

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS' EXPERIENCES WITH COACHING

by

Julie Ray

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

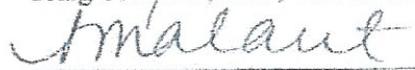
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Approval Signatures:

	<u>3/13/20</u>
T. Hampton Hopkins, EdD, Committee Chair	Date
	<u>3.13.2020</u>
Craig Schieber, EdD, Committee Member	Date
	<u>3/13/2020</u>
Stacey Malaret, EdD, Committee Member	Date
	<u>3/17/2020</u>
Vicki Butler, EdD, Dean	Date

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the topic of principal coaching using principal supervisors. In the past, the traditional model of principal supervision focused on monitoring principals as building managers who hired and guided staff, cared for the building, and supervised the budget. However, today principals face an environment of high accountability, ever-increasing job challenges, and expanded responsibility for instructional leadership. Studies to understand how best to develop and support the role of principals are limited, and this scarcity of inquiry into coaching and mentoring indicates further investigation in this field is needed. The author of this study investigated the possible impact of coaching on the development of instructional leadership skills, conditions of successful coaching, and the perceptions of the coaching experience related to principals. Ten elementary principals in one urban district in Washington State were selected through maximum variation sampling. The phenomenological research design was utilized to explore the experiences of principals who have gone through principal coaching. Data were collected through detailed interviews and analyzed by coding to find common themes which reflected the principals' experiences. The results of this research illustrate how leadership support impacts the shifting of the old model of monitoring to a new method of principal coaching. Further research can be built upon this study to address criteria for evaluating effective coaching, types of training and professional development needed to support principal supervisors and coaches, and best procedures to develop principal growth.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In the past, principal coaching was examined based on the traditional focus of principals as building managers running the daily operations of the school. However, in more recent years, there has been a movement to recognize the complex profession of principals and their role as instructional leaders. Plessis (2013) researched principals as instructional leaders and articulated a new focus which centers on the principal's responsibilities of teacher growth and high student achievement to enhance a more positive concentration on student learning.

According to Lunenburg (2013), this shift to instructional leadership and student learning makes data use and teamwork essential to informed decision-making. Instructional leadership is a fundamental component in supporting teachers and improving practices that will transfer to an increased use of student achievement data (Lunenburg, 2013; Plessis, 2013). James-Ward and Potter (2011) found a relationship between strong leadership and increased student learning.

However, despite these findings, Honig (2012) realized few studies were based on the topics of principal coaching, effectiveness of coaching, and types of coaching needed to improve the instructional leadership skills of principals even with the use of district office personnel as teachers. Other research gaps occurred in principal preparation and training programs that focused on instructional leadership. Therefore, the development

and support of the principal as an instructional leader is a concept that needs to be researched and explored further.

Principals are pulled in multiple directions and often spend many hours managing building logistics without ever impacting teacher effectiveness or student learning. They wear several hats and perform many duties to create a favorable climate which would improve teaching, learning, and student achievement. The new focus on instructional leadership requires targeted task prioritization based on demands which improve teacher practice and support the school culture shift to a rich learning environment (Plessis, 2013). The school culture shift requires a clear vision of high-quality instruction, targeted feedback, whole group professional development, and the expertise needed to foster teacher practice in individual classrooms and small groups (Plessis, 2013).

Principal coaching was explored through a qualitative methodology and phenomenological design based on the lived experiences of 10 elementary principals. The subjects from an urban district in Washington State participated in principal coaching with their principal supervisors focused on instructional leadership. Data were collected through detailed interviews and analyzed by coding to find common themes which reflected the principals' experiences. Finally, the researcher shared possible limitations of the study and ways the research could be valuable to educational leaders.

Background/Foundation

Principals play an essential role in moving teachers forward to improve instruction, create systems that encourage collaboration on school goals, and utilize data to inform next steps for increasing student achievement (Lunenburg, 2013; Plessis, 2013). The emphasis on improving instruction and setting up systems to ensure schools focus on teaching and learning is often difficult for principals due to the many roles they engage in daily. Plessis (2013), studying principals as instructional leaders, found that the technical issues of managing a building and improving teaching and learning can be a complex balance for principals. In recent years their traditional role as managers running the operation of the building has shifted due to an increased concentration on student learning and accountability for school performance.

Lunenburg (2013) shared the importance of principals participating in and providing regular professional training opportunities concentrated on learning and student achievement. Research has underscored how these exercises play a vital role in providing professional development opportunities for staff; monitoring high quality instruction; adopting culturally relevant curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and setting up systems for teacher teams to collaborate on curriculum and student needs. Principals must learn to strengthen educational practices by providing job-embedded opportunities for staff, professional development training for large-and-small group collaboration, and individual training opportunities. Plessis (2013) found that principals who emphasized

instructional improvement, high-quality teaching, and student achievement contributed to a stronger learning culture. In addition, instructional leadership is associated with high expectations for teachers and goals which support the curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices of the school. The role of the principal is multifaceted and composed of many technical and evolving responsibilities with a history of isolation, a lack of mentorship, and little support after the initial principal school training.

Lattuca (2012), on principalship in transition, shared the historical background of the school principal or administrator when the primary role was the supervision of the school and its teachers. This administrative role began during the late 19th century, and the position involved mostly managerial responsibilities such as student discipline, parent complaints, budget, and maintenance of the building. Support and initial on-going training to help the principal meet these many demands has been and continues to be a constant challenge that dates back to the first principals (Lattuca, 2012). Grissom, Loeb, and Mitani (2015) studied principal time management skills, and asserted that principals with strong building management skills such as the hiring and monitoring of staff, caring for the building, and supervising the budget allowed no additional time to work with and strengthen teacher instructional practices.

Peterson (2001), in research on principals' work, socialization, and training, reported that principals work in an environment of numerous interruptions and assume responsibility for solving almost constant challenging and immediate problems. These

countless situations make it difficult to find time to train principals adequately for the stress and maturity needed to handle all facets of the position. Other responsibilities that are more hidden but expected of principals may be after-hour recitals, celebrations, fundraisers, or charity events that add to the workload of principals and often lead to fatigue or burnout.

The role of the principal has been plagued by the challenging demands of the job requirements, misconceptions about the reality of the job, and an overall lack of support. Scarce coaching has taken place relative to balancing the many school needs and prioritizing the most important work related to instructional improvement and support. Lattuca (2012) discussed the importance of adequate training that helps principals thoroughly prepare for the job, but Lattuca (2012) found insufficient training in the following areas: demands of multiple tasks with inadequate time to complete the tasks, myriad and almost constant changes, a lack of coaching or mentoring, a scarcity of high-quality evaluations, and minimal district support and preparation. Mentoring and coaching have been used primarily with teachers in the educational system, but they are a rare occurrence for the complex job of principal. Finding a mentor who had been an effective past principal has been shown to provide valuable support and feedback. In addition, mentoring develops a shared vision, builds leadership capacity, and provides a role model who may contribute to the growth of new and experienced principals (Lattuca, 2012; Peterson, 2001). Coaching or guiding principals may help these new principals

learn to use reflection, joint problem-solving, and metacognition to address concerns in a productive and positive manner.

The position of principal remains one of the hardest roles in education, not only because of the responsibility for school improvement, but also for meeting assessment demands that increase each year. These demands, which have intensified in recent years, include student achievement and standards accountability (Dolph, 2017).

Dolph (2017) studied the challenges and opportunities for school improvement and stated that principals already had difficult jobs, and the recent shift based on the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2001 and the *Adequate Yearly Progress* requirements in the core subjects of mathematics, reading, science, and social studies has escalated their responsibilities. Recent state assessments showed dismal results, with almost two out of five schools in the United States not demonstrating proficiency in the core subjects. The *No Child Left Behind Act* did not only serve to raise the required results of students in core content areas, but also held schools accountable for student success or failure. These changes increased the pressure and need for high-quality and savvy school leaders (Dolph, 2017).

Furthermore, the *No Child Left Behind Act* was recently replaced by the *Every Student Succeeds Act* that went into effect in 2015, and current assessment results show even more significant gaps in urban schools (Dolph, 2017). In the report *Giving Every Child a Fair Shot* from the Executive Office of the President of the United States (2015),

the results showed students who attend the bottom 5% of performing schools in the country demonstrated a 31% gap in reading achievement and a wider gap of 36% in mathematics. The report included the statistic that Hispanic and Black students in the fourth grade are 50% less likely to be proficient in math as their Caucasian peers. These factors demonstrate the need for effective leaders and principals who can support instructional improvement. They must possess leadership skills necessary to inspire a shared vision among stakeholders to improve achievement results in schools, especially urban schools that face many challenges. The principal is second only to the classroom teacher in supporting a quality school, facilitating instructional leadership, and impacting student achievement (Dolph, 2017).

The government in its *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders Report* (2015) revised and updated its 1996 school standards due to the complex needs and 21st century requirements of increased school accountability and budget challenges. The new standards articulate the components of high-quality leadership: mission, vision, and core values; ethics and professional norms; equity and cultural responsiveness; curriculum, instruction, and assessment standards; community care and support for students; professional capacity of school personnel; professional community for teachers and staff; meaningful engagement of families and community; operations of management; and school improvement (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). These standards are complex and require a holistic and collaborative approach to leading

a school. Educational leaders face a challenging job with high turnover that needs coaching support and reflection along with implementing standards that serve as a framework for professional development grounded in foundational guideposts. The standards underline the belief that school leaders may improve outcomes for students by engaging in high-quality leadership and creating supports and positive climates for staff. The standards paint a picture of fitting the many puzzle pieces together (Okilwa & Barnett, 2017).

Instructional leadership is an essential component in the many complicated roles of a school principal and has been found to be pivotal in supporting teachers and other stakeholders in ensuring a high-functioning school. Grobler (2013), on school principals as instructional leaders, found that instructional leadership is a vital component of principalship and includes not only supporting and holding teachers accountable for teaching, but also confirming that the standards and curriculum are taught. Similarly, Wallace (2012) studied the school principal as leader, and identified the strong characteristics of a high-quality principal as possessing adaptive leadership abilities and habits which communicate a strong vision of high expectations, build leadership capacity, improve instructional efforts, certify excellent systems, monitor staff and procedures, and create a positive climate that provides for emotional, intellectual, and social safety and well-being (Dolph, 2017; Wallace Foundation, 2013).

A number of research studies advance the idea that influential leaders focus on reinforcing teacher improvement practices, facilitating connected professional development, setting a shared vision of high expectations, and monitoring student learning (Lunenburg, 2013). In conclusion, principals are faced with an ever-challenging job of improving student learning and supporting staff in achieving superior results while juggling the many hats of daily discipline, budget, safety, and security.

Instructional leadership must be a basic skill and quality required for successful principals; however, on instructional leadership competencies of school principals, Gulcan (2012) found that principals tend to be more comfortable in the managerial parts of their job and not the complexity of instructional leadership and school improvement. Many principals may already support and develop teachers, but a majority of their time is spent dealing with student discipline and other managerial tasks, leaving few occasions to work on instructional leadership (Gulcan, 2012). Farver and Holt (2015), on the value of coaching in building leadership capacity of principals in urban schools, found positive themes with mentoring such as principals developing strong relationships, encouraging trusting conversations, supporting staff leadership, creating a respected climate, and forming reflective partnerships. The themes also suggest that principal coaching and support may help increase the confidence of principals as they strengthen their instructional leadership and experience real-time coaching with a focus on reflection, leadership practices, and school improvement (Farver & Holt, 2015). Chapter 2 will

focus on the improvement of instructional leadership skills, the conditions of successful coaching, and the perceptions of principals who have experienced the coaching process and its relationship to advancing their leadership.

Problem Statement

Many principals focus on the management tasks of their job versus an emphasis on instructional leadership, leadership practices, reflection, and school improvement. Studies to understand how best to develop and support this leadership role of principals are limited, and the scarcity of inquiry into coaching and mentoring indicates further investigation in the leadership field is needed. Bickman, Goff, Goldring, and Guthrie (2014) researched changing principals' leadership through feedback and coaching and found a correlation between best practices in instruction and the leadership skills of principals through leadership coaching. Lunenburg (2013) shared the importance of developing leadership which stresses student learning and positive environments; however, principals often work more on the management tasks of their job rather than their leadership skill-building. James-Ward and Potter (2011) found that current principal training does not focus primarily on instructional leadership despite research which shows that strong leadership has been found to increase student learning. Honig (2012) found a gap in research based on the topic of principal coaching, the effectiveness of coaching, and the type of coaching needed to improve the instructional leadership expertise of principals.

There is research in adult business learning which may help administrators understand how best to coach principals in instructional leadership. The content-related theory of Andragogy by Knowles (1984) is based on learning practices that benefit adult learners. It includes understanding the purpose and relevance of the educational process, paying attention to problem-based learning, and undergoing practices rooted in real job situations. Additionally, in a study on executive coaching and the relationship to transformational learning, Cerni, Curtis, & Colmar (2010) worked with eight principals in a ten-week coaching cycle modeled after executive coaching practices. The executive encounters were based on leadership skills, reflective processing, and work aligned with the vision and goals of the system. As a result, the principals who received this directed coaching increased their metacognitive and communication skills. Based on the best practices in several adult learning areas, coaching principals in educational leadership may develop positive perceptions of coaching experiences in which they can adapt to daily situations.

Audience

This research was a qualitative phenomenological study designed to explore the lived experiences of ten elementary principals who have already participated in principal coaching with their principal supervisor focused on instructional leadership. The findings of the research may enlighten central office administrators, principals, teachers, and educational preparation programs at the university level. The results of this study may

help to promote practices and training to support principals in their leadership role and contribute to instructional improvements in the school system.

Specific Leadership Problem

Few studies exist concerning principal training programs and job-embedded coaching focused on instructional skills for principals. This scarcity of studies occurs despite the research that strong leadership has been found to increase student learning. Meddaugh (2014) concurred that additional studies are necessary to examine the results of coaching principals based on the likelihood that coaching is a valuable exercise that may increase instructional practices and impact the quality of teaching and learning.

Instructional leadership remains a key characteristic of a school principal, but recently the myriad of responsibilities has grown more complex, and accountability for student learning has increased (Gulcan, 2012). Principals receive training during their internship, but then face a job that is often isolating and lonely. They are the one in charge and the main person responsible for the management and instructional leadership of maintaining and improving the school. In a study on leadership coaching and mentoring, Gray (2018) discussed the need for a shift away from the traditional focus of just managing the building. The new training, under the guidance of a mentor, is needed to prepare principals for instructional leadership and the complexity of the principalship. Recommendations included daily learning in the field and engaging in practical problems with the concentration on leadership, instruction, and reflection.

Coaching may be a method to support principals, but research based on the impact of coaching and the effectiveness of coaching is limited. In a study on the coaching experience of 16 urban principals, James-Ward and Potter (2011) stated that initial principal training programs are not enough to advance the role of the principal. However, coaching based on concise feedback, improvement in teaching and learning, implementation of next steps, and a targeted cycle of inquiry with regular debriefing may result in positive experiences for principals. Finally, Meddaugh (2014) discussed the need for further research in the ways principal coaches may contribute to improving the instructional practices in schools based on common expectations of best methods between the leader and the teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of elementary principals in one urban district where principal coaching was implemented through principal supervisors. The study helped the researcher explore the results of coaching related to improving principal instructional skills, developing leadership skills, knowing the conditions of effective coaching, and examining the subjects' perceptions of their coaching experience.

Moreover, the researcher used detailed interviews to explore the lived experiences of the principals based on their coaching in the school setting. The study results highlighted the impact of principal coaching relative to improving the instructional

leadership skills of principals and the perception of coaching related to positive feelings connected to leadership and instructional skills. The findings and personal comments highlighted the lack of support for the complex job of the principal and may convey to central office staff, school leaders, teachers, and university personnel an understanding of the types of coaching and support to help improve the instructional leadership skills of principals.

