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**THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP COACHING
AS PERCEIVED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
OF TITLE I CAMPUSES IN TEXAS**

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by

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Treatise

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Dedication

This is dedicated to Heather, my ever-encouraging companion and inspiration, and my family and friends who have always believed in me.

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My sincere gratitude goes out to the members of my committee, Drs. Gooden, Ovando, Cantu, Garza, and Pringle, who helped me grow as a leader and researcher. Thank you for your patience in reading and commenting on my first attempt at qualitative research. Also, I extend my appreciation to Hortensia Palomares, Linda Overton, and my cohort friend, Dr. O’Doherty for offering continual direction and assistance in navigating graduate study requirements and protocols. Additional thanks go to Dr. Ovando for her dissertation class and mentoring that kick-started me on my way to completion.

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I’ve learned through the process of my doctoral research that no one travels this journey alone. While any inaccuracies or misrepresentations within this paper are undoubtedly my own, any insights presented are the result of a collaborative effort, and for all contributors, I am grateful.

The Influence of Leadership Coaching as Perceived by Secondary School Principals of Title I Campuses in Texas

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While various systems of support and professional development are in place for teachers, there remains a distinct void when it comes to these same opportunities for beginning and especially, experienced principals. An emerging form of assistance for campus principals is leadership coaching: a confidential relationship between a professional coach and principal focused on capacity building and the provision of time and support for the school leader to thoughtfully reflect, plan, problem solve, and establish and achieve significant goals. Leadership coaching is an investment in campus principals, which seems to fill an immediate need for them to experience relevant, ongoing, job-embedded, and individualized professional development.

This multiple-case qualitative study, using a grounded theory approach, was framed by the research questions: What are the experiences of middle and high school principals participating in leadership coaching and what benefits result from principal participation in leadership coaching? Through the constant comparative analysis of individual and collective data obtained through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documental evidence of principals participating in leadership coaching, principals' perceptions of their leadership coaching experience and any benefits were revealed.

Overall, findings suggested that participation in leadership coaching was perceived positively and led to principals taking time to pause from their stressful roles and responsibilities to reflect and plan. Principals described factors that accounted for initially connecting with their coaches, such as client readiness and the coach's experience, as well as the conditions established by the coach that helped build and sustain a healthy coaching relationship: safety, flexibility, action-orientation, and skillful guidance.

Additionally, principals reported personal, professional, and organizational benefits resulting from leadership coaching. Personal benefits included better self-care, reduced isolation, increased self-confidence, and heightened self-awareness. On a professional level, coaching resulted in the generation of plans/ideas, improved communication, individualized professional development, and an enhanced sense of efficacy. And finally, organizational benefits were identified in areas of staffing, solutions, student performance, and the extension of coaching to others.

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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

No one has ever suggested that being a principal of a public school is an easy profession, but being a 21st century school principal is arduous. There are mitigating factors that confront these individuals daily. Principals and the campuses they lead face ever-increasing demands of academic accountability coupled with strong public scrutiny. In addition to local and state mandates, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 adds further requisites for assessment, programs, and personnel (U. S. Department of Education, 2009); and society often amplifies this pressure by expecting swift dramatic improvements in school performance.

Enormous and escalating challenges, many of which principals had no part in creating and for which principals have been ill-prepared by their professional training or support systems currently in place (Reiss, 2004; Sparks, 2005), make the role of the campus leader a daunting one, to say the least. Scott Thompson (2005) likens the task of school leadership to *Leading From the Eye of the Storm*. Even formerly successful principals are being confronted by responsibilities in sharp contrast to the ones they faced in decades past and are having to learn a completely new set of knowledge and skills in order to meet the needs of the schools they lead (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005). Occupational stress is heightened by stakeholders anticipating boosted test scores from an education system weighed down by the complexities of a rapidly changing society. Some liken the current culture of accountability and its myopic focus on test scores to a culture of fear for the school leader, as to whether or not he or she will still have a job come the results of student assessments (McGhee & Nelson, 2005).

The increased demands placed on Texas principals of working to meet both state and federal accountability requirements are enough to heighten fear, hasten premature burn-out and/or encourage a career change or early retirement by novice and veteran principals. Retention of campus leaders is a growing concern (Young & Fuller, 2009), alongside a diminishing pool of candidates who are seeking to take on the role of school principal (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003; Educational Research Service, 1998; Rayfield & Diamantes, 2003). The Educational Research Service (2000) determined the top three factors discouraging someone to become a school administrator were compensation, occupational stress, and amount of time required by the job.

The fast-paced and demanding life of school principals leaves little to no time for reflection or thoughtful planning for school improvement, thwarting the critical role of instructional leadership (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005). Personally and professionally, school leaders are inadequately prepared to take care of themselves (Grace, 2005) and districts have been slow to establish strategies for retaining and supporting their leaders through targeted professional development. Given school leadership comes to the forefront, as Fullan (2005) suggests, during times of dramatic change, the question must be raised: What is being done to support and build capacity of both novice and experienced campus principals during these turbulent times?

An emerging form of support for school leaders is leadership coaching, a confidential relationship focused on capacity building and the accomplishment of significant goals by school leadership. This potentially promising, yet nontraditional professional development practice is a response to the current demanding challenges

school principals face. Leadership coaching is an investment in campus leaders which provides time and support to reflect, plan, problem solve, and establish goals and action plans to achieve those goals. Coaching appears to fill the immediate need for school leaders to experience relevant, sustained, job-embedded, focused professional development, and could be the added boost for principals in achieving all that is expected of them (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

The following sections provide a general overview of coaching and then describe the specific leadership coaching provided for principals of this study. A description of the problem this study sought to address, research questions, and a brief summary of the methodology are outlined. Terms used in the study are also defined, as well as the significance of this investigation, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions.

Background of the Study

Brief Introduction to Coaching

The term “coach” is widely recognized, but can be construed in a variety of ways. Any sports player can identify with the role of an athletic coach and an increasing number of teachers can relate to the role of an instructional coach, but employing an executive or leadership coach in the professional world in an effort to boost performance of a leader is much different. This type of coaching does not operate on the premise of deficiency, where a coach is working to “fix” the client, but rather on the assertion of sufficiency, where a coach is working to further enhance the already existing talents, skills, and intelligence of the client to improve performance and attain goals.

Coaching in the Business World

The business world has benefitted for decades from executive coaching. Benefits have included improvements in organizational strength, executive retention, productivity, work quality, working relationships with staff, teamwork, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reduced conflict and complaints (Reiss, 2007). Coaching has become an essential aspect of many contemporary leaders' repertoires. Once reserved for only the top management of Fortune 500 companies, it is now being used to develop leaders at multiple levels. Robert Hargrove, in the *Masterful Coaching Handbook* (2000), points out that because today's leaders at all levels and various contexts are confronted by rapid change and complex problem-solving scenarios, "organizations need coaches and a culture of coaching more than ever" (p. 6). He goes on to recognize coaching as "...the new face of leadership," stating that "coaching is about continuously expanding your personal (organizational) capacity to perform and learn" (p. 8).

The practice of executive coaching is emerging and adapting in the education world. Campus and district administrators are turning to experienced educators serving as leadership coaches to assist them in attaining their personal best in leading schools. Since leadership coaching is a fairly novel approach to professional development of school principals, there are only a few significant studies, detailed in Chapter Two, which examine the effectiveness of coaching campus leaders in the education field. In contrast, within the business world, numerous studies have been conducted (De Meuse & Dai, 2009) and some, also shared in Chapter Two, have concluded that coaching produces high returns on investment, almost six times the cost of coaching (Reiss, 2004), which

holds promise for the field of education; but before investigating the status of leadership coaching for campus principals, it is important, for the purposes of this study, to first clearly differentiate the leadership coaching examined for this study from a variety of other existing understandings of coaching in the world of education.

Coaching in the Education World

In discussing coaching in education, it is natural to first think of current efforts to coach and mentor the teacher in the classroom. Skiffington and Zeus (2003) described the key areas for teacher coaching as curriculum and classroom instruction. While coaching students, coaching for academic success, literacy coaching, career coaching, and more prominently, peer coaching have all advanced in the educational arena and share some common concepts and strategies with leadership coaching for principals, the intention of leadership coaching is distinctively different and therefore bears definition as a professional development practice.

Definition and intention of leadership coaching. The etymology of the word “coach” refers to carrying one through, which is a fitting introduction to the definition of leadership coaching. Leadership coaching is not about telling someone what to do, but more about walking beside someone, encouraging them, and asking reflective questions to assist them in getting where they want to go. One definition of leadership coaching is “a confidential and purposeful professional relationship designed to build leadership capacity and facilitate a leader in attaining breakthroughs and accomplishing significant goals” (SIRC, 2009a). It is client-focused, client-driven, job-embedded professional development, which offers campus leaders the opportunity for non-judgmental

customized support from a strategic thinking partner. The coach is the client's ally for brainstorming, planning, and implementing school improvement. The expected outcomes of leadership coaching include clarification of goals, creation of thoughtful and detailed action plans for accomplishing goals, and ultimately, the accomplishment of goals (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003; Bossi, 2007; SIRC, 2009a). Simply put, the leadership coaching that was the focus of this study is considered goal-oriented, non-directive, solution-focused, and performance-driven (Ives, 2008). More specifically,

Masterful Coaching involves expanding people's capacity to make a difference with the individual, their organizations, and their world. It involves impacting people's visions and values and offering them a powerful assist in reinventing who they are being, their thinking, and behavior that is consistent with achieving what they need to achieve. (Hargrove, 2000, p. 15)

With the work of today's principal including a plethora of complex responsibilities, such as managing and resolving conflict and regularly facilitating the introduction of new beliefs, values, or actions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), coaching is a tool to help carry some of the tremendous weight that accompanies school leadership. Leadership coaching offers a promising direction in how an educational organization supports its leaders, but necessitates a commitment by the district (Coe, Zehnder, & Kinlaw, 2008) to explore, try, and apply innovative practices; and although the common practice of mentoring by many districts is a key ingredient in building a school leader's capacity, there are certain distinctions needing to be made between mentoring and coaching.

Coaching juxtaposed to mentoring. The lines between the terms coaching and mentoring are understandably often indistinguishable. The two notions overlap in some

areas, yet also have unique characteristics worth noting for this study. Grant (2001)

counterbalances the two:

The key issue in comparing coaching to mentoring is that mentoring traditionally involves an individual with expert knowledge in a specific domain passing on this knowledge to an individual with less expertise....In contrast, coaching is a process in which the coach facilitates learning in the coachee. The coach need not be an expert in the coachee's area of learning....Of course, many coaches have great expertise in specific areas and use this expertise to advance their coachee's learning. Many mentors may have good coaching skills and many mentoring relationships undoubtedly involve high levels of nurturance, but mentoring per se does not require coaching skills. (pp. 6-7)

Bloom, Castagna, and Warren (2003) differentiate between mentoring and coaching:

“Mentors are typically senior organizational *insiders* in job-alike positions. The most effective coaches are generally *outsiders* who, while professional experts, have leadership coaching as their primary work” (p. 20). The vital distinction between mentoring and coaching exists in who is the focus of attention and who is responsible for the action and/or learning.

In mentoring, the mentor's role is modeling the behavior, and thus the focus is on the mentor. There is often no assurance that learning will occur or that improved performance will occur. Mentoring does not regularly result in a specific action plan, and is a much longer process than coaching.

In coaching, the focus is on the client being coached to establish areas of need, and the coaching is conducted in a specific timeframe. The coach helps the client to develop an explicit action plan, yet the client is ultimately responsible for his or her own actions and/or learning.

Bloom, et al. (2003) further discuss the need to move beyond mentors to coaching for principals, observing that “the mentoring received by most principals is inconsistent and suffers...because the mentoring...usually comes from colleagues in the same district, it may be difficult to share confidences” (p. 21). Colleague mentors are also at times wrapped up in their own job responsibilities and not completely accessible to their mentee. Professional coaches, on the other hand, are usually not connected to the district in any way and their jobs are solely to coach clients. Principals often have to informally find a mentor who is willing to guide them, but professional development for principals cannot be left to chance (Sparks, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

While various systems of support and professional development are in place for teachers, there is a distinct void in regards to these same opportunities for beginner and especially, experienced principals. Many school administrators must rely on short and sporadic one-size-fits-all trainings for continued leadership development (Bossi, 2007). “With higher demands, shrinking budgets, and fewer people entering leadership roles, we must provide improved support to ensure the success of current and new leaders” (Reiss, 2004, p. 23).

Although novice principals, in particular, need new knowledge and skills, even the most veteran principal needs occasional guidance and assistance that can come from a coach or thinking partner outside the district, who guarantees confidentiality and is solely dedicated to the principal’s success. Leadership coaching is one possible strategy for retaining and supporting principals, and popular literature (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren,

2003; Bossi, 2007; Grace, 2005; Reiss, 2007; Rich & Jackson, 2005) suggests positive results for principals such as:

- Clarification of goals and the creation of well thought-out and detailed action plans for accomplishing these goals
- Time for reflection and reframing of difficult issues
- Increased leader self-awareness and more effective delegation skills
- Reduction in stress and feelings of isolation.

Some rigorous research has begun to emerge in the field (e.g., Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007; Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003), but there is still a paucity of empirical evidence to substantiate the effects of leadership coaching on school principals.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the experience of leadership coaching and any benefits resulting from participation by middle and high school principals of Texas Title I campuses. According to Strong, Barrett, and Bloom (2003) and O'Doherty (2011), few studies probe the effects of school leadership coaching programs; therefore, more research is needed to confirm coaching as a valid approach to supporting and developing principals. Through the analysis of information obtained through the perceptions of principals participating in leadership coaching, this study aimed to investigate their experiences in an effort to determine what outcomes and benefits, if any, the process generates.

Research Questions

This research focused on the topic of leadership coaching for school principals guided by the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of middle and high school principals participating in leadership coaching?
2. What benefits result from principal participation in leadership coaching?

Methodology and Framework

This was a multiple-case qualitative study of middle and high school principals on Title I campuses in Texas, using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). With grounded theory, “the goal is to understand the action in a substantive area from the point of view of the actors involved” (Glaser, 1998, p. 115). A particular theory was not chosen to interpret the findings ahead of time, but a description and “grounded” theory of leadership coaching systematically arose through collecting an extensive amount of data and a rigorous process of constant comparison. This study primarily utilized data from semi-structured interviews of a varied group of principals who participated in over 15 hours of leadership coaching. Additional data sources included a review of documents referenced and/or presented by the principal and observations of the principal. As explained further in the data analysis section, constant comparative analysis of all qualitative data gained from interviews, collected documents, and observations was performed; and open, axial, and selective coding phases informed the final analysis of the results (Mertens, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morse & Richards, 2002; Patton, 2002).

This study could also be considered phenomenological and ex post facto. It was phenomenological in nature as it attempted “to obtain information concerning the current status of a phenomen[on], to describe ‘what exists’ with respect to variables or conditions in a situation” (Key, 1997, p. 19). It was ex post facto because the study examined, through principals’ perceptions, the experience of leadership coaching *after* principals participated in 15 hours or more of this type of professional development. If this group retrospectively identified benefits as a result of actively engaging in leadership coaching, the findings would be denoted as “ex-post facto since both the effect and alleged cause have already occurred and are studied by the researcher in retrospect” (Gay, 1981, p. 197). More detailed descriptions of the methodology, measures, design, and procedures, are found in Chapter Three.

Definition of Terms

The following are operational definitions of terms used in this research study:

Leadership Coaching: A confidential and purposeful professional relationship designed to build leadership capacity and facilitate a leader in attaining breakthroughs and accomplishing significant goals (SIRC, 2009a); a client-focused, client-driven, solution-focused/result-oriented, job-embedded professional development, which offers campus leaders the opportunity for non-judgmental customized support from a strategic thinking partner.

Capacity: A leader’s knowledge, skills, behaviors, and time needed to manage and facilitate productive change (Senge, 1990b, p. 5; Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 164).

Executive Coaching: “A practical, goal-focused form of one-to-one learning for busy executives...used to improve performance of executive behavior, enhance a career or prevent derailment, and work through organizational issues or change initiatives (D. Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999, p. 40).

Mentoring: A “process in which a more skilled or experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled” or less experienced person by promoting their “professional and/or personal development” (E. M. Anderson & Shannon, 1988, p. 39).

Title I Campus: Schools receiving additional federal financial assistance based on the number of low-income children. Title I schools have at least 40 percent of their enrollment eligible for the free lunch program (U. S. Department of Education, 2011).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Federal school accountability measurement created through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act to ensure that, by the year 2014, 100 percent of all students obtain proficiency in reading/language arts and mathematics (Texas Education Agency, 2002).

School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC): “Under the Title I, School Improvement Program of No Child Left Behind, a Local Education Agency or campus that does not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years will be considered in need of improvement” (SIRC, 2011). The School Improvement Resource Center is a statewide initiative that works in partnership with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and according to SIRC, assists schools “in need of improvement” and

provides “...information, clarification, resources, and technical assistance regarding the school improvement process”.

Executive Coach: A thinking partner who works strategically with senior level business executives and possesses “...appropriate knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to coaching” (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005, p. 111).

Leadership Coach: A thinking partner who works strategically with school and/or school district leaders, is typically an experienced educator, has successfully completed intensive training in an approved coaching program, and possesses “...appropriate knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to coaching” (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005, p. 111; SIRC, 2009a).

Coachee/Client: The individual who is being coached.

Significance of the Study

This investigation has significance for school principals, education as a whole, and the field of leadership coaching. It is obvious that the role of school leader has changed in scope and urgency in the past decade and grows more demanding by the year.

The complexities of the job, changing socioeconomic realities, and ever-increasing expectations are driving current and aspiring administrators away from the position. The increased state pressure of federal mandates to include standards and accountability movements have all converged into a perfect storm that now threatens to batter principals. (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005, p. 24)

The pressures of this “perfect storm” were confirmed by a Texas study on principal tenure/retention rates (Young & Fuller, 2009), which revealed the strong negative influence working at a low-achieving and/or high-poverty school has on the principal staying in the position. Research about how coaching can support principals, especially in

underperforming and/or high-poverty schools and school districts, may help retain both novice and veteran principals at these often hard-to-staff schools.

In related fashion, the study could benefit the education profession through harbingering an innovative way to reinvest in and reenergize principals, who are burned out and considering leaving the profession, by helping them remain, recommit, and be successful. For those principals who have already left their campus positions for district-level jobs or retirement, more knowledge surrounding the outcomes of leadership coaching may encourage them to give back to their profession by being trained and serving as coaches for current campus principals.

Moreover, as experienced principals retire and younger less-experienced ones replace them, school districts will need to look to support the new leadership, while retaining those still in the position. This study may inform superintendents and school boards about the influence of leadership coaching and whether to commit time, money, and energy towards the professional development practice. Besides assisting districts, results could also provide valuable insight to the regional service center personnel and/or organizations providing coaching, helping them enhance the technical assistance provided to campuses and districts.

As aforementioned, a good deal of research has been done in the business world regarding executive coaching and in the education world concerning instructional and/or peer coaching of teachers, but there is still a lack of similar studies, according to Hobson (2003) and Strong, Barrett, and Bloom (2003), conducted around the practice of coaching school principals. This approach is a relatively new and emerging field in the area of

ongoing professional development for educational leaders, and expanding the body of research is essential to situate the practice as a professional development opportunity of the education arena.

Because the practice of coaching is growing faster than the analysis of its results, an exploration of the influence of coaching on the school principal from the principal's perspective could make a significant contribution to the areas of adult learning, school leadership, and various school leadership coaching programs across the nation. Finally, attention to this expanding, yet unconventional professional development approach could potentially enhance principals' leadership capacity, thereby assisting them and their schools in successfully implementing reform efforts, meeting state and federal accountability measures, and, ultimately, improving education for all students.

Delimitations

Even though it is understood that in the larger context of campus leadership, the role of teacher leaders would be integrated (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995), this study focused solely on middle and high school principals of Title I campuses in Texas. The study participants all led campuses subject to the requirements and federal sanctions of the School Improvement Program because, according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) guidance and the State of Texas accountability system, their campuses had been designated as not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the same academic accountability indicator for two years or more. Each school was also part of an additional voluntary grant overseen by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC) that required coaching of the principal in the first

year (2008-09) and then offered coaching of the principal as an option in the second year (2009-10). Further, only principals who have actively engaged in leadership coaching, as defined by participating in over 15 cumulative hours of coaching, were included in the study. And finally, the quality of leadership coaches, as to consistent skill level and use of strategies in which they were trained, is not addressed in this study.

Limitations

The difficulty of generalizing the findings to other situations is a main limitation of qualitative research inquiry (Gail, Gail, & Borg, 2003). This study only included a group of middle and high school principals of Title I campuses working with the School Improvement Resource Center, thus the findings could not be readily generalized to all principals participating in leadership coaching.

Also, the interviews solicited insight and feedback on principals' experiences with leadership coaching and thus relied on retrospective self-perceptions of the participants to investigate the experience and any possible benefits of leadership coaching. The innate limitation of relying exclusively on individuals' perceptions of a personal experience is its subjectivity, which could have hindered a clear and objective accounting of the facts, thus limiting and affecting the interpretation of the results.

In addition, although the study sample was selected from only principals who had participated in over 15 hours of coaching, the total hours of coaching for each principal varied from 16 to 33 at the time of the interviews. This wide range in coaching hours could have affected principals' experiences with and perceived benefits from leadership coaching, and thus was considered another study constraint.

Further, in qualitative inquiry, a limitation is the concern over a lack of research rigor in case studies. The researcher took steps to minimize this limitation and potential bias by following systematic procedures for conducting qualitative research (Yin, 2003), which are outlined in Chapter Three.

Finally, given that both Mertens (2005) and Patton (2002) contend that the researcher is the primary instrument of qualitative studies, there is a possibility for partiality when a single researcher both gathers and interprets the data (McEwan & McEwan, 2003). Since this study was interpretive in nature, there were limitations to the inferences drawn from the data. The possibility existed that other researchers might have drawn different conclusions based on the same findings. This researcher also had the added potential bias due to his work at the same organization that oversaw the leadership coaching provided to this sample of principals.

Assumptions

For this study of leadership coaching the following assumptions were made:

1. Principals seriously considered the questions asked of them and provided honest and accurate reports of their experiences with the leadership coaching program.
2. The principal was recognized as central to the academic achievement of a school.
3. Trained leadership coaches implemented the coaching model and processes in which they were trained with integrity.

4. The researcher assumed there would be some benefits to participating in leadership coaching.

Summary of Chapter

Education needs highly effective principals who can facilitate, model, and lead our schools (McEwan & McEwan, 2003). Numerous changes in the expectations and role of the school principal have made the work nearly impossible to do without ongoing support; and “highly qualified principal candidates” are in short supply to replace “nearly sixty percent of principals [who] will retire, resign, or otherwise leave their positions within the next five years” (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). The occupational stress and shortage of leadership may be significant, but the potential for leadership development is promising.

Leadership coaching is being offered as a possible professional development strategy to retain and support new and experienced principals as they lead their schools. A few studies have been conducted around coaching principals and have yielded positive results (e.g., Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007; Reiss, 2007; Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003), but there is still so much more to learn in regards to principals' leadership coaching experiences and its influence on them as school leaders.

This study researched the experience of middle and high school principals participating in leadership coaching and possible benefits as perceived by the principals being coached. The qualitative research design has been summarized, and although there are methodological limitations, the results of this study could be far-reaching in

benefitting principals, districts, regional service centers, principal coaching programs, and education as a whole.

Organization of the Study

This research is organized into five chapters, with supplementary appendices and bibliography.

Chapter 1 introduced the study of leadership coaching for school principals through a defined statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions addressed, brief summary of the methodology used, and explanation of the study's significance. Additionally, chapter 1 established delimitations and acknowledged limitations for the research design.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review to establish the context for studying leadership coaching. Major coaching models are summarized and differentiated, so they can be clearly understood and serve as lenses to analyze findings from recent research conducted on business-oriented executive coaching and school-focused leadership coaching.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used to conduct the research, the framework of the study, and why a qualitative approach was chosen as the guiding methodology. This chapter also explains the method for selecting interview recipients, the data gathering process, data analysis procedures, and initial evaluation of results.

Chapter 4 describes the school principals involved in this study as well as presents the results drawn from their interviews, documents reviewed, and observations conducted.

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings and how they could inform recipients of leadership coaching and the work of leadership coaching programs. This chapter also proposes areas for further research suggested by the results of this study.

In an effort to provide a background for this research, focus will now turn to examining the current literature on coaching.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The demands of school principals in the early 1980s exhibit little similarity to the demands confronted by those in the 21st century. The managerial and evaluative responsibilities of the past have been usurped by expectations that a principal establish and sustain a data-driven and collaborative campus culture. This reality, compounded by the accountability requirements of state and federal laws and heightened public pressure to make quick and marked improvements, requires new skill sets for principals. Beginning and experienced principals are equally affected. Novice principals must enter with, and veteran principals must now master, new knowledge and skills to meet the challenges of the schools they lead (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005). There is an urgent need for principals to experience job-embedded, real-life, continuous, and instructionally-centered professional development that will enable them to effectively lead their schools and students into the 21st century.

Attempts to fill this need through various support initiatives, such as leadership coaching for school principals, have begun to seep into the research literature. Historically, the focus has been on providing campus-wide professional development for teachers, but the urgent need to build the capacity of principals and support their leadership of 21st century public schools brings to light the lack of consistent support currently being provided to principals and propels the examination of the relatively scant number of structured programs presently being offered to support these school leaders. Leadership coaching is gaining momentum as a promising, yet nontraditional professional development approach for campus leaders, but the practice of leadership

coaching in education is ahead of any specific analysis of data and related results of the practice, thus prompting this study and a review of existing knowledge on the topic.

This review of literature is structured to accomplish the functions outlined by Mertens (2005) in providing a context for the research described in this report, analyzing current studies, and identifying areas not well represented by the current body of literature as possible avenues for further research. In order to deepen the reader's conceptual understanding of coaching in education and to frame this study of the influence of leadership coaching on school principals, a summary of existing knowledge in three overarching areas will be expanded upon in this chapter: the critical and challenging role of the school principal, the practice of leadership coaching, and the current state of research on leadership coaching for principals. Prominent coaching models and current coaching programs in the field of education are also highlighted in order to serve as lenses to analyze findings of recent research conducted around coaching for principals.

The 21st Century School Principal

It is widely accepted that the principal plays a vital role in shaping the quality of the 21st century school. It could even be said that behind every successful school lies a successful principal. Joint research by the universities of Minnesota and Toronto found that “leadership not only matters; it is second only to teaching among school related factors in its impact upon student learning” (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 1). A principal's job is critical in regards to school improvement. Effective leadership for systemic school improvement necessitates an instructionally-focused

principal (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000) who takes an active role in sustaining reform efforts (Murphy & Datnow, 2002) and in developing a positive school culture that promotes change (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Principals are expected to possess the leadership capacity to both lead and manage instruction and improvement.

Principals of high-performing campuses are described by researchers of effective schools as confident instructional leaders, who are also goal-oriented, organized, able to delegate, and possessing high expectations of students and staff (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Robinson, 1985; Teske & Schneider, 1999). Ironically, the same high expectations of school principals by their districts and the public has resulted in occupational stress leading to the loss of talented experienced school leaders and a shrinking pool of interested and worthy replacements (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003). Accompanying increasing demands to improve schools are leadership preparation programs that some critics, including principals themselves, deem ineffective (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005) and more pertinent to this study, a lack of support for accomplishing improvements and coping with the accompanying stress (Lovely, 2004; Reiss, 2004).

