

To the University of Wyoming:

The members of the Committee approve the project of Larry J. Reznicek presented on April 7, 2017.

Dr. Suzanne Young, Chair

Dr. Leslie Rush, Outside Member

Dr. Mary Alice Bruce

APPROVED:

Dr. Mary Alice Bruce, Dept. Chair, Department of Professional Studies

Dr. Ray Reutzel, Dean, College of Education

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Abstract

This study seeks to provide additional information on the body of knowledge specifically regarding Wyoming principal perceptions on the use of instructional facilitators in their buildings. Expanding awareness of this field may help school leaders to incorporate this form of professional development for teachers within their buildings.

The study explored the perceptions of Wyoming principals and their experiences with instructional facilitators. The participants in this study were identified as those who are currently a principal in a Wyoming school and work directly with an instructional facilitator. This study analyzed the perceptions of principals as to their vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude of the instructional facilitator program.

Principals reported strong agreement in their perceptions of vision with regards to instructional coaching as an effective means to improve teacher instruction. With roles and responsibilities, the highest rated item was the goal of the instructional facilitator improving instructional practice within their building. Supporting teachers with instructional facilitators was the item rated the highest when principals were asked about their attitudes towards the program. There was no significant difference regarding the vision of the program between elementary and secondary principals. However, elementary principals reported significantly stronger opinions compared to secondary principals in their beliefs about roles and responsibilities of instructional facilitators used in their buildings. Elementary principals also showed significantly more positive attitudes about the instructional facilitator program compared to secondary principals.

INSTRUCTIONAL FACILIATORS IN WYOMING'S SCHOOLS:
PERSPECTIVES OF THE PRINCIPALS

by
Larry J. Reznicek

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Purpose of the Study.....	2
Research Questions	2
Significance of Study	3
Literature Review	4
Characteristics of Instructional Coaching.....	6
Teacher Professional Development Needs.....	7
Wyoming Instructional Facilitator Program	9
Methodology	11
Research Questions	11
Survey Design	12
Population	13
Data Collection	13
Summary	13
Results	15
Description of Respondents	15
Vision	17
Roles and Responsibilities	18
Attitude	20
Elementary and Secondary Principal Views	21
Open-ended Question	23
Summary	24
Discussion	27
Conclusions	28
Limitations	29
Recommendations	30
Suggestions for Further Research	30
Summary	35

REFERENCES	36
APPENDIX A.....	
Cover Letter and Survey	42
APPENDIX B.....	
IRB Approval Letter	45

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Information	16
Table 2. Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations for Principals' Beliefs about Vision for the IF Program	18
Table 3. Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations for Principals' Beliefs about Roles and Responsibilities for the IF Program	19
Table 4. Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations for Principals' Attitude about the IF Program	21
Table 5. Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations of Elementary and Secondary Principals' Vision, Roles and Responsibilities, and Attitude about the IF Program	23

Introduction

During the 2006 Wyoming Legislative interim session, the school district funding model was recalibrated. The 58th legislative session of the State of Wyoming passed Enrolled Act Number 23 during the 2006 budget session (Wyoming Legislative Services Office, 2006). This act created an enhanced funding model for the State of Wyoming K-12 public school education system. Picus and Associates, a consulting firm hired to recalibrate the funding model, recommended the addition of instructional facilitators to school districts in the state (Odden et al., 2005). Instructional facilitators have a responsibility for providing school based staff development, primarily supporting the instructional practice of teachers in the classroom. The rationale for instructional facilitators was to improve teacher effectiveness through high quality professional development. Picus and Associates identified the use of instructional facilitators as one of the most important school improvement strategies for effective professional development. Their recommendation was the institution of school-based instructional facilitators or instructional coaches, also called mentors, site coaches, curriculum specialists or lead teachers.

On average, teachers need approximately 50 hours of professional development in any given area to improve their instruction; however, they seldom receive this amount (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009). School leaders need strategies to increase student learning. Principals and teachers are challenged by new demands to prepare students, and ongoing professional development is the key to meeting these challenges (Yager, Pedersen, Yager & Noppe, 2011). According to Peterson, Taylor, Burnham and Schock (as cited in Rush & Young, 2011), instructional coaching as a form of professional development to help improve teacher instruction and coaching is a way for teachers to observe and learn new strategies, as well as receive feedback on their classroom practices. Teachers need coaching to

push their dialogue to the epistemological level; thoughtful dialogue encourages teachers to reflect on their instructional decisions (Collet, 2012). An instructional coach's role is non-evaluative and focuses on determining the needs of teachers (Hemphill & Duffield, 2007).

This study was intended to examine principal perceptions of the use of instructional facilitators in Wyoming schools. Principals were asked their opinions on the vision of the instructional facilitator program, how they use their instructional facilitators (roles and responsibilities), and their attitude toward the program. Finally, this study gathered information related to how elementary and secondary principals perceived these characteristics.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Wyoming principals toward the instructional facilitator program. Wyoming principals who work with instructional facilitators in their buildings were surveyed. The results of the study could lead to improvement in the instructional facilitator program as a professional development model, which would not only benefit Wyoming but, potentially, other states or school districts who are interested in using coaches.

Research Questions

The following four research questions guide this study. These questions were asked to examine perceptions of Wyoming principals regarding the vision, roles, and attitudes about the instructional facilitator program.

1. How do principals in Wyoming envision the instructional facilitator program?
2. What do principals identify as the roles and responsibilities for instructional facilitators serving in their respective schools?
3. What are the attitudes of Wyoming principals about the effectiveness of the

instructional facilitator program?

4. How do elementary and secondary principals differ on vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude about the instructional facilitator program?

Significance of the Study

The use of instructional facilitators in Wyoming began in 2005. Few studies have been done to gather opinions of principals on the use of instructional facilitators in Wyoming schools. This study addresses these principal opinions through specific questions regarding the vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude toward the instructional facilitator program. The results of this study may help principals improve or introduce a coaching program.