Methodology Overview

A qualitative method was applied with a focus on the phenomenological framework based on the understandings of the lived experiences of elementary principals who received principal coaching. Their perceptions of the impact of coaching and their knowledge of the coaching related to improved instructional leadership skills were studied. Moreover, the qualitative methodology and the phenomenological design helped disclose how coaching impacts the leadership and instructional skills of principals, and the types of supports and conditions principals need from their coaches (Bickman, Goff, Goldring, & Guthrie, 2014; Honig, 2012; Meddaugh, 2014).

The sample size included ten elementary principals from one urban district in Washington State where administrators practice principal coaching based on instructional leadership during real, everyday experiences. The phenomenological research design was an appropriate fit for this research topic due to the small sample size and the use of interviews as the main source of data collection and analysis. The theory of Andragogy,

according to Malcolm Knowles (1984), was also suitable for this research study since it connected to the qualitative research design based on the adult learning components of self-directed learning, past participant experience, real-life learning, and problem-based lessons. In a book on research design, Creswell (2018) discussed the smaller sample size of qualitative studies and how the phenomenological design has a range of up to ten participants. In another book focused specifically on phenomenological research methods, Moustakas (1994) communicated the importance of selecting participants who experienced the research topic, demonstrated an interest in sharing the meaning of the lived experience, and were open to detailed interviews.

The interview questions played an essential role in the research and were closely aligned with the topic of principal coaching based on the real-life experiences of principals (Creswell, 2018). Additionally, Moustakas (1994) stated that the most basic questions must align with the actual experiences of subjects, their behavior during their participation, and the depth of their involvement in the coaching. Patton (2015) stated how in-depth interviews aligned to phenomenology due to the need to explore the meaning of the participants' experiences and conduct an interview that allows for a thorough and detailed description of their perception of the prior experience, Mortari (2013), looking at writing reflections, described the reflective nature of the phenomenological design and the significance of allowing the participants to reason in a metacognitive way which resulted in a stream of consciousness during the interview.

Phenomenology is intended to explore the experiences of real people and study both individual and group practices (Patton, 2015). The phenomenological design is structured so the researcher only selects participants who are familiar with the research topic since the data collected are based on firsthand knowledge. This phenomenological design incorporated maximum variation sampling to capture a range of perspectives on principal coaching (Harsh, 2011; Higginbottom, 2013). The participants included mixed genders, and both new and veteran elementary principals. Letters and an email containing information about the study were sent to the principals to see who would be interested in participating, thus ensuring that participation would be voluntary. The information included clear procedures for the study and allowed any subject to withdraw at any time without explanation.

Gelling (2015), on qualitative research, stated how data can be collected through face-to-face interviews with a small group of participants conducting an active analysis of their life experiences. Similarly, on understanding phenomenology, Flood (2010) discussed how detailed interviews are a key component of the study to fully understand the subjects' involvement relative to the topic and provide an analysis and reflection of the themes. Seidman (2013), in his book on qualitative research, recommended each interview consist of a beginning, middle, and conclusion, allowing enough time to share real-life experiences. To ensure participants said all they wished to say, each interview was held in the district office and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The in-depth

interview provided information about subject rights throughout the process, potential risks and gains, confidentiality, the sharing of the results, conditions for at-risk populations, and contact information for the researcher and the Institutional Review Board (IRB), if questions arose before, during, or after the study (Seidman, 2013).

The detailed interview analysis included a thorough review to select the key components and themes that aligned to the major ideas and ensured the validity of the experience (Goulding, 2005). Interview answers helped the researcher fully understand the principals' involvement, determine the analysis and reflection of the themes, and examine the true meaning of the lived experience (Flood, 2010). The researcher, a Central Office Administrator and former principal, worked to control potential biases by recognizing any preconceived opinions. In conclusion, the phenomenological design aligned with this research study due to the nature of co-constructing the meaning of lived experiences relative to principal coaching (Flood, 2010). The methodology was consistent with the more significant details related to the findings.

Research Questions

The research questions used in this study included:

1. How does the lived experience of principal coaching impact the leadership skills of principals?
2. How does the lived experience of principal coaching impact the instructional skills of principals?

3. What types of supports and conditions do principals need from coaches to improve their instructional leadership skills?
4. What is the overall perception of principals who have experienced coaching?

Study Limitations

This research study may have had limitations due to potential issues related to reliability and validity of conducting qualitative research. However, measures were taken to ensure personal biases did not influence the study, and human rights were protected throughout the process.

A limitation may have included the possibility that the interviewer emotionally attached to the participants due to their shared passion for the topic. Since the researcher in this study is a district administrator and former elementary principal, biases needed to be attended to during the process. The subjects were school principals, so status or power was recognized during the interview process.

Moustakas (1994) held that biases needed to be acknowledged before engaging in the interview, and personal experiences must be set aside. Listening with an open mind and paying attention to the participant was very important. In a book on crafting phenomenological research, Vagle (2018) discussed the use of bracketing to fight pre-understanding. Bracketing required the researcher to engage in journaling or writing down personal experiences, suspending judgment, and concentrating on the subject's

information. Bridling was another strategy that protected the researcher from jumping to conclusions or judging too quickly. It allowed the researcher to think ahead during the study and consider the subject's experiences in their entirety. Finally, journaling was used before, during, and after the study to help the researcher reflect on the information and monitor comprehension of the data.

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher reviewed various studies connected to the topic to weigh diverse findings. The researcher also used inquiry-based learning such as questioning, reflecting on practices, sharing feelings, and understanding the benefits of the procedures. Cope (2014) studied the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research, and the ways researchers added credibility to inquiry by sharing their own experiences with the subjects. Creswell (2018) discussed the benefit of communicating a summary of the findings to the subjects and providing a link to their individual experience, race, or gender. Additionally, validity was strengthened by the researcher disclosing a detailed account of the study after all of the interviews were completed.

Shenton (2004) discussed strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research through direct feedback and questions from educational colleagues. Their input helped the researcher consider and prevent biases from occurring. The colleagues also ascertained words or phrases which held various subjective preconceptions. The researcher sought help from several other educational administrators to examine the documents for any subjective findings and thus safeguard confidence.

Finally, other methods to establish trustworthiness included making participants comfortable and willing to discuss their experiences and giving them the ability to withdraw at any time if they were uneasy. These strategies gave participants control over their own involvement. Finally, transcripts, data, and feedback were reviewed by several central office administrators and principals to ensure participants' words aligned with the researcher's meanings and themes (Shenton, 2004). The identity of the participants was protected by assigning each one a pseudonym and keeping confidential the name of the school, the school district, and the city. By using pseudonyms, participants felt they could answer questions honestly with full anonymity.

Delimitations

This study focused on research questions integral to the experience of principal coaching, the types of conditions that support effective coaching, the lived experiences of coached principals, the perceptions of principal coaching, and the ways situations may impact the instructional leadership skills of principals. Elementary principals who participated in coaching cycles with their principal supervisor in an urban school district were the target group for this research study based on a mix of gender and years of experience. The participants were selected from a district which practiced coaching for at least one year, meeting once a month from August to the end of June. Each visit lasted approximately two hours and focused on leadership practices and systems for improving continuous achievement.

In closing, the research focused on an urban district and only a small group of elementary principals were selected; therefore, the findings and results may not be generalizable to a larger population of principals, small school districts, or secondary principals.

Definition of Key Terms

Adaptive leadership. Leading through change in challenging situations by involving stakeholders in working together to understand the change process, solve problems, and co-construct creative solutions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

Adult learning theory. A model of strategies that support adults with self-directed learning, use of life experiences, problem based and need based learning (Knowles, 1984).

Bridling. Reflection on former experiences before and during research to ensure preconceived notions do not taint the process (Vagle, 2018).

Bracketing. The suspension of judgment based on personal experiences that may impact the trustworthiness of the study (Vagle, 2018).

Differentiated Coaching. A method used by coaches to help participants receive individualized support (Kise, 2006).

Every Student Succeeds Act. A law established in 2015 meant to eliminate achievement gaps in student subgroups and special education, and ensure school accountability (Dolph, 2017).

Executive Coaching. A method geared towards helping learners improve their leadership skills and align their goals to the system (Cerni, Curtis, & Colmar, 2010).

Instructional Coaching. A method of supporting participant teaching strategies, leadership skills, and instructional practices through modeling and questioning (Jones & Ringler, 2018).

Instructional leadership. Principals supporting teachers to improve teaching and learning, student growth, and strong professional development that endorses school goals and vision (Salo, Nylund, & Stjernstrom, 2015).

Perception. The main component of knowledge that is not questioned in phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology. A qualitative method which allows the researcher to explore the lived experiences and descriptions of a human's life (Moustakas, 1994).

Principal. A school leader or head of the school (Merriam-Webster, 2000).

Principal Coach. A support person who helps principals gain skills in instructional leadership, improve leadership skills, and employ methods to cause reflection through questioning and listening (Delinger Kane & Rosenquist, 2018).

Principal Supervisor. A supervisor of principals that oversees the management and instructional efforts of principals to improve principal performance (Goldring, Grissom, Rubin, Rogers, Neel, & Clark, 2018).

Professional Learning Community. A group of school staff who meet regularly to analyze student data and utilize the inquiry process to inform next instructional steps (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016).

Technical leadership. Leadership focused on the skills, daily tasks, and organization of the workplace (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of ten elementary principals in one urban district who experienced principal coaching with a concentration on instructional leadership. Principalship in the past focused heavily on technical components and managerial tasks such as hiring, budget, discipline, and numerous other assignments. Today the emphasis is on instructional leadership based on higher accountability for student achievement and school improvement (Lunenburg, 2013).

The job of a school principal is a complicated and demanding role with little or no required on-going coaching support after initial principal training. Research shows that coaching and continuous training are essential to supporting principals as they prioritize vital issues, focus on instructional leadership, monitor student learning, set a vision for staff, and develop leadership abilities. Coaching support helps principals develop their leadership goals by reflecting on specific leadership skills and shaping next steps to school improvement (Lattuca, 2012). Principal coaching is a limited area of study and

additional research is needed to explore its effectiveness on instructional and leadership skills, methods of effective coaching, and perceptions of the coaching experience.

Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive literature review of the research on principal coaching and adult learning theory, the impact of principal coaching, and the effectiveness of improved principal leadership skills. The literature review includes studies relative to improving principal instructional leadership, developing leadership skills, understanding the conditions of effective coaching, and studying the participant perceptions of effective coaching.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent government accountability reports have imposed a shift in the principal's role from the traditional emphasis as supervisor operating the technical aspects of the building to principal as instructional leader. This emphasis initiated the importance of developing and supporting the principal as an educational leader and underscored the need for research and exploration into effective strategies which could contribute to a positive student learning environment.

However, there is a scarcity of research on principal coaching regarding principal preparation programs and training. Many studies do not emphasize instructional leadership despite findings that suggest strong leadership correlates to increased student learning (James-Ward & Potter, 2011). Honig (2012) found little inquiry into the topic of principal coaching, the effectiveness of coaching, and the type of coaching needed to improve the instructional leadership skills of principals. Therefore, principal coaching was explored through a review of the literature centered on improving instructional leadership skills, the conditions of successful coaching, perceptions of principals who have experienced the coaching process, and best strategies to enhance principal leadership.

Coaching Principals as Instructional Leaders

Research on the significance of developing principals as instructional leaders is in the emerging stage, and the impact of possible coaching benefits have not been fully

substantiated. Therefore, additional studies are needed to determine if job-embedded coaching increases the instructional skills of principals (Goff, Guthrie, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014). In a study on leadership coaching for novice principals, Lochmiller (2014) found that coaches adapted their strategies according to participant progress. The author indicated that successful principals focused on instructional leadership and modeling during the first year of coaching, and with more experience, moved into an inquiry and facilitative stage. This movement forward supported the idea of growth in the instructional skills of principals based on the coach's behavior and ability to differentiate support that centered on practice and reflection (Lochmiller, 2014).

James-Ward and Potter (2011) focused their research on coaching experiences and studied sixteen principals from urban or low-performing schools. Each principal worked with a coach to determine if the partnership resulted in the growth of instructional skills for the principal. The coaches and principals engaged in weekly meetings to work on the essential goals of structuring objectives, determining skills, developing strengths, engaging in reflective conversations, and creating next steps for long-term leadership. Seven of eight participants indicated increased instructional skills with the most beneficial impact on the analysis of classroom instruction and targeted feedback to teachers (James-Ward & Potter, 2011).

Six of eight principals in the study indicated a positive relationship with the coach and noted an impact in their ability to make difficult decisions (James-Ward & Potter,

2011). The authors maintained that coaches should concentrate on teaching practices and strategies to develop the instructional leadership skills of principals. Overall, it was revealed that all principals but one found coaching beneficial to their role as an instructional leader and contributed to their making changes that positively impacted students.

Meddaugh (2014), on coaching to help a principal's capacity to lead underperforming schools, focused on three coaches from the Midwest Coaching Institute who had experience in schools with low student achievement. The author asserted that principals needed more support and training in the area of instructional leadership, especially in shifting duties from building managers to instructional leaders. Personal experience and a principal coach helped change leadership practice by reflecting and discussing instructional videos, providing feedback to the classroom teacher, and recognizing high-quality instructional methods. Meddaugh (2014) found that a trusting relationship and on-going collaboration targeted at best practices between the principal and teacher were essential ingredients in impacting instructional improvements in schools.

Coaching tied to supporting instructional leadership skills for principals may improve the leadership practices and confidence in balancing the technical and adaptive work needed to lead a positive school with a shared vision. Fink and Markholt (2017) looked at inspiring growth, and discussed how utilizing metacognition, reflective

practices, and high-quality instruction with follow-up feedback and professional development may support principals in developing instructional leadership skills. Similarly, on principals as instructional leaders, Fink and Silverman (2014) examined how central office administrators shifted their work to provide coaching and support as compared to the traditional principal supervisory role focused on compliance and technical skills. Finally, on what questioning can accomplish, Stevenson (2017) shared how coaches who utilize concrete modeling, planning, and one-on-one questioning to support growth and on-going professional development may realize more benefits than those who work with group strategies disconnected from everyday school problems. Coaches who work with principals as partners utilize goal setting with the principal, reflective questioning, connections to the vision, and a trusting and open relationship. Coaching relationships focused on common goals, self-reflection, instructional leadership through classroom observations and feedback, and the development of a strong partnership, may contribute to positive leadership practices.

Goff et al. (2014) selected a random sample of principals to analyze the impact of on-going coaching plus feedback as opposed to feedback alone. Twenty-six principals participated in evaluative information and coaching, while an additional 26 principals received input, but no coaching. The principal coaches did not have a standard agenda for the sessions but focused on the needs and next steps of the individual principals to create a monitored action plan. It was revealed that feedback alone did not seem to change

principal behaviors, but feedback in conjunction with leadership coaching helped principals turn critiques into positive actions. Principal leadership skills were also enhanced through evaluative assessment, discussion of goals, and shared comments with the staff. Limitations of the study included the time needed to develop principals as instructional leaders based on not knowing the optimal period needed to sustain and develop practices.

Honig (2012) studied school districts in Atlanta, New York, and Oakland which practiced principal coaching during school hours. Honig completed 283 interviews throughout the school year with principal coaches, principals, and central office employees. The author asserted that principal coaches worked mainly on improving teaching and learning and tailored their support and mentoring to the individual strengths and differences of each principal. A key finding was the need to shift from whole group professional development to personal job-embedded training by helping principals develop their individual ability to focus on high-quality teaching and learning.