Occupational Stress and the Resulting Shortage of Principals

Extended work hours, an overwhelming job description, growing accountability, and increasingly unrealistic expectations from multiple stakeholders produce unbelievable stress for principals, which affects work quality (Engelking, 2008). The “dynamic and detail complexity” (Senge, 1990a) of being a school principal is more than enough to disturb professional competence and lead to the intensification of work, which

“occurs when the load that individuals are required to carry...exceeds the personal and professional resources available to them” (Isaacson, 2003, p. 3). Some researchers and practitioners believe that the demands and requirements of the 21st century school principal far outweigh the realistic capabilities of any one person, and therefore consider the conventional means of principal preparation no longer sufficient to deal with the challenges presented by public schools (Elmore, 2000; Levine, 2005; Peterson, 2002).

Aside from concerns regarding the adequacy of school administrator preparation, research studies have identified causes that prevent individuals from applying for principal positions and conversely, make it difficult to retain principals already in the position. Yerkes and Guaglianone (1998) assert the following stressors for school principals: long hours, job complexity and workload, minimal pay, high expectations, state and district pressures, and social problems; while the Educational Research Service (2000) corroborates with these concerns in the following list, in order of importance: inadequate compensation, job stress, excessive time requirements, difficulty of satisfying parent and community demands, and social demands preventing focus on instruction. In specifically studying beginning principals, Barnett (2001) proposed an additional three categories of stress for new recruits: absorbing large amounts of information, working for change despite significant resistance, and proving oneself to others.

Due to these factors, persuading educators to become and/or remain principals grows increasingly difficult. A survey by Rayfield and Diamantes (2003) confirms a reluctance to join the ranks of school administration, while others (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005) have determined that the daily challenges faced by school

administrators hinder the principal's ability to be an instructional leader. Fortunately, many of those probing the issues of the occupational stress of being a school principal and the resulting challenges of attracting and retaining quality principals, have also suggested possible remedies. These range from improved recruitment, training, and mentoring practices for inductees (Doud & Keller, 1998; Hopkins-Thompson, 2000) to comprehensive, on-going, job-embedded models of professional development and support for currently serving principals (Casey & Donaldson, 2001; Peterson & Kelley, 2001; Reiss, 2007), on which this research study focused, in the form of leadership coaching for principals.

The Need for the Coaching of Principals

Heightened accountability expectations for all students and an overall need for continuous improvement in schools has produced an abundance of professional development opportunities for teachers, but the same does not hold true for the principals who lead these teachers; and according to Drucker (1992), successful organizations of the 21st century will be learning organizations that build continuous learning into jobs at *all* levels. The stressful work of the school principal is fast-paced and often isolated from that of the teacher, yet there remain few, if any, support systems in place to assist these leaders in being successful. This reality is further accentuated by the decreased quantity of qualified candidates for school leadership roles combined with the increased number of retiring administrators. As the budgets of school districts throughout the nation have been infused with millions of federal dollars through the American Recovery and

Reinvestment Act or ARRA (U. S. Department of Education, 2009), the potential to address and remedy this issue is palpable.

While limited research still exists on leadership coaching as a professional development model in education, the business world presents promising information. A study of 100 executives by Manchester Incorporated (Innovative Leadership International, 2001), determined the average return on investment to be almost six times the cost of providing coaching; and although quantitative findings are not consistently significant according to CompassPoint Nonprofit Services (2003), multiple qualitative studies have determined coaching to be helpful in reducing workplace stress (Hearn, 2001; Richard, 1999; Wales, 2003). Also, recent advances in the field of neuroscience have shed light on the usefulness of coaching in leading and influencing mindful organizational change (Rock & Schwartz, 2006); however according to William Rentz, the vice president of The Brande Foundation, “When it comes to leadership development, school administrators, unlike their peers in the corporate world, don't get much in the way of help or support...[and] can reap huge benefits from coaching” (Pardini, 2003, p. 10).

Principals making decisions under stress and without thoughtful reflection may find their schools' performance suffering, since their attention is more directed towards managing their stress than it is to increasing the organization's potential (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). A national study of superintendents and college deans by Metzger (2003) concluded that, although finding time to do so is difficult, it is extremely important “to incorporate practices and activities that foster self/inner development in the personal and professional lives of educational leaders” in order to reduce the shortage of quality

candidates and maximize leader effectiveness (p. 684). In a dissertation study by Bichsel (2008), secondary principals indicated coaching as their preferred delivery method for professional learning, followed by mentoring, regardless of the initiative (p. 120). Reiss (2007) states that school leaders seek out coaching for a variety of reasons, such as:

- Transitioning and integrating into new, higher-level positions
- Deciding whether to stay in their current positions or move on to others
- Strengthening their leadership competencies and confidence
- Struggling with staff or having conflicts with school board members
- Seeking feedback
- Interested in learning about their strengths and areas for personal development
- Interested in managing and balancing their personal and professional lives. (p. 18)

Other seasoned scholars confirm leadership coaching as an essential piece of any principal professional development plan hoping to ensure significant success and change for 21st century schools (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; Sparks, 2005).

In order for schools to become transformed into “learning organizations capable of ongoing renewal” (DuFour & Berkey, 1995, p. 5), the trend of stopping and dropping the work at-hand in order to attend a workshop for professional growth must be abandoned for job-embedded, ongoing systems of support. “Busy school leaders need a different system. They need just-in-time opportunities for ongoing, confidential dialogue with a thinking partner to...brainstorm and develop strategies that benefit...” them in their jobs (Reiss, 2007, p. 16). This involves help with daily management issues, as well as maintaining a clear focus on the more complex issues of teaching and learning that are

involved with school improvement, change, and reform. “Coaches assist with managing the speed of change and smooth transition through change” (Rock & Schwartz, 2006, p. 6).

Transforming principals into effective change agents is imperative for school districts, yet too often this responsibility is left to chance (Sparks, 2005). Leadership coaching is an investment in principals to provide them with opportunities and support to intentionally think, reflect, plan, strategize, and create goals and action plans to accomplish these goals. Successful schools change and improve because school districts empower their leaders with continuous growth opportunities, coaching and supporting them in a similar way effective schools support their teachers’ learning and development (Barry & Kaneko, 2002). Lambert (2003) goes even further to say that leadership-capacity building techniques such as coaching are not only beneficial to school leaders, but necessary; and in order to fully understand this emerging professional development approach, an examination of leadership coaching as a whole would prove beneficial.

Leadership Coaching

Although leadership coaching of school principals is relatively new, the field of coaching has a history rooted on varied disciplines dating back to the 1950s. Before then, coaching as a distinctive practice was nearly nonexistent. Originating as a management or training strategy, coaching gained its first attention as a particular approach to human and organizational development. Athletes, public orators, actors, and more recently, business executives struggling with how to maintain and boost performance have turned to

coaches. An effective coach helps a client to identify his or her existing and hidden talents in order to propel them forward and maximize their performance.

Coaching is client-focused, client-driven, and one of the fastest growing professions. The burgeoning career field comes in a myriad of forms, such as work, spiritual, financial, relationship, and the broadest, life coaching. In 2004, the International Coach Federation's (ICF) membership had doubled in only two years to 7000 members in 33 countries (Johnson, 2004). Membership is now over 18,000 in 100 countries (International Coach Federation, 2011). Past ICF president, Judy Feld, stated that coaching has increased because it works, producing gains of "increased productivity, greater job satisfaction, higher retention rates and more skilled leadership" (Pardini, 2003).

Leadership Coaching Defined

Coaching is a familiar term, although one that has been expanded greatly by a variety of ideas and techniques so that its definition is no longer simple or precise; however, since it is commonly known that athletes rely on coaches to bring out their best performance, this concept can be used as a beginning point for gaining an understanding of leadership coaching.

A successful sports coach helps athletes "recognize the previously unseen possibilities that lay embedded in their existing circumstances" (Hargrove, 2000, p. 43). This same premise can be applied to leadership coaching of principals. One superintendent describes the leadership coach's role as helping clients "tap into their own resources to create answers, identify and [en]vision the future, align their goals with their

core values and identify multiple pathways to achieve their goals” (Pardini, 2003, p. 10). Grant (2006) adds, “Coaching is essentially about helping individuals regulate and direct their interpersonal and intrapersonal resources to better attain their goals (p. 153). A leadership coach is not working to “fix” the client, but instead is working to highlight and develop the already existing talents, skills, and intelligence of the client to improve performance and attain goals.

Rock and Donde (2006) describe leadership coaching as a “...self-directed and solutions-focused,” process that facilitates “positive change by improving the quality of thinking (in line with organizational goals)” (p. 31). Coaching is intended to create action, to assist clients in discovering and creating pragmatic strategies that meet their needs in reaching their goals. Coaching is far from being didactic; instead, a coach aids a client in creating her or his own solutions. Coaching pathways to success are born from the coachee’s own knowledge and experience base, thus adding genuineness to the solutions.

To further support this idea, Thomas Crane (2002) explains coaching as developing people’s capacity to solve problems, which is extended by Robert Hargrove (2000) when he depicts coaching as a process to “impact people’s visions and values and offer them powerful assistance to reinvent who they are, their thinking, and behavior that is consistent with achieving what they need to achieve”(p. 15). While leadership coaching incorporates many diverse paradigms, scholars all seem to agree that it is a process by which relationships are constructed around capacity building and purposeful support to achieve intended goals, integrating the fundamentals of both performance and

development (Costa & Garmston, 2002). And with few exceptions, all coaching approaches contain the following commonalities:

- Systematic process designed to facilitate development (change), increased performance and/or results, and goal achievement
- Individualized, tailor-made approach
- Aim of encouraging clients to assume charge of their life and choices
- Basis on the twin growth areas of awareness and responsibility
- Coach trained in the twin skills of listening and questions, as well as specific strategies that help clients overcome obstacles/challenges and achieve high levels of performance
- Collaborative, egalitarian, and confidential relationship between coach and client
- Relationship where the client agrees to be held accountable for their choices and/or actions
- Reliance on the inner resourcefulness of the client
- Focus on the achievement of a clear stated goal, rather than problem analysis (Ives, 2008, pp. 103-104; Reiss, 2004).

For purposes of this study, leadership coaching is defined generally as a confidential and purposeful professional relationship designed to build leadership capacity and facilitate a leader in attaining breakthroughs and accomplishing significant goals (SIRC, 2009a). The practice is goal-oriented, non-directive, solution-focused, and performance-driven (Ives,

2008). In order to enrich understanding, attention will now shift from what leadership coaching is to an examination of what it is not.

What Leadership Coaching Is Not

Most commonly, coaching is confused with mentoring, therapy, consulting, and/or instructing/teaching. Of these four varied approaches to helping someone, mentoring is perhaps the most closely connected to coaching, thus the most complex to delineate, and why a separate and subsequent section from this one is dedicated to comparing and contrasting mentoring and coaching. In regards to the related practices of therapy, consulting, and instructing/teaching, differentiation is made easier by clearly describing each:

Therapy. This problem- or crisis-centered helping profession emphasizes diagnosis, analysis, and/or healing; it might include testing, prescription of drugs, and a focus on early life experience and the involvement of other family members (Parsloe & Wray, 2001). Coaching is action-oriented and focused on the accomplishment of specific goals, and while it may deal with challenging personal subject matter, it does not dig into personal history and wrestling with psychological meanings like therapy does.

Consulting. Consultants, like mentors described in the next section, are often experts in a field, whose primary focus is offering solutions to problems. Although some coaches occasionally dip into offering guidance, the purest coaching is never about giving advice like consultants are paid to do. In contrast, coaches are trained to facilitate clients in creating solutions for themselves.

Instructing/Teaching. Similar to consulting, instructing or teaching implies telling someone what to do; and although it may be solution-focused, instructors typically determine the end-result themselves and/or have a curriculum to cover, whereas coaching has no predetermined agenda and addresses the specific needs decided instead by the individual.

None of this is to say that these practices do not intermingle and overlap with one another. An excellent teacher may use coaching skills to instruct, a coach may use a therapeutic questioning technique to help an individual solve a problem, and so on. The practice of blended coaching (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005) is purposefully designed to pull from multiple skills and strategies of diverse approaches to best support the client, but when it comes to the unadulterated practice of self-directed, solutions-focused coaching, Rock and Donde (2006) use the continuums shown in Figure 2.1 to visually illustrate the differences.

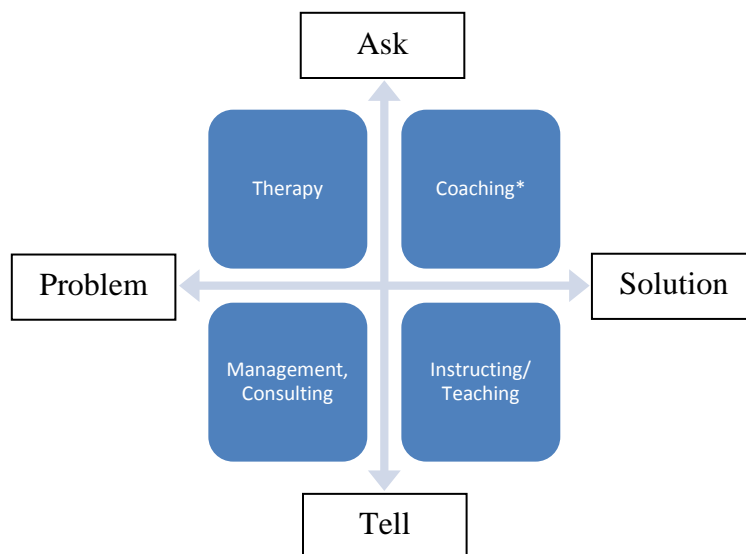


Figure 2.1. Clear Definitions (p. 31)

Coaching vs. Mentoring

As discussed in chapter one, coaching and mentoring are often viewed as one in the same, and although these two approaches to supporting school principals are closely related, they also have some dissimilarities worth highlighting.

Coaching and mentoring are different roles and different processes, each requiring different skills and experiences. Coaching is an inquiry, a discovery and learning process, whereas mentoring is about sharing experiences and what's worked for another...Although both roles focus on helping the client succeed...a coach has specialized training in the process of change and hundreds of hours of practice developing coaching skills. A mentor has been in the other person's role and shares their experiences. A well-trained coach does not need to have hands-on knowledge of the client's role. (Reiss, 2003, p. 18; 2007, p. 13)

Tooms (2003) adds that mentors are "usually wiser, more powerful and more experienced than their protégé. While coaches are indeed wise and have experience, power is not an issue in a relationship with a coach" which ultimately frees the coach up to focus exclusively on the client (p. 22).

Since the mentor's classic role is to share his/her experiences and lessons learned with the mentee, the focus is on the mentor and his/her knowledge; and there is no assurance that learning or improved performance will occur. In coaching, the focus is on the person being coached and her/his knowledge and established areas of need. The coach helps the coachee in developing an action plan, but the client is ultimately responsible for her or his own actions and/or learning. The key distinction between mentoring and coaching exists in who is the focus of attention and who is responsible for the action and/or learning.

Bloom, Castagna, and Warren (2003), recommend that new principals have a mentor for obtaining insider district information, but also an external coach, an outsider to the district, as a source of confidential support regarding the more complex personal matters that come with the job. Sharing confidences with a collegial mentor in the same district may present barriers to a coaching relationship, especially in regards to the critical component of trust. Mentors internal to the district are also wrapped up in their own job responsibilities and are often not fully available to their mentee. Tooms (2003) furthers this by stating that trust and bonding are “difficult to achieve when both participants are busy trying to slay dragons and ensure that no child is left behind. The beauty of executive coaches is that they can focus their entire attention on the person with whom they are working” (p. 22). Professional coaches are usually not connected to the district in any way and therefore owe their allegiance to no one other than the client they are coaching. To illustrate the influence of such a relationship and deepen the reader’s knowledge of leadership coaching, it is necessary to examine some of the literature within the business world, where coaching for executives has been established as a common practice for some time.

Executive Coaching in the Business World

Leadership coaching, commonly referred to as executive coaching, is widespread among corporate managers in the business world. Its popularity stems from a variety of reported benefits including improvements in organizational strength, executive retention, productivity, work quality, working relationships with staff, teamwork, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reduced conflict and complaints (Reiss, 2007).

Executive coaching remains an essential piece of many modern CEO's repertoires, and the practice is now also being used to develop leaders at *all* levels, thus reinforcing Robert Hargrove's (2000) reference to coaching as "...the new face of leadership" (p. 8).

While the practice of executive coaching continues to grow, the rigorous evaluation of its observed effect on leadership behavior change is lagging, which some attribute to the challenges that arise when attempting to measure soft skills. There is, however, widespread anecdotal, case study, and other qualitative studies describing the practice of coaching and the self-reported positive impact coaching has had on leaders in the business world (De Meuse & Dai, 2009). "Although the published literature has begun to reflect the emergence of professional coaches, rigorous empirical investigations of the outcomes associated with coaching are greatly outnumbered by practitioner articles purporting the benefits of it" (p. 1).

Although coaching outcomes were not consistent across all studies, a meta-analysis of existing empirical studies did still reveal an overall positive impact for executive coaching (De Meuse & Dai, 2009). According to Olivero, Bane, and Kopelman (1997), coaching increased productivity for 31 managers by 88 percent. Additionally, there are a number of return-on-investment (ROI) studies reporting returns ranging from 221 percent to as high as 788 percent (Meyer, 2011). MetrixGlobal, LLC also reported a Fortune 500 company placing the value of coaching at more than five times the cost (M. C. Anderson, 2001).

Moreover, Rock and Donde (2006) examined the impact of using coaches internal to the organization and found significant changes in goal achievement, motivation,

commitment to vision, work engagement, and stress levels. These findings were expanded further when Boyatzis, Smith, and Blaize (2006) acknowledged that "Coaching, along with the experience of compassion, should ameliorate the negative physiological and psychological effects of power stress...Coaching with compassion is likely to enhance a leader's sustainability" (p. 12).

As the education world seeks to find ways to retain and support a dwindling base of quality principals, the successes of executive coaching continue to provide impetus for an adapted version of executive coaching for school and district leaders. Leadership coaching in education is still considered a relatively innovative approach to the professional development of school principals, so the research base regarding its benefits, roadblocks, and efficacy for school leaders pales in comparison to the same for business leaders; but there are promising results to varieties of coaching already having taken root in the education world.

School-focused Coaching in the Education World

Although leadership coaching for principals is the focus of this study, there is a range of related coaching practices and corresponding research already existing within the education world that solicit a brief overview, for the twofold purpose of differentiating coaching varieties in education and also providing a lens for examining the emerging practice of leadership coaching for principals. Similar to the pressures faced by principals described earlier, school staffs are facing an inordinate amount of internal and external pressures to raise performance. Stakes are high and just as each student needs individualized support in order to attain success, every campus staff member needs

similar customized support to handle and respond to the urgency of school improvement. Coaching, in a diversity of arrangements, is one way schools and districts are meeting that need.

In thinking about school-focused coaching, logically the center of attention would be the classroom and current efforts there to instructionally mentor and coach the teacher. According to Skiffington and Zeus (2003), teachers are coached around the major areas of curriculum and classroom instruction; and the research of Joyce and Showers (1996) on peer coaching has revealed some noteworthy conclusions:

Results of our early studies showed that teachers who had a coaching relationship – that is, who shared aspects of teaching, planned together, and pooled their experiences – practiced new skills and strategies more frequently and applied them more appropriately than did their counterparts who worked alone to expand their repertoires. Members of peer-coaching groups exhibited greater long-term retention of new strategies and more appropriate use of new teaching models over time. (p. 13)

These well-known researchers went on later (2002) to recommend coaching as a necessary requirement for teachers implementing any new skill or strategy, leading to the reasonable inquiry: If coaching is suggested as a prerequisite for teachers, why would the same not apply for principals?

While peer coaching involves teachers working in concert with one another to build their knowledge and skills, more and more campuses are utilizing district level instructional coaches on the campus whose style is more technical in nature. The responsibility of an instructional coach is to convey the latest teaching strategies and techniques into the normal repertoires of teachers through observation, questioning, guided reflection, and feedback. A similar approach to instructional coaching is literacy

coaching, which is supported in a study of 27 schools as a promising professional development approach for improving student learning and the instructional quality of teaching (Poglinco et al., 2003), while still acknowledging that research on the effectiveness of coaching is still in its infancy. Boatright and Gallucci (2008) add:

When professional development takes teachers' experiences and work contexts seriously from its inception, when it considers teachers as more than consumers of knowledge but also engaged actively in inquiry, and when it aims for professional growth and collegueship, teachers are more likely to engage intellectually, socially, and emotionally with ideas, materials, and their work peers. (p. 4)

An emergent practice for some schools is partnering with coaches from outside the district whose focus is school improvement and/or turnaround. Unlike the leadership coaching that is the concentration of this treatise, these school improvement coaches are attentive to the needs of both the individual *and* the organization. To support this dual role, it is not uncommon for one coach to work with a team of individuals, providing “a balance of pressure and support to initiate and sustain meaningful school improvement” (Kostin & Haeger, 2006, p. 40).

Although not the concentration of this study, it helps to highlight that while there are multiple programmatic avenues for implementing coaching at the school level, there is also a wide variety of philosophical styles applied to coaching practice. Sometimes not as self-directed and/or solutions-focused as the coaching approach that is the concentration of this study and was detailed previously, there is also co-active coaching (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 2007), cognitive coaching (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Ellison & Hayes, 2006), transformational coaching (Hargrove, 2000), and lastly, blended coaching (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003). One of the

main coaching programs described below uses a blended coaching approach, so it warrants special emphasis. Blended coaching is malleable and sinuous, and permits the coach to draw from whatever coaching approach best suits the client's needs in a particular situation. As Bloom et al. explain:

Effective coaches move between instructional coaching strategies, in which the coach serves as expert consultant, collaborator, and teacher; and facilitative strategies, in which the coach adopts a meditational stance, with a primary focus upon building the coachee's capacity through metacognition and reflection; blended coaching strategies draw upon a number of coaching disciplines, including cognitive coaching and transformational coaching. (p. 22)

Blended coaching is a combination of a variety of distinct coaching disciplines.

While peer coaching, instructional coaching, literacy coaching, school improvement coaching, and a variety of philosophical coaching styles for school staff have all advanced in the educational arena and share some common concepts and strategies as leadership coaching for principals, their purposes and audiences are also distinctively different. This examination of the literature will now turn its focus to leadership coaching conducted specifically for principals by providing an overview of existing principal coaching programs and then associated academic research.

Leadership Coaching Programs for Principals

With the exception of the Coaching for Experienced Principals program in Australia (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007), examples of formal systems of support for *experienced* principals are virtually nonexistent; but mounting concerns over the decreasing pool of new quality principal candidates have produced numerous mentoring

and/or coaching programs for new and aspiring principals across the world. Barnett (2006) mentions the following:

- SAGE Mentoring Program - Australian Principals Centre (Victoria, Australia)
- Headteacher Induction Program, New Visions Program, and Leadership Pathways Program - National College for Leadership of Schools (England)
- Professional Headship Induction Program - National Headship Development Program (Wales)
- First-Time Principals Program - University of Auckland (New Zealand). (pp. 2-3)

Because the majority of the coaching research that has been done, including research for this study, relates specifically to coaching programs in California, Australia, and Texas, the following summaries of each program are offered.

Coaching for New Principals in California

When it comes to specifically coaching novice principals, most references in the literature are made to California's collaborative efforts between the New Teacher Center and the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) in supporting emerging principals through The New Administrator Program (NAP) and the associated coach training program, Coaching Leaders to Attain School Success (CLASS).

The New Teacher Center provides site-based coaching by retired administrators to induct principals in their first and second years. The New Administrator Program is a job-embedded socialization model highlighting the importance of professional relationships in acclimating new principals into the school organizational culture (New Teacher Center, 2009). According to the New Teacher Center, essential components include:

- On-site one-on-one coaching every two or three weeks, focused on immediate problems and needs, professional growth goals, and school leadership issues
- A structured and scaffolded coaching process using blended coaching strategies functioning along a continuum of facilitative and instructional approaches (NAP allows for the coach to give specific advice when appropriate, which is not a common, or even acceptable, practice with professional coaches.)
- Coaches who are free and available during the school day, and for whom coaching is their primary work
- Coaches who are “outsiders,” and bring an outside perspective and guarantee confidentiality to participants
- On-going networking and professional development for coaches
- The observation and coaching of participants around real work
- The signing of a participation agreement by the participant, the participant’s supervisor, and the coach, outlining each party’s commitments
- Participation by beginning principals in a nine-session institute covering the state principal standards, theoretical framework for the process, and individual and practical applications of activities.

Coaching for Experienced Principals in Australia

Only one example of a formal coaching program for experienced school administrators could be found in the literature. Most prominently mentioned by researchers Barnett and O’Mahony (2006), the Coaching for Experienced Principals (CEP) program in Victoria, Australia focuses on the specific needs of seasoned

principals. One of a number of strategies identified by the country's *Blueprint for Government Schools* for building leadership capacity, CEP was developed by the Australian Principals Center (APC) at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (Jackson & Sherry, 2006). Major elements of the program consist of:

- 10-15 hours of face-to-face coaching, plus email and phone conversations
- Coaching approach that is developmental and collaborative, not interventionist or instructional
- Coaches who are familiar with the context and policy priorities of the government
- Coaches who are trained to use a set of coaching tools, including appreciative inquiry and a focus on reflection to bring about leadership transformation
- Coaches who promote transparency and maintain strict confidentiality
- A “leadership development project” as a focus for action
- Principal-coach matching process using input from principals, regional officers, program organizer, and data from the principal's online 360-degree Educational Leadership Feedback Instrument (ELFI). This also, along with other school data, provides a starting point for the coaching relationship.
- Principals and coaches meet at the beginning and throughout the coaching relationship at a series of regional programs.
- Coaches participate in a mid-program refresher program to build a professional learning community and support network.
- Evaluation of the program and the coach's effectiveness.

Coaching for New and Experienced Principals in Texas

Title I schools in Texas that do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years are required to enter the School Improvement Program and meet designated requirements, such as providing school choice to students, receiving technical assistance from the state, and revising their campus improvement plan (SIRC, 2011).

Many of these schools also had the option in school years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 of joining an additional grant program that provided leadership coaching for principals through a partnership between the School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC) and Coaching for Educational Leaders (Region XIII Education Service Center, 2009). This leadership coaching model embraces the following fundamentals:

- 10-20 hours of over-the-phone coaching in 30-60 minute increments
- Coaching approach that is focused on SIRC's goal of developing increased leadership capacity of school administrators, so that principals may increase their effectiveness and achieve their goals
- Coaches who are thinking partners, not givers of advice; who help the client clarify what they want and develop multiple action plans for continued and increased success
- Coaches who are skilled in a variety of listening, questioning, and other leadership coaching strategies gained through an intensive nine-day training (plus practicum hours) that was built around the International Coaching Federation's 11 core competencies

- Coaches who are “outsiders” to the schools/districts in which their clients work, thereby better enabling coaches to maintain strict confidentiality as designated in the coaching agreement signed by both coach and client
- A coaching relationship that focuses on the whole person, personal and professional (Bolman & Deal, 2001; Mitroff & Denton, 1999)
- Clients must participate in a one-day orientation to leadership coaching called Readiness for Coaching (RFC), which focused on developing a common understanding of the leadership coaching and clarifying program requirements.
- Clients and coaches sign an agreement focusing on how confidentiality, honesty, reliability, and commitment in their relationship would be practiced.
- On-going networking and professional development for coaches through group learning calls, mentoring, and trainings
- Evaluation of the program and the coach's effectiveness. (SIRC, 2009a)

Since this study focuses specifically on the Texas/SIRC model for leadership coaching, additional details regarding the typical coaching process follow: While the principal completes an above-mentioned Readiness for Coaching orientation, a trained leadership coach is assigned to the principal. Coaches are experienced educators who have completed nine days of rigorous training on the philosophy and skills of leadership coaching, including practicum coaching hours. Some coaches are also certified through the International Coach Federation (ICF).