Literature Review

In the past, teachers have sought improvement in their skill set to foster high levels of learning among students, especially with students experiencing difficulties (Lewis & Young, 2013). For teachers, professional development can require change to this practice. One of the practice-based professional development approaches is the use of instructional coaching, a form of professional development involving classroom modeling, critique of practice, and observation (Shanklin, 2006). The in-class support from coaches seeks to help teachers effectively implement new instructional formats and practices into teacher classrooms (Poglinco & Bach, 2004). Of the many techniques coaches can use, modeling instruction in individual classrooms is more likely to result in modifications in instructional practices (Poglinco & Bach, 2004). Habegger and Hodanbosi (2011) suggested one model to address instructional improvement is the use of instructional coaches, as they can provide ongoing training to address issues teachers face in their classrooms. When beginning teachers are partnered with more experienced teachers, specific knowledge and skills related to instructional practice can ensue (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Instructional coaching is described as non-supervisory and non-evaluative, with individualized guidance to support classroom teachers in the instructional setting (Taylor, 2008).

Incorporating techniques from traditional staff development tends to be nonexistent, and teaching practices may or may not change (Corcoran, 1995; Rosenfield & Gravois, 2011). Those teachers who receive job-embedded and sustained professional development tend to be the most effective (Perkins & Cooter, 2013). The scope of job responsibilities of the instructional coach is working with teachers modeling instruction, providing resources, and problem solving (Rush, 2013). Furthermore, one of the essential functions of the instructional coach is to assist teachers

in a myriad of topics including differentiated instruction, classroom management, test-taking strategies, unit and lesson planning, and other areas teachers have problems (Rush, 2013).

A study conducted by Feldman and Tung (2002) involving five schools, 75 teachers, and nine administrators indicated instructional coaches had a positive impact on classroom changes in instructional practice. In this study, coaches worked with principals to assist in the focus for school improvement, facilitated professional development activities, and assisted teachers in the decision-making process regarding imbedded interventions for students. Instructional coaches are expected to spend the “bulk of their time in classrooms, modeling lessons, giving feedback to teachers, and helping improve the instructional program” (Odden et al., 2005, p. 40). Coaching can vary but is based on a focus on the teacher, concern for action, and direction to provide correction or to stimulate continuous improvement, all of which can provide a vital and necessary form of professional development (Killion, Harrison, Bryan & Clifton, 2012). The instructional coach’s role involves enhancing the knowledge and skills of a teacher to improve classroom instruction. Coaches primarily facilitate adult learning in schools, helping to improve instructional practice (Knight, 2009).

The role of a coach is similar to that of a classroom teacher; a coach, however, manages the learning of adult teacher participants differently than the learning of K-12 students. Adults pursue education with immediate application and relevance, whereas younger students simply engage in education often without a clear sense of direction (Park, Johnson, Vath, Kubitskey & Fishman, 2013). Teachers have many opportunities for staff development such as courses, workshops, reading professional literature, networking, and attending conferences, opportunities which may not always translate into practice. A study conducted by Neuman and Cunningham (2009) suggests there is strong evidence that a practice based model of professional development

demonstrated higher quality teaching practices. It takes a great deal of time and patience to incorporate instructional coaching into the culture of a school. Training programs might do well to change the balance from traditional classroom professional development to classroom and coaching in an attempt to influence quality practices (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009).

Characteristics of Instructional Coaching

Instructional coaching provides an on-site resource for teachers, a person who can provide targeted staff development to meet specific teacher deficiencies (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) indicated high quality professional development is one of the most important resource strategies for teachers to improve practice. Using instructional coaches for professional development is one of these important resource strategies. Several factors were found to be instrumental in incorporating instructional coaches into schools. These factors include location and duration, with school-based training having a longer lasting impact than off-site professional development (Ferguson, 2008). Coaches work side-by-side with teachers within the classroom. They can be school leaders who facilitate change and initiatives for reform. Coaches can design and facilitate adult learning in schools, influencing instructional practice (Knight, 2009). In schools where the coach and principal work together, coaching becomes the reason teachers refine their teaching practice and, most importantly, increase student learning (Sweeney, 2013). There are four essential criteria for coaches. Their practice should be (a) grounded in inquiry and reflection, (b) collaborative, (c) based on a shared exchange of knowledge, and (d) ongoing (Snyder et al., 2011). The major components of coaching include guidance and the ability to model effective instruction in order to engage teachers individually, facilitate group meetings, bring and transfer the latest research,

and help teachers deal with diverse student learning needs (Snyder, Best, Griffith & Nelson, 2011).

Instructional coaches have a responsibility for providing on-site, in the classroom support for teachers. As members of a profession, their role involves enhancing the knowledge and skills of a teacher to improve classroom instruction to students. Instructional coaching is generally accepted as a means to foster change and improvement, providing learning opportunities to facilitate change (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). According to Knight (as cited in Stock & Duncan, 2010), instructional coaching is different from mentoring in that coaching often involves an instructional modeling and feedback process not typically present in mentoring programs. Coaching can build will, skill, knowledge, and capacity because it can go where no other professional development has gone before: into the intellect, behaviors, practices, beliefs, values, and feelings of an educator (Aguilar, 2013). Coaching creates a relationship in which the teacher feels cared for and is therefore able to access and implement new knowledge. The instructional coach utilizes a variety of strategies to provide the emphasis for high-quality instructional interventions within the school (Knight, 2004). Knight, in his research over a nine-year span, identified seven procedures instructional coaches employ. Those procedures include meeting with individuals and groups of teachers to collaborate on common concerns, supporting teachers in the use of instructional resources, planning interventions with teachers, preparing instructional materials for teachers, modeling lessons, observing teachers, and providing feedback to teachers. The ultimate goal is for the coach and teacher to develop a relationship based on mutual professional respect and to channel their efforts toward the utilization of research-based interventions to better meet the needs of students.

