that of the 15,000 teachers the authors surveyed, "73 percent of teachers surveyed said their most recent evaluation did not identify any development areas, and only 45 percent of teachers who did have development areas identified said they received useful support to improve" (p. 6). Effective systems of formative evaluation have actionable and useful feedback as one of their core components. Hence, the absence of useful feedback effectively undermines the purpose of the evaluation, part of which is to impact professional growth. This lack of fidelity to teacher evaluation processes appears to be common (Lillejord & Borte, 2020; Tuytens & Devos, 2012), which could negate possible professional growth benefits that might arise from the use of formative evaluations and feedback targeted toward teacher change.

Reflective Practice. Although reflective practice is not a type of professional development for teachers that is mandated and facilitated by others, such as workshops or

instructional coaching, its use alongside professional development opportunities can encourage professional growth. Reflective practice, or reflection, is essential for improving practice for teachers. Reflective practice builds competence in teachers' professional practice (Schon, 1983) and is an integral part of professional growth in teaching. Most empirical, peer-reviewed studies that support the claim that reflective practice is beneficial to teacher professional growth focus on preservice teachers (Lambert et al., 2014; Mena-Marcos et al., 2015; Weaver et al., 2022). However, since teaching is a profession that requires ongoing learning to keep up with changes in pedagogy, the results could potentially apply to practicing teachers as well.

In a study of 534 student teachers enrolled at a Spanish university, Mena-Marcos et al. (2013) found that reflective practice was productive for preservice teacher growth. From their study and the review of relevant literature, the authors concluded that "teacher-education programs have as their mission to educate critical reflective thinkers for increasingly complex scenarios" (Mena-Marcos et al., 2013, p. 147) in order to facilitate professional growth. Subsequently, Lambert et al. (2014) studied four preservice teachers in an agricultural university. They found that reflection is part of what moves teachers from one stage of their professional growth to the next.

Weaver et al. (2022) studied 28 preservice teachers at a Midwestern university who were asked to reflect on their learning using a graphic organizer for six weeks. The preservice teachers were then surveyed to determine how engaging in reflective practice led to their professional growth as educators. The authors found that using a reflection framework helped preservice teachers to better plan and revise instruction than had they not reflected. "When preservice teachers were able to self-reflect on their instruction and use of best practices, the majority were able to make improvements and modifications" (Weaver et al., 2022, p. 8).

These three studies provide valuable insights into the role of reflective practice in the professional development and growth of preservice teachers, albeit in different contexts and methodologies. Findings from Mena-Marcos et al. (2013) underscore the mission of teacher-education programs to facilitate professional growth through reflective practice. Similarly, Lambert et al. (2014) delved into the developmental stages of teachers, highlighting reflection as a pivotal factor in transitioning between these stages. In contrast, Weaver et al. (2022) focused on a more specific approach. They showcased the practical benefits of structured reflection, demonstrating how it enhanced preservice teachers' ability to plan and revise instructions effectively. Both Weaver et al. (2022) and Mena-Marcos et al. (2013) underscored the importance of reflective practice in improving teacher practice, with Weaver et al. (2022) offering a more targeted strategy through the use of a reflection framework. These studies collectively emphasize the transformative power of reflective practice in shaping the professional growth of future educators, albeit with varied methodologies and contexts. Findings could apply to practicing teachers as well, especially given the foundational role of reflective practice in teacher growth (Schon, 1983).

Barriers to Implementation

There are a multitude of reasons why both public and private schools find it challenging to implement PD that aligns with the characteristics of high-quality, job-embedded PD to enhance professional growth. A significant gap between theory and practice exists in this field (Korthagen, 2017). Additionally, PD and its resulting professional growth are context-specific (Durksen et al., 2017), making it challenging to transfer effective PD strategies from one context to another.

Schools and districts are highly context-specific due to their varying population of students and teachers, state and local education law, and, specifically, in the case of independent schools, mission and values. Thus, on a macro level, PD that leads to professional growth in one school will only sometimes yield similar results in another. On a micro level, PD that leads to professional growth for one teacher will only sometimes work for another. Because teachers vary in how they respond to the same PD opportunities (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Guskey, 1986) and because they do not consistently implement the theories and practices they learn in PD sessions (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010), effective PD cannot consistently be implemented according to theoretical best practices, especially since most traditional PD employs a one-size-fits-all approach (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

Even when stakeholders in schools or districts can determine what type of PD facilitates professional growth in their local contexts, the barriers of time, cost, and hierarchical mandates can present challenges. Traditional PD has only been shown to be effective when there is a long-term investment, which is not the norm for most schools (Smith & Gillespie, 2007). Yoon et al. (2007) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) conducted meta-analyses of PD studies whose findings suggest that teachers need 20-50 hours of PD on a specific skill, spread out over 6-12 months in order for the PD to be effective in supporting teacher growth. Considering the time constraints that most schools and teachers face, this seems an impossible feat. Finally, public school teachers often face hierarchical mandates that get in the way of professional growth, such as mandated student testing (Sprott, 2019) or accountability measures that prioritize the quantity of PD over the quality of PD (Yates, 2007). However, because students in independent schools do not take state or district standardized tests, and their teachers are not subject to accountability measures that include student academic outcomes, this particular barrier to implementation may

not exist in independent school contexts. In conclusion, although it is evident in theory what high-quality, job-embedded PD to promote teacher professional growth could look like, it is exceptionally challenging to implement PD that meets these characteristics in practice in both public and private schools.

Implications

The current PD landscape suggests a need for increased effectiveness in fostering teachers' professional growth. PD that does help teachers change their practice must be job-embedded and include opportunities for active learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015) and collaboration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Hill & Papay, 2022; Trust & Horrock, 2017), and be focused on how students learn (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017 Desimone & Garet, 2015). Instructional coaching, the characteristics of which align with these three tenets of high-quality, job-embedded PD, could potentially be the most effective way to increase teacher professional growth in schools.

Instructional Coaching

Instructional coaching, conceptualized here as a process in schools in which an expert coach works with teachers to improve various aspects of instructional practice, has been shown to be an effective tool for teacher professional growth (Aguilar, 2013; Joyce & Showers, 1996; Knight, 2022). Although not an institutional panacea, it can lead to meaningful teacher change that impacts student learning outcomes (Aguilar, 2013).

Purpose

Modern instructional coaching was developed in the 1980s by educational researchers Bruce Joyce and Beverley Showers. It was a research-backed response to PD literature from the 1970s that suggested only 10% of teacher participants in professional development sessions

implemented what they learned (Joyce & Showers, 1996). Joyce and Showers proposed that teachers needed more help to implement teaching strategies and practices they learned in professional development sessions to change their teaching practices, beliefs, and attitudes. Jim Knight, a more recent scholar in the field of instructional coaching, claimed that "coaching is essential for the kind of growth we need to see in schools" (Knight, 2022, p. x). Coaching helps teachers to see what is happening in their classrooms, set goals for themselves and their students, and learn and integrate teaching practices to meet those goals (Knight, 2022, p. v). Through these practices, the instructional coaching process can possibly lead to professional growth for teachers.

Definition

Instructional coaching is a multifaceted professional development strategy that involves a non-evaluative, collaborative partnership between a knowledgeable instructional expert and a teacher, both committed to shared learning goals designed to enhance instruction and elevate student achievement (Knight, 2006). Instructional coaching is highly contextual, as its implementation varies based on the unique needs and dynamics of individual schools, teachers, and coaches (Aguilar, 2013).

At its core, instructional coaching is characterized by its individualized, intensive, sustained, and context-specific nature (Aguilar, 2013, p. 553). Coaching sessions are conducted one-on-one, ensuring personalized support for teachers. Because teachers and coaches often set their own goals, the focus of instructional coaching will differ for each participant (Knight, 2022). Coaches and teachers interact regularly, typically at least every few weeks, allowing for continuous feedback on and improvement in teacher practice (Aguilar, 2013). Coaching relationships are sustained over an extended period, ideally enabling deep-rooted changes in

teaching practices within the specific context of the teacher's classroom. The focus of instructional coaching is deliberate practice and the refinement of specific skills, ensuring targeted and meaningful professional growth (Aguilar, 2013).

In essence, instructional coaching embodies a context-specific, multifaceted approach to professional development. It not only addresses teachers' immediate instructional needs, but also potentially nurtures a culture of continuous learning, empowering teachers to grow, adapt, and excel, ultimately leading to teacher professional growth. Instructional coaching stands as a powerful catalyst for educational improvement for teachers.

As instructional coaching becomes a more common type of professional development used in schools, many practitioner-focused materials have been published in order to provide frameworks and strategies for districts, coaches, and teachers. Jim Knight and Elena Aguilar are two leading experts in the field of instructional coaching who have published such materials. I draw on these two authors' contributions but acknowledge that they are not based in empirical, peer-reviewed research. Thus, when discussing their instructional coaching frameworks I supplement their work with empirical literature.

Components of Instructional Coaching

Although the approach to instructional coaching differs depending on the context of the school in which it is used and the stakeholders involved in the process, there are several key components of instructional coaching that are implemented across contexts in varying ways. Elek and Page (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 53 studies on instructional coaching to address the question, "Which features of coaching have been found to be critical to improving the teaching practices of early childhood educators?" (p. 568). The authors limited the included

studies to peer-reviewed, empirical research that used a coaching intervention through experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

Although Elek and Page's (2018) findings serve to describe the frequency of key characteristics of instructional coaching processes throughout the literature they studied, which is what I will draw from this meta-analysis, the studies they analyzed are so highly varied that it is challenging to draw significant conclusions about coaching effectiveness. The coaching interventions in these studies targeted a range of desired outcomes for students including academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes, and each measured the success of the coaching intervention as an increase or decrease in the desired student outcome, depending on the context. Because coaching is so contextual, the absence of a standardized intervention approach across these studies (including content and goals of coaching) makes drawing inferences about the effects of the interventions as a whole nearly impossible. The studies also varied significantly in size, including between three and 440 teacher participants. Because coaching can become more complicated with larger numbers of teachers, results from smaller-scale studies may not be able to be compared with or generalized to contexts with more educators. Finally, the number of coaching sessions (between one and over 70) and the total intervention time (between five weeks and two years) were highly variable. This poses challenges for drawing conclusions regarding coaching efficacy from the findings of these studies, as it is clear from professional development literature that the amount of time that is spent on PD matters for teacher understanding and uptake of new instructional strategies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015).

That said, Elek and Page's (2018) study can be used to determine which elements of coaching were most common within the 53 studies, regardless of their effectiveness. The

authors' findings suggest that there are ten elements of instructional coaching that are common to the instructional coaching process across early-childhood contexts. According to Elek and Page (2019), most instructional coaching processes have some or all of the following components: feedback, observation, training, goal setting, resource provision, reflection, modeling, assistance, giving information, and partnership development (p. 574).

Feedback was the most common element of instructional coaching, appearing in 96% of the studies, though the nature and delivery of feedback differed depending on the context. In 21% of studies, feedback was described as "directive," or led by the coach. In 26% of studies, feedback was characterized as "reflective," or led by the educator. The other 53% of studies did not provide enough information to determine what type of feedback was used during the instructional coaching process. The variability in the types of feedback offered in the coaching studies prevented the authors from describing which types of feedback were effective for teacher learning and student success based on the content of the coaching intervention.

The second most common element among the studies (91%) was coach observation of a teacher's practice. Observation was frequently followed by reflection, which was described in 55% of the studies. The concept of reflection in the instructional coaching process was defined by the authors as discussion and problem-solving between the teacher and coach, especially as it related to the teacher's goals (Elek & Page, 2018). Goal setting was a characteristic of 68% of the coaching programs and was generally led by the educator, with five studies discussing goals set by the instructional coach.

Modeling was identified in 40% of the studies, which involved the coach modeling the teaching practices that the coached teacher was attempting to improve. Of the studies discussed, 28% mentioned the coach's role in providing assistance to the coached teacher, either by

supporting them in the classroom or helping them to plan lessons. Finally, 21% of the studies

mentioned the development of a partnership between the coach and the educator. Several

described the importance of the coach being non-judgmental or non-evaluative and of allowing

the teacher choice in the coaching process.

Although this quantitative data sheds light on aspects of instructional coaching processes

that are potentially the most common, there is not enough information to determine which

aspects, and in what quantity or combination, impact the effectiveness of coaching programs.

Much more research is needed into how and why coaching works, especially given the context-

dependent nature of coaching goals.

Although these features were only identified in coaching literature studying instructional

coaching in early-childhood environments, the coaching elements identified in this meta-analysis

align with published coaching materials appropriate for all grade levels. For example, Knight's

instructional coaching Impact Cycle (Knight, 2021) includes all of the major instructional

coaching components addressed by Elek and Page (2018): feedback, observation, reflection, and

goal-setting, although it is unclear if they are conceptualized in the same way. Aguilar's

transformational coaching model also has at its core these four components, with the additional

approach of focusing on a teacher's being, beliefs, and behaviors (Aguilar, 2013). So, although it

may not be clear whether there are best practices associated with instructional coaching, it is

clear that instructional coaching literature, empirical and otherwise, illustrates a set of common

instructional coaching practices.

Instructional Coaching Models

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to instructional coaching and there are as many

models of instructional coaching as there are practitioners of it, making it a challenging concept

to study. Additionally, not only is there limited empirical evidence surrounding which instructional coaching models are most frequently used in schools, there is also limited empirical evidence demonstrating the overall efficacy of instructional coaching. So, there is no clear data to suggest which instructional coaching models are best suited to developing teachers' instructional practice. Some authors have attempted to break instructional coaching models down into various categories such as cognitive coaching, technical coaching, and problem-solving coaching (Kurz et al., 2017); or student-focused coaching and teacher-centered coaching (Wang, 2017). But, given that there is no one definition of instructional coaching and the parts of the various instructional coaching processes overlap and are highly interconnected, it is challenging to parse out the different approaches.

The Instructional Coaching Group, a consulting group founded by Jim Knight that offers professional development in instructional coaching, delineates three categories of coaching based on the organization's understanding of the types of instructional coaching that are currently being implemented in American schools: dialogical coaching, facilitative coaching, and directive coaching (Knight, 2021). Elena Aguilar (2013) also discusses directive and facilitative coaching in her book, *The Art of Coaching: Effective Strategies for School Transformation*, but instead of dialogical coaching she outlines an approach she calls transformational coaching. Below, these four approaches suggested by Knight and Aguilar will be discussed in detail. Additionally, empirical research that supports the efficacy of each of the coaching models will be discussed, as most readily available coaching material (such as Knight and Aguilar's books) is based on anecdotal as opposed to empirical evidence.

Directive Coaching

Directive instructional coaching, which is sometimes referred to as instructive coaching, has at its core the goal of helping teachers master a specific skill for a particular need (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2021). For instance, if a group of middle school math teachers was asked to change their approach to teaching algebra in order to be consistent with a new instructional model, they may need directive coaching to help implement that new model. In directive coaching, the coach serves as the knowledgeable expert - they tell teachers what to do and how to do it (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2021). Knight (2021) suggested that directive coaching can be effective when teachers are committed to learning something specific. An example of the effectiveness of directive coaching can be seen in the findings of Hammond and Moore's 2018 study on the effects of directive instructional coaching on ten teachers in Australia.

The study focused on a directive coaching process that was used by three coaches to help ten teachers implement a new set of skills in explicit instruction that they learned from a professional development workshop. Hammond, one of the study's authors, developed the directive coaching process that was used with these teachers, which included coaches observing teaching, discussing observation notes with the teacher that highlighted strengths and areas for improvement, and working alongside the teacher in the classroom in order to help model and implement the explicit instruction skills (Hammond & Moore, 2018). During coaching conversations, the coach expanded upon feedback points noted during the observation, emphasizing the positive aspects of the teacher's performance. Simultaneously, the coach highlighted one or two specific areas that the teacher could consider addressing in the upcoming session. The researchers calculated how many times the coached teachers used the new skills of

explicit instruction in their lessons after coaching and interviewed the teachers to determine their perceptions of the directive coaching model (Hammond & Moore, 2018).

Hammond and Moore's (2018) findings illustrated a positive impact of the directive coaching process on the ten coached teachers. After coaching, teachers were more likely to use the explicit instruction skills that they had learned in the professional development workshop. In interviews, teachers stated that the feedback they received from the coaches through the directive coaching process was helpful for their growth and learning. Teachers also stated that they felt guided, supported, and affirmed throughout directive coaching (Hammond & Moore, 2018), which contrasts with some coaching experts' assessments of the directive coaching model. However, it is important to note that one of the authors of the study developed the coaching process that was implemented, which could potentially introduce bias into the design, implementation, and interpretation of the study. Additionally, results of this study may not be transferable to other contexts as this coaching model only exists in that school setting.

Although in this particular case, directive coaching was a successful tool to help teachers implement a new skill, directive coaching is not always the best coaching approach. Knight argued that directive coaching encourages "deprofessionalization of teaching by minimizing teacher expertise and autonomy and therefore frequently engenders resistance" (Knight, 2021, Directive Coaching). Additionally, Aguilar suggested that directive coaching doesn't necessarily "expand the teacher's internal capacity to reflect" (Aguilar, 2013, p. 22), which Elek and Page (2019) argue is necessary for effective coaching. So, although directive coaching may be an effective approach in some instances, it depends on the goal and context of coaching.

Facilitative Coaching

Facilitative coaching, in contrast to directive coaching, is an approach to instructional coaching that positions the instructional coach not as an expert problem-solver, but as an equal participant in the work of coaching (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2021). Facilitative coaches do not share their expertise or suggestions with teachers, as they assume that teachers already have the knowledge they need to improve (Knight, 2021). Aguilar's assessment of facilitative coaching is similar to Knight's - she suggests that the role of the facilitative coach is to help clients build upon their existing knowledge and skills. The role of the facilitative coach is to center the teacher in the coaching process and ask questions that allow the teacher to unpack their knowledge.

Robertson et al. (2020) studied five coach-teacher dyads at two university-based literacy clinics in the US in order to determine the types of discourse that best helped teachers to engage in the uptake of new instructional strategies. Coaches in this study used a facilitative coaching model where the focus of coaching was on allowing coached teachers to, through questioning, unpack their knowledge to address their instructional concerns. Although the coaching cycle was similar to that of the directive coaches in Hammond and Moore's (2018) study, including the use of observations and post-observation meetings, the approach to teacher-coach discourse differed dramatically. The facilitative coaches guided teachers toward refining their practice in a way that left the teacher thinking that they were the source of the information and the problem-solver. Coaches used the strategies of elicitation, affirmation, and clarification in their coaching sessions in order to center the teacher and their knowledge. After coaching, the researchers videoed teachers and measured their use of the instructional strategies on which the facilitative coaching was focused. They found that when the facilitative coaching approach was used, teachers were more likely to use the new instructional strategies afterward in their teaching (Robertson et al.,

2020). These findings suggest that facilitative coaching could be an effective method of instructional coaching for teacher uptake of new skills.

However, as with directive coaching, there are drawbacks to facilitative coaching. It may not always be the best or most effective method as it relies too much on the inherent knowledge of the teacher. If a teacher does not have the knowledge they need to address their goals, facilitative coaching may not be an appropriate approach (Knight, 2021). In these cases, dialogical coaching, a balance between facilitative and directive coaching, may be a more useful coaching model.

Dialogical Coaching

Knight's description of dialogical coaching suggests that it is a mix of the two approaches discussed above: "The dialogical coach balances advocacy with inquiry" (Knight, 2021, Dialogical Coaching). A dialogical coach asks questions and thinks and collaborates with teachers. Like with facilitative coaching, a dialogical coach's role is to ask teachers to do the heavy thinking. However, a dialogical coach is also willing to share their expertise. Knight argued that this coaching approach works best to allow teachers to reach their goals, as it provides a mix of reflection and support (Knight, 2021).

Bradley et al. (2013) studied Knight's dialogical coaching model with four instructional coaches and eight middle school teachers in a city in the northwest US. The purpose of the study was to implement Knight's model with teachers to see its effectiveness in helping teachers change their instructional practice. Overall, coaches were able to implement the dialogic coaching model with fidelity. They used both directive and facilitative coaching strategies to help teachers learn new instructional strategies. As with Hammond and Moore (2018) and Robertson et al. (2020), coaches used a series of observations, meetings, and modeling strategies

to help teachers learn. In interviews, teachers reported that the coaching process helped them to implement new teaching strategies in their classrooms. The researchers found that teachers were more likely to change their instructional practices after coaching when they engaged in self-reflection, which is a critical component of both facilitative and directive coaching. Bradley et al.'s (2013) study highlights the successful implementation of Knight's dialogical coaching model, suggesting that the balance of facilitative and directive approaches to coaching may work to improve teacher practice.

Transformational Coaching

Like Knight's dialogical coaching approach, Aguilar's transformational coaching is a mix of both facilitative and directive coaching, but with one key difference. Aguilar's transformational coaching model has at its core the goal of changing not only the individual teacher's instructional practice, but also the core systems and structures in which the teacher operates and the broader educational and social landscape (Aguilar, 2013). The transformational coaching model is grounded in systems thinking and exploring root causes of instructional or educational issues, as opposed to just the beliefs or behaviors of the individual teacher (Aguilar, 2013). Like with dialogic coaching, the client and coach engage in the transformational coaching process equally, and the coach also must be committed to transforming not only their own practice but the systems in which their practice operates. Aguilar argued that transformational coaching is the best instructional coaching approach for teachers, though it has not been widely studied or used in schools (Aguilar, 2013). Thus, research on the use of transformational instructional coaching in schools is limited.

Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) studied four literacy-based instructional coaches in one school district to determine how the "framing of coaching as a lever for systemic and/or

individual reform influences the enactment of literacy coaching" (p. 180). After the coaches

participated in training on transformational coaching with the Literacy Coaching Network, the

researchers analyzed data from coach interviews, inter-coach discussions, and documents to shed

light on how the coaches' work with teachers attempted to address systemic issues. The findings

of this study illustrated that the coaches were deeply uncertain as to how their roles as literacy-

based instructional coaches were meant to facilitate systemic reform within the school district.

The coaches found that their work helping individual teachers make changes to their practice did

not produce any results consistent with broad systemic change (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015).

This study raises questions about how transformational coaching can be used to promote both

change in individual teacher practice and also systemic reform. Much more research is needed to

determine if transformational coaching is an effective approach to instructional coaching for both

teachers and education systems.

Although Aguilar and Knight both argued that their transformational and dialogical

approaches are best to increase teacher uptake of new skills and transform teacher practice, there

is not enough evidence to support the use of one method of instructional coaching over another.

Approaches to instructional coaching depend on the needs of the stakeholders implementing the

process and the context in which the process takes place. Additionally, although instructional

coaching is becoming a more common focus of empirical research, much more information is

needed on the effectiveness of particular coaching models in addition to instructional coaching as

a whole.

Impact on Teacher Professional Growth

Instructional coaching offers a pathway for educators to apply professional development

and learning consistently and deeply, which can lead to professional growth (Aguilar, 2013). The

instructional coaching approach emphasizes the integration of instructional strategies into teacher practice to enhance student achievement, which can then lead to changes in teacher beliefs and attitudes, according to Guskey's (1986) Teacher Change Model and the Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Given that each school and district has different desired outcomes and measures professional growth differently (e.g., through evaluations, observations, value-add measures of student outcomes, etc.), studying the impact of instructional coaching on professional growth is challenging. However, studies (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016) suggest instructional coaching affects teacher uptake of new instructional strategies, which, when combined with an increase in student academic outcomes, can illustrate effective change in teacher practices, attitudes, and beliefs.

Papay et al. (2016) studied 14 teachers in several elementary and middle schools in Tennessee where high-performing teachers coached their low-performing counterparts on instructional skills. The teachers were identified as a result of formative evaluations, and their coaching sessions focused on particular instructional skills that the low-performing teachers needed to grow. The study found a modest increase in student performance (0.12 SD) in coached classrooms as compared to control classrooms, suggesting that instructional coaching works to increase teacher performance, which increases student outcomes. However, there are significant limitations of the study. Student outcomes cannot be attributed solely to teachers, the sample was small, and baseline data for teachers was taken from performance evaluations, which may be flawed due to human error. Papay et al. (2016) only used student outcomes to measure how instructional coaching impacted teacher professional growth but may have been more successful in determining the role of coaching in teacher professional growth had they interviewed teachers or used an evaluation scale to determine teacher outcomes.

Building on Papay's work, Kraft and Blazar (2017) conducted a randomized trial of 59 teachers in New Orleans charter schools to determine the effects of instructional coaching on professional growth. The researchers randomized who received instructional coaching and analyzed emails and coaching logs to determine coaching practices. After coaching had taken place, the researchers analyzed observation scores, principal evaluations, and student surveys and compared them to the non-coached control group. The results highlighted a substantial improvement (0.59 SD) in effective teaching practices among coached teachers, suggesting that instructional coaching can improve teacher practice.

Because coaching is so personal and contextualized, the impact of the coaching experience varies based on teachers' individual teacher needs. Thus, these findings may not be able to be transferred to differing contexts. Although this study is promising regarding instructional coaching's impact on teacher professional growth, it is not without limitations. The researchers discovered that control group teachers were exposed to coaching through colleagues, which may have skewed the results for coached teachers. These findings once again emphasize the need for larger samples and further research.

Finally, Kraft et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis, examining 60 studies primarily focused on literacy instruction coaching for pre-K and elementary teachers. Their research highlighted the effectiveness of combining coaching with traditional PD. Results illustrated significantly larger effect sizes on teacher instruction (0.31 SD) and student academic achievement (0.12 SD) than engaging in traditional PD alone, which is consistent with the claims of seminal instructional coaching literature (Joyce & Showers, 1984, 1996). However, this meta-analysis has significant limitations for application. Increased student achievement cannot be directly attributed to teacher change in instructional practices as there are many factors that affect

how a student performs on standardized tests. Kraft et al.'s (2018) study focused on instructional coaching in literacy programs for elementary school teachers, leaving out a large population of teachers, and primarily used small sample sizes, possibly preventing transferability to other contexts. It could be hypothesized that the larger a coaching program is, the more opportunity there is for program challenges to exist, so data from smaller instructional coaching programs cannot necessarily be sized up. Additionally, many of the studies had participants who opted into the study, which could skew results.

The studies by Papay et al. (2016), Kraft and Blazar (2017), and Kraft et al. (2018) collectively explored the impact of instructional coaching on teacher professional growth and student outcomes, providing a multifaceted view of this educational intervention. Papay et al. 's (2016) study initiated the discussion, showcasing the potential of instructional coaching in enhancing teacher performance and subsequently improving student outcomes. Kraft and Blazar (2017) built upon this foundation by conducting a randomized trial, demonstrating a significant improvement in effective teaching practices among coached teachers. Kraft et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis further supported the effectiveness of instructional coaching, particularly when combined with traditional professional development, emphasizing its positive influence on teacher instruction and student academic achievement.

Although the literature is relatively consistent regarding the positive effects of instructional coaching on teacher professional growth, despite its limitations, instructional coaching may not be a fit for all contexts. Walsh et al. (2020) studied 127 elementary teachers in a California school district who received instructional coaching. The teachers completed a survey sharing their instructional coaching experience and its impact on their instructional practice, classroom management, and student engagement. Findings revealed that instructional coaching

impacts teachers more when they have more needs as educators, as novice teachers perceived a higher impact of instructional coaching. "The perception of impact on instructional coaching in supporting [teachers] late-career needs was not as favorable" (Walsh et al., 2020, p. 1153), which suggests that veteran teachers (defined in this study as more than 15 years of teaching) may need something different than instructional coaching to facilitate professional growth.

In essence, instructional coaching not only ideally enhances instructional practices and student outcomes but also fosters reflective practice and collaboration, which lead to professional growth. These qualities align with best practices in professional development, emphasizing their role in elevating professional growth (King et al., 2010). However, these studies highlight critical gaps and limitations in the current research landscape. Further research is crucial to understand instructional coaching's impact on teacher professional growth, including the long-term effects.

Challenges with Implementation

Although instructional coaching has been shown to facilitate teacher professional growth, barriers to implementation prevent instructional coaching from being a feasible tool for teachers' professional growth in all school environments. As with any form of PD, the context in which instructional coaching occurs matters, so coaching will look different depending on the school environment. However, there is consensus in the literature regarding the characteristics of a school context that must be in place for coaching to be an effective tool for teacher professional growth. Because not all schools can provide these specific institutional features, coaching will not necessarily work in practice to promote professional growth as it does in theory.

According to Knight (2022), schools must have the following features in place in order for coaching to be successful: a deep understanding of coaching implementation, hiring of effective coaches, theoretical alignment with school goals, clarification of a coach's role, an

understanding of confidentiality, a culture of learning, and support of school leadership (p. 167).

Knight's comprehensive criteria for successful instructional coaching shed light on the intricate

factors schools must consider when implementing coaching programs. First and foremost, having

a profound understanding of coaching implementation is crucial. Schools must be aware of the

coaching process, its goals, and how it aligns with the overall educational objectives of the

institution. Equally vital is the selection of skilled and effective coaches who can not only guide

teachers but also adapt their strategies to the diverse needs of educators. The theoretical

alignment of coaching methods with school goals ensures that coaching initiatives are purposeful

and targeted, fostering a coherent approach to professional development. This is especially

relevant for independent schools, as each school has its own unique mission and context. Clear

delineation of a coach's role, understanding the importance of confidentiality, and fostering a

culture of continuous learning contribute significantly to the success of coaching endeavors.

Moreover, the backing and support of school leadership are paramount, as they signify a top-

down commitment to the coaching process, encouraging teachers to engage wholeheartedly.

Knight (2022) argued that schools that address these aspects are better positioned to implement

instructional coaching, fostering an environment where educators thrive, learn, and, ideally,

enhance student academic outcomes.

Findings from Hannan and Russel (2020)'s mixed-methods case study of 31 instructional

coaches in 21 school districts in Tennessee support several of Knight's (2022) claims. The

researchers used data from a large-scale, three-year coaching project to determine how

contextual factors in schools could impact instructional coaching in mathematics. The authors

found that coaches work differently depending on contextual constraints and characteristics.

However, a collaborative learning environment and a significant understanding of coaching implementation for all stakeholders were supportive conditions for all coaches.

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University is an educational think tank that "strives to equalize and improve educational opportunities by bringing together diverse thinkers to tackle difficult problems" (Annenberg, 2023, About Us). The Institute's handbook on instructional coaching (King et al., 2003) supports Knight's (2022) and Hannan and Russel's (2020) assertions regarding the contextual factors necessary for the implementation of effective instructional coaching. The handbook states that coaching often fails when it operates in an institutional system that does not have a culture of professional learning, ignores district-wide goals, fails to reach resistant teachers, and lacks documentation of the impact of the coaching system.

As with other forms of PD, barriers to implementation for coaching also include finding time for teachers to engage in and implement what they learned in coaching (Kraft et al., 2018). Finally, cost is a significant issue when it comes to instructional coaching, as it is six to nine times more expensive than other types of teacher professional development (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2009), which could be a deterrent for some school contexts depending on funding for PD initiatives. Thus, although instructional coaching may work for some teachers in some contexts, and the research is generally favorable regarding its impact on professional growth, it may not be a viable option for various reasons.

Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Coaching

While some effects of the instructional coaching process on teacher professional growth have been studied, there is a dearth of research on teachers' perceptions of the instructional coaching process. Few peer-reviewed studies shed light on what teachers think of instructional

coaching, though this topic appears to be a common choice for doctoral dissertations. The findings of the available studies and several dissertations are discussed below.