The first coaching sessions are dedicated to logistics of the coaching relationship (norms, contact information, call schedules, etc.), the coach and coachee/client getting to

know one another, and the client beginning to self-assess and create personal and professional goals. Critical to the success of the coaching process is building, from the beginning, a strong relationship between the coach and coachee that is founded on trust (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2008). The content and focus of subsequent coaching are primarily determined by the client's individual needs, but are facilitated by the coach's use of listening and questioning strategies, as well as other techniques and tools designed to create and clarify action plans, challenge and reframe thinking, and gently hold the coachee accountable for accomplishing their goals. Coaching over the phone is the standard for this Texas program.

Finally, it should be noted that at the beginning of this discretionary grant for Texas schools, leadership coaching was a *requirement* for campus principals, which, according to program organizers, resulted in varying levels of commitment and/or active participation (SIRC, 2009b); this information further supports those in the literature that advise against mandating coaching as professional development (Hargrove, 2000; Latham, Almost, Mann, & Moore, 2005; Rock & Donde, 2006). Those coordinating leadership coaching for SIRC saw many positives in exposing almost 200 middle and high school principals to this new approach to support principals through coaching, but based on the implementation challenges experienced, made leadership coaching a choice in the second year of the grant.

Research on Leadership Coaching for School Principals

As alluded to through the earlier descriptions of leadership coaching programs, the small number of formal coaching programs for principals translates to limited

definitive research on the use and effects of coaching school principals. Results from coaching principals are primarily found in practitioner articles and a growing number of doctoral research studies, like the one currently being read (e.g., Bradley, 2006; Burkhart, Hough, & McDonald, 2007; Contreras, 2008; C. A. Hall, 2007; Marzolf, 2006; Pecina, 2008; Rogers, 2004); all whose approaches and study participants vary greatly.

Although empirical studies on the effects of coaching leaders are rare (Hobson, 2003; O'Doherty, 2011), numerous positive outcomes for principals resulting from coaching can be found in retrospective studies, including the following:

- Clarification of goals
- Creation of well thought-out and detailed action plans for accomplishing goals
- Accomplishment of goals for school improvement
- Transformation of counterproductive habits
- Reframing of difficult issues
- Reduction in feelings of isolation
- Increased leader self-awareness
- Conversion of weaknesses into strengths
- More effective delegation skills
- Reduction of stress and a more balanced life. (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003; Bossi, 2007; Grace, 2005; Reiss, 2007; Rich & Jackson, 2005)

Focus will now turn towards slightly more rigorous studies conducted around the aforementioned Californian and Australian programs.

Coaching Research for New Principals

In contrast to the lack of formal support systems in place for experienced principals, there are many examples of coordinated efforts in place to sustain new principals, although it must be noted that most fall into the category of mentoring and/or a form of instructional coaching (Fink & Resnick, 1999; Weingartner, 2001), versus the client-centered, solutions-focused leadership coaching described in this paper. The blended coaching approach used by the New Teacher Center in California for coaching principals during their first years in the profession comes closer to the leadership coaching examined in this study.

And regarding the New Teacher Center, some of the most thorough research on coaching new principals has been conducted there around the New Administrator Program (NAP) (Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003). 31 principals were studied and 27 of them received coaching from an experienced principal. Through interviews, questionnaires, and case studies, researchers looked at how effective the blended coaching program was in regard to satisfaction, retention of principals, and addressing leadership issues faced by beginning principals. Principals who were coached found the practice helpful in all regards studied and some even reported they would have quit without the support provided. The principals not receiving coaching continued in their roles, but several wished for the mentoring the others received. Principals reported spending time working with their coaches on staff issues, time demands, district issues, student data analysis, parent and community relations, and dealing with the legacy of

previous administrators. Questions regarding satisfaction with coaching, retention of principals, and effectiveness with leadership conveyed positive results.

Based on a 10-point scale, participants reported a 9.6 satisfaction with their coaches, as compared to a 5.6 rating for district support; the researchers acknowledge, though, that these results hold limited value unless they are elaborated upon, stating “any extra attention is perceived as useful under times of stress, no matter the quality” (Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003, p. 36). Results regarding coaching’s impact on the retention of principals were inconclusive. Researchers state that although several coached principals stated coaching helped them stay the course, it was too early to make proper comparisons with the group not receiving coaching and further investigation was needed. Finally, in regards to the effectiveness of coaching with leadership issues, 50 percent of the principals specifically reported getting help with instructional leadership issues, stating reflective conversations and supportive feedback as most helpful.

A particular strength of this study is the use of a small control group. Although significant conclusions are limited, there are a few similar coaching and dissertation studies with similar findings. Pecina (2008) used interviews and case studies of six participants to strongly conclude that the coaching process helped principals in decision making; while Contreras (2008) surveyed 60 principals and 64 coaches participating in California’s New Administrator Program, who all strongly agreed that coaching resulted in improved ability to lead at school.

While Strong, et al. mention the importance of gathering more elaborative information than simply survey ratings, concerns center on the limited number of study

participants and more importantly, the representation of the sample. Of the New Teacher Center's seven case study participants, six were elementary principals, none were high school principals, and six were females. Also, because this coaching program openly acknowledges its use of an often more directive or instructional approach to coaching than the coaching focused on in this study, the applicability of its results may be limited.

Coaching Research for Experienced Principals

While it can be argued that assisting newcomers to the principal profession is important, experienced principals also have critical coaching needs, but research on experienced principals participating in leadership coaching is extremely limited in scope. There are, however, a few studies involving experienced educational leaders other than principals that bear brief highlighting, before the more thorough research performed by Barnett and O'Mahony (2006; 2007) around the Australian Coaching for Experienced Principals (CEP) program is reviewed.

Reiss (2004) mentions two leadership/executive coaching pilot programs in New York that included aspiring and veteran leaders of professional development centers. After four months of group and individual coaching sessions, "participants reported greater competence and confidence in their roles, increased comfort dealing with interpersonal communication and more courage to step out of their comfort zones and try new strategies/skills" (p. 18). A rare quantitative coaching study conducted by Ryan (2007) used questionnaires and open-ended comments of California special education administrators to conclude that coaching was an effective use of their time and important to their job effectiveness. Finally and slightly closer to the participants of this study,

Sparks (2002), then the executive director of the National Staff Development Council, launched a coaching program for 50 principals and superintendents in 2000 that revealed positive results, with participants reporting feeling more focused, purposeful, and confident as a result of the coaching.

Attention now turns to the most careful study performed around the influence of coaching on experienced principals. Barnett and O'Mahony (2006; 2007) examined the Coaching for Experienced Principals (CEP) program multiple times. Using the Educational Leadership Feedback Instrument (ELFI), a comparison was made between the individual principal's perception and feedback from others in the school on eight dimensions: strategic leadership, change management, relationships, communication skills, people management, self-management, people development, and results focus. 42 of 97 principals in the program participated in the study and used a five-point scale to rate the success of receiving coaching.

Coaching relationships were judged extremely effective during the first cycle with over 90 percent of the CEP principals feeling that their coaching experience was successful or very successful. Benefits realized by the principals included: awareness of their transformational leadership tendencies, self-confidence, and achievement of school-level priorities through the implementation of a well-focused and structured school improvement project. Later studies incorporated the first two of five levels of Guskey's (2000) model for examining the effects of professional development: participants' reactions and participants' learning. Principals in the second cycle reported gaining insights about their leadership habits and deficiencies by reflecting with their coaches and

positive influences on leaders' personal habits and self-confidence. Of particular note, observers of the principals in the study also reported positive changes in the experienced principals' leadership practices, such as increased involvement of others in important decisions, better alignment and organization of resources, and more strategic thinking around school improvement.

Summary of Chapter

With shortage of qualified candidates and the innate stress and increased demands placed on principals by the public and the heightened state and federal accountability requirements, districts can no longer ignore establishing systems of support to retain and support school principals. Although some formalized coaching programs are currently in place, they are limited in number. There is an urgent need to build the capacity of principals and sustain their leadership through a formalized system of support. Leadership coaching is gaining momentum as a promising, yet nontraditional professional development approach for meeting this need for campus principals.

A review of literature suggests mostly positive results gained through leadership coaching. While current research varies greatly in study design, sample participants, coaching models used, and/or philosophies, similar conclusions are illuminated: leadership coaching is well-received by most clients, holds potential as a job-embedded support system for school leaders, and is a viable means to retain and to support school principals.

The literature also revealed an obvious need for further research, especially with regards to coaching support provided not only for new principals, but for experienced

principals as well. Through the use of a qualitative methodology incorporating multiple case studies, this research examined and described the experience of leadership coaching and whether or not secondary school principals of Title I campuses reported any benefits.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Leadership coaching is emerging as a possible system of support and professional development for campus principals. This chapter explains the research plan used to examine and describe principals' experiences of participating in leadership coaching and any resulting benefits, and includes a re-statement of purpose, the research questions, methodology, reasons supporting the selection of a qualitative design, and the strengths and limitations of this method of study. Sampling procedures used to select the study participants are described, as well as the instrumentation, data collection procedures, and method of data analysis.

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the experience of leadership coaching and any benefits resulting from participation by middle and high school principals of Title I campuses. Scholars (Hobson, 2003; Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003) point to the need for more research in order to confirm coaching as a valid approach to retain and to support principals. Through the analysis of information obtained from the perceptions of secondary principals who have participated in leadership coaching, this research aimed to enrich and expand information regarding the practice and examine the outcomes for campus administrators.

This research focused on the topic of leadership coaching for school principals by investigating the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of middle and high school principals participating in leadership coaching?
2. What benefits result from principal participation in leadership coaching?

Research Design

Research design is guided by how and what the researcher chooses to study (McEwan & McEwan, 2003; Mertens, 2005; Trochim, 2001). The intent of this study was not to decide ahead of time what others' experiences of coaching were, but conversely, to individually consider each person's experience of coaching through self-perceptions (Van Maanen, 1988) discovered through the use of case studies (Yin, 2003).

This multiple-case qualitative study of secondary school principals of Title I campuses in Texas, used a grounded theory approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). With grounded theory, a particular educational framework has not been chosen to interpret the findings (Morse & Richards, 2002); instead, grounded theory "seeks to ensure that the theory emerging arises from the data" versus another source (Crotty, 1998, p. 78), thus making it "more likely to resemble the reality than...theory...based on experience or solely through speculation" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 12-13).

Data sources included semi-structured interviews of a varied group of principals who had all participated in over 15 hours of leadership coaching provided through Coaching for Educational Leaders at the Region XIII Education Service Center in Texas. Additional data sources included documental information referenced and/or displayed by principals, as well as observations of principals at their campuses. A constant comparative analysis of all qualitative data gained from interviews, collected documents, and observations was performed. Open, axial, and selective coding phases were used to help conceptualize findings and lead to the final analysis of the results (Mertens, 2005;

Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morse & Richards, 2002; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

This study could also have been considered phenomenological and ex post facto. It was phenomenological in nature as it attempted “to obtain information concerning the current status of a phenom[on], to describe ‘what exists’ with respect to variables or conditions in a situation” (Key, 1997, p. 19). It was ex post facto because the study attempted to ascertain, through principals’ perceptions, the experience and outcomes of leadership coaching after at least 15 hours of participation. If this group identified a change in their behavior as a result of actively engaging in leadership coaching, the findings were denoted as “ex-post facto since both the effect and alleged cause have already occurred and are studied by the researcher in retrospect” (Gay, 1981, p. 197).

Qualitative Research

The primary methodology of this study fell into the expansive category of qualitative human research. Qualitative research is explained by Trochim (2001) as “a vast and complex area of methodology... [which] has special value for investigating complex and sensitive issues” (p. 152). Qualitative research does not impose “preexisting expectations on the phenomena under study” (Mertens, 2005, p. 230). This allows studying the phenomenon without a fixed theory or model, and the experiences expressed by the study participants determine the direction of the research (Patton, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) further elucidate, “qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” and attempts “to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them” (p. 13).

Additionally, qualitative research values understanding the human experience and is “oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic” (Patton, 2002, p. 55). In this study, meaning from the principals’ experiences was presented through the researcher’s interpretations. Patton (1985) explains:

[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (p. 1)

The descriptive qualities of qualitative research “permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance” (Patton, 2002, p. 227) and made qualitative research methodology the natural choice for this study based on the depth and richness needed to understand the phenomenon of leadership coaching for principals. Qualitative data encompasses descriptive details of circumstances, relations, and actual quotes from study participants based on personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts. It consists of open-ended accounts of people’s experiences that do not necessitate verification (Patton, 1990).

Mertens (2005) describes seven major strategies utilized for qualitative research: ethnographic study, case study, phenomenological research, grounded theory, participatory research, clinical research, and focus groups. Grounded theory and case study were used for this study.

Grounded theory. Credited originally to Glasser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory states that “reality is negotiated between people, always changing and constantly evolving” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). “The value of the methodology...lies in its ability not only to generate theory but also to ground that theory in data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 8). The investigator works to allow the situational context to guide the study’s direction, via thoughtful questioning and constant comparison of discoveries and experiences, which permit the research results to reflect the study participant’s reality versus the researcher’s predetermined ideas. Grounded theory is not all-inclusive inductive research, but instead a tool for examining and making sense of unrefined data (Patton, 2002).

Case study. In addition, Patton (2002) proposes that in selecting a method of analysis for a particular study, a researcher must establish what he or she wants “to say something about at the end of the study” (p. 229). A case study framework lends itself well to “saying something about” the experience and influence of leadership coaching for principals. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) report that case study research is an in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon. This study examines in depth, from the perspective of school principals, the experience of the phenomenon of leadership coaching.

Definitions of case study differ slightly depending on the source. According to Merriam (2001), “A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is...in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research” (p. 19). Soy (1996) describes or defines case study methodology as a

research technique best suited to ascertain themes and relationships and to describe real life, contemporary, and human conditions. Consequently, case study results can relate directly to the reader's daily experiences and assist in understanding intricate, real-life situations.

Case studies regularly include accounts of the participants themselves. The case study deeply examines an individual or a small pool of individuals, making conclusions about the participant or group in a particular situation. The quest of case study researchers is not to reveal some universal, comprehensive truth, nor to search for general cause-effect relationships. Instead importance is placed on exploration and description, thus the reason case study research is often done in the early stages (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005) and when relatively little research has been done in a particular area (Schell, 1992).

Chisom (2002) also reports that case study is the best means of offering rich and complex particulars of a phenomenon. A broad understanding of the case is arrived at through a process known as thick description. In generating thick description, the researcher searches for concepts that assemble the data, relate them to other research findings, and can be used to explain the phenomenon. Themes are defined as salient, characteristic features of a case (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

A multiple case study “involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases and can be distinguished from the single case study that may have subunits or sub-cases embedded within” (Merriam, 2001, p. 40). A multiple case study allows for analyzing a phenomenon both within a particular setting/context and across different settings/contexts. For this research, a multiple-case study was chosen to study the

perspectives of six principals participating in leadership coaching, individually and collectively. By examining “a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can...strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29).

Rationale. Since the purpose of this study was to examine and describe the experience of leadership coaching and any benefits reported by principals, a qualitative approach matched the investigation. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), the spirit of the research problem ought to determine the method to be used: “Qualitative methods can be used to explore substantive areas about which little is known” (p. 11), therefore a fitting choice for this study. Qualitative research sees “experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21), allowing deeper and more revealing insights. Examining leadership coaching through a qualitative research process provided a better understanding of the principals’ experience with coaching.

Finally, this was not an investigational or trial study of *what works*, or *does it work* (McEwan & McEwan, 2003). According to Morse and Richards (2002), qualitative methods may be the only choice in some cases:

If the purpose is to understand an area where little is known or where previously offered understanding appears inadequate...you need research methods that will help you see the subject anew and will offer surprises.

If the purpose is to learn from the participants in a setting or process the way *they* experience it, the meanings they put on it, and how they interpret what they experience, you need methods that allow you to discover and do justice to their perceptions and the complexity of their interpretations.

If the purpose is to understand phenomena deeply and in detail, you need methods for discovery of central themes.... (pp. 27-28)

Strengths and limitations. All research methodologies have intrinsic strengths and limitations (Patton, 2002). Qualitative methodology is valued for its full descriptions, findings of distinctive patterns, and inclusion of varied and unanticipated perceptions. Although qualitative studies may not easily apply to other settings and situations, the in-depth imagery produced through open-ended questions and/or interviews may afford a better understanding of a phenomenon than a standardized data gathering system (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Entering into the articulated thoughts of study respondents through direct quotations gives voice to the research (Patton, 1990). In qualitative studies, patterns or lack of patterns among participant responses are sought after (Morse & Richards, 2002).

The integrity of an individual response in qualitative study can be preserved and valued in its own right, instead of being lost in the collective response, which is frequently the situation in quantitative research (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research generally allows participants more freedom to openly share their own experiences, which promotes the possibility of hearing atypical responses (Mertens, 2005), referred to by Cary (1999) as *unexpected stories*. These responses may be unconventional and instead of being handled as irregular data, may help reveal a deeper understanding of a phenomenon.

An area of limitation acknowledged in this study includes the small sample size and purposeful selection of respondents. Although six principals were interviewed, this

was approximately only a fourth of the principals participating in leadership coaching provided by the Region XIII Education Service Center at the time of the study, and predictably only a fraction of principals participating in some form of leadership coaching across the state and nation. All respondents were purposefully selected for their experience with leadership coaching and their perspective as a principal and therefore only represented their own individual views. Other unsolicited viewpoints may have divulged contrasting perspectives on the practice of leadership coaching. Results were generalized and conclusions limited, so caution should be applied to recommendations for wider populations and future papers may benefit from further research with larger numbers of research participants.

Other limitations include the lack of a comparison group, the snapshot approach of the study, and its reliance on self-perceptions. This study did not include comparison information with a group of principals who had not been coached, so the level of rigor could be questioned. A further limitation was the collection of data during a single point in time. This snapshot approach does not allow for changes in perception and attitude over time, which relates to the accuracy concern of relying on individual self-perceptions.

Finally, the researcher's knowledge, skills, and experience are an additional limitation to this study. If, according to Margaret Wheatley (1999), "Nothing exists independent of its relationships, whether looking at subatomic particles or human affairs...." (p. 163), then surely the researcher, the researched, and the interactions between them influence the qualitative research project (Morse & Richards, 2002; Patton, 2002; Trochim, 2001). The researcher's lived experiences impact the interview questions

asked, how they are asked, who is interviewed, and how the data is interpreted (Merchant & Willis, 2001). Patton (2002) states that “understanding comes from trying to put oneself in the other person’s shoes, from trying to discern how others think, act, and feel” (p. 49), so empathy and rapport are essential to the quality of the results of an interview.

Because even researcher characteristics such as being a white male with principal experience may have impacted the responses shared by those interviewed (Bettis & Adams, 2005), during data collection an attempt was made to disconnect the researcher’s ideas and interpretations as much as possible from those of the principals interviewed. This practice of putting aside one’s own partialities and opinions is called “bracketing” or “*epoche*,” Greek for staying away from or abstaining (Moustakas, 1994). Although the researcher inserts interpretation into the analysis of data, the objective of bracketing, according to Moustakas, is to “orient us toward looking before judging, and clearing a space within ourselves so that we can actually see what is before us and in us” (p. 60).

In spite of these limitations, the personal nature of qualitative research still allows for a richer interaction between researcher and researched, in addition to the possibility of increased depth and insight (Morse & Richards, 2002). Notwithstanding, it should also be noted that this study was conducted by a novice of such an endeavor.

Description of Sample

Participant Selection Process

This research studied, primarily through interviews, the experience of leadership coaching for a sample of middle and high school principals of Title I campuses. The total population of Texas principals potentially available to take part in this multiple case

study was 26 Texas principals who were participating in leadership coaching provided through a partnership between the School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC) and Coaching for Educational Leaders (Region XIII Education Service Center, 2009). Of the original pool of 26 principals, 14 were male, 12 were female; 15 worked at high schools, 8 at middle schools, and 3 were at secondary level charter schools. Through a combination of both convenience and purposeful sampling, every effort was made to select a varied sample of study participants from this beginning group to actually interview. Variety was provided through a range of principal experience and hours of coaching encountered, as well as a blend of male and female participants and middle, high, and charter school principals.

When using a convenience sampling method, participants are selected because of their immediate availability and willingness to participate (Creswell, 2003). A direct sampling was possible since the researcher had knowledge of the formal leadership coaching being provided to principals of Title I campuses in Texas struggling to meet federal performance standards and had access to the names of those currently participating. These principals were provided leadership coaching through SIRC as part of the SIP Academy grant and were given the option of participating (see Chapter 2); therefore all 26 principals had voluntarily chosen to be coached.

Interview participants were also selected purposefully from the potential participant pool described above. “Purposeful sampling is different...in that researchers do not simply study whoever is available, but use their judgment to select a sample that they believe, based on prior information, will provide the data they need” (Fraenkel &

Wallen, 2003, pp. 104-105). Patton (2002) defines purposeful sampling as selecting information rich cases strategically and purposely. Information rich cases were those this researcher believed could have revealed a great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of this inquiry and therefore yielded deeper insights and understanding into the experience of leadership coaching. Creswell (2003) also reports that purposefully selected participants will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question.

Through an examination of coaching service logs, a purposeful sampling method was used to narrow the participant pool from 26 to 18 by identifying principals who had received at least 15 hours of coaching with one coach, based on the belief that these selected principals and their experiences with leadership coaching would provide deeper insight into the practice. To determine actual interview participants, the tapered group of 18 was sent an email request to participate in the study (Appendix A). This email explained the purpose of the research and provided a copy of the consent form (Appendix B) and a link to a short five-question Participant Selection Survey (Appendix C), which was designed to gather descriptive information and assess willingness to participate in a 60-minute one-on-one interview. Of the nine principals completing the survey, eight agreed to participate in the study. Of the eight, only six continued to communicate with the researcher, despite follow-up contact efforts made. In general, all study participants had:

1. Participated in leadership coaching provided by the School Improvement Resource Center in partnership with Coaching for Educational Leaders (Region XIII Education Service Center).
2. Served as principal of a Title I campus in Texas while participating in leadership coaching.
3. Participated in at least 15 hours of coaching with the same coach sometime during the two years prior to the study.
4. Agreed to participate in the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations must be taken into account when using interviews as a primary tool for qualitative research. The American Anthropological Association (1998) and the American Sociological Association (1997) codes both affirm that the researcher “must respect the rights, lives, attitudes, and opinions of the people they are studying” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p. 249). Maintaining the confidentiality of the principals in the study was a priority.

Through email and/or phone, participants being interviewed for this research study were made aware of the purposes of the study and the data collection instruments that were to be used. The principals agreed to participate in the study only with the understanding that their responses and other identifying characteristics in any interview would remain confidential. Furthermore, a letter of consent (Appendix B) was obtained from each participant in accordance with procedures of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas. These letters specified the purpose of the study, what

participation meant, benefits to participation in the study, and issues of confidentiality. The researcher also submitted the Human Participants in Research form to the Institutional Review Board of the University of Texas and obtained permission to conduct this study of leadership coaching.

Participants' personal information was protected at all times through the use of pseudonyms and their identity was known only to the researcher. Participants were given the right, at any time during the study, to withdraw their consent and end participation. Careful thought was also given to the reporting of the findings in order to protect the identity of the schools and individuals participating in the study. In addition, audiotapes, transcripts, and all other documents for this study physically remained with the researcher and were destroyed six months following the study's conclusion.

Procedures and Data Collection

The instrument used in this study, the development of the instrument, and procedures for data collection are described below. Both Mertens (2005) and Patton (2002) contend that the researcher is the primary instrument of qualitative studies. Since this study represented the first major qualitative project undertaken by this researcher, ongoing support, input, and insights were sought from others more knowledgeable in qualitative research design, data gathering, data analysis, and interpretation. In addition to the prominent role played by the researcher, the literature on qualitative research identifies the use of multiple data sources (Mertens, 2005; Patton, 1990; Trochim, 2001). For this study, a methodological triangulation of interviews, supporting documents, and observations of the principals informed the findings. Furthermore, the interview

instrument used was developed and validated based on the two research questions and processes detailed in this section.

Interviews

Interviews are a method for discovering the individual perspectives of each respondent. “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). It was vital in this study to reveal individual viewpoints and hence, the majority of the data gathered and analyzed consisted of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are explained by Merriam (1998):

In this type of interview either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. Usually, specific information is desired from all respondents, in which case there is a highly structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. (p. 74)

Interviews necessitated at least 60 minutes of time and were conducted with six principals, seemingly a sufficient number, as interviews began to reveal similar information, what Strauss and Corbin (1998) identify as data saturation. Each chosen interviewee was contacted by email and/or phone and made aware of the study objectives and process, the fact that the interviews would be audio-taped, and to schedule a face-to-face interview and observation time. A data sheet was used in each interview to note pertinent descriptive data and findings of each individual’s coaching experience. Interviews were also recorded and transcribed after each interview in order to facilitate ongoing data analysis. Each participant was given a copy of the interview questions and

later the transcribed interview, when they were allowed the opportunity to verify, clarify, or expand upon their responses.

Interview questions were organized into an interview guide (Appendix D) “to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry were pursued with each person interviewed” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). By using the interview guide, it was hoped that the interviews would remain fairly conversational and situational, allowing time for the participant to reflect upon responses and provide detailed answers. The interview guide included probing questions supporting the study’s two main research questions and addressing select levels of two similar evaluation models:

1. The first three levels of Kirkpatrick’s (1998) evaluation model:
reaction/satisfaction, learning, and application/behavior.
2. Levels 1, 2, and 4 of Guskey’s (2000) framework for assessing professional development: participants’ reactions to content and delivery of the program, participants’ reported learning, and participants’ application/use of new knowledge and skills.

To ensure the perceptions shared in the interviews were clearly understood by the researcher, and to strengthen the credibility of the study, a member check was conducted. Participants were provided with a transcribed copy of their interview responses and were asked to verify the accuracy of the transcript. Interviewees had the opportunity to elaborate on and clarify any portion of the dialogue that they believed might have been misunderstood or incomplete. Data collected from the member checks was added to the existing data and embedded into the final analysis. All this was done in an effort to

ensure that the interview provided an accurate and in-depth understanding of each participant's personal experience with leadership coaching.

Validity. McMillan (2000) states, "Validity should be established before the data to be analyzed in the research is collected" (p. 137), and further stresses that "locally devised instruments, with little or no history of use or reviews by others, need to be evaluated with more care" (p. 136). The researcher-developed interview questions/guide was reviewed by key state leaders in coaching and adjusted appropriately to reflect their recommendations in order to establish validity of its content and process, as well as whether or not the instrument addressed the research questions. Pilot interviews with these same leaders were also used to further refine the interview questions (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Documental Data

Supportive documentation was another source of information for this study. Since documents frequently provide important insight into settings (Morse & Richards, 2002), pertinent documental evidence was requested before and during the interview process to confirm and reinforce responses. Principals produce a broad range of documents (Trochim, 2001), and any or a variation of these documents could have verified learning that took place, application of new skills, reported changes in behavior, and/or other outcomes attributed to leadership coaching, and only strengthened the credibility of the data gathered through the interviews.

Some examples of documental data referenced by principals during the course of this study included various student performance reports, coaching prep forms, action

plans, informal notes, email correspondence, and research articles. A more detailed listing of documents referred to and/or examined during interviews and/or added to ongoing data analysis was maintained by the researcher during the study and can be found in Appendix E.