Teacher Professional Development Needs

With more research reviewing teacher success, studies suggest high quality instruction has a positive effect on student achievement (Chetty, Friedmen & Rockoff, 2011; Hanushek, 2011). Teachers have identified relevant professional development as an important element to support instructional practice (Smith, Petty & Day, 2008). Traditional professional development generally involves mandatory meetings and may not be pertinent to individual teacher needs. Follow-up tends to be sparse or nonexistent, and few, if any, teaching practices are instituted or changed (Rosenfield & Gravois, 2011). To reverse this trend, Rosenfield and Gravois (2011) suggested a need to equip teachers with the appropriate resources to improve their teaching.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 identified instructional improvement as an important area of concern in regard to increasing student achievement. This legislation led to an emphasis on providing professional development to improve the quality of instruction by teachers. According to Stes (2008), instructional coaching is one important way to equip teachers with appropriate resources as it enables teachers to develop an optimal and comfortable learning environment, which enhances the practice of new techniques in the classroom. The professional development provided by instructional coaches is an important resource to improve teacher instruction.

The standard approach to instructional coaching is collaborative, collegial, observation-based, and reflects on practice (Snyder et al., 2011). Instructional coaching, which is based on teaching and learning through demonstration and shared history, involves a partnership between experienced teachers and less experienced teachers (Snyder et al., 2011). Instructional coaches with a strong background in theories of adult learning create a safe place for teachers to strengthen their skills through self-reflection, collaboration, feedback, and enhanced emotional awareness (Patti, Holzer, Stern & Brackett, 2012). The ultimate goal of an instructional coach is

to help teachers attain high student achievement levels with evidence-based instructional interventions, while allowing teachers a voice in their own professional growth (Edwards, 2001). The challenges for instructional coaches include the preservation of their role as non-evaluative and the continuing task of determining the needs of teachers (Hemphill & Duffield, 2007). The hope is the interaction between coaches and teachers provides help to the teachers in a noncritical, mutually respectful environment. Ideally, the setting is a nonthreatening, collegial, learning-by-discussing environment, which allows for constructive conversations. Professional coaching helps teachers work with their own strengths to acquire new strategies, reflect on their practice, and apply new learning to their classrooms (Patti et al., 2012).

Wyoming Instructional Facilitator Program

In March 2005, the Wyoming Legislature contracted with Lawrence O. Picus and Associates to conduct a study of the recalibration of the school funding system. This study called for evidence-based strategies for improving instruction. Their recommendation was the institution of school-based instructional facilitators or instructional coaches also called mentors, site coaches, curriculum specialists or lead teachers. This study suggested Wyoming schools had a critical need for ongoing instructional coaching (Odden et al., 2005).

In their report to the Wyoming Legislative Select Committee on Recalibration, Odden et al. (2005) addressed six necessary components for effective professional development for teachers. The type of professional development activity was cited as the first component. Professional development activities need to be site-based, job-embedded, and focused on the curriculum. The duration of the activity was the second component, suggesting continuous, long-term professional development should total between 100 and 200 hours. The third component addressed the importance of group-oriented activities, which, over time, included the entire

faculty. The fourth component identified that the activity should have a focus which deepens teacher content knowledge, as well as incorporating information about how students learn. Fifth, activities should offer opportunities for active learning, allowing teachers to become more engaged in the analysis of teaching. The final component indicated the activity should promote coherence in teacher professional development through aligning the activity with other significant portions of the education system. The use of instructional facilitators represents Wyoming's attempt to provide effective professional development in the form of coaching for teachers (Rush & Young, 2011).

According to the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) (2009), instructional facilitators were allocated based on the diverse needs of different grade levels and individual schools. These needs were based on a strong emphasis for professional development, including funding for instructional facilitators or coaches to support the quality of instructional practices (Odden, Picus, Archibald & Smith, 2009). The goal is to help teachers implement effective instructional practices in their classrooms through observation and feedback.

Identifying the types of coaching and the professional development needs of teachers in conjunction with what is taking place in Wyoming are important to this study. The next section outlines the purpose, research questions, and methodology utilized for this study, which explores the perceptions of principals about their vision, roles, and attitudes toward the instructional facilitator program.

Methodology

This study utilized a survey approach. The survey design provides a numeric description of attitudes of a sample of principals and allows the researcher to generalize conclusions about the population (Creswell, 2003). Alreck and Settle (2004) list the advantages of survey research as being flexible, versatile, specialized, and efficient. A survey is an effective way to gather information regarding attitudes and opinions (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2006). This study examined the vision of principals with regards to the instructional coaching position, their thoughts on the roles and responsibilities of an instructional facilitator, and attitudes about the effectiveness of the program. In addition, perceptions of elementary principals and secondary principals were compared in the areas of vision of the program, roles and responsibilities, and effectiveness of the program. Approval to conduct this study was received from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Wyoming. The survey was designed based on a review of the literature and organized around a brief overview of current research of the use of instructional facilitators.

Research Questions

The following four research questions guided this study. These questions were asked to ascertain perceptions of Wyoming principals and their opinions regarding the vision, roles, and attitude about the instructional facilitator program.

1. How do principals in Wyoming envision the instructional facilitator program?
2. What do principals identify as the job functions for instructional facilitators serving in their respective schools?
3. What are the attitudes of Wyoming principals on the effectiveness of the instructional facilitator program?

4. How do elementary and secondary principals differ on vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude about the instructional facilitator program?

Survey Design

The survey (see Appendix A) consisted of 29 items. Of the 29 items, eight collected demographic information (gender, teacher experience, principal experience, position, school size, instructional facilitator numbers, instructional facilitator concentration, and full time equivalency of their instructional facilitators). The remaining 21 items consisted of principal vision of the instructional facilitator program (five items), the roles and responsibilities of the instructional facilitators in buildings (nine items), and principal attitude toward the instructional facilitator program utilization in their building (eight items). In addition to their selected responses, respondents were provided an opportunity to add additional comments at the end of the survey (one item).

Current research on instructional facilitators as a premier form of professional development provided a foundation for many of the questions for the survey. The survey used a 5-point scale with one reflecting “strongly disagree” and five reflecting “strongly agree.”

Prior to sending the survey to participants, the survey was sent to two secondary principals and two elementary principals for review. These administrators were asked to provide input on the survey items and other questions that would be helpful or informative for this study. These administrators were also asked to make suggestions regarding their vision, roles and responsibilities of instructional facilitators and their attitudes regarding instructional facilitators being utilized in their building.