Additionally, Honig (2012) observed that not all principal coaches worked collaboratively with their subjects. Some engaged in the traditional model of principal support, relying on compliance rather than reflection. However, those who shared the goal setting and strategies with the principals were able to co-construct a problem, address it, and implement it.

Honig (2012) believed additional research is necessary to analyze the role of the principal coach to maximize instructional leadership and develop principal leaders.

There was a benefit to principals when the coach engaged in a collaborative partnership versus the traditional coaching role of advice and compliance (Honig, 2012).

Additionally, the principal coach may help increase the instructional leadership skills of principals as opposed to the daily management tasks of running a building. While studying a new role for principal supervisors, Goldring et al. (2018) found that principal coaching and instructional support reduced the number of direct reports, allowing the principal more time to develop leadership skills. The focus on fewer direct reports allowed the principal supervisor to spend more time and focus on adaptive leadership work versus a reliance on technical skills.

The role of principal in a school is complex but key to high-quality teaching and learning. It requires both technical and adaptive skills, and research indicates that principal coaching may be pivotal in supporting and developing essential leadership skills.

Instructional Leadership Characteristics

Principals face daily tasks and rapid challenges as they cope with managerial duties, instructional activities, problem solving, and leadership strategies. Zepeda, Parylo, & Bengston, (2013) in their article on principal professional development practices through the lens of adult learning theory, found that principals' efforts to increase student

learning and achievement may often be sidetracked by the overwhelming number of managerial tasks. The sheer number of technical tasks that principals face daily can distract from the instructional leadership work and vision in a building. Instructional coaching that is focused on problem-based learning, reflection, and instructional leadership may support principal leadership. McCotter, Bulkley, and Bankowski (2016) examined multiple pathways to develop inclusive instructional leaders, and found that principals understood the difficulty of cultivating a robust instructional vision. To achieve that goal, they needed to include staff in the learning process, support teachers with real time feedback, and assist the organization with goal setting.

Characteristics of strong instructional leadership practices include promoting a connected vision related to the following: (a) supporting teachers with regular feedback; (b) building leadership strategies in partnership with teachers; (c) facilitating professional development trainings for teachers; and (d) promoting a favorable climate focused on cohesive systems and high expectations for all (Salo et al., 2015; Sheng, Wolff, Kilmer, & Yager, 2017).

Many principals today set a vision and create opportunities that include teacher support with classroom visits, timely feedback, and professional development trainings connected to school goals. In a study on the instructional role of primary school principals from South Africa, Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy, and Schmidt (2013) found that most principals focused on managerial roles and were inconsistent with the

implementation of instructional leadership skills. It was suggested that principals believed they would improve in instructional skills and teacher support if they modeled teaching practices themselves. They would then focus on instructional leadership rather than managerial tasks that often overtake their day.

In a study based on principals' skillful observation and coaching, Carraway and Young (2015) found that content knowledge related to pedagogy and quality instructional practices, a healthy school climate with solid systems in place that contribute to smooth operations, and positive experiences with teachers based on sharing instructional feedback may impact the experiences of principals as instructional leaders. The role of the principal has changed in recent years due to increased accountability and expectations for student growth and achievement. Instructional leadership is a skill set that is essential in the role of the school principal in terms of supporting a shared vision of coaching support and creating high expectations for student learning.

Coaching Principals to Develop Leadership Skills

Principals may face an isolated and lonely job as the primary administrator in the building, accountable for student achievement, an inspired vision, and high learning expectations. In adult learning theory, the importance of leadership abilities and the role of the leadership approach is emphasized. Katz (1974) discussed the skills of an effective administrator and the need for principals to increase their instructional strengths in the coaching experience while attending to the technical, human, and conceptual skills that

make leaders successful. The technical skill is necessary to improve instructional leadership and understand what high-quality instruction looks and sounds like in the classroom. The human skill is essential in the principal coaching partnership to facilitate a respectful, honest, and open relationship between the coach and principal and to create new ideas and ways of thinking (Katz, 1974). The conceptual skill of developing leadership is vital, so principals become visionary leaders who understand the "why" of the changes they are implementing and see the big picture of success in the ideal state. Strong principal leadership must balance technical, human, and conceptual skills while attending to stakeholder relationships which promote a healthy and trusting environment (Lunenburg, 2013; Northouse, 2016).

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory or Andragogy has implications for the coaching of principals since it is rooted in the best practices of inquiry and reflection. The theory of Andragogy identifies practices that benefit adult learners which include understanding the purpose and relevance of the learning, using problem-based learning, and basing learning on practical job experiences (Knowles, 1984). Other strong components of adult learning theory encompass guidance, self-assessment, self-directed inquiry, and self-diagnosis.

Hagen and Park (2016) studied the use of cognitive science to explain how Andragogy works, and concluded the importance of self-directed learning, the use of personal experiences, the necessity of motivation, and the link to real-life applications as

they contributed to memory and information recall. They found reflection on prior learning and self-directed experiences enhance the short- and long-term memory of adult learners. Important concepts related to the principles of Andragogy include subject participation in the planning of their learning, the use of real-life experiences and situations, and problem-solving strategies.

Adult learning theory may have an impact on the professional development and coaching of principals based on the theory's characteristics which showed improvement in the transfer of learning to real life situations. In a study on principal professional development practices through the lens of adult learning theory, Zepeda et al. (2013) validated definite benefits for principals who received professional development focused on practical situations, goals, and action steps. Adult learning characteristics were aligned to the goals of principal coaching and the importance of individual problem-based learning, collaborative goal setting, job relevancy, and personal improvement objectives. Principals who helped create a culture of collaboration demonstrated increased ownership, additional engagement in learning, a drive to improve, and the ability to transfer learning to the real world (Hagen & Park, 2016; Honig, 2014). Watkins (2015), while researching the evolving nature of psychoanalytic supervision, found that a partnership in the learning and co-construction of practice problems supported learners and honored their individual voice and prior experience.

Cerni et al. (2010) observed that executive coaching practices and transformational leadership strategies were based on leadership skills, reflective processing, and work aligned with the vision and goals of the system. The principals who received coaching increased their leadership strategies of metacognition and communication. The research of James-Ward and Potter (2011) involved eight principals who, when coached, became more self-reflective in their leadership and more courageous in their decision-making. Six of the eight participants related the coaching experience to their leadership growth, but only four principals reported instructional improvement in supporting teachers and analyzing data.

While studying instructional leadership through collaborative coaching, Houchens, Stewart, and Jennings (2017) utilized a coaching protocol focused on reflection to develop leadership and problem-solving skills. The authors chose four principals and two coaches from the Southeastern United States and employed strategies to solve challenges aimed at supporting reflective thinking and problem-solving skills. They determined that self-reflection increased the ability to solve challenges, reveal next steps, and align leadership to the vision and goals of the school (Houchens et al., 2017; James-Ward & Potter, 2011).

Silver, Lochmiller, Copland, & Tripps (2009) conducted a study of university-based coaching for 17 new administrators. It was discovered that most of the administrators agreed that leadership coaching benefitted their leadership development.

In addition, the majority of these administrators decided the most substantial benefit of coaching was the individualization of professional development. Likewise, the match of the coach and principal was essential to a successful coaching relationship when they both focused on the specific needs and issues of the particular principal. This partnership and attention to individual requirements may be a contributing factor to the success of the coaching relationship and may impact leadership development. Additional research is needed in the area of differentiated coaching and the role of the coach in unique situations, keeping in mind the various requirements of administrators and the impact of coaching on improving leadership and self-reflection.

Conditions and Supports Related to Effective Coaching

The characteristics of effective principal coaching is a topic still in the beginning stages since it is a relatively new practice employed in a few school districts, but not systemically across the United States. However, several studies have shown coaching to be an effective tool for leadership development. Stevenson (2017) discussed the importance of coaching to facilitate deeper reflection, alignment to individual principal goals, and powerful questioning techniques that probed for understanding, self-reflection, and problem-solving skills. Augustine-Shaw and Reilly (2017) on mentoring and coaching, determined that principal coaching which focused on high-quality instructional videotapes followed by discussion and questioning may contribute to a partnership based on collaboration. Similarly, Martin (2017) discussed mentoring and coaching, and the

principals' need for a trusting relationship with the coach to form an authentic partnership where practical problems are seen as opportunities for reflection and growth, not mistakes.

Research by Hammack and Wise (2011) on coaching competencies and best practices supported the importance of a strong coaching relationship and a stable climate of trust between the coach and administrator. The important traits of the partnership included setting clear goals with a common purpose and employing well-defined communication. The coaching competencies related to leadership skills were perceived by the principals as positive support to help transfer their new expertise to practical, daily experiences.

Honig (2012) researched how the principal and principal coach could improve instruction and navigate practical instructional problems based on questioning techniques and honest discussion of teacher practices. Honig (2012) found that a method of self-reflection and questioning between coaches and principals allowed principals to identify their most common problems and craft their differentiated support.

In contrast, the coaches who employed a traditional supervisory model of telling the principal what to do versus co-constructing action plans were not as effective in building principal ownership and problem-solving skills (Honig, 2012). The coaches who used questioning and facilitation skills to help principals think metacognitively established a more connected and successful partnership (Honig, 2012; Stevenson, 2017).

The connection between coach and principal often carries over to principal and teacher collaboration. Principals who coach and support teachers with instructional methods such as reflective thinking and problem-solving strategies develop even stronger leadership skills. Gettys, Martin, and Bigby (2010), on mentoring and principals' instructional leadership skills, found that organizational coaching facilitated a strong learning atmosphere for all stakeholders within the first five years of a principal's career. Feedback for the principal was given not only by the coach, but also by teachers who supported improved observations and strategies. Goff et al. (2014) found that the most successful coaching methods used in changing principals' practices included a combination of coaching and feedback relative to the principal's leadership skills. The art of questioning to facilitate deeper self-reflection and understanding of goals and areas of need was also consistent with other research studies on successful principal coaching (Augustine-Shaw & Reilly, 2017; Fink & Silverman, 2014; Stevenson, 2017). Feedback, in conjunction with coaching, helped principals see evaluative advice as a growth opportunity to be utilized in their instructional work with teachers.

Previous studies pointed to some evidence that matching coaches with principals based on needs or characteristics may impact the quality and outcomes of a successful principal coaching experience (Gettys et al., 2010; Lochmiller, 2014). Lochmiller (2014) conducted a study in which novice principals were matched with coaches based on the coach's experience and the needs of the particular principal. A vital skillset of effective

coaches entailed different strategies to meet the needs of individual principals (Honig, 2012; Lochmiller, 2014). Lochmiller (2014) discovered that coaches focused on modeling techniques for principals in the first year, then moved to questioning and facilitation in the second and third years due to the principal's leadership growth and confidence. This type of adaptive coaching helped principals develop metacognitive skills, brainstorm solutions to problems, and learn how to navigate complex leadership challenges (Honig, 2012; Lochmiller, 2014; Stevenson, 2017). Furthermore, Lochmiller (2014) learned that the third year of coaching support was not as time intensive as the first two, and this later phase resulted in a gradual decrease of support but increase in principal confidence. The coaching relationship in the third year evolved into a partnership focused on principal-led conversations concerning leadership challenges.

Another component that may contribute to successful principal coaching relates to the principal supervisor shifting from managing to mentoring for instructional improvement and leadership. Alvoid and Black (2014) studied the changing role of principals and shared how adjustments occurred over time in the way supervisors engaged in the teaching and learning with principals. These modifications occurred even more frequently if there were fewer principals per coach. Similarly, when examining how districts take charge of the principal pipeline, MacFarlane, Riley, and Turnbull (2015) identified strategies and modifications to strengthen the principal pipeline including emphasis on individualized support, adaptive leadership coaching, and more frequent

visits to observe, offer feedback, and align professional development goals. Shifting the role from the traditional principal supervisor to the role of coaching and supporting instructional leadership may contribute to positively impacting the direction of a principal.

The conditions of successful coaching remain a topic in the early stages of research. Some evidence exists to support effective mentoring strategies such as collaborative work between the coach and principal, strategies of questioning aimed at deeper self-reflection, increased support to process problems, growth in instructional skills, and leadership methods to improve instruction and create positive leadership.

Principal Perceptions of Effective Coaching

The role of the principal has changed in previous years with the implementation of laws such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2001 and its expectation of increasing student achievement in a complex educational system based on the evolving social, economic, and ethnic differences of students (James-Ward & Potter, 2011; Meddaugh, 2014). The instructional leadership expectations and accountability of principals in terms of raising student achievement and managing complex tasks has intensified (James-Ward & Potter, 2011). Instructional coaching may be a leadership strategy that will improve the complicated nature of the principal's key role in supporting education and developing leadership practices (James-Ward & Potter, 2011; Meddaugh, 2014). Participant

perception of the coaching experience and quality of the partnership between the coach and principal supports principal coaching as an effective process.

In a study about enhancing instructional leadership through collaborative coaching, Houchens et al. (2017) observed that principals who participated in a protocol focused on instructional leadership and self-reflection increased their metacognitive abilities to navigate leadership problems, increase trusting relationships, and follow through on practical problems. James-Ward (2013) found that similar coaching strategies for four novice principals which emphasized leadership and reflective questioning facilitated their metacognitive skills and accountability measures. These new principals perceived the coaching experience as helping them learn new ideas faster and cooperatively and accepting responsibility for next steps. They gained greater confidence from the coaching experience and grew in their ability to give teachers feedback (James-Ward, 2013). Other areas of perceived growth included overall leadership skills and an understanding of the relationship between collectively building goals and the guidance of a coalition of leaders.

Farver and Holt (2015) studied the value of coaching in building the leadership capacity of principals in urban schools. Their results showed that principals gained leadership skills by working with their coach on realistic problems, setting collaborative goals, and co-constructing action plans. The participants gained confidence asking questions, rephrasing their thinking, and listening to staff in a renewed manner. Celoria &

Roberson (2015) and Purcek (2014) observed how coaching helped support new principals who faced a demanding and traditionally isolated job while trying to solve leadership challenges and build trusting relationships.

Celoria and Hemphill (2014) studied coaching from the perspective of six coaches. The authors examined process skills related to self-reflection and problem-solving and the participants' perceptions of new principal coaching. The authors suggested that process versus content was a strong element in supporting principals as they developed the self-directive and leadership skills necessary to navigate the complex job of principal. The strategies of asking varied questions and addressing real situations unique to the principal helped principals with self-reflection and metacognition.

Rogers, Hauser, & Skytt (2016) considered the use of cognitive coaching to build school leadership capacity, and described cognitive coaching as a tool to build school leadership and foster a trusting relationship between the principal and the coach. Regular meetings were held to reflect on coaching sessions and discuss protocols to ensure a focus on the principal's leadership needs.

Overall, it was discovered that positive feelings related to co-constructing practical problems, asking open-ended questions concerning facilitated learning and self-reflection, and grounding leadership practices in a shared vision and goal contributed to school improvement.

Conclusions and Findings Related to Principal Coaching

Principal coaching is a concept that has a limited body of research, although some evidence exists to support principal coaching improving leadership abilities, instructional leadership skills, self-reflection, and problem-solving (Bickman et al., 2014; Honig, 2012; Meddaugh, 2014). Principal coaching on instructional leadership showed a positive impact in terms of supporting teacher and instructional practices and enabling feedback (Bickman et al., 2014; James-Ward & Potter, 2011). James-Ward and Potter (2011) found themes in their study related to the benefit of facilitated questioning and reflective practices that contributed to some principals acting more courageously in terms of leadership, although more research would be necessary to fully support these findings. The main themes in the study by Meddaugh (2014) included the realization that principal coaching was most effective when common goals were agreed upon by all school stakeholders and a strong partnership existed between the teachers and the principal. Additional findings relative to the leadership skills of principals included a positive relationship between inquiry-based coaching models focused on questioning skills, the development of metacognition, and the co-constructing of practical problems (Cerni et al., 2010; Fink & Markholt, 2017; Stevenson, 2017).