First, Mason (2007) surveyed 52 teachers in four elementary schools in Georgia who had gone through an instructional coaching process for two years. Of the teachers surveyed, 97% articulated that they found the instructional coaching experience beneficial to their teaching. The most prevalent reasons were "the opportunities to learn new strategies; the coach's modeling of lessons in the classroom; the immediate feedback given by the coach to the teacher; and the availability of resources from the coach" (p. 79). Most (83%) of teachers reported learning new strategies from their instructional coaching and implementing them in the classroom. Additional feedback on the instructional coaching processes included teachers wanting more time with the coach and to be coached more often, which is consistent with known barriers to the successful implementation of instructional coaching (Kraft et al., 2018).

Next, Hammond and Moore (2018) followed ten teachers from a single school who participated in five instructional coaching sessions aimed at improving the implementation of strategies learned during a PD workshop. The researchers interviewed teachers before and after their coaching to track teacher attitudes and beliefs about the coaching process. Overall, teachers' perceptions of coaching started negatively and ended positively. Participants said that coaching made their teaching practice more effective and boosted confidence in their abilities as educators. They also discussed the importance of building a relationship with their coach. Finally, the participants acknowledged that the instructional coaching process can prove challenging, but teachers must persevere to make effective change in their professional growth.

Similarly, Warnock et al. (2021) interviewed 11 teachers within one high school in the UK after one year of a new instructional coaching program. Teachers identified that the benefits

of instructional coaching were "improved relationships, enhanced practice, awareness, reflectiveness and positive attitude" (p. 333). Teachers claimed that coaching changed their practices, behaviors, and attitudes and, as a result, impacted their professional growth. Once again, these studies are limited by the small sample sizes, focus solely on elementary teachers, and context-specific research that prevents them from being transferred to other contexts.

Further, three doctoral dissertations researching teacher perceptions of the instructional coaching process illustrated both similarities and differences to the peer-reviewed literature. Preciado (2015) interviewed 11 teachers in a Pre-K-8 school in central California to determine teachers' perceptions of the instructional coaching process in their school. Though most teachers reported that instructional coaches had a significant impact on their teaching practice, some claimed that the instructional coaching processes did not make a difference in their teaching. Teachers also were unsure if the instructional coaching process was effective in terms of making a change in student outcomes. Preciado (2015) reported, "Ninety percent of teachers reported that working with an instructional coach has helped improve their practice. While positive, only about 69% of teachers believed that working with a coach directly benefited their students" (p. 90). Teachers also reported that they were initially intimidated by the instructional coaches but later realized the importance of the role in their professional growth. Some veteran teachers articulated that they did not need the help of the instructional coach because they had been teaching for so long. Participants also reported that teachers must form good working relationships with coaches to build trust (Preciado, 2015).

Jasso (2018) found similar results. The author surveyed 116 teachers across six states engaging in PD and instructional coaching to support English language learners in their

classrooms. Five survey participants were willing to be interviewed to shed light on their perceptions of the instructional coaching process. Of the 116 survey participants,

> Ninety-four percent of participants reported that coaching motivates them to try new things in their teaching practice; 92.2% indicated that the knowledge they gain from coaching could immediately be applied to their work; and 84.5% said that coaching motivates them to give their best effort at work. (p. 99)

The teachers articulated that coaching helps to improve instruction, especially when coaches have a consistent presence in the classroom. Respondents emphasized the importance of the hands-on learning that instructional coaching provides. They also acknowledged that forming a relationship with an instructional coach is crucial. When asked if they felt resistant to instructional coaching, none of the teachers interviewed determined that they themselves had felt resistance to the instructional coaching process. However, they identified that they perceived their colleagues as resistant to instructional coaching.

Jacobs et al. (2018) focused on the idea of instructional coaching resistance in their study of 71 middle school teachers who were assigned to an instructional coach to support the implementation of a new reading comprehension program. When asked about the degree to which they were satisfied with the instructional coaching process, 83% of teachers answered "somewhat satisfied" or "satisfied." A handful of teachers resisted the instructional coaching program and illustrated their resistance by refusing to make time for the instructional coach. These teachers also perceived instructional coaching negatively and would not implement coach feedback. Most of these participants had at least ten years of teaching experience, suggesting that there may be a challenge for veteran teachers regarding their perceptions of the instructional coaching process, which is consistent with Walsh et al.'s (2020) findings.

These studies and doctoral dissertations offer a nuanced view of teachers' perceptions regarding instructional coaching processes. Mason's (2007) research demonstrated overwhelming positive feedback from teachers, highlighting the benefits of coaching, such as learning new strategies, immediate feedback, and availability of resources. Similarly, Warnock et al. (2021) and Lasso (2018) found positive teacher attitudes toward coaching, emphasizing the importance of relationships with coaches and hands-on learning experiences. These studies showcased the potential of coaching to motivate teachers, improve instruction, and foster confidence in teachers' teaching practice.

However, the research also illuminated challenges. Hammond and Moore (2018) revealed initial negative perceptions that transformed into positivity, emphasizing the importance of perseverance and relationship-building in the face of coaching challenges. Preciado's (2015) and Jacobs et al.'s (2018) findings highlighted resistance, particularly among veteran teachers, suggesting that experienced educators might perceive coaching differently, indicating the need for tailored approaches depending on individual teachers and school context.

The studies collectively emphasize the importance of positive relationships between teachers and coaches, hands-on learning experiences, and the need for overcoming resistance, particularly among veteran educators. Nevertheless, the studies' limitations, such as small sample sizes and specific contexts, emphasize the necessity for further research to explore these dynamics in diverse settings and with larger participant groups. Additionally, deeper investigations are needed to understand how individual differences, experience levels, and contextual factors influence teachers' perceptions of instructional coaching.

Research Gaps and Summary

The literature reviewed and presented here suggests that high-quality, job-embedded PD, and particularly instructional coaching, can facilitate teacher professional growth. It is also important to articulate the challenges inherent in studying a complex system like instructional coaching and teacher professional development in general. Additionally, gaps in the literature require further study to fully understand the complexities of teacher professional growth and the impact of instructional coaching on teacher professional growth.

The most apparent gap in the literature is the lack of peer-reviewed studies on professional growth, PD, and instructional coaching in independent schools. Although there are many articles on the role of PD in independent schools on the NAIS website, they are not empirical, peer-reviewed studies. Research is needed on how independent school administrators and teachers conceptualize professional growth, how independent schools conceptualize and implement professional development, and how independent schools use instructional coaching to facilitate professional growth.

Another concern is that schools, both public and private, are highly contextual. Thus, any study in a school or district in one setting will not necessarily transfer to another. Public schools operate under varying state, district, and local laws; various organizations govern private schools with different approaches toward teacher development; and independent schools are governed by boards of trustees whose goals are to uphold the missions and values of their schools.

Additionally, the literature demonstrates that coaching programs differ depending on the school, the coach, and the teachers being coached. Results from one context will not necessarily apply to another. However, most of the literature reviewed for the purposes of this study is qualitative, suggesting that generalizability is not the goal. Findings from qualitative research

could potentially be translated from one context to another if contextual factors are similar. Accordingly, case study methodology may be an appropriate methodological approach for learning more about how different school contexts approach PD and, specifically, instructional coaching. Case study methodology could also shed light on the various perspectives of instructional coaching in a single context. Most of the literature discussed in this review shares findings solely from a teacher or coach perspective and does not triangulate interview or survey data by delving into the perspectives of additional stakeholders. By employing case study methodology to study instructional coaching in depth, this study could potentially shed light on how all instructional coaching stakeholders in a single institution see its effectiveness in facilitating teacher professional growth, and not just the teachers being coached.

Finally, studying instructional coaching and its impact on teacher professional growth is challenging because PD is not the only factor that impacts how teachers grow professionally. Teachers could potentially grow naturally in their skills over time through experience without the PD stimulus, which may explain why veteran teachers are more resistant to coaching (Preciado, 2015; Walsh, 2020). Because formal PD-related collaboration helps to facilitate teacher professional growth, it is also possible that teachers will develop their practice from informal, non-PD-related collaboration, which may not be measured as part of a study. Additionally, teachers might engage in reflective practice, proven to impact professional growth, without a formal stimulus, the results of which may not be measured. The limitations illustrate a need for much more research on how all teachers grow professionally and best practices in PD to help them do so. Additionally, scholars need to delve into the perceptions of teachers and coaches on instructional coaching in order to determine how teachers' attitudes toward coaching might affect its effectiveness.

These challenges point to the necessity for further research to unravel the complexities of teacher professional growth and to identify how PD opportunities, and particularly instructional coaching, can facilitate professional growth in the unique landscape of independent schools.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the methodology used for this inquiry. First, I discuss how the research design stemmed from the research questions to address the problem of practice. Second, I justify the use of qualitative survey and case study methods to gather data. Third, I break up my discussion of methodology into the two phases for this study and address sampling, data collection, and data analysis for Phases One and Two. Finally, I address issues related to trustworthiness in this study.

Research Questions

As described in previous chapters, Dreyfus lacks an effective system of teacher professional growth. However, stakeholders in the school have determined that a system of teacher professional growth is necessary to ensure high-quality teaching and learning that aligns with the school's goals. This study investigated how Dreyfus's peer institutions conceptualize and facilitate teacher professional growth. Additionally, because instructional coaching has been proven to be effective in facilitating professional growth for educators, this study explored how stakeholders at one of Dreyfus's peer institutions implement instructional coaching and how they perceive the instructional coaching process. The objectives of this study were to determine how professional growth is conceptualized and facilitated in independent schools, shed light on the instructional coaching process in independent schools, contribute to the body of literature on independent schools, and gather data to make recommendations to Dreyfus about a possible instructional coaching process.

The research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: How do Dreyfus's peer schools conceptualize and facilitate teacher professional growth?

- RQ2: At a peer school that utilizes instructional coaching, how does instructional coaching facilitate teacher professional growth?

  - RQ2a: How do stakeholders at the school conceptualize teacher professional growth?

  - RQ2b: How is instructional coaching implemented at the school?

  - RQ2c: How do stakeholders at the school perceive the instructional coaching process?

Research Design

This study used a two-phase qualitative design, commencing with a brief survey to determine how administrators in Dreyfus's peer schools conceptualize and facilitate teacher professional growth (Phase One). From those findings, a case study site was identified to study instructional coaching in a single independent school in more depth (Phase Two). A visual model of the research design can be found in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

Two-Phase Qualitative Research Design
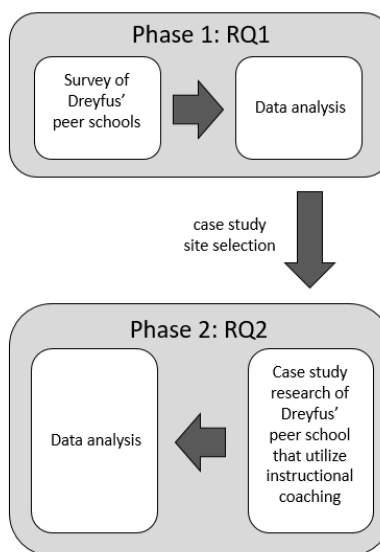
Two-Phase Design

The two-phase design of this study was advantageous as it enabled capitalization of the strengths of two approaches to qualitative research methods, a broad survey and more descriptive case study design. The use of both survey and case study methods was necessary to collect data on the research questions for this study. The data collected illustrated both broad and specific information about the status of professional development, professional growth, and instructional coaching in independent schools.

Phase One: Survey Design

Surveys are "information collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences, and behavior" (Fink, 2017, p. 1). Surveys can be used in a variety of ways for a multitude of purposes but are helpful because they can quickly gather information directly from many people. Surveys require careful planning and testing before they are implemented in order to ensure reliability and validity of results (Fink, 2017). They can also be combined with other types of data collection methods, which is particularly common in research and program evaluation (Fink, 2017). In this study, both survey and case study methods were used to collect data.

By employing a qualitative survey (Appendix D) to gather information about the facilitation of professional growth in independent schools, a surface-level, broad understanding of how Dreyfus's peer institutions approach teacher professional development was obtained. This information was necessary for two reasons. The first is that limited empirical research on the state of professional development and professional growth in independent schools exists. The second is that by surveying Dreyfus's peer schools I was able to identify schools that employ

instructional coaching to facilitate teacher professional growth and select a site for the case study component of this inquiry project.

Phase Two: Qualitative Case Study Design

Case studies are a common qualitative research approach (Priya, 2021). According to Cresswell (2014),

> Case Studies are a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. (p. 241)

All case studies (descriptive, exploratory, explanatory) involve detailed research of a particular phenomenon within the constraints of its context (Priya, 2021). Descriptive case studies seek to describe a phenomenon in detail (Yin, 2014). By using descriptive case study methodology for this study, enough data was gathered to provide detailed, comprehensive insight into the state of instructional coaching at one of Dreyfus's peer schools. A descriptive case study approach also provided data from a variety of stakeholders which aimed to support triangulation through the ability to cross-check information from varying perspectives and experiences.

Qualitative interviews uncover the meaning structures that people use to make sense of their worlds (Hatch, 2002). According to Hatch (2002), "these meaning structures are often hidden from direct observation and taken for granted by participants, and qualitative interview techniques offer tools for bringing these meanings to the surface" (p. 92). Conducting semi-structured interviews with the administrator in charge of the instructional coaching process, instructional coaches, and coached teachers provided holistic and comprehensive data on the instructional coaching process at one of Dreyfus's peer schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

The section provides an overview of how participants were identified for this study and how data was collected and analyzed while adhering to best practices to promote trustworthiness. I will first discuss the data collection approach for Phase One, including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis, followed by the data collection approach for Phase Two.

Phase One

In this section, I will discuss my approach to data collection for Phase One of this study, which addressed the research question, "How do Dreyfus's peer institutions conceptualize and facilitate teacher professional growth?"

This study used a two-tier sampling design for participants due to its two phases. The sample for Phase One consisted of Dreyfus's 59 peer schools, which are college-preparatory independent schools located in the Mid-Atlantic region (District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia) with at least 500 enrolled students.

Sampling and Participants

This study used non-probability, purposive sampling of Dreyfus's peer schools to determine a participant pool for Phase One. Much like colleges and universities, independent schools identify their peer schools through a variety of metrics. According to the Director of Admissions at Dreyfus, these metrics can be academic, such as schools that have a similar percentage of students who matriculate to four-year colleges and universities or schools whose students have similar scores on standardized tests like the ACT or SAT (personal communication, October 25, 2023). Independent schools can consider peer schools through an athletic lens, as students in independent schools play each other in sports in predetermined leagues (personal communication, October 25, 2023). Schools can also be considered peer

schools because they are in the same geographic location, have similar missions, or have similar tuition rates or endowments (personal communication, October 25, 2023). In order to determine Dreyfus's peer schools for the purposes of this study, the following steps were taken. A visual summary of these steps can be found in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2

Selection Process for Dreyfus's Peer Schools
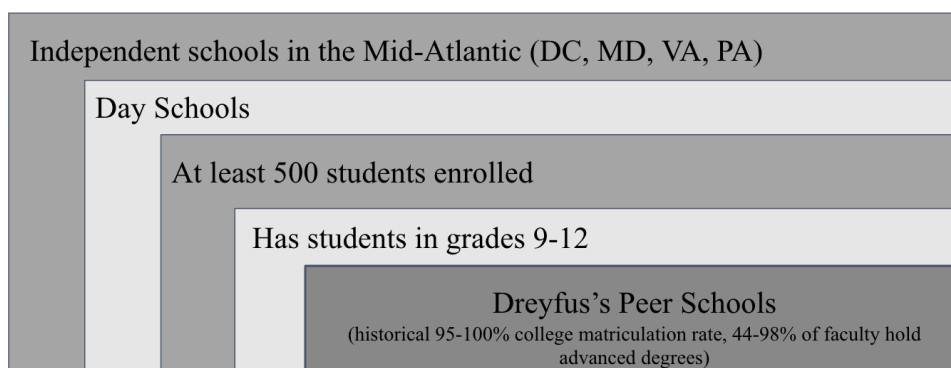
The Director of Admissions at Dreyfus provided a list of peer schools from an admissions perspective. These are schools that are in direct competition with Dreyfus for enrollment. The Director of Admissions listed 11 schools that are within 10 miles of Dreyfus, each of which is an independent, college-preparatory day school with over 500 students enrolled in grades Pre-K-12 or 3-12, 100% of whom historically attend college after graduation. These schools also have similar teacher populations to Dreyfus, with 68-85% of teachers holding advanced degrees, and similar educational approaches according to their published missions. Because the 10-mile designation is simply for admissions and enrollment purposes, the search was expanded to institutions in the greater mid-Atlantic area in order to gain a more robust sample, using Dreyfus's peer school metrics to fuel the search (independent, college-preparatory, day, over 500 students enrolled).

The NAIS online "Find a School" function (Find a School, 2023) provided a list of day schools with over 500 students enrolled, including those in grades 9-12, in the mid-Atlantic area. Boarding schools were excluded while day schools were included because the cultural differences between the two are significant (Martin et al., 2014), although there is no empirical research on the differences between teacher professional development or growth opportunities at the two types of schools. This search returned 59 schools, including the 11 schools that had already been designated as peer schools for Dreyfus. Of the 48 remaining schools, all have between 95-100% college matriculation rates, with 44-98% of teachers holding advanced degrees. These 59 schools served as Dreyfus's peer institutions for the purpose of this study.

The survey for Phase One was sent to the person in charge of conducting teacher PD at their institution, which included a variety of Academic Deans, Deans of Faculty, Assistant Heads and Associate Heads of School, or other related positions. Participant emails were found on the schools' websites.

The UVA IRB-SBS requires that researchers gain informed consent from human participants in research studies. Participants selected for this survey were informed of the purpose of the survey and how data that they provided was going to be collected, analyzed, and kept confidential. Pseudonyms were used in the findings and discussion of this survey to protect identifiable information. The study information sheet for the survey in Phase One of this project can be found in Appendix E, which was sent to participants through email as part of the survey.

Data Collection

After IRB approval for this study was granted, the survey for Phase One was emailed (see Phase One Recruitment Email in Appendix F) through Qualtrics to the appropriate administrators for all 59 of Dreyfus's peer schools. After one week, a follow-up email was sent to non-

respondents. After three additional days, one final email was sent to non-respondents. The survey was then closed for data collection. Of the 59 schools selected for the sample, 17 school administrators responded for a response rate of 29%.

Although the data cannot be de-identified due to its use for case study site selection, all raw data collected from the survey remained confidential and accessible only by me. This is further explained in the Phase One Study Information Sheet for this project (Appendix E) and in the data management plan (Appendix G).

Instrumentation

Phase One of this study commenced with the implementation of the Teacher Professional Development and Growth Survey for Independent Schools (Appendix D) in order to address the first research question, "How do Dreyfus's peer institutions conceptualize and facilitate teacher professional growth?" According to Fink (2017), "surveys are data collection methods used to obtain information from and about people" (p. 6). Ideally, surveys are informed by existing surveys in the research literature (Fink, 2017). However, because there is limited empirical research regarding independent school teacher professional development and growth, no existing surveys were appropriate for this inquiry project. Below, I describe how I created the Teacher Professional Development and Growth Survey for Independent Schools (Appendix D).

The process began with a review of existing literature on teacher professional development and growth. This step helped to understand the key concepts of teacher professional development and growth to inform the survey questions, including the list of possible professional development activities and the characteristics of high-quality PD.

Careful consideration was given to the wording of questions to ensure clarity and avoid bias. The inclusion of closed-ended questions allowed for efficient completion of the survey.

Closed-ended questions are also often more reliable than other types of questions because of the uniform data that they gather (Fink, 2017). Closed-ended questions with clear response categories were included to enhance reliability and to quantify responses, allowing for surface-level descriptive statistical analysis and comparison.

Open-ended questions were included to allow participants to express their thoughts freely, providing rich qualitative data. Open-ended questions provided opportunities for respondents to express opinions (Fink, 2017). A pilot test was completed by Dreyfus's Academic Dean to identify any ambiguities, confusing questions, issues with the survey flow, and survey timing, as is a best practice in survey methodology in order to improve reliability and validity (Fink, 2017). Feedback from the pilot test was used to refine the survey further.

In summary, the survey questions were crafted in a way that they were directly related to the objectives of understanding how administrators at independent schools conceptualize teacher professional growth and facilitate teacher professional development. Data collected from this survey directly addressed the first research question.

Data Analysis

The purpose of survey data analysis is to describe and interpret respondents' survey answers (Fink, 2017). To analyze the data collected on Qualtrics by the Teacher Professional Development and Growth in Independent Schools Survey (Appendix D), descriptive statistics were used to summarize the responses. Discussing the frequency of responses to questions 3.1A (types of PD opportunities) and 3.2 (fidelity to characteristics of high-quality PD) aided in determining the general landscape of PD opportunities that exist to facilitate professional growth in independent schools.

In order to help situate these PD opportunities in their local context, open-ended

qualitative questions also appeared on the survey. Questions 2 (conceptualization of professional

growth), 3.1 (explanation of impact of PD on professional growth), and 4 (any additional

information) required more in-depth qualitative data analysis. Content analysis is "a method of

analyzing qualitative data for the purpose of drawing inferences about the meaning of recorded

information such as the open-ended responses and comments made by survey respondents"

(Fink, 2017, p. 152).

To analyze the data, a system of coding and categorizing to label individual and

collective pieces of qualitative data from the survey, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2015)

and Saldana (2016), was employed. Using the existing literature and the theoretical and

conceptual frameworks in addition to the research questions, *a priori* codes were developed prior

to data analysis to help guide understanding of the survey data. An example of an *a priori* code

for this phase was "desired outcomes," to code any data that illustrated the administrator's

description of the desired outcomes of the professional growth process in their institutions.

Several emergent codes were created to address concepts that the *a priori* codes were unable to

categorize. For example, the code "PG setup" emerged from the data to illustrate how the

professional growth process within a school was facilitated. Although this is not a specific

question that was asked in the survey, several administrators discussed the framework or timing

of their professional growth and professional development approaches, illustrating a need for

emergent codes to describe the data.

After coding, codes were then grouped together to illustrate themes that emerged from

the data. For example, the codes "collaboration," to describe when administrators discussed

examples of teacher collaboration or teamwork, and "community," to code respondents' use of

the word "community," were grouped to illustrate the theme of community building within the data. This theme is described in more detail in Finding 1b in Chapter 4.

These codes and their related data were kept in in an organized codebook (Appendix H).The coding process will be described in more detail in the section on data analysis for Phase Two, which discusses data analysis for the data collected from interviews. The coding approach to qualitative data, including the grouping of codes to illustrate themes within the data, was the same for both phases of this study.

Phase Two

In this section, I discuss the approach to data collection, including sampling, collection, instrumentation, and analysis, for Phase Two of this study. This phase used descriptive case study methodology to address the research questions:

- RQ2: At a peer school that utilizes instructional coaching, how does instructional coaching facilitate teacher professional growth?
  - RQ2a: How do stakeholders the school conceptualize teacher professional growth?
  - RQ2b: How is instructional coaching implemented at the school?
  - RQ2c: How do stakeholders at the school perceive the instructional coaching process?

Sampling and Participants

Sampling for Phase Two was a two-tier process that encompassed the selection of a case study site and participants within that site.

Choosing A Site for Case Study. Data gathered from Phase One allowed for the purposive, information-oriented sampling of schools in Phase Two to determine a suitable site

for case study research. Because the aim of case study research is not to generalize to a broader population but to engage in intensive research in one or multiple cases bounded by space and time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017), the selection of a case depends on the goals of the study. One of the aims of this study was to collect data to provide recommendations to Dreyfus to inform its system of teacher professional growth, so the site and participants for the case study needed to align with Dreyfus's characteristics as much as possible to provide a representative sample.

The survey that was administered to Dreyfus's peer schools asked whether the schools use instructional coaching to facilitate teacher professional growth. From those schools that identified use of an instructional coaching process, one school site was chosen to study the implementation of the instructional coaching system. The school site, Cooper Academy, was chosen due to its similarities to Dreyfus. Like Dreyfus, Cooper has three school divisions (Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools). Instructional coaching is a significant programmatic undertaking, and teachers across grade levels benefit from its implementation. Because Dreyfus has three divisions, it was logical to choose another institution with three divisions in order to ensure alignment based on the grade levels that teachers teach.

Cooper also has a student-to-teacher ratio of 8:1, which mirrors Dreyfus's student-to-teacher ratio of 7:1. The use of this selection criterion helped to ensure that the teachers at the identified case site have a similar teaching experience to teachers at Dreyfus in terms of number of students and classroom experience, which can impact instruction.

Additionally, approximately 80% of Cooper's teachers hold advanced degrees, compared to approximately 85% of Dreyfus's teachers. It is helpful to study another context where the

distribution of advanced degrees is similar to help ensure that the teacher population is similarly educated.

Description of Case Study Site. Cooper Academy is a kindergarten through 12th grade, college-preparatory day school in a major metropolitan area in the Mid-Atlantic. Approximately 1,000 students, 40% of whom identify as students of color, are enrolled across the school's three divisions. There are about 230 full-time faculty members at Cooper, approximately 80% of whom hold advanced degrees. Cooper Academy is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools.

As is the case with all independent schools, Cooper has a specific mission that guides its approach to teaching and learning. In order to protect Cooper's confidentiality, the mission is paraphrased below (as reported in the philosophy section of the school's website):

Cooper Academy values the uniqueness and dignity of every person in its community. The school commits to offering a nurturing learning environment where educators stimulate the cognitive, imaginative, and physical capacities of students while encouraging integrity and empathy. Cooper inspires students to be curious, ask questions, and develop independence, establishing the groundwork for a perpetual passion for learning.

Cooper's focus on valuing the unique individual and building empathy within its community illustrates the school's commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The emphasis of individual dignity and mutual respect is central to fostering a culture where every student feels valued and empowered. One of Cooper's core values as an institution is the integration of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work into its teaching and learning processes (as reported on the DEI section of the school's website).

DEI at Cooper has been an important aspect of school life since the school's founding in the mid-20th century. According to the school's website, Cooper prides itself on being a pioneering institution in terms of its dedication to social justice and is recognized as a national leader in diversity education. All school stakeholders are expected to engage in social justice and DEI work and actively live out the mission of the school. As part of that expectation, teachers are expected to design and deliver an equitable curriculum that honors the identities of every student.

Choosing Participants Within a Site. After selecting Cooper Academy as the site for this case study inquiry, I met over Zoom with the Assistant Head of Teaching and Learning, Dana (pseudonym). In that meeting, the study aims and design (as discussed in the Phase Two Study Information Sheet, found in Appendix I) as well as the rationale for site selection were reviewed. I answered questions that Dana put forth, and permission to study Cooper Academy was granted (see IRB permission form in Appendix J). After, I emailed the four instructional coaches using the Phase Two Recruitment Email (Appendix K) to invite them to participate in this study and again included the Phase Two Study Information Sheet. Three of the four instructional coaches (two Upper School instructional coaches and one Middle School instructional coach) gave their consent to participate.

To maintain the confidentiality of teacher participants, Dana emailed Cooper Academy's 230 teachers using the Phase Two Recruitment Email (Appendix K) to ask if they would be willing to participate in the study. This email also included the Phase Two Study Information Sheet (Appendix I) to provide information on this inquiry project for interested participants. Three teachers, two Middle School and one Upper School, emailed me to give their consent to participate in the study. A summary of interview participants can be found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Interview Participants

Participant Role	Division	Name (pseudonym)	Education and/or Coaching Experience (years)	Amount of time at Cooper Academy (years)
Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning	Lower, Middle, Upper	Dana	1-5 years in current job	5-10
Full-time instructional coach	Upper	Chris	30-40 teaching 1-5 coaching	1-5
Part-time instructional coach	Upper	Kai	20-30 teaching 1-5 coaching	20-30
Full-time instructional coach	Middle	Jamie	1-5 coaching	5-10
Coached teacher	Upper	Sam	40-50	40-50
Coached teacher / Department Chair	Middle	Jordan	5-10	1-5
Coached teacher	Middle	Billy	20-30	10-20

Note. Years of teaching experience and years at Cooper are expressed as ranges to protect the confidentiality of participants. Overall years of teaching experience were not provided by Dana or Jamie.

Data Collection

The method for data collection for Phase Two included interviews with multiple stakeholders. Interviews with an administrator, instructional coaches, and coached teachers lasted approximately 45 minutes. Recorded interviews took place on Zoom due to its ease of use, cost-effectiveness, and data management and security tools (Archibald et al., 2019).

In order to more deeply understand the instructional coaching process at Cooper and to support data triangulation, I had hoped to gain access to documentation about the professional growth process and the instructional coaching program at Cooper. This decision was motivated by the recognition that documents could provide invaluable objective insight into school policies and processes. However, documentation of the professional growth and instructional coaching processes at Cooper does not exist at the current time. The endeavor to document these school processes is currently being undertaken by school administrators but has not yet resulted in tangible information that could be utilized for research purposes.

Instrumentation

In order to gather data to address the research questions, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews Cooper stakeholders.

Interview Protocol. Formal, semi-structured interview protocols, adapted from best practices described by Jacob and Fergurson (2012), were developed to gather data on the instructional coaching process. There are three different interview protocols, one for each group of stakeholders: Administrators (Appendix L), instructional coaches (Appendix M), and coached teachers (Appendix N).

The Assistant Head of School for Teaching and Learning, Dana, was interviewed in order to gain insight into the organizational or systemic perspective on instructional coaching. Three instructional coaches at the school (Chris, Kai, and Jamie) were also interviewed, as they are at the forefront of the instructional coaching process and were able to provide valuable insight into the implementation of the process and its impact on teacher professional growth. The conceptual framework for this study suggests that instructional coaches impact teacher practice and

professional growth through the instructional coaching process. Thus, their input was valuable to better understanding the process as a whole.

Three coached teachers were also interviewed (Sam, Billy, and Jordan). By interviewing coached teachers, firsthand insight into the experiences of instructional coaching and professional growth was gained. Gathering insight from teachers who have engaged in the instructional coaching process provided clarity on the implementation of coaching strategies and offered concrete examples of how coaching has influenced their professional practice.

Semi-structured interviews are well-suited to case study methodology due to their planned but flexible nature (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). This interview format is effective in regard to delving deeply into participants' experiences and perspectives. Interview questions asked participants how they define teacher professional growth, how the instructional coaching process is implemented, and how it facilitates teacher professional growth. Responses to these questions addressed the research questions.

A robust interview protocol was created to ensure the comprehensive exploration of the research questions, including the conceptualization of teacher professional growth, implementation of the instructional coaching process, and stakeholder perceptions of instructional coaching. Interview questions were derived from the research questions, the literature reviewed for the study, and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study, consistent with best practices in qualitative interviews (Jacob & Fergurson, 2012). Open-ended questions were crafted to encourage participants to reflect deeply on their ideas, experiences, and perceptions to address the research questions (Jacob & Fergurson, 2012). Interview questions were semi-structured, including both structured and unplanned elements (Hatch, 2002), to address each research question explicitly while allowing participants the opportunity to elaborate

on their thoughts through probing and follow-up questions. Relevance of responses was ensured

by carefully considering the wording of the questions and adjusting the language to align with

the participants' varying roles.

Throughout the question development process, efforts were made to mitigate bias.