Population

An email with a link to the survey was sent to all Wyoming school district principals ($N=303$) asking them to take the survey. An email list was obtained from the Wyoming Department of Education with the email addresses of the intended recipients. The Wyoming Department of Education lists 177 elementary and middle school principals and 152 secondary principals.

Data Collection

Prior to beginning data collection, approval from the Institutional Review Board was sought and received (Appendix C). A cover letter (Appendix B) was sent to participants via email along with a link to the survey. The cover letter explained the reason for the survey and emphasized the confidentiality of participant responses. Participants could choose to take the survey or decline participation in the study. Follow up emails were sent after the original email requesting participants complete the survey. In addition, an email was sent to the elementary and secondary principal organizations in Wyoming.

Summary

This study utilized a survey approach. This study examined the vision of principals with regards to the instructional coaching position, their thoughts on the roles and responsibilities of an instructional facilitator, and attitudes about the effectiveness of the program. In addition, perceptions of elementary principals and secondary principals were compared in the areas of vision of the program, roles and responsibilities, and effectiveness of the program.

The survey consisted of 29 items. Of the 29 items, eight collected demographic information. The remaining 21 items consisted of principal vision of the instructional facilitator program, the roles and responsibilities of the instructional facilitators in buildings, and principal attitude toward the instructional facilitator program utilization in their building. Respondents were provided an opportunity to add additional comments at the end of the survey. An email with

a link to the survey was sent to all 303 Wyoming school district principals asking them to take the survey. The next section provides the results of the study.

Results

This section presents the results of the study conducted to ascertain attitudes, roles and responsibilities, and vision of the instructional facilitator program from the principal perspective. This study also sought to compare these perspectives between elementary and secondary principals. After describing the characteristics of the respondents, analyses are organized by the research questions. Means, standard deviations, and percentages of vision, roles and responsibilities and attitude are reported. In addition, independent sample t-tests were used to compare views regarding vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude between elementary and secondary principals. Respondents were also asked to provide input and comments on the use of instructional facilitators in their buildings.

Description of Respondents

A total of 304 emails were successfully sent, and 119 participants completed the survey for a response rate of 39.15%. Demographic data were collected to include gender, teacher experience, principal experience, position, school size, number of IFs, types of IFs, and the percentage of time IFs work in their respective buildings. The sample included 65 elementary principals and 49 middle or secondary principals. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages were used to describe the sample. Table 1 shows demographic details for the 119 respondents.

Table 1
Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Information

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	77.0	(64.7%)
Female	38.0	(31.9%)
No response	4.0	(3.4%)
Total Teacher Experience		
1-5 years	7.0	(5.9%)
6-10 years	36.0	(30.3%)
11-15 years	35.0	(29.4%)
16-20 years	1.0	(16.0%)
21 or more years	18.0	(15.1%)
No response	4.0	(3.4%)
Total Administrative Experience		
1-5 years	40.0	(33.6%)
6-10 years	27.0	(22.7%)
11-15 years	19.0	(16.0%)
16-20 years	17.0	(14.3%)
21 or more years	12.0	(10.1%)
No response	4.0	(3.4%)
Position		
Elementary Principal	65.0	(54.6%)
Middle or Secondary Principal	45.0	(41.2%)
No response	5.0	(4.2%)
School Size		
0-100	12.0	(10.1%)
100-200	17.0	(14.3%)
201-350	41.0	(34.5%)
351-500	24.0	(20.2%)
500+	21.0	(17.6%)
No response	4.0	(3.4%)
Number of IFs working in the building		
<1	3.0	(2.4%)
1	57.0	(47.9%)
2	23.0	(19.3%)
3	7.0	(5.9%)
4 or more	1.0	(0.8%)
No response	28	(23.5%)
Area of concentration		
Technology	8	(6.7%)
Literacy	60	(50.4%)
Math	10	(8.4%)
Other	35	(29.4%)
No response	6	(5.0%)
Full Time Equivalency (FTE)		
Full time	65	(54.6%)
Less than Full time	45	(41.2%)
No response	5	(4.2%)

Of the 119 respondents, two-thirds were male. Slightly more than 57% identified their position as an elementary principal, with the rest identifying themselves as middle or secondary principals. Of the participants, 10.1% worked in schools with less than 100 students, and the majority (36%) of principals reported a school size between 201 to 350 students. Just over 18% of principals reported having schools with 500 or more students. Of the respondents, 48% indicated they work with one IF in their building; 19.3% of those responding indicated they had two or more IFs in their building. Seven respondents, or 5.9%, indicated they worked with three or more IFs in their building and only one respondent indicated they work with four or more IFs in their building.

In areas of instructional concentration, half indicated they work mainly in Literacy. Math was shown to be an area of concentration with 8.4%. This was followed closely by technology with 6.7% of respondents. The second largest indication of concentration was 29.4%, who marked themselves as “other.” These respondents stated they do not have only one area of concentration, but different areas based on the needs of the building. The next section summarizes survey responses related to the research questions.

Vision

How do principals in Wyoming envision the instructional facilitator program? A scale consisting of five items was provided with possible responses of strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). Mean responses to the vision items were then rank-ordered from highest mean to lowest mean as seen in Table 2. The item with the highest mean of 4.61 ($SD=0.61$) asked if instructional coaching is an effective means for teachers to improve their instructional practice. The item with the lowest mean, 3.63 ($SD=1.20$), asked if facilitators are used in a non-instructional capacity.