Observations

A third source of information for this study was observations of principals at their campuses, which averaged between one and two hours depending on principals' availability. Watching principals at work, interacting with faculty, staff, students, parents, or others revealed additional data to verify perceptions shared by principals regarding the results of their coaching. Notes and reflections made by the researcher during and after observations became one more information source included in the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

“The challenge of qualitative analysis remains in making sense of massive amounts of data,” (Patton, 2002, p. 432), and according to Stake (1995), “there is no particular moment when data analysis begins” (p. 71). Analysis begins with giving meaning to initial impressions and continues through to final conclusions. This multiple case study included data collected through semi-structured interviews, supporting documents, and observations of principals. A constant comparative method was used to analyze each of these data sources.

The constant comparative method is defined by Merriam (2001) as comparing one segment of data with one found in the same or another data set for the purpose of identifying possible patterns and categories possibly leading to theory formulation. It is

the simultaneous and repetitively looping collection of data and analysis. This method allows the researcher to adjust questions as the themes emerge and/or key concerns are revealed.

The constant comparative method is the heart of a grounded theory, which has the goal of generating theory emerging from the study participants' point of view and thus connected to the reality the theory is developed to explain. "Grounded theory depends on methods that take the researcher into and close to the real world so that the results and findings are 'grounded' in the empirical world" (Patton, 2002, p. 125). Strauss and Corbin's (1998) outline for grounded theory includes three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open Coding

In using constant comparative method, the analysis of data commences as soon as the researcher begins to gather data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morse & Richards, 2002). Once interviews had been transcribed, documents collected, and observations made, the open coding method began. At this stage, "the researcher must take apart an observation, a sentence, or a paragraph and give each discrete incident, idea, or event a name or label that stands for or represents a phenomenon" (Mertens, 2005, p. 424). Open coding allows data to be "broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102).

This first step allows for global categories or themes to surface which may influence the focus of the study as it develops. The researcher can record thoughts, hunches, and speculations using marginal notes and memos directly associated with the

transcribed interviews and other data sources. Open coding is also an iterative process (Patton, 2002). The codes developed during this initial stage are examined and narrowed through multiple passes with the data. This process continues throughout the data collection phase in order to “cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 50).

Axial Coding

In contrast to breaking down, naming and categorizing data, axial coding is where data are “put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). It is the “process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed ‘axial’ because coding occurs around the axis of the category” (Strauss & Corbin cited in Patton, 2002, p. 490). At this stage “the complexity of the context [is brought] back into the picture” (Mertens, 2005, p. 424). Data are “reassembled through statements about the nature of relationships among the various categories and their subcategories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 102-103). This phase is a proving ground for identified relationships and therefore is considered a significant stage in grounded theory analysis (Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002) since it is where the researcher begins to look for direct association of data to the research questions.

Selective Coding

Selective coding is the last stage and what distinguishes grounded theory from merely naming and categorizing data. It is “the process of selecting the core category,

systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.

116). Mertens (2005) adds:

The model includes an explication of the conditions, context, strategies, and consequences identified in the axial coding phase. You then validate your theory by grounding it in the data; if necessary, you seek additional data to test the theory. (p. 424)

A story revealed by the researcher is told in this final phase through the creation of a central category to which all the other categories are related.

Multiple Case Studies

As mentioned above, the continual coding process begins when the first data are collected around an individual situation and again later when comparing multiple situations. Since data around the coaching experience was collected and analyzed from multiple perspectives or settings, two stages of analysis were used: case-within-the-case and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2001). Each principal's data was analyzed independently for themes and categories before beginning the cross-case analysis. In cross-case analysis the researcher looks for themes which span across individual settings, in order to deepen understanding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) define a theme as a salient, characteristic of a case. This process was used to answer the guiding questions of the study.

Technology

The computer program NVivo was used to assist the researcher in a comprehensive analysis of all data. Interview transcripts, notes from observations, and

information from referenced and/or shared documents were uploaded into the program and then open coding was performed through the use of codes created by the researcher within NVivo. Although some of the NVivo tools were utilized to help visualize connections between codes, the stages of axial and selective coding were conducted manually.

Reliability and Validity

Since this was the first major study embarked on by this researcher, and Patton (1990) points out that “the validity and reliability of qualitative data depend to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (Patton, 1990, p. 11), close attention was paid to Creswell’s (2003) eight primary strategies for determining validity of the data:

1. *Triangulate* different data sources....
 2. Use *member-checking* to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings....
 3. Use *rich, thick description* to convey the findings.
 4. Clarify the bias the researcher brings to the study.
 5. Present *negative* or *discrepant information* that runs counter to the themes.
- [The last three strategies were not used for this study:]
6. Spend *prolonged time* in the field.
 7. Use *peer debriefing* to enhance the accuracy of the account.
 8. Use an *external auditor* to review the entire project. (p. 196)

While Creswell notes that one of the strengths of qualitative research is its natural incorporation of multiple perspectives, a major drawback, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is each set of data can be interpreted in as many ways as there are researchers to interpret it. A practice called bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) was used in order to assist the researcher in setting aside as many personal biases as possible. This is a process where the researcher consciously records his/her thoughts before interviewing

in order to facilitate a certain degree of separation and awareness during the interview process.

Some scholars state that the discipline of qualitative research lacks a standard for analysis (Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002), so it was not anticipated that conclusions drawn would generalize to other settings; nevertheless, reliability was addressed by “rigorous and systematic data collection procedures” (Patton, 2002, p. 545), as well as detailed descriptions of these analysis techniques. It was the hope of the researcher that process and procedures were described clearly enough that they could be duplicated by other researchers.

To further guarantee the quality and integrity of the research, Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend asking, “Is my study being conducted carefully, thoughtfully, and correctly in terms of some reasonable set of standards?” (p. 294). Also, thought should be given to the qualitative research evaluation criteria of credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Mertens, 2005).

Credibility. Mertens (2005) states that credibility involves the length of engagement with the study participant(s), an active search for negative examples that will counter findings, use of member checks, and triangulation. Although it was a challenge to predict the exact time that was spent with each principal, data collection continued until saturation was reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). “The purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand phenomena of interest from the participant’s eyes” (Trochim, 2001, p. 162), so member checks were used throughout the study. Participating principals were provided opportunities to explain, clarify, correct, and add depth to their spoken

reflections. As a qualitative study, “the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts are important to understanding. Particularization is an important aim, coming to know the particularity of the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 39). Triangulation was accomplished by comparing multiple sources of information such as the study’s interviews, observations, and documental data.

Transferability. Even though the findings of this study cannot be indiscriminately applied to other settings, transferability was practiced through “extensive and careful description of the time, place, context, and culture” (Mertens, 2005, p. 256). This thick description aids the reader in identifying the level of compatibility of the principals participating to principals as a whole or in dissimilar situations.

Confirmability. In accordance with Mertens (2005), the qualitative correspondent of confirmability is objectivity. Qualitative researchers must “disclose their biases, predispositions, and even connections to the subject of the study” (McEwan & McEwan, 2003, p. 84). Efforts to reveal connections between the researcher and the organization providing the coaching that is the focus of this study are embedded throughout this paper. Also, as aforementioned, bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) was used in this study to assist the researcher in setting aside as many personal biases as possible. This practice has the goal of “orient[ing] us toward looking before judging, and clearing a space within ourselves so that we can actually see what is before us and in us” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60).

Summary of Chapter

The methodology for a study of principals participating in leadership coaching has been presented. While there have been some recent studies of the practice of leadership coaching in education reporting positive results, there has been much less research on the experience of coaching and results for the school principal. Since the purpose of this research was to examine and describe the experience of leadership coaching and identify any benefits resulting from participation by middle and high school principals, a qualitative methodology was selected.

This research's purpose, questions, methodology, and supporting reasons for using a qualitative design have been explained along with supporting information by acknowledged practitioners in the research (McEwan & McEwan, 2003; Mertens, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morse & Richards, 2002; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The requirements established for a convenient and purposeful selection of interview participants have also been detailed. All of these elements led to a qualitative methodology employing constant comparison and based on grounded theory and a multiple case design being chosen as the most appropriate path to complete this study of leadership coaching for principals. Rich descriptions and individual responses through interview questions were a major strength of this study and complemented observations, documental evidence, and limited descriptive demographic data. Limitations included the lack of the ability to generalize findings, the small sample size, and the absence of a comparison group of principals not participating in leadership coaching.

Before data collection began, an outline of the proposed procedures for data collection included three main data sources: semi-structured interviews, document review, and observations. All data collection and analysis was conducted by a single researcher and employed constant comparative data analysis following the structure suggested for grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This research was improved by adhering to reliability and validity through credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Leadership coaching for Title I campus principals forms the foundation for this research study, and the purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the study in four sections. The first section provides an overview of the study and its design for data collection, which is then followed by a description of the participants interviewed and summary accounts of their individual experiences framed around categories that support the research questions. The third section reviews the process utilized to analyze data from individual experiences and cross-case experiences; and finally, based on analysis of all data, a summary of the findings is presented through resulting themes.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the experience of leadership coaching and any benefits resulting from participation by secondary school principals in Texas. Through the analysis of information obtained from the perceptions of middle and high school principals who have participated in leadership coaching, this study aimed to enrich and expand information regarding the practice and examine the outcomes for campus principals.

The particular coaching studied for this research was provided through a partnership between Texas' School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC) and Coaching for Educational Leaders program (Region XIII Education Service Center, 2009). Title I schools in Texas that do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years are required to enter the School Improvement Program and meet designated requirements of the state (SIRC, 2011). Many of these schools also had the option of

joining an additional grant program that provided leadership coaching for principals.

From a pool of 26 principals participating in coaching, six became the participants in this study and were interviewed and observed in May of 2010 in an effort to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the experiences of middle and high school principals participating in leadership coaching?
2. What benefits result from principal participation in leadership coaching?

Research Design

The intent of this study was not to decide ahead of time what others' experiences of coaching were, but conversely, to individually consider each person's experience of coaching through self-perceptions (Van Maanen, 1988) discovered through a case study approach (Yin, 2003). This research was a multiple-case qualitative study of secondary school principals, used a grounded theory approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory "seeks to ensure that the theory emerging arises from the data" versus another source (Crotty, 1998, p. 78), thus making it "more likely to resemble the reality than...theory...based on experience or solely through speculation" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 12-13).

Data sources included semi-structured interviews of a varied group of principals who had all participated in over 15 hours of leadership coaching. Additional data sources included documental information referenced and/or shown by principals, as well as observations of principals at their campuses. A constant comparative analysis of all qualitative data gained from interviews, collected documents, and observations was

performed. Open, axial, and selective coding phases were used to help conceptualize findings and lead to the final analysis of the results. This study could also have been considered phenomenological as it attempted “to obtain information concerning the current status of a phenomen[on], to describe ‘what exists’ with respect to variables or conditions in a situation” (Key, 1997, p. 19).

The primary methodology of this study fell into the expansive category of qualitative human research. Qualitative research does not impose “preexisting expectations on the phenomen[on] under study” (Mertens, 2005, p. 230). This allows studying the phenomenon without a fixed theory or model, and the experiences expressed by the study participants determine the direction of the research (Patton, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) further elucidate, “qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” and attempts “to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them” (p. 13).

Additionally, qualitative research values understanding the human experience and is “oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic” (Patton, 2002, p. 55). In this study, meaning from the principals’ experiences was presented through the researcher’s interpretations. The descriptive qualities of qualitative research “permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance” (Patton, 2002, p. 227) and made qualitative research methodology the natural choice for this study based on the depth and richness needed to understand the phenomenon of leadership coaching for principals. Qualitative data encompasses descriptive details of circumstances, relations, and actual quotes from study participants

based on personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts. It consists of open-ended accounts of people's experiences that do not necessitate verification (Patton, 1990).

Data Collection

As mentioned previously, data for the research was gathered from triangulated sources: semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and documents, which translated to semi-structured individual interviews with six secondary principals, direct observations of these principals in their work settings, and an examination of documents referenced and/or presented by the principals to further support their interview responses. A full list of specific documents referenced and examined for this study can be found in Appendix E, some of which include campus data reports, coaching forms and notes, and resulting action plans.

Out of 26 total principals participating in leadership coaching, 18 met the criteria of having received at least 15 hours of coaching with the same coach and as a result, received an email request to participate in the study (Appendix A). This email explained the purpose of the study and provided a copy of the consent form (Appendix B) and a link to a short five-question Participant Selection Survey (Appendix C). Of the nine principals completing the survey, eight agreed to participate in the study. Of the eight, only six continued to communicate with the researcher, despite follow-up contact efforts made, and therefore one-on-one interviews and observations of six principals were scheduled and conducted with the Interview Guide (Appendix D) as a reference for collecting data.

All interviews and observations were conducted in May 2010 at the participants' campuses. The interviews, which all took place in the principals' offices and lasted between one and one and a half hours, were recorded and then transcribed; and the ensuing transcripts were shared with participants and verified for accuracy and clarity. Observations of principals and their interactions with faculty, staff, students, parents, and others followed the interviews and lasted between one and two hours. All data collected, including notes regarding documents and observations, were analyzed using a constant comparative approach, the details and results of which are shared after study participants and their data are described below.

Presentation of Study Participants and Their Individual Data

In this section, a description of the study participants and their individual data is provided. Characteristics of the principals are first discussed globally and then individually. Following, a summary account of the each participant's experience is shared, leading to the analysis of all collected data and resulting themes.

Study Participant Characteristics

A total of six principals, four females and two males, took part in this study. Their experience as principals ranged between two and fifteen years and at the time of being interviewed, each had participated in at least 15 hours of leadership coaching with the same coach. Five out of the six principals had actually received more than 20 hours, with three principals receiving more than 30 hours.

The research included three high school principals, two middle school principals, and one principal in a unique secondary setting of a Pre-K through 12th grade charter

school. Their campuses ranged from a small rural high school of 300 students to a large urban high school of 1286 students; and supervised staff members from 37 to 183.

As indicated in the title of this study, each principal’s school qualified as a Title I campus and had economically disadvantaged student percentages between 74 and 95. Further student demographic information discovered during the interviews and in examined school documents revealed a work setting of high Hispanic student populations for all six schools (70-91%). The following Table 4.1 summarizes the data discussed above for each principal and her/his school.

Table 4.1

Background and Work Setting for the Six Studied Principals

Principal Information				School Information				
Name*	Gender	Years of Principal Experience	Hours Coached at Time of Interview	Grades Served	Student Enrollment	Student Demographics*	Economically Disadvantaged	Total Staff
John	M	6	28.5	Middle 7-8	1169	H-70% W-15% AA-14%	77%	110
Krystal	F	6	33	High 9-12	1286	H-79% AA-13% W-6%	74%	183
Lori	F	15	22.25	High 9-12	881	H-74% AA-22% W-3%	95%	89
Martha	F	4	31	Middle 6-8	451	H-76% AA-21% W-3%	92%	46
Sally	F	3	31	Charter PreK-12	1033	H-77% W-13% AA-10%	91%	144
Ron	M	2	16	High 9-12	300	H-91% W-8%	78%	37

Notes. *All names are pseudonyms; Student group percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding and non-measured groups; H-Hispanic, W-White, AA-African American

Maintaining the confidentiality of the principals in this study was a priority. Principals agreed to participate in this research of leadership coaching with the understanding that their individual responses would be scrubbed of any easily identifying characteristics. Participants signed a letter of consent (Appendix B) which ensured their confidentiality. The privacy of the principals was further maintained through the use of pseudonyms. The pseudonyms of the six participants were John, Krystal, Lori, Martha, Sally, and Ron. To assist readers in identifying and relating to the study participants, short professional profiles for each follow and are reiterated in a summary chart in Appendix F.

John. At the time of his interview, John was in his third year as principal of a suburban middle school with a student enrollment of 1169 and a total staff of 110. His school was 70% Hispanic, 15% White, and 14% African American, with 77% of the students identified as economically disadvantaged. For the four years prior to his principalship, he served as assistant principal of the same campus; and previous to that, John spent three years as a charter school principal and two years as an associate principal at the high school in the same district where he worked when interviewed. In describing how he came to his current position, he stated, “I thought the junior high was the battle ground....I was looking for a school that had issues.”

Krystal. Krystal’s successes during four years as principal of a middle school in her current district led to her being recruited to turnaround one of their lowest-performing high schools. When interviewed, she was completing her second year as principal of an urban high school with a total staff of 183 and a student enrollment of 1286. Her school

was 79% Hispanic, 13% African American, and 6% White, with 74% of the students identified as economically disadvantaged.

Lori. After closing out her career in education as a superintendent, Lori was brought out of retirement in order to turn around the urban high school where she was in her tenth year as principal at the time of being interviewed. Her school was 74% Hispanic, 22% African American, and 3% White, with 95% of the students identified as economically disadvantaged. Lori also created and led a drop-out recovery charter school located within her campus. Her total student population was 881 with a total staff of 89. Lori held a doctorate in education and, prior to her years as a superintendent, was a school principal for five additional years.

Martha. A year and a half serving as an assistant principal preceded Martha's four years as principal of her sixth through eighth grade campus, which was located in a district with approximately 20,000 students. Her campus had an enrollment of 451 and a total staff of 46. Her students were 76% Hispanic, 21% African American, and 3% White, with 92% identified as economically disadvantaged.

Sally. When interviewed, Sally was completing her third year as principal of a Pre-K through twelfth grade charter school situated in a large metropolitan area. She described the excitement of having three-year-olds wandering the same campus as high school seniors. Her school was 77% Hispanic, 13% White, and 10% African American, with 91% of the students identified as economically disadvantaged. Student enrollment was 1033 with a total staff of 144.

Ron. Ron was concluding his first year of leading a rural high school with 300 students when he was interviewed. His students were 91% Hispanic and 8% White, with 78% identified as economically disadvantaged. Ron led a total staff of 37 and his previous administrative experience included a year as a junior high principal, a year as an assistant principal, and multiple years as a district technology director.

The above descriptive information suggests that the principals who participated in this study were characterized by a variety of backgrounds, work settings, and years of administrative experience. Guided by the open-ended questions of the interview guide (Appendix D), focus will now turn to summary accounts of data shared by each principal around leadership coaching, which are framed around categories that support the two research questions:

1. What are the experiences of middle and high school principals participating in leadership coaching?
2. What benefits result from principal participation in leadership coaching?

Individual Participant Data Gathered

Based on the data collected through participant interviews, observations, and documents, an abbreviated account of each principal's leadership coaching experience, using first-person text and guided by general categories supporting the above research questions, was developed by the researcher for each principal. In these glimpses into each interviewee's leadership coaching experience and the subsequent analysis, direct quotes and/or extended excerpts from the interviews were utilized with limited editing; however, some of the responses were amended slightly for clarity and readability.

Moustakas' (1994) explanation of horizontalization, a critical aspect of qualitative and/or phenomenological research, was taken into account during this process.

Horizontalization allows using verbatim transcription to capture the study participant's experience, and emphasizes being open to every word of the interviewee and understanding her/his language, which strengthens the ability of the researcher to know the heart of the participant's experience. In a preliminary attempt to interpret, organize, and know the heart of each principal's experience, the following summary accounts were created and categorized into the general areas of:

- Impressions – Initial coaching experience and any changes through the experience
- Process – Logistics of the coaching call and procedures
- Reflections – Advantages, disadvantages, and/or benefits/results identified
- Uses – Specific areas for which principal used coaching
- Recommendations – Feedback from experience to share with other principals.

John. Coaching is like having an academic friend that you just talk to about the academics and not worry about the repercussions or about what they think of you. This job can be isolating. My conversations with my coach could never happen with those who supervise me or with those I supervise. My supervisors would think I'm either incompetent or instead too confident. My coach is someone that I can just freely speak my mind and he'll give me some criticism or he'll give me some pointers, and I just take it as that and I hang up the phone and I'm done. I get things off my chest. I can talk to my coach about the politics. He just laughs with me. He reminds me that I can't expect the district office to know everything, every detail. That's my job to know every detail.

Impressions. Going into coaching I was very negative. I did not have an hour to waste my time talking to some guy who doesn't understand what I'm going through. Eventually it turned into an anticipation of each call. He has really helped out. He's been very positive with me and we've actually created a relationship. My coach is my sounding board and I look forward to the conversations with him. On a 10-point scale, I give my coaching experience a 10.

Process. Talking to my coach was like talking to my grandpa, who used to be an administrator. That's how familiar it was for us. It became a really good relationship, a very comfortable feeling. We completely deviated from the preliminary forms and it just became more of a very personal, professional-personal level, and that was nice to have. When I talk to him, I already have issues that I want to bring up. We don't go by any script. It's just us really questioning each other on things, talking about changes, and prioritizing what comes first: The academic scores or the climate? My secretary is so used to it. She's excited when my coach calls. They'll talk for maybe five minutes and then she puts a little sign on my door that says that I'm out for an hour.

Reflections. Before my coach, I was pretty much on my own. Since we were the only school that did not make AYP, no one else could really understand what we were going through and what we were trying to do. He was someone I could talk to and if I complained or if I had my issues with the district, those above me, I was safe with him. I could tell him all the drama that we were dealing with. My coach ran a junior high school so he knew the daily turmoil I was facing with these same aged kids. He could relate because he had the experiences and probably had gone through similar difficult times. The main thing for me was the ability to talk to somebody else and tell them what's going on. I think if you open up, seriously open up, that's when you get real benefit.

My confidence has changed because of coaching, confidence that what I'm doing and what I am trying to do is on the right track. I was making a lot of changes. I was pushing the envelope and surrounded by naysayers. Coaching conversations really helped build my confidence, as far as me taking risks for this campus, because when I had people over here saying, No, no, no, I could talk to someone who'd actually been through this. And he'd tell me, You're the principal. You go forward with that. And that's nice to have. I'm on the right track. I'm doing the right thing.

My coach is my sounding board. Him not being here on our campus, we can't really get too much into the details, which is a good thing, because I don't want him to get flustered with minute details, but the bigger ideas is what helps so much. He also asks about my family. That helps because we're in a climate here where everything is so focused on TAKS. It's like a little reminder that there's a whole other world out there. That there are more important things in life than just what our TAKS scores are. He helps in balancing things out. And that calms me down a lot. We talk things out and then either I'll go forward with a decision or I'll tweak it a little bit, after talking to him.

It's someone to talk to, that's willing to listen. That's really important, because in our positions... The superintendent told me once that this is the loneliest position to have. So to not have someone here that I can talk to, to tell them what I think... because I'm not going to go and complain or show doubts in front of the staff. My coach is a little secret weapon back there. My secretary is the only one who knows I have a coach and knows I feel better afterwards. I talk to my coach and then I open my office and I'm like, I got it all off my chest. I feel better. I feel good, and then I go and tackle my issues.

Uses. I worked with my coach on setting up the campus for splitting into two middle schools and gaining the courage to speak to my superintendent about the possibility of me leading the new middle school. I don't attribute any specific change to my coach, but it's like he was just a part of the changes we were already making. It wasn't like I'm going one way then he comes and tells me to completely switch gears. We were making changes and I'd talk to him and he'd say, I like that idea or he'd ask some questions. So he was like a constant with us. It was perfect timing because we were so depressed, frustrated. So he's been part of the change. I've used my coach to help me in dealing with my own administrators. I give him ideas of what I'm trying to do, frustrations and he helps me think through things. I also used coaching with staffing/room changes and got not one complaint with the process.

Recommendations. I recommend coaching for other principals, our high school principal in particular. I've always been her sounding board or coach, her right-hand guy. Now she's at the high school and pretty much by herself. She needs someone to talk to.

The experience has been very positive. I wish more of my APs could have done it. It started off as a check off. It was something I had to do. That was an issue, because it was something else I had to do. And then this year when it was more of an option, I was like, Yeah, I'll take it. I wasn't quite done yet with what I needed to do here. And coaching was another little piece of the puzzle. If you're introducing coaching to principals without mandating it, I hate to say it, but with some, I think you just have to do it, make it a requirement. Maybe it's not an option, but I think if it was given to me an option, I wouldn't have had the time. When I got those forms and felt like there were certain questions, it felt like it was a burden. But now that I've done it... this is a way for me to really just let it go, get the monkey off my back, and tell someone else about it, so it doesn't feel as much. I don't feel the tightness as much.

Krystal. Coaching for me is simply a source of sanity. When you're in such a high-pressure job, coaching is my pause button. I'm much better at what I do, because of it, because it is so individualized. It's like that individualized

intervention plan for a kid. It's so specific to you and to the moment that I've learned a lot, because it is very relevant. It's not a therapy session in that sense of me keeping my sanity. It gives me the tools that I need to handle a situation. You always do feel better afterwards.

Impressions. Going into coaching, I didn't want to do it. I thought it was crazy. I had just left what was considered the top middle school in the district, so I had that big chest of I'm a great principal and now they're putting me in a low-performing high school to fix it. I'm in good shape. What do I need a coach for? I was young and wiry and had all kinds of great ideas and thought, I don't need this. That was another principal who earned that label. So why do I have to get the coaching? So I wasn't very excited about it. I talked to our superintendent and our chief academic officer, who both have professional coaches. So, it opened my eyes a little bit. When I got a coach, I got two. I got one through SIRC, and I also got one through [another state required program], which was a very different coach. There was a drastic difference. So I wasn't quite sure how it was going to help me. I was real nervous about who I was going to get and how that was going to work and whether it was going to be a waste of my time or not, so it wasn't quite kicking and screaming, but I went in very reluctant.

My expectations have changed very much so. I'm not willing to let coaching go. It took me probably a couple of coaching sessions before I started to see the value in it. On a 10-point scale, I would rank the coaching experience near 10. When I was considering starting my own consulting business, I left coaching in the budget so that I could buy it on my own. That should tell you how I feel about it now compared to what I felt about it before. Coaching makes me feel great. Honestly, I get done with a coaching call and go, Woo hoo! Let's go. Like another principal in our district says, I can open my door and I'm like, ready to take on the world. Clarity might be a really good word for it. Your purpose is very clear. You're much clearer on how to handle things and what to do with them.

Process. First, my secretary needs to be in the building. If she's in a building, I never have to worry. She'll grab me if I'm distracted so I'm not late, and then once I shut that door, nobody interrupts and nobody knocks. My coach and I spend the first five minutes catching up, so she's got a real good feel of the campus, as well as a real good feel of what's going on, what's playing a factor with me at that moment. We usually end up working through that first and then we get onto whatever it was that we had planned to talk about. I started with those coaching forms, but then those just didn't work. I still have my folder over here. I did the coaching forms for a while and then I just went to note paper, because I ended up ignoring what was printed on the forms and just writing my own notes. This [showing sheet from her coaching folder] was our very first primary focus tool. I still keep that and look back at it ever so often. Sometimes it's just random

e-mails that end up in here. I'm mapping stuff out or just trying to remember what we talked about last time. Lately, I'm writing it here or if I'm plotting something out, then I'm writing it on a stickie. Occasionally, it's in my journal.

I'm not quite sure how it all works. Every so often she'll ask a question like, So what does that look like? She just leads me through an issue and by the end, I have an answer. An hour seems to go by so fast. And that surprised me, because there's no way I can shut my door for an hour. There's just no way. The school will blow up. Now, I've learned. It's forced me to really trust that when I shut my door, it's okay. Everything out there is all right. I can trust what goes on.

Reflections. When you're in a very high pressure job and have so much going on and so much to balance, I don't have time to just take off and go to a conference and learn something. That's my stack of books that I haven't had a chance to read yet. I've got too much else going on. So my coach has been a great resource. She's at the ready with so many different things which helps. That first year I worked so hard on critical conversations. I had four staff members I was really working on. I ended up four for four in counseling them out of their positions, because within a year you don't have enough documentation to do what you need to do. So then I became a very quick believer in the coaching.