Questions were phrased in a way that did not lead participants toward specific responses,

allowing for diverse opinions and experiences to emerge. The question design was mindful of

potential biases and ensured that the interview protocol facilitated an unbiased exploration of

instructional coaching through each participant's unique perspective and school context.

Additionally, a standardized opening and closing script was included in the interview protocol

(Jacob & Fergurson, 2012).

Data Analysis

In the section below, I describe how I engaged in the analysis of the qualitative data that I

collected during this study. A visual representation of data analysis can be found in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3

Approach to Data Analysis
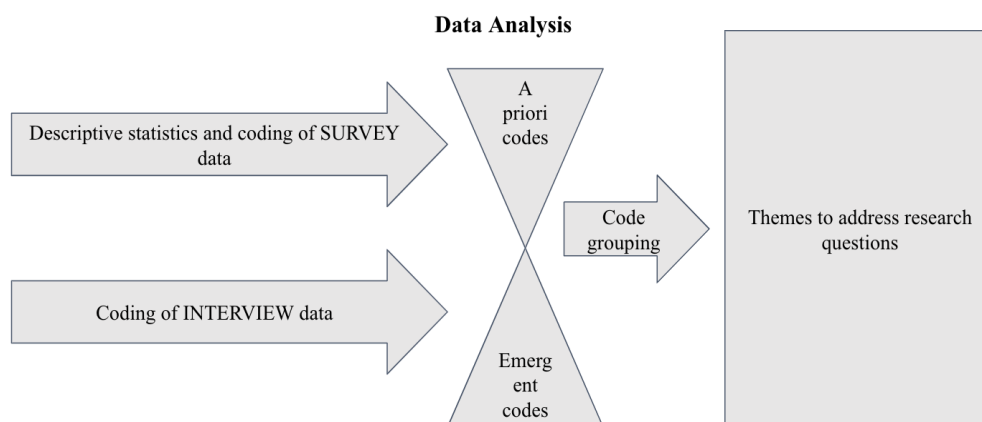
A priori codes. Before collecting data, a set of deductive, *a priori* codes was developed (Appendix H). These *a priori* codes drew upon the research questions, literature review, theoretical foundations, and conceptual framework (Bazeley, 2013). The creation of *a priori* codes ensured that the analysis of the data aligned with the aims of this study (Bazeley, 2013). As the data was coded, these *a priori* codes served as a foundation for the organization of the data. *A priori* codes were mostly descriptive in nature in order to generate an overview of what was talked about in the interview data set and how frequently concepts were discussed (Saldana, 2016). Examples of *a priori* codes were "Individual Conceptualize," to describe how individual stakeholders conceptualize teacher professional growth, "IC Impact," to describe how teachers perceive the impact of the instructional coaching process on their teaching practice, and "IC PG," to describe examples of how instructional coaching has led to teacher professional growth.

Emergent codes. As the data gathered from interviews was coded it became necessary to create a set of inductive, emergent codes in order to encapsulate ideas in the data that the *a priori* codes did not address. Emergent codes were both In Vivo in nature, such as "Non-eval," to describe when a participant discussed the non-evaluative nature of the instructional coaching

process, and process codes, such as "Relationship-building," to describe when an interview participant discussed the role of relationship-building in the instructional coaching process.

Codebook. Both the deductive *a priori* and inductive emergent codes are identified in a codebook, which includes definitions of the codes, examples, and inclusionary and exclusionary criteria (Appendix H).

Coding Procedures. The coding process for the interview data was multi-layered. Initially, the raw data from the interviews was transcribed word for word and then systematically organized into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. This organization involved placing each segment of transcribed data into its own Excel row, ensuring accessibility for the coding process.

The first round of data analysis involved applying the inductive, *a priori* codes, which were predetermined. These initial codes served as the foundation for identifying preliminary themes and patterns within the data. Each relevant data segment was coded with an *a priori* code, if applicable. While coding, it became clear that additional inductive codes were needed to label the data. Emergent codes were developed based on the data set and used to code the data in a second round of coding. One additional third round of coding, using both *a priori* and emergent codes, was necessary to fully capture the nuances and complexities of the data and ensure that the codes accurately represented the meaning of the interview data.

Following the coding rounds, the analysis process focused on refining and categorizing the codes into themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences and perspectives. According to Saldana (2016), themes are statements that identify what units of data mean or what they are about and are used to organize the data into findings.

This theming stage of analysis involved careful examination of the coded data to identify connections and patterns that could be woven into a coherent narrative about interview participants' conceptualizations of professional growth, experiences of the implementation of the instructional coaching process, and perceptions of the instructional coaching process. Finally, the emergent themes were used to structure the findings section of the study, with direct quotes from the interviews serving as evidence to support the themes.

Reflective Memos

Keeping reflective memos is an instrumental part of the qualitative data collection and analysis process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). While collecting and analyzing data, researchers should write memos capturing "reflections, tentative themes, hunches, ideas, and things to pursue" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 196), as well as anything the researcher might want to follow up on. Researchers should also record decisions that they make about coding and ideas they have about coding in consistent reflective memos as they go through the coding process (Bazeley, 2013). These memos should describe the coding process and note any important information about codes and coding (Bazeley, 2013). Reflective memos were kept throughout the process of data collection and analysis to record thoughts and reactions. An example of a reflective memo can be found in Appendix O.

Data Management

The UVA IRB-SBS requires that researchers gain informed consent from human participants in research studies. Participants selected for this survey were informed of the purpose of the survey and how data that they provided was be collected, analyzed, and kept confidential through Study Information Sheets for both Phase One (Appendix E) and Phase Two (Appendix I) of this study. Additionally, I began each participant interview by reviewing the

purpose of the study, explaining that participants could end the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question, and also gained verbal consent from each participant.

Limitations

Although measures were taken to encourage the trustworthiness of the findings of this study, there were limitations in terms of research design and data collection.

First, this study was limited by its sample in both research phases. The sample for Phase One only included independent schools in the Mid-Atlantic region that were identified as Dreyfus's peer institutions. Because independent schools are so unique, findings from a peer school may not be directly transferable to the context at Dreyfus. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling may introduce bias into the sample. Finally, the metrics through which Dreyfus's peer institutions were selected were based on location, school size, college matriculation rate, and teacher education, which may not relate to the school's approach to teacher professional development and growth. Additionally, of the 59 school administrators who received the survey, only 17 completed it, for a response rate of 29%. Although according to Fink (2017), a response rate of 30% is statistically viable, a higher rate of survey completion would have lent more credibility to the findings of this study.

For Phase Two, the selection of Cooper Academy as the case study site was purposive, and schools similar to Dreyfus may not represent the full diversity of instructional coaching programs in independent schools. Additionally, the number of participants in Phase Two of this study was limited to three instructional coaches, three teachers, and one administrator, all of whom volunteered to participate in the study. This small sample size may present challenges with transferability of findings. A larger and more diverse participant pool in Phase Two could have offered a broader perspective on the conceptualization of professional growth and

implementation of instructional coaching at Cooper. Students, parents, and non-coached teachers were also not interviewed for this study, which means data was not collected on the full possible range of perspectives.

Next, the survey instrument used in Phase One of this study required participants to self-report data about their institutions. Self-reported data can easily be influenced by social desirability bias, or the desire of the participant to feel pro-social (Brenner & DeLamater, 2016). Brenner and DeLamater explained, "Because these behaviors are valued and widely seen as good—for the individual, his or her community, or society—they are claimed on surveys even when the respondent's behavior does not support such claims" (p. 333). Therefore, it is possible that school administrators could have provided misleading, overly positive, or inaccurate responses on the survey, portraying their schools as engaging in more PD activities than they actually are. Ideally, school documents for each institution would have been analyzed to triangulate the survey data to enhance credibility and validity (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017), but the time constraints of this project did not allow for that method of data collection.

There are also limitations regarding data collection in Phase Two. Although steps were taken to triangulate interview data through interviewing stakeholders with multiple perspectives on the instructional coaching process, analyzing documents and conducting observations of coaching sessions may have provided richer data on the instructional coaching process as it would not be self-reported by participants. However, due to time constraints observations were not possible and documentation of the instructional coaching process did not exist.

Finally, this study was limited by its timing. Phase One was limited by its one-time approach to data collection. The PD activities in which independent school teachers participate may differ between or within years. Just because a school currently engages in a particular type

of professional development does not mean that those PD opportunities will continue or that they have or have not impacted professional growth in the past. Ideally, the survey would have been administered at multiple points in time, but again, due to the time constraints of this project, the survey was only administered once. Additionally, stakeholders in Phase Two would ideally have been interviewed more than once and at various points in time. This would have allowed for richer data but was not possible due to time constraints.

Ethical Considerations

Many steps were taken throughout the conceptualization and implementation of this study to ensure appropriate treatment of ethical considerations. First, participants in both Phase One and Phase Two were provided with detailed informed consent information. Participants were informed about the purpose and design of the study, including how their data was used, and were informed that participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Additionally, all participants and the school site for case study were given pseudonyms to protect the identities of those involved. Finally, I managed the data such that it was securely stored and de-identified (see Appendix G for data management plan).

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, it is assumed that the researcher will subjectively engage with the research process due to the characteristics of the design approach (Creswell, 2014). In order to identify how that subjectivity may impact research findings, researchers should address their positionality (Creswell, 2014).

In my 11 years of teaching, eight of which have been at Dreyfus, I have always been someone who consistently engages in professional growth, which I define as ongoing, long-term change in teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices that leads to desired outcomes. Given how

dynamic and fleeting changes in educational best practices can be, I believe that teachers should

be continuous, lifelong learners. It is important for educators to grow our practice as research-

backed approaches to education change.

I also believe that educators must engage in this growth as it is defined by the institutions

in which we teach. Schools, and particularly independent schools due to their unique nature, are

highly contextual, diverse institutions. Administrators in schools approach teaching practice,

professional development, and professional growth in a variety of ways, depending on the

mission and goals of the institution. Administrators expect teachers to engage in professional

development and growth in order to best serve the student population with which they work.

Because of my interest in this topic, I was asked to be a founding member of the Teacher

Professional Growth and Evaluation Committee at Dreyfus. The purpose of the committee is to

create a process of teacher professional growth at Dreyfus and, eventually, a system of

evaluation to ensure that teachers engage in the process of teacher professional growth. Joining

this committee was the catalyst for my interest in how other independent schools approach

professional development and professional growth. There is a significant lack of empirical

literature on this topic, which led to the conceptualization of this study. I wanted to know more

about how independent school stakeholders conceptualize teacher professional growth and what

professional development strategies schools use to facilitate teacher professional growth. The

findings of this study provide recommendations for how Dreyfus could approach this work and

also contribute to the body of empirical research on independent schools, which is significantly

lacking.

Some qualitative researchers run into issues of power and privilege with their study

participants if they conduct their study in a local context that is familiar to them. Although I am

quite familiar with independent schools, which may have influenced my understanding of participants in this study and the institutions in which they work, I do not work at the same schools as my participants. Thus, I did not encounter any roadblocks regarding inherent power dynamics in this study.

However, my inclination was to view this work through a lens that prioritizes the importance of educators being continuous, lifelong learners, especially in an environment where teachers are not consistently held to a standard of high-quality teaching. This perspective may have influenced the selection of data sources and the interpretation of findings and informed the analysis process for this study. While there is no way for me to completely remove myself, my experiences, and my biases from this study given its qualitative nature, I took steps to mitigate any bias that may have been introduced.

Trustworthiness

Given the researcher positionality discussed above, steps were taken to address trustworthiness throughout this study. Below, I discuss issues related to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

In this section, I discuss how I approached trustworthiness to ensure the findings of this study were credible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define credibility as confidence in the "truth" of the findings.

Triangulation. In order to establish credibility, I attempted to triangulate the data that I collected. There are four types of triangulation: multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple researchers, and multiple theories to confirm findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I

used multiple methods to address the research questions by collecting both survey and interview data, some of which overlapped. Although I was unable to collect and analyze documents for this study, I did interview multiple participants in the instructional coaching process, including an administrator, three coaches, and three coached teachers, in order to compare and cross-check the data. This ensured that the findings came from multiple sources, which enhances their credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Member Checking. Member checking ensures that participants agree with the researcher's interpretations of their responses (Stalh & King, 2020). Although I did not engage in traditional member checking through follow-up interviews due to time constraints, I did share the findings of this inquiry with all interview participants, none of whom shared questions, concerns, or feedback.

Transferability

Although qualitative research is not generalizable, findings from one context may be relevant to another (Stahl & King, 2020). By including thick description of the research context, participants, and methodology that I used to collect data, I provided opportunities for application to other circumstances. A detailed discussion of methodology, including data collection, helped to provide for the transferability of findings (Stahl & King, 2020).

Dependability

Dependability is the idea that study findings are consistent and could be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to do that, I maintained detailed records of my steps for data collection and analysis and any decisions I made while completing this study. I also maintained consistency in my approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation, which enhances the dependability of my research.

Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that it is necessary for the researcher to articulate to what extent the findings of a study are shaped by the participants and not researcher bias. The researcher positionality statement reflects my reflexive approach to this research and identifies how my personal experiences and biases may have impacted the research process. I kept track of these biases and interpretations of data in the reflective memos discussed earlier in this chapter.

Chapter Summary

This chapter opened with a discussion of the methods and research questions for this study. I discussed why a qualitative design, using both a survey and qualitative interviews to collect data to address the research questions, is an appropriate research design for this inquiry project. I also discussed the limitations inherent in that design. Finally, I addressed my positionality as the researcher and how I maintained trustworthiness and rigor despite possible biases. The next chapter will discuss the findings of this research.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this two-phase qualitative inquiry was twofold. First, this study sought to determine how administrators at Dreyfus's peer schools conceptualized professional growth and what professional development strategies they used to facilitate teachers' professional growth. Second, this study explored the implementation of the instructional coaching process at one of Dreyfus's peer schools, Cooper Academy, and how the process may have facilitated teachers' professional growth in the context of a single institution. This chapter uses data and subsequent analysis from a survey, stakeholder interviews, and documents to address the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do Dreyfus's peer schools conceptualize and facilitate teacher professional growth?

- RQ2: At a peer school that utilizes instructional coaching, how does instructional coaching facilitate teacher professional growth?

  - RQ2a: How do stakeholders at the school conceptualize teacher professional growth?

  - RQ2b: How is instructional coaching implemented at the school?

  - RQ2c: How do stakeholders at the school perceive the instructional coaching process?

The findings in this chapter are organized according to the research questions. First, I describe the findings from Phase One of this study, which used the Teacher Professional Development and Growth Survey for Independent Schools (Appendix D) to collect data on how Dreyfus's peer schools facilitated teacher professional growth. Then, I articulate findings from Phase Two of

this study, which employed semi-structured interviews at Cooper Academy to explore how the school's instructional coaching program facilitated teacher professional growth.

<center>**Phase One Findings**</center>

To address the first research question, I relied upon participant responses to the survey sent to administrators at Dreyfus's peer schools, as defined in Chapters 1 and 3. In the following section I share evidence to support four key findings related to the conceptualization and facilitation of professional growth at these independent schools. A visual summary of these findings can be found in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1

Visual Model of Phase One Findings
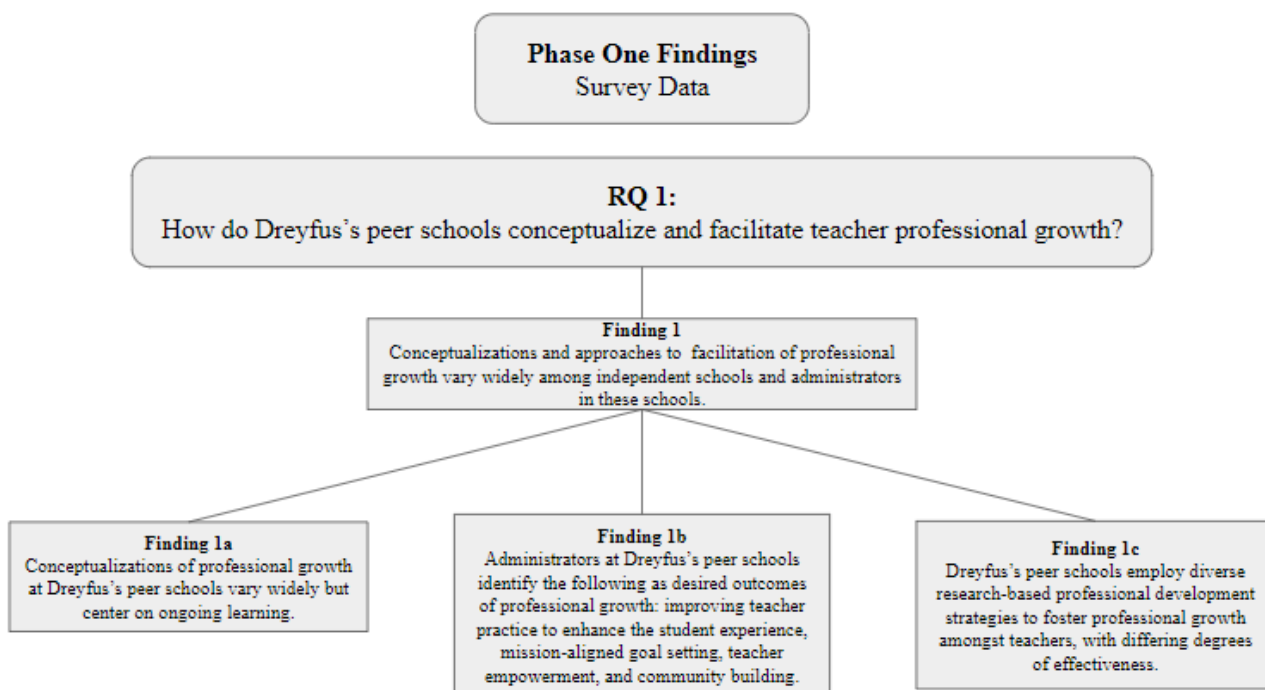
Finding 1: Conceptualizations and approaches to facilitation of professional growth vary widely among independent schools and administrators in these schools.

Data collected in Phase One illustrated high variability in Dreyfus's peer schools' approaches to teacher professional growth, both in terms of conceptualization and facilitation. As outlined in Chapter 1, each independent school represents a unique context, and this uniqueness is reflected in the diversity of approaches to professional growth. Independent schools are diverse institutions run by boards of trustees whose job is to ensure the schools live out their unique missions and visions. Because there are no overarching governing bodies for these schools, their missions can vary widely, leading to significant differences in how independent school stakeholders approach the organization of teaching and learning. Consequently, the findings from the survey data were diverse in nature and signified that there was a lack of coherence among independent school stakeholders in how they conceptualized and facilitated teacher professional growth and professional development. This variability was evident in all findings presented throughout this section and constituted a major theme in the survey data.

Despite the variability in responses, several themes emerged from the open-ended qualitative responses on the survey. Overall, these themes illustrated survey respondents' focus on teacher professional growth and development within their school contexts. First, the responses showed the strong emphasis on ongoing learning that existed within these independent schools, which underscored the necessity of continuous professional growth and development to enhance teaching effectiveness. Second, the theme of mission-aligned goal setting emerged from the data, reflecting an effort by school stakeholders to ensure that teachers work toward the school's institutional priorities within the professional growth process. Third, community building emerged as an important theme, highlighting the importance of community and collaboration in

each school's approach to teacher professional growth. Fourth, the theme of teacher empowerment was illustrated in the data, emphasizing administrators' understanding of the importance of providing teachers with both the support and autonomy necessary for their professional growth. Each of these themes is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Finding 1a: Conceptualizations of professional growth at Dreyfus's peer schools vary widely but center on ongoing learning.

The first question of the administered survey asked administrators in charge of the professional growth process at their school to discuss how they conceptualized professional growth (PG) in their context. The results suggested that the participants interpreted the question in different ways, as seen in Table 4.1. Of the respondents, 29% articulated clear definitions of PG, 47% described their school's programmatic approach to PG, and 24% described the content of the professional development (PD) on which their PG structure is based if there was one.

Table 4.1

Administrators' Conceptualizations of Professional Growth

Conceptualization of Professional Growth	# of Respondents (n = 17)
PG as ongoing learning	5
PG as programmatic approaches	7
PG as PD Content	5

Ongoing Learning

A theme of lifelong learning emerged from the five responses that defined professional growth. One respondent defined PG as "ongoing learning to refine one's practice and pedagogy," which suggested that PG must be sustained over time throughout a teacher's career and should center refinement in teaching practice as its desired outcome. Similarly, another respondent identified that PG means "continuing to evolve and develop throughout your career." Although this conceptualization of PG mirrored the idea of lifelong learning, it did not define what the

desired outcomes of PG were. Finally, a third definition, "a teacher who grows professionally at our school is an individual who sees themself as a lifelong learner," also discussed lifelong learning but emphasized the role of the individual's conceptualization of themselves as lifelong learners, as opposed to the lifelong development of their practice. Collectively, these participants highlighted that ongoing learning and development is central to conceptualizing professional growth.

Facilitation of Professional Growth

Respondents who conceptualized professional growth as how PG was facilitated in their school context articulated this idea in various ways. Respondents described formal growth and evaluation processes, professional development funding information, documentation that describes high-quality teaching in their institutions, and teacher goal-setting processes. The data suggested that regardless of how school stakeholders conceptualized teacher professional growth, that growth was facilitated in a variety of ways. Additionally, respondents who articulated the content of their school's PD shed light on how teachers can grow their professional practice by engaging in professional development on DEI and "teaching and learning." These ideas are discussed in more depth in the section of this chapter on the desired outcomes of the professional growth process.

The Role of Students

Interestingly, only two responses mentioned students. One respondent articulated that they conceptualized professional growth as "each teacher journeying toward their fullest potential as an educator, eventually creating the best learning outcomes for our students." Another described professional growth as "the conscious journey of teachers to provide a better and more meaningful learning experience for our students." Both ideas emphasized a

conceptualization of teacher PG as it related to the eventual goal of improving the learning experience for students. However, they differed slightly in their approach, with one response centering student learning outcomes and the other discussing the overall student experience.

Overall, the data revealed a common thread of ongoing learning within school administrators' conceptualizations of professional growth. This theme was enhanced by an articulation of the diverse approaches to facilitating professional growth within independent schools, which for some, was ultimately aimed at improving the student learning experience.

Finding 1b: Administrators at Dreyfus's peer schools identify the following as desired outcomes of professional growth: improving teacher practice to enhance the student experience, mission-aligned goal setting, teacher empowerment, and community building.

It is essential to define the desired outcomes of the professional growth process at each school in order to better understand how administrators in Dreyfus's peer schools conceptualized professional growth. Several themes emerged when participants were asked to describe the desired outcomes, or goals, of professional growth in their institutions. Table 4.2 summarizes the desired outcomes the respondents articulated, organized by theme.

Table 4.2

Administrators' Desired Outcomes of Professional Growth

Desired Outcomes of Professional Growth	# of Respondents (n = 17)
Advancing teaching practice to improve the student experience	9
Teacher growth through alignment with the school's missions and goals	8
Teacher empowerment	5
Community building	3

Improving Teacher Practice

According to Dreyfus's peer school administrators, the primary aim of professional growth was to improve teachers' skills and practices to positively impact the learning experience

for students. Respondents articulated this idea in a variety of ways, all centered on enhanced teaching and learning. One respondent expressed that a desired outcome of teacher PG at their school was to "allow teachers to advance in their teaching craft, thereby engaging students and creating positive learning outcomes for students." This response articulated a clear connection between teacher PG and student learning outcomes. Another respondent communicated a similar idea, saying that the desired outcome of teacher PG was "doing a better job meeting the needs of students, improving assessment to be focused on the whole child while assessing knowledge gained from lessons." While the second response discussed improving a teacher's understanding and implementation of assessment in particular, the first was broader. A third respondent described the desired outcome of teacher PG as "cultivating an awareness of current best practices." Although the respondent did not mention student learning outcomes in particular, best practices in education are such because they help students learn effectively. Together, these quotes build the narrative of teacher professional growth as a pathway to enhanced student success.

Mission-Aligned Goal Setting

Survey respondents also identified the desired outcome of teacher growth as alignment with the school's mission and goals. However, none of the respondents articulated in detail what those goals were. One respondent discussed the need for teachers to "support the growth of our entire school initiatives," which suggested that collective growth is an important desired outcome of the professional growth process. This idea was echoed by a second respondent, who wrote that the goal of PG is to "set goals that benefit the 'strategic growth' of the school." The use of the word "strategic" signaled an emphasis on moving the entire school's teaching community forward in a way that aligned with the school's strategic plan or mission.

Additionally, two respondents discussed specific documents or frameworks that outline professional growth goals, describing the desired outcomes of PG as encompassing "our Long Term Transfer Goals" and "our school-wide Definition of Excellent Teaching document." These responses implied that some schools have specific frameworks that elucidate targeted desired outcomes of professional growth for teachers. About half of respondents articulated that mission-aligned goal setting was integral to the professional growth process. However, it was unclear if respondents meant that mission-aligned goal-setting was a desired outcome of the professional growth process or an essential part of the process that ideally leads to professional growth.

Teacher Empowerment

Additionally, the theme of teacher empowerment as a desired outcome of professional growth appeared in five of the responses. One respondent articulated that school stakeholders "want our teachers to feel connected and empowered to do the work they want to do," which relates to allowing educators the autonomy to explore their passions while staying connected to the broader school community. Another expressed that a desired outcome of PG was to "use the principles of self-determination theory to unlock the intrinsic motivation of every educator." Self-determination theory posits that individuals have innate needs for autonomy, competence, and community and that if those needs are fulfilled, individuals can achieve well-being and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Thus, this respondent suggested that a goal of their school's PG process is to ensure that teachers have autonomy over their practice, specifically as it relates to a teacher's motivation and sense of community. Finally, a third respondent articulated that their institution's desired outcome for teacher PG is "increased joy and enthusiasm for the work we do together." Job satisfaction has been shown to be a factor in teacher empowerment (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2005), and enthusiastic and happy employees

tend to be more satisfied with their jobs (Lopez et al., 2023). Thus, increased joy and enthusiasm could potentially lead to a sense of teacher empowerment. Together, these responses illustrated a potential link between professional growth and teacher empowerment.

Community-Building

Finally, the theme of community-building emerged from the data. Respondents identified that the professional growth process should lead to a "more inclusive and equitable community," "build a collaborative community," and enhance "teamwork within the structure of the school experience." These survey responses underscored the desired outcome of teamwork and collaboration among teachers. Additionally, an administrator's articulation of a "more inclusive and equitable community" as a desired outcome of the PG process suggested that teachers must strive to ensure that all community members were valued and felt a sense of belonging. Although only these three respondents conveyed this theme in response to this particular question, data from other questions suggests that community building, specifically through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work, was a desired outcome of PG for at least four other schools.

In summary, administrators at Dreyfus's peer schools envisioned professional growth as a multifaceted process with varied desired outcomes. These outcomes included advancing teaching practice to enhance the student experience, aligning teacher growth with the school's mission and goals, and empowering teachers to implore their passions while fostering a sense of community and collaboration. Together, these approaches emphasized individual teacher development and also collective progress toward creating an inclusive, equitable, and supportive learning environment.

Finding 1c: Dreyfus's peer schools employ diverse research-based professional development strategies to foster professional growth amongst teachers, with differing degrees of effectiveness.

Additional themes emerged regarding how administrators in Dreyfus's peer schools described the professional development opportunities used in their institutions to facilitate professional growth, as well as administrators' assessment of the impact of those opportunities on teacher professional growth.

Programmatic PD and PG Structures

Because about half of respondents described their school's professional growth and professional development structures when asked how they conceptualize professional growth, it is important to report what respondents articulated about their school's process. Respondents from four schools briefly described formal professional growth systems, including formative evaluations. As discussed above, respondents from eight schools alluded to some kind of goal-setting process related to professional growth at their institution. Respondents also described a variety of structures associated with PD and PG. Examples included the requirement for teachers to go through a formalized professional growth process every five years, built-in time for teacher learning once each week, and a professional growth model that includes goal setting, observations, follow-up meetings, and written feedback. The structures used to facilitate professional growth in these independent schools varied widely but included many types of PD opportunities described in detail below.

PD Choice and Funding

Another theme in the survey responses was the selection and financing of PD opportunities at Dreyfus's peer schools. The schools generally funded PD, and teachers had

access to "sufficient financial resources to support faculty development" or a "robust PD budget." The respondents differed in the ways they discussed how PD opportunities were chosen, with a balance of decisions made solely by the administration and teachers applying for opportunities that the administration approves. Of the seven respondents who discussed how PD was chosen at their institution, 43% identified that administrators make PD decisions for the school. In contrast, 57% described a teacher application process for particular PD opportunities, which required approval by an administrator. These responses suggested that schools offered a balance between individualized and whole-school PD, both of which are important for a teacher's professional growth.

When administrators make decisions about PD, they can align PD with the school's overarching goals. A top-down approach to PD opportunities might prioritize whole-school development and mission-alignment, but also may come at the expense of a teacher's autonomy. Allowing teachers to apply for specific PD opportunities may support teachers' sense of empowerment and self-determination, but requiring administrative approval ensures that the chosen PD ideally still fits within the school's broader educational goals and desired outcomes for the professional growth process. This dual approach underscores independent schools administrators' understanding that both approaches may be necessary to support teachers' professional growth.

Prevalence of PD Strategies

Survey item 3.1A included a matrix of ten commonly-researched professional development strategies and prompted respondents to identify which were offered at their schools. Then, respondents were asked to identify their understanding of the impact each of these PD strategies has on teacher professional growth at their school, checking "small," "moderate," or

"significant" impact. Finally, participants were offered an opportunity to explain their responses

in written form, which few did. The results are summarized in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Professional Development Strategies Used in Dreyfus's Peer Schools

Type of PD	% of schools that use it	Of schools that use it, % small impact	% Moderate impact	% Significant impact
Guest speakers	94	38	56	6
Online courses/webinars	94	63	31	6
Workshops	88	13	80	7
Conferences	88	20	67	13
Formative evaluation	88	20	33	47
Funds for graduate study or certification/licensure	88	27	20	53
Peer observation	82	14	36	50
Mentoring programs	82	29	43	29
Communities of practice (PLCs, CFGs, etc.)	53	45	33	22
Instructional coaching	47	13	50	37

Impact of Traditional PD. All of Dreyfus's peer schools used an assortment of research-

based professional development strategies to facilitate faculty professional growth, ranging from

traditional PD opportunities, such as guest speakers and conferences, to opportunities aligned

with high-quality, job-embedded PD, such as peer observation. All schools reported offering

both in-house and external professional development opportunities. The two most common types

of PD provided at the schools were guest speakers and online courses or webinars. It is

interesting to note that although almost all schools offered these opportunities, only 6% of

administrators articulated that these PD opportunities significantly impacted teacher professional

growth.

One respondent identified, "Sometimes the type of PD depends on the intention. For

example, we invited a guest speaker to help get faculty excited and motivated for the new school

year ahead, but we didn't necessarily expect that it would impact their teaching in the long term."

Interestingly, this particular administrator conceptualized professional growth on the survey as,

"More effective teaching and learning, a more inclusive and equitable community, addressing

evolving needs of students, personal satisfaction and growth." This discrepancy illustrated the

idea that although a school and its stakeholders may have a vision for PD and its desired

outcomes, sometimes PD opportunities for teachers may not be intentionally chosen to reach

those goals. However, the minimal impact of these types of traditional PD on teacher

professional growth make it challenging to argue for their inclusion as a PD focus at all.