Table 2

Number of Responses, Means, and Standard Deviations for Principals' Beliefs about Vision for the IF Program

Item	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The program is an effective means for teachers to improve their instructional practice.	120	4.61	0.61
The IF program is effective professional development.	120	4.33	0.85
The IF program positively impacts student achievement.	120	4.23	0.90
The IF program is being implemented appropriately.	120	4.05	1.07
The program allows Ifs to be used in a non-instructional capacity.	119	3.63	1.20

Note. Scale responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Roles and Responsibilities

What do principals identify as the roles and responsibilities for instructional facilitators serving in their respective schools? A scale was provided with possible responses of strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). Mean responses to the roles and responsibilities questions were then rank-ordered from highest mean to lowest mean as seen in Table 3. Principals were asked about the roles and responsibilities of IFs who work in their buildings. The item with the highest mean was 4.55 ($SD=0.64$) and asked if their IFs are a way to improve student achievement. This was followed closely by the item about the role of IFs introducing research based strategies and had a mean of 4.54 ($SD=0.65$). The item that elicited the smallest mean of 3.69 ($SD=1.11$) asked if the IF provides large group professional development

Table 3

Number of Responses, Means, and Standard Deviations for Principals' Beliefs about Roles and Responsibilities for the IF Program

Item	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The work of the IF is a means to improve student achievement.	115	4.55	0.64
The role of the IF is to introduce research based strategies.	118	4.54	0.65
The IF in my school is knowledgeable about district programs.	115	4.51	0.64
The work of the IF is to improve instructional practice.	120	4.47	0.80
My IF is an instructional leader who facilitates commitment.	115	4.43	0.75
The IF should be a resource for implementing a professional learning community	114	4.39	0.85
The IF in my school helps teachers use formative assessment data to improve instruction.	114	4.04	0.92
The IF in my school provides large group professional development.	115	3.97	1.07
The IF in my school spends much of his/her time with individual teachers or small groups of teachers modeling instruction.	115	3.69	1.11

Note. Scale responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Attitude

What are the attitudes of Wyoming principals on the effectiveness of the instructional facilitator program? A scale was provided with possible responses of strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). Mean responses to the attitude items were then rank-ordered from highest mean to lowest mean as seen in Table 4. Principals were asked to respond to statements regarding their attitude toward the instructional facilitator program. The items asking if principals want to continue with an IF was 4.59 ($SD=0.75$); this had the highest mean of all attitude items. This was followed closely by the item asking if this program has professional value and had a mean of 4.54 ($SD=0.80$). The item asking if standardized test scores have improved due to the use of IFs in their buildings had the lowest mean of 3.58 ($SD=1.01$).

Table 4

Number of Responses, Means, and Standard Deviations for Principals' Attitude about the IF Program

Item	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I want to continue to work with an IF in my school.	115	4.59	0.75
The IF program has professional value to me.	114	4.54	0.80
I believe the IF in my school is available to support teachers.	115	4.51	0.81
The IF program has become an important part of professional development for teachers.	115	4.25	0.99
I believe teachers have improved their instructional practice because of this program.	115	4.24	0.91
Instructional facilitators are being utilized effectively in my school.	115	4.11	1.10
The IF program has helped teachers develop stronger relationships with one another.	114	3.86	0.93
Standardized test scores in my school have improved due to the use of Ifs.	115	3.58	1.01

Note. Scale responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Elementary and Secondary Principal Views

How do elementary and secondary principals differ on vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude about the instructional facilitator program? Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude between elementary and secondary principals. There was no significant difference in the means for vision between

elementary and secondary principals ($t=1.57, p =.119$). There was a significant difference in the means for roles and responsibilities between elementary and secondary principals ($t=2.31, p =.023$). Elementary principals had significantly more positive perceptions regarding the roles and responsibilities compared to secondary principals. There was a significant difference in the means for attitude between elementary and secondary principals ($t=2.19, p =.031$). In regards to attitude, elementary principals also had a significantly more positive opinion of the program than their secondary colleagues. The means and standard deviations of vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude for both groups are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Number of Responses, Means, and Standard Deviations of Elementary and Secondary Principals' Vision, Roles and Responsibilities, and Attitude about the IF Program

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Vision			
Elementary	65	4.25	0.62
Secondary	49	4.06	0.66
Role and Responsibilities			
Elementary	65	4.39	0.53
Secondary	49	4.15	0.60
Attitude toward the IF Program			
Elementary	65	4.34	0.71
Secondary	49	4.03	0.80

Note. Scale responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Open-ended Question

What do you see as the greatest benefit of having an IF in your building? This question elicited over 100 responses from principals across the state. The responses were categorized into three general areas including professional development, supporting instruction, and supporting implementation of school and district initiatives. Many principals stated the greatest benefit of this program is “professional development” or the idea of consistent job-embedded professional development. The majority of written comments addressed the notion of the greatest benefit being onsite professional development. “Purposely planned coaching and mentoring of staff, as well as helping to provide best practice professional development for teachers,” as stated by one of the respondents supports the importance of instructional facilitators in their building. In

response to supporting instruction, principals noted the importance of modeling strategies for teachers, refining teaching practice, and teacher support and modeling. One principal said it this way, “The greatest benefit is support and education for the use of best practices and research-based instructional strategies to support teachers in planning and delivering instruction.” Many also responded that the instructional facilitator is instrumental in helping with curriculum shifts, action research, and coordination of curriculum and district initiatives. One principal stated, “This individual is used in a non-evaluative role to implement new curriculum, new instructional techniques, and other district/building information. As a former IF and current administrator, I can see how this role can be used in a positive manner if utilized correctly and appropriately by the schools/districts.”

Many times, having a neutral resource to clarify curriculum and district initiatives is extremely helpful to teaching staff. One principal explained the program eloquently by saying, “Teachers new to the profession receiving quality instructional coaching, as well as implementing new curriculum across all disciplines for all teachers, is the greatest benefit. However, the principal still has to be the primary instructional leader of the school.” The principals felt the instructional facilitator program supports and bolsters instructional improvement in buildings by sharing leadership roles.

Summary

This section provided the data analysis from Wyoming principals and their perceptions of vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitudes of the instructional facilitators utilized in their buildings. Data analysis was also completed to ascertain if these same perceptions differed between elementary and secondary principals. The research questions guided the study and questions were asked during the survey to ascertain opinions of Wyoming principals about their

perceptions of these areas. Principals reported strong agreement in their perceptions of vision with regards to instructional coaching as an effective means to improve teacher instruction. With roles and responsibilities, the highest rated item was the goal of the IF being to improve instructional practice within their building. Supporting teachers with instructional facilitators was the item rated the highest when principals were asked about their attitudes towards the program. The final research question examined the differences between elementary and secondary principals regarding vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude toward the instructional facilitator program. There was no significant difference regarding the vision of the program between elementary and secondary principals. However, elementary principals reported significantly stronger opinions compared to secondary principals in their beliefs about roles and responsibilities of instructional facilitators used in their buildings. Elementary principals also showed significantly more positive attitudes about the instructional facilitator program compared to secondary principals.