A focus on reflection, processing, and individualized coaching based on daily problems impacted a principal's leadership in a positive manner (Lochmiller, 2014). Celoria and Hemphill (2014) determined that process coaching facilitated reflection and

problem-solving skills that may contribute to growth in navigating problem-based situations at the school. The methods utilized questioning and an inquiry-based process that led to supportive structures beyond the traditional evaluation method typically employed in many districts (Honig, 2012; Stevenson, 2017).

Honig (2012) showed that some districts supported principals with job-embedded professional development using a school support method centered in the executive central office. Lochmiller (2014) determined that principal coaching may differ from teacher coaching as teachers concentrate on the classroom but principals work in a broader context based on their leadership challenges. Most principals perceived coaching as a positive experience with benefits in self-reflection, process coaching, facilitation in reaching a shared understanding of school goals, and as a next step in the improvement of leadership skills (Celoria & Hemphill, 2014; Houchens et al., 2016; James-Ward, 2013).

James-Ward (2013) observed that principals perceived the coaching process in a positive way enabling them to pick up new ideas faster, develop new plans of action, increase school confidence levels, give more comprehensive feedback, and understand the benefit of crafting common goals and visioning with staff. Principals also felt more confident and comfortable in their job. Further research on the success of coaching at all levels is needed to further understand how principal coaching supports principals, impacts their leadership abilities, improves their instruction and reflection, and develops problem-solving skills (Houchens et al., 2016).

The concept of principal coaching is still in the beginning stages as some districts are shifting the training of principals from the traditional supervisory evaluation model to job-embedded coaching focused on leadership, instructional skills, and individualized problem-solving. Gaps in principal coaching research still exist; therefore, researchers need to explore the effectiveness of coaching processes, the types of coaching that may or may not be useful, the perceptions of the participants, and the application of learning to practice (Honig, 2012). Educational researchers need to focus on the complexity, challenges, and high accountability of the principal's job in terms of student achievement, culture, and overall leadership in sustaining a high-functioning school.

Summary

Principal coaching was demonstrated to have positive results as many principals perceived the coaching experience as beneficial to their leadership. However, principal coaching is a limited area of study, and additional inquiry is needed to make a stronger correlation between the effectiveness of principal coaching to instructional improvement, the conditions of leadership development, and the perceptions of the coaching experience. This researcher explored principal coaching through qualitative methodology and phenomenological design to examine the effectiveness and perception of principal coaching related to instructional and leadership skills. The methodology related to the study on principal coaching will be discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The information in this research study focused on elementary principals in one urban district where principal coaching has been implemented with a principal supervisor. The results of principal coaching in relation to improving instructional competencies, developing leadership skills, implementing effective coaching, and understanding participant perceptions was explored. The results of detailed interviews highlighted the lived experiences of elementary principals in the school setting.

The purpose of the study was to explore how principal coaching may improve the instructional and leadership skills of principals and the perceptions of the experience. The results of the study will hopefully contribute to the limited research on leadership support for principals and help central office administrators, university colleagues, and practicing principals develop an awareness of principal coaching.

The data were collected from ten elementary principals in one urban school district in Washington State, and the findings were analyzed using a qualitative method based on phenomenology. Phenomenology is a framework which the researcher relies on to examine experience and consciousness. This framework uses small samples and interviews as its primary source of data for analysis. It aligned well to this research study of the lived experiences of principal coaching and the ways the experiences supported the development of instruction and leadership (Creswell, 2018). Gelling (2015) believed the actual experiences of the participant were the most important data source and involved

situations most likely shared by other principals. The exploration of these common experiences may contribute to instructional leadership, conditions of coaching, and perceptions of the coaching experience.

Research Questions

The research questions that were posed in this study related to the phenomenological design and aligned to the lived experiences and perceptions of ten principals in one urban district who underwent principal coaching. The questions focused on how principal coaching may impact the leadership and instructional skills of principals, the types of conditions that may support principal coaching, the effect of using lived experiences, and the perceptions of the coaching method. The research questions included:

1. How does the lived experience of principal coaching impact the leadership skills of principals?
2. How does the lived experience of principal coaching impact the instructional skills of principals?
3. What types of supports and conditions do principals need from coaches to improve their instructional leadership skills?
4. What is the overall perception of principals that have experienced coaching?

Research Method

A qualitative methodology was utilized with a focus on a phenomenological design based on understanding the lived experiences of elementary principals who received principal coaching, their perceptions of the coaching, and whether the coaching improved their instructional and leadership skills. The qualitative methodology helped the researcher examine possible ways coaching impacted the leadership and instructional skills of principals, the types of supports and conditions principals needed from coaches to improve their skills, and the impact coaching had on leadership abilities.

The qualitative methodology was the most appropriate for this research due to the open-ended nature of participant questions, the small sample size, and responses based on the lived experiences and perceptions of principal coaching (Creswell, 2018). Creswell suggested that quantitative methodology was best utilized when one sought to confirm a hypothesis about a particular phenomenon or looked for quantifiable answers to a specific problem. Based on these criteria, the researcher determined that quantitative research was not appropriate for this study, since it utilized closed-ended questions and participant responses through surveys or highly structured data-gathering techniques were selected from a larger participant base (Vogt, 2007). The researcher further determined the mixed methods methodology was not appropriate for this study, since the problem had not been adequately studied and there was an interest in exploring the nuance of principal coaching on leadership and instructional skills (Creswell, 2018).

Researchers try to understand the true meaning of a phenomenon by questioning people who went through the experience. Descriptive, structural, and behavioral questions as well as detailed examples help identify the shared meaning of the lived experience (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). To achieve identification of true phenomena for this study, a quantitative research method was considered. Vogt (2007), in a book on quantitative research methods, listed the essential elements of such a study: large sample size, in-house treatment, the assignment of randomly selected participants, and the use of a posttest at the end of the experiment. Ultimately, the researcher chose not to select quantitative methodology, since a small sample size was more appropriate for exploring the phenomenon of lived experiences.

The mixed methods approach was also considered for the benefit of a comprehensive approach utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Parylo, 2012). This methodology may have resulted in a deeper understanding of the phenomena that were being investigated; however, its weakness was related to the potential need to follow up with additional research based on possible discrepancies between qualitative and quantitative results. Also, different sample sizes between the quantitative and qualitative approach might have influenced the study (Creswell, 2018). The researcher ultimately decided that a qualitative methodology would best fit this study based on the topic, problem statement, purpose, and research questions.

Research Design

The phenomenological design was used in this study to help the researcher explore the lived experiences of elementary principals. Maximum variation sampling was also used to capture a range of perspectives on principal coaching (Harsh, 2011; Higginbottom, 2013). Phenomenology was the most appropriate approach due to the focus on research questions designed to understand the meaning of the experience and the researcher's interest in the topic (Moustakas, 1994).

The phenomenological approach best fit this research study because of its use of lived experiences or phenomena, its small sample size, and its use of interviews as the main source of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2018). In a book on researching lived experiences, Van Manen (2016) discussed how the researcher explored a deeper understanding of the participant's situation and supported the phenomenological design through interviews. Phenomenology is based on data sourced from real experiences lived by participants who have gone through the situation, shown an interest in sharing their experience, and are open to detailed interviews (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Patton (2015) explained how the authors, through interviews, examined the meaning of a lived experience and provided a perceptive and detailed description of the experience. Mortari (2013) described the reflective nature of the phenomenological design and the importance of allowing the participant to employ metacognition and stream of consciousness. Giorgi (1997) discussed how phenomenology related to complete systems

rather than parts and how this complete understanding helped the author recognize the impact and awareness of an experience.

In a book on phenomenological research methods, Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenology focused on the whole process of the experience while exploring multiple sides until the true meaning of understanding the experience was leveraged. The phenomenological process fit this study due to the nature of co-constructing the meaning of lived experiences relative to principal coaching (Flood, 2010). The researcher's final decision was to use the phenomenological approach due to the tight alignment of the topic, problem statement, purpose, and questions that connected to the exploration of the lived experiences of coached principals.

Other qualitative research designs were considered for this study. Grounded theory was considered, but not selected, due to the focus on continuously comparing research and inductive theoretical methods for the analysis of research connected to the real world (Patton, 2015). Grounded theory would have required analyzing multiple data points to continuously construct theory in an objective way. Multiple data points would have needed to be collected using observations, interviews, former research, and any other data points that related to the interaction between the principal coach and the principal (Gelling, 2015).

Ethnography was determined as not appropriate for this research based on the topic of principal coaching and the concentration on exploring the lived experiences of

principals. Ethnography focused on the researcher fully participating in the study during elongated time periods to understand the culture through observation and involvement in the field (Patton, 2015). The phenomenological design was not dependent on being fully immersed in the culture and was not bound by time as was the ethnographic design. The focus of a phenomenological design was studying the lived experience of participants and their perceptions (Creswell, 2018).

The researcher served as the main instrument in this research study, and detailed interviews were utilized with open-ended questions related to understanding the perceptions of principal coaching. The phenomenological design was focused on exploring the meaning of the participants' experiences related to principal coaching and understanding the descriptions of the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi (1997), in describing the phenomenological, psychological method, used phenomenology and free imaginative variation to explore a deeper understanding of significant principles. Giorgi (1997) found that by varying the details of the situation, the researcher determined if the essence of the experience was still present. The results then aided the researcher in comprehending the fundamental nature of the experience at a deeper level of consciousness. Gelling (2015) discussed the use of detailed interviews with the participant and engagement in the active process of analyzing real life experiences. Interviews were the primary format of this phenomenological research and supported the

topic of principal coaching based on connections to improving leadership, instruction, and perceptions of the coaching experience.

Interview questions aligned with the phenomenological design and were administered through in-person, unrestrictive questioning at the district office (see Appendix A). Open-ended questions encouraged participants' reflection by deepening their understanding and helping them identify the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2013). The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and were transcribed and recorded using a digital device. The analysis of the detailed interview included a thorough reading, coding, and selecting of key components, constructing themes that connected to major ideas, categorizing the themes of the phenomenon, and reviewing the interview process to ensure validity of the analysis (Goulding, 2005).

Instrument

Detailed interviews were conducted with ten elementary principals from one urban district in Washington State which employed principal coaching focused on instructional leadership. Interviews provided the primary data in understanding the individual experience, analyzing and reflecting on the themes, and deciphering the true meaning of the lived experience (Flood, 2010). The researcher contacted each participant to share the selection criteria, meeting times and locations, the purpose of the study, participant expectations, and details of the informed consent form which was signed prior to the first interview (Seidman, 2013).

The interview questions focused on the prior experiences of the principals, the details of their experiences using principal coaching, and their understanding of the essence and meaning of the coaching experience (Seidman, 2013). Interview questions were developed to align with the study's phenomenological design and to explore the lived experiences of principal coaching, possible benefits of coaching related to leadership, and the perception of the experience. The researcher listened closely to the participants' stories to fully understand their experiences. An interview guide was used to articulate the purpose of the interview, explain the process, gain information about previous experiences, and discover any supports that were or were not in place before coaching (see Appendix B).

Giorgi (2012) studied the descriptive phenomenological, psychological approach, and discussed two methods, bracketing and bridling, that helped the researcher fight any pre-conceptions or early biased conclusions. These strategies were used to fight pre-understanding and helped suspend any judgment based on personal experiences. Bracketing was used by the researcher in the form of journaling, an approach to encourage reflection on previous experiences and background knowledge. Bridling helped the questioning stay engaged and move forward without attempting to understand too quickly or jumping to conclusions. The researcher was the main instrument in qualitative research and ensured the principals had ample time to reflect on their lived

experiences in an authentic and comfortable manner (Creswell, 2018; Seidman, 2013; Vagle, 2018).

The interview addressed 18 questions connected to shared experiences focused on leadership, perception of coaching, and instructional skills (see Appendix A). Follow-up questions delved into the supports and conditions of successful strategies, perceptions about principal coaching, and the impact of instructional and leadership decisions. Questions related to roadblocks, problem-solving skills, and decision-making allowed participants to self-reflect on the effectiveness of the coaching experience. The researcher actively listened during the interviews and allowed the principals to share their perceptions while using the metacognitive skills of re-direction, self-reflection, and thinking aloud to discover the essence and meaning of the phenomenon being shared (Vagle, 2018). In addition, the researcher shared personal knowledge as a principal and principal coach.

The 90-minute interview was transcribed and recorded using a digital device. There was a follow-up personal interview or conference call, if additional time was needed to finish the interview questions or clarify transcribed answers. At the end of the study, the participants were asked to review the research findings in a member checking process to ensure there were no biases reflected in the transcribed data (Cope, 2014; Pierce, 2015; Vagle, 2018).

Participants

The sample included ten principals from one urban district in Washington State which employed principal coaching focused on the study of instructional and leadership skills based on lived experiences. Maximum variation sampling was used by the researcher to support participant diversity in gender and years of leadership in order to capture a range of perspectives on principal coaching (Harsh, 2011; Higginbottom, 2013). Potential participants received communication through an email detailing questions to ensure a degree of principal participation. Five questions were asked in the selection process:

1. How long have you been in education? How long were you a teacher?
How long have you been an elementary principal?
2. How many years were you a principal in another district? How long have you been in your present school district?
3. Did your principal supervisor provide coaching if you were in another district?
4. What supports were or were not in place in your current district?
5. How do you identify your gender?

The information guided the selection of gender and levels of experience of the participants (Higginbottom, 2013). Permission for the research process was granted by the appropriate district personnel and superintendent. There were 24 elementary

principals who qualified in the school district and the researcher initially communicated with all of them. An email was sent to the 24 possible elementary principals, and ten of them were chosen. The principals received a phone call inviting them to participate in the study and a contact visit was set up for the in-depth interview. The phenomenological approach called for a small sample size, and the researcher recruited 10 participants (Patton, 2018). There were 24 elementary principals in the district, and the phenomenological design was based on a small sample size appropriate for this pool of principals (Patton, 2018). Once the 10 principals were chosen, the school district signed the organizational consent form. The district also revised and signed a Memorandum of Understanding and a Data Sharing Agreement.

Ethical Protection of Participants

The researcher met with each participant in the study to explain the purpose of the research, the interview process, times and dates for the interviews, the rights and risks in a signed consent form, and potential study benefits. Additionally, participants were informed of confidentiality, the conditions for at-risk populations, the measures taken to ensure impartiality, and contact information for the researcher and the Institutional Review Board (IRB), should questions arise (Seidman, 2013). The researcher shared the purpose of the study, agreed upon a meeting location that was comfortable for each principal, communicated the amount of time required, and disclosed information about the researcher including current employment and university attended (Seidman, 2013).

Possible risks of participating in the study were disclosed such as the potential for recognition even though pseudonyms would protect the names of participants, the city, and district. Voluntary participation was stressed, and details about withdrawing from the study were included in the consent form and communicated at the first contact meeting. Finally, the researcher kept all interview notes, consent forms, and digital recordings in a secure space for 10 years, after which they will be destroyed.

Data Analysis Methods

To ensure validity, the analysis process included detailed readings of the interviews, selection of key components, and construction of themes that explained the phenomenon (Gelling, 2015). Interviews were the primary format of this phenomenological research, and the process fit well with the problem statement, topic, and research questions connected to the study (Flood, 2010). The researcher engaged in the bracketing and bridling processes by writing and reflecting on prior experiences or understandings related to principal coaching. The goal of these two strategies was to ensure active listening and comprehension to make certain biases did not conflict with the phenomena the participants experienced as they shared their truth (Giorgi, 1997). The experience of principal coaching and the essence of how principals felt about going through the real-life experience of the event were analyzed to reveal universal themes (Van Manen, 2015).