Respondents' characterization of conferences and workshops was similar to that of guest

speakers, webinars, or online courses. Although 88% of the schools offered these types of PD,

their impact on PG was overwhelmingly identified as moderate. One respondent, whose

conceptualization of PG centered on meeting their school's Definition of Excellent Teaching

framework, articulated that "workshops and conferences are an excellent source of learning

about new approaches to education resulting in little to no measurable change on campus," but

did not provide any information on what they think leads to measurable change in their school

community. Interestingly, these four types of PD, generally considered traditional, one-off

approaches to teacher learning, were the most common across the schools but were also seen as

those that have the least significant impact on teacher PG. One administrator wrote,

> We have begun to move away from outside experts, guest speakers, etc, and instead are
>
> focusing more on internal professional growth through peer observations, instructional
>
> coaching, mentoring programs, etc. Those seem to have a more significant impact on
>
> faculty performance.

These responses indicated that at least some of Dreyfus's peer school administrators were thinking about how to best facilitate teachers' professional growth through high-quality, job-embedded PD.

Higher-Impact PD Strategies. The types of PD that respondents identified as having the most significant impact on teacher PG were funds for graduate study or licensure, formative evaluation, and peer observation. Interestingly, these types of PD were those where teachers may likely engage in one-to-one conversations and receive feedback. One participant identified that "it is the one-to-one interaction where discussions can occur that impact practice," and another said, "I find that teachers say that the simple act of talking with other teachers about what they are doing, wondering about, grappling with, can be really informative and enriching." It is possible that engaging in one-to-one conversations with other teachers, administrators, or professors allows teachers to grow their professional practice in a way that is not possible with online courses, guest speakers, conferences, or workshops.

Less Common PD Approaches. Finally, although the vast majority of schools (82% and above) reported using the first eight PD strategies identified in the table, there was a notable drop in how many schools employed communities of practice (53%) and instructional coaching (47%) as methods of PD to facilitate PG. About half of school administrators perceived that communities of practice had a small impact on professional growth, and about half perceived a moderate to significant impact. This raised a question of how communities of practice were structured and how they were implemented across contexts. Finally, of the respondents who said their school used instructional coaching as a method of PD to facilitate PG, 87% articulated that it had a moderate to significant impact on teacher professional growth. This raised a question of why instructional coaching was not more widely used.

Alignment of PD with Research-Based Characteristics

A survey question asked respondents to assess the alignment of their institutions' PD approaches, shown in Table 4.3, with researched-based characteristics of effective PD, as described in Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Desimone and Garet (2015). Survey respondents were given a list of the seven characteristics in Table 4.4. They were asked to respond "yes" or "no" regarding whether their school's PD offerings aligned with the characteristics.

Table 4.4

Alignment of Dreyfus's Peer Schools' PD with Research-Based Characteristics

PD Characteristic	% of schools
Is aligned with mission and goals of the school	100
Provides models of effective practice for teachers	94
Is focused on how students learn content	88
Encourages active learning on behalf of teacher	88
Provides opportunities for feedback and reflection	81
Offers individualized coaching and support	81
Is sustained over time (20-50 hours spent developing a single skill)	25

Although in Table 4.2, only 47% of respondents articulated that mission-aligned teacher professional growth is a desired outcome of the professional growth process, 100% of respondents reported that PD opportunities aligned with the school's mission and goals. Several respondents took the opportunity to expand on their responses in written form. One articulated, "All school PD opportunities are connected to all school goals. Individual PD may also be related to individual goals." Because this respondent did not articulate if individual goals were also aligned with all-school goals, it is unclear if all PD offerings provided in their institution were consistently mission-aligned. Another respondent identified, "We ask teachers to focus on our Long Term Transfer Goals when applying for PD funding or permission to attend a

course/workshop," which suggested that individual PD opportunities in this institution were mission-aligned.

The vast majority of school administrators (81% and above) responded that their PD opportunities were aligned with the provided characteristics of effective PD, which suggested that teachers in these schools have significant opportunities to grow their professional practice. However, without more detailed information surrounding the intricacies of the individual PD programs, it was impossible to know how these PD opportunities were implemented and if they genuinely were aligned with theoretical best practices in teacher professional growth. One item of note in Table 4.2 is that only 25% of respondents identified that their PD opportunities provide 20-50 hours of practice in a particular skill. Of the respondents who identified that their PD opportunities provide sustained engagement, only one articulated how their school approaches scheduling PD in another part of the survey, stating that the school provides built-in time one per week for PD. This raised questions of whether the PD opportunities in which teachers engaged were sustained enough to significantly impact their professional growth and how schools actually managed to provide these opportunities in a sustainable way.

Summary

The findings from Phase One of this study, which describe themes that emerged from survey data, offer a comprehensive overview of the state of professional development and its facilitation of professional growth in a selection of independent schools. The lack of coherence in how teacher professional growth was conceptualized and facilitated in these institutions underscored the unique challenges posed by the diverse missions and structures of independent schools. To better understand how one example of high-quality, job embedded PD impacted

teacher professional growth in a single institution, Phase Two embarked upon a case study of instructional coaching at Cooper Academy. On the Phase One Survey, the Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning at Cooper identified that Cooper used instructional coaching as part of the professional growth process for teachers. Due to its use of instructional coaching and the school's characteristics that align with those of Dreyfus as discussed in Chapter 3 and in the next section, Cooper was chosen as the site for case study for this inquiry.

Phase Two Findings

To address the research questions for Phase Two, data was collected from stakeholders at one of Dreyfus's peer schools, Cooper Academy. Cooper was selected as a case study site for this study as it exhibited similar characteristics to Dreyfus. Cooper Academy is a college-preparatory, independent day school with three divisions, a student to teacher ratio of 8:1, and a faculty advanced degree completion rate of 80%. A thorough description of Cooper can be found in Chapter 3.

Creation and Philosophy of the Instructional Coaching Program at Cooper Academy

Before discussion the findings from Phase Two in detail, it is necessary to discuss the context of instructional coaching at Cooper, including the creation and philosophy of the instructional coaching program. This section also discusses the interview participants for Phase Two of this study. All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the interview participants.

Creation of the Instructional Coaching Program and Coach Interview Participants

The instructional coaching program at Cooper Academy was born out of a grassroots effort by Kai, an Upper School teacher and now part-time Upper School instructional coach, who attended a Jim Knight instructional coaching conference in 2017. Kai was moved by the

potential of instructional coaching to make effective change at Cooper Academy and piloted the program with a few teachers in the Upper School by helping them with lesson planning. According to Dana, the Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning, Cooper Academy's administrators observed that teachers were engaging in "excellent" (interview, February 1, 2024) PD opportunities outside the school but were struggling to implement what they had learned in practice. Chris, an Upper School instructional coach, articulated that the overall goal of bringing coaching to Cooper Academy when they were hired was an "effort to have embedded PD for our teachers" (interview, February 1, 2024).

According to Kai, teachers and coaches believed that the emerging instructional coaching program was helping teachers grow their professional practice. Thus, stakeholders within the school decided to organize the program into a more intentional process. In 2020, three full-time instructional coaches were hired, one for each division of the school, with Kai staying on as a part-time instructional coach. Jamie, the Middle School instructional coach, had already been working at Cooper as a teacher for several years and was hired internally to become an instructional coach, whereas Chris, the additional Upper School coach, was an external hire. Information was not provided on the status of the Lower School coach, nor did school stakeholders provide the instructional coaching job description that was used as a part of the hiring process. The coaches trained with Elena Aguilar's *Bright Morning* coaching consulting company for one year, meeting online monthly to do training and role-plays. Aguilar's transformational coaching model played a significant role in the way coaches at Cooper conceptualized their roles. Each of the coaches mentioned Aguilar's influence in their work, particularly as it related to the relational and emotional aspects of instructional coaching, which is discussed in further detail in later findings.

After training, the four instructional coaches met every other week to discuss the instructional coaching process and work through problems of practice within the context of Cooper Academy. Although the instructional coaching program was in its third year when this study was conducted, coaches explained that they were still figuring out how to run the program. Chris, an Upper School coach, articulated, "it's kind of like a moving target as to what exactly [Cooper Academy's] vision is for this program. Is everyone in line with, you know, what is instructional coaching here at [Cooper]?" (interview, February 1, 2024). This sentiment is discussed in further detail as part of Finding 2.6.

Philosophy of the Instructional Coaching Program

In addition to the creation of the instructional coaching program at Cooper Academy, all three coaches discussed the philosophy behind it. A theme emerged that the goal of coaching at Cooper Academy was to provide a non-evaluative, transformational coaching model that facilitates professional growth through reflective practice, personalized support, and the integration of DEI to be aligned with the mission of the school and create an equitable educational experience for all students. All three coaches used the word "non-evaluative" in their interviews and made it clear that their role as coaches is not to evaluate, supervise, or judge teachers.

Although the philosophy was similar across divisions, the implementation of instructional coaching was different in the Middle and Upper Schools due to the schedule, the needs of the specific teachers, and varying roles that coaches played, all of which is discussed in further detail as part of the findings of this inquiry. Instructional coaching in the Lower School is not discussed as part of these findings, as the Lower School instructional coach was unavailable for interview.

Additional Interview Participants

In addition to the three instructional coaches, the Assistant Head for Teaching and

Learning was interviewed, as well as three coached teachers. Dana, the Assistant Head for

Teaching and Learning, oversaw the instructional coaching program as well as the school's

professional growth and development approaches. When Dana was hired for the Assistant Head

position, they had already been working at Cooper as a teacher for several years. Sam, an Upper

School teacher participant and one of instructional coach Chris's coached teachers, had been

working at Cooper for their entire teaching career. Jordan, a Cooper Middle School teacher for

between 1-5 years, and Billy, who had also worked in the Middle School but for between 10-20

years, were also interviewed for the purposes of this study. Both Middle School teachers were

coached by Jamie, the sole Middle School instructional coach. A visual representation of the

interview participants, as well as their nested coach and coached teacher relationships, can be

found in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2

Visual Representation of Interview Participants
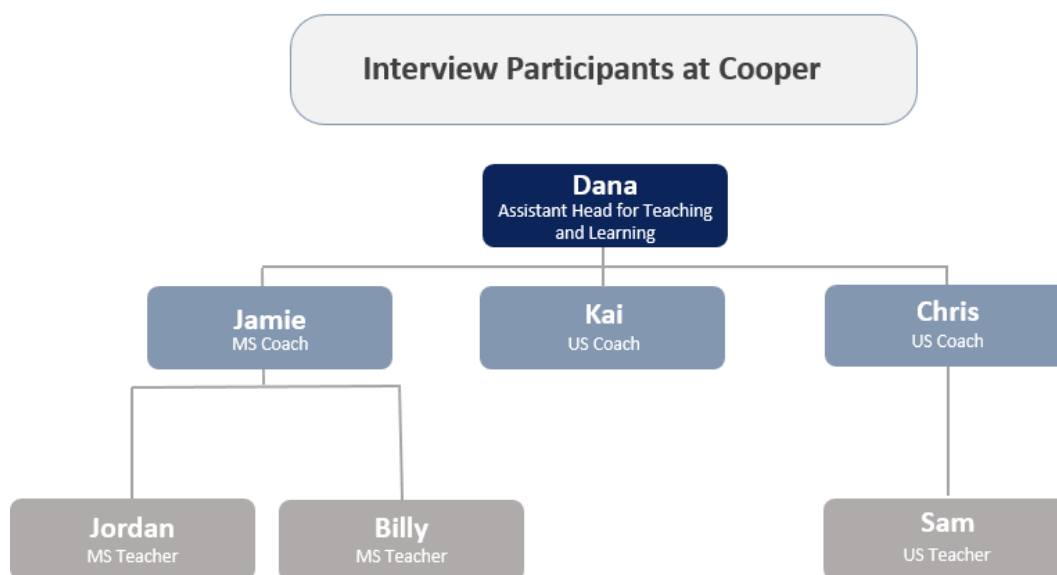
Through semi-structured interviews with the Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning, three instructional coaches, and three teachers, all described in more detail in the next section, data was collected to shed light on the research questions for Phase Two of this inquiry. The overall research question for Phase Two is, "At a peer school that utilizes instructional coaching, how does instructional coaching facilitate teacher professional growth?" To answer this overall question, I present findings across the three sub-questions that illustrate how stakeholders at Cooper Academy conceptualized professional growth, how they implemented the instructional coaching process, and what their perceptions of the instructional coaching process were. A visual model of findings for Phase Two can be found in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3

Visual Model of Phase Two Findings
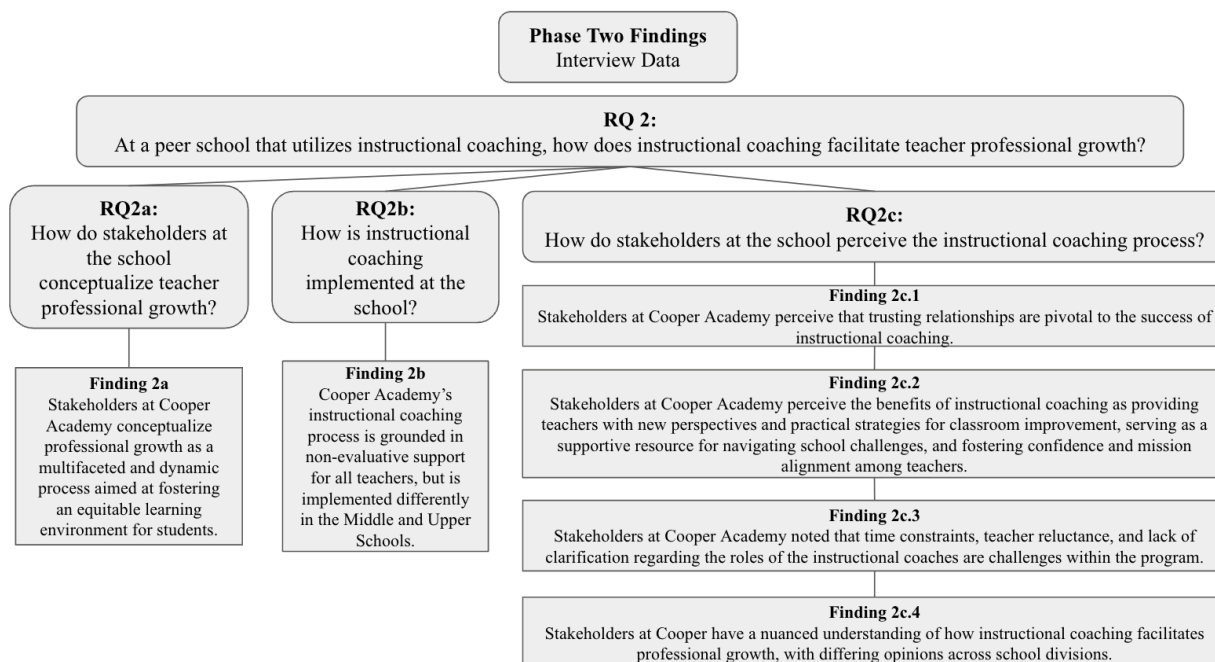
Finding 2a: Stakeholders at Cooper Academy conceptualize professional growth as a multifaceted and dynamic process aimed at fostering an equitable learning environment for students.

The finding for the first research sub question, "RQ2a: How do stakeholders at Dreyfus's peer institution conceptualize teacher professional growth?" mirrors the findings from the survey data. Stakeholders at Cooper Academy had diverse conceptualizations of professional growth, with several underlying themes of ongoing learning and growth, mission alignment, recognizing the impact of one's identity as a teacher, engaging in collaboration and reflective practice, and reaching students. Improving the student experience at Cooper Academy seemed to be the driving force behind, and a significant desired outcome of, the professional growth processes, which was facilitated through a variety of professional development approaches.

Conceptualization of Professional Growth at Cooper Academy

Overall, interview data suggested that the concept of professional growth was important to stakeholders at Cooper Academy. The school's Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning, Dana, articulated the need for teachers to intentionally grow their professional practice in order to be the best teachers possible, much like employees in any other profession. When asked about their view of the role of professional growth for teachers, Dana expressed,

> Why do we keep thinking that for teachers you just need to be smart and good and mission-aligned, and that's gonna get you there? And I'm sort of like, I'm smart. I'm good. I have a heart. I'm not a cardiologist (interview, February 1, 2024).

This quote highlighted Dana's idea that having innate or static knowledge of a profession is not enough to excel in it. It suggested a belief that engaging in intentional and continuous refinement of practice is essential for teachers. As the administrator in charge of the professional growth

process at Cooper, Dana's language about the role of professional growth within the school illustrated that it is an important aspect of Cooper Academy's program.

All Cooper Academy stakeholders emphasized the importance of engaging in ongoing growth and learning to become more effective educators. Chris, an Upper School instructional coach, focused on the need to lean into areas of growth that teachers have identified for themselves. This sentiment was echoed in their belief in the collective capacity for growth and learning through continued, effortful practice. Billy, a Middle School teacher, highlighted educators' role in setting an example for students as lifelong learners. Sam, a veteran Upper School teacher, also articulated this idea by noting that improvement in teaching is a perpetual journey: "I don't think you ever get as good as you'd like to be" (interview, February 8, 2024). Jordan, another Middle School teacher, identified that professional growth is "all about working toward achieving goals, either because it's part of the initiative that the school environment started for educators, or whether that's just a personal goal that you have" (interview, February 9, 2024). These quotes emphasized the collective commitment of Cooper Academy stakeholders to continued professional growth, in particular highlighting the importance of identifying areas for improvement through both personal and institutional goals.

Several stakeholders discussed the role of the school's mission in their conceptualization of professional growth. Kai, an Upper School instructional coach, expressed,

> What professional growth means to me is to have a teacher constantly growing in a way to become more and more deeply aligned with the school's mission, while also moving the mission, you know, forward (interview, February 1, 2024).

Thus, whether it is through goals that are mission-aligned or goals that teachers have set for themselves, stakeholders consistently articulated that professional growth is an important aspect of employee life at Cooper Academy.

Stakeholders also discussed the roles of identity, reflective practice, and collaboration as aspects of how they conceptualize professional growth. Kai discussed the nuances of bringing "our full professional selves into our teaching" (interview, February 1, 2024) and the need for teachers' professional growth to honor who the educator is at their core. They said, "the best growth is the growth where…my rhythms, connective patterns, and habits can stay as they are, and also grow" (interview, February 1, 2024). Chris had a similar idea about honoring an educator's identity in the professional growth process, stating, "it's a unique thing about education is that it is so personal, and so much of our own identity is part of our preferred professional growth" (interview, February 1, 2024). Chris and Kai's quotes illustrated the need for a professional growth process to honor the uniqueness of each educator while simultaneously moving them toward growth. Additionally, stakeholders highlighted the need for teachers to engage in reflective practice as part of professional growth. As teachers grow individually, they also share that learning and growth with their peers. Billy said that professional growth is "about connecting with colleagues and your administrators and learning how to be better" (interview, February 7, 2024). Dana also expressed this idea, articulating, "How does that learning and their reflective practice then help to generate a culture of learning as well. So how are they also in their learning, pushing their colleagues thinking forward?" (interview, February 1, 2024). These discussions underscored a deeply nuanced understanding of professional growth for these educators, transcending the enhancement of teaching skills and intertwining introspection, identity, and community.

Desired Outcomes of Professional Growth at Cooper Academy

At the heart of the approach to growth at Cooper Academy lied care and concern for the students. Interview data revealed that stakeholders at Cooper engaged in professional growth in order to enhance the student experience. The focus on meeting the diverse needs of students, identifying and supporting all students' identities, and ensuring every child has the opportunity to succeed encapsulates the school's mission, which is described in Chapter 3. Chris conceptualized professional growth as "feeling like you're reaching students" (interview, February 1, 2024) and making their experience the best that it can be from "mental health to equity and access to our curriculum" (interview, February 1, 2024). Jamie, Middle School instructional coach, and Kai also echoed this idea, particularly in regard to how the student experience relates to equity. Jamie said,

> Really, it's about student growth. And I mean, like, the whole thing is just like focusing on what the students are doing. Are we meeting their needs? Who's struggling? How are we, how are we helping them? So it really I think, is an equity piece, right, like, offering equity and access to all the kids (interview, January 31, 2024).

This sentiment was echoed by the teachers at Cooper Academy as well. Jordan discussed their understanding that, as teachers at Cooper Academy, their "personal and professional goals kind of center…around equitable education, and I guess, the idea of, like, having an unbiased, equitable, sustainable education" (interview, February 9, 2024). Although none of the participants discussed how they conceptualized equity, it can be inferred from the school's mission statement (as reported in the philosophy section of the school's website) and description of DEI approaches (as reported in the DEI section of the school's website) that stakeholders thought of equity as honoring the unique individuality of every student.

Dana also discussed the role of equity in the educational experience at Cooper Academy but articulated their desired outcomes of the professional growth process in a more concrete, tangible way. Dana described three goals of the professional growth process at Cooper. The first was that teachers should know how to ask questions about their practice and be able to lean into the "inquiry cycle." Second, teachers should have "an extensive toolbox of strategies to support students in becoming independent learners" (interview, February 1, 2024), which centers the learner at the heart of teacher professional growth. Finally, through engaging in reflective practice, Dana would like to see teachers "generate a culture of learning" within the school, though they acknowledged that "that's sort of a cherry on top" (interview, February 1, 2024).

In sum, the approaches to professional growth and its desired outcomes at Cooper Academy centered on prioritizing student well-being and success. Teachers and coaches emphasized the importance of focusing on the student experience, specifically in regard to equity, while Dana outlined specific goals for teacher growth inclusive of these ideas. Overall, these collective efforts aimed to optimize the educational experience for all students at Cooper Academy. One way in which stakeholders attempted to do this is through the instructional coaching process.

Finding 2b: Cooper Academy's instructional coaching process is grounded in non-evaluative support for all teachers, but is implemented differently in the Middle and Upper Schools.

Cooper Academy's instructional coaches shared that the philosophy and goals of the instructional coaching program were the same across the two divisions that were studied, but also articulated that there were significant differences in the way instructional coaching was implemented between the Middle and Upper School divisions. In this section, I present findings

to answer research question 2b, "How is instructional coaching implemented at the school?" I discuss the participants in the instructional coaching process, the timing of the process, and the activities and content involved.

Stakeholders Involved in the Instructional Coaching Process at Cooper Academy

The major stakeholders in the instructional coaching process at Cooper Academy were the instructional coaches and teachers. Although instructional coaches in both divisions stated that they reported back to divisional administrators and the Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning, the information they shared with administrators was solely thematic in nature. Coaches in each division did not share individual concerns about teachers with administrators, citing the need for trust and confidentiality within the instructional coaching process.

Teacher Participation in Middle School Coaching. In the Middle School, one instructional coach worked with about 40 teachers. The process was entirely voluntary due to challenges within the schedule. Because teachers in the Middle School did not have as many free periods as Upper School teachers, individual instructional coaching took place whenever teachers and Jamie, the coach, could find the time. Sometimes, Jamie attended scheduled team planning meetings to help coach a team of teachers. Most often, coaching happened informally, with teachers stopping by the instructional coach's office or the faculty lounge, where Jamie could often be found coaching colleagues.

Jamie noted that although they would have liked to meet with every teacher, there were some "frequent fliers" (interview, January 31, 2024) that took more advantage of instructional coaching than others. Jamie kept a spreadsheet where they noted who had come to them for coaching and why. According to Jamie, there were not any patterns related to who came to them for help and who did not, and they expressed a desire that more teachers take advantage of

instructional coaching. Sometimes, Department Chairs or others with administrative roles suggested that Jamie work with a particular teacher or all teachers on a particular topic, such as the rollout of standards-based grading that occurred in recent years. However, that is rarely the case. Thus, even if instructional coaching helped to facilitate professional growth for teachers in the Middle School, not all teachers took advantage of it.

Teacher Participation in Upper School Coaching. In the Upper School, instructional coaching was mandatory for all teachers and happened on a specific cycle, shown in Figure 4.4. Teachers in their second year at Cooper, fifth year, and every odd year after engaged in formal instructional coaching. Teachers in their fourth year were offered optional instructional coaching. There were two instructional coaches, one full-time (Chris) and one part-time (Kai), for about 65 teachers. The decision to do a full year of coaching with each teacher was intentional. Chris stated, "You get kind of a skewed perspective if you're only working with someone for a semester" (interview, February 1, 2024). When teachers were in an "on" coaching year, they engaged in biweekly 30-minute meetings with their instructional coach.

Figure 4.4

Cooper Academy Upper School Instructional Coaching Cycle
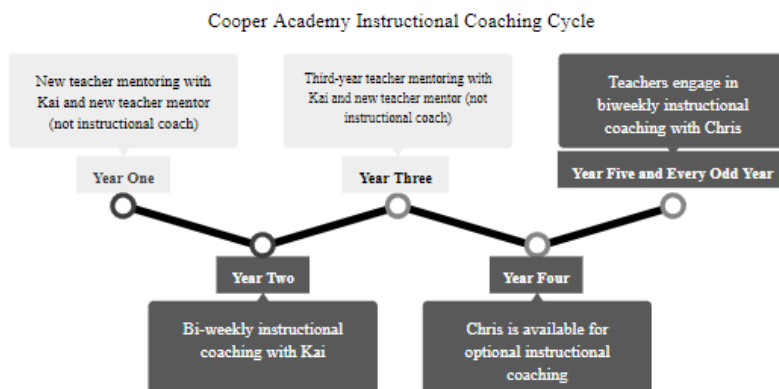
Despite the mandatory nature of instructional coaching meetings, the Upper School coaches found that not all teachers were interested in meeting with them, although there were no specific consequences for teachers' refusal to participate. Chris articulated,

> I definitely felt like I had a handful, at least maybe two handfuls of people that I, I kept, like putting out the invitations, and they were not coming. And, so I didn't know if it was like, "Okay, I've been at this place long enough. I know if I just wait it out, it'll disappear." And that's kind of the sense I had was that like, "Okay, she's gonna stop bugging me eventually" (interview, February 1, 2024).

Thus, a challenge at Cooper lied not just in the logistics of implementing a comprehensive instructional coaching program across divisions but also in fostering a culture where all educators see the value in actively participating in it in order to facilitate professional growth. This challenge is discussed in further detail in Finding 2.5.

Components of Instructional Coaching at Cooper Academy

Several themes emerged from the data regarding the components of instructional coaching in both divisions at Cooper Academy. Coaches and teachers discussed participating in one-to-one meetings, utilizing coaching discussions, engaging in classroom observations, giving and receiving feedback, and specifically in the Middle School, enhancing collaboration through team meetings and peer-to-peer visits to facilitate teachers' professional growth.

One-to-One Meetings. One-to-one meetings took place regularly as a function of instructional coaching in both the Middle and Upper Schools. The Upper School program mandated one-to-one meetings with instructional coaches Kai and Chris, whereas Jamie, the Middle School coach, frequently met one-to-one with teachers when they ask for help. Billy articulated this example: "I mean, I've literally walked out of my class because a kid asked me a

question and I go to look for [Jamie] in the faculty room because I have a quick question about it" (interview, February 7, 2024). Jordan echoed Billy's approach to meeting one-to-one with instructional coach Jamie, illustrating that these meetings were relatively informal.

    Coaching Discussions. In those one-to-one meetings across divisions, various strategies were used to foster reflective practice among teachers, emphasizing dialogue and collaboration. Jamie stated, "I'm a good listener. And I ask a lot of questions" (interview, January 31, 2024), highlighting the important role of the coach in helping teachers learn to be self-reflective. Kai approached their coaching meetings similarly. "I would say it's a mix of asking generative questions and giving suggestions" (interview, February 1, 2024), Kai said. They also emphasized the importance of coaching through a constructivist approach: "We're not being directive. We're walking side by side on the journey with them…and helping them reflect on their own practice." Jamie's method of listening carefully and asking guiding questions and Kai's blend of posing questions and offering specific suggestions illustrated a coaching model that was mostly grounded in teacher self-reflection rather than a more directive approach.

    This approach was echoed by Sam, who described what it was like to engage in conversation with their instructional coach. Sam said their coach,

    Usually would not disagree with me. So [they] kind of helped me engage in my own criticism, you might say, it was [their] sort of her technique. And [they've] got you to sort of analyze how it had gone. But [they] didn't come in and say, 'Well, I thought it was good, except here.' [They] didn't do anything like that (interview, February 8, 2024).

Sam's example illustrates the constructivist and facilitative nature of the coaching at Cooper Academy, while the coaches articulated more of a dialogical model, blending the methods of offering suggestions and leading teachers to engage in self-reflection. By leading teachers

through critical self-reflection on their own practice, coaches underscored the important role that the teacher has in working to address the challenges they bring to coaching. This coaching method also highlighted the roles of personalization and collaboration in the coaching process at Cooper, which gave teachers the opportunity to work alongside a coach in order to grow their professional practice in unique ways suited directly to them.

Occasionally teachers did not want to consider coaches' suggestions. Chris described a time when they offered a targeted suggestion to a teacher, and their response was to say, "No. I can't do that" (interview, February 1, 2024). Chris articulated that you "have to be okay" (interview, February 1, 2024) with that type of response because the purpose of coaching is really about meeting teachers where they are and helping them learn to be reflective practitioners in order to enhance professional growth.

Coaches also took notes during or after these one-to-one conversations to prepare them for the next discussion and to keep clear data about the purpose of the coaching conversations for each teacher. Kai and Chris both articulated that they came to their meetings prepared, having read the notes from the previous session, but also let the teacher direct the conversation depending on what they need at the moment. This approach signified the coaches' understanding that each teacher's professional growth journey is unique.

The essence of these instructional coaching conversations as depicted by these stakeholders underscored a deeply collaborative and constructivist approach. Their assessment of coaching discussions emphasized the important role of dialogue, reflective practice, and meeting teachers where they are, illustrating that coaching at Cooper is not a one-size-fits-all process.

Classroom Observation and Feedback. Classroom observations and subsequent teacher feedback were used at Cooper as part of the instructional coaching process, although

there were differences between divisions. The process of classroom observation across both divisions involved teachers extending invitations for coaches to join their classroom spaces and using data from those observations to support professional growth. Observations were not framed as mandatory and there was a clear emphasis on collaboration and support rather than judgment or evaluation.

Observation and Feedback in Middle School. In Middle School, Jamie tried to observe each teacher once a month. Billy provided an example of how the observation process could work. He said,

> I actually just had my instructional coach in my classroom a couple of days ago. Because there are some things happening in one of my core classes and I wanted just another vantage point. [Jamie's] been an amazing thought partner. [They] came in and observed and we had a nice follow-up conversation (interview, February 7, 2024))

After observation, coaches and teachers sometimes engaged in conversations to debrief what the coach noticed to help the teacher make changes to their practice. Jamie stated that the "debrief session is really where the secret sauce is" (interview, January 31, 2024). If Jamie did not have time for a more formal conversation, they would leave notes of affirmation with positive feedback about what they saw to "build trust and open up the conversation." However, the offer of feedback depended on the individual teacher's comfort level with receiving it. Jamie articulated that coaches "are not here to give [teachers] feedback unless they want to" (interview, January 31, 2024), which demonstrated both the personalized and voluntary nature of coaching in the Middle School.