It was a lot of planning ahead. My coach would come to the call and it sounded like she had books open on her desk. Now in this research it says this and in this research, it says that. Okay, so now what do you think that's going to look like? And we'd end up talking through and planning out conversations, and then I'd come back the very next call and I'd go, Okay, here's how the conversation went. And my coach would ask, what's the next step? What does the research say? What do you think it's going to look like? Knowing this person, how do we think they're going to react? So it was a lot of mapping out those conversations. It progressed very naturally. We took the summer last year to work on tools and being organized and how I was going to re-organize and have certain tools to monitor. We'd done all this implementation and now I needed to work on monitoring. We very quickly shifted focus, which I think is one of the benefits of coaching. Each call can be so drastically different.

As far as disadvantages, I assume it's real hard to match people. I feel very, very lucky that I have a good match, because I've bragged on coaching so much, and not everyone else in my building has had a good coaching experience. Although I know other principals in my district have had great experiences, my assistant principals have not. I don't know if that's because of their role and they're not as much into those critical conversations or maybe it has to do with their match.

Coaching refocuses me. Every two weeks I get refocused. You have that moment for reflective practice, just putting things in perspective, re-organizing, and resetting your goals for those next two weeks. Intermittent refocus. My first goal going in was I wanted balance to my life and coaching taught me that balance in life is not something that is achievable. It's something you move towards.

Professionally, the work around conversations has been great. I've learned I can drive a conversation and know exactly where it's going to end. I can get it to where I want it to end versus just sitting down and hoping that it ends up there. That's been a real revelation. I've learned the science around conversations. I sit back and listen now too. It's a whole new way of listening and analyzing, and it's good, because I'm very aware of conversations now.

If you asked my secretary, she'd tell you that I'm in a better mood afterwards. I've never asked, but I would venture to say my fiancé probably says that I am more balanced. I would venture to say that if my administrative team knew me before coaching, they'd have noticed me gaining conversation skills, my Jedi mind tricks.

Uses. I use coaching to map out conversations. I use sticky notes. We map it out and I end up placing my notes somewhere on this calendar so when I'm having the conversation, those little bullets are here. Now that person sitting there has no idea, but I know exactly. So I glance down at my calendar, and can know exactly where I'm going. And it's funny, because we'll map it out and then my coach will try to derail it and I map out how to bring it back.

I've worked on how to minimize the impact of my actions on the climate of the campus. I had to fire a coach midyear which never really goes well. When you have to let go of someone who's a good guy and who you like, it really impacts the climate of the campus. Probably the toughest thing I've ever done as a leader, ever; so working through both minimizing that and also keeping your personal emotions out of professional conversations.

I also have a staff member who was kind of a wolf in sheep's clothing. I used coaching to identify that and how to handle that. Through coaching I've learned how to deal with different personalities. I also have learned that the mark of a good leader is that your school can operate without you. You grow the people and the environment enough that it will carry on when you're not present. That was a two-year revelation.

Recommendations. You have to be ready to be coached. Coaching can't be mentoring and so coaching has to be tapping into people who are already decent at what they do. They are not in the beginning stages of learning. That would be a

mentoring relationship. In coaching, you really come to the table with the answers. You just don't realize you have the answers, but in the end, I'm the one who had the answer in the beginning. I just didn't realize I had it yet.

Coaching really has to be for people who are at a certain level of leadership. You don't take a brand spanking new person out of college who's just now starting and give them a coach. It goes to the executives. I think that's just the design of coaching. New principals need it, but they need it in a mentoring relationship, not a coaching relationship. And my fear is that if you call it the same thing, you devalue coaching. Because if I had known that a first-year principal was going to get a coach and I was going to get a coach back when I already thought coaching was crazy, I would have thought it was even worse...remedial.

If you're not a talker, I can't imagine how that coaching conversation would go. Also, I'm not sure everybody is ready to be coached. Our superintendent has had the same coach for ten years. It's a person that kind of goes with you versus someone who is specific to your district.

If you call mentoring coaching, you're never going to get these upper levels to want to open their eyes to do it. People say, I've been coaching trained, and I'm like, what kind? Leadership coaching is productive, so by the end of the hour I've accomplished something. With other coaching, I explained what had been going on and that was it. I went through a conversation where I already had the answer and was having to explain to my coach why I thought that was the answer, my thinking already. Where in leadership coaching I don't have the answer yet, but by the time we're done at the end of the hour, I've found the answer. And I've been able to discover what it is.

With other coaching, there never seemed to be a plan to the conversation. My other coach was also the person who was supposed to be evaluating me in the program, which doesn't help. It was questions of, what's going on right now? It wasn't, what do you want to work on? There's a big difference in that. It ended up being more like a conversation. They may have called it coaching, but I don't think it was. It was in terminology only. It was more mentoring. To me it's just very different. And you can't have somebody who works in the same district coach you. I won't trust them. A coach as an outside person and being on the phone versus a face-to-face coach is much better. You stay focused on the work more. I think with face-to-face it's easier to bird-walk onto something else.

I brought in leadership coaching and had my lead content teachers trained in it. I wanted them to start using it as teacher leaders on our campus with their peers. They all are actually loving their coaches and have asked if I can renew it for next year for them. They'd had other coaching and it wasn't going well. So what do

you think about that? So what I hear you saying is...If that's all that somebody said to me and kept paraphrasing back to me, that would drive me nuts.

Hearing about coaching from somebody who was getting coached, who went into it not excited about it, I think helped some of them be open to it. Are all of them open to it on my staff? Of course not. Some people, it just doesn't work for, but some of them are more open to it.

If you're introducing coaching to principals, I'd tell them, if you have any inkling of wanting to be a better leader, you need to try it, because it is that individualized. It's not therapy. It helps you improve, little steps at a time. When you don't have time for conferences and reading, I give one hour every two weeks to a different type of professional development. If you're in a critical area, I think it's a necessity to have. Any turnaround principal, I think, has to have it.

Lori. I have actually been the area Superintendent over this school at one time in my career. I'm here on a mission, not because I need to work, and coaching for me has been absolutely marvelous. You would think with all the experience that I have had in education and all the different jobs I've had that that wouldn't be the case, but it is. I think the value of coaching is we get caught up in the day-to-day mundane kinds of things that we do, the tasks that we do so often, and we don't take time to just be quiet and think. That's a real plus for this, because you're required to take time and you're required to talk and listen and think, and so that is a real advantage. You just have to do it. We think we don't have time, but we do.

Impressions. First year we were put into this, I was almost offended that after all my years of service in the district as a principal, and every kind of superintendent that someone was going to coach me on how to be a principal, so I thought, I don't need coaching. And it wasn't that we had a choice, which infuriated me because they put us into it without even talking to us about it. So the first time I got a call, I probably unloaded, because I had been struggling with this school and trying to get it off low performing and up to where we needed to be. But my coach didn't respond negatively to me and I absolutely began to learn so much from her. She and I developed a real relationship, where I could talk about the real problems I was having. And she would help me work through them, and as it turned out, I requested to have the coaching another year when I never thought I would.

Process. My coach and I decide on a day and time and I call her at that time and we talk. The problem is that sometimes it's really hard to schedule for an hour of uninterrupted time, but I've done it. Some days I have more to talk about than other days, but we talk whether I have a lot to talk about or not, because as we start talking, things will come out of my mouth that she'll say, Let's explore that.

My coach is very indirect in her approach. She led me to solve my own problems by exploring possibilities that I otherwise wouldn't have had time to stop and think about. The next time we'd talk, she would come back to it and would say, Tell me what's happening now. What I loved about my coach was she was not authoritative. I like people who give other people the opportunity to explore possibilities, and that is what she did with me.

It's hard for me to think of issues to deal with in advance which was the structure, so I would just talk...and my coach never insisted that I send her what issues were going to be discussed in advance. What happened in my coaching was she just let it emerge. My coach would ask, What's happening right now? Let's explore that. What kinds of things have you already done and I told her and she said, And what do you have plans to do? And that's how she approached everything and we are now great friends and I have to say a lot of what I've accomplished is because of the coaching I got.

Reflections. I never thought that coaching could be so valuable because I feel I'm different from most principals, because I've come back out of retirement and I've stayed for this long. I know that my experience is not like most, but it may be even more profound that it has made such a positive impact, because I have had all those other experiences, but I was really surprised at the value of it. I was surprised at how sometimes just an idea would emerge during our discussion. That I would come out of there with a solution when I had never even thought about what we talked about, because I'd like to think I'm pretty knowledgeable, but I found out I wasn't that swift. There are some ideas I just don't think about.

Coaching helped me to think through things, because so much I wouldn't discuss with anyone else on staff, and I really didn't want to take all this junk on, so my coach gave me that opportunity. For me, coaching has been a 10.

Some people have noticed that when I talk to my coach, I seem to be more relieved. When I come out, they say it's like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. After I come out of being coached, my front office tells me I come out singing sometimes.

The only disadvantage of coaching for me is the amount of time it takes, because most, especially high school principals, think that they don't have time to do it. And sometimes it is difficult to work it in. Some crisis comes up and then I can't do it. If I miss one, I make it up, because it's that important to me.

Uses. My coach helped in dealing with members of my administrative leadership team. I was having a horrible time with one person in particular. Through

coaching I brought this challenging individual close to my chest, and kept her there. She began to change, as I worked with her, but my coach gave me a chance to just talk about it and explore it, so that I solved my own problem. I've talked with my coach about how we were struggling to get students into after-school tutorials. She helped me consider double blocking classes instead. I hadn't thought about that, but she didn't say, Why don't you do this or why don't you do that? Her indirective approach led me to a change in practice.

I also had this kid who was being absent so much. I discussed this with my coach and she got me talking about some options we might have. Coaching gave me time to come up with a plan and gave me somebody to bounce ideas off of.

I talked to my coach about grieving. It's not that my coach was a psychologist or anything like that. It was just having a chance to talk about how I was really hurting inside. Not something I could talk to anyone on staff about.

I have been struggling with wanting to retire again. And I'm writing a book about my experiences, but I don't have time to write when I have a school like this, so I've been talking with my coach about how I can ever get out of this without disrupting our momentum. I want to go home, but I can't seem to go home. She spent a lot of time talking to me about whether I'm going to retire or not, because I can't work on my book and be here too.

I've also talked with her about our gang problems. I talk to my coach about all the crazy kinds of stuff that goes on here and that has made a difference. I just talk to her about the issues, the pros and cons. She helps me with that, so coaching has been invaluable to me.

Recommendations. I believe not everyone is coachable. We have a superintendent that I think is un-coachable and I think that we had one before that who was un-coachable. If you think that you know everything and you think that you're all that and a six-pack, I think that you can't be coached. We need to be sensitive to the fact that some people are less open and less transparent and less accepting of any sort of criticism or feedback.

I'm thinking men high school principals wouldn't like to be coached much, if they think they're CEOs and are all about management and have forgotten that it's still about kids. When I have talked to them about coaching, I can tell they think, Oh, please. That's a woman thing. They really need it. They don't know they need it or at least they don't want to admit they need it. They could do better than they're doing. I think you have to realize that if you're open to growing and learning, that it is absolutely one of the best things that could possibly happen to you as a

professional and even to me, personally. You just can't be all that and get anything from coaching.

I would recommend it to other principals, and I would say that as long as you're open and you really want to grow. If you feel very insecure about yourself, you might be less open to learning from a coach. What I've found about so many principals and administrators is that they think they have to be all-knowing and they really don't. Any principal that I could talk to, I'd say, Go for it. And be open to it and just learn from it. I'm a very, very big advocate of it, when I wasn't the first time.

I think you have to be open to coaching and it also depends on the coach, because I've had some teachers who did not have the same experience that I did with their coaches. If the coach is authoritative and has the answers, that's dangerous. When you have very bright people on the campus, they don't really need somebody to say, Do this, do that, but to help them to explore options.

I just can't say enough positives about it. I just think that people need to understand coaching better. They need to understand the purpose of it. First of all, they need their choice. I resented the hell out of somebody saying I need coaching, so I think if you give people a choice and they understand it - that you're trying to help, that you're not in any way trying to diminish that individual, then I think that it will work. I know it will work. It certainly has worked for me.

Martha. I was pleased to receive coaching and have that one-on-one, where someone can make you stand back, take a look at yourself, and see yourself with your strengths and your weaknesses and come up with plans and keep you on a timetable. With coaching, you're not so frustrated, you can understand where you're going and you see the big picture, because a lot of times when you're going...you don't see it. You just see the now situation, but having my coach keeps me focused on down the road.

Impressions. Coming into coaching, I was a little excited about it, because the district had attempted coaching training for us before, but we did not have the individual coaching component of the program. We didn't take it to the next step and that's what really makes the program come alive. When we sat through this training, it was just one more of those sit and get and come back home, but when we had the coach assigned to us and we had to do those hour calls and they were guided, on a range of topics, that made the difference.

At first I don't think I was taking it really seriously. I thought it was good, but I began to look forward to coaching because it was a person outside of the district that could see things from a clearer perspective and that's what I've come to

really appreciate about the program. Initially, we did it because we wanted the grant. We had to, so for me I thought it would be okay and I would walk through it and do our requirement, but just being able to have that ear to talk to really changed my thinking about it.

If only I could have had this as a beginning principal. It just wasn't available in our area or people hadn't tapped into. It makes a difference. Having a resource and being able to see things from people who have done it outside of where you are...because a lot of times the problems you have are systemic. Everybody's out there trying to do something, but when you go somewhere else, you can see it from their perspective.

Process. My secretary protects me during my coaching call. So when I'm having my coaching calls, I put a note on the door so anybody passing through there knows. It says, Do not disturb and they know not to. I really haven't had any problems. I thought that would be a big thing, committing that hour, being faithful to make my calls because you're responsible to do it; so I scheduled things around the coaching, scheduled it on days when I knew I wouldn't have meetings or it would be a light day, or made it a light day, so that hasn't been a problem at all. But this year I have had more problems and have had to reschedule some calls.

For the call, my coach and I usually have an agenda. We celebrate the things that have gone on first. Then I usually have three items I'm working on and my coach asks me to report back to see what I did in those areas. So I'm always thinking, Okay, I've got my coaching call coming up. What did I do? I had the exercise program going on and we did pretty well for a while and it has taken care of me. Sometimes I report that I jumped off the wagon, and then my coach will ask, what are you going to do about that? It's usually a time factor and I'm not holding fast to that. And then the next time, my coach is checking in with me. What did you do to accomplish whatever? That's been a great part about coaching for me.

It was required so what I did was make myself stick to my appointments and I thought that would be hard and that I would forget, but I put it on my calendar. When my calendar beeps at me, I get up my sign which tells everybody, Do not interrupt me unless it's a real emergency. When I tell them I'm having my coaching call, they know they're sort of sacred, so unless you really have to bother me, somebody from the district office, they don't bother me.

A lot of times when we're talking, a little light bulb comes on. Okay, that's why I'm acting this way or that's why I can't get any further along. So my coach guides me through those types of things and asks what I am going to do about it. We get to that point and we may have an agenda, but when we hit that little light

bulb moment, we stop and redirect because we've discovered what is keeping me from where I need to go. That part I like about the coaching.

Reflections. A positive of coaching is the encouragement I receive when I'm working with data or instruction and receiving some advice or resources. A negative is being very vulnerable, opening up more than you probably should because it is about everything, the personal and the professional. Of course, the coach lets you know at first, this is my job, these are my limitations. I'm not here for this, this, and this. And we talked about the vulnerability, but once you bond with your coach, you get comfortable. So when I signed back up this year, I asked for the same coach because I had built that relationship with that individual and I trusted that individual. Anything I don't want to share, I don't and it's not digging for anything, but I feel comfortable about the things we talk about because everything we talk about are things that affect what I do here on the job, whether it's personal or professional.

Having an ear that understands what you're going through is important. This is an ex-principal, so she knows the stress factors that I have. She knows the responsibilities that I face and understands what my time is like and how I need to use it. My coach understands the problems I have with faculty and community and so forth. So, when I'm talking to someone like that and something comes up, because there are times when I walk in and say, Today is just not a good day because I've been through this and the coach understands that, so then the coach may redirect what we're going to talk about based on that.

So when you have someone that understands your shoes, the coach is more prone to walk through, not advise. I share what's bothering me and the coach lets me know that I'm not being wimpy or childish about things. I'm able to express things to her that I may not necessarily express to anybody else. I get it off my chest and I think that's the one thing that's really kept me sane through a lot of things that I've had to go through this year. Just having that ear that would hear, and not necessarily tell me what I needed to do but say, Okay, you got that off your chest. Now, what are you going to do about it? Or it's okay to feel that way for now, but you're going to come to a solution or it's going to get better.

I'd put the experience at a 9.5, because it's been great. A lot of times it was inconvenient, but it was precious to me, so I always scheduled it at good times for me.

This year there were days that if I did not have someone making me see where I've been and where I was going, I would have felt this small and crawled under this desk and died. But because I had someone that kept reminding me, Think about where you've been and where you are now, remember your goals, and

realize you can't do everything. My leadership coaching conversations allow me to put things out there and get real honest answers back. Okay, you can say this, but what are you going to do about it?

Coaching helps me to see the things that I need to do. I get to the point when I need to get to the point. The leadership coach helps you to understand that you can't feel guilty about having difficult conversations. You have to do your job. You have to do it in a professional manner. Part of my leadership coaching has helped me to understand that. You have to do what you have to do.

I have received coaching through SIRC and through [another state-required program], and they are different. A lot of staff development goes on with [another state-required program]. We have face-to-face, webinars, PD360, we have group coaching sessions and a lot of that is going over, perhaps, books we've read, webinars we've seen. We usually have topics, and we discuss it. With SIRC and my individual coaching, it is me and my coach and normally I'm the one that's guiding whatever we're going through. Both deal with the professional development of you as a leader. Leadership coaching gets more personal, if you've got personal to work on.

The only disadvantage you would have with either type of coaching would be time. You have to set aside the time.

Uses. Coaching started off helping me professionally. This year we worked more personally. I've gone through a lot of things professionally here on the job, and one of the things that I've been able to get out of coaching is to take a look at what things are hindering me from going forward. One of the things we've identified is there is a lot of clutter in my life, whether they be physical things or emotional things.

Currently, emotional things are related to my job more, but we've been trying to come up with ways that I can remove clutter that keeps me from not being focused. Whether they're things I'm doing at home or things I'm doing here, just talking through those things and what I am going to do about it. Am I going to delegate that or what's going to be the priority? To have someone sit and talk you through that really makes things not so overwhelming sometimes.

Coaching is all about me. How do I take care of things? Not pointing fingers, but what do I need to do to make things work for me? That's why this clutter thing has been a big thing because I hold onto things and I realize I can't be the best I can be if I'm not delegating like I could or not setting some limits on working, because I will work forever as long as I'm not tired and taking care of myself.

So we've been working on me cutting the clutter. Okay, that doesn't have to be done today. Making a list of things that really has to be done and sticking to it, because I do my list all the time but I get off of my list, and so it's been easier this last couple of months cause I finally had to say, You know what? If I don't take care of me, nobody's going to be there to do it for me, so just having someone to reinforce that and really put the positive on all those negative things that I have going on a lot. It's been a great help.

When we first started out, we were talking about the increases I wanted in every academic content area and the overall image of the school. How can we change the culture and the image of our school? And I would just jot ideas down. She'd just be guiding me along. A lot of the things we do in staff development would come out of our conversations. The theme for our Summer Planning Academy came from talking to the coach. I had a day to try and get all this stuff together and during our little hour, by the time we got through talking, I had my theme together and figured out where I was going to get the stuff.

I have meetings with my assistant principals when we're doing things like this, but the freedom and, I guess, being relaxed in the coach's presence, helped me to be more creative. I had been going days...Okay, I've got my data I'm going to use here. I had tools and tasks, but theme, I didn't have.

We have been working on organization for two years. I've gone through folder systems. I'm really trying to go to paperless. I'm getting to the point where you don't really have to have it, and so I'm slowly letting go. All of that stuff cluttered up those important papers that I need to find and my coach and I are working on that. Just let that go or let somebody else handle it.

There's lots of stuff happening this year with me. Of course, there's my faith, but the second thing is having a coach that I can put everything on. They listen to me, they understand, and then I can walk out focused. My coach also helps me think ahead. What are your plans for this? What are you going to be doing ten years from now? My coach has help me make decisions this Spring that I normally probably wouldn't have made, because I was thinking about the here and now, and my coach keeps saying, But where are you going to be and how do plan to get there? What are my priorities?

When I sit down with the coach and talk about the personal stuff, she asks, Are you taking time for yourself? Are you getting the rest you need, are you exercising, are you taking those trips? We talked about that last year and I was saying, I love the mountains, so I actually went to the Smokey Mountains and spent a week there last summer, but that came out of my coaching call.

Sometimes when you've got a lot of things coming at you and everybody's trying to tell you how to do things, to have my coach say, Okay, just wait a minute, gave me the little vent I needed.

Right now my job is on the line, so my coach and I are talking about what I'm going to do. It's making me take a look at maybe this is the time for me to slow down. Is it time for me to move on? I haven't moved this campus the way it should be moved, so am I the right person for this? Can I accept that? So what do I do? How do I sell myself from here? Am I going to give up? Not an easy thing to deal with. These are the types of conversations my coach and I are having.

Recommendations. If I was describe coaching to someone, I would tell them if you are a person who is able to open up and share your feelings, your thoughts, able to take constructive criticism, and you need an ear outside of your regular network of people or your district, then this is a great resource to draw from. I said stuff to her that I wouldn't dare say to my boss or even my staff or faculty members, but she understands.

I would recommend coaching to other principals, if they're the type of person that could talk to people. Everybody's not that way, but I believe you need people. We can say we can do this all by ourselves, but you need somebody. I'm a single lady, so I don't have people I can go home and scream at. I can scream at my coach, and she doesn't mind. For school things I have my coach, a resource for me. For the rest of my life, I have my church ladies, or my pastor's wife, or my pastor, but to have people that can understand what you're going through is so important, especially when you can't be objective about some things sometimes.

Leadership coaching helped me to stay focused on what I needed to do. There were things that I probably would have been overwhelmed about, but with coaching I could sit and take a deep breath and say, You know what? This will be here tomorrow. Just having someone to remind you that you still need to take care of yourself. That's the great thing. It's an opportunity for me to hear myself, and sometimes I hear how wrong I am about something, too. So it's not always, you're right, but you can see where, maybe I can make this better. All this coaching makes me good, because it takes care of me, feeds me.

Sally. Coaching has given me the opportunity to really take time to reflect. In the day to day life of a principal, there's no reflection time. Sometimes you're still pushing papers until 6 or 7 o'clock at night trying to get everything done that's required of you. That's one of the things I see as far as going to the conferences – as I'm sitting in the conference, it's not necessarily what's being said to me, but the ideas that I'm coming up with from listening to the people talking, and having time to stop and just think about things and think about what we're doing on the

campus and what we could do better, and where we need to look for improvement. Having that time to reflect is just amazing and I think more than anything it stops me for an hour every couple of weeks to just think about what I'm doing and what direction I'm going in and what I need to shift. So the time for reflection is the best thing, and having someone to guide you through that reflective time makes it so productive for you.

Impressions. When I started coaching, I found out I just missed AYP when we had expected to exit. It was a low moment for us and very frustrating because we put all this effort and energy into it. I was very interested in coaching, and I thought it was a great idea, but I was a little leery because I wasn't sure how it was going to play out. I was very stressed over forgetting my coaching calls, because they talked about if you don't make the calls, they'd have to report that to the school improvement office. So that was very stressing for me because I get very busy, most principals do, and I thought if I miss these calls, my coach is going to be upset with me and school improvement's going to be upset with me, but in two years I've only missed one. As a principal, I have so many things up in the air at one time, and just the whole thing of being in school improvement, all of the reports. It's overwhelming on top of everything else you have to do, and you're thinking, I need to be in the classroom more, yet I have all this paperwork and unfortunately we're a small district so I run lots of things.

My expectations around leadership coaching have changed. I love it. It's wonderful. I'm an auditory learner anyway, and I work really well coming up with ideas as I talk through things, so for me coaching has been great because as we talk through the things we're working on, then my ideas start to flow, and as they start to flow between us, we're solving problems as we're sitting there for an hour. My ideas are going and I'm able to come up with solutions as she's guiding me. That works great for me because I work like that anyway.

Process. My assistant tries to keep me on pace. She gives me a warning ahead of time. You've got 30 minutes until your coaching call and then if I have something going on, we have kind of a system to clear people out of my office. She'll say, you have five minutes until your coaching call.

My coach uses the basic coaching form. I guess it's the same for all of them. We talk at first about any celebrations that she and I both may have had over the week. Sometimes I'm not sure I have any celebrations, but as we start talking about it, I'm like, Oh yeah, that's a celebration, and we'll talk about that. Then we talk about challenges that I may have on my plate at the moment. I found that sometimes if I'm frustrated with my district office, that talking about that challenge first and getting it out of the way, gets me ready to talk about where I'm going. So sometimes you have to deal with your frustration first. We talk about

the challenges first and get that out of the way, and then we can start talking about what it is that I'm trying to accomplish and how she can be a part of that.

There are a lot of times when I don't even know where I'm going, and despite that fact, we always accomplish great amounts of work. It's very interesting, but I'm the kind of person where as I'm talking I get where I'm going. Sometimes I have to unload three or four different things off of my mind to get down to where I need to be, and where the work really is.

I know they may have questions written up, but as your conversation is going, it goes wherever it goes, so you have to have somebody that can come up with some ideas and keep you rolling in the right direction. Once the conversation takes off and begins to roll up hill, then you have to have somebody that can make that adjustment and keep pushing. That's a key to coaching, you have to have people that can go with you and figure out how to help direct you in whatever direction you may be going. And you never know when that conversation starts where you're going to end up, because you just kind of flow until you get there.

Reflections. The disadvantages for me are time, just having the time to devote to coaching; and scheduling time where I can really concentrate on it because during the day it's so hectic. Being able to shut everybody out is so difficult. Despite the fact that you put a sign on the door that says, Do not disturb, they still knock and come in anyway. Staff are getting better at it, but it's hard to protect your time because everybody wants a piece of your time. So the time and the scheduling, for me were the big disadvantages of it, trying to maintain that schedule and trying to find times that worked for everybody and trying to protect my time.

There are so many advantages. I love having someone who was impartial because when you're talking about things with people here on the campus, they all have an opinion, and as the leader I don't think you can voice a whole lot to people. She's like half my secretary and half my mother, so I can say whatever I need to to her and I know that it's not going to go out of here. If I'm having a bad day, then I can express that to her. Her job is to protect me. So I think one of the biggest advantages is having someone who is distanced from the situation, who can give you some perspective. Coaching has been a 10 for me.

The relationship is a huge part of it. I don't know necessarily how you put who with who, match people, but when I got off the phone with my introductory conversation with my coach, my secretary said to me, Sounds like you all have known each other forever. We just found things in common outside of the whole educational realm, so we bonded really quickly. The personalities worked, and I think that made a huge difference in the productivity of the coaching.

I figured out really quickly that it was a safe relationship, and I think that makes all the difference. If you don't feel like it's a safe relationship, if you don't feel like the coach is supportive of you and going to be confidential and on your side, if you're saying things to them and they're coming back with some judgmental-type responses, you're going to quickly shut that down. I think that was a big thing – having somebody you could trust, having a coach that you felt like you had a connection with, and somebody that was going to be able to help you come up with good ideas.