Data were collected through interviews using open-ended questions, and before engaging in the data analysis, the researcher carefully examined all of the data (Giorgi, 1997). The first stage of analysis included a detailed reading of the transcribed interviews based on individual and group self-reflection. The researcher then read the transcribed interviews again at a slower pace to look for shared meaning (Giorgi, 1997). The next stage involved hand coding the data by reading each sentence and selecting a word that correlated to a list of codes (Creswell, 2018). Codes surfaced during the data analysis process as they related to the themes of emerging ideas. Finally, codes described the setting and details related to the phenomena and indicated the themes found in the lived experiences of principal coaching and the actual expressions of the participant (Giorgi, 2012).

Limitations

Power could have played a role in the interview process as the researcher is in a supervisory position, although not in a direct controlling role over the participants. Vagle (2018) discussed this issue of the researcher's position and the vulnerability of the participant. The researcher alleviated this possible power imbalance by viewing the principal as the expert in describing the unique perceptions and experiences and using broad and open-ended questions which allowed for a more "organic" process. There was also the potential of the researcher becoming emotionally attached to the participants due to the passion of the topic shared between the researcher and the principals. Vagle (2018)

discussed strategies which prevented the author from becoming personally involved with opinions. One such strategy was examining various data sources prior to the research to expose diverse results and opinions. The approach included inquiry-based learning such as questioning, reflecting, sharing perceptions, and exploring the phenomena.

Trust was crucial during the study to ensure the reliability and validity of the qualitative research. Creswell (2018) discussed gaining trust through the sharing of the findings with the participants. The researcher provided a link to the individual experience and a summary of the results. Moustakas (1994) found that listening with an open mind and putting aside preconceived ideas supported the validity of the phenomenological approach. Vagle (2018) determined that bracketing or writing down the experiences and concentrating solely on the interview process, was a method that reduced biases. Bridling was another strategy that allowed the researcher to reflect on background and prior experiences to be more aware of potential biases and expand understanding.

Other methods to ensure trustworthiness included: journaling; reflection before, during, and after the research; and the metacognitive strategies of classifying data and making connections among data. After the completion of the detailed interviews, the subjects were invited to review the transcripts and data to help ensure their words were accurately reflected in the meanings and themes (Creswell, 2018). The principals and central office administrators were also asked to provide feedback or ask questions based on the findings, supporting further validity (Creswell, 2018). Member checking enhanced

the credibility of the reported results as participants reviewed the themes and gave input on the key findings (Creswell, 2018).

Delimitations

The study delimitations related to the questions integral to the experience of principal coaching included understanding conditions that support effective coaching, the impact coaching may have had on the instructional and leadership skills of the principals, and the perceptions of principal coaching. The findings and results of the study may not be generalizable to small school districts, locations, or periods in the future since the participating principals were limited by gender and years of experience, familiarity with principal coaching for at least one year, and careers in an urban school district.

Summary

Principal coaching was studied through a qualitative study focused on lived experiences which may have impacted the effectiveness of instructional and leadership skills. The conditions of effective coaching and the perceptions of the coaching experience were explored. Ten principals from one urban district were studied through detailed interviews, and the data were analyzed and categorized into common themes. The researcher then considered and reflected on the significant findings, conclusions, and additional questions needed on this topic. Chapter 4 outlines the findings and conclusions related to possible impacts of principal coaching on the leadership and instructional skills

of principals, the types of supports principals need from coaches to support their instructional growth, and the principals' perceptions of the coaching experience.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This qualitative, phenomenological study was used by the researcher to explore the lived experiences of elementary principals in one urban district where principal coaching was implemented through principal supervisors. The data helped the researcher investigate the results of coaching and the ways it may improve principal instructional skills, develop leadership competencies, determine conditions of effective coaching, and evaluate the perceptions of coaching experiences. The researcher employed detailed interviews with 10 principals to explore the lived experiences of the participants and the coaching process as it related to instructional leadership skills and the coaching experience.

The research findings highlighted the value of coaching and support through focusing and prioritizing principals' demands. It is hoped that the study results will assist central office staff, teachers, and educational leaders gain a deeper understanding of principal coaching in the growth of their instructional and leadership skills. The following four questions involving principal coaching supported this study:

1. How does the lived experience of principal coaching impact the leadership skills of principals?
2. How does the lived experience of principal coaching impact the instructional skills of principals?

3. What types of support and conditions do principals need from coaches to improve their instructional leadership skills?
4. What is the overall perception of principals who have experienced coaching?

Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2015) discussed sampling in qualitative research, and how the phenomenological process allows the researcher to arrive at a deeper awareness of participants' real-life experiences. The phenomenological process and qualitative approach were utilized in this research study to analyze data based on interviews with 10 elementary principals in one urban district in Washington State. The interview questions focused on the outcomes of principal coaching by a principal supervisor in the areas of improving instructional competencies, building leadership skills, understanding conditions of successful coaching, and processing perceptions of the coaching experience. Participants were selected through a permission process from the appropriate district personnel and superintendent. After district permissions were given, an email was sent to 24 elementary principals, resulting in the desired number of 10 study participants.

Maximum variation sampling was used to select participants based on gender diversity and years of experience. The participants chosen included six males and four females with varying years of teaching and principal experience. Participants included three elementary principals with fewer than six years of teaching experience, three with

10-15 years of teaching experience, and three with 16 years or more of teaching experience. Principal experience ranged from four subjects with five years or fewer, two with six to ten years' experience, and four with more than 10 years. Six of the principals were coached by a male principal supervisor and four by a female principal supervisor in the same district. Both principal supervisors worked in the same district, with the male entering his third year as a principal supervisor, and the female her fifth year. Table 4.1 represents the participants' demographic information:

Table 4.1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Years in Education	Years as a teacher	Years as a principal	Gender
Jon (P1)	37	16	21	Male
Mary (P2)	31	26	4	Female
Bob (P3)	12	5	7	Male
Jan (P4)	28	16	10	Female
Kate (P5)	24	9	15	Female
Beth (P6)	34	14	12	Female
Alex (P7)	25	15	4	Male
Ron (P8)	15	10	2	Male
Dan (P9)	17	6	5	Male
Russ (P10)	18	6	13	Male

The researcher met with principals at their individual schools. All interviews were conducted in person, and a digital device was used to record the interview after ensuring the participants understood and signed the confidentiality and permission forms (see Appendices B & C). The signed consent forms, shared and signed prior to the detailed interview, advised participants of the research purpose, their rights, risks, and potential

study benefits. Participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality along with the contact information for the researcher and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in case any issues arose during the process. A digital device was used during the interview process, and a professional transcription service provided the transcript. All interview notes, consent forms, and digital recordings were kept in a secure file that will be destroyed after 10 years.

The data analysis process included a detailed reading of the interview transcripts, selection of key conceptual categories, and construction of themes that explained the common phenomena. The researcher initially engaged in the bracketing and bridling processes by writing in a journal before, during, and after the data analysis, then documented and reflected on prior experiences or understandings related to principal coaching. The goal was to ensure active listening and comprehension as part of the research to confirm biases did not conflict with the phenomena the participants experienced as they shared their lived experiences.

In a study on coding for qualitative researchers, Saldana (2016) shared how codes relate to word meanings and form patterns based on the words which emerged more than two times. This word coding information was relayed to the professional transcribers who read, coded, and categorized the emerging common themes. The researcher then read the transcribed interviews in their entirety as a first reading and again at a slower pace to look for shared meanings. Afterward, the transcribed interviews were formatted into a table to

ensure space for notes, coding, conceptual categories, and common themes. A table was created using a hand-coding method, and each sentence was analyzed to find a word that correlated to the list of codes forming the materializing themes. The codes described the setting and details of the phenomena and indicated the themes found in the lived experiences of principal coaching.

Presentation of Findings

The research findings were based on the interview questions (see Appendix B) and transcribed using a transcription company. The answers were read in their entirety, coded, and classified into conceptual categories from which common themes emerged. The subjects were invited to review the final transcripts, conceptual categories, and themes to ensure their words were accurately reflected. A small group of central office district administrators were given the opportunity to review and ask questions based on the conceptual categories and themes. Member checking enhances the credibility of the reported results as participants review the themes and give input on key findings (Creswell, 2018).

After the analysis of the transcripts and review of codes, broad conceptual categories surfaced. The categories included a safe and encouraging environment, authentic relationships, listening and trust, responsiveness and follow through, principal collaboration and family, balance of pressure and support, calibration on instructional practices, prioritization of tasks, positive and ongoing communication, reflective

questions, and honest feedback on growth and goals. Three themes surfaced from the conceptual categories: supportive relationships; collaborative, professional learning; and reflective communication. The following table lists the major themes and categories found in the data.

Table 4.2 *Themes and Conceptual Categories*

Themes	Conceptual Categories
Supportive Relationships	Safe & Encouraging Environment Authentic Relationships Listening/Trust Responsiveness/Follow Through
Collaborative, Professional Learning	Principal Collaboration/Family Balance of Pressure & Support Calibration on Instructional Practices Prioritization of Tasks
Reflective Communication	Positive/Ongoing Communication Reflective Questioning Honest Feedback on Growth/Goals

Theme: Supportive Relationships

A supportive, shared relationship from the principal supervisor was a common theme throughout the detailed interviews as participants revealed the importance of a safe and encouraging environment, an authentic relationship, deliberate listening, relationship trust, and responsiveness to needs and follow-through with next steps discussed. Garland (2018), on the process of discovery, described how building relationships with a coach is

the first step needed to cultivate trust and facilitate a genuine relationship aimed at reflective conversations focused on school improvement.

Safe and Encouraging Environment

One significant thread based on the theme of supportive relationships stressed the creation of a safe and encouraging environment. Participants stressed the learning, communication, support, encouragement, guidance, practical applications, and ability to develop in their own personal way. The idea of having a trusted leader as a mentor and guide helped them create their unique leadership qualities. The following are personal participant quotations:

I've learned a lot. There's been great reflection but freedom to develop my leadership as opposed to being pigeonholed or told exactly how to do it. So yeah, it's been a good experience (Beth).

Again, there was a lot of communication: the visits, the emails, phone calls. [My coach] was really good about making frequent check-in phone calls. Just that touchpoint felt good. I always felt supported (Bob).

Without question I think it is huge to know that you've got someone in your corner, right? (Jan).

So, the list is long when I think about positives. I have been encouraged to take bold steps. That is professionally beneficial to the school community and personally empowering. I have been guided in excellent hiring practices. I've been supported in critical moments of human resources issues with staff and in personal relations (Alex).

I think the big positive for me was that it solidified a lot of my learning and made it real as opposed to on paper. So, I think that was the most positive is seeing how it all comes together and with a positive transformational leader that is creating a culture that has trust and good environment and is safe and all those things. You can move. So that was my big positive (Russ).

Authentic Relationships

Principals stressed the significance of developing strong and authentic relationships with their principal supervisor and the contribution this connection factor made to a supportive, positive, and beneficial coaching experience. Participants reviewed the importance of direct and frank discussions; the value of hearing the personal experiences of the coach; the humor, warmth, and honesty of the coach; and the ways these conversations designated the coach as a caring advocate who affirmed the professionalism of the principals. The following are personal participant quotations:

My coach's communication to me was always positive and friendly, frequent, and that developed the relationship. I think the coach being able to describe his experiences as an instructional leader was really helpful for me (Bob)

Overall it was a great experience. Just having somebody to support our moves who cared about the direction of our vision, and who advocated for the supports that other schools had (Jan).

He is personable. He's funny. I can tell he cared about us (Jan).

Participants also found an authentic relationship enables honesty and gives confidence for both coach and principal to push without offending the person. They realized the ability to have honest conversations with a supervisor contributes to a transparent relationship.

Comments included:

The biggest impact is obviously when two people who work together form a relationship with that person. So, on authentic relationships, [my coach] and I have a very good relationship that is authentic. I don't have to be on eggshells or mind my Ps and Qs or whatever. We just have frank discussions and I always appreciate that. And that's through her intentional relationship building (Dan).

I have a positive orientation to the coaching experience. For a combination of different things, I would say it's affirming, and I would say it's real (Alex).

So, our relationship is up front enough that she doesn't have to pad around that. She can just say it. And that probably depends on how secure a principal is in their skill set and their relationship with the supervisor and their relationship with the school community that allows them to have that transparency (Beth).

Listening/Trust

The important coaching skills of listening for understanding and building trust were essential for participants to feel supported by the coaching experience. The principals commented how clear and honest feedback helped them build self-confidence in making their own decisions and how they appreciated the supervisor being "in the moment" and actively listening to their concerns. However, there were times when things were rushed, and the participants felt short-changed, but the advising and flexibility of the supervisor was always appreciated even during busy schedules. The following are personal participant quotations:

And I feel like she's very honest with her feedback. And so, I can be honest too. So, having the humor with the honest conversation and clear feedback is helpful (Mary).

The coach helped me gain confidence in myself as a leader. I think that's probably been my biggest impact. The coach has guided me to trust my decision-making and not second guess it. And that's as a leader and instructional leader as well (Bob).

There were some times that I felt the conversations were rushed, and that [my coach] had other pressing issues, and that he wasn't always in the moment. And there were times I didn't think he listened fully to whatever the concern or idea or celebration was, and I understand that this work is busy, and all the supervisors have multiple schools (Jan).

I think my current supervisor-one of the things that makes him a generally well-liked coach among principals in my judgment is the ability to read what's happening and adjust the plan based on the information in the room like a good teacher. Taking formative feedback and knowing when to cut bait (Alex).

I felt like he listened to me and gave me confidence, good advice, and he was super responsive. And I felt like he trusted me too (Ron).

I would ask her for advice on whatever kinds of things I was working on. And she always would listen, provide advice, and rarely gave me a directive to do (Dan).

Responsiveness/Follow Through

Timely and thoughtful responsiveness to issues, follow through, and on-going coaching sessions grew to be extremely important to the principals. They treasured the consistency of the coaches and the regularly scheduled meetings. The availability of the coaches whether by phone, text, email, or in-person, kept the participants on-track and feeling they had a dedicated advocate whose positive attitude deepened the relationship.

The following are personal participant quotations:

What I appreciated about him was he is always positive. Super responsive. There was not a time where I would call, or text him, or email him, where I didn't get an immediate and thoughtful response from him. He was super supportive of me (Ron).

I guess the positive is the relationship again which is crucial to any kind of coaching model. The consistency. I know her schedule is really busy. So, she made 90% of the appointments that we had. I could always get her when I needed her (Dan).

She's really consistent. So, I appreciate that. I would be upset if I got cancelled a lot (Mary).

Overall, the experiences of the participants gleaned the benefits of supportive coaching relationships and the impact the coaching supervisor had on their experiences and leadership growth. The next section relates to collaborative professional learning and the ways the learning opportunities strengthened instructional skills and leadership.

Theme: Collaborative Professional Learning

Collaborative professional learning and its many benefits emerged as relevant to the professional learning opportunities available to the participants. Johnston, Kaufman, and Thompson (2016) looked at support for instructional leadership and found that principals realized coaching was more valuable when the focus was on instructional leadership and teaching practices. Similarly, on learning outside the classroom, Vogel (2018) found that principals identified one of the most important components of their role as support for teachers' instructional practices and growth. The process of reflection on instructional leadership, adaptive leadership, and calibration of teacher practices was apparent throughout the coaching experiences of the principals.

Principal Collaboration/Family

Principals collaborating with each other and creating an atmosphere of family emerged as a high-ranking benefit. Participants spoke of the solidarity and fellowship that developed among themselves as they supported each other and shared issues and experiences in a positive, safe environment. Several saw the coach as a role model who

handled large and small meetings with confidence using listening and questioning skills to understand substance. The following are personal participant quotations:

The camaraderie of our group and the supporting of each other was one of the best parts (Jon).