Observation and Feedback in Upper School. In the Upper School, classroom observations were not as common. Kai tried to observe coached teachers at least once during the

first semester but acknowledged in their interview that they waited for teachers to invite them in, which means that they may not be able to observe everyone. Chris noticed an uptick in the number of invitations they were getting for classroom observations at the end of the first year of instructional coaching. Chris was excited by this, saying "I am happy to provide targeted feedback" after observations (interview, February 1, 2024), suggesting that feedback is also a component of coaching in Upper School.

The classroom observation and feedback component of the instructional coaching process at Cooper, highlighted by Jamie, Kai, and Chris's approaches, reflected voluntary participation and collaboration in the instructional coaching process, although it was approached differently between the two divisions.

Enhancing Collaboration in the Middle School. A theme that emerged solely within the data from Middle School stakeholders was the idea of the instructional coach enhancing teacher collaboration. Interviews with Middle School stakeholders at Cooper highlighted Jamie's role in enhancing collaboration among the teachers. Jamie discussed several examples of meeting with teaching teams to help with both curriculum development and team building. Jamie also attended department meetings and department chair meetings in their capacity as instructional coach. Jordan articulated, "We all feel comfortable having [them] around and just bouncing ideas off of each other in that aspect" (interview, February 9, 2024). Jamie facilitated the creation of a peer-to-peer observation program to help teachers become comfortable with having observers in their classrooms prior to observations by the instructional coach. After these peer observations, teachers convened to share insights and learnings, engaging in reflective discussions about their practices. Jamie said about the peer observation process, "This is really about teacher growth and their own self-reflection, rather than somebody telling them what's

good, and somebody telling them what to do" (interview, January 31, 2024). In their role at Cooper, Jamie facilitated opportunities for teachers to learn from one another, which is a driver of teacher professional growth.

Content of Instructional Coaching at Cooper Academy

Several themes emerged from the data surrounding the content of the instructional coaching process at Cooper. The overarching takeaway was that instructional coaching was personalized to the individual teacher. However, classroom and student management, enhancing curriculum and instruction, mission alignment, and teacher emotional support were the most common topics of discussion in instructional coaching across divisions. Although classroom and student management and mission-alignment are consistent across divisions, there are key differences between the Middle and Upper Schools regarding the instructional coach's role in enhancing curriculum and instruction and providing emotional support for teachers.

Personalization. Instructional coaching in both divisions at Cooper was personalized to the needs and wants of the teacher. Chris identified that the focus of instructional coaching "is really going to be responding to the specific needs of the teacher that's in front of me" (interview, February 1, 2024). They went on to say "We're really starting these conversations with 'What's on your mind?' So it's not like it's top down" (interview, February 1, 2024). This personalized approach to teacher professional growth could help to ensure that teachers use the instructional coaching process for what they need.

A similar approach was taken in the Middle School. Jordan articulated that Jamie was promoted as,

A resource to educators, whether that's for lesson planning, professional growth,

brainstorming ideas on how to, like, implement things in our classroom, whatever it is,

she's our go to, I guess, number one, opportunity available for us (interview, February 9,

2024).

Jordan's quote illustrated that the role of the coach was to help teachers with the unique needs

that they identified. Jamie mirrored this idea, saying that teachers come to them for all sorts of

reasons: "Some teachers just want feedback on a simple task. Others want to dig into a question

of practice" (interview, January 31, 2024). Together, these quotes suggested that instructional

coaching at Cooper was characterized by a teacher-centered approach that was personalized to

the needs of each educator.

      Classroom and Student Management. Instructional coaches and teachers in both

divisions provided many examples of coaches helping teachers with issues of classroom and

student management. Billy shared an anecdote about Jamie making a suggestion for how to set

up the desks in their classroom to help students be better able to see the whiteboard. Chris

offered a story of helping a teacher determine why student engagement was low in one of their

sections. Stakeholders from both divisions explained that much of instructional coaching was not

content-specific, but dealt with more general teaching issues. Chris articulated,

> I would say it's more about…engagement or organization of my class, or, you know,
>
> creating a useful agenda or time management or helping build executive functioning
>
> skills for my students. So it tends to be more outside of the content area or relates to
>
> interpersonal stuff (interview, February 1, 2024).

Billy echoed this idea when they said, "I feel like the stuff [Jamie] has given me hasn't been

subject-specific. Like, it's things that any teacher could use" (interview, February 7, 2024),

talking specifically about common instructional and classroom management strategies. By

offering teachers across departments solutions to common classroom challenges, coaches like Jamie and Chris provided support that was practical and universally applicable, demonstrating that coaching helped all kinds of teachers at Cooper make small, but effective, changes to their practice. These types of changes, when they are ongoing and positively impact student outcomes, exemplify professional growth.

Enhancing Curriculum and Instruction. Another theme that emerged from the interview data was the instructional coach's role in enhancing curriculum and instruction. While Middle School stakeholders emphasized the pivotal role of the instructional coach in refining curriculum development and instructional approaches as aligned with school goals, Upper School stakeholders revealed a less defined focus on content-specific coaching, which raised questions about the purpose and efficacy of coaching in the Upper School context.

Enhancing Curriculum and Instruction in the Middle School. When asked about the content of instructional coaching, Middle School stakeholders identified the role of instructional coaches in helping teachers to develop skills in curriculum development and instructional practice. Jamie and Jordan discussed specific examples of Jamie's work with a science teaching team to help them rewrite a project to incorporate more social justice themes. Jordan acknowledged that they didn't think the team would have been able to do that without Jamie's help. Jordan also discussed an example of a teacher who did not have a teaching team and worked with Jamie on planning for their class: "[They've] worked with [Jamie] on developing projects, developing rubrics. [Jamie] is the ultimate resource to sort of prepare a teacher for any new initiatives that they want to include in the classroom" (interview, February 9, 2024). Jamie provided another example of helping a teacher discern how to develop a student's conceptual understanding of a math problem, which suggested that coaching transcends content areas.

Enhancing Curriculum and Instruction in the Upper School. The approach to enhancing curriculum and instruction through the instructional coaching process was less clear in the Upper School. Chris articulated that teachers sometimes "want to use [instructional coaching] time to reflect on how the last few classes have gone with a new prep" (interview, February 1, 2024), but also acknowledged that coaching "is less content-specific for me because everyone has their department chair and their departments" (interview, February 1, 2024). Although department chairs at Cooper may have been able to help teachers with content-specific issues, they did not act as instructional coaches.

Both Upper School coaches alluded to helping teachers with curriculum and instruction, but Kai clearly stated that lesson planning was not a focus of instructional coaching in the Upper School. When asked, neither coach clearly articulated a specific example of how they helped a teacher with a specific curriculum or instructional problem. Chris discussed helping teachers with classroom organization and student engagement, while Kai provided an example of walking a teacher through how to better align with one of his colleagues on a project. But, when asked to provide a specific instance of how instructional coaching led to a change in a teacher's practice, neither coach provided one. This suggested that coaching instructional and curricular practices were not as significant of a focus in the Upper School.

Mission-alignment. Stakeholders from across divisions articulated the importance of mission alignment in the instructional coaching work that they did, particularly as it related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). As discussed in Chapter 3, DEI as an overall concept is a foundational aspect of Cooper's educational program and is intended to be woven through the work that teachers do to ensure that all students feel seen, heard, and valued in the school community, regardless of their identities. Coaches and teachers emphasized the integral role of

instructional coaching discussions in fulfilling the school's mission and evolving teaching practice to meet the unique needs of students and teachers. Jamie articulated that much of what they think about during instructional coaching is, "Are we living into our mission? And how are we, you know, helping to evolve the programming of the teachers alongside that?" (interview, January 31, 2024). Jordan also expressed this idea: "A big part of our mission is we want kids to learn and learn to change the world. Working with the instructional coach gives us an opportunity to help those kids go out there and do exactly that" (interview, February 9, 2024). Earlier, Jordan discussed an example of how Jamie helped a science team integrate more social justice themes into a particular project. This example illustrated how coaching might help teachers "live into" (interview, January 31, 2024) the mission of the school. The data showed that this emphasis on mission alignment served as a foundational principle in shaping the educational and professional growth environment in the Middle School at Cooper.

Mission alignment was not unique to the Middle School instructional coaching program. Kai, an Upper School instructional coach, identified that coaching "is a place where a lot of DEI work happens" (interview, February 1, 2024) and even said that "every conversation has that in there" (interview, February 1, 2024). Chris articulated that the mission at Cooper "grounds our work with teachers." However neither coach provided specific examples of what these mission-aligned conversations or processes look like in the Upper School.

Overall, the interview data underscored the significance of ongoing conversations and actions centered around DEI, specifically as it related to teachers' professional growth. It highlighted a commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment where all members of the community ideally feel seen, valued, and respected.

Emotional Support in the Upper School. Interviews with Upper School coaches and teachers revealed a theme of emotional support for teachers as a central focus of instructional coaching, which is a key difference between divisions. Although Middle school coach Jamie joked that instructional coaching can be like "teacher therapy" (interview, January 31, 2024), the vast majority of what the instructional coaching process focused on in the Middle School was specifically about teaching and learning. In the Upper School, however, much of the instructional coaching focused on teacher emotional support, including talking about teachers' personal lives and allowing them to vent about whatever is bothering them at school. Chris articulated the reasoning behind this, saying,

> It is important for us to be coaching emotions, and emotions bleed in. You can't contain them. Stuff that's happening in our personal lives frequently impacts our professional lives and so like, allowing for some of the coaching conversation to be about the elderly parent that they're also caring for, you know, a situation with their own child and also steering it back to their professional practice, and also making sure they're getting the support that they need in areas that are not my expertise (interview, February 1, 2024).

Chris also acknowledged that instructional coaches were not therapists, and "towing that line" (interview, February 1, 2024) could be challenging, especially because they wanted to ensure that teachers got the support they needed in all facets of their personal and professional lives.

Kai also discussed the idea of coaches offering teachers emotional support, but through a more school-related lens. Kai articulated that sometimes teachers just wanted to vent, share stories, and feel seen. They said,

> Some teachers really want to use that as a half hour just to talk about their practice,

because who else is going to listen to that, and be like, really supportive and informed

about…not the content necessarily…but about their work? (interview, February 1, 2024)

Additionally, Kai discussed their role as a listening ear for teachers to vent about their work and

the school. "I'm a safe place to do it," they said, "but then you're in an interesting moment where

you've got to support the school" (interview, February 1, 2024). Instructional coaches at Cooper

acted as a bridge between teachers and the school's administration only insofar as they shared

themes from instructional coaching conversations with relevant administrators. In a similar vein,

Sam described their experience with instructional coaching as a place to vent. They said,

> A lot of us are not entirely happy with some of the decisions that [the administration is]
>
> making. And [Chris is] very good at talking about that because [they] sort of seem like
>
> [they're] on our side, so a lot of times I come in and now [they] seem to just almost be
>
> ready to hear what bugs me this week and what's on my mind. And so we don't really talk
>
> as much about teaching, as we do more about the school and…how we're reacting to this
>
> and that (interview, February 8, 2024).

Although using the instructional coaching process as a place to vent could potentially be both

helpful and cathartic, Dana, the Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning, expressed concern

about the content of Upper School instructional coaching. They said,

> My sense is we have a mixed bag of instructional coaches who are actually having
>
> conversations about instruction…some have opened it like 'tell me everything that's
>
> going on with you.' We can get stuck (interview, February 1, 2024).

Dana's articulation of the variability in coaching focus - ranging from instructional to personal

support - highlighted inconsistencies across divisions in the instructional coaching program. This

variability elicited a question of which aspects of the instructional coaching program actually

worked to facilitate teacher professional growth and help teachers align with the mission of the school, and which were simply forms of teacher emotional support.

Stakeholder Perceptions of the Coaching Process

The following sections address research question 2c, "How do stakeholders at Dreyfus's peer school perceive the instructional coaching process?" through four separate findings. First, I discuss the role of relationship-building in the instructional coaching process. Then, I illustrate both the benefits of and the challenges inherent within the process, as described by stakeholders. Finally, I describe the relationship between instructional coaching and teachers' professional growth.

Finding 2c.1: Stakeholders at Cooper Academy perceive that trusting relationships are pivotal to the success of instructional coaching.

A theme that emerged across the interview data was the role of relationship-building in the instructional coaching process at Cooper in both divisions. Data illustrated that coaches worked to establish a foundation of trust with teachers in order to help them understand how instructional coaching could impact their professional growth and to engage them in the instructional coaching process. Jamie, the Middle School instructional coach, articulated that coaches "try to play the long game, to build trust, and you know, go slow to go fast" (interview, January 31, 2024). Jamie's quote suggested that relationship-building is a foundational aspect of coaching at Cooper.

Chris, an Upper School instructional coach, echoed this sentiment when they said, "There's a lot of trust that has to happen when…we are starting conversations with, 'what's on your mind?" (interview, February 1, 2024). Chris had a similar idea to Jamie's suggestion and explained that teachers were more comfortable sharing their inner thoughts with someone whom

they trust. This need for trust was also articulated by Dana when they said, "There has to be trust on multiple ends that the coaches are doing what they need to do to move people along," which suggested that not only did the coaches and coached teachers need to build a level of trust to have a successful coaching relationship but that administrators in charge of the coaching process also needed to trust that the coaches were implementing the instructional coaching program in the way that was envisioned by school stakeholders.

Additionally, the Upper School coaches discussed the emphasis on confidentiality and personalized and relational support in the instructional program. Coaches articulated that they invested time in understanding the unique needs of each teacher, specifically as those needs related to a teacher's identity, and personalizing the coaching experience to them. Coaches also kept the content of what was discussed in coaching meetings confidential to preserve and promote relationship-building with teachers. By prioritizing this type of support for their coached teachers, Upper School instructional coaches may have been able to cultivate a trusting partnership that facilitated teacher professional growth though exploration and reflection.

Curiously, none of the interviewed teachers used the word "trust," or any of its forms, in their interviews. Coached teachers did, however, describe ways in which their interactions with the instructional coaches have led to potentially trusting relationships. Billy articulated that they "couldn't imagine a better person to be their instructional coach" (interview, February 7, 2024) and Jordan expressed that teachers "all just feel comfortable having [them] around" (interview, February 9, 2024). These statements illustrated how teachers and coaches built relationships as the foundation for instructional coaching. Additionally, Sam expressed that they have "gotten a good friend in [Chris]" (interview, February 8, 2024) their instructional coach. Thus, the instructional coach and teacher relationship was built on a potentially unspoken trust that

fostered a supportive and collaborative environment, which may have contributed to the development of professional growth.

Finding 2c.2: Stakeholders at Cooper Academy perceive the benefits of instructional coaching as providing teachers with new perspectives and practical strategies for classroom improvement, serving as a supportive resource for navigating school challenges, and fostering confidence and mission alignment among teachers.

Overall, the findings from interviews illustrated a positive view of instructional coaching at Cooper. Both coaches and teachers described numerous benefits of instructional coaching, although differences again emerged depending on stakeholders' division. In the Middle School, stakeholders identified the benefit of new perspectives and practical strategies for classroom improvement. In both divisions, stakeholders discussed that benefits of the instructional coaching process included supportive resources for navigating school challenges and fostering confidence and mission alignment among teachers. Because several of these themes have been outlined in other sections of this chapter, the explanation below will focus on how stakeholders articulated these concepts as beneficial to their practice.

New Perspectives and Practical Strategies for Classroom Improvement in the Middle School. During their interview, Jamie shared a story about suggesting a strategy to a teacher for improving a student's comprehension of a math concept. According to Jamie, the teacher said as part of that one-to-one discussion, "Oh my gosh, you've opened up my mind to all these different, new ways of thinking!" (interview, January 31, 2024). This example illustrated that one of the benefits of instructional coaching was helping teachers gain a new perspective on their teaching practice. Billy relayed a similar story about instructional coach Jamie's impact on their teaching practice, stating that after Jamie suggested they gather more

feedback from students about their teaching, a student's comment prompted Billy to change the color of the marker they used when they wrote on the whiteboard to help the student to read more clearly. Thus, instructional coaching allowed for coaches to offer targeted ideas for teachers to make small, impactful changes in their classrooms to enhance the student learning experience.

A Supportive Resource for Navigating School Challenges. Coaches and teachers across divisions shared examples of ways instructional coaches helped teachers navigate challenges within the school setting. Sam described at length how Chris was a listening ear for their worries about changes being made at Cooper. Kai echoed this sentiment and described multiple conversations they had with teachers to help them better understand school culture. Billy and Jordan discussed the rollout of standards-based grading at Cooper and Jamie was instrumental in assisting teachers in adapting their teaching methods to accommodate this change. Overall, data showed that instructional coaches played a role in helping teachers process and adjust to challenges within school life at Cooper.

Fostering Confidence and Mission Alignment Among Teachers. Additionally, multiple stakeholders shared how instructional coaches helped teachers develop confidence in their teaching and enact practices aligned with Cooper's mission. Chris identified that a benefit of instructional coaching was the confidence built amongst teachers as they went through the process. Jordan noticed this as well, saying that "confidence is the main result" (interview, February 9, 2024) of instructional coaching. Although other stakeholders did not specifically discuss confidence as a benefit of instructional coaching, they did share examples of how working with an instructional coach led teachers to feel empowered in their practice.

Finally, stakeholders across divisions discussed the role of instructional coaches in fostering mission alignment among teachers. Jordan articulated that having Jamie as part of the Middle School team was been "influential in helping us develop goals that meet the mission of the school" (interview, February 9, 2024). Jamie expressed that part of their coaching job is "pushing our mission to keep equity and access for our students' learning at the center" (interview, January 31, 2024). Kai expressed that instructional coaching helped teachers "grow closer and more deeply connected" (interview, February 1, 2024) to the mission of the school. Finally, Dana expressed that instructional coaching has impacted teachers' practice by helping them to be more in line with Cooper's mission, which, in Dana's assessment, positively impacts the student experience.

Interview data illustrated that instructional coaching at Cooper helped empower teachers in their practice by building confidence and also played a role in ensuring teachers' practice was mission-aligned, potentially enhancing the overall educational experience for students.

Finding 2c.3: Stakeholders at Cooper Academy noted that time constraints, teacher reluctance, and lack of clarification regarding the roles of the instructional coaches are challenges within the instructional coaching program.

Despite the benefits of instructional coaching articulated by stakeholders at Cooper Academy, the data suggested there are challenges within the instructional coaching process that differed by division.

Time Constraints in the Middle School. The data highlighted the logistical challenges of the instructional coaching role, particularly in the Middle School. Although all coaches described not having enough time in the schedule to accomplish what they wanted to in regard to coaching, Jamie in particular articulated that the lack of dedicated time to meet with teachers

inhibited the coaching process. Jamie also stated that there was a need to be "delightfully pushy" (interview, January 31, 2024) and assertive with teachers to ensure that time was made for instructional coaching. A related challenge was that Jamie often got "pulled into so many other things" (interview, February 9, 2024) such as leading Department Chair meetings, working with the student support team, or even subbing classes. The teachers that Jamie coached also noticed this, as both articulated that a challenge of the instructional coaching program was that the coach simply did not have time due to the additional job responsibilities placed on them, which, according to Billy, "diminishes [Jamie's] role as the instructional coach" (interview, February 7, 2024). These data highlighted logistical hurdles faced by Middle School stakeholders when it came to having time for instructional coaching.

Teacher Reluctance Across Divisions. The perceived reluctance of some teachers to participate in the instructional coaching process was another theme that emerged from the data. Jamie expressed concern that teachers in the Middle School did not understand the purpose of instructional coaching, which may have inhibited the process and make teachers reluctant to engage. Billy noted that they "have colleagues that are happy, quite happy, teaching in a silo" (interview, February 7, 2024) and went on to articulate that those teachers may not understand how Jamie can support their practice. This sentiment was echoed by Jordan, who said that some teachers did not use Jamie's instructional coaching expertise because it is not required and "if something's not required, people are just not going to do it" (interview, February 9, 2024). Additionally, Jordan conveyed a belief that some teachers are reluctant to change, and thus did not take advantage of instructional coaching. Dana mirrored this idea, saying " if something doesn't feel familiar, we resist" (interview, February 1, 2024). Kai told an anecdote of consistently reaching out through email to offer coaching to teachers, but never receiving a

response. Together, these quotes and examples illustrated a theme of teacher hesitancy toward embracing instructional coaching, underscored by a lack of understanding of its purpose and value.

Instructional Coaching Role and Program Clarity Across Divisions. Stakeholders across divisions at Cooper agreed that for teachers to have an understanding of what instructional coaches do, coaches' roles needed to be clarified. Role clarification may help teachers to understand that the coaching process is meant to be non-evaluative. When discussing their roles the three instructional coaches emphasized that they do not serve as therapists. However, the data indicated that a significant portion of Upper School instructional coaching revolved more around addressing emotional aspects rather than focusing on instructional practices. Dana expressed concern that some coaches functioned more like human resources representatives instead of transforming coached teachers' practices, which was not Cooper's goal for instructional coaching.

Finally, the data revealed a sense of uncertainty about the instructional coaching program's direction and goals. Dana articulated that one of their goals was to pull together documentation about instructional coaching and Cooper's professional growth process to have a more holistic understanding of what is happening and what can be improved. Chris articulated that Cooper's vision for the instructional coaching program is a "moving target" and wondered if "everyone is in line with what is instructional coaching here at [Cooper]" (interview, February 1, 2024). Billy furthered this idea sharing that it's been challenging to get traction with the instructional coaching program because of a general lack of awareness of its goals. These insights highlighted a need for clarity and alignment regarding the role of instructional coaches and the objectives of the instructional coaching program.

Finding 2c.4: Stakeholders at Cooper have a nuanced understanding of how instructional coaching facilitates professional growth, with differing opinions across school divisions.

The last finding that emerged from interview data is that stakeholders at Cooper had a variety of ideas regarding how instructional coaching facilitated teacher professional growth in their school context. Some participants had trouble identifying or articulating a connection between instructional coaching and professional growth. There were differences between the stakeholder groups (coaches, coached teachers, and the administrator) and between divisions.

Instructional Coaching and Professional Growth in Middle School. Middle School stakeholders offered clear examples of how instructional coaching facilitated teachers' professional growth at Cooper. Middle School coach Jamie relayed an anecdote about helping a teaching team move from parallel planning to collaborative planning and explained that since the team engaged in coaching, their planning has been much more intentionally collaborative, which exemplifies an ongoing, long-term change in teachers' practices. Jamie also identified that they needed more data on whether teachers were implementing strategies to increase student learning as a result of instructional coaching, which could highlight the connection between instructional coaching, teacher professional growth, and the desired outcome of an enhanced learning experience for students.

Billy articulated that Jamie helped evolve their teaching by introducing them to a specific set of thinking routines. Billy said, "This is just another example of how you can do something for a really long time, and there's still something new to learn" (interview, February 7, 2024). Jordan expressed that instructional coaching at Cooper allowed them to grow their professional practice in ways they could not at their old school. Jordan expressed, "Jamie does a good job of challenging you and supporting you and your development. So I can definitely say who I am

now as an educator was not who I was back then" (interview, February 9, 2024). These data demonstrated that Middle School teachers at Cooper saw a connection between instructional coaching and teachers' professional growth.

Instructional Coaching and Professional Growth in Upper School. Upper School coaches and teachers expressed mixed opinions about the role of instructional coaching in facilitating teachers' professional growth. Kai articulated that they see a sincere connection between the two and shared that they "have teachers come to me like after their second year and say, 'Oh, my God, like I walked in the very first day and had a completely different sense of the kids in my room'" because of the instructional coaching process. On the other hand, Chris did not provide a specific example of how coaching helped to facilitate a teacher's professional growth. Sam expressed that although they had gained a friend in their instructional coach, they did not see instructional coaching as an avenue to enhancing a teacher's professional growth and instead preferred traditional professional development structures such as attending workshops. Thus, for Upper School teachers, it was challenging to determine if and how coaching may facilitate professional growth.

An Administrator's Perspective on Instructional Coaching and Professional Growth. Finally, Dana, Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning, expressed an overall point of view that instructional coaching could potentially help to facilitate teacher professional growth at Cooper, but wasn't doing so yet on a broad scale. Dana articulated that they saw teachers do things differently as a result of instructional coaching, but that the program wasn't yet getting at the "deep layers" (interview, February 1, 2024) of helping teachers be self-reflective about their instructional practices. Dana compared the state of instructional coaching and professional growth at Cooper to a "weighted blanket" (interview, February 1, 2024), suggesting that the

instructional coaching program was providing support to teachers. However, Dana also expressed that "a weighted blanket for the teacher is not moving our students [forward], particularly our students who need us the most" (interview, February 1, 2024). Thus, data suggested that although instructional coaching may have some impact on teacher professional growth, Dana had not yet seen an impact on the enhancement of student learning.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the findings from the survey and case study that allowed me to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do Dreyfus's peer schools conceptualize and facilitate teacher professional growth?

- RQ2: At a peer school that utilizes instructional coaching, how does instructional coaching facilitate teacher professional growth?

    o RQ2a: How do stakeholders at the school conceptualize teacher professional growth?

    o RQ2b: How is instructional coaching implemented at the school?

    o RQ2c: How do stakeholders at the school perceive the instructional coaching process?

Analysis of survey data from 17 of Dreyfus's peer schools in Phase One and interview data from Cooper Academy in Phase Two led me to put forth the following findings:

- Finding 1: Conceptualizations and approaches to facilitation of professional growth vary widely among independent schools and administrators in these schools.

- Finding 1a: Conceptualizations of professional growth at Dreyfus's peer schools vary widely but center on ongoing learning.

- Finding 1b: Administrators at Dreyfus's peer schools identify the following as desired outcomes of professional growth: improving teacher practice to enhance the student experience, mission-aligned goal setting, teacher empowerment, and community building.

- Finding 1c: Dreyfus's peer schools employ diverse research-based professional development strategies to foster professional growth amongst teachers, with differing degrees of effectiveness.

- Finding 2a: Stakeholders at Cooper Academy conceptualize professional growth as a multifaceted and dynamic process aimed at fostering an equitable learning environment for students.

- Finding 2b: Cooper Academy's instructional coaching process is grounded in non-evaluative support for all teachers, but is implemented differently in the Middle and Upper Schools.

- Finding 2c.1: Stakeholders at Cooper Academy perceive that trusting relationships are pivotal to the success of instructional coaching.

- Finding 2c.2: Stakeholders at Cooper Academy perceive the benefits of instructional coaching as providing teachers with new perspectives and practical strategies for classroom improvement, serving as a supportive resource for navigating school challenges, and fostering confidence and mission alignment among teachers.

- Finding 2c.3: Stakeholders at Cooper Academy noted that time constraints, teacher reluctance, and lack of clarification regarding the roles of the instructional coaches are challenges within the program.

- Finding 2c.4: Stakeholders at Cooper have a nuanced understanding of how instructional coaching facilitates professional growth, with differing opinions across school divisions are challenges within the program.

Because the instructional coaching program at Cooper was implemented differently between the Middle and Upper Schools, not all Phase Two findings originated equally from the data collected from each division. Figure 4.5 illustrates the variations between the findings.

Figure 4.5

Visual Model of Findings by School Division
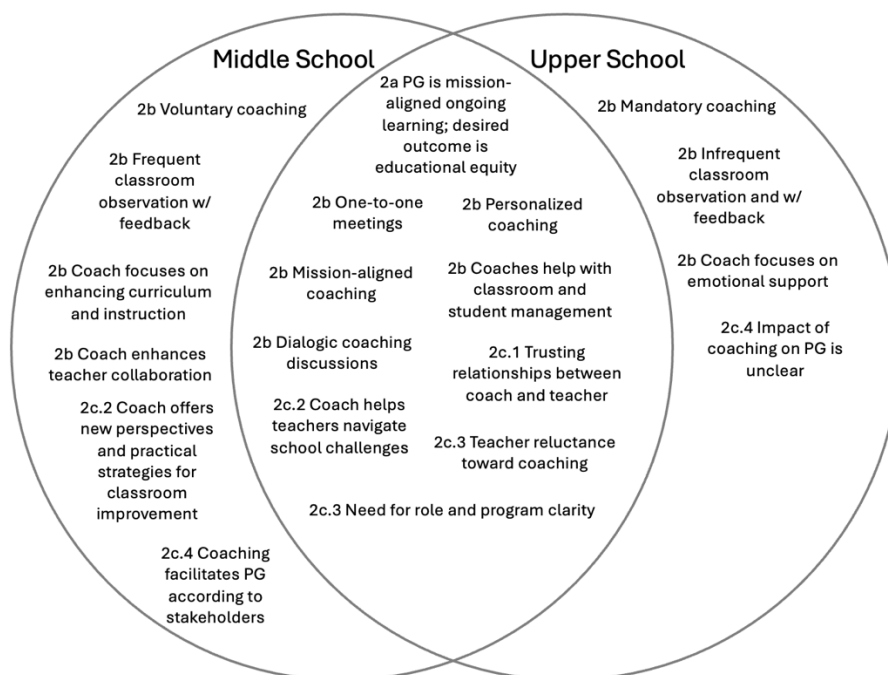
The variations between the Phase Two findings illustrated that instructional coaching as it is defined in the literature - a multifaceted professional development strategy that involves a non-evaluative, collaborative partnership between a knowledgeable instructional expert and a teacher, both committed to shared learning goals designed to enhance instruction and elevate student achievement (Knight, 2006) - existed at Cooper only in the Middle School division. Although there were many shared characteristics between the coaching programs in Cooper's Middle and Upper Schools, the Upper School instructional coaching program did not embody instructional coaching as it is defined in the literature due to its focus on teacher emotional support, as opposed to the enhancement of teacher skills. Thus, the recommendations relating to Phase Two in Chapter 5 stem solely from data gathered from Cooper's Middle School stakeholders, as that division is where research-based instructional coaching was implemented.

In Chapter 5, I discuss my interpretations of the findings and connect them to the literature reviewed for this study, as well as the theoretical foundations and conceptual framework. I will also share the implications of these findings and specific recommendations for The Dreyfus School.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This capstone research project was conducted to address a problem of practice at the

Dreyfus School, a 3-12th grade, college-preparatory independent school in a major metropolitan

area in the Mid-Atlantic. Although research illustrates that high-quality teaching has a significant

impact on student achievement (Berg, 2010; Daley & Kim, 2010; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Quinn,

2014; Roberston-Kraft & Zhang, 2018) and that teachers can improve their teaching quality by

engaging in professional growth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Guskey, 2002a; Muir et al.,

2021; Yoon et al., 2007), the Dreyfus school does not currently have a programmatic approach to

facilitating teacher professional growth. By developing a transparent system of teacher

professional growth focused on facilitating high-quality teaching, administrators at Dreyfus aim

to provide students with the best possible educational experience. Additionally, many teachers,

Department Chairs, and other stakeholders within the school have expressed support for a

straightforward program to facilitate teacher professional growth (PG).

This study sought to explore several concepts related to the problem of practice at

Dreyfus. First, this study sought to identify how administrators in independent schools

conceptualize and facilitate professional growth in their institutions. Second, this study aimed to

explore the implementation of an instructional coaching program at Cooper Academy, one of

Dreyfus's peer schools, and stakeholder perceptions of that program. This study investigated the

following research questions through the collection and analysis of survey and interview data,

the findings for which were articulated in Chapter 4:

- RQ1: How do Dreyfus's peer schools conceptualize and facilitate teacher professional

  growth?

- RQ2: At a peer school that utilizes instructional coaching, how does instructional

  coaching facilitate teacher professional growth?