There weren't any great revelations from coaching, but it propelled me further in the direction that I was going. Maybe like steering a car, I'm getting too close to this white line. I need to move a little back to the middle, but nothing dramatic. It was more like the engine pushing the boat. She was able to give me a little push to go further in the direction that I'm going, adding extra fuel to the fire. Principals are already doing what they need to be doing for the most part. They're in there, trying to affect change, trying to move in the direction we need to go, and we're already looking at the things. Sometimes I think the coaching experience allows you to look at something different, give you a little bit of a different perspective, because you may be concentrating really hard over here and then, like in our situation where you're concentrating on your LEP students, and then all of a sudden, here's your white demographic over here that bottoms out for you and you weren't really paying attention to that. So you're not looking at something you should be looking at, and they help to bring that clarity of focus. Coaching sets you back and gives you a different perspective.

I've gone through an incredible growth experience this year because of frustrating situations with those over me. I have learned how to hold my tongue and be one way at the district office and another way here on campus. I attribute some changes to coaching because I remember a conversation with my coach where she said to me, When people are berating you, belittling you, she advised thinking about where they're coming from, trying to look at their perspective. It helped me to put perspective on the situation. Coaching helped me to have more compassion. When this person turns and starts yelling at you in front of everybody, your first reaction is to tell them how it's... Your second is to shut-up and be angry, and I finally made it to my third reaction – thinking, I'm sorry that you're so unhappy that you have to be this way to other people. I came full circle, and that was something. I've learned how to handle that situation and how to be compassionate and understand that some of that reaction has nothing to do with me. I think my leadership style really hasn't changed. I'm just more focused in my leadership style, and some of that can be attributed to coaching.

People around me have noticed that I'm handling challenges and adversity better. They've really noticed that I seem to be more up to the challenge and better able

to handle when things aren't working out exactly right. I have more patience and more ability to step back and take a deep breath rather than screaming at the situation. I tell them my prayer life increased, but also things that my coach and I have been working on.

Uses. Last year we talked a lot about things that I was concerned about on the campus. This year I've spent more time just trying to deal with the things that are coming at me, and I've been less offensive and more defensive. So I've found that the productivity has gone down, but my ability to handle things, actually, has improved with the coaching this year because I'm not going forward as fast as I was last year. She's helped me to put things into perspective, someone from the outside saying, Okay, let's think about this, walk through it. Just being able to voice it to somebody that I'm struggling with what the district office is asking me to do has helped.

Last year we made huge progress with our Special Ed students, and I would talk to my coach about the issues. I know that they talk about being non-judgmental, they're not supposed to give you a whole lot, but it just so happened that the coach that I have used to work Special Ed and so she was able to give me a lot of input, ideas of things that I could look at. She didn't say, You need to do this, but she gave me some direction and contacts of people that she knew would help me pursue some things. As a result, we created a partnership with a traditional middle school in a neighboring district, and created a collaborative between their teachers and ours.

Our coaching conversations were around how my Special Ed students did not do well on TAKS M, and they're in inclusion. How could we better our inclusion? How can I get the teachers to be more productive? We had coaching conversations around how do I get the general ed teacher to accept the special ed teacher as a part of the instruction in the classroom rather than delegating them to running copies, modifying tests, and treating them like a teacher's aide? How do I make inclusion work and improve my passing rates? My passing rates went from 23 to 46% in special education by working on that. LEP concerns this year, so another part of my coaching conversations. And as a result of a big conversation on this, my LEP kids actually went from 58 to 75, so I was blown away when I got the scores in.

We've had a number of coaching conversations on how to deal with teachers that are not making the grade, and how do I talk with them and get them to understand the change that I need them to make. You teach teachers the way you teach kids: You find out what is it that's important to them and how can I utilize what's important to them to get them to make the shift that I need them to make. She and I spent a lot of time talking about that because I dismissed two teachers mid-year,

but at the end of the year I really didn't dismiss anyone, because we got them to make changes based on their data. That's a big part of the coaching is how do I get them to buy-in? Something we continually work on. How do I address teachers to make changes that I need them to make? How do I approach them? What do you use as motivation to get them to become a part of that change process? I've become much better at it and I would say that is definitely a part of my coaching experience.

Recommendations. I would definitely recommend coaching to others. I was just thinking this morning, How could we keep coaching going? I think it would be great to continue it for myself, as well as for some of our district-level people and maybe a couple of the other principals. I would like to try to keep my coach because it has been such a benefit to me. Like I said to our deputy superintendent, I think that the coaching would be extremely beneficial for some of our district office because they're in kind of a situation where they can't bounce things off of anyone.

My deputy superintendent has been feeling the stress of the superintendent, and I end up being his coach. I'm like, okay, I understand, so how did that go for you? So I'm coaching him and I'd rather he get coached somewhere else, but what I said to him was, I call and I get an hour with this person and we get to talk about whatever it is that I'm dealing with, whatever my challenges are, whatever I'm excited about. All those things that you would need to talk to someone about and yet you've got an impartial ear. You can't necessarily go home and unload everything on your husband or wife or significant other, so instead of burdening your wife with all of this, you have somebody you can talk to that's able. These are experienced educational people. They've sat where you've sat, and they understand some of the challenges you are facing. They can give you insight as well as help you work things through. Most of the time you don't need a whole lot of help, you just need somebody there to help you work it out, stop long enough to think about it and work it out yourself.

So whatever it is that you've got going on, you call and say, Hey, this is my challenge for today and I need you to help me think through it, work through it, and figure out where I'm going to go from here and what my next step is. Then when you hang up the phone, you go after your next step. It's been a great experience for me, and I think that my personality lends to it because being able to sit there and talk about it and work it out, just made a big difference for me, for my perspective if nothing else.

Ron. As a result of leadership coaching, I'm still here. When I came here, I wanted to be here for four years at least. One of the board members told me the following board meeting after I was hired, in front of all the other board members,

We're not going to screw around. If two weeks into the school year, I don't see a huge change, I'm going to recommend to this board, and I think they'll approve, firing you on the spot. The high school has been through seven administrators in seven years. So if it wasn't for the coach reminding me about when the superintendent did back me up on decisions that I've made....When I was frustrated, he was telling that stuff back, because otherwise things accumulate. The coaching was a chance to see a balanced picture, so for me personally that has made a huge difference.

The ability of my coach to see what's going on from outside has really, really helped. And it's probably the major factor for why I'm staying another year. I don't think I would've stayed otherwise. And I've had other offers. But yeah, the coaching is probably a big reason...I'd say that coaching, my assistant principal, and my wife, not necessarily in that order, are the reasons why I'm staying another year.

Impressions. When I was at the training in the summer time, they tried to explain the coaching to me, but that didn't really do a whole lot of good, because when I came on board, they had all these hours of coaching that my school hadn't done, and I was told that I had to do those hours. So how accurate their explanation was, I've got to be real honest, I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it, because I had like 20-something hours of coaching I had to do from June to August, which is just about impossible. It was horrible. Did not like that at all, because I was brand-new and the school was in a mess. We were going from stage two to stage three AYP. I had stressed-out teachers who thought this was the year they were all getting fired and board members that thought this was the year they should all be fired. I had all sorts of pressure from central office. I didn't have an assistant principal. So in the summertime to be told, you have to subtract 20-something hours out of your time to do this, going in my expectation was that this wasn't going to be as valuable as what I should've been doing.

My expectations of coaching changed after it was laid out that the expectation was that coaching was going to fit comfortably into my schedule. That helped a lot. The second thing that changed my expectations was the coach. Once I got on the phone with him, probably about my second coaching call, it wasn't a waste. The stuff that we talked about...when I would present things that were difficult and he'd say, What are you thinking about doing? And I would say stuff I was doing and he'd say, Do you think that's enough or would you like to know more possibilities? I always want to know more possibilities. And just after the first couple of coaching calls, there were things that...Well, I saw this at this school, and I saw this at this school, telling me the names of the schools and what happened at the schools and the results. So I could go through and see, Well, that would work. This wouldn't work. That's something I need to look at. So in areas

where I felt like I didn't have enough options, the coach was there to provide more options for me.

And what I really liked was that it wasn't done in a "you have to do it this way" or "if you don't do this, you're stupid." By the time I got to the second or third phone call, he's asking you about something that we had discussed before. The nice thing was we didn't get into that psychiatrist mode, where everything is a question, because at some point you want a little affirmation. That sounds like it worked out well for you. Are you happy with that? He put just enough of the affirmation in that you didn't feel like you were in front of a psychiatrist.

So after the first couple of calls, I saw some value to it, even though I was really swamped. And by the third or fourth call, I could see where this time was actually helping me. I could see where that hour was saving me more than an hour during the month. He took me through some tough things in the summertime.

Process. I usually come in my office and I tell everybody to leave me alone. I usually tell them something like, This is TEA (Texas Education Agency) stuff. You can't bother me, unless it's really, really critical. The place is burning down and the fire truck has got a flat. They usually leave me alone for it. I usually sit in my chair, because I can't stop watching out the window.

Reflections. The biggest disadvantage is the time. To take an hour or so out of the middle of your day is very, very difficult in this particular job. In this particular case, my coach was excellent, because probably a third of the time, maybe half of the time, when we'd try to connect and he couldn't get hold of me, if we started 15, 20 minutes later or something, he didn't give me a hard time about it and he could have. The logistics part of the phone call was very difficult some days.

The positive part, the biggest thing, is the ability for somebody to be smart enough to know what questions to ask, so that later on they know what support to give. He knew what to ask me so that a month or two later, he had examples of what I said to help me. That, I think, is just a huge positive.

A lot of it deals with reflection. It forces you to do a reflection every month, and it's a targeted reflection. It's not just a "sit back and reflect on what happened that day." It's a targeted reflection on things that I said were my goals, my action plan. A lot of things came out of the action plan. What were my goals? What did I want to do when I took the job? What did I want for the job? He recorded all those goals, and so the different topics and stuff throughout the years, the majority of them aligned with the goals and the rest of them dealt with different critical things that I brought up during the year. So the ability to have progress monitoring on your goals was really valuable, too.

On the negative side, sometimes once a month isn't enough. Even though finding the time for the phone calls was a killer, sometimes it would have been better to have that feedback more often.

The success of coaching depends on the coach, the ability of the coach. How nonjudgmental they can be, how many examples they can bring when you need some examples. I'm not inexperienced. By the time I went into the principal stuff, I had already heard a ton of the crises that principals went through. The coach brings a lot of these experiences. When I came here, there were areas here that, even though I had all sorts of experience, I had no experience in those areas. To be able to say to somebody outside of the school with no interest, Have you seen this? What have you done with this? We talked about everything. In fact, we even talked about cheerleading one time. To be able to get examples of how things went in other places without all that judgmental stuff in there was really valuable.

Leadership coaching and the coaching I had last year through [another state-required program] are quite a bit different. If I was to look up professional coaching, the leadership coaching I had through SIRC matches that very close. If I was to look up professional mentoring, that's more of what I had through [another state-required program]. It was more of a mentoring type of thing. And plus some of our calls we would have these conference calls which were supposedly helping us, mentoring and coaching us and everything, but they used the terms the same. When there's three or four of us on the phone and we're all having a conversation, I don't consider that a coaching call. To me, a coaching call is a one-on-one thing. But again, it's a definition thing. Sometimes they would say it was mentoring. Sometimes they would say it was coaching.

Last year's coaching with [another state-required program] was something that would be okay for some people, but I wouldn't be interested in it. The coaching that I have had this year, I think just about anybody would like this coaching, because what happened this year with leadership coaching, which I think is a good model, is he would send me a list of things that were suggestions for us to talk about, but never did he say, That's all we can talk about. So if there had just been a blowup with some parent the day before and this was something I didn't have a lot of experience with, I could say, This and this happened. Have you ever had that happen before? Although he would not go out of his way to tell stories, if I asked him, he would tell me stuff. On the other hand, if I didn't have something like that to talk about, he always had some topics that were important to anybody in a school leadership position. He always had stuff laid out to talk about and that to me was the best part about it.

To me leadership coaching, where I can control some of the stuff we talk about, or if there's been a lot of things going on and I can control almost everything we talk about, that really, really helps. Leadership coaching, where the person on the other side is nonjudgmental – and I don't mean that from the point of view where they don't say, Well, that didn't work out so well, did it? That doesn't bother me. But it's before you know the answer, you're already saying what the answer is going to be, that I don't need.

I'd rank leadership coaching with a 9. I can't give it a 10, because there were times when I had coaching calls when there was stuff going on. There is always going to be logistic problems with it. But aside from that, it was great.

There were not any real big revelations that blew me out of the water that came out of coaching. More subtle things, more gradual things. One of the problems that I had after the first few months here was so many things I tried to do failed. After all the work I put into my action plan, it became real clear to me within just a matter of weeks, a lot of problems on this campus came from central office. And by the end of the summer, I realized that central office didn't think that any of the problems on the campus came from central office. When I got to that point, and when I'm talking to my coach through the summer, it more and more looked like this beast was not going to be able to be fixed, because I didn't have the support and stuff I needed to turn the ship around. My coach would go back to the previous conversations and would say, But how did this go? Well, that went well. We got that taken care. Well, how did this go? Well, that went well. We got that taken care of. And I could see the victories that I had made. I could see that we had moved the campus forward. I could see that this massive ship was starting to turn, even though it hadn't turned much. I could see that. Without the coach, that would have been very difficult.

One of the things that the coach has done is turn frustrations back at me. He made me look at how I don't like it when people do things to me and do I do the same to other people? For some of the things, I found out that I do. I don't like it when they just shove things down my throat and then I go to my staff and say, We have to do this. We don't have a choice. That's really frustrating and re-examining that every once in a while...you have a tendency to start sliding away from that and making decisions on things that you could've waited a day or two. Coaching has helped me with that and the need to walk the walk more.

I've received feedback around my coaching from my wife and my assistant principal. There are changes we've made, things that I do, that my assistant principal sees I've changed. She'll ask, Why did you change that? I would talk to her and she would be like, That's a good idea. So there are things that when I get off the phone that over the next day or two I make adjustments to. A lot of times

it's my own ideas, that somehow he drew out of me, which you know he'd like to go put that in a bottle. And then I would say, Well, I was talking over this and this with the coach and he asked me this question. He asked me that question and I hadn't ever looked at it from that point of view before.

With my wife, too. We make a strong effort to talk, even if we have to follow each other around. We talk about work and both have strong opinions. I had talked to her in the morning. It had not been a good week up to that point. When I went off with her in the morning, I don't think she was real happy with me, either. And when I talked to her that night, she said, Well, I guess that coaching call did you a lot of good. You seem to be in a way better mood.

Uses. I spend time talking with my coach about frustrations. He helps me remember what I have accomplished. Currently, we're focusing on the goals that haven't been finished. What are the things we started out the year wanting to do and what was not able to get done. It's important to understand why it wasn't able to get done. Either I can't carry the weight for that, I have to be able to let that go, try to find some other way to do it, or just understand it's a nightmare. Some of the goals, when we look at them, it's like this is totally out of my control. It's not just the goals of the school. It's also personal goals. He'll ask me questions about my doctoral program. In one instance my coach helped me with DAEP (Disciplinary Alternative Education Program) stuff and led me towards making a crucial phone call to an attorney.

Recommendations. I would recommend leadership coaching to other secondary principals, especially to principals in a new place. Even though I brought a lot of experience with me, every new job has new experiences. You go to a new place, there are things you'll run into in that town. You can be a principal for 30 years and you come to a new town and you're going to run into things, especially if you change demographics. The problems you're going to run into are radically different in different places. And the attitudes are radically different. To be able to talk to a coach that can tell you some other experiences...my coach was very well-versed and that was a huge help. It's our junior high principal's first year as a principal. Baptism by fire. I wish he had the coaching calls.

Really, coaching gives an outside sounding board with somebody that has no direct interest in the outcome of what happens. This is somebody who doesn't have any connection at all to what decisions I'm making, doesn't harm him either way. So you can talk to somebody in a totally objective manner. That to a lot of people may not feel valuable, but after you start going through it, it's very helpful.

Leadership coaching is a place where, on a regular basis, I can discuss interests or topics of high interest to an administrator and review how they have worked, how

the decisions were made, and how they have worked over a time period. The coach takes notes, and then a month or two later, we come back to that, and we go over how it worked out. So we look at decisions that were made and what the results were and we look at decisions that are going to be made.

I think coaching is a good idea. I think when you guys talk about coaching, you'd be way better off if you had some people, who had been successful on the receiving end of coaching and successful on the giving end of coaching, to get up there to give some testimonies. I think the perception that people have about coaching is not accurate.

Data Analysis

“The challenge of qualitative analysis remains in making sense of massive amounts of data” (Patton, 2002, p. 432). This multiple case study included data collected through semi-structured interviews, supporting documents, and principal observations, which were triangulated to inform the findings and analyzed using a constant comparative method. This section gives a brief overview of the data analysis process used for this research, followed by the resulting findings of cross-case patterns and themes.

Data Analysis Process

The technique of constant comparison is described by Merriam (2001) as a process of comparing one segment of data with one found in the same or another data set for the purpose of identifying possible patterns and categories possibly leading to theory formulation. It is the simultaneous and repetitively looping collection of data and analysis. This method allows the researcher to adjust questions as themes emerge and/or significant discoveries are made. The constant comparative method is the heart of a grounded theory, which has the goal of generating theory emerging from the study participants' point of view and thus connected to the reality the theory is developed to

explain. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) outline for grounded theory includes the three stages of open, axial, and selective coding.

Open coding allows for global categories or themes to surface, which influence the study as it develops. These categories or themes emanated from data collected through interviews conducted, observations made, and documents shared or referred to, but were also supplemented by the researcher's thoughts recorded on a pad of paper before, during, and after each campus visit. Open coding is an iterative process (Patton, 2002), so codes began to be developed immediately after each campus visit, then again once interviews were transcribed, and continued to be developed, examined, and narrowed through multiple passes with the data. This process was assisted by the computer program NVivo, where all interview transcripts, notes from observations, and information regarding referenced and/or presented documents were uploaded and coded by the researcher. A list of the codes identified during this initial coding phase across four or more principals can be in found in Appendix G.

In contrast to breaking down, naming and categorizing data, axial coding is where data are "put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). Also supported by the NVivo program, but increasingly at this stage involving coded interview quotes cut and sorted by hand, data was "reassembled through statements about the nature of relationships among the various categories and their subcategories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 102-103). This phase was a proving ground for identified relationships and where the researcher

began to look for direct association of data to the research questions. Resulting core themes with their associated codes are located in Appendix H.

Selective coding is the last stage and what distinguishes grounded theory from merely naming and categorizing data. During this phase, the researcher clarified connections identified during axial coding and validated theory by grounding it in the data. It is during this final phase that the researcher revealed the story that the data told through the creation of a leadership coaching model that tied together how all categories/themes were related. This culminating work is illustrated in Appendix I and discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

The coding process began when data were collected from each principal and continued when comparing data from all principals: cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2001). Interview transcripts, documental data, and observation notes were constantly analyzed for themes and categories which led to cross-case analysis, where themes that connected across different contexts deepened understanding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process was used to answer the guiding questions of the study, and the following section explores the findings within the framework of each research question. Each major theme is defined and described through supporting information and underlying data identified through the research.

Key Findings

The data analysis process is designated by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) as the close examination of data in order to find themes and patterns that describe and explain the phenomenon being studied. Patton (2002) reports that a qualitative analyst deals

first with the challenge of convergence or figuring out what things fit together; and this is accomplished by looking for repeated regularities in the data, which reveal core meanings or themes contained in the cases.

A theme is not an inflexible categorization, but a mechanism for clustering the descriptions of the experience being examined, in a manner that helps make sense of the experience. A theme provides focus and meaning for a description of experience and is the best attempt of the researcher to organize the data in a way that adds clarity and structure to the experience. Themes are not objects one encounters at certain points in a text, but are always partly the interpretation of the researcher. Based on the data analysis process described above and framed around the two research questions of the experience and benefits of leadership coaching, the creation and clustering of codes led to the emergence of the following core themes (also found in Appendix H):

1. What are the experiences of middle and high school principals participating in leadership coaching?
 - Taking the time to pause
 - Connecting with the coach
 - Client readiness
 - Coach experience
 - Coach distance
 - Building and sustaining a healthy coaching relationship
 - Safety
 - Flexibility

- Action-orientation
 - Skillful guidance
2. What benefits result from principal participation in leadership coaching?
- Personal
 - Better self-care
 - Reduced isolation
 - Increased self-confidence
 - Heightened self-awareness
 - Professional
 - Generation of plans/ideas
 - Improved communication
 - Individualized professional development
 - Enhanced sense of efficacy
 - Organizational
 - Staffing
 - Solutions
 - Student performance
 - Extending coaching to others

The experience of leadership coaching. Aside from initial hesitation by some principals to participate in coaching and the invariable challenge of time constraints, study findings consistently suggest the experience of leadership coaching, although

varied as the principals participating, to be a positive one. As Lori, a principal brought out of retirement, stated,

It's rare that you'll find someone who comes back and stays as long as I've stayed, so it may be even more profound that coaching has made such a positive impact, because I have had so many other experiences, but I was really surprised at the value of it.

For this study, experience was considered to be the principal going through or participating in leadership coaching and the knowledge and thoughts around that involvement. As principals reflected on their experiences of leadership coaching, several broad themes emerged from the data: taking the time to pause, connecting with the coach, and building and sustaining a healthy coaching relationship.

Taking the time to pause. Although time is of short supply for principals, taking the time to, as Krystal described it, “press the pause button” and participate in leadership coaching has paradoxically become a remedy for increasing productivity. “After the first couple of calls, I saw some value in it, even though I was really swamped. And by the third or fourth call, I could see where that hour was saving me more than an hour during the month.”

The daily stress of being a principal was repeatedly referenced throughout all interviews, as well as confirmed through observations. Sally expressed having “so many things in the air at one time.” Ron, new to his rural high school, embodied it this way:

The school was a mess. We were going from stage 2 to 3 of school improvement. I had stressed out teachers who thought this was the year they're all getting fired and a board that thought this was the year all the teachers should be fired. I didn't have an assistant principal. POs hadn't been processed, so summer trainers were refusing to show up and the new software wasn't installed. Construction that was to be done in June and July was being done in August. They were putting new

doors on classrooms the Sunday before kids came back. Seven administrators in seven years.

Lori was dealing with regular gang fights when she first arrived at her school and teachers who hated her because of the changes she expected.

Stress was also evidenced by crises that even interrupted several interviews, ranging from the minor (entrepreneur student selling chips in the cafeteria) to the major (angry parent reclaiming her homeless son). What was referred to as “the loneliest job” and “a ride like no other,” was compounded by pressures of state and federal accountability systems and unrealistic demands on the principal’s time.

As explained by the principals, making time for leadership coaching was the most prominent challenge. “It’s hard to protect your time when everybody wants a piece of your time.” Lori stated, “To schedule an hour of uninterrupted time is very, very difficult in this particular job...” yet went on to say, “...but I’ve done it and am solving problems and exploring possibilities that I otherwise wouldn’t have had time to stop and think about.” When John first heard about coaching, he thought, “I do not have an hour to waste my time talking to some guy who doesn’t understand what I’m going through, doesn’t have a clue.” Two years of leadership coaching later, he stated, “I open my office door and I’m like, I got it all off my chest. I feel better and then I go and tackle my issues.”

Krystal shared, “The hour goes so fast and that surprised me, because I thought there’s no way I can shut my door for an hour. Coaching is sanity for me.” Lori summed it up in this manner:

I think the value of coaching is we get caught up in the day-to-day mundane tasks that we do, and we don't take time to just be quiet and think about things. That's a real plus for this, because you're required to take time to talk and listen and think, and you just have to do it. We think we don't have time, but we do.

And similarly, Sally articulated,

Ideas come from having time to stop and just think about what we're doing on the campus and what we could do better, where we need to improve. Having that time to reflect is just amazing and I think more than anything, it stops me for an hour every couple of weeks to just think about what I'm doing, what direction I'm going in, and what I need to shift. I have somebody to help me work it out, stop long enough to think about it and work it out for myself.

Connecting with the coach. Inherent to the purposeful selection of principals with over 15 hours of coaching with the same coach, principals relished strong relationships with their coaches, but also acknowledged their fortune in initially connecting or bonding with their coach and the critical role that plays in the beginning success of leadership coaching. As Sally put it, "We bonded really quickly and that made coaching incredibly productive." Other comments about the connection between coach and client included:

- My coach's personality is very similar to mine, so that was good.
- I loved my coach from the beginning. My secretary told me, it sounds like you have known each other forever.
- We bonded really quickly and that made coaching incredibly productive.
- I certainly think the relationship is a huge part of it. Mine sure worked.
- She and I developed a real relationship where I could talk about real problems.
- I was real nervous about who I was going to get as my coach and how that was going to work. I feel very, very lucky that I have a good match.

According to principals' experiences, the initial and essential successful connection between coach and client can be facilitated by client readiness, coach experience, and coach distance.

Client readiness. Consensus from all principals was that although leadership coaching could benefit anyone, not just anyone was ready for coaching. Principals shared that leadership coaching experiences varied in success for others participating at their campuses. Principals attributed differing success to the client's ability to open up with someone, comfort in talking, and desire to continue learning and growing. As Lori stated, "You just can't be all that and get anything from coaching." Other factors shared that may affect readiness included insecurity, over-confidence, and possibly gender, race, or campus role.

Coach experience. Given a client is ready and willing to participate in coaching, principals also highlighted the importance of the coach's experience in education as a key connector between coach and client. "Talking to somebody that could relate, who had the experiences and had actually been through this" was vital to most coach-client relationships. Martha expressed,

Coaching is an ear that understands what you're going through. This is an ex-principal, so they know the stress factors that you have. They know the responsibilities that you face. They understand what your time is like and how you need to use it. They understand the problems you have with faculty and community and so forth. To have people who can understand what you're going through is so important, especially when you can't be objective about things sometimes.

Sally indicated, "They've sat where you've sat, so they understand the challenges."

Coach distance. While physical distance and being coached by phone was mentioned as a positive by Krystal, many referred to the advantage and necessity of being coached by someone detached from the district where they worked. “What I’ve come to really appreciate about the program is the coach being a person outside of the district who can see things from a clearer perspective.” All principals appreciated the safety and impartiality of “having someone who is distanced from the situation, who can give you some perspective.” The insurance of having a coach outside the district, which is a requirement of the studied coaching program, promoted trust and allowed principals to share and work on issues with their coaches that they “wouldn’t dare say to [their] boss or even [their] staff or faculty members.”

Building and sustaining a healthy coaching relationship. As aforementioned, data gathered suggests the preliminary connection between coach and client is foundational to a positive coaching experience, but the ongoing connections forged through coaching conditions established by the coach are fundamental to building and sustaining a healthy coaching relationship. Based on the interviews, the essential conditions for building and sustaining the coaching relationship can be classified into sub-themes of safety, flexibility, action-orientation, and skillful guidance. In the words of Lori, “Success depends on the coach and the approach.”

Safety. A safe environment conducive to positive and productive leadership coaching was characterized by principals as comfortable, confidential, impartial, nondirective, and encouraging. Sally explained, “If you don’t feel like the coach is supportive of you and trustworthy...you’re going to quickly shut down.” Principals

valued the opportunity to openly and honestly talk through issues and vent frustrations without being judged, or as John put it, “freely speak your mind without worrying about the repercussions or what the coach thinks of you.”