The biggest impact for me has been the times that we have been with a group of principals, and we have been able to have open and honest conversations with each other about issues that we share (Jan).

Our cohort meetings are really positive. I am actually fine with the whole days because I do think they were positive (Kate).

Another area that some principals mentioned was the benefit of small group leadership discussions with colleagues. Comments included:

She (our coach) has really moved us to get into smaller groups as triads to do some reflective conversations. Really, I like it when we get that because we get ideas from each other (Beth).

We spent a lot of time in professional development talking about best practices. Looking at the implementation of the walk-through tool was a piece I used to give people feedback (Ron).

He (our coach) was great at facilitating conversations with my colleagues. I think he understood that he's also not the expert there, but he was really good at getting other people talking in a way that was not threatening, in a way that you felt comfortable and safe, which I appreciated (Ron).

[My coach] and I would have one-on-one time set up, but then we would also have opportunities for the whole group to come together which was great. It was nice to be able to bounce ideas with a small group of people, and then to hear from them, but also it was really nice to be able to meet with [my coach] and go over some individual things that were more specific growth for me that I needed to focus on (Russ).

What I saw he was able to do was create a culture amongst the principals he was working with that was really collaborative and positive, and almost like a family, which I was watching that I was like whoa” (Russ).

Balance of Pressure and Support

The category of pressure and support resulted in many comments concerning the significance of high expectations and definitive coach support. Participants addressed the ways coaches always focused on leadership and high expectations. They learned to keep students at the forefront of instructional leadership and to adapt their leadership skills through delegating authority. Reflection enabled them to think deeply about change and flexibility and how receiving support from the coach enabled them to support each other and their school. Celebrating successes was greatly appreciated as well as the compassion and empathy modeled by the coaches.

The one-on-one two-hour meetings with the principal supervisor once a month included an all-day professional development training for principals focused on practical leadership and not technical leadership, enhancing their decision-making skills and personal relationships with their teachers and staff. The following are personal participant quotations:

Maybe 10% was technical. We rarely talk about anything that’s not related to instruction and data (Mary).

That demand and support matrix of high demand. She’s done a really nice job of giving high support in those things too (Mary).

Celebrating successes that happen, and successfully holding high standards through pressure and support (Alex).

So, there was accountability both personal but also with [my coach]. But also, it didn't feel as though it was I'm going to get you. It was more of a I want to help you grow. So that was great (Russ).

Calibration on Instructional Practices

Instructional walkthroughs and calibration of best instructional practices materialized as a strength in instructional leadership skills and overall leadership. Participants mentioned and elaborated on the importance and usefulness of the walkthrough tool which was created to recognize, develop, and share good teaching practices. It was used for classroom visits, monthly meetings, and knowledge growth to help principals focus on instructional leadership and teaching. It supported school-wide curriculum and helped develop clear, relevant feedback for teachers and staff. One participant stated that the tool or rubric built his instructional self-confidence and helped the principal gain respect from other educators. The following are personal participant quotations:

I realized by just using that simple tool and doing walkthroughs that good instruction is good instruction. And I do understand what this should look like. And I really got to know the needs of the building by doing those walkthroughs that first year especially (Mary).

We always checked in on classrooms and this building's focus has been the literacy framework and so it really centered around seeing growth in that (Bob).

We were pinpointing certain aspects of various teachers whose classrooms we visited and debriefed about some of the observations we made (Jan).

And so, we would do a walkthrough at one of our schools and look at some evidence of those things that are going on. We would norm ourselves with our walkthrough. So, we just open one up. Bring the small groups and go into a room

and look and come back out and say, ‘What did you score?’ And then we don’t save it and send it. We are just doing it to norm ourselves. So that’s been the bulk of the work during that time (Beth).

We spent a lot of time in professional development talking about best practice. Looking at the implementation of the walkthrough tool was a piece that I used to give people feedback. It was also a place that allowed me to show my staff, who I was new to and they were new to me, that I knew what I was talking about in terms of what good instruction looks like (Ron).

The walkthrough tool or rubric helped principals recognize good teaching and develop vocabulary and common criteria to norm teaching standards and share them with all staff. This ability to observe, recognize, develop, and teach added greatly to self-confidence in leadership and instructional skills.

Prioritization of Tasks

The principal supervisor recognized the many and various demands on the principals, so prioritization of tasks and challenges evolved over the training. The ability to learn prioritization was mentioned as a great tool which supported their own goals and vision. Participants spoke of how encouragement from the principal supervisor helped them find a balance in their daily work and relieve some of their stress. They learned to form connections with their tasks which instead of being fragmented, interrelated and made more sense to them and their staff. The participants talked about their many demands and responsibilities, so they were relieved to realize the coaches kept their training requirements practical, meaningful, and within reason. The following are personal participant quotations:

Be realistic sometimes. Although I appreciate the high expectations, I think sometimes realizing there is more. I mean the instructional leadership portion is really important but sometimes we get a little bogged down with too many things, and the concentration on the important things would be better. And maybe just a prioritization with our group on what should be done down the pecking order (Jon).

I think it is important for her to be careful of the extra things she asks. But if it's things that we are doing already, I am okay being asked for it (Mary).

In summary, the experiences that emerged from the participants reflected the benefits of a collaborative, professional learning environment. The many coaching skills and objectives had a strong impact on the instructional leadership and growth of the principals. The next section will provide information on reflective communication and the importance of honest and direct feedback to strengthen leadership skills and school goals.

Theme: Reflective Communication

Open, on-going, and honest communication were common threads throughout the experiences of the participating principals. On using cognitive coaching to build school leadership capacity, Rogers et al. (2016) shared how dialogue between the participant and the coach helped strengthen reflective thinking and flexibility. Questions which support reflection in participants enable them to own their personal dialogue by reflecting out loud, monitoring their thoughts, and using questions and answers to create new ways of thinking about the complex work of a principal. The shared experiences of the participants reflected safety and security, consistency in communication, truthfulness in

feedback and the ability to reflect upon leadership practices which resulted in improved school systems.

Positive/Ongoing Communication

Honest and on-going communication contributed to a positive and impactful coaching experience for principals. The participants relied on helpful and honest feedback from their coaches and found the coaching and reflection essential to their growth. They realized positive, regular, and honest communication led to a trusting relationship with their coach and prompted their willingness to learn. They learned from the one-on-one meetings and monthly meetings which connected topics and allowed them to see connections. The follow-up conversations and sharing of goals and priorities with their colleagues allowed them to reflect and open their thinking. One of the results of authentic communication was growth as a principal and development of school-wide goals. The following are personal participant quotations:

I think the frequent check-ins, discussions, the progress monitoring of what I was doing towards that kept me on top of my game with my staff by being visible and present in the process throughout the year (Bob).

It's a fine balancing act to communicate in just the right way. Over time, there would come to feel a distrust for the process. It would feel disconnected like there was a perfunctory coming together and completing of an evaluation that wasn't really grounded in an awareness of the things that I'm working on (Alex).

[My coach] and I would have one on one time set up, but then we would have opportunities for the whole group to come together which was great. It was nice to be able to bounce ideas with a small group of people and then to hear from them. But it was also nice to meet with [my coach] to go over some individual things that were more specific growth for me that I needed to focus on (Russ).

Reflective practice that comes from coaching when a coach is asking to pause and think deeply has transformed everything that I see about education (Beth).

Reflective Questioning

Questioning which created reflection on the part of the participant led to honest communication and thoughtful decision-making. Tough questions with follow-through were most effective especially since coaches would check to see how assessments and determinations were being implemented in the procedures of the school. Participants felt the process of questioning was more than just speculation, but also aided in making important decisions which built their self-confidence as leaders. The walkthroughs in and out of the classrooms resulted in questions about observations and differing perspectives. The questioning laid a fundamental layer, the foundation for further assessments and actions. Positive questions pushed thinking, and participants became aware of the difference between coaching, questioning, and supervising questions. They learned problem-solving skills, developed greater self-confidence, and learned to have faith in their leadership intuition and decision-making. The following are personal participant quotations:

I'm going to be honest with you. I have probably learned having had five different directors who were all instructional leaders. I probably learned the most from [my coach]. She's tough but very supportive. She has taught me more about being an instructional leader through data, walkthroughs, through just giving me tough questions to ponder and then coming to see how her seeds of thought and instructional leadership suggestions are taking hold in the buildings (Jon).

And we would conduct walkthroughs together. We would make noticing of certain things, maybe identified before. We would walk into the classroom. We would debrief after a visit to a classroom and I might get a question like, “What did you notice?” “What did you see?” Or what questions would you ask this particular staff member. Sometimes the conversation led to us seeing different things, which then moved us into a different conversation, which was helpful to see that we might not be seeing the same thing in the moment. But it was perspective. And that was often discussed (Jan).

And fortunately, my current Ed Director is a vastly networked person in the system. And so, he is helpful in sort of facilitating some of those things. Asking the right questions so I can help frame the next layers of work. So, it’s more I would say in that sense, it’s more of that sort of coaching model. And more of a think partner instead of a director (Kate).

I would say it’s one thing that doesn’t happen is that the switching of the hats when I’m being asked a question from a supervisor or giving you a coaching question is never clear. And it’s fuzzy. So, at times you have to ask or tease that out or worry like, ‘Is this a directive or is this a coachable moment?’ That’s easier with the relationship, the longer you are with somebody to say that. But it is and I think the less secure that you are in that relationship, the harder it is to read that. So, at this point, [my coach] and I have a very open relationship (Beth).

(My supervisor) was just really good at keeping things positive and asking questions that got me to think. Looking back on it there were times where he was telling me to do something or maybe redirecting my thinking that I didn’t even realize that’s what he was doing in the moment (Ron).

Well I guess she always encouraged me to go with my gut and what I felt was right. And be authentic because if you are not yourself than it doesn’t work. And I don’t think she ever explicitly stated that she would just question all throughout everything. That’s kind of what the direction was. As long as my choices are in line with what we are doing as a district and student learning, any situation was like, go with your gut and what is it telling you to do in this situation (Dan).

Honest Feedback on Growth/Goals

Direct and authentic feedback from coaches grew to be an essential and effective tool to build the self-confidence of participants and allow them to focus on their own strengths and the vision and goals of the school. The feedback concerned personal evaluations and perceptions, school goals, and ways to implement the results of the data analysis. The coach and participant would identify challenges and work through realistic options by breaking down challenges into manageable components. The greatest benefit of honest feedback was its contribution to building a trusting relationship which evolved over time and interaction. The following are personal participant quotations:

He [my coach] helped me hone-in-on the subgroups because mine were broad and he just thought it was going to be too open ended. And so, he kinds of guided me to select a smaller subgroup so that could be an area of focus (Jan).

I think we kind of shifted as she then learned my style and the relationship kind of grew to a post where it's more of an open flow dialogue conversation (Beth).

Nope. That's not going to work. I was initially frustrated but went back to the drawing board and took the feedback to improve my school goals several times. Ultimately, the direct feedback was helpful, and the desired outcome became clear due to the hard work and continuous conversation about the goal and measurements along the way (Mary).

She's very good at giving feedback on which areas that maybe she would like more or less (Jon).

I like being given clear feedback. I don't care if it's harsh feedback either. I felt like he listened to me, gave me confidence, gave me good advice, and he was super responsive (Ron).

Summary

The qualitative phenomenological study focused on exploring the lived experiences of elementary principals engaged in principal coaching. Personal interviews were held with the participants, and the analyzed transcripts revealed reflections concerning improved instructional competencies, leadership skills, criteria for successful coaching, and perceptions of the coaching experiences. Three themes emerged: supportive relationships; collaborative, professional relationships; and reflective communication. The researcher read, reviewed, and analyzed all transcripts assigning codes to determine major categories. Chapter 5 will focus on a discussion of findings, conclusions, and applications including recommendations for practical action and further research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of elementary principals in one urban district where principal coaching was implemented through principal supervisors. The results of the study provided the researcher with information regarding the impact of principal coaching and its effect on improving principal instructional skills, developing leadership skills, implementing successful coaching practices, and understanding the perceptions of the coaching experience. The study may provide beneficial information for the following audiences: superintendents, principals, teachers, principal supervisors, and faculty in university principal preparation programs. The findings resulted in the improvement of principal leadership skills with an overall positive feeling of the coaching experience and support.

The qualitative methodology focused on the phenomenological design of understanding the lived experiences of 10 elementary principals who received principal coaching, their perceptions of the coaching, and the improvement of their instructional and leadership skills. Maximum variation sampling was utilized to select diverse participants based on gender and years of experience. The researcher developed the following four questions regarding the lived experience of principal coaching:

1. How does the lived experience of principal coaching impact the leadership skills of principals?
2. How does the lived experience of principal coaching impact the instructional skills of principals?

3. What types of support and conditions do principals need from coaches to improve their instructional leadership skills?
4. What is the overall perception of principals who have experienced coaching?

The process included in-person, detailed interviews with ten principals from one urban district in Washington State. The data analysis included a detailed reading of the interview transcripts, selection of key conceptual categories, and construction of themes which explained the common participant phenomena. Codes surfaced during the data analysis process to form themes based on emerging ideas. The three main themes which materialized from this analytical process included: supportive relationships; collaborative, professional learning; and reflective communication. Chapter 5 incorporates the research findings, the conclusions of the problem statement and their application to leadership, recommendations for action and further research, and a concluding statement.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

The interview questions were based on leadership and instructional practices experienced by coaching, practices that supported the coaching experience, and the participant perceptions of coaching. The research questions emerged from the literature review in Chapter 2 and the answers to the research questions in Chapter 4. The analysis of transcripts and review of codes based on the interview questions resulted in the following categories: a safe and encouraging environment, authentic relationships,

listening and trust, responsiveness and follow through, principal collaboration and formation of family, balance of pressure and support, calibration of instructional practices, prioritization of tasks, positive and ongoing communication, reflective questioning, and honest feedback concerning growth and goals. From these categories, three major themes evolved: supportive relationships; collaborative, professional learning; and reflective communication. These main topics answered and supported the study's research questions.

RQ1: How does the lived experience of principal coaching impact the leadership skills of principals?

This research question was addressed in the interview protocol in Appendix B. Participants were asked to explore their experiences of the coaching process and relate which part of the experience impacted them the most. All participants shared positive experiences related to the coaching and their principal supervisor and recounted how the experience contributed to their leadership skills.

Experience going through the coaching process. Eight of the 10 principals believed they benefitted most from the honest conversations during one-on-one visits with the principal supervisor and the cohort discussions during the monthly professional development meetings. These meetings led to trusting relationships and allowed for authentic and encouraging conversations about their jobs. All participants related how the coaching experience and the principal supervisor were positive experiences beneficial to their leadership growth. Seven principals stated their principal supervisor's process of

asking reflective questions advanced their leadership and decision-making growth. Six principals credited the classroom walkthroughs and the calibration of the observed teaching practices as important contributions to their leadership skills.

Biggest impact of the coaching experience. All participants shared positive effects from the one-on-one coaching and regular cohort principal trainings. The walkthrough tool or rubric which calibrated classroom teaching influenced their leadership skills the most. Bob's coach helped him gain confidence in himself as a leader:

The coach has guided me to trust my decision-making and not second guess it. And that's as a leader and an instructional leader as well (Bob).

Five participants appreciated the thoughtfulness of their coach and the stress on reflection and open and honest conversations.

Alex connected to a strength-based coaching which established a caring work relationship:

My coach helped me recognize who I am as a leader, played to my strengths, and put systems in place that mitigated my weaknesses (Alex).