Data collected found 57% of respondents were elementary principals and the remainder secondary principals. A little over 56% of all principals had less than ten years of administrative experience. However, a large percentage (71%) had between 6 and 15 years of teaching experience. The survey also revealed a majority of principals worked with only one instructional facilitator. The data reported over 50% of the instructional facilitators worked in the area of literacy. The largest percentage of principals, 34.5%, worked in a school with a population between 201 and 350 students.

An open-ended question asked what principals thought was the greatest benefit of having an instructional facilitator in their building. Respondents reported instructional facilitators helped their schools in three distinct ways: onsite professional development, data interpretation, and as

someone who advances curriculum and district directives. The comments supported their perceptions of the highest area of vision, suggesting that instructional facilitators were effective in helping teachers improve instructional practice. Comments suggested this type of job-embedded coaching helped teachers with instructional development in a non-threatening manner. Comments related to roles and responsibilities also supported principal opinions that instructional facilitators are a way to improve student achievement. Principals stated instructional facilitators support on-site teacher training that leads to student success. A high number of principals also reported that they wanted to continue with their instructional facilitator program. Principals stated the program supports instructional improvement in their buildings. The comments given by principals provided strong support for the program.

Discussion

The principal is typically recognized as the instructional leader of the school; however, Wyoming public schools have hired instructional facilitators to assist with the task of providing on-site professional development to teachers to help improve instructional strategies in the classroom (Lunenburg & Irby, 2006). This has happened, in part, due to the recommendation of Picus and Odden to include instructional facilitators as a way to improve accountability in schools (Odden et al., 2005). Studies continue to show on-site professional training is highly effective when compared to traditional one day workshops (Knight & Cornett, 2009). Picus and colleagues indicated the instructional facilitator program had potential as a systematic and ongoing approach to school-based profession development (as cited in Rush, 2013) and the current study supports this notion.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to gather the perceptions of principals within the state of Wyoming about the IF program. These perceptions included their vision of the IFs, the IF roles and responsibilities, and principal attitudes toward the use of instructional facilitators in their buildings. It was intended to uncover principal opinion while working with this program within the school setting. The focus of this study also included the difference of these perceptions between elementary and secondary principals.

The research method used in this investigation was a survey grounded in a quantitative approach. The researcher used a sampling of known principals in Wyoming, using a Likert scale to collect data. The instrument, the scale plus the demographic questions, was developed to investigate perceptions of principals regarding the instructional facilitator program. These perceptions included their vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude toward the program.

Conclusions

Instructional facilitation has great potential for improving teaching practices. Instructional facilitators have many roles, but one of the most important roles is to provide in-school staff development with the particular purpose of improving teacher practices through defining areas needing improvement and providing constructive feedback. According to Balow (as cited in Rush, 2013), Wyoming's instructional facilitators are considered content coaches, as their work is particularly focused on working with teachers to improve teacher instructional practice. Instructional coaches within schools can help implement change faster by tailoring professional development to specific teacher needs. Successful in-service programs are those that provide extensive and intensive interventions along with support to implement these interventions (Walpole & McKenna, 2004).

The presence of an instructional facilitator in schools can enhance several areas of staff development, primarily using assessment data and improving teaching strategies based on this data. In a study conducted by Rush (2013), instructional facilitators reported much of their responsibilities included collecting, analyzing, and managing data. Principals feel this program is able to help teachers in their classrooms with immediate changes, stating instructional facilitators can offer fresh ideas and are able to use assessment data to accurately pinpoint teaching interventions. The goal is to provide help without repercussions or evaluation of a teacher. Instructional facilitators should emphasize their roles as professional development coaches and minimize their administrative roles or roles that conflict with professional development (Heineke, 2010). Principals have reported their instructional facilitators meet with teachers individually and in group settings. Principals have noted teachers are able to focus on teaching strategies, which help improve student achievement. Instructional coaching is described as an

opportunity for teachers to learn new strategies, observe these strategies in action, and practice these strategies in their own classrooms (Rush & Young, 2011).

The Wyoming Legislature recalibration model encourages and recommends the use of instructional facilitators for Wyoming schools. Through a grant, this program hired over 350 instructional facilitators across the state. Elementary principals involved in this study had significantly stronger opinions regarding roles and responsibilities and attitudes of the instructional facilitators program than secondary principals. The responses suggest the role and responsibilities of the instructional facilitator and attitude toward the program is different based on the needs of primary versus secondary schools. Elementary principals seem to have more knowledge of the program and the direction; however, IFs may not have been used as effectively at the secondary level. Elementary and secondary principals felt that collaboration is taking place, especially one-on-one, in groups, and with specific instructional strategies.

Limitations

Although the survey was sent to all Wyoming principals, the response rate of 39.5% may not allow the findings to generalize to the entire population of principals in Wyoming. Instructional facilitators or coaches are a relatively new concept of professional development. This study has a number of limitations to consider. First, as in most studies, the research presented here was limited by the responses received by a small number of principals and the fact that not all districts use instructional facilitators. This study may not show the true picture of how this program is used in Wyoming schools. Second, the survey questions may not be transparent to all principals, who are unable to ask questions for clarification. Lastly, with principals having many duties and responsibilities, finding time to adequately complete this survey may have been difficult.

Recommendations

The results from this study could help school districts and legislators with decisions regarding the continuation of this program, providing professional development opportunities for teachers in Wyoming. The perceptions of Wyoming principals can educate agencies, legislators, and citizens of this type of professional development, which targets instructional improvement for teachers.

Respondents expressed the view that instructional facilitators have a unique position within their buildings. Principals commented they want to continue to work with instructional facilitators in their schools and they value their work professionally. They also believed the instructional facilitators are available to support teachers through collaboration.