Safety was created by having a coach who, as previously mentioned, was not employed by the district and therefore had no supervisory role or political connections, as well as who practiced a nonjudgmental approach. All aptly emphasized in these words of Ron:

Coaching gives you an outside sounding board with somebody who has no direct interest in the outcome of what happens. This person does not have any connection at all to the decisions I’m making, doesn’t harm them either way, so they can talk to you in a totally objective manner. That might not feel valuable to some, but after you start going through it, it’s very helpful.

A nondirective and encouraging approach also created a comfortable environment, where “coaching was never a you-have-to-do it-this-way,” but instead an “opportunity to explore the possibilities.”

Flexibility. A recurring condition to sustain coaching revealed in the interviews was the coach’s skill and comfortableness with being flexible and going with the flow.

Sally elaborated,

As your conversation is going, it goes wherever it goes, so you have to have somebody that can come up with ideas and keep you rolling in the right direction. Once the conversation takes off and begins to roll up hill, then you have to have somebody that can make that adjustment and keep pushing. That’s a key to coaching: you have to have people that can go with you and figure out how to help direct you in whatever direction you may be going. And you never know when that conversation starts where you’re going to end up, because you just kind of flow until you get there.

According to Krystal, an effective coach “can quickly shift focus. Things will happen before the call, and we end up working through that first and then we get back onto whatever it was that we had planned to talk about.” Martha shared, “When we hit that light bulb moment, we stop and redirect.”

Related to the technical aspects of the leadership coaching experience, the majority of principals did not value the formalized structures and paperwork of beginning coaching sessions, but instead preferred the flexibility that evolved as the relationship between the coach and coachee strengthened. This was illustrated by “At the beginning, we had the whole charts to fill out and we completely deviated from that and it just became more of a very personal, professional-personal relationship, which was nice to have” as well as “I didn’t like the structure of having to say in advance a problem I was having. It’s not the way my mind even works, but she never insisted on that. She would just let issues emerge.”

Action-orientation. To balance out the easy-going flexibility described above, participants also appreciated a focus by the coach on moving them to act through the design and use of action plans, goals, questioning strategies, and monitoring tools. Ron and Martha articulated the value of having a coach reminding them of their goals and checking on their progress. Several principals presented notecards, papers, and folders containing plans and bulleted pointers for taking action. “I was pleased to have someone who could make me come up with plans and keep me on a timetable. What are you going to do about this? Tell me next time what you did to accomplish this.” The productivity of leadership coaching sessions was described in a several ways:

- By the end of the hour I've accomplished something.
- When I hang up the phone, I go after my next step.
- Okay, you got that off your chest. What are you going to do about it?
- My coach would say, don't say you're going to do it. Do it. And I was glad she did.

Skillful guidance. Principals also articulated the coach's overall resourcefulness, ability to ask the right questions, and skillfulness in guiding them to discover answers within themselves as contributing to a sustained coaching relationship. Several principals noted that their coach had been a bank of experiential knowledge, research, and other resources. Martha said, "She's been a resource for me with whatever walk or aspect I have in my life," while Krystal stated, "My coach loves to read books, which is probably what makes her such a good coach, because she's at the ready with so many different things to help."

Although several interviewees stated there were occasions when coaches shared knowledge, resources, and advice with them, a practice not typically encouraged in leadership coaching, all principals gave accolades for their coaches' skill in both setting the tone for and asking the questions that elicited them to find answers, solutions, ideas within themselves. "In leadership coaching I don't have the answer yet, but by the time we're done at the end of the hour, I've found the answer. She leads me to discover what it is." Lori expressed, "She led me to solve my own problems by exploring possibilities that I otherwise wouldn't have had time to stop and think about." Others termed this condition

of coaching as “my perspectives, my solutions,” “a little light bulb would come on,” or “my ideas would start to flow.” Perhaps the clearest explanation was Krystal’s:

Coaching is about tapping into people who are already decent at what they do. They are not in the beginning stages of learning. That would be a mentoring relationship. In coaching, you really come to the table with the answers. You just don’t realize you have the answers. My coach has some of the latest research for me and can help guide me a little bit, but in the end, I’m the one who had the answer in the beginning. I just didn’t realize I had it yet.

Benefits from leadership coaching. Benefits were considered for this research to be advantages or improvements resulting through principals’ participation in leadership coaching, and according to the findings, benefits associated with leadership coaching far outweigh any disadvantages. On the whole, coaching appears to have had a profound influence on principals and their work as school leaders on a personal, professional, and organizational level.

Personal. Benefits considered to be personal were those related to individuals themselves – their private lives or particular personalities. On a personal level, data revealed that leadership coaching resulted in better self-care, reduced isolation, increased confidence, and heightened self-awareness for principals

Better self-care. Principals reported less stress, overall better mood, and improved balance in their lives because of coaching. The heaviness of the principal role was apparent throughout the interviews and observations, yet principals reported a certain amount of relief obtained through their coaching. Martha shared, “Just to have someone sit and talk you through things, it makes it not so overwhelming. Coaching was the one thing that kept me sane...this year.” John also contributed, “Coaching is a way for me to

really just let go, get the monkey off my back and tell someone else about it, so it doesn't feel as much. I don't feel the tightness as much."

Several principals shared that those around them even noticed the difference a coaching session made for them:

My office manager said, "I've worked with you long enough to know if you're carrying around something really heavy, you won't talk to us about it, but when you come out of there, you're singing. When you talk to your coach, it's like a weight has been lifted off your shoulders."

Spouses and secretaries were noted by all principals as having noticed their better moods, calmer demeanors, and increased patience. "When you're still pushing papers at six or seven o'clock at night, the opportunity to step back and take a deep breath is welcome."

"Coaching has taught me that balance in life is not something that is achievable. It's something you move towards." Be it a job change, pending retirement, book writing, or a possible move to private consulting, coaching appeared to help principals move towards better balance. Better balance also came through coaches helping principals, bogged down by negativity or failure, see the positives and what was being successful:

- When I was frustrated, he was telling successes back to me, because otherwise things accumulate.
- Sometimes I'm not sure of anything to celebrate over the week, but as we start talking, I'm like, oh yeah, that's a celebration.
- There were days this year that if I didn't have someone making me see where I've been and where I was going, I would have felt this small and crawled under this desk and died.

The impact of coaching was heard throughout the interviews. Sally acknowledged that because of coaching, she “handles challenges and adversity better,” while Ron revealed, “Because of coaching, I’m still here.”

Reduced isolation. Isolation for principals came in the form of physical distance from other school districts, being a school “in improvement”, or most often the inherent loneliness of the principal role. No matter the source of feelings of isolation, the relationship with and company of a coach was repeatedly referred to as a benefit. “He’s drinking his coffee. I’m drinking mine. It’s like a couple of friends sitting on a porch watching the sun rise and talking about our problems.” John likened his coach to a “grandpa with whom I can talk about test scores,” and added, “Since we were the only school not making AYP, no one else in the district could really understand what we were going through. Before coaching it was pretty much on my own.”

The ability to talk with, vent to, scream at, unload on, or confide in a coach was shared repeatedly as an advantage of participation in leadership coaching. Sadly, principals alluded to the fact that they didn’t have anyone to talk to about certain serious issues, personally and professionally:

- My coach took me through some tough things with the district during the summertime.
- Coaching helped me through my grief. It wasn’t that she was a psychologist or anything. It was just having a chance to say that I really hurt, when I couldn’t discuss it with anyone on staff.

- I'm a single lady, so I don't have people I can go home to and scream at. I can scream at my coach, and she doesn't mind. (I don't really scream at her.)
- It helped to be able to voice to somebody that I'm struggling with what [central office] is asking me to do, because I don't feel it's necessarily in the best interest of the teachers and students.

Increased self-confidence. Given the stress and gravity of the principal job, it should be no surprise that even the most self-assured principal has their confidence shaken at times, but interviewees conveyed that they regained their strength through their coach or "secret weapon," as John referred to his coach. "Honestly, you get done with a coaching call and go, Woo-hoo. I open my door and I'm like, ready to take on the world. Let's go." Ron reported that after feeling frustrated about events, his coach helped him see the victories that had been made, which helped him see that they "had moved the campus forward and that this massive ship was starting to turn." Krystal noted, "You always feel better afterwards. You feel like you can handle a situation because you have the tools you need."

Through observations of John's data "war-room", robotics class for special education students, and interactions with teachers around test results, it became more evident that he spoke the truth when he said, "Coaching gave me confidence that what I was doing and trying to do was on the right track, because I was making a lot of changes. I was going against the grain, pushing the envelope, and surrounded by naysayers." According to studied principals, coaching conversations led to formerly-delayed crucial conversations with certain teachers taking place, proactive moves in regards to career

advancement possibilities, and honest conversations with upper-management. Self-confidence came as a result of a coach who affirmed and encouraged the principal, while also pushing him/her to action through the use of goal-setting and accountability.

Heightened self-awareness. Most principals talked about behaviors that indicated improved self-awareness. Some of these included self-reflection, realization of their own limitations, trusting others more, improved perspective, and self-responsibility. Martha called coaching “an opportunity for me to hear myself.” Several principals spoke to identifying their strengths and weaknesses and realizing areas where they needed to step up and other areas where they needed to trust others to step up, which entailed being more understanding of others. “I’ve learned that some folks handle things differently than I would and to be okay with that.”

Tied into the earlier self-care benefit, some participants have learned to step back, reflect more, and be more thoughtful of the bigger picture.

My coach has helped me take responsibility for where I stand, to understand where I’m going and see the big picture, because a lot of times when you’re going, you don’t see it. You just see the now situation, but my coach always keeps me focused on down the road.

John realized, “I can’t expect the folks above me to know everything, every detail. That’s my job.” Ron stated that his coach “turn[s] things back on me. He made me look at whether I do to other people what I don’t like people doing to me.” And finally, Sally concluded, “The coaching experience gives you a little bit of a different perspective, because you may be concentrating really hard over here, while missing an issue somewhere else.”

Professional. Professional benefits were considered those connected to the specific role, job responsibilities, and daily work of the principal. Principals revealed professional benefits that clustered into the following areas: generation of plans/ideas, improved communication, individualized professional development, and an overall enhanced sense of efficacy.

Generation of plans/ideas. Every principal talked about the plans and ideas that came out of their coaching sessions. There were two aspects to note about this benefit of productivity: the actual plans and ideas generated and the fact that the principal was the source of generation. Participants not only highlighted the creation of plans, but also the accountability around those plans. Martha voiced, “I was pleased to have someone who guided me to come up with plans and kept me on a timetable.” Ron added, “The coach takes notes, and then a month or two later, we come back to that, and we go over how it worked out.” Lori expressed appreciation for having a chance to “think long enough to come up with a plan,” and was “surprised at how many times an idea would just emerge during our discussion.”

Principals frequently referenced that coaches led them to come up with ideas and solutions. Although there were times when a coach shared an idea or helped generate possibilities, principals described the generation of plans and ideas in first person:

- A little light bulb came on in *my* head.
- By the time we got through, *I* had come up with the theme for our training.
- My coach guides me a bit, but in the end, *I'm* the one who had the answer in the beginning.

- By the end of the hour, *I've* found the solution and *I've* been able to discover what it is.
- *I* come up with ideas as we talk through things, so as we talk, *my* ideas start to flow.
- Coaching gave me the opportunity to talk about and explore it, so that *I* solved *my* own problems.

Improved communication. Principals shared a variety of interpersonal communication examples where coaching played an integral part. Scenarios ranged from conversations with challenging teachers to fellow administrative team members to central office staff. Because of coaching, several principals commented they were better communicators and listeners.

I sit back and hear people better now. I know exactly where our superintendent is headed and we're walking right into it. It's a whole new way of listening and analyzing. I'm very cautious now in how I phrase things both professionally and personally. I'm very aware of conversations now. Mapping out conversations just didn't make sense and now it does.

Principals regularly used their coach to pre-plan for crucial conversations with teachers. As a result, they successfully counseled teachers into resignations, guided campus-wide classroom changes, and guided teachers to understanding and using data-driven instruction. Krystal shared, "I've learned I can drive a conversation and get it exactly where I want it to end versus just sitting down and hoping that it ends up there." She also said her administrative team jokingly refers to her conversation ability as her "Jedi-mind tricks." Sally specifically mentioned working on teacher buy-in necessary for change, including understanding what motivates someone to change. Finally, Martha described

how her coaching conversations helped her transform her staff's complaints into action steps.

Individualized professional development. Principals continually referred to having access to customized job-embedded professional development/assistance from an experienced educator. In Krystal's words:

If you have any inkling of wanting to be a better leader, you need to try coaching, because it is that individualized. It's how to help you improve, little steps at a time. I don't have time for conferences and reading, but I give one hour every two weeks to a different type of professional development. I'm continually growing. If you're in a critical area, I think it's a necessity to have. Any turnaround principal, I think has to have it.

Principals were grateful to be given the possibility to address a wide range of issues in response to their individual needs at the time of being coached.

"It's like that individualized intervention plan for a kid. Coaching is so specific to you and to that moment that I've learned a lot. It is very relevant." The ability of the coach to "quickly shift focus" and allow the principal to control content was mentioned numerous times through all interviews. "She would always say, 'What's happening right now? Let's explore that.'" Coaching consistently "depended on the situation" in which a principal was. Tailored to "whatever you've got going on," participants valued the opportunity to occasionally tap into "examples of how things went in other places", research and book information, and "advice and resources" from someone who "understands what I'm going through" or in other words, a coach with experience specifically in education and/or as a principal, who was able to directly relate/quickly connect to the issues shared.

Enhanced sense of efficacy. As mentioned earlier, participants reported increased self-confidence, which is correlated to the belief that they are more effective in their roles as principals. As Krystal put it, “I’m much better at what I do because of coaching.” Principals stated they were more efficient in their work because they were more clearly focused, action-oriented, and reflective.

While one coaching principal called it focus, the other would call it prioritization, but “Clarity might be a really good word for it. Your purpose is very clear after coaching. You’re much clearer on how to handle things and what to do with them.” Coaching was about putting things in perspective, figuring out what’s a priority, and deciding what to delegate out. As Martha puts it, “My coach listens to me, understands, and then helps me walk out of it focused.”

Principals talked about getting clear through coaching on what they needed to do, but also talked about moving to action. The word “action” or words closely connected to the concept of taking action were used heavily throughout all interviews. According to principals, action-oriented questions utilized by their coaches included:

- What are you going to do about it?
- What are your plans for this?
- What are your next steps?
- Where do you need to go from here?
- What’s that going to look like?

Developing goals, plans, or action steps in one coaching session were followed up on in the next, and principals appreciated being held accountable for action. “So I was always

thinking, okay, I've got my coaching call coming up. What have I done?" Coaching moved some principals out of being frozen in a situation or from an occasional "standstill". Martha summed it up this way, "I made decisions this spring that I normally wouldn't have made, because I was thinking about the here and now. And my coach kept saying, but how do you plan to get there if these are your goals?"

After principals used coaching to gain clarity and move to action, coaching also guided them to exercise looking back and learning from what they had done. "We would come back to things and go over how it worked out. We would look at decisions that were made and what the results were and then based on that, look at decisions that were going to be made." In the midst of high-stress and time-intensive responsibilities, principals reported taking the time to do targeted reflection on how their actions worked out, how aligned their actions were to their goals, and resetting goals based on the reflection. Sally summarized it this way:

Ideas come from having time to stop and just think about things and think about what we're doing on the campus and what we could do better, where we need to look for improvement. Having that time to reflect is just amazing and I think more than anything, it stops me for an hour every couple of weeks to just think about what I'm doing and what direction I'm going in and what I need to shift. So the time for reflection is the best thing, and having someone to guide you through that reflective time makes it so productive for you.

Organizational. Benefits to the organization were considered those impacting the school or district as a whole, and by far, the most challenging benefits to identify through principal responses. Most of these findings arose from principals' descriptions of specific topics or issues for which they used coaching and are categorized into staffing, solutions, student performance, and extending coaching to others.

Staffing. A wide variety of organizational benefits around school staffing are covered within this category. Although principals most frequently shared situations related to supervision and evaluation, and the surrounding conversations, they also highlighted how coaching impacted staffing logistics and staff culture.

Several principals described using coaching to help them with challenging staff situations. Krystal, recruited to turn around her high school, became “a very quick believer in the coaching” when she used her coach on a regular basis to plan or “map out” critical conversations with under-performing teachers. “We were four for four my first year in getting resignations from each.” Coaching led her through letting the head football coach go mid-year, someone whom she personally liked. “Toughest thing I’ve ever done as a leader.” Martha shared,

Coaching helps me get to the point when I need to get to the point and be decisive with staff members. My leadership coach has helped me to understand that I can’t feel guilty about doing my job. It may be hard to tell nice sweet people that they just don’t need to be around kids anymore, but I have to say it and I have to do it.

Sally commented that she and her coach “have had a number of conversations on how to deal with teachers that are not making the grade,” while Lori described how she credited her coach for helping her smooth out her relationship with her instructional dean.

Studied principals also benefitted from coaching in regards to staffing logistics. John used coaching to assist him in “moving 20 teachers out of their rooms, and not one complaint.” Martha recruited her coach’s help in facilitating the effective use of PLC (Professional Learning Communities) time, and John credited coaching for helping him prepare for the opening of another middle school by designating dual department heads.

One last aspect of how coaching benefitted staffing at principals' schools was pertaining to staff culture. Martha talked about using coaching to generate ideas for improving school climate and culture, while Krystal used coaching to minimize the impact of a major event (i.e., letting the head football coach go mid-year). Coaching played a pivotal role in helping Krystal understand that "the mark of a good leader is that your school can operate without you, that you've grown the people and the environment enough that it will carry on when you're not present." Lastly, Sally benefitted from coaching conversations by getting "general ed teachers to accept special ed teachers as part of the classroom instruction, rather than delegating them to running copies, modifying tests, and treating them like a teacher's aide."

Solutions. Principals shared a variety of instances where coaching was utilized to solve campus-specific problems. This section attempts to capture the diversity of examples by highlighting a few cases where coaching has played a beneficial role in providing technical support to principals through the resolution of particular school dilemmas.

- For Lori's high school fraught with trying to get students to show up for after-school tutorials, coaching led to the solution of double-block scheduling.
- For Ron's high school struggling with some issues and questions regarding their alternative education program, the coach asked him if he was allowed to contact the school attorney. He was, he did, and issues were resolved.
- Lori used coaching to discover an alternative scheduling solution for a bright student with excessive absences due to a sad family situation.

- Sally's charter school, through her coaching sessions, was guided to a new level of implementing inclusion for special education students.
- A coaching session with John played a part in the hiring of an assistant principal assigned specifically to address performance issues for their special education and limited English student populations.

The coaching process was described by Sally this way: "As my ideas start to flow between the coach and me, we're solving problems as we're sitting there for an hour, because my ideas are going and I'm being able to come up with solutions as she's guiding me."

Student performance. Perhaps the most persistent question for any program implemented on a campus is, what impact did it have on student performance? Although this study was not designed to address this question, data gathered from principals did reveal some benefits connected, although indirectly, to student performance. Three principals pulled out actual reports of test results during the interviews and spoke to the school performance goals they had worked on at various times with their coaches. Lori stated, "TAKS kills us. Everyone is so stressed out about it, and my coach would get me talking about it and what kinds of interventions we were doing with our kids now to prepare." John added, "I talked with my coach about AYP scores, because I can't talk about them with administrators above me." A data analysis tool and "tools to monitor implementation" were also both mentioned as subjects of recent coaching sessions. Possibly the most direct correlations made between the benefits of coaching and student performance were these:

We had coaching conversations around my special education students who did not do well on TAKS-M and other issues; and we ended up making huge progress with SPED students: 23 to 46% passing rates. This year we had coaching conversations around my LEP students in math. They had just barely met standard and the standard was going up by nine points. Our scores actually went from 58 to 75 and I was blown away.

Although direct benefits of coaching for student performance were mostly unspoken, they were woven into each principal's coaching story. One can only begin to imagine the underlying impact coaching had on student performance when principals talked about less stress, better balance, greater confidence, improved communication, generation of plans and ideas, enhanced efficacy, etcetera. Krystal addressed the influence of her coaching on student performance this way: "Soon as our scores came in, I texted my coach, because I said, you own these too."

Extending coaching to others. More palpable organizational benefits resulting from the coaching experience were principals using the coaching strategies they had experienced when working with others on their staff, as well as offering and providing professional coaches for other leaders on their campus. Krystal shared, "I brought it in and had my lead content teachers trained in it because...I wanted them to start using leadership coaching as teacher leaders on our campus with their peers. We also trained my entire staff on how to be a coachee." She went on to explain her hope that coaching would "fester a bit in the teaching," although she acknowledged that it would take on a slightly different role there. "But when teachers come to [lead teachers], it's about understanding where they're coming from so you know how to react back."

Additionally, several principals expressed that they were “coaching” fellow administrators. Krystal was trying to replicate her own experience with her assistant principals, trying “to get them to discover the answer within.” Sally said she ended up being a coach for her deputy superintendent, because he didn’t have “anyone to bounce things off of.” She also provided a coach for her math director. Principals also shared that they used coaching techniques multiple times in conversations with teachers.

Additional Findings

All principals interviewed felt coaching was beneficial to them, anticipated the time with their coach, and recommended it for other secondary principals and district personnel; but several were resolute in distinguishing leadership coaching from mentoring, therapy, and another version of coaching that consistently emerged in the interviews, provided either through the district or another coaching program mandated by the state for principals of low-performing campuses. In rating the overall experience of leadership coaching on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest, principals ranked the experience at an average of 9.8, with the most notable disadvantages centered on the concept of time.

Time posed difficulties on multiple levels. It was not only a challenge for principals to find the time for coaching sessions, but also to honor the time once it was scheduled. Because of the fast-paced and often unpredictable daily work of the principal, the establishment of a specific time, routine, and a protected space for coaching calls was described and encouraged by all study participants. The prevalent problem of time for leadership coaching among principals, and consequently their coaches, can only be

heightened when research emphasizes the need for leadership coaching to remain a voluntary professional developmental activity, resulting in varying levels of commitment.

In spite of the pervasive problem of finding and protecting time for coaching, study participants reliably depicted their coaches as thinking partners, friends, confidants, researchers, and while not the sole reason for significant changes by the principal, an integral and embedded part of those changes.

Summary of Chapter

This study sought to examine the experience of leadership coaching and any benefits resulting from participation by secondary school principals of Title I campuses in Texas. Through the data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents referenced and/or shared by principals, it was revealed that participation in leadership coaching led principals to take the time to pause from their stressful and busy roles and responsibilities. Principals also described factors that accounted for initially connecting with their coaches, as well as the conditions established by the coach that helped build and sustain a healthy coaching relationship: safety, flexibility, action-orientation, and skillful guidance.

Additionally, principals reported personal, professional, and organizational benefits resulting from their participation in leadership coaching. Personal benefits included better self-care, reduced isolation, increased self-confidence, and heightened self-awareness. On a professional level, coaching resulted in the generation of plans/ideas, improved communication, individualized professional development, and an

enhanced sense of efficacy. Organizational benefits were identified in areas of staffing, solutions, student performance, and the extension of coaching to others.

In summary and based on the data gathered and analyzed, leadership coaching appears to be a promising leadership development practice for upholding and bettering principals in these demanding times in public education. And since principals appear to value the personalized learning and support provided through the coaching experience, serious examination of the implications of these findings is warranted.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings collected in the previous chapter and this study's aim of providing insight into leadership coaching as a possible approach in supporting and developing principals, this chapter contains a discussion of the research results and implications, recommendations, and conclusions determined through discoveries made.

Summary of Study

To summarize and restate, this study examined the experience of leadership coaching through the perceptions of secondary principals who participated in over 15 hours of coaching. Based on interviews, observations, and documental evidence of six principals, a research goal of more richly understanding the coaching experience and determining any resulting benefits was accomplished through the collection and analysis of data in relation to two main research questions:

1. What are the experiences of middle and high school principals participating in leadership coaching?
2. What benefits result from principal participation in leadership coaching?

Concerning the experience of leadership coaching, data collected from principals revealed that participation in leadership coaching led principals to take the time to pause from their stressful and busy roles and responsibilities. Principals described factors that accounted for the initial connection between principal and coach, such as principal readiness, the coach's distance from the principal's immediate work setting, and the coach's experience in education. They also alluded to conditions established by the coach

that helped build and sustain a healthy coaching relationship: safety, flexibility, action-orientation, and skillful guidance.

Additionally, principals reported personal, professional, and organizational benefits resulting from their participation in leadership coaching. Personal benefits included better self-care, reduced isolation, increased self-confidence, and heightened self-awareness. On a professional level, coaching resulted in the generation of plans/ideas, improved communication, individualized professional development, and an enhanced sense of efficacy. Lastly, and perhaps the most difficult to ascertain through perceptions, organizational benefits were identified in areas of staffing, solutions, student performance, and the extension of coaching to others.

Discussion

Although research around leadership coaching programs for principals is growing, it still remains in its infancy. Because of this limitation, this study's findings are contrasted to existing education literature on coaching principals, but also supplemented by research in the business world on coaching executives.

The Experience of Leadership Coaching

The first levels of Kirkpatrick's (1998) and Guskey's (2000) evaluation frameworks relate to participants' reactions to/satisfaction with an implemented program. This study's findings substantiate those of prior research in that the coaching experience is considered to be a positive one (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006, 2007; Reiss, 2004; Sparks, 2002; Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003). Principals felt coaching was beneficial to them, anticipated the time with their coach, and recommended it for other secondary principals

and district personnel. Principals ranked the coaching experience at an average of 9.8 out of 10, with the primary disadvantage cited, one familiar to the literature, as finding the time to be coached (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003; Hobson, 2003; Robertson, 2005).

Taking time to pause. While the lack of sufficient time for coaching was a challenge principals stated, they conversely appreciated coaching for forcing them to step off the treadmill for a moment and away from the stress that has become synonymous with being a principal (Barnett, 2001; Engelking, 2008; Isaacson, 2003; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). “Pressing the pause button” in order to participate in leadership coaching ironically became a way for principals to be more effective and use their time more efficiently, which is a promising result of leadership coaching warranting additional study.

Connecting with the coach. The recognition by principals in this study around the significance of initially connecting with the coach adds to a steady stream through the literature concentrating on the relationship between the coach and client (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007; Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005). This essential beginning connection also alludes to pivotal importance of matching coach to coachee (Hobson, 2003) and Strong, Barrett, and Bloom's (2003) conclusion that coaching relationships are likely to fail when there are mismatches. And although there was not a structured coach-client matching process at the beginning of the Texas coaching program, one has since been developed based on feedback similar to what the principals of this study provided. Based on Kirkpatrick's (1998) work, a positive reaction (connection) to the coach may increase the likelihood of learning, changes in behavior, and improved performance.

Principals additionally expressed that not just anyone is developmentally ready for coaching and research in the business world around executive coaching firmly supports this premise (J. Hunt, 2004; Laske, 1999; Sztucinski, 2001) and the critical role that client motivation and commitment have on the successful outcomes of executive coaching (Flaherty, 1999; O'Neill, 2000). An apparent void around this idea in the education research suggests a need for further examination of whether the reported ability to open up with someone, comfort in talking, and desire to continue learning and growing are accurate indicators of a principal's readiness to participate successfully in leadership coaching.

The coach's experience in education was also identified by principals as a key connector between coach and client, which relates to Barnett and O'Mahony's (2007) statement that the coaching relationship is a "dynamic learning process between two people who have held similar leadership roles" (p. 3). And since it's necessary that 21st century principals possess such a wide variety of skills and knowledge, one could conclude that principals would value coaches with similar vocational experience (Potter, 2001) and/or experience in similar types of schools (Strachan & Robertson, 1992).