  - o RQ2a: How do stakeholders at the school conceptualize teacher professional

    growth?

  - o RQ2b: How is instructional coaching implemented at the school?

  - o RQ2c: How do stakeholders at the school perceive the instructional coaching

    process?

In this chapter, I present recommendations to address the problem of practice at Dreyfus. Each recommendation is first presented as a broad recommendation for all independent schools. Then, each recommendation is discussed in detail, supported by findings from this inquiry, a discussion of relevant literature, and a discussion of the theoretical and conceptual foundations on which this inquiry was based, where appropriate. Finally, I present specific recommendations for the context of Dreyfus. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this inquiry and questions for further research.

Recommendations

The recommendations are organized into three categories, all of which apply to both independent schools as a whole and Dreyfus specifically. First, I present Recommendations 1-3, which address the conceptualization and facilitation of professional growth in independent schools. Then, I present Recommendations 4-5, which address concerns relating to the creation and philosophy of instructional coaching programs. Finally, I present Recommendations 6-10, which relate to the implementation of instructional coaching programs. As discussed in Chapter 4, recommendations 4-10, which relate specifically to instructional coaching, stem mostly from the Middle School-level findings from the case study of Cooper's instructional coaching

program, as that is where instructional coaching was implemented according to research-based

practices. Overall, these recommendations offer actionable steps for independent schools and

specifically the Dreyfus School to create professional development and instructional coaching

programs that facilitate teacher professional growth. Throughout, I reference the Dreyfus School

Professional Growth and Instructional Coaching Action Plan (Appendix P), which will be shared

with administrators and the Teacher Professional Growth and Evaluation Committee at Dreyfus

to help the school implement the recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Define and Communicate a Vision for Professional Growth

Independent school administrators should define and communicate a clear vision of

professional growth and its desired outcomes to enable teachers to engage in professional growth

processes within their schools more effectively. Clearly communicating a vision for professional

growth and its desired outcomes will allow teachers and administrators to align their professional

growth goals with the school's overall educational goals. Additionally, I recommend that the

National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), regional independent school

organizations, or administrators within the schools themselves create mechanisms for

independent schools to share their conceptualizations of professional growth and effective PD

strategies that facilitate teacher growth.

Rationale

This recommendation stems from this study's findings highlighting variation among

Dreyfus's peer schools in conceptualizing professional growth, specifically Findings 1, 1a, 1b,

and 2a. Although this diversity reflects the respective mission and vision of each independent

school, it also illustrates that professional growth is a nebulous concept in these school contexts.

This finding was not surprising, given the lack of a common definition or conceptualization of professional growth in existing literature.

For the purposes of this inquiry, professional growth was defined as "ongoing, long-term change in teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices that leads to desired outcomes." The survey question that asked administrators to define professional growth did not include this definition, the inclusion of which may have helped narrow the range of conceptualizations discussed in Finding 1a. The data shown in Table 4.1 illustrate that surveyed administrators conceptualized professional growth in a variety of ways, ranging from a definition of what professional growth means in their institution to the professional development structures that are used to facilitate it. This variety of conceptualizations suggested that the concept of professional growth, as it is defined throughout the literature and for the purposes of this inquiry, may not be at the forefront of the minds of administrators in charge of the professional growth processes within their schools. If independent school administrators do not understand what professional growth is or how to conceptualize and define it, it is unclear how they might go about helping teachers to grow their professional practice in a meaningful and effective way.

The themes that emerged from both survey and interview data illustrated that the administrators who truly defined the concept of professional growth, and specifically teachers and instructional coaches at Cooper, viewed professional growth as a multifaceted and dynamic process that occurs through ongoing learning. Overall, the data supporting Finding 1b showed that stakeholders saw the desired outcomes of this process as improving teaching practice to enhance student learning, aligning teacher growth with the school's mission, empowering teachers, and building a community. Although these concepts emerged as themes, the data illustrated a lack of concrete ideas of the goals of teacher professional growth within these school

contexts, suggesting a need for clarification. I discuss this, and how these concepts relate to the conceptual framework for this study, in more detail as part of Recommendation 2.

It may be helpful for independent school administrators to clearly articulate their conceptualization of professional growth and its desired outcomes for school stakeholders. A clearly defined conceptualization may allow teachers to understand what professional growth means in their school context and better understand the expectations of the professional growth process. Additionally, because most independent schools are members of NAIS and thus have committed to alignment with NAIS's "Principles of Good Practice" (Appendix A), clearly articulating what professional growth means in the context of the school could ensure that teachers grow their professional practice in line with the expectations set forth by NAIS. Finally, it may be helpful for NAIS to also define what professional growth means to provide guidance to independent schools.

Finally, independent school administrators across schools could collaborate to enhance high-quality teaching in their school contexts by sharing conceptualizations of professional growth and how that growth is facilitated within schools. Sharing PG and PD approaches could strengthen professional growth processes in independent schools by allowing school administrators to benefit from the knowledge and approaches that other schools have, ultimately benefitting teachers. Additionally, asking administrators to share their school's approaches to PG and the impact of PD on PG could address a knowledge gap until more published literature explores theoretical best practices regarding PG and PD in independent schools. Further research could also explore how these concepts are approached in all independent schools, not just those limited to the survey sample, and how and why administrators in independent schools choose PD opportunities to facilitate professional growth.

Translation to Practice at Dreyfus

To effectively clarify and communicate Dreyfus's conceptualization of professional growth and its desired outcomes, administrators at the school should task the Teacher Professional Growth and Evaluation Committee (TPGEC) with defining what professional growth means in the context of the school, including a clear description of the desired outcomes of the professional growth process. Specific steps to accomplish this, including running stakeholder focus groups, are outlined in the Dreyfus School Professional Growth and Instructional Coaching Action Plan (Appendix P). Once this conceptualization is complete, the committee should work with relevant administrators to refine and communicate the school's professional growth vision to teachers and other school stakeholders as necessary. Factors for the committee to consider are articulated in later recommendations.

Recommendation 2: Focus Professional Growth and Professional Development Opportunities on Student Outcomes

I propose that professional growth and professional development processes in independent schools be designed with a focus on student academic outcomes to ensure that these processes lead to enhanced student learning, which should be their primary goal (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Guskey defined student academic outcomes as positive changes in the cognitive, affective, or psychomotor domains that show evidence of student learning (Guskey, 2002b).

Rationale

As discussed in Chapter 1, teachers in independent schools do not consistently collect reliable and valid data on student academic outcomes. Consequently, it is not surprising that the survey data from the Teacher Professional Development and Growth Survey for Independent

Schools (Appendix D) illustrated that directly enhancing student academic outcomes is not the primary focus of PD and professional growth in these schools. Of the 17 administrators surveyed, only nine discussed the "student experience" as a desired outcome of the professional growth process. None of these nine respondents articulated in detail what they meant by "student experience," and throughout the qualitative survey responses only two administrators discussed the concept of student academic outcomes. Although there is ostensibly a connection between student achievement and the other desired outcomes that were identified (such as mission-aligned teacher growth, teacher empowerment, and community building), the relationship between these concepts was not articulated by survey respondents. These findings underscored the need for future research into the purpose of PD and PG at all independent schools, and how these processes relate to student outcomes.

This study's conceptual framework, the Teacher Professional Growth Model for Independent Schools (Appendix C) suggests that teachers in independent schools may not explicitly consider student outcomes when engaging in the PG process and that independent school teachers may not need to see changes in student learning outcomes to grow their professional practice, as suggested by Guskey (1986) and Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002). Although the survey in Phase One did not specifically collect data on teachers' professional growth in each institution, administrators were asked to define the desired outcomes of their professional growth processes and articulate their understanding of the connection between various types of professional development and teacher professional growth. Given that only two administrators mentioned student academic outcomes in any part of the survey, it can be assumed that this sample of independent school administrators did not see evidence of student learning outcomes as a necessary driver of the teacher professional growth process, which is

supported by this study's conceptual framework. Additionally, because the desired outcomes of the professional growth process at these institutions were not well-defined, an assumption can be made that teachers in independent schools do engage in the professional growth process without necessarily seeing evidence of the school's desired outcomes.

Given that research shows coaching can significantly impact student academic outcomes (Kraft et al., 2018; Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Papay et al., 2016), stakeholders at Cooper and any other independent schools that use instructional coaching should measure coaching's impact on students to determine its efficacy, regardless of teachers' participation in the professional growth process. It is essential to narrow the focus of coaching and overall PD to specifically improve student outcomes, as this should be the primary goal of all PD (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In their interview, Dana, the Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning at Cooper, mirrored this idea, expressing that it is essential for school stakeholders to ensure coaching and overall professional growth do not simply provide a sense of comfort for teachers like a "weighted blanket" (interview, February 1, 2024). Dana emphasized the ultimate aim of any professional growth process and its associated PD should be to positively impact student learning.

As previously shared, teachers at Cooper do not measure student academic outcomes generally or specifically related to the impact of instructional coaching. That said, coaches and teachers articulated examples of ways teachers changed their instructional practice or attitudes and beliefs about teaching due to instructional coaching. Guskey (1986) and Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) teacher change models suggest teachers must see evidence of change in student academic outcomes to change their practice. Data from stakeholder interviews at Cooper refuted this idea, demonstrating that teachers at Cooper changed their teaching practice without seeing evidence of change in student academic outcomes. These changes in practice, when

ongoing and moving toward Cooper's desired outcomes, could be considered professional growth. Although the lack of focus on student outcomes as part of the professional growth process is not ideal, as student academic outcomes should be the focus of the professional growth process to order to ensure that professional growth positively impacts student learning, it does suggest that teachers in independent schools may engage in professional growth differently from Guskey (1986) and Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) proposed trajectories. These findings are consistent with the conceptual framework for this study, the Teacher Professional Growth Model for Independent Schools (Appendix C).

Translation to Practice at Dreyfus

Ideally, all PD and PG at Dreyfus should focus on processes that impact student learning. As outlined the Action Plan (Appendix P), Dreyfus's Academic Dean and other administrators should clarify the purpose of PD and PG for stakeholders at the school. Additionally, all planned PD opportunities should be evaluated to ensure alignment between teacher learning and student outcomes.

Because student academic outcomes are not consistently measured at Dreyfus and other independent schools in valid and reliable ways, a culture shift is needed regarding data-driven decision-making to focus Dreyfus's PD and PG processes on student outcomes. In order to do this, teachers in the school must learn how to consistently collect reliable and valid data on student academic outcomes, which can be achieved through PD focused on data literacy, as discussed in the Action Plan (Appendix P). These data could inform instructional coaching and other professional growth activities, ensuring they are directly linked to enhancing student learning. By shifting the culture at Dreyfus to underscore the importance of evidence-based practice and continuous improvement, teachers may see a more direct connection between PD

and PG processes and their impact on student learning. To do this, I recommend that stakeholders in the school learn about the value of data-driven decision-making and how to implement it effectively.

Additionally, because it is challenging to make the leap between teacher PD, professional growth, and student outcomes, there needs to be an intermediate step. As part of the professional growth process, teachers at Dreyfus should document what they learned from the PD opportunities provided at the school through specific examples of how that learning impacted their practice. This action step, also discussed in the Action Plan (Appendix P) could help provide data on teachers' uptake of new instructional strategies and illustrate whether PD opportunities at the school actively support the school's desired outcomes for the PG process. More research is also needed into how independent school stakeholders measure teachers' professional growth in order to inform this process at Dreyfus.

Recommendation 3: Offer Sustained, High-Quality, Job-Embedded, Mission-Aligned PD

Professional development activities in independent schools should be sustained, high-quality, job-embedded, and aligned with schools' missions to ensure that PD facilitates teachers' professional growth within the school context.

Rationale

Survey data from the Teacher Professional Development and Growth Survey for Independent Schools (Appendix D) illustrated various PD approaches in independent schools, discussed in Finding 1c. These data supported findings in the available literature about independent schools, specifically Balossi and Hernandez's (2016) study illustrating that 99% of administrators in the 744 schools they surveyed indicated that they financially support PD for teachers. However, as was also the case in the survey data for this inquiry project, the

administrators in Balossi and Hernandez's (2016) study identified that they were unsure how PD impacts teacher quality or supports teachers' professional growth. This suggests a need for administrators in independent schools to better understand the landscape of professional development research and ensure that their schools are implementing high-quality professional development and measuring its impact on teachers' professional growth and student outcomes.

According to the survey data from this study, 88% of Dreyfus's peer schools implement a "theory to practice" approach (Guskey, 1986; Korthagen, 2017, p. 388) regarding teacher PD. This includes guest speakers, online courses, webinars, workshops, and conferences. Although there is significant reliance on these types of PD among the schools, the assessment of the impact of these types of PD on teachers' professional growth was exceedingly low. Only 6-13% of respondents, depending on the type of PD they were assessing, articulated that these PD approaches significantly impact teacher professional growth. This elicits further questions about the purpose of PD at independent schools and the use of high-quality, job-embedded PD strategies to facilitate teacher PG. Additionally, it may have been helpful for administrators to have definitions and examples of these types of PD to ensure the validity of the responses. The conceptual framework for this study, as well as PD literature (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) suggests that if these types of traditional PD are to have an impact on teacher professional growth, they must be paired with instructional coaching.

According to survey data, some schools implemented high-quality, job-embedded PD strategies, which Finding 1c suggests have a much more meaningful impact on teacher PG. Examples of high-quality, job-embedded professional development include engaging in collaborative communities of practice such as Professional Learning Communities, peer observation and feedback, and instructional coaching. Depending on the type of PD, 29-47% of

surveyed administrators determined that these high-quality, job-embedded PD approaches had a significant impact on teacher professional growth. These data were consistent with literature on PD strategies, which suggests that high-quality, job-embedded PD is more likely to facilitate professional growth than traditional approaches (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015). These data were also consistent with the conceptual framework for this study, which suggests that these types of PD can drive teacher professional growth in independent schools.

Although PD literature shows that collaborative communities of practice (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020; Hill & Papay, 2022; Trust & Horrock, 2017) and instructional coaching (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016), especially when paired with traditional PD (Joyce & Showers, 1984, 1996; Kraft et al., 2018) can have a meaningful impact on teacher PG, only 53% and 47% of the surveyed schools employed these strategies. The literature shows that barriers to implementing these strategies include time (Kraft et al., 2018) and cost (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2009), which could be a factor at the independent schools that were surveyed. More information is needed on why and how administrators in independent schools choose PD opportunities to better understand the landscape of high-quality, job-embedded PD in these schools.

Finally, research on effective PD shows that it should not only be high-quality and job-embedded but also sustained over time and aligned with the mission of the school to have an impact on teacher professional growth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015). Only 25% of administrators articulated that PD at their school is sustained over time, which needs to be addressed to ensure PD opportunities lead to teacher professional growth. Additionally, the literature suggests that teacher PD, including instructional coaching (Knight,

2022), should be aligned with the school's mission and goals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015). Independent schools follow this best practice, as 100% of survey respondents identified that PD in their institution is mission-aligned. This was echoed at Cooper in Finding 2c.2, where all stakeholders discussed the role of instructional coaching in helping teachers align their practice with the school's mission, mainly its focus on DEI.

Translation to Practice at Dreyfus

To ensure that teachers at Dreyfus have the opportunity to engage in high-quality, job-embedded, mission-aligned, and sustained professional development to facilitate professional growth, school stakeholders should conduct a PD audit, as discussed in the Action Plan (Appendix P). Once the Teacher Professional Growth and Evaluation Committee and the Academic Dean have defined the school's vision for professional growth and its desired outcomes, the committee should evaluate the PD opportunities for teachers for the upcoming school year and beyond. The committee should educate themselves on the value of high-quality, job-embedded PD and its impact on professional growth. Then, the committee and administrators within the school should integrate evidence-based high-quality, job-embedded PD activities that have been shown to impact teacher professional growth and student learning directly, particularly collaborative PD models such as communities of practice, peer observations, and instructional coaching. Lastly, the committee must guarantee that all PD activities align with the school's mission, ensuring the PD is relevant, effective, and supports Dreyfus's overarching goals. This information should be communicated as part of a strategic plan for teacher PD, as referenced in the Action Plan (Appendix P).

Recommendation 4: Adopt a Non-Evaluative, Dialogical Instructional Coaching Model

One approach to sustained, mission-aligned, high-quality, job-embedded professional development is instructional coaching. The literature reviewed for this study, the conceptual framework, and the findings from this inquiry show that if independent school stakeholders want to help teachers grow their professional practice, they should adopt high-quality, job-embedded approaches to professional development, specifically instructional coaching. Officially, I recommend that independent schools adopt a non-evaluative, dialogical coaching model as a form of high-quality, job-embedded PD. This model emphasizes a collaborative, conversational approach to learning and development, fostering a supportive and enriching environment for teachers to grow their practice. Recommendations 5-10 discuss the specific implementation steps required to adopt instructional coaching.

Rationale

Research demonstrates that instructional coaching is an effective method of growing teacher practice and that it effects student outcomes (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016). Instructional coaching can significantly impact teacher uptake of new instructional strategies (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016) and, ideally, lead to teacher professional growth. The conceptual framework for this study suggests that, when paired with traditional PD (which, according to Finding 1c is what most independent schools used), instructional coaching can lead to teacher professional growth. Finding 2c.4 also supports this idea, illustrating that instructional coaching can facilitate teachers' professional growth at Cooper, although there was nuance within this finding as it relates to the instructional coaching program in each division. Finding 2c.4 showed that, according to interview data, instructional coaching in the Middle School at Cooper had an impact on teachers' professional growth.

However, instructional coaching in the Upper School, as it was implemented at the time of this study, did not appear to facilitate professional growth. However, the sample was significantly limited. Only three coaches and three teachers were interviewed for the purpose of this study in addition to the school's administrator. The participants included five women and two men, as well as five White people and two Black people. A larger sample of interview participants could have provided much more insight into the benefits and drawbacks of coaching, how it is implemented within the context of this school, and its impact on professional growth, specifically through various demographics. All data was also self-reported, which may have introduced bias into the finding. Regardless, the findings of this inquiry, particularly in Cooper's Middle School, were illustrative of the potential for the positive impact of coaching on teachers' professional growth. Thus, I recommend independent schools adopt instructional coaching as a high-quality, job-embedded PD strategy to facilitate professional growth, provided it is implemented according to Recommendations 4-10.

Experts argue that coaching must be non-evaluative to be effective (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2006). This was the case at Cooper, where teachers and coaches across divisions espoused the value of having a judgment-free zone for teachers to hone their instructional practice and navigate school challenges. At Cooper, coaches used a dialogical coaching model, which mirrors Knight's (2021) model, as described in Chapter 2. This model suggests that coaches should use a mix of questions and suggestions in coaching conversations to drive teachers' professional growth forward and "balance advocacy with inquiry" (Knight, 2021, Dialogical Coaching). Coaches and teachers at Cooper discussed the value of the dialogical model, explicitly identifying how it helped teachers engage in reflective practice while allowing coaches to support teachers in various ways. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, more

information is needed on the implementation and efficacy of various types of coaching in all school contexts.

In addition to the dialogical coaching model, coaches at Cooper used Aguilar's (2013) transformational coaching framework. Although Aguilar's model is dialogical, it also has at its core the goal of transforming the institutions' systems and structures according to school goals as a result of coaching. Although this goal is admirable, especially given Cooper's focus on DEI and valuing every student, it is unclear from interview data whether using Aguilar's model works to transform systems at Cooper. Additionally, stakeholders in Cooper's Upper School seemed to use Aguilar's framework as the driver of their reliance on emotional support as the foundation of coaching, which is not consistent with the literature on the purpose of instructional coaching. More information is needed, particularly in a longitudinal sense, to see if Aguilar's model is effective long-term. In the meantime, the focus on Aguilar's transformational model may be hindering the instructional coaching experience at Cooper for Upper School coaches and teachers due to its reliance on the coaching of emotions in the Cooper context. This will be discussed in more detail in Recommendation 5.

Translation to Practice at Dreyfus

To ensure that PD at Dreyfus has a meaningful impact on teachers' professional growth, the school should adopt a non-evaluative, dialogical instructional coaching model for all teachers in the community. This model will ideally foster an environment where teachers feel supported and empowered to refine their practice without fear of judgment. There are many considerations when adopting and implementing an instructional coaching program, which is evident from the literature and the findings of this inquiry. Many of these considerations are discussed in further detail in later recommendations and in the Action Plan (Appendix P). First, stakeholders at

Dreyfus, such as the TPGEC members, must learn comprehensively about instructional coaching, the benefits and drawbacks of coaching, and implementation strategies. The findings of this study constitute a step in that process.

Additionally, school stakeholders should clearly articulate the reasoning behind and rationale for adopting coaching. I recommend that administrators within the school develop infrastructure to support the coaching process, including providing dedicated time for coaching sessions, resources for coaches and teachers, and a system for feedback and continuous improvement of the coaching model. Finally, coaches must undergo comprehensive preparation on the principles of dialogical coaching and strategies for effective implementation. There are many instructional coaching consultancy services that could ostensibly provide this type of training.

Finally, as discussed in the Action Plan (Appendix P), Dreyfus administrators should hire four instructional coaches: one for Lower School, one for Middle School, and two for Upper School, due to the number of teachers in each division and the variation in schedules.

Recommendation 5: Clarify the Instructional Coaching Role and Objectives

For instructional coaching to be effective, the roles of instructional coaches and the objectives of the coaching process must be clearly defined and communicated with coaches and teachers. Clarity helps manage expectations and enhances coaching effectiveness by leading to desired outcomes of the coaching process.

Rationale

A meaningful finding that emerged from the interview data was that the roles of coaches at Cooper needed to be clarified for the coaching program to be more effective in reaching the program's desired outcomes. This is supported by Knight's (2022) claim that for instructional

coaching to be implemented effectively, it must be clear what the instructional coach does. Finding 2c.3 illustrated the challenges in the instructional coaching program that may benefit from clarification of the coach's role. Middle School stakeholders explained that the Middle School coach, Jamie, was often asked to participate in or lead activities outside their purview as an instructional coach, which took time and energy away from instructional coaching responsibilities. Additionally, the teachers in the Middle School articulated that they thought some of their colleagues still did not understand the purpose of instructional coaching, which role clarification could address.

In the Upper School, coaches functioned more as a listening ear for their colleagues' emotional issues, school-related or otherwise, as opposed to traditional instructional coaches. Both Upper School coaches justified this approach by citing Aguilar's (2013) transformational coaching model and its reliance on "coaching emotions" (interview, February 1, 2024). However, in her work Aguilar argues that the focus of instructional coaching should be deliberate practice of and refinement of specific skills (Aguilar, 2013). Although teachers do need a place to vent and share troubles, instructional coaches cannot focus on helping teachers with personal issues while at the same time ensuring teachers grow their professional practice. Findings 2c.2 and 2c.3 indicated that Upper School coaches at Cooper were unable to provide concrete examples of assisting teachers with instructional strategies, which is an important part of the instructional coaching role according to coaching literature (Aguilar, 2023; Elek & Page, 2018; Knight, 2022). This lack of clarity points to a need to define more clearly the coaches' responsibilities at Cooper, especially since the main goal of the instructional coaching program was to improve student learning, rather than addressing teachers' emotional needs.

The role of instructional coaches should align with the objectives of the instructional coaching program, which should align with the institutional objectives or mission of the school (Knight, 2022). Knight suggested that teachers should set clear goals within the instructional coaching process that relate to the objectives of the coaching program, and goal-setting was a common feature of the instructional coaching programs discussed by Elek and Page, with 68% of the programs using goal-setting as a mechanism for teacher professional growth (2018). Although Cooper's teachers mentioned goal-setting, according to interview data the goals for instructional coaching differed from those teachers' goals that aligned with the desired outcomes of the professional growth process as a whole. In order for coaching to align with the PG process's desired outcomes, as articulated by school administrators, coaching goals should align with the overall institutional priorities of the school context. Although the Teacher Professional Growth Model for Independent Schools, the conceptual framework for this study, suggests that teachers in independent schools can engage in professional growth without seeing evidence of student learning outcomes or other desired outcomes, student learning should still be the focus of any PD approach, as argued in Recommendation 2.

Given the articulated purpose of instructional coaching, and all PD, within the base of literature, the desired outcome of a coaching program should be to enhance student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015). Thus, the coach's role should be to help teachers grow their professional practice to do that. Clear role and objective clarification are needed within an instructional coaching program to ensure fidelity to the program and school's goals.

Translation to Practice at Dreyfus

Several action steps, outlined in the Action Plan (Appendix P) can be taken at Dreyfus to ensure that instructional coaches' roles and the objectives of the instructional coaching process are clear for school stakeholders. First, the TPGEC and relevant administrators should create detailed job descriptions that delineate coaches' responsibilities, focusing on the enhancement of teachers' instructional strategies and teacher professional growth. These descriptions should be shared with all coaches and teachers to ensure clarity. Additionally, the TPGE, in conjunction with Dreyfus's administration, should create clear objectives for the instructional coaching program. These objectives should be aligned with the school's desired outcomes for the professional growth process. They should be communicated in written form, discussed at the start of each year, and revisited regularly by coaches and teachers. Finally, coaches and teachers need training to understand the purpose of instructional coaching in the school's context, specifically as it relates to enhancing student learning outcomes, as discussed in Recommendation 2. Finally, the Academic Dean should regularly review coaching implementation to ensure it aligns with the articulated role, the school's mission, and the desired outcomes for coaching.

Recommendation 6: Prepare Coaches for Relationship-Building

In addition to preparing for the basic implementation of coaching, instructional coaches should engage in training that allows them to build trust, foster positive relationships with teachers, and encourage teacher collaboration. This is critical for creating a supportive environment where teachers feel comfortable engaging in coaching and collaboration, both of which drive professional growth.

Rationale

Relationship-building was a significant theme that emerged from interview data at Cooper, as discussed in Finding 2c.1. Coaches prioritized establishing trust with teachers, recognizing that it is essential for teachers to feel comfortable and engaged in the coaching process. This trust-building process involved taking the time to understand each teacher's needs and identity, as well as maintaining confidentiality to promote openness and honesty in coaching sessions. The interviews illustrated that coaches in both the Middle and Upper School divisions emphasized the importance of relationships in their interactions with teachers. They acknowledged that building trust takes time but was fundamental to creating a supportive and collaborative environment conducive to professional growth. Coaches also recognized the significance of trust not only between themselves and teachers but also between administrators and coaches to ensure the effective implementation of the coaching program. Additionally, while teachers did not explicitly mention trust in their interviews, their remarks indicated that they valued the relationships they developed with their instructional coaches.

Given these findings, it is recommended that schools implementing instructional coaching prioritize training for coaches in relationship-building skills. Coaches should be equipped with strategies to establish trust, create a personalized approach to teacher support, maintain confidentiality, and foster collaborative partnerships with teachers. Investing in coach training in relationship-building may enhance the effectiveness of instructional coaching programs and potentially help to facilitate teacher professional growth.

This theme is supported in depth by the literature on instructional coaching, which illustrates that coaches must have good working relationships with teachers and build trust in order for coaching to be effective in facilitating professional growth (Hammond & Moore, 2018;

Preciado, 2015; Warnock et al., 2021). Additionally, Knight (2022) argues that coaches must have a deep understanding of confidentiality to implement coaching effectively in a school environment. It is clear from the interview data that this confidentiality exists at Cooper. Coaches share only thematic data with administrators and keep individual coaching conversations confidential. Adoption of a similar policy in other school contexts may help coaches build trusting relationships with teachers and encourage teachers to feel like the coaching process is non-evaluative.

Additionally, themes emerged from the interview data suggesting that relationship-building outside the coach-teacher relationship is also a positive effect of the instructional coaching program, depending on the coach's role. Middle School teachers and the instructional coach at Cooper discussed several examples of how the coach encouraged collaboration among teachers and identified that this collaboration impacts teachers' professional growth. The literature shows that there is widespread evidence that teacher collaboration leads to sustained professional growth (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020; Hill & Papay, 2022; Trust & Horrock, 2017), and Knight (2022) argued that school must be an inherently collaborative environment for coaching. This supposition is supported by Hammond and Russel's (2020) findings that a collaborative learning environment is necessary for the successful implementation of coaching. Thus, instructional coaches should engage in training to learn how to build relationships with coached teachers and be facilitators of collaboration in their school contexts.

Translation to Practice at Dreyfus

To ensure instructional coaches at Dreyfus can build effective relationships with coached teachers, several factors related to coaching implementation need to be considered, all of which

are discussed in the Action Plan (Appendix P). First, Dreyfus must equip instructional coaches with skills in building trust, promoting confidentiality, and enhancing collaboration. The Academic Dean and TPGEC should hire an instructional coaching consultant to design and deliver training sessions emphasizing relationship-building and strategies for creating a non-evaluative coaching environment. Alternately, administrators could send coaches to workshops designed for this purpose.

Following training, it will be necessary for the Academic Dean and instructional coaches to collaboratively outline steps for building strong, supportive relationships. One way to start the relationship-building process is to offer optional, exploratory, and experimental instructional coaching sessions as an option for teachers. These sessions would be designed to introduce teachers to the concept of coaching in a low-pressure environment. To further introduce teachers to the benefits of coaching and to help build relationships, coaches could also visit teachers' classrooms on a regular basis to provide positive observational feedback. Regular visits would not only allow coaches to understand the context of teaching and learning at Dreyfus, but also demonstrate their commitment to getting to know teachers.

Recommendation 7: Make Teacher Participation Mandatory

For coaching to be effective, participation in instructional coaching programs should be mandatory for all teachers to ensure widespread engagement and positive impact. A mandatory coaching policy would emphasize the school's commitment to continuous improvement and professional development, which is needed for independent school teachers.

Rationale

As discussed in Chapter 1, there are no overarching standards for teacher quality in independent schools, and many do not have evaluation systems to ensure that teachers employ

theoretical best practices in regard to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Many independent school teachers lack coursework or advanced degrees in education. Regardless of educational background or teaching experience, all independent school teachers can potentially benefit from instructional coaching. To ensure consistent adoption of effective teaching strategies across the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, coaching should be a requirement for all educators within a school that provides it. As discussed in Finding 2b, coaching was mandatory in the Upper School at Cooper and voluntary in the Middle School. Findings 2c.2 and 2c.4 illustrated that Middle School stakeholders at Cooper believed instructional coaching had a positive impact on their teaching practices and professional growth, but coaching was underutilized, which was potentially due to its optional nature. Making instructional coaching mandatory for all teachers would ensure that every educator receives equal opportunities for professional growth. Discrepancies in participation levels between "frequent fliers" and others indicate that a voluntary system may inadvertently disadvantage certain teachers who may not actively seek out coaching opportunities.

Meanwhile, interview data collected from an Upper School teacher at Cooper illustrated that, despite its mandatory nature, the teacher did not perceive instructional coaching to be effective. However, as discussed in Finding 2b, this teacher was not participating in an instructional coaching program that was intentionally focused on teacher PG in an instructional sense. The Upper School's structured coaching cycle, with regular meetings over a full year and coaching every odd year of a teacher's career at Cooper, provided a more thorough and sustained approach to professional development. This contrasts with the Middle School's mostly impromptu coaching sessions, which may lack the depth and continuity needed for meaningful growth. Although the findings may not directly suggest that coaching should be mandatory for

all teachers, especially given the discrepancies between coaching's impact on professional growth between the Middle and Upper schools as discussed in Finding 2c.4, Middle School-level data illustrated that coaching, when implemented according to research-based practices, can be an effective tool for teacher professional growth. Thus, I argue that all teachers can benefit from coaching.