Suggestions for Further Research

Clarity in the areas of vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude by Wyoming principals could help other school district personnel utilize this type of professional development in their buildings. With this clarity and focus, a collective effort to utilize instructional facilitators more effectively can be realized. The results of the survey and analysis have led to the following recommendations being offered for future efforts.

Student achievement and standardized testing. An area in need of further research is the perceptions reported by principals surrounding student achievement and the difference in these perceptions. In the vision section, when asked if the instructional facilitator program positively impacts student achievement, principals rated this item as the third highest out of five items with a mean of 4.23. However, when asked about the roles and responsibilities and if the work of the instructional facilitator is a means to improve student achievement, this same item was the highest rated of six items with a mean of 4.55. When asked their attitude about the

positive effect of instructional facilitators on standardized test scores, respondents reported with a mean of 3.58, the lowest of eight items.

If the role and responsibility of using the instructional facilitator to improve student achievement is rated as the highest and the attitude item about standardized test scores have improved due to the IF is the lowest, further research may be needed. One possibility is the perception of what principals expect from their instructional facilitators as they may not have seen the gains in student achievement they had hoped. Improving student achievement can also mean growth on a number of other assessments used by schools to monitor student progress. However, one would expect these to be closer with the increased emphasis on improving standardized test scores.

Principals need to work with their instructional facilitators to achieve a common goal of improving teacher practice to improve student achievement. Although this study asked opinions regarding principal views on student achievement and standardized test scores it does not delve into the relationship between improved teacher practice and improved student growth. Reviewing the roles and responsibilities of the instructional facilitator and working with instructional facilitators on clear expectations could help to improve principal perceptions.

Roles and responsibilities. Although instructional facilitators were introduced conceptually in 2005 with a legislative recommendation by Picus and Associates, many districts in Wyoming were unsure of what role these facilitators were to play in their schools (Odden et al., 2005). Many times, principals hired facilitators into these positions with little or no information on the true nature or concept of what the expectations were for these facilitators. The idea of hiring an adult-centered professional development staff member was foreign to many principals. Principals are familiar with hiring the best teachers for their schools; however, they

may not have the same experience in hiring an instructional facilitator whose main role is to work with adults. Even today, there may be questions by principals on how these facilitators are to be used in their schools. Job descriptions were not provided by the consultants, so districts drafted and adopted a variety of functions. Unfortunately, without much guidance, some districts put teachers in these positions that were not suitable for the tasks of providing instructional coaching for struggling teachers. It is important to establish and create robust job descriptions to help establish instructional facilitators' roles in their school buildings.

Elementary vs. secondary principals. Another area which deserves further research is the differences between elementary and secondary principal perceptions related to roles and responsibilities and principal attitude regarding the instructional facilitator program. Elementary principals had significantly more positive perceptions regarding the roles and responsibilities when compared to secondary principals. In regards to attitude, elementary principals also had a significantly more positive opinion of the program than their secondary colleagues.

One reason for this could be teachers and administrators in secondary schools may not work as collaboratively because of the structure of secondary schools. Over half of the principals indicated their instructional facilitators work in the area of literacy; most of these were elementary principals. With a singular focus to improve literacy for young struggling readers, a natural collaboration may exist between elementary instructional facilitators and elementary teachers. With a wide variety of subject areas at the secondary level, it may be harder to form collaborative teams and recognize the value of an instructional facilitator. Why the roles and responsibilities and attitude between elementary and secondary principals differ may be a lack of understanding by secondary principals on the use of instructional facilitators. Secondary focuses can be many and the principal may not see the value of an in-school professional development

coach to help with struggling teachers. A recommendation would be to bring together a secondary leadership team and talk about how an instructional facilitator can be utilized more effectively. Secondary schools have just as many struggling teachers and students as elementary schools, so the concept of an instructional facilitator helping to improve instruction at any level can take place. A review of the roles and responsibilities of an instructional facilitator could help to improve the outlook of secondary principals with regards to this program. As with any program, a sustained effort to include continual training for instructional facilitators and principals on the purpose and reasoning for this program is paramount. A more structured attempt of utilizing instructional facilitators as teacher leaders in secondary buildings would help to build rapport and respect. As many principals have indicated, their instructional facilitators help to drive curriculum initiatives, district programs, and help to gather student data to help drive instruction. These attempts could help strengthen the role and help with in-roads at the secondary level.

When reviewing the secondary open-ended question responses, these help to answer why differences exist. Of the 49 comments from secondary principals, eight add some indication that a review with secondary principals is vital. One principal made the comment “very little if any” when asked what do you see as the greatest benefit of having an IF in your building? Another comment stated the IFs in the district have no secondary experience. This is a possible reason why the secondary principal in this particular district would not see the value as much as other secondary principals. “They do not provide much if any assistance at the 7-12 level” indicates a lack of focus at the secondary level. Another comment, “extra resource that we do not use effectively due to the fractionalization of the position,” does help to explain the differing needs at the secondary level. The other three comments indicated little support or commitment to the IF

program. Only one of 65 elementary comments was negative towards the use of instructional facilitators with the following comment, “waste of money [and] could be used elsewhere”.

Although a small percentage of the comments were negative, it is important to note more work needs to be done at both levels to help with the understanding of how instructional facilitators can be properly utilized.

Summary

Pressure to improve student achievement in an era of accountability has created more focus on how this will happen at the building level in Wyoming schools. The Wyoming legislature has written statute stating the goal is to be a national leader of education among states. Principals must be able to improve and sustain student learning. A major component of this is to support the continuous improvement of teachers by quality professional development. In Wyoming, many principals have embraced instructional facilitators in their buildings as a means to support their teachers.

This support begins with identifying the vision, roles and responsibilities, and attitude toward a program centered on improving teacher instruction. With a limited amount of professional development funding available, it is essential to amass information to help principals make the best choices for their buildings. This is particularly important in a state with declining revenues and long distances between communities.

This study sought to determine those needs and preferences by gathering information from Wyoming principals. Wyoming principals reported they are supportive of the program and express positive feelings towards this type of professional development, viewing it as accessible and readily available to their teachers. It is important to understand that principals have a complex set of duties and improving the instruction of their teachers is paramount to improving

student achievement. Creating and providing sustained professional development opportunities to meet these needs are vital. The instructional facilitator program has been shown to be an effective and efficient way to provide instructional support for teachers.