Ron, who was in his first year as principal, appreciated the way his coach seemed to always emphasize the positive by supporting his instincts and decisions:

He highlighted positives that he saw here. Always highlighted positives. Made me feel like I was doing a good job because as a first-year principal, it's helpful to know when I'm doing things good, or doing things right, or to keep that up. You know, the positive reinforcement is important because no doubt it was a stressful year. I don't tell many people that, but he knew it. I knew it was going to be stressful (Ron).

Overall, the participants shared affirmative experiences which encouraged supportive relationships and growth in their leadership skills.

RQ2: How does the lived experience of principal coaching impact the instructional skills of principals?

This research question aligns to Questions 2 and 4 in the interview protocol (see Appendix B). The queries were designed to understand how the experience of principal coaching impacted instructional leadership and improved school goals. The data revealed that all participants agreed the coaching experience supported their instructional leadership growth and impacted school improvement.

Coaching experience impact on instructional leadership. Four of the ten principals talked about the value of using a walkthrough tool or rubric based on teaching observations with their principal coach and how it helped in the calibration and reflection of strong instructional practices. Mary shared how using a common walkthrough tool or teaching observation rubric every month with her coach helped her grow in understanding the components of quality instruction and how its frequent use subsidized her work in coaching teachers. Jan discussed the benefit of using the observation rubric at different schools every month:

So, we were pinpointing certain aspects of various teachers whose classrooms we visited and debriefed about some of the observations that we made (Jan).

Similarly, Ron shared the advantage of classroom walkthroughs:

He joined me on walkthroughs which again was helpful. He would see things that maybe I didn't see. We had good conversations about teachers, maybe teachers that were super effective and ways we could support other teachers (Ron).

Finally, three participants disclosed the importance of reflection when discussing instructional leadership and ways this component of the coaching experience benefitted their instructional growth.

Experience of monitoring and adjusting school goals. All principals agreed that the discussions and reflections regarding school goals with their coach both in individual and small group meetings lifted their self-confidence. School and leadership objectives were reoccurring themes at the meetings and reinforced principals' decision-making skills. Russ said small-group debates on school and leadership targets during monthly professional development meetings enabled him to see differing perspectives. Jan told how the goal-setting process helped her as a leader:

So, based on the data, I set goals. And I was on comprehensive evaluation last year because of the alphabet. So it was that time for me. And it's always a wonderful process to reflect on those criteria. Where are we? Where do we need to go to be distinguished? But I set those goals based on the data, and [my coach] felt that some of the goals were too broad. And so, he helped me home in on the subgroups (Jan).

Bob discussed how regular check-ins and reflection on goal setting and monitoring of goals helped him stay on the right track and kept him engaged in the process with staff all year.

RQ3: What types of supports and conditions do principals need from coaches to improve their instructional leadership skills?

This research question aligns to Questions 6 through 8 in the interview protocol (see Appendix B). The participants were asked to explore the conditions that supported a positive and productive coaching relationship. Their answers included a safe and encouraging environment, an authentic relationship, listening and trust, responsiveness, and follow-through.

Positive aspects and drawbacks of the coaching experience. Participants clearly valued a trusting relationship built on honest feedback, frequent and consistent communication, and realistic meeting schedules. Three principals mentioned the support of the principal cohort group during monthly professional development meetings and the ways these meetings strengthened leadership growth and instructional skills to help set tenable goals.

Drawbacks of the coaching experience included added stress and increased responsibilities. These concerns surfaced with eight of the 10 principals who disclosed how time management and prioritization of tasks were challenging parts of the process. Mary realized how valuable her time was and discussed how coaching could be consuming. As a result, she learned how important effective focusing can be. Jan shared how coaching conversations were sometimes rushed and how important it was to prioritize and focus daily.

Meeting schedule and content of coaching sessions. All participants appreciated the two-hour monthly meetings with their coach and the monthly cohort professional development seminars which lasted all day. Nine of 10 principals spoke of the adaptive coaching conversations focused on leadership, instruction, and preparation for next steps rather than the technicalities of daily tasks and workplace organization.

Russ, a first-year principal, had a different experience compared to the other participants. He said his attention was split between a technical and adaptive focus. This separation allowed him to handle upset parents and tough staff decisions.

Piece of advice to strengthen the coaching relationship. A common theme that emerged from many participants pertained to making sure given tasks were essential and related to key work. John shared the importance of being realistic about the number of tasks and ensuring they did not take away from the core leadership work. He believed less is sometimes more and prioritizing key components with the principal group allowed for deeper understanding. Alex shared:

I think remembering the humanity of the people that you're working with. We are not machines" (Alex)

He said his coach did a great job of reading the room and adjusting to the audience even if that meant not all deadlines were met. Jan stressed the importance of active listening and assuming positive intent since conversations can be rushed based on time and complexity. Bob also appreciated his coach being clear and transparent with communication.

RQ4: What is the overall perception of principals who have experienced coaching?

This research question relates to Questions 11, 14, 15 and 18 in the interview protocol (see Appendix B). The participants were asked to explore their experiences with a principal supervisor, uncover the part of the coaching relationship that was valued most, and determine the traits that make a coach successful. All participants felt positive about their coaching experience and expressed an overall appreciation of their involvement.

Feelings about the coaching experience. All participants appreciated the leadership conversations, connections with their supervisor, and regular check-ins that were rarely rescheduled. Mary discussed her feeling about the coaching process with her principal supervisor:

But I like it because like I said, I want to get better. And I really love to see the results. I want to see that we are growing. And I think that she knows how to do that. I suppose if I was working with someone I didn't see that they knew the process, I might be less excited about it. But yeah, I think it's really helpful (Mary).

Jan also shared her positive feelings about coaching:

Overall it was a great experience. Just having somebody to support our moves that cared about the direction of our vision, which advocated for the supports the other schools had, and seeing us go through these growing pains as we are struggling to become a real school when we have never had a model like 4-8. And let alone a principal doing elementary and middle school at the same time. (Jan).

Beth discussed her feelings about the coaching process and how reflective communications are key:

Like I said, to me those reflective conversations are the meat and potatoes of my growth and transformational work of leadership (Beth).

What might be different without coaching. Most of the principals revealed they would feel lonely, isolated, and disconnected if they did not have the experience of positive principal coaching. The participants concluded that if they had not had the coaching, they would not have grown in the areas of operating independently, maintaining status quo, and determining common practices with colleagues. Beth felt the coaching made the relationship between her and the coach more than evaluative and allowed her to form her own answers, and not those of another person. Ron, as a first-year principal, would have felt isolated and stressed with low self-confidence without coaching. Similarly, Bob shared the following comments about what would have been different if he had not experienced a coach:

I'm not sure I would stay as a principal. I'm not sure I could do the job at the level that I want to do it, and so being honest with myself, I would probably say there is going to be a better way for me to work and enjoy my work. I think it is important to have that coaching and I don't know that I could do this job well enough without it (Bob).

Mary also highlighted what would have been different if she had not experienced coaching with her coach:

I suspect that we wouldn't necessarily have the practices in place that we do. And the things that we are using are researched based to make a difference in schools. And we have seen the growth. And I think our school culture is positive (Mary).

Valued the most and least about coaching experience. Reflective communication, positive and ongoing communication, reflective questions, and honest feedback were valued the most by the participants. Five participants valued honest

feedback, regular communication, reflective dialogue, and frequent check-ins as the best part of coaching. Bob discussed the part of coaching he valued the most:

I appreciate the casual approach my coach takes. It's a casual, lighthearted, fun loving approach that allows me to be honest with him. I think that's important in a coaching role (Bob).

Alex shared a similar reaction and summarized how his coach recognized the humanity in the work and saw him as a person and leader.

Participants least appreciated the number of tasks that come at a principal every day and the time it takes to go through the coaching process. Prioritizing important responsibilities was a common difficulty, and principals needed a coach to help with time management.

Beth discussed how important boundaries were for principal supervisors who also serve as a coach:

I think the difficulty is when those lines are blurred, and I'm not sure if the person is wanting a specific answer from me or a truthful reflection (Beth).

Alex similarly discussed the line between a supervisor and coach:

I would say the conflicting role and complexity of the job to be both an evaluator and a supervisor and a coach means that at times, the humanity of the coach is at play. There is a limitation of capacity and there is a short fuse, so sometimes it's less helpful than it is critical (Alex).

Traits for a successful coach. A successful coach is the ability to build solid relationships. Two participants valued active listening and using reflective questions as the most important ingredients for successful coaching.

People skills, being loyal to the purpose, empathy, and high expectations also emerged from the interviews as qualities of a positive coach. Overall, supportive and authentic relationships, the importance of a safe and encouraging environment, true listening and trust, and responsiveness were considered the most valuable parts of the coaching experience.

Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement

Principals have a complex job managing the technical and instructional aspects of a school while balancing improved outcomes for students. Over time, the principal's role as a building manager changed due to increased accountability for student growth and learning (Grobler, 2013; Plessis, 2013). The new responsibilities include instructional leadership as a key skill in supporting staff and stakeholders, constructing a school vision, cultivating a learning environment, and coaching and supervising staff (Vogel, 2018).

Although the principal position has shifted over the years and has become more complex due to the increased responsibilities and expectations, research on support for principals through coaching is limited. In a study of the effectiveness of coaching for leadership development, Markus (2016) discussed how leadership coaching is increasing, but gaps still exist in the success and value of leadership coaching models. Honig (2012) focused on the topic of principal coaching and supports that may impact the instructional leadership of principals. The researcher concluded that studies on this topic of support were limited and further research was needed.

The results from this research study demonstrated that 10 elementary principals participating in principal coaching through their principal supervisor had a favorable experience which resulted in productive leadership growth. The study outcomes demonstrated the ways realistic, job related coaching may contribute to positive outcomes needed to support principals in the demands of their position. The data showed how respectful and encouraging relationships, collaborative professional learning, and reflective communication are essential ingredients to a successful coaching partnership and may contribute to peer collaboration, confidence, and increased leadership skills. Celoria and Roberson (2015), in their article on principal support, found that coaching helped principals discuss challenging issues in an authentic way and provided a safe place to learn, make mistakes, and grow.

The key findings from the study showed that the principals had a supportive relationship with their coach based on listening skills, trust, monthly one-on-one and small principal cohort meetings, and encouragement derived from the needs of the principal. Collaborative professional learning grew as teamwork and trainings focused on classroom walkthroughs and best instructional practices. Participants discussed the ways the walkthrough tool or rubric concentrated their observations and facilitated their calibration of effective teaching practices. They spoke of its power in maturing their instructional leadership skills.

Finally, all participants credited the importance of reflective communication and learned that direct, positive, and honest exchanges were a necessary part of the coaching

experience and contributed to a reflective coaching relationship. Overall, the principals in the study felt that the principal supervisor contributed to a positive coaching partnership by facilitating constructive and ongoing communication and focusing on reflective questions rather than directives. The questions helped participants problem-solve, reflect on their personal practices, and grow in confidence. They all appreciated how time with their coach supported the prioritization of key tasks to ensure their work was relevant, manageable, and driven by quality, not quantity.

Application to Leadership

The detailed interviews focused on the lived experiences of 10 principals participating in principal coaching through their principal supervisor. The results of the study suggested that the principals valued authentic relationships, listening skills facilitated by the coach, honest and direct feedback, reflective questions, and attention to follow-up or next steps. The data demonstrated that principals need more than a focus on the technical aspects of a building; they need a thought partner who challenges their thinking, encourages them to question their assumptions, and prompts innovation (Gray, 2018). Reflecting on real job experiences, processing challenges, and thinking with a trusted thought partner may result in a positive growth experience that will impact decision-making and future choices (Anthony & van Nieuwerburgh, 2018).

Researching leadership programs for primary principals as instructional leaders, Naidoo and Petersen (2016) studied the importance of coaching principals on individual leadership practices through reflection, problem-solving, collaboration, and instructional

calibration. Similarly, on leadership coaching and mentoring, Gray (2018) shared the benefits of leadership coaches in facilitating problem-solving processes, modeling instructional strategies, providing feedback, and guiding reflective conversations aimed at improving metacognition and decision-making.

The adult learning theory explored in Chapter 2 stressed the importance of leadership abilities while the theory of Andragogy identified components that may help adult learners such as understanding the purpose of the training and using real-world applications of problem-based situations grounded in the real job setting (Knowles, 1984). These elements of adult learning theory included guidance, self-reflection, and self-directed inquiry and are found in the data of this study.

Kurz, Reddy, and Glover (2017) analyzed the multidisciplinary framework of instructional coaching and considered the essential ingredients of business coaching. They included creating opportunities for self-reflection, discussing core beliefs, facilitating listening to understand, questioning for reflection, and increasing the inner thoughts and awareness of subjects. The participants who experienced principal coaching all stated that the process of reflective questioning, active listening, and positive communication aimed at helping them make better and more effective decisions contributed to their leadership growth.

On successful school leadership, Gurr (2015) discussed the importance of professional learning opportunities for principals based on real job learning, one-on-one and small group training experiences, and coaching from mentors. The subjects in the

Gurr article (2015) received monthly one-on-one coaching from their principal supervisor for approximately two hours with a focus on walkthroughs, personal goals, and ongoing conversations related to leadership and next steps for school improvement. The principals in this study experienced the same activities and spoke positively about the monthly full day training with their principal cohort and the discussions concerning a common walkthrough tool, the calibration of instructional practices, and the determination of goals.

Overall, the data from the detailed interviews supported adult learning theory by aligning the goals of principal coaching to problem-based learning, collaboration, goal setting, and the prioritization of real-world challenges. Questioning skills and direct feedback strengthened self-confidence and leadership assurance.

Recommendations for Action

There are three recommendations for action as a result of this research study: 1) supportive and focused instructional leadership and professional learning, 2) effective coaching elements, and 3) a variety of coaching types and formats. The common thread running through these recommendations is the development and growth of principal leadership skills and the balance of technical and governance decisions that create a successful school.

Support and Focus on Instructional Leadership and Professional Learning

Instructional leadership development needs deliberate attention and training since the job of school principal changed from the traditional focus of management tasks to the

present-day focus of student learning (Meddaugh, 2014). Meddaugh (2014) found that principal coaching facilitated the leadership growth of principals through calibrating effective classroom practices and communicating authentic feedback. These activities created an authentic relationship focused on student learning and high-quality teaching practices which led to improved instructional procedures.

Johnston, Kaufman, and Thompson (2016) examined instructional leadership, and found that principals benefitted from coaching when the support focused on the role of instructional leadership. High-functioning districts supported principals with at least one hour or more of coaching or training every month. All participants in this study endorsed this supportive practice and believed the monthly meetings with their coach were invaluable to their learning. All but one participant found that time spent on everyday issues was more beneficial than time spent on other problems. This participant was a first-year principal who appreciated the guidance with parent complaints and other personnel demands.

The study was based in an urban district where one-on-one coaching and principal cohort professional development took place every month. All principals in this study participated in personal coaching with their principal supervisor for approximately two hours per month and one full day per month with their principal cohort.

Recommendations include spending quality time every month one-on-one with a principal coach and participating in principal cohorts focused on instructional leadership.

Sutcher, Podolsky, and Espinoza (2017) investigated support for principals' development and shared the benefits of principal learning groups that focused on analyzing student learning and practical problems. The groups which concentrated on instructional practices and leadership skills pushed ideas forward in a collaborative and authentic setting. All participants in this research study experienced a similar professional learning model once a month with a primary focus of observing effective classroom teaching, reflecting on goals, and discussing leadership issues. Most principals shared how this professional learning opportunity influenced their leadership development and positive perception of the coaching experience.

Effective Coaching Components

Effective coaching is an area needing additional research to help educators understand the common values of principal coaching (Honig, 2012). Reflective questions, listening to understand, engaging in self-reflection, and constructing collaborative goals are essential to successful coaching (Fink & Markholt, 2017). In this study, the importance of reflective communication with the principal supervisor was demonstrated. Participants valued a trusting, reflective, honest, and open coaching relationship which focused on questioning, listening skills, and a common commitment to working on goals for improvement.