Additionally, Cooper stakeholders identified that the desired outcome of the instructional coaching program was to help teachers grow in order to provide an equitable learning experience for all students, as aligned with the school's mission. If Cooper aimed to improve teaching practices and student outcomes through coaching, making it mandatory aligns with this objective. It ensures that all teachers are actively engaged in efforts to enhance their instructional practice, which ultimately benefits students across all grade levels. Thus, if a school has clear goals for its instructional coaching program, it naturally follows that all teachers should participate to ensure that those goals are met. Given existing research indicating that instructional coaching can advance teaching practice and improve student outcomes (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016) a compelling case can be made for mandatory participation for all independent school teachers.

Two things need to happen if all teachers are expected to participate in the instructional coaching process. First, there needs to be a continued focus on the personalization of instructional coaching, as suggested by experts in the field (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2006; Knight, 2022). Every teacher is at a different career stage and experiences different strengths and challenges. Thus, instructional coaching cannot be a one-size-fits-all model if it is to be effective in facilitating teachers' professional growth. Additionally, if instructional coaching is mandatory, the school schedule must include time for coaching to occur. One of the reasons instructional

coaching was made voluntary in the Middle School at Cooper is because the schedule did not allow for intentional, planned meetings between teacher and coach. This was not the case in the Upper School, where teachers had more free periods, so coaching could be made mandatory. According to Kraft et al. (2008), lack of time is a common barrier to implementing instructional coaching. Thus, if a school wants to implement a mandatory coaching process, they need to ensure that time is given for stakeholders to engage in it and that it remains personalized to the needs of the individual teacher.

Translation to Practice at Dreyfus

At Dreyfus, mandatory instructional coaching should be formally integrated into the school's PG and PD policies and strategic plan. Policies should clearly outline expectations for new and returning teachers, and there should be a clear plan of action for addressing noncompliance, as discussed in the Action Plan (Appendix P). The importance of instructional coaching and the rationale behind its implementation should be shared with teachers to enhance teacher buy-in.

The school's schedule must also be addressed in order to accommodate time for instructional coaching. Although teachers in the Upper and Middle Schools at Dreyfus have reliable free periods during which they could participate in instructional coaching sessions, teachers in the Lower School do not have the necessary time in their schedules. The scheduling committee at Dreyfus must find a way to make time for teachers in the Lower School.

Recommendation 8: Center coaching around one-to-one meetings, classroom observations, and consistent feedback for teachers

One-to-one meetings, classroom observation, and consistent feedback mechanisms should be integral to instructional coaching. These practices provide concrete, actionable insights

for teacher improvement and are essential for the iterative professional growth process. Additionally, research shows that these activities specifically target and positively impact teachers' professional growth, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Rationale

One-to-one meetings are a hallmark of any instructional coaching process and experts suggest they enhance instructional coaching (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2006; Knight, 2022). One-to-one meetings with coaches ensure personalization, as the coaches can focus specific teacher needs. Meeting one-on-one with a coach also allows teachers to engage in reflective practice through dialogue with their coach. As illustrated in Finding 2b, stakeholders at Cooper discussed the value of one-to-one meetings and the ability of instructional coaches to balance asking questions with offering suggestions to help teachers reflect on their practices. Regular one-to-one meetings with instructional coaches were an integral aspect of the instructional coaching program in both the Middle and Upper Schools. In the Upper School, mandated one-to-one meetings with coaches Kai and Chris were implemented, while in the Middle School, coach Jamie frequently engaged in one-to-one sessions with teachers upon request for assistance. This approach fostered a supportive environment where teachers felt comfortable seeking guidance and clarification.

At Cooper, these sessions served as pivotal moments for fostering reflective practice and professional growth. Across divisions, coaches like Jamie and Kai employed various strategies emphasizing dialogue and collaboration to facilitate self-reflection among teachers. Jamie's emphasis on active listening and questioning, coupled with Kai's blend of inquiry and suggestion, underscored the significance of these meetings in fostering teacher introspection. This approach, exemplified by Sam's experience, highlighted the personalized and collaborative

nature of coaching, where teachers engaged in critical self-analysis. The interview data illustrated that these individual sessions provided opportunities for personalized support and tailored guidance, allowing coaches to meet teachers where they are in their professional journey. Thus, one-to-one meetings emerged as important structures for promoting dialogue, reflective practice, and individualized support, ultimately enhancing teacher development and fostering a culture of continuous improvement at Cooper Academy. According to Bradley et al. (2013), this type of dialogical coaching model can encourage self-reflection and teacher uptake of new instructional strategies. Literature also shows that engaging in reflective practice as an educator can lead to teacher professional growth (Lambert et al., 2014; Mena-Marcos et al., 2015; Weaver et al., 2022).

Classroom observations and subsequent feedback can help teachers grow their professional practice through an instructional coaching model. Elek and Page (2018) described each of these tools as standard parts of the instructional coaching process, with 91% of the programs they researched using teacher observations and 96% using feedback from coaches to teachers. Although classroom observations were not common at Cooper, a Middle School teacher espoused the benefits of having their instructional coach in their classroom to help them work on particular classroom management and instructional strategies. They engaged in pre-observation and post-evaluation conferences to set up the goals for the observation and discuss the feedback from the observation. According to Maslow and Kelley (2012), feedback can be a valuable mechanism for helping teachers engage in professional growth. Thus, any instructional coaching program should use one-to-one meetings, observations, and feedback to facilitate teachers' professional growth.

Translation to Practice at Dreyfus

To address this recommendation at Dreyfus, school stakeholders should take a few things into consideration. First, a schedule should be created for the implementation of one-to-one coaching sessions in each division. Coaches should set up regular, biweekly recurring meetings with teachers. Second, coaches should formalize a process for classroom observations, including pre-observation and post-observation conferences to provide targeted feedback, support, and action items. Third, coaches must be trained in how to give actionable, useful feedback in a timely and constructive way to ensure that teachers can use coach feedback to facilitate their professional growth. By adopting these specific recommendations, stakeholders at Dreyfus can help ensure that the instructional coaching program has a positive impact on teachers' professional growth.

Recommendation 9: Address Teacher Resistance to Coaching

Schools should proactively identify and address reluctance or resistance toward instructional coaching among teachers to ensure that all teachers benefit from the instructional coaching process.

Rationale

Although little research currently exists on teacher perceptions of instructional coaching, and much more information is needed on this topic, specifically in independent schools, teacher resistance and reluctance to coaching are common themes within instructional coaching literature. King (2003), in the Annenberg Institution Handbook on instructional coaching, argued that, to be effective, instructional coaching must reach resistant or reluctant teachers. At Cooper, multiple stakeholders discussed teacher reluctance to participate in the instructional coaching program, a challenge identified in Finding 2c.3. All three coaches discussed a small number of

specific teachers who have never come to them for coaching or do not respond to their email requests for coaching meetings, which mirrors Jacob et al.'s (2018) findings. Stakeholders expressed concerns regarding teachers' understanding of the purpose and value of coaching, with some perceiving it as optional and therefore disregarding it. At Cooper, this reluctance was attributed to a combination of factors, including a preference for working independently, resistance to change, and a lack of familiarity with the coaching process. These insights underscore the importance of addressing misconceptions and promoting the benefits of instructional coaching to encourage broader participation and support professional growth among all teachers. This suggests that schools that adopt instructional coaching must have specific plans in place to address teacher reluctance and disengagement.

Additionally, existing literature shows that some teachers may need time to come around to the idea of instructional coaching or to experience coaching to accept it as a valuable professional development tool. Hammond and Moore (2018) found that their sample of teachers initially had negative perceptions of coaching and then, after coaching, had positive perceptions, which may illustrate that coaches simply need to persevere in getting teachers to participate in coaching. Preciado's (2015) findings echo this idea, as teachers in the study articulated that they were initially intimidated by coaching and then after they experienced it, realized its importance and impact. Thus, any instructional coaching program may also need time to take hold and for teachers to be comfortable engaging. Coaches, teachers, and administrators should exhibit patience and grace to allow the program to catch on among school stakeholders.

Translation to Practice at Dreyfus

To effectively address teacher resistance and enhance engagement in instructional coaching, Dreyfus should cultivate a culture of open communication within the school.

Administrators can start this process by clearly communicating the vision and rationale for coaching to teachers, including myths and misconceptions about the coaching process. By addressing teacher reluctance before it starts, administrators may be able to lessen its impact on the coaching process.

The Academic Dean should also continuously gather feedback on teacher perceptions of coaching, both before coaching begins and continuously after. By creating an environment where teachers feel comfortable sharing concerns about the coaching process, the school can better identify and address reluctance or apathy before it happens.

It may also be helpful for teachers who have experienced coaching to describe what their experience was like and to share any success stories. This could serve as a powerful tool to illustrate the benefits of participating in coaching for other educators. Additionally, as described in Recommendation 4, Dreyfus teachers must know that coaching is meant to be a non-evaluative, judgment-free, personalized process. Ensuring that teachers see instructional coaching as an opportunity for growth, and not an opportunity for criticism, may help ward off negative attitudes toward coaching.

Recommendation 10: Document and Assess Coaching Effectiveness

The impact of instructional coaching on teacher practice and student outcomes should be systematically documented and evaluated. Evaluation is vital for assessing coaching effectiveness and informing future coaching planning and implementation.

Rationale

At Cooper, there was no formal documentation of the coaching process, including the overall programmatic structure, coaching program implementation strategies, or its impact on teachers or students. Two key concerns arise with this lack of documentation. First, there is no

way for school stakeholders to determine if the program is working to achieve its desired goals. Second, there is no program documentation for coaches and teachers to reference when they are unclear on the goals of instructional coaching or the roles of coaches.

While research on how documenting and evaluating instructional coaching affects a coaching program's success is limited, it is generally agreed that any new programmatic initiative should be documented and evaluated regularly. King (2003) argued that coaching fails when its impact is not documented because there is no information on the effectiveness of the process. In the absence of data, school stakeholders will not know if the coaching program is reaching its desired outcomes. Coaches and administrators should collect data on the instructional coaching program, including its implementation, teacher feedback, and teacher explanation of how the program has impacted their professional growth. This will allow school stakeholders to see the benefits and challenges within the program and make changes to the program to make it more effective.

Translation to Practice at Dreyfus

To effectively document and evaluate the instructional coaching process, the TPGEC at Dreyfus must develop a comprehensive system for documenting coaching sessions and their objectives and outcomes, as discussed in the Action Plan (Appendix P). The system should include teacher input regarding their progress toward their goals, how that progress has impacted their instructional practice, and how those instructional practices have impacted their students. Additionally, the coaching program needs to be regularly evaluated through surveys and conversations with coaching stakeholders to ensure it is effective in meeting its objectives and the desired outcomes of the professional growth process at Dreyfus. All stakeholders should be

able to provide feedback on the instructional coaching program for the school to gain a comprehensive understanding of its value and any changes that need to be made.

Chapter Summary

The recommendations presented in this chapter advocate for a clear, systemic, and student-growth-oriented approach to professional development and professional growth among all independent schools, particularly at The Dreyfus School. Recommendations stemmed from the findings of this inquiry, the literature reviewed for the purposes of this study, and the application of this study's conceptual framework, the Teacher Professional Growth Model for Independent Schools. The applicability of these recommendations may be limited by the small survey sample, the focus on a single school context, and the reliance on self-reported data. The recommendations are tailored to Dreyfus's unique needs to address the problem of practice that was the focus of this study and offer actionable steps to administrators in the hopes of improving the quality of teaching at Dreyfus and, consequently, student outcomes. Future research should broaden the scope of inquiry to include more independent schools and adopt longitudinal study designs to assess the long-term impacts of instructional coaching and other professional development strategies on teachers' professional growth and, by extension, student outcomes. Finally, determining the desired outcomes of teacher professional growth at independent schools and developing reliable systems of measurement to evaluate the success of professional growth programs remains a topic for further investigation. While this study offers actionable steps to Dreyfus to help improve teacher practice, it also underscores the need for more research related to professional growth and instructional coaching in independent school settings.

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Appendix A

NAIS Principles of Good Practice

Teachers

1. The teacher has a thorough knowledge appropriate for his or her teaching assignment and stays abreast of recent developments in the field.
2. The teacher uses a variety of teaching techniques suitable to the age and needs of the students and subject matter being taught.
3. The teacher establishes positive relationships with students, which, while recognizing the differing roles of adult and child, are characterized by mutual respect and good will.
4. The teacher collaborates with colleagues and the school's leadership in the design and implementation of curriculum within the context of the school's overall program and mission.
5. The teacher initiates growth and change in his or her own intellectual and professional development, seeking out conferences, courses, and other opportunities to learn.
6. The teacher is self-aware and self-monitoring in identifying and solving student, curricular, and school problems. At the same time, the teacher knows the mission and policies of the school and, when questions or concerns arise, raises them with appropriate colleagues and supervisors.
7. The teacher serves his or her school outside the classroom in a manner established by the individual school and consistent with the responsibilities of a professional educator. For example, teachers often serve as advisers, coaches, or activity sponsors.
8. The teacher participates in the establishment and maintenance of an atmosphere of collegial support and adherence to professional standards.
9. The teacher welcomes supervision in the context of clearly defined and well communicated criteria of evaluation.
10. The teacher models integrity, curiosity, responsibility, creativity, and respect for all persons as well as an appreciation for racial, cultural, and gender diversity.

Appendix B

Dreyfus School Teaching Competencies

Community Responsibility: Teacher takes responsibility for supporting Holton's mission and vision in words and actions and works to advance the school's strategic initiatives both inside and outside the classroom

Knowing Your Students: Teacher builds authentic relationships with students by recognizing and affirming students' intersecting identities.

Classroom Community: Teacher fosters a collaborative learning environment that honors students' diverse and intersecting identities in order to promote physical, academic, social, and emotional wellbeing for students.

Peer Collaboration: Teacher plans collaboratively with peers across divisions and departments to design and deliver effective learning experiences.

Content Knowledge: Teacher has knowledge of their content area to allow them to facilitate content-specific pedagogy. Courses and units are backwards designed from LW3 and content-specific goals and driven by inquiry-based essential questions.

Instructional Strategies: Teacher understands and uses a variety of student-centered instructional strategies, including technological tools, to help students learn.

Assessment and Feedback: Teacher regularly assesses student performance in a variety of ways and provides feedback to support student growth in a timely manner.

Adaptive Teaching: Teacher plans, reflects on, and adjusts curriculum, instruction, and assessment based on observation and understanding of their students' interests, abilities, skills, knowledge, identities, and social dynamics.

Proactive Communication: Teacher builds relationships with families, students, and colleagues through proactive and responsive communication in order to enhance teaching and learning.

Professional Development: Teacher engages in ongoing professional learning and reflective practice in order to improve pedagogy and content knowledge.

Appendix C

Conceptual Framework Diagram

Professional Growth Model for Independent School Teachers
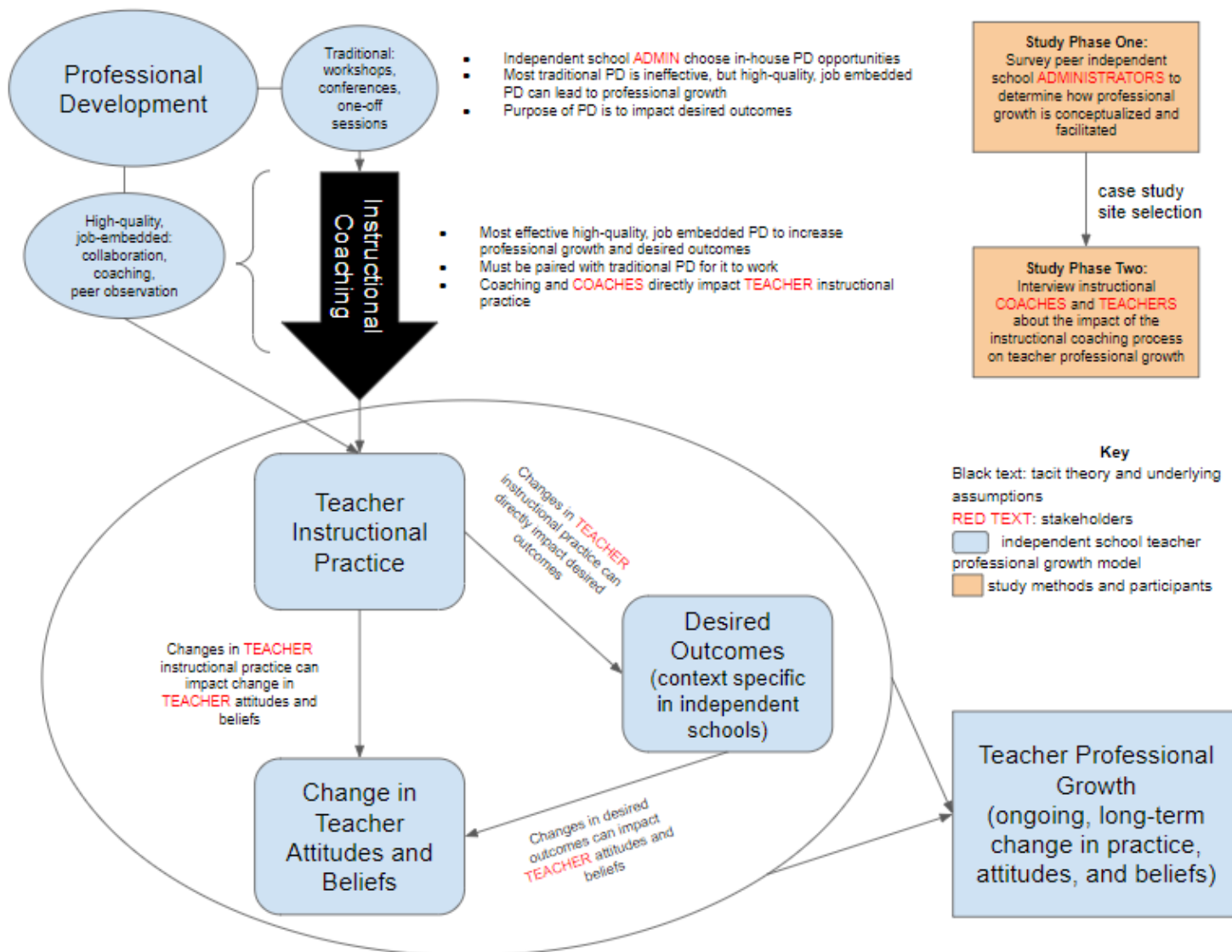
Appendix D

Teacher Professional Development and Growth Survey for Independent Schools

Survey Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey, which should take about 5-10 minutes to complete. This survey is being sent to all Academic Deans, Deans of teacher, or other similar roles at independent, college-prep schools in the Mid-Atlantic region with over 500 students. The purpose of this survey is to gather data to address the question, "How do Dreyfus's (pseudonym) peer institutions facilitate teacher professional growth?". The data gathered from this survey will be used to inform my Capstone research project on teacher professional growth in independent schools. Though your responses are not anonymous, results will be kept confidential.

Section 1: Demographics

1.1 Name of School:
1.2 Your Position:
1.3 Number of teacher Members in Your School:

Section 2: Conceptualization of Teacher Professional Growth

2.1 How do you define teacher professional growth in the context of your school?

2.2 What are the desired outcomes or goals of teacher professional growth in your school?

2.3 How does your institution choose which professional development opportunities to offer to teachers?

Section 3: Facilitation of Teacher Professional Growth

3.1A The following section seeks to understand what professional development opportunities exist for teachers in your school and your perceptions of their impact on teacher professional growth. If you check "yes" in Part A, please indicate in Part B your opinion of the impact these activities had on teachers' professional growth.

	Part A		Part B			
	Yes	No	No impact on PG	Small impact on PG	Moderate impact on PG	Significant impact on PG
Workshops and seminars						
Guest speakers						
Conferences						
Online courses/webinars						
Funds for graduate study/teacher licensure						
Peer observations						
Formative evaluation						
Mentoring programs						
Communities of practice (Professional Learning Communities, Critical Friends Groups, etc.)						
Instructional coaching						

3.1B Please briefly explain your responses to Part B above.

3.2 Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Desimone and Garet (2015), leading researchers in the field of teacher PD, suggest that high-quality PD for teachers should meet the following criteria. Please check the boxes that you think apply to the PD opportunities offered at your school.

PD should…

        Be aligned with the mission and goals of the school

        Be focused on how students learn content

        Encourage active learning on behalf of the teacher

        Be sustained over time (20-50 hours spent on developing each skill)

        Provide models of effective practice

        Provide opportunities for feedback and reflection

        Offer coaching and expert support

Section 4: Additional Comments

4. Is there anything else you would like to share about professional development and professional growth for teachers in your school context?

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your input is vital for enhancing the professional development and professional growth experiences of teacher members in independent schools. If you have any additional comments or insights you would like to share, please feel free to reach out to me at ln2vp@virginia.edu.

Appendix E

Phase One Study Information Sheet

Please read this study information sheet carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study
This research investigates teacher professional development and growth in independent schools that engage in instructional coaching. The study's significance lies in its potential to inform tailored systems for effective teacher professional growth in independent schools. The first phase of the study seeks to determine how administrators in independent schools conceptualize and facilitate professional growth. The second phase of the study will focus on how instructional coaching is implemented in independent schools.

What you will do in the study
You will be asked to complete the Qualtrics survey that follows this information sheet. The survey is made up of both multiple-choice and open-ended questions, and aims to explore your conceptualization of teacher professional growth and the strategies employed for implementing professional development opportunities at your institution. You can skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Time required
The survey will require about 15 minutes of your time.

Risks
There are no anticipated risks associated with this study.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study may help us understand how teachers in independent schools grow their professional practice.

Confidentiality
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation
Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no effect on your employment.

Right to withdraw from the study
You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study
If you would like to withdraw from the study, close out of the survey. If you would like to withdraw after completing the survey, please email the researcher, Louisa Nill, at ln2vp@virginia.edu.

Payment
You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Using data beyond the study
The data you provide in this study will be retained in a secure manner by the researcher for 5 years and then destroyed.

Please contact the researcher listed below to:
- Obtain more information or ask a question about the study.
- Report an illness, injury, or other problem.
- Leave the study before it is finished.

Louisa Nill
Department of Curriculum, Instruction, & Special Education
Bavaro Hall 312
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903.
ln2vp@virginia.edu

Jennifer S. Pease, Ph.D.
Department of Curriculum, Instruction, & Special Education
Bavaro Hall 312
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903.
434.227.9111
jcs3m@virginia.edu

You may also report a concern about a study or ask questions about your rights as a research subject by contacting the Institutional Review Board listed below.
Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences
One Morton Dr Suite 400
University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392
Charlottesville, VA 22908-0392

Telephone: (434) 924-5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website: https://research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs
Website for Research Participants: https://research.virginia.edu/research-participants

UVA IRB-SBS # 6399

You may keep this copy for your records.

Appendix F

Phase One: Survey Recruitment Email

Subject line: University of Virginia Research Opportunity Re: Teacher Professional Growth in Independent Schools

Content:

My name is Louisa Nill, and I am a graduate student at the University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education Department. As a requirement for the Doctor of Education program, I am conducting a study on how teacher professional growth is facilitated in independent schools.

The purpose of this study is to determine how stakeholders in independent schools conceptualize and facilitate teacher professional growth. I am reaching out to you in the hopes that you will complete this survey, which should take about 10-15 minutes.

Please see the attached Study Information Sheet which contains more information about this study. Thank you so much in advance for your participation!

Louisa Nill
University of Virginia
Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education
School of Education and Human Development
ln2vp@virginia.edu

Faculty Advisor: Jennifer S. Pease, Ph.D.

Louisa Nill
Teacher Professional Growth and Instructional Coaching: An Investigation of Approaches Used in Independent Schools
IRB-SBS #6399

Appendix G

Data Management Plan

The research project described in this data management plan explores how the Dreyfus School's (pseudonym) peer schools (independent day schools in the Mid-Atlantic with more than 500 students) conceptualize professional growth and facilitate professional growth, particularly through the use of instructional coaching. Data will be collected in two phases, through an online survey and case study research. Below, I describe how the data I collect in each phase will be managed.

Data collected in the survey in Phase One of this study will be collected on Qualtrics and will be housed on the Qualtrics server, which employs robust encryption and security protocols. If the data needs to be downloaded from Qualtrics, the conventions outlined below will be followed.

Data for Phase Two will be collected from multiple schools through 30-60 minute semi-structured interviews over Zoom and document analysis. All participants and schools will be given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Data Organization and Documentation

The file naming convention for case study research data will be School ID #, Data Type, Source ID # or Pseudonym Initials, and Date. A list of identifying details for the School ID and Source (pseudonym or document number) will be kept separate from the files.

For example, if I conduct an interview at School 1 with a participant whose pseudonym is Sally L on November 6th, the file name would be: 1_INT_SL_11.06.2023

If I conduct a document analysis of the 6th document from School 2 on December 10th, the file name would be: 2_DOCA_6_12.10.2023

The types of data collected and managed for this project are:
- Interview protocol: INT
- Interview audio/video: INTV
- Interview transcripts: INTT
- Documents: DOC
- Document analysis: DOCA
- Spreadsheet with coded data: CODE

Non-survey data will be housed on the UVA Box server and organized in the following nested categories (which can be expanded if necessary):
- Interviews

- ○ Interview protocols
- ○ Interview audio/video
- ○ Interview transcripts
- Documents
  - ○ Documents
  - ○ Document analysis protocols
- Data analysis
  - ○ Codebook
  - ○ Spreadsheet with coded data

Data Access and Intellectual Property
All data files will be uploaded to the secure file hosting system UVA Box. In order to protect privacy and confidentiality, participants will be assigned pseudonyms prior to data dissemination. Furthermore, all participants and documents will be assigned a source ID. Source IDs will be recorded in a Microsoft Word document separate from the data. This document will also be uploaded to the secure file hosting system UVA Box.

Data Sharing and Reuse
I will use deidentified data to write my Capstone, which will be shared with the UVA community. Data will be excerpted, and pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' identities. If peers or professors require access to the raw data, they will need to request direct access from me, and I will consult with the IRB.

Data Preservation and Archiving
Survey data will be kept on the Qualtrics survey for six months before being deleted. Interview and document data will be preserved and archived in the secure file hosting system UVA Box for 3-5 years according to UVA standard protocol. The file formats used are .docx, .mp4, and .xls, which are long-lived.

Appendix H

Codebook

Code Name	Definition	Inclusionary Criteria	Exclusionary Criteria	Example
Collaboration	References to collaboration in PG process	References to collaboration within the professional growth (PG) process, including cooperative planning or shared learning experiences.	Descriptions of individual activities or professional development efforts that occur without interaction, cooperation, or input from others, not reflecting a collaborative approach.	"We're actually being constructivist, right, we're, we're talking the teacher through, we're walking side by side on the journey with them"
Community	Mention of word community	Any mention of the word "community" in the context of professional growth.	Mentions of "community" unrelated to professional growth.	"Our professional development opportunities should work toward the following goals: building a strong PK-12 community…"
Desired Outcomes	How participant sees desired outcomes or goals of teacher professional growth through a school lens.	Explicit mention of the specific outcomes or goals that the participant identifies as desired for PG through a school lens. Instances where the participant identifies school context-related	The participant discusses only their personal desired outcomes for teacher professional growth without explicitly considering or mentioning school-wide goals.	"Doing a better job meeting the needs of students"

		measurable criteria for assessing the success of teacher PG process.		
Empowerment	Discussion of PG as relating to teacher empowerment	Any discussion or mention of professional growth in relation to teacher empowerment.	Mentions of empowerment unrelated to professional growth or teaching.	"We want our teachers to feel connected and empowered to do the work they want to do."
Goals	Mention of goal-setting	Any reference to goal-setting in the context of professional growth.	Instances where the term "goals" is used in a general sense unrelated to professional development.	"All school PD opportunities are connected to all school goals."
IC Activities	Description of instructional coaching activities	Specific details about the activities in which instructional coaches and coached teachers engage	The participant includes information that is not directly related to identifying coaching activities in the instructional coaching process.	"We would have a pre observation, conversation and a post"
IC Challenge	Description of challenges faced during the instructional coaching process	Identification of any challenges, roadblocks, etc. faced by instructional coaches, coached teachers, or admin in the instrucitonal coaching process	The participant engages in theoretical discussions about potential challenges in instructional coaching without providing practical examples.	"The schedule is a challenge"

IC Content	Description of instructional coaching content and skills	Specific details about the content and skills that instructional coaches and coached teachers develop in instructional coaching sessions	The participant includes information that is not directly related to identifying the content and skills that are focused on in the instructional coaching process.	"We're talking about formative assessment"
IC Creation	Explanation of how or why the instructional coaching program was created	Any data that provides reasons or motivations for initiating the instructional coaching program and how the program was created	Descriptions of general professional development activities not specifically related to the instructional coaching program	"We all did some training with Elena Aguilar's company"
IC Desired Outcomes	Description of how instructional coaching process has impacted identified desired outcomes	Discussion or examples of how the instructional coaching process has contributed to teachers achieving the school's specific desired outcomes or goals	Description of overall PD desired outcomes or goals.	"The school really, genuinely believes in excellence and really is passionate about the children getting the most out of their education, which can only be achieved if teachers are excellent or influential in what they do. So they really do kind of nudge you to look for opportunities to grow"

IC Impact	Description of how instructional coaching has impacted teacher practice.	The participant explicitly states how instructional coaching has made a positive or negative impact on their teaching practice. The description should clearly indicate a cause-and-effect relationship between instructional coaching and changes in teaching practice.	The participant provides vague statements about the impact of instructional coaching without offering specific details. The absence of a direct link between the described impact and the coaching process. The participant discusses the impact of instructional coaching in generic or theoretical terms without providing concrete examples or practical applications.	"Jamie's sort of prompting was a kid that said, I didn't like what I wrote in an orange marker, because it was hard for them to read it on the board, like, I would have never known that. So I don't write with orange markers anymore because of Jamie."
IC Improvements	Description of how challenges can be faced or how improvements to the instructional coaching process can be made	Proposed solutions, strategies, or suggestions for addressing challenges within the coaching process and making improvements	The participant discusses challenges in instructional coaching but does not provide any proposed solutions, strategies, or suggestions for improvement. The participant engages in theoretical discussions about potential improvements in instructional	"So leaders making space for teachers to do that stuff in the moment, I think, is one way for her to get more meaningful and more consistent feedback."

			coaching without providing practical examples.	
IC PG	Description of the connection between instructional coaching and professional growth	Explanations that draw a connection between the instructional coaching process and participants' professional growth	The participant discusses instructional coaching without explicitly mentioning or connecting it to their own or others' professional growth. Lack of clear articulation of the link between instructional coaching and professional development. Lack of concrete, real-world illustrations of how coaching contributes to professional growth.	"You know, recently, there's a lot of talk about, like, what's the what's the why behind the what? And so she has me thinking about the why, well, why do I have this routine?"
IC Student Academic Outcomes	Description of connection between the instructional coaching process and student outcomes	Discussion or examples demonstrating a perceived connection between instructional coaching and student academic outcomes	Discussion of desired outcomes or goals other than student academic outcomes.	"Schools have to get clear about the link between their professional growth and learning systems plan and student growth."
IC When	Description of timing and frequency of	Information about when instructional	The participant includes information that	"Some teachers I'm working with regularly, like I

	instructional coaching	coaching occurs, including frequency, duration, time in schedule	is not directly related to identifying when the instructional coaching process occurs.	come every week to their teaching meeting"
IC Who	Description of participants and roles in the instructional coaching process	Clear identification of the individuals involved in the instructional coaching process including their respective roles and responsibilities	The participant includes information that is not directly related to identifying the individuals and their roles in the instructional coaching process.	"We do coaching with every member of the Upper School faculty, that was in year four and above"
Individual Conceptualize	Description of how the participant conceptualizes or defines teacher professional growth for themselves.	Explicit discussion of how participant conceptualizes or defines teacher professional growth in their own personal context. Personal views on and understanding of teacher PG.	Participant discusses how their school conceptualizes of teacher professional growth.	"So much of our own identity is part of our preferred professional growth"
Mission-alignment	Discussion of mission in PG process	Discussion of how the school's mission is integrated into the activities and objectives of instructional coaching or professional development initiatives	Broad statements about the school's mission or educational philosophy that do not specifically tie back to the professional growth process or explain how the PG initiatives align with or	"Are we living into our mission? And how are we, you know, helping to evolve the programming and the teachers alongside that?"

			support that mission.	
Non-eval	Mention of non-evaluative nature of IC	Explicit mention of the non-evaluative nature of the instructional coaching, indicating that the coaching is meant to support and develop rather than assess teacher performance for evaluative purposes.	References to evaluative processes, assessments, or any form of performance review that is not directly related to the non-evaluative support provided by instructional coaching.	"That's making it non evaluative"
Ongoing	Description of PG as ongoing learning	Descriptions or discussions indicating professional growth as an ongoing learning process.	Statements implying a fixed or finite nature to professional growth without mention of ongoing learning.	"Ongoing learning to refine one's practice and pedagogy"
PD Example	Examples of PD opportunities	Detailed examples of PD opportunities offered at the school, including workshops, courses, seminars, conferences, or online learning modules	Overarching descriptions or frameworks of how PD is organized at the school without focusing on specific examples	"Our science department is working with Julie Stern to aid in curriculum planning"
PD Impact on PG	How PD approaches impact PG	Discussion of how non-instructional coaching PD practices impact teacher PG	Information about instructional coaching	"Most of the PD I ranked as having a 'small impact' are those that are one-offs that do not

				require any sort of follow up either from the host organization or the cohort."
PG Setup	Description of how PD is set up at the school to facilitate PG.	Include statements or descriptions that outline the overall framework or structure of PD within the school	Personal reflections or opinions about the PD process without describing the setup. Information focused on the impact of PD	"We offer almost everything through the course of a year, so that our entire community gets a decent amount of PD every school year"
Relationship	Description of relationships in IC process	Detailed description of the dynamics, quality, or characteristics of relationships formed during the instructional coaching process, including relationships between coach and teacher, among teachers, or between teachers and administrators within the context of IC.	General discussions of interpersonal relationships in the school environment that do not specifically relate to or arise from the instructional coaching process.	"And we definitely try to play the long game, like you build the trust, and you, you know, go slow to go fast, basically."
School Conceptualize	Description of how the stakeholder conceptualizes or defines teacher professional growth in/for	Explicit discussion of participant's view on how their school conceptualizes or defines teacher	Participation discusses how they personally conceptualize teacher professional growth.	"I define professional growth in the context of my school as each teacher journeying toward their

	their school context.	professional growth. Participant's perspective on their school's approach/definition of PG.		fullest potential as an educator, eventually creating the best learning outcomes for our students."
Teacher Support	Mention that IC supports teachers in a relational or emotional sense	Any specific mention or example where the instructional coaching (IC) directly supports teachers in a relational or emotional capacity	General statements about teacher support that do not explicitly involve emotional support in the instructional coaching process.	"Instructional coaching is supporting the teachers, primarily. And it's not anything to do with the evaluation of teachers, and we try to hold trust with them. "

Appendix I

Phase Two Study Information Sheet

Please read this study information sheet carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study
This research investigates teacher professional development and growth in independent schools that engage in instructional coaching. The study's significance lies in its potential to inform tailored systems for effective teacher professional growth in independent schools. The first phase of the study focused on how administrators in independent schools conceptualize and facilitate professional growth. This phase of the study seeks to determine how instructional coaching is implemented in independent schools.