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Appendix A

Instructional Facilitator Program Wyoming Principal Cover Letter and Survey

In 2005, the Wyoming state government allocated monies for the Department of Education to fund the work of Instructional Facilitators in schools across the state. I am researching perceptions of principals regarding this program. I hope the results of this research will help instructional facilitators improve their work with teachers and administrators, and ultimately improve student achievement.

I hope you will assist me by participating in my study. It involves completing an online survey, which that will take no more than 10 minutes of your time. Data will be stored online, using one of the University of Wyoming's secure servers. As soon as the collection period is over, the data will be downloaded to my personal computer, deleted from the server, and stored for at least three years. It will be password protected on my computer and saved until I no longer need it for analysis. If you are interested in completing the survey, please be assured your responses will be anonymous.

Anticipated risk to you as a respondent is minimal, as your responses are anonymous. If you identify yourself, your personal identifying data will be eliminated. As a busy principal, this survey may seem burdensome. However, completing this survey will help gather research data on an important topic regarding professional development for Wyoming schools.

If you have questions about the study or are interested in obtaining the results after the data has been collected and summarized, please contact me or my faculty advisor, Dr. Suzanne Young. Our contact information is below. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the UW IRB administrator at 307-766-5320.

If you work with an instructional facilitator in your building please click on the link below to go to the website for the survey. By clicking yes below, you are consenting to participate in the study. Your participation is voluntary and if you decide you do not wish to continue completing the survey, you may simply close your browser window and none of your data will be saved.

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this project!

Larry Reznicek
lreznicek@ccsd.k12.wy.us
307-687-4511

Dr. Suzanne Young
syoung@uwyo.edu
307-766-4231

Yes No

Directions: There are varying numbers of instructional facilitator in schools. This survey will use instructional facilitator (IF) as singular. If you work with more than one IF, please choose one you work with most often as you respond to the items.

These items are related to your vision regarding the IF program. Please choose from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

1. Instructional coaching is an effective means for teachers to improve their instructional practice.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. The IF program is being implemented appropriately in my building.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. The IF program is effective professional development for teachers.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. The IF program positively impacts student achievement.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. The IF program in my building allows IFs to be used in a non-instructional capacity.	SD	D	N	A	SA

The following items represent roles and responsibilities of IFs in your building. Please choose from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

6. The work of the IF is to improve instructional practice in my building.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. The IF should be a resource for implementing a professional learning community.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. The role of the IF is to introduce research-based strategies to teachers.	SD	D	N	A	SA
9. The work of the IF is a means to improve student achievement.	SD	D	N	A	SA
10. The IF in my school is expected to be knowledgeable about district programs in specific content areas.	SD	D	N	A	SA
11. The IF in my school is an instructional teacher leader.	SD	D	N	A	SA

These items are related to your attitude regarding the IF program. Please choose from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

12. I believe the IF in my school is available to support teachers.	SD	D	N	A	SA
13. I want to continue to work with an IF in my school.	SD	D	N	A	SA
14. The IF program has professional value to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
15. The IF program has helped teachers develop stronger relationships with one another.	SD	D	N	A	SA
16. The IF program has become an important part of professional development for teachers in my school.	SD	D	N	A	SA

17. I believe teachers have improved their instructional practice because of the IF program.	SD	D	N	A	SA
18. Instructional facilitators are being utilized effectively in my school.	SD	D	N	A	SA
19. Student achievement has improved due to the IF in my school.	SD	D	N	A	SA

Please tell me about yourself and IF(s) in your school.

20. What is your gender? _____ Female _____ Male

21. How many years of experience do you have as a teacher?

_____ 0-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16-20 _____ 21+

22. How many years of experience do you have as a principal?

_____ 0-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16-20 _____ 21+

23. Please select one of the following that best describes your present position:

Elementary Principal _____ Middle or Secondary Principal _____

24. How many students are enrolled in your school?

_____ Less than 100 _____ 100-200 _____ 201-350 _____ 351-500 _____ 500+

25. How many IFs work in your school? _____

26. Please choose a concentration that best describes the area in which your IF primarily works.

Technology Literacy Math Other _____

27. Does the IF(s) work full-time as an instructional facilitator in your school?

Yes _____ No _____

28. What percentage of time does the IF(s) work in your school? (This question will only be answered if no was selected on question 27). _____

29. What do you see as the greatest benefit of having an IF in your building?

Appendix B

UNIVERSITY
OF WYOMING

Vice President for Research & Economic Development
1000 E. University Avenue, Department 3355 • Room 305/308, Old Main • Laramie, WY
82071 (307) 766-5353 • (307) 766-5320 • fax (307) 766-2608 • www.uwyo.edu/research

January 15, 2016

Larry Reznicek
HR Director for Campbell County School District
Human Resources
1000 West 8th St.
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Suzanne Young

Protocol #20160115LR01071

Re: IRB Proposal “*Principal Perspectives of Instructional Facilitators in Wyoming School Districts*”

Dear Mr. Reznicek:

The proposal referenced above qualifies for exempt review and is approved as one that would not involve more than minimal risk to participants. Our exempt review and approval will be reported to the IRB at their next convened meeting February 18, 2016.

Any significant change(s) in the research/project protocol(s) from what was approved should be submitted to the IRB (Protocol Update Form) for review and approval prior to initiating any change. Per recent policy and compliance requirements, any investigator with an active research protocol may be contacted by the recently convened Data Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB) for periodic review. The DSMB’s charge (sections 7.3 and 7.4 of the IRB Policy and Procedures Manual) is to review active human subject(s) projects to assure that the procedures, data management, and protection of human participants follow approved protocols. Further information and the forms referenced above may be accessed at the “Human Subjects” link on the Office of Research and Economic Development website: <http://www.uwyo.edu/research/human-subjects/index.html>.

You may proceed with the project/research and we wish you luck in the endeavor. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Colette Kuhfuss

Colette Kuhfuss
IRB Coordinator
On behalf of the Chairman,
Institutional Review Board