Jones, Woods, and Guillaume (2016), on the effectiveness of workplace coaching, researched the gaps which still exist in understanding effective and quality coaching. The authors showed that feedback from different sources did not contribute to the quality of

coaching and may have led to participants feeling negative about advice. However, the 10 participants in this research study had only one coach and described positive and ongoing communication based on questions and reflective opportunities during collaborative and safe meetings.

Quality coaching during monthly cohort meetings resulted in additional positive experiences. Cosner, Walker, Swanson, Hebert, and Whalen (2018) discussed the architecture of leadership coaching, and the benefits of engaging principals in coaching based on real time observations and participation with other colleagues to share problems of practice. Zepeda et al. (2013), in their study of principal professional development, pointed out the benefits of groups debating problem-based learning, collaborative goal setting, and leadership issues.

Types and Formats of Coaching

The final recommendation for action relates to different types of coaching that may be useful to district administrators, superintendents, and principal supervisors. The 10 principals interviewed in this research study all received monthly one-on-one coaching for approximately two hours and monthly all-day professional development training with their principal cohort. All participants shared the value of both experiences and mentioned the importance of creating a connection between the two. During both experiences, topics included goal setting, classroom walkthroughs, teaching calibration, and leadership problems and skills.

Cosner et al. (2018) found that in-person coaching was the most beneficial coaching when it took place in the school setting and focused on leadership challenges, reflective questioning, and metacognitive strategies. The authors discussed how observing principals while running a staff meeting or leadership team meeting or facilitating a post-lesson meeting with a teacher were extremely valuable. Viewing principals during everyday activities affords an opportunity to engage in reflective dialogue and give immediate feedback based on leadership strengths and possible next steps.

Jones et al. (2016) explored how in-person meetings between principals and coaches were found to be the most valuable experience. The author proposed that the frequency of coaching and time spent correlated to successful coaching outcomes. Additional research is needed in this area of time and frequency to study different formats and the recommended number of coaching sessions.

The 10 principals met monthly in one-to-one meetings, but participants also discussed how their supervisor communicated through email and phone calls, and how this responsiveness was a key part in building trusting relationships. Several participants told how their supervisor rarely cancelled coaching sessions, and how the commitment to regular meetings helped them build trust in the coaching experience.

Recommendations for Further Research

Chapter 2 discussed the limitation of research on the effectiveness of principal coaching and the shifting role of the principal from building manager to leader focused

on student learning and achievement. The findings from this study revealed the importance of principal coaching and the positive perception of the coaching experience from all 10 participants. They remarked how coaching supported their new and many responsibilities aiding them in the evolution of their new obligations. Participants related the ways supportive relationships, collaborative professional learning, and reflective communication with their principal supervisor improved and benefitted their leadership and personal skills. Further research should include evaluating and norming coaching practices, the type of qualifications most suitable for coaching, the role of the coach, and the training process for principal supervisors.

Criteria for Evaluating Coaching Practices

The evaluation of effective coaching practices needs further study, as the subject is still limited among scholars. Jones et al. (2016) examined coaching criteria which may benefit the development of leadership skills. Mihiotis and Argirou (2016) reviewed coaching from challenge to opportunity and the qualities of an effective coach, and found that self-awareness and reflection were two highly valuable traits.

Additional research is needed on ways to enter a coaching relationship that supports leadership growth and deep reflection. Findings from this study showed most participants credited their growth in leadership and decision-making to their principal supervisor and the reliance on questions rather than directives. Honig (2012) discussed a need for further research studies focused on the qualities of effective coaching and criteria for coaching that facilitate increased instructional skills.

What Type of Person and Role Should Coach Principals

Additional research is suggested for determining the best type of person and most effective role for coaching principals in terms of supporting principal growth and facilitating a trusting yet rigorous coaching experience. Honig (2012) shared how there has been a recent shift in years to central office administrators or principal supervisors assuming the role of a principal coach. In order to make this shift happen, the district in the study reduced the former managerial work of central office administrators and limited the number of principals they supervised and supported. These changes allowed for increased time with principals and a greater focus on instructional leadership.

On district leadership for effective principal evaluation and support, Kimball, Arrigoni, Clifford, Yoder, and Milanowski (2015) looked at how urban districts are moving towards principal supervisors supporting smaller groups of principals so they may focus on the quality of coaching. Gray (2018) examined a model of leadership coaching and mentoring which teamed principal mentors to beginning principals and emphasized building a trusting relationship, nurturing leadership, and focusing on problem-solving. Ng and Szeto (2016) researched the results of mentor programs which engaged a mentor coach who used frequent coaching sessions, one-on-one and cohort meetings, problem-based learning at school, and reflection of learning strategies.

Mihiotis and Arigirou (2016) studied the effects of involving executive coaches or leaders in a senior executive position. Further research is needed on the essential traits

of a principal coach and may help central office leadership and superintendents choose the most knowledgeable person for small or large districts.

Training for Principal Coaches and Supervisors

The final recommendation for further research relates to the training and professional development needed to increase the skills of coaches and supervisors so they support the instructional and leadership skills of principals. Studies are limited in the area of principal coaching and the role of a principal supervisor is different in many districts. Principal supervisors in both small and large districts vary depending on the focus of managerial duties or support of principal growth (Kimball et al., 2015). Key differences include the number of participants supervisor coaches support, other responsibilities included in their job description, and time spent on training and understanding the principal evaluation system.

To support the limited body of research focused on principal coaching, researchers need to examine best practices that have effectively improved leadership and instructional skills. The findings would encourage central office administrators and principal coaches to focus on quality coaching practices and leadership growth in both small and large educational districts.

Concluding Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of 10 elementary principals in one urban district where principal coaching was implemented through principal supervisors. The researcher explored the results of

coaching related to improving principal instructional skills, developing leadership skills, understanding the conditions of effective coaching, and examining the principals' perceptions of their coaching experience. The findings showed principal coaching increased the instructional leadership skills of principals and positive perceptions of the coaching experience. In addition, the participants appreciated the relationships formed between coach and colleagues because the collaboration allowed them to feel connected and unified with other principals.

The common themes that emerged from the study related to the experience of principal coaching included the benefits of a supportive relationship, collaborative professional learning, and the growth from reflective communication cycles with the principal supervisor. The data collected and analyzed from this study may help central office administrators, principals, and superintendents understand how the lived experience of principal coaching may contribute to the leadership skills of principals; how the coaching experience impacts instructional leadership; the types of supports principals need from coaches to impact their instructional leadership skills; and positive qualities that principals appreciate from a healthy coaching relationship with their principal supervisor and coach.

Recommendations for action in principal coaching include focusing and concentrating on instructional leadership, professional learning, and effective coaching components. These key behaviors may result in a positive and worthwhile coaching experience aimed at improvement in leadership skills and effective coaching. Further

research can be built upon this study to address criteria for evaluating effective coaching, types of training and professional development needed to support principal supervisors and coaches, and best procedures to develop principal growth.

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APPENDIX A**City University Research Participant
Consent Form**

School/Division of Applied Leadership

CITYU RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT**Title of Study:**

Elementary Principals' Experience with Principal Coaching

Name and Title of Researcher(s):

Julie Ray, student in the Ed.D Leadership Program

For Student Researcher(s):

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Hampton Hopkins

Department: Applied Leadership

Telephone: 704-614-2785

City U E-mail: hhopkins@cityu.edu

Program Coordinator (or Program Director): Dr. Nicole Ferry

Key Information about this Research Study

You are being invited to participate in a research study.

The researcher will explain this research study to you before you will be asked to participate in the study and before you sign this consent form.

- You do not have to participate in this research.
- It is your choice whether or not you want to participate in this research.
- Your participation is voluntary and you can decide not to participate or withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or negative consequences.
- You should talk to the researcher(s) about the study and ask them as many questions you need to help you make your decision.

What should I know about being a participant in this research study?

This form contains important information that will help you decide whether to join the study. Take the time to carefully review this information.

You are eligible to participate in this study because you are an elementary principal that has experienced coaching from your principal supervisory through school visits and professional development.

You will be in this research study for approximately one detailed interview that will last approximately 90 minutes and will receive a copy of the transcription to check the accuracy of the content no more than two weeks after the interview.

About 8 individuals will participate in this study.

To make your decision, you must consider all the information below:

- The purpose of the research
- The procedures of the research. That is, what you will be asked to do and how much of your time will be required.
- The risks of participating in the research.
- The benefits of participating in the research and whether participation is worth the risk.

If you decide to join the study, you will be asked to sign this form before you can start study-related activities.

Why is this research being done?

Purpose of Study: The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study is to research the topic of principal coaching using principal supervisors. In the past, the traditional model of principal supervisors focused on monitoring principals as building managers who hired and guided staff, cared for the building, and supervised the budget. However, today principals face an environment of high accountability, ever-increasing job challenges, and expanded responsibility for instructional leadership. The author of this study will investigate the possible impact of coaching on the development of instructional

leadership skills, conditions of successful coaching, and the perceptions of the coaching experiences related to principals.

Research Participation.

You will be asked to participate in the following procedures:

I understand I am being asked to participate in this study in one or more of the following ways (initial options below that apply):

Respond to in-person and/or telephone Interview questions; Approximate time: 90 minutes

Other, specifically, review the transcription from the interview for accuracy of the content. Approximate time: 30 minutes

You may refuse to answer any question or any item in verbal interviews, written questionnaires or surveys, and, you can stop or withdraw from any audio or visual recording at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.

The data including the digital devices, typed documents from the interview, and interview notes will be protected in a locked cabinet and stored on a password protected laptop owned by the researcher. The data will be stored for five years, and at the end of that time, will be destroyed by the researcher.

There are no known risks to participating in this interview. Confidentiality of your name, district, and principal supervisor will be confidential before, during, and after the interview.

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your participation in this research. However, possible benefits may include supporting principal preparation programs, stakeholders in districts such as superintendents, central office leaders, students, parents, teachers, and principals. The result of the study may help districts gain a better understanding of the possible benefits of principal coaching related to the instructional skills of principals, leadership skills, the conditions related to effective coaching, and the perception of coaching.

You will not receive any payment for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

I understand that participation is confidential to the limits of applicable privacy laws. No one except the faculty researcher or student researcher, his/her supervisor and Program Coordinator (or Program Director) will be allowed to view any information or data collected whether by questionnaire, interview and/or other means.

Steps will be taken to protect your identity, however, information collected about you can never be 100% secure. Your name and any other identifying information that can directly identify you will be stored separately from data collected as part of the research study. The results of this study will be published as a thesis and potentially published in an academic book or journal or presented at an academic conference. To protect your privacy no information that could directly identify you will be included.

All data (the questionnaires, audio/video tapes, typed records of the interview, interview notes, informed consent forms, computer discs, any backup of computer discs and any other storage devices) are kept locked and computer files will be encrypted and password protected by the researcher. The research data will be stored for five years. At the end of that time all data of whatever nature will be permanently destroyed. The published results of the study will contain data from which no individual participant can be identified.

Signatures

I have carefully reviewed and understand this consent form. I understand the description of the research protocol and consent process provided to me by the researcher. My signature on this form indicates that I understand to my satisfaction the information provided to me about my participation in this research project. My signature also indicates that I have been apprised of the potential risks involved in my participation. Lastly, my signature indicates that I agree to participate as a research subject.

My consent to participate does not waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, and/or City University of Seattle from their legal and professional

responsibilities with respect to this research. I understand I am free to withdraw from this research study at any time. I further understand that I may ask for clarification or new information throughout my participation at any time during this research.

I have been advised that I may request a copy of the final research study report. Should I request a copy, I understand that I will be asked to pay the costs of photocopy and mailing.

Participant's Name: _____
Please Print

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: Julie Ray
Please Print

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

If I have any questions about this research, I have been advised to contact the researcher and/or his/her supervisor, as listed on page one of this consent form.

Should I have any concerns about the way I have been treated or think that I have been harmed as a research participant, I may contact the following individual(s):

Dr. Nicole Ferry, Program Coordinator (and/or Program Director), City University of Seattle, City University of Seattle, at 521 Wall Street Suite 101, Seattle, WA 98121, 206-239-4764, FerryNicole@cityu.edu

This study has been reviewed and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of City University of Seattle. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the IRB at IRB@Cityu.edu.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Leadership & Instructional Practices Experienced by Coaching

1. Describe your experience going through the coaching process with your principal supervisor.
2. What was the biggest impact of the coaching experience? How did the coaching experience impact your role as a leader?
3. How did the coaching experience support your role as an instructional leader?
4. How did your principal supervisor help you monitor and adjust schools' goals?
5. How did your principal supervisor help you support the continuous improvement process?

Conditions that Support the Coaching Experience

6. What were the most positive aspects of the coaching relationship?
7. How often did you meet with your coach? What was the content of the meetings?
8. Was more time spent on technical or adaptive leadership issues during your meetings with your coach? What type of coaching (technical or adaptive) has been the most beneficial in terms of supporting your growth as a principal?
9. What have been the most positive results either professionally or personally based on coaching from your principal supervisor?
10. Was there anything that could have strengthened the coaching partnership?
11. What would be one piece of advice you would give your coach to strengthen the coaching relationship?

Principal Perceptions of Coaching

12. How did you feel about going through the coaching experience with your principal supervisor?

13. What was your greatest learning based on the coaching experience?
14. What got in the way of your learning?
15. What would be different if your principal supervisor did not coach you?
16. What is one part of the coaching relationship that you valued the most and would want to continue with a coach? What did you value the least about the coaching experience?
17. How did the coaching relationship positively impact your work as a principal and instructional leader?
18. What other information would you like to share with me based on your experience with your principal supervisor and the role he/she has made in your role as a principal?

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Interview Date:

Time:

Researcher:

Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is Julie Ray and I am researching the topic of elementary principals' experiences with principal coaching. The purpose of the study is to understand the possible impacts of principal coaching on the development of instructional leadership skills, conditions of successful coaching, and the perceptions of the coaching experience.

The interview today will take approximately 90 minutes and will involve open ended questions to reflect on the experience of principal coaching. I will take notes as you share your responses to the questions and will also record the interview using a tape. The researcher will let you know if a follow up interview is necessary after this interview.

Do you give permission for me to start taping? _____

Today is _____. The code number for the participant is _____.

APPENDIX D

Email inviting principals to participate

Dear _____,

My name is Julie Ray, and I am a doctoral candidate at City University of Seattle. My dissertation topic relates to principal coaching through the role of the principal supervisor. I will be studying the possible impact of coaching on the development of instructional leadership skills, conditions of successful coaching, and the perceptions of the coaching experience. I am planning on conducting my research at the end of August and early September.

I am emailing you to ask if you would be willing to participate in my study. The research will involve a detailed interview of approximately 90 minutes and, if necessary, a much shorter follow-up interview. I will utilize a digital device during the interview to review my notes and then analyze the content. I will follow up with your interview no later than two weeks after the interview and you will be emailed a transcription of your interview. You will have the opportunity to review the transcription and inform me if I accurately captured the interview.

The total process will be confidential including your name and the name of your district. I have been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the School of Applied Leadership at City University of Seattle and will ensure your confidentiality.

Please email me back this form with a response to the below questions if you are interested in participating at jraym@cityuniversity.edu. I will contact you to set up a convenient time and location if you choose to be part of the study.

1. How long have you been in education? How long were you a teacher?
What was the level?
2. How many years were you a principal in another district? How long have you been in your present school district?
3. Did your principal supervisor provide coaching if you were in another district?

4. What supports were or were not in place in your current district?
5. How do you identify your gender?

Please reach out to me if you have additional questions. I look forward to hearing back regarding your decision to participate in my study.

Sincerely,

Julie Ray