What you will do in the study
You will be asked to participate in a 30–45-minute Zoom interview to discuss how you conceptualize professional growth at your institution and your understanding of how the instructional coaching process is implemented. The Zoom interview will be recorded. You can skip any question that makes you uncomfortable and t can stop the interview at any time.

Time required
The interview will require about 30-45 minutes of your time.

Risks
There are no anticipated risks associated with this study.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study may help us understand how teachers in independent schools grow their professional practice.

Confidentiality
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation
Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no effect on your employment.

Right to withdraw from the study
You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study
If you would like to withdraw from the study, you can tell the interviewer to stop the interview. If you would like to draw after the interview please email the researcher, Louisa Nill, at ln2vp@virginia.edu.

Payment
You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Using data beyond this study
The data you provide in this study will be retained in a secure manner by the researcher for 5 years and then destroyed.

Please contact the researcher listed below to:
- Obtain more information or ask a question about the study.
- Report an illness, injury, or other problem.
- Leave the study before it is finished.

Louisa Nill
Department of Curriculum, Instruction, & Special Education
Bavaro Hall 312
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903.
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Jennifer S. Pease, Ph.D.
Department of Curriculum, Instruction, & Special Education
Bavaro Hall 312
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903.
434.227.9111
jcs3m@virginia.edu

You may also report a concern about a study or ask questions about your rights as a research subject by contacting the Institutional Review Board listed below.
Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences
One Morton Dr Suite 400
University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392
Charlottesville, VA 22908-0392

Telephone: (434) 924-5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website: https://research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs
Website for Research Participants: https://research.virginia.edu/research-participants

UVA IRB-SBS # 6399

You may keep this copy for your records.

Appendix J

Phase Two Permission Form

UNIVERSITY ⫿ VIRGINIA | Vice President for Research

1/24/24

To ⫿⫿⫿⫿_____,

The University of Virginia's Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences (IRB-SBS) would like to confirm your acknowledgment of the planned research study:

Study number IRB-SBS#: 6399

Principal Investigator: Louisa Nill   Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Dr. Jen Pease

Study Title: Teacher Professional Growth and Instructional Coaching: An Investigation...

The IRB-SBS is responsible for providing approval for this research study to be conducted. However, as the research is occurring in a community with which your group is familiar, the IRB-SBS is seeking to confirm acknowledgment from your group.

◉ Yes, I confirm acknowledgment. The study team has been in contact with my group and we are aware of the research study plan. We have no concerns at this time. (If applicable, please attach any rules or requirements for the study team to follow while interacting with this group.)

○ No. The study team has not been in contact with my group, and/or the group has reservations/concerns about the research study plan which we would like to discuss with the study team and the IRB-SBS prior to the study plan moving forward.

If a copy of the study protocol or a description of the study was not provided by the study team, your group may request this information. Additionally, your group is welcome to contact the study team and/or the IRB-SBS at anytime if concerns or questions regarding this research study arise in the future.

For more information about research, please see the IRB-SBS website: https://research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs or email us at irbsbshelp@virginia.edu

Signature: ⫿⫿⫿⫿⫿⫿⫿⫿⫿⫿⫿⫿⫿⫿

Varsity Hall | 136 Hospital Drive | Box 400301 | Charlottesville, VA 22904 | 434.924.3606
research.virginia.edu

Appendix K

Phase Two Recruitment Email

Subject line: University of Virginia Research Opportunity Re: Instructional Coaching at Independent Schools

Content:

My name is Louisa Nill and I am a graduate student at the University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education Department. As a requirement for the Doctorate of Education program, I am conducting a study on how instructional coaching is implemented in independent schools.

The purpose of this study is to determine how stakeholders in independent schools conceptualize teacher professional growth and how instructional coaching may impact teacher professional growth in these unique institutions. I am reaching out to you because you completed the survey I sent earlier this year and identified that your school uses instructional coaching as a tool for teacher professional development and growth.

The study involves participating in one 30-45 minute Zoom interview with me, and a potential (short) follow-up interview.

The study is currently enrolling administrators in independent schools who are in charge of the instructional coaching process, instructional coaches, and coached teachers. Eligible participants are those who hold one of these positions at your school.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me!

Louisa Nill
University of Virginia
Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education
School of Education and Human Development
ln2vp@virginia.edu

Faculty Advisor: Jennifer S. Pease, Ph.D.

Louisa Nill
Teacher Professional Growth and Instructional Coaching: An Investigation of Approaches Used in Independent Schools
IRB-SBS #6399

Appendix L
Interview Protocol for Administrators

Research questions:

At a peer school that utilizes instructional coaching , how does instructional coaching facilitate teacher professional growth?

    a. How do stakeholders at the school conceptualize teacher professional growth?

    b. How is instructional coaching implemented at the school?

    c. How do stakeholders at the school perceive the instructional coaching process?

Interviewer: Louisa Nill   Interviewee:

Date, time, and location:

Before the interview:

- "I am conducting a qualitative case study about teacher professional growth and the implementation of instructional coaching at your school."
- "I am hoping to learn how stakeholders conceptualize teacher professional growth, how the instructional coaching program is implemented, and what stakeholders' perceptions are of the instructional coaching process."
- "I am going to ask you a variety of questions, but you don't have to answer all of them and you can end the interview at any time."
- "Thank you so much in advance for your participation, it is greatly appreciated."
- Gain verbal and written consent (if have not done so already)

Background Questions

What is your name?

What is your role at this school?

How many years have you worked here?

Essential Questions

1. What does professional growth mean to you in regard to teachers in this school?
    a. In your personal opinion, what are the desired outcomes or goals of the professional growth process?
2. What do you think professional growth means at your school?
    a. What do you think are the desired outcomes or goals of the professional growth process from a school standpoint?

3. What opportunities are available for teachers to engage in professional growth at your school?
4. I'd like to learn more about instructional coaching, which I know you have experience with. What can you tell me about the process?
   a. Who is involved?
   b. What happens during coaching? What skills are teacher being coached in?
   c. When does coaching occur? How often does it happen?
5. Why did your school choose to use the instructional coaching process? How did it come to be?
6. Are there benefits to the instructional coaching process? What are they?
7. What are the challenges with the instructional coaching process?
   a. What would you suggest to improve the process?
8. Can you provide specific examples of how engaging in the instructional coaching process has impacted teachers' teaching practice?
9. Can you describe how engaging in the instructional coaching process has impacted a teacher's professional growth?
10. Have you observed any connection between the instructional coaching process and student outcomes?

Thank you once again for your valuable time and insights. Your contributions are instrumental in advancing the understanding of instructional coaching and its role in teacher professional growth in independent schools. If you have any additional comments or thoughts after the interview, please feel free to share them. Your feedback is highly appreciated.

Key words and phrases	Interviewer observations, questions, wonderings

Appendix M

Interview Protocol for Instructional Coaches

Research questions:

At a peer school that utilizes instructional coaching , how does instructional coaching facilitate teacher professional growth?
    a. How do stakeholders at the school conceptualize teacher professional growth?
    b. How is instructional coaching implemented at the school?
    c. How do stakeholders at the school perceive the instructional coaching process?

Interviewer: Louisa Nill   Interviewee:

Date, time, and location:

Before the interview:
- "I am conducting a qualitative case study about teacher professional growth and the implementation of instructional coaching at your school."
- "I am hoping to learn how stakeholders conceptualize teacher professional growth, how the instructional coaching program is implemented, and what stakeholders' perceptions are of the instructional coaching process."
- "I am going to ask you a variety of questions, but you don't have to answer all of them and you can end the interview at any time."
- "Thank you so much in advance for your participation, it is greatly appreciated."
- Gain verbal and written consent (if have not done so already)

Background Questions
What is your name?
What is your role at this school?
How many years have you worked here?

Essential Questions
    1. What does professional growth mean to you as an instructional coach?
        a. In your personal opinion, what are the desired outcomes or goals of professional growth?
    2. What do you think professional growth means at your school?
        a. What do you think are the desired outcomes or goals of professional growth from school standpoint?

3. Can you share specific examples of how teachers have grown professionally in your time at this school?
4. I'd like to know more about the instructional coaching process. Can you tell me about it?
   a. Who is involved?
   b. What happens during coaching? What skills are teacher being coached in?
   c. When does coaching occur? How often does it happen?
5. Have you seen teachers or instructional coaches benefit from the coaching process? How so?
   a. Can you tell me more about…
6. Have you or teachers you have coached faced challenges throughout the instructional coaching process? How so?
   a. How might you address those challenges? What improvements can be made?
7. Can you describe how engaging in the instructional coaching process has impacted your coached teachers' teaching practice?
   a. Can you provide a specific example?
8. Can you describe how engaging in the instructional coaching process has impacted your coached teachers' professional growth?
   a. Do you see a connection between changes in their teaching practice and changes in their professional growth?
9. Have you observed any connection between the instructional coaching process and student outcomes?

Thank you once again for your valuable time and insights. Your contributions are instrumental in advancing the understanding of instructional coaching and its role in teacher professional growth in independent schools. If you have any additional comments or thoughts after the interview, please feel free to share them. Your feedback is highly appreciated.

Key words and phrases	Interviewer observations, questions, wonderings

Appendix N

Interview Protocol for Coached Teachers

Research questions:

At a peer school that utilizes instructional coaching , how does instructional coaching facilitate teacher professional growth?
   a. How do stakeholders at the school conceptualize teacher professional growth?
   b. How is instructional coaching implemented at the school?
   c. How do stakeholders at the school perceive the instructional coaching process?

Interviewer: Louisa Nill   Interviewee:

Date, time, and location:

Before the interview:
   ● "I am conducting a qualitative case study about teacher professional growth and the implementation of instructional coaching at your school."
   ● "I am hoping to learn how stakeholders conceptualize teacher professional growth, how the instructional coaching program is implemented, and what stakeholders' perceptions are of the instructional coaching process."
   ● "I am going to ask you a variety of questions, but you don't have to answer all of them and you can end the interview at any time."
   ● "Thank you so much in advance for your participation, it is greatly appreciated."
   ● Gain verbal and written consent (if have not done so already)

Background Questions
What is your name?
What is your role at this school?
How many years have you worked here?

Essential Questions
   1. What does professional growth mean to you as a teacher?
        a. In your personal opinion, what are the desired outcomes or goals of professional growth?
   2. What do you think professional growth means at your school?
        a. What do you think are the desired outcomes or goals of professional growth from school standpoint?
   3. What opportunities are available for you to engage in professional growth at your school?

4. Can you share an experience you've had at your school that has led to your professional growth? I am asking specifically about school-sponsored opportunities - not external conferences, etc.
5. I'd like to learn more about instructional coaching, which I know you have experience with. What can you tell me about the process?
   a. Who is involved?
   b. What happens during coaching? What skills are teacher being coached in?
   c. When does coaching occur? How often does it happen?
6. Have you benefited from the instructional coaching process? How so?
   a. Can you tell me more about…
7. Have you faced challenges throughout the instructional coaching process? How so?
   a. How might you address those challenges? What improvements can be made?
8. How has the instructional coaching process impacted your teaching practice?
   a. Can you provide a specific example?
9. Can you describe how engaging in the instructional coaching process has impacted your professional growth?
   a. Do you see a connection between changes in your teaching practice and changes in your professional growth?
10. Have you observed any connection between the instructional coaching process and student outcomes?

Thank you once again for your valuable time and insights. Your contributions are instrumental in advancing the understanding of instructional coaching and its role in teacher professional growth in independent schools. If you have any additional comments or thoughts after the interview, please feel free to share them. Your feedback is highly appreciated.

Key words and phrases	Interviewer observations, questions, wonderings

Appendix O

Example of Reflective Memo

Wednesday, Jan 31

I interviewed [Jamie] today which was super interesting. After the interview I'm realizing that independent school teachers may not actually be able to define how they conceptualize professional growth. When I asked them about it, they launched right into PD. So, I'm thinking the concept isn't widely understood or widely defined in the independent school world.

Later on in the interview they acknowledged that they see it sort of as a change in thinking over time and that was interesting as it relates to my CF, but it took a lot of talking to get that idea or definition out of them.They also wanted my recommendations for how they're doing with their instructional coaching program, and I guess I hadn't thought about whether I'm really analyzing that as part of my study. Because I think I'm just using what they have and making recommendations to [Dreyfus], so I need to think about that.

I need to get documents from [Chris], though it sounds like they don't really have any. Would be really helpful to get objective information on the program, but so far everyone has said they don't exist. Hoping I can interview maybe like five teachers to get a better idea of how the program works and cross-reference what the coaches said? I'm not really sure how many interviews I should be doing. Maybe six, maybe two from each division? That would give good insight into the divisional differences because [Jamie] did say that there are differences in the instructional coaching programs across the divisions, which is definitely something I am going to have to delve into and ask more about. So maybe I need to think about what specific to Middle School versus Lower and Upper. Something to consider when I'm coding and theming!

**Appendix P**

The Dreyfus School Professional Growth and Instructional Coaching Action Plan

The slideshow on the following pages serves as an Action Plan for the Dreyfus school regarding how the school could implement the recommendations outlined in Chapter 5.

The Dreyfus School
Professional Growth and Instructional Coaching Action Plan

Louisa Nill, Spring 2024

Action Plan Outline

1. Action plan goals/desired outcomes
2. Timeline overview of action plan implementation
3. Explanation of action plan steps stemming from recommendations
   a. Rationale
   b. Stakeholders involved
   c. Action items
   d. Questions to consider

Goals for the Professional Growth and Instructional Coaching Action Plan at Dreyfus

Stemming from the recommendations of the study (Teacher Professional Growth and Instructional Coaching: An Investigation of Approaches Used in Independent Schools), the following action items should be implemented at Dreyfus in order to:

- Refine the school's vision for professional growth to clarify what PG is for school stakeholders
- Ensure professional development activities are high-quality, job-embedded, sustained, mission-aligned, and relevant so that they have an impact on teacher professional growth
- Focus teacher professional growth on enhancing student learning
- Facilitate teacher professional growth in alignment with school goals

Year One: Laying the Foundation

Jun, Jul, Aug	Sep, Oct, Nov	Dec, Jan, Feb	Mar, Apr, May
TPGEC focus groups to define professional growth and desired outcomes TPGEC and Academic Dean audit existing PD to evaluate alignment with PG vision and school's mission; make PD plan for upcoming school year	Communicate defined vision for PG to all stakeholders Collect feedback on PD opportunities and implementation of new instructional strategies	Develop plan for IC program, begin hiring process for instructional coaches Communicate defined vision for PG, PD, and IC to all stakeholders and gather feedback Write mandatory coaching policy for contracts	Pilot IC program with a small group of teachers and internal placeholder IC and gather feedback Communicate myths and misconceptions about IC to teachers to address reluctance

Year Two: Implementation and Experimentation

Jun, Jul, Aug	Sep, Oct, Nov	Dec, Jan, Feb	Mar, Apr, May
Onboard and train instructional coaches in IC program and relationship-building Gather feedback re: IC pilot program Teacher PD in DDDM	Ongoing teacher PD in DDDM Begin optional IC in each division, ICs observe classes Gather IC feedback	Continue optional IC in each division, etc. Teachers share success stories with colleagues. Ongoing teacher PD in DDDM TPGEC develops system for documenting coaching and assessing impact	Continue optional IC in each division, etc. Teachers share success stories with colleagues. Ongoing teacher PD in DDDM TPGEC develops system for documenting coaching and assessing impact

Year Three: Implementation and Refinement

Jun, Jul, Aug	Sep, Oct, Nov	Dec, Jan, Feb	Mar, Apr, May
Roll out mandatory coaching to teachers Using feedback from IC program, continue to train coaches Gather data re: effectiveness of DDDM PD	Begin mandatory coaching, gather feedback Implement framework for sharing PG, PD, IC successes Review vision for PG and PD and evaluate	Implement framework for sharing PG, PD, IC successes Review vision for PG and PD and evaluate Plan for systematic documentation and feedback collection on PG and PD	Host school-wide PG conference during morning faculty meetings to showcase PG successes Plan for sustained implementation of IC program

Recommendation 1: Define and communicate a vision for professional growth

Rationale

- Defining and communicating a clear vision of PG and its desired outcomes will enable teachers to engage with the process more effectively
    - Findings illustrate that PG is a nebulous concept in independent schools that needs to be clarified
- If PG is defined, teachers and admin can align PG goals with school mission and goals

Recommendation 1: Define and communicate a vision for professional growth

Stakeholders Involved	School administrators, Academic Dean, Teacher Professional Growth and Evaluation Committee (TPGEC), teachers
Actions	1. TPGEC leads focus groups at morning faculty meeting to collaboratively define professional growth and its desired outcomes in context at Dreyfus with all stakeholders 2. TPGEC develops document outlining vision for PG and desired outcomes, including system of measurement for desired outcomes
Questions to Consider and/or Suggestions	What are the desired outcomes of PG at Dreyfus? What specific student outcomes need to be targeted? Why? How? How does the vision for PG align with the school's mission?

Recommendation 2: Focus PG and PD opportunities on student outcomes

Rationale

- Teachers in independent schools often do not collect consistent, reliable, and valid data on student outcomes
  - Enhancing student outcomes is not the major focus of PG in independent schools according to findings
  - Participants discussed enhancing the "student experience," but did not explain in further detail
- Student outcomes should be the focus of the professional growth process in order to ensure that professional growth positively impacts student learning
- Coaching can positively impact student academic outcomes (Kraft et al., 2018; Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Papay et al., 2016)

Recommendation 2: Focus PG and PD opportunities on student outcomes

Stakeholders Involved	Academic Dean,TPGEC, teachers
Actions	1. Academic Dean and TPGEC choose professional development sessions that focus on aligning teaching strategies with identified desired student outcomes 2. Offer PD to teachers in data-driven decision-making 3. TPGEC develops a framework for teachers to document how specific PD activities influence their instructional practice, professional growth, and student learning
Questions to Consider and/or Suggestions	How do we measure student outcomes at Dreyfus? How will we measure the impact of PG and PD on student learning at Dreyfus? What evidence-based teaching strategies are reasonable to adopt to improve student learning outcomes?

Recommendation 3: Offer Sustained, High-Quality, Job-Embedded, Mission-Aligned PD

Rationale

- Engaging in high-quality, job-embedded PD can help to ensure that PD facilitates teachers' professional growth within the school context.
- 88% of Dreyfus's peer schools are implementing the "theory to practice" approach (Guskey, 1986; Korthagen, 2017, p. 388) regarding teacher PD (guest speakers, online courses, workshops, etc.)
  - Very limited impact on teacher PG according to administrators (6-13% of respondents said "significant" impact)
- Fewer schools using HQ-JE PD (coaching, peer observations, communities of practice, etc.)
  - 29-47% of respondents said the impact of HQ-JE PD on teacher PG was "significant"
- More likely to facilitate professional growth than traditional approaches (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015).

Recommendation 3: Offer sustained, high-quality, job-embedded, mission-aligned PD

Stakeholders Involved	Academic Dean, other administrators, TPGEC, PD providers
Actions	1. TPGEC and Academic Dean audit existing and planned PD opportunities to evaluate alignment with PG vision and school's mission, share with admin 2. TPGEC, Academic Dean, and Admin research ways to provide HQ-JE PD to teachers (other schools, consulting companies, etc.) 3. Administrators and Academic Dean write and communicate PD strategic plan
Questions to Consider and/or Suggestions	Which existing PD opportunities are most effective for teacher PG? Why? How can we ensure PD is sustained over time? Create a consistent feedback mechanism for teachers to share how PD is affecting PG and student learning

Recommendation 4: Adopt a Non-Evaluative, Dialogical Instructional Coaching Model

Rationale

- Cooper teachers and coaches emphasized the effectiveness of a non-evaluative and conversational approach to coaching
- Instructional coaching is an effective method of growing teacher practice and positively impacting student outcomes (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016)
- Middle School teachers attribute change in practice to instructional coaching
- Coaching must be non-evaluative to be effective (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2006)

Recommendation 4: Adopt a non-evaluative, dialogical instructional coaching model

Stakeholders Involved	TPGEC, Academic Dean, school administrators, teachers, coaches
Actions	1. TPGEC define vision for dialogical, non-evaluative instructional coaching program, including implementation strategies 2. TPGEC and Academic Dean share rationale for IC program with teachers 3. Administrators hire four instructional coaches (one LS, one MS, two US)
Questions to Consider and/or Suggestions	How can Dreyfus build a culture that supports and values instructional coaching, including scheduling considerations? What resources are necessary to support effective instructional coaching? Start the coaching program with a pilot program with one trained internal coach and gather feedback on its effectiveness. Pilot IC program with a small group of teachers and internal placeholder IC and gather feedback

Recommendation 5: Clarify the Instructional Coaching Role and Objectives

Rationale

- Coach role clarity helps manage expectations and enhances coaching effectiveness
  - Desired by several Cooper stakeholders
- At Cooper, role of coach is loosely defined, creating challenges in the coaching process
  - Not enough time for MS coach
  - US coaches focusing too much on teacher emotional support
- For instructional coaching to be implemented effectively, it must be clear what the instructional coach does (Knight, 2022) and does not do
- The focus of instructional coaching should be deliberate practice of and refinement of specific skills (Aguilar, 2013) to enhance student learning

Recommendation 5: Clarify the instructional coaching role and objectives

Stakeholders Involved	TPGEC, Academic Dean, Administrators
Actions	1. TPGEC and Academic Dean develop detailed job descriptions for coaches that emphasize coaches' role in enhancing teaching practice and student outcomes 2. TPGEC set clear expectations for role of instructional coaches 3. Academic Dean regularly reviews coaching role to ensure it aligns with school's mission and desired outcomes
Questions to Consider and/or Suggestions	What mechanisms can be put into place to ensure coaching remains aligned with its objectives? How will school stakeholders gather feedback on coaching and implement that feedback?

Recommendation 6: Prepare Coaches for Relationship-Building

Rationale

- Instructional coaches should prepare or engage in training to build trust, foster positive relationships with teachers, and encourage teacher collaboration.
- Critical for creating a supportive environment where teachers feel comfortable engaging in coaching and collaboration
  - Stakeholders at Cooper highlighted the importance of the coach/teacher relationship and the confidentiality of coaching
- Coaches must have good working relationships with teachers and build trust in order for coaching to be effective in facilitating professional growth (Hammond & Moore, 2018; Preciado, 2015; Warnock et al., 2021).

Recommendation 6: Prepare coaches for relationship-building

Stakeholders Involved	Instructional coaches, Academic Dean, TPGEC, instructional coaching company
Actions	1. Academic Dean hires instructional coaching company to prepare instructional coaches and/or sends coaches to workshops for training 2. Academic Dean and coaches outline steps for relationship-building with teachers 3. Coaches open up optional, exploratory, experimental instructional coaching to start building relationships 4. Coaches consistently visit classrooms
Questions to Consider and/or Suggestions	How can coaches balance relationship-building with the need to challenge teachers' practices? How will the school decide on an instructional coaching company and framework? When and how often should coaches observe teachers in the preliminary stages?

Recommendation 7: Make Teacher Participation Mandatory

Rationale

- There are no overarching standards for high-quality teaching in independent schools
- Instructional coaching has positive impact on teacher practice and student outcomes (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2016)
  - Shown in Middle School at Cooper
- Instructional coaching at Cooper is personalized to the needs of the teacher, so all teachers could benefit
- According to Cooper stakeholders and literature, some teachers are resistant to coaching and will not engage in voluntary coaching

Recommendation 7: Make teacher participation mandatory

Stakeholders Involved	School administrators, teachers
Actions	1. Administrators formulate a policy making instructional coaching mandatory for all teachers and come up with a plan for when teachers refuse to participate in coaching 2. Administrators ensure that there is built-in time in teachers' schedules for instructional coaching in all divisions 3. Administrators communicate vision and rationale for mandatory coaching to teachers
Questions to Consider and/or Suggestions	How can we ensure that mandatory participation doesn't lead to resistance toward or fear of instructional coaching? How do we make time in teachers' schedules for coaching? What support do teachers need to make the most out of coaching? Start with optional coaching in year one Have teachers frequently share coaching success stories

Recommendation 8: Center coaching around one-to-one meetings, classroom observations, and consistent feedback for teachers

Rationale

- One-to-one meetings, classroom observations, and consistent teacher feedback are common aspects of instructional coaching (Elek & Page, 2018)
    - Highlighted by coaches and teachers at Cooper as effective strategies
- These activities provide concrete, actionable insights for teacher improvement and are essential for the professional growth process.
    - Middle School teachers shared examples of how observations and feedback helped to change their practice
- Research shows that these activities specifically target and positively impact

Recommendation 8: Center coaching around one-to-one meetings, classroom observations, and consistent feedback for teachers

Stakeholders Involved	Teachers, coaches
Actions	1. Standardize the coaching process across divisions to ensure that it includes one-to-one meetings, classroom observations, and consistent feedback mechanisms for teachers 2. Set up meeting and observation schedules 3. Teach coaches how to conduct observations and give feedback to teachers in actionable, helpful ways
Questions to Consider and/or Suggestions	What training do coaches need to effectively observe and provide feedback to teachers? How do we create a culture of collaboration so teachers feel comfortable having coaches in their classrooms? Create opportunities for coaches to meet regularly to learn from each other

Recommendation 9: Address teacher resistance to coaching

Rationale

- Cooper stakeholders discussed teacher resistance toward coaching
  - Also common theme within instructional coaching literature
- Dreyfus should proactively identify and address reluctance or resistance toward instructional coaching among teachers in order to ensure that all teachers benefit from the instructional coaching process.
- Coaches, teachers, and administrators must exhibit patience and grace to allow the program to catch on among school stakeholders.

Recommendation 9: Address teacher resistance to coaching

Stakeholders Involved	TPGEC, Academic Dean, administrators, coaches, teachers
Actions	1. TPGEC, Academic Dean, and administrators communicate vision and justification for coaching to teachers, including addressing myths and misconceptions about the coaching process 2. Academic Dean gathers feedback on teacher perceptions of coaching (before coaching begins and continuously after) 3. Teachers regularly share coaching success stories with colleagues during meetings
Questions to Consider and/or Suggestions	What are the causes of teacher resistance to coaching? How can we ensure that coaching is appealing for all teachers? What happens if a teacher refuses to participate? Communicate myths and misconceptions about IC to teachers to address reluctance

Recommendation 10: Document and assess coaching effectiveness

Rationale

- Cooper does not have documentation of the coaching program or its impact
- King (2003) argued that coaching fails when its impact is not documented because there is no information on the effectiveness of the process.
- Coaches and administrators should collect data on the instructional coaching program, including its implementation, teacher feedback, and teacher explanation of how the program has impacted their professional growth.
  - This will allow school stakeholders to see the benefits and challenges within the program and make changes to the program to make it more effective.

Recommendation 10: Document and assess coaching effectiveness

Stakeholders Involved	TPGEC, Academic Dean, coaches, teachers
Actions	1. TPGEC and Academic Dean develop a system for documenting coaching sessions and progress toward identified desired outcomes, including student outcomes 2. Academic Dean regularly evaluates the coaching process, using qualitative (discussions with teachers and coaches) and quantitative (survey) data
Questions to Consider and/or Suggestions	How often will the coaching program need to be evaluated? What metrics will be used to evaluate the coaching program? How will the data gathered be used to continuously improve the program?