Finally, this study revealed the advantage of being coached by someone outside of or distanced from the district in which the principal worked. Although Rock and Donde (2006) and their research around the use of executive coaches *internal* to the organization may challenge this notion, Long (2003) attributes an outside coach and the accompanying objectivity and confidentiality to a successful executive coaching experience. Within the literature on coaching for principals, a coach from the outside and/or that brings an

outside perspective is emphasized (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007; Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005). Although principals in this study adamantly recommend against being coached by someone within the district, a comparison between internal and external coaching for principals would prove insightful.

Building and sustaining a healthy coaching relationship. The conditions created by the coach through their style and approach are fundamental to building and sustaining a healthy coaching relationship. This aspect of the coaching experience is substantiated by both coaching literature in the education world (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006; Norris, Barnett, Basom, & Yerkes, 2002) and the business world (J. Hunt, 2004; Wasylshyn, 2003). Principals in this study identified the essential coaching conditions of safety, flexibility, action-orientation, and skillful guidance as key in a strong coach-client relationship.

A safe coaching environment begins with having a coach from outside the district, as mentioned earlier, which in turn sets the stage for coaching that is confidential, nonjudgmental, and free of a predetermined agenda (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006, 2007; J. Hunt, 2004; Robertson, 2005; Sztucinski, 2001). The flexibility of the coach and coaching process is supported throughout Barnett and O'Mahony's studies of the Australian Coaching for Experienced Principals program and Hunt's research on executive coaching, but also seems to contradict much of the business literature on executive coaching that emphasizes the need for a structured coaching process (Flaherty, 1999; Goldsmith, Lyons, & Freas, 2000; O'Neill, 2000). This difference might be a distinguishing characteristic between coaching executives in business and coaching

principals in education. Or the discrepancy could be due to the length (two years) and/or strength of the coaching relationships examined for this study. Perhaps, as the coach-client relationship grows, less structure is needed and/or desired by either.

While principals in this study desired flexibility, they also appreciated a coach that moved them to action, which is a published step in some executive coaching processes: action to help implement change (Witherspoon & White, 1998) and action planning (Freas, 2000); and although not yet formalized in the burgeoning field of leadership coaching for principals, taking action has been highlighted by some principals and/or their coaches as part of the coaching process (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007). When it comes to the skillful guidance of the coaches and their ability to ask the right questions, elicit answers from the client, and be an overall source of knowledge, the literature strongly supports this idea of competence in both the education (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007; Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; Rich & Jackson, 2005) and business (Freas, 2000; J. Hunt, 2004; O'Neill, 2000) sectors of coaching.

Benefits from Leadership Coaching

The benefits identified by principals in this study were considered to be on a personal (better self-care, reduced isolation, increased self-confidence, heightened self-awareness), professional (generation of plans/ideas, improved communication, individualized professional development, enhanced sense of efficacy), and organizational level (staffing, solutions, student performance, and extending coaching to others). And similar to the above discussion around the experience of leadership coaching, benefits identified through this study are compared to current literature from the education world

on coaching for principals and accompanied by literature from the business world on coaching for executives when appropriate.

Personal. The idea of better self-care, in terms of this study's results of less stress and improved life balance, is spread throughout the literature on coaching principals (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006; Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003; Bossi, 2007; Grace, 2005; Reiss, 2007; Rich & Jackson, 2005), helping to bridge Hunt's (2004) findings, that executives valued being coached as a whole person instead of a one-dimensional employee, to the education domain. Popular literature on coaching principals concurs that coaching reduces feelings of isolation (Rich & Jackson, 2005), which is also supported by Hurd's (2002) dissertation study finding that executive coaching creates "the sense of genuine connection that is often missing in organizations" (p. 116).

By acknowledging, validating, and encouraging the strengths of the principal through leadership coaching, increased self-confidence results and confirms previous research of Barnett & O'Mahony (2006, 2007), as well as Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren (2005). Based on this current study, increased self-confidence appears to be closely connected to the principal's ability to take risks, or risk changes (Hurd, 2002). Finally, heightened self-awareness through increased reflection, self-identification of leadership styles, and improved perspective validates findings in both education (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006, 2007; Robertson, 2008) and business (CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, 2003; Hurd, 2002; Sztucinski, 2001) coaching studies.

Professional. Rudimentary evidence of learning and application of new knowledge and skills (Guskey, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 1998) is offered in the professional

(and subsequent organizational) benefits revealed by this research through principal self-reports, observations, and examined documents. And while popular notion might suggest that experienced principals are not in need of additional help and/or coaching support, this study's findings challenge this supposition. As a result of coaching, principals reported the generation of plans and ideas, improved communication, learning through individualized professional development, and an enhanced sense of self-efficacy.

The generation of plans and ideas by principals because of coaching has limited corroboration in the education literature, but de Haan (2004) does suggest that an executive coach stimulates new ideas and Tony Jimenez (cited in Hargrove, 2000) comments that coaches' greatest value may come in triggering creativity through "the art of the strategic whisper" (p. 245). Moreover, principals' claims of being better communicators and listeners support the leadership coaching research of Reiss (2007) and the executive coaching research of Sherman & Freas (2004) stating that coaching transfers essential communication skills and makes clients better communicators.

The research of Barnett & O'Mahony (2006, 2007) validates that coaching results in the benefit of individualized professional learning focused on relevant issues. Researchers of executive coaching also support the concept that coaching provides client-focused, job-embedded professional growth and skill development (Bougae, 2005; Sztucinski, 2001; Wasylyshyn, 2003). Furthermore, principals' reports of being more focused, action-oriented, and reflective are in agreement with the research on coaching principals (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007; Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003), as well as much

of the research on coaching executives (D. Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999; Hurd, 2002; Sztucinski, 2001).

Organizational. As previously acknowledged, it is difficult within the limited scope of this study's design to determine organizational benefits resulting from coaching, but based on the perceptions, observations, and documents of principals, an initial attempt has been made to enter into this arena for leadership coaching of principals. Businesses have long conducted return-on-investment (ROI) studies of executive coaching to determine organizational benefits, but research on *any* benefits, much less organizational, of coaching principals is still in the earliest stages; therefore, there is limited, if any, supporting research to substantiate any of the findings of organizational benefits suggested in this study around staffing, solutions, student performance, or extending coaching to others. Indirect connections can be made, but there remain a number of possibilities for further research in this area.

Conclusions and Implications for Research

Recognizing the crucial and complex role and responsibilities of the 21st century principal, there is an existing and growing need for implementing effective professional development programs for principals that mirror the needs and practices of what actually occurs in schools (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007). And since many of the leadership programs that currently exist for principals overlook the internal matters of leadership, such as how a principal thinks and acts (Reiss, 2003), the leadership coaching addressed in this paper offers a promising solution through individualized, on-the-job support for school principals. Based on this study, leadership coaching is a collaborative and

beneficial relationship between a coach and a principal where a dynamic, focused, and customized interaction leads to results, action taken, and changed behavior.

Leadership Coaching Model

For leadership coaching to be successful, strong relationships founded on trust, confidentiality, and mutual respect must be developed between coach and principal. These relationships do not instantaneously occur, so it is acknowledged by scholars such as Robertson (2005) that effective coaching relationships will progress through a series of stages, which she designates broadly as: (1) initiation – when trust and confidence develop, (2) implementation – as deeper educational issues are discussed and feedback is provided to one another, and (3) institutionalization – when person being coached becomes more autonomous and takes direction of the relationship. O'Mahony and Barnett (2006) theorize the coaching process for principals happening over four stages: (1) establishing the relationship and understanding the context, (2) building and understanding direction, (3) progressing and reviewing the program, and (4) consolidating and continuing the learning.

Turning to the principals' experiences and benefits identified in this study, the success of leadership coaching appears to rest on the strength of the relationship between the coach and client and the quality of the coaching process. The vital relationship between coach and principal relies primarily on the findings of Chapter Four: the initial connection and/or match, the contributions of both the principal (readiness) and coach (experience, distance, and ability) to the process, and the safe and comfortable coaching conditions or environment established by the coach. In turn, the desired quality of the

coaching process seems to depend primarily on the coach's skills and style in providing individualized and practical guidance through a delicate balance of both flexibility and accountability/action.

These findings resulted in the development of the following leadership coaching model, which will be discussed further as a possible operating framework from which to guide the implementation of leadership coaching programs and systems, and which can also be found in slightly more detail in Appendix I:

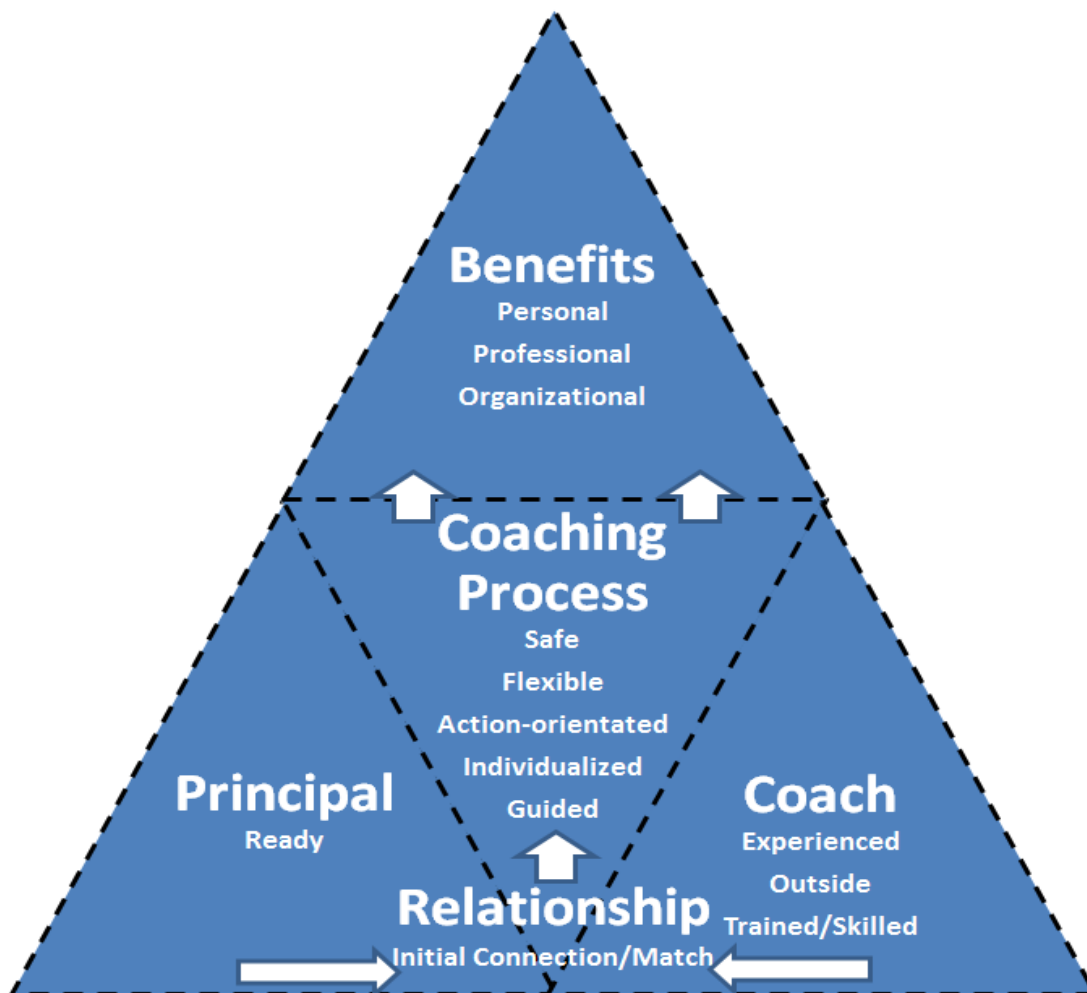


Figure 5.1. Leadership Coaching Model

This study suggests that leadership coaching holds significant potential as a practice for supporting and improving the effectiveness of school principals personally and professionally, as well as organizationally at the school district level. In addition, this research advances the idea that beneficial leadership coaching rests on the dynamic interaction of the coach and principal and the coach's style, approach, and focus within a coaching session, the true art of successful coaching.

Limitations and Further Research

While this study attempted to highlight principals perceptions associated with leadership coaching, wide generalization may not be possible, and conclusions are limited. Thus, caution should be applied to recommendations for wider populations and further research may include a larger number of participants. It is also important to acknowledge that the lack of a comparison group, the snapshot approach of the study, and its reliance on self-perceptions limits its scope. A retrospective study produces variability in participants' ability to recall their experiences. Also, since data were collected a single point in time, changes in perception and attitudes over a longer period of time were not noted, relying on individual self-reports.

To address some of this study's acknowledged limitations and raise its level of rigor, the following recommendations for further research are made:

- Increase the number of principals sampled and/or similar to Strong, Barrett, & Bloom's (2003) study, incorporate the use of a control group of principals who have not been coached.

- Increase the number of years, across which principals are studied, to assess long-term effectiveness. Perhaps, select different or similar data samples at multiple longitudinal collection points. Barnett & O'Mahony's (2007) study of successive cohorts of Australian coaches and experienced principals is one example of this approach.
- Perform the same or a similar study with elementary principals participating in leadership coaching and compare the findings to this research.
- Conduct a mixed-methods study, combining quantitative and qualitative data, thus allowing a deeper exploration of the leadership coaching experience and benefits.

The first three levels of Kirkpatrick's (1998) evaluation model:

reaction/satisfaction, learning, and application/behavior, blend well into levels 1, 2, and 4 of Guskey's (2000) framework for assessing professional development: participants' reactions to content and delivery of the program, participants' reported learning, and participants' application/use of new knowledge and skills. For this research, the application of new knowledge and skills was determined through principal self-reports, abridged observations, documents, but would be more concretely evidenced by interviewing those working daily alongside study participants.

- In order to lessen the subjectivity of only capturing principals' impressions of the coaching experience and benefits, obtain and triangulate information from observers of principals, such as their teachers, support staff, fellow administrators, and/or supervisors. Kirkpatrick (1998) recommended using multiple sources for

collecting data as well as repeating the evaluation to make sure that reported benefits/improvements are not temporary.

- For a more valid determination of the impact of leadership coaching at the higher levels of Kirkpatrick's (1998) or Guskey's (2002) models for evaluating professional development, such as improving job performance, utilize and compare assessments collected prior to and at the conclusion of the coaching experience.

The following continued suggestions for additional research might serve to extend and enrich the findings of this study:

- Conduct a qualitative study of principals who were not satisfied with the leadership coaching experience to determine why and if factors stated represent the inverse of themes presented in the current study (e.g., no strong initial connection, no readiness on the part of the client, no safety or flexibility provided by the coach).
- In order to maximize the inherent opportunities of having a coach, investigate this study's finding that principals must be ready to be coached and the impact of their readiness level on the coaching experience.
- Further explore the style and approach of coaches that have created and sustained healthy coaching relationships by identifying and collecting coaching best practices from the perspective of both the principal and the coach.
- Despite the complications of attempting to determine how student performance is affected by principals who are participating in leadership coaching, studies

incorporating standardized test results; questionnaires; interviews with students, teachers, and parents; and student portfolios could begin to address this neglected area of research.

- Build on the importance of the principal initially connecting with their coach by examining and developing a more technical, concrete process for effectively matching coaches to principals.
- Study previously coached principals' inclination to engage in coaching other staff to determine the implications on how to sustain and develop an organization through leadership coaching.
- Compare principals participating in external coaching by leadership coaches outside the district to principals participating in internal coaching by district leadership coaches.
- Although this study suggested that principals appreciated their coaches having education and/or principal experience, determine whether coaches from non-educational and/or non-principal backgrounds can effectively coach principals.
- Examine the difference between principals who have received one-on-one coaching from a certified leadership coach and principals who have participated in large group professional development around leadership.
- Compare the retention rate of principals in school districts that provide leadership coaching to districts who do not.
- Explore the impact gender has on the experience and benefits of leadership coaching by conducting a comparison study between male and female principals.

In addition to the above ideas for broadening the research base of leadership (or executive) coaching for school principals, the following two research recommendations might provide some alternative insights to the findings of this study:

- Study the perceptions of superintendents and school boards and their acceptance of providing leadership coaching for principals.
- Track the financial resources allocated to providing leadership coaching for principals and attempt to calculate the return on investment (ROI) of those resources.

Notwithstanding the above stated limitations, this study contributes to the academic community and the profession of coaching by advancing the notion that executive coaching in education, as the new and emerging field of leadership coaching for principals, has potential to provide on-going professional support to both novice and experienced principals as they cope with the stress of the occupation and navigate the complicated intricacies of school leadership's ever-changing demands.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

This study's findings have implications for principals, districts, and the coaching profession, both organizations providing leadership coaching and coaches themselves. It is important, therefore, to recognize the roles of each in the effectiveness of leadership coaching experiences and to suggest associated recommendations for practice around each.

Principals

There seems to be little doubt regarding the pressures encountered by today's school leaders and the resulting impact on their well-being. This research study seems to promote a need for a support system such as leadership coaching, which appears to be effective in assisting leaders of secondary schools, of varying levels of experience, deal with the challenges of the occupation; and endorses a need for principals taking the time to pause, leaning on a professional thinking partner and advocate, and being ready to enter such a relationship.

Need for pausing. Principals in this research study consistently confirmed ongoing vocational stress and how making time for coaching helped to alleviate some of the pressure; so in spite of the prominent challenge of finding the time to “press the pause button,” this research advances the need for principals to somehow pause within the confines of their daily administrative responsibilities in order to think, reflect, and plan. Be it leadership coaching or a similar developmental avenue, it is recommended that principals create and protect time in order to reap the personal, professional, and organizational benefits suggested in this study. Principals participating in leadership coaching specifically suggested following a predetermined coaching routine by setting up a protected time and physical space, as well as enlisting others to assist in honoring the routine established.

Need for a thinking partner and advocate. In a similar vein, principals described the loneliness of their jobs and how coaching helped reduce the isolation they felt. They needed a personal supporter, who was willing to listen to or travel alongside

them on a “ride like no other,” as one principal put it. Connecting with a coach outside of their occupational circle afforded a safe place to vent feelings, think through situations, contemplate actions, and receive encouragement. Based on these findings, new and experienced principals alike need a thinking partner and advocate. If current situations or budgets prevent the provision of a professional coach, it is still suggested that principals identify a comparable individual who can help carry them through the administrative journey.

Need for coaching readiness. It is important to recognize the role of the principal/client in the coaching process. Successful leadership coaching begins with a principal who is motivated, committed, and ready to participate. And this study points to the significance of a principal initially trusting the coach and the process, being willing to be vulnerable and open to learning, and taking the responsibility to remain engaged in the coaching process.

It is essential that principals be ready to participate in leadership coaching, and in order to ensure this readiness, principals should be clear on the definition and purpose of leadership coaching, especially challenging given the stressful pace at which they function and the variety of coaching types and approaches currently existing within the field of education, a subject revisited later. A principal should be committed to the process, agreeable to investing the time and energy necessary to do the work, and possess the desire to maximize the opportunity.

On a related note of readiness, this research backs the notion that principals participate voluntarily in leadership coaching. Although the success of leadership

coaching relies heavily on the relationship between the coach and principal, ultimately it is the principal who has the greatest responsibility for making sure that the timing is right for participating in coaching and that s/he is ready, willing, and able to take full advantage of the potential growth that could result. If principals do not desire the assistance of a coach and are yet required to take part, leadership coaching could function merely as another required professional development and thus doubtfully produce the same level of results this study revealed.

School Districts

This research presents the promising possibility to school districts that leadership coaching could positively impact the efficacy of its principals. And although some larger school districts may have the internal capacity to support their principals in similar fashion, they often lack the desire or time to do so. Providing an outside trained leadership coach dedicated to each principal and their personal and professional goals and growth could, in turn, boost the effectiveness of the entire district. It would be prudent for school districts to focus on creating a coaching environment, being careful in their design and approach of coaching programs, and ensuring coaching-like support systems are in place for all leaders.

Coaching environment. The more a district recognizes the possible benefits of coaching, uses the language of coaching, and encourages the practice as a positive step towards the development of its leaders, the more comfortable those same leaders will become in broadening their feedback network and increasing their willingness to change and grow.

To establish a coaching environment, schools districts are encouraged to create a clear vision and plan for what they are trying to achieve through a “coaching friendly” culture, where stretch goals, learning by doing, and learning through mistakes are all supported (J. M. Hunt & Weintraub, 2002). This environment is one where leaders feel safe to admit what they don’t know and seek help. This may be a challenge for an education world where principals are expected to know everything and perform at the highest levels at all times.

School districts should also aim to educate all staff, including senior leadership, about coaching. Demystifying and enlightening through definitions, examples, and case studies assists in establishing buy-in and letting everyone know what is possible with coaching. Raising principals’ awareness of how others are applying coaching and possible benefits for them personally and professionally could further boost positive results. In addition, spreading the wealth of coaching opportunities and offering other forms of coaching, many of which were mentioned in Chapter 2 of this study, across the district may also help to sustain coaching benefits even after individuals cease participation.

Design and approach. Based on the findings of this research, flexibility in implementing leadership coaching is a must. This is not to say that goals or systems do not play a role in successful execution, but a reminder that effective coaching is about relationships, and districts should be cautioned against an approach that is too formalized or delivering a one-size-fits-all model. Individual needs and preferences of principals may be most important in attaining positive results. It is advised to consider leadership

coaching as one possible component of principals' individualized/customized professional development plans.

Districts should also understand that principal commitment and motivation are prominent factors leading to positive results from leadership coaching, and must ensure that participation is not required, but voluntary. As stated earlier, it is critical that potential coaching clients are educated about the opportunity in order to raise the probability that it will be taken advantage of, but as made evident through the interviews for this study, principals must desire participation. Districts must respect the notion of coaching readiness – principals educated on the goals/purpose of coaching, committed to the process, agreeable to investing the time and energy, and desirous of maximizing the opportunity.

Finally, district personnel must make certain that coaches and coaching providers are reputable and that clear communication around goals and purpose is maintained. In ensuring quality leadership coaching, districts should at the same time not infringe upon the confidentiality of the relationship. One way to maintain this delicate balance is to hire and use coaches from outside the district, while also confirming that the coaches have appropriate training and experience, reliable systems and tools are in place for matching coach to client, and ongoing feedback/evaluation takes place around all coaching services.

Other support systems. As mentioned previously, both new and experienced principals need time to step off the treadmill in order to think, reflect, and plan. Ironically, this thinking time, that leadership coaching offers and that could help a district

function more effectively during the most challenging times, seems to be one of the first “luxuries” given up when budgets are tight. Even though coaching is a relatively new principal support system in districts, this study provides encouraging results; so if outside professional coaching cannot be provided for principals, it is recommended that districts work towards developing, implementing, and sustaining some type of leadership support systems similar to coaching for principals expressing that they value this type of support.

One affordable alternative could be to simply embed time/opportunities within principal trainings and meetings for reflecting on practice and thoughtful planning. Perhaps, on-demand professional coaching can be provided, although a lack of depth in the coach-principal relationship may fail to yield the same results described by the principals in this study. Finally, based on this research, districts should seriously consider training and support for principals around effective communication, especially in regards to difficult conversations.

Coaching Profession: Providers

Many of this study’s implications for the organizations providing leadership coaching also apply to principals, school districts, and coaches, but coaching providers are definitely in the most influential position to design and refine basic operational aspects of the coaching profession. The findings in this study emphasize the importance of both the development and communication of clear guidelines and standards for the coaching program and process. Organizations providing coaching have the best opportunity to do this and improve leadership coaching through the establishment of functional definitions, frameworks, and systems.

Definitions. In their interviews, principals themselves called for and worked to provide clear definitions of leadership coaching. Undoubtedly, clarity in defining leadership coaching will not only benefit principals, but also school districts considering the provision of leadership coaching for their administrators, and coaching providers seeking to provide leadership coaching to the education world. Coaching providers can use the literature review of Chapter 2 to gain a comprehensive understanding of what leadership coaching is and is not, but listening to the principals who have experienced leadership coaching firsthand may provide the most practical and basic appreciation.

Several principals were resolute in distinguishing leadership coaching from mentoring, therapy, and variations of coaching that were provided either through school district offices or another coaching program mandated by the State for principals of low-performing campuses, which Ron described as “professional mentoring” and Krystal likened to “a conversation without a plan and not productive like leadership coaching.” Krystal went on to equate leadership coaching to executive coaching in the business world:

It really has to be for people at a certain level of leadership. It is not that people new to leadership don't need coaching; they just need more of a mentoring relationship. If you call coaching and mentoring the same thing, you devalue coaching, coaching will be viewed as remedial, and you'll never get upper level leadership to open their eyes to it.

Other insightful definitions of leadership coaching provided by principals included:

Coaching is like an engine pushing the boat. My coach gives me a little push to go further in the direction I'm going. I call and get an hour with this impartial person to talk about whatever challenges I'm dealing with and my coach helps me think

through them, work through them, and figure out where I'm going to go from here, what my next step is.

Coaching is a place where, on a regular basis, I can discuss topics of high interest to me and review how they are working/have worked, what decisions are being made/have been made around them, and what the results might be/were.

Coaching is a different type of professional development that is individualized and helps me improve, little steps at a time.

Coaching is like having an academic friend with whom you can freely speak your mind and not worry about repercussions or what someone thinks of you.

Crafting definitions of leadership coaching will assist coaching providers with marketing and communications, as well as face-to-face and online trainings and readiness assessments for coaches and potential clients. As alluded to by principals in this study, clearly communicating about leadership coaching can and should be enriched through leveraging in-person and recorded testimonials of principals who have experienced effective coaching. Success stories can also be promoted through encouraging sharing among and networking of principals who are or have participated in leadership coaching.

Operating framework. Based on principals' narrative descriptions of the leadership coaching experience and the resulting findings of this study, it is recommended that coaching providers work to create an operating framework or model on which to guide the implementation of all related systems and services. This model could be used for grounding and centering systems of recruiting, training, and evaluating coaches, as well as orienting potential coaching clients to processes of leadership coaching. A suggested operating framework for leadership coaching, based on the research from this study, was presented in the conclusions section above.

Systems. The findings of this study confirm the need for a flexible coaching process, but also for the establishment and use of a systems approach to providing leadership coaching. A systematic methodology could be helpful in recruiting and training coaches, assessing client readiness, matching coach to client, implementing the coaching process, and evaluating and supporting coaches.

Finding and training the right people to coach. The coach-principal relationships examined for this research were strong ones, developed over at least 15 hours of coaching, but based on the feedback of principals, this may not always be the case. To increase the potentiality of creating other solid coach-principal relationships, it is recommended that coaching providers heed the evidence provided by study participants as to what they appreciated about their coaches.

In recruiting and training coaches, coaching providers would be wise to consider making experience in education a requirement for their coaches. Although this study was not aimed at determining whether non-education-experienced coaches would yield the same benefits with principals, all principals did point out that they valued the education experience of their coaches. Also, principals appreciated characteristics in their coaches which resulted in the coaching conditions findings of safety, flexibility, action-orientation, and skillful guidance. Organizations delivering coaching should contemplate creating applications, interviews, and trainings that aim at filtering coaches through their aptitudes of delivering these conditions to the coaching relationship.

Assessing principal readiness. To further the conversation around setting up for successful principal-coach relationships, it became evident within the interviews that not

everyone is ready to participate in coaching. Consideration should be given by coaching providers to developing processes and/or tools that assess client readiness. Based on the words of principals themselves, school leaders contemplating taking part in coaching should possess the ability to open up, comfort in talking with another person, and a desire to learn and grow. Principals must be willing and able to trust the coach and the process in order to successfully engage in the coaching process.

Matching coach to principal/client. This research validates that the relationship between coach and principal is critical to an effective coaching engagement, and that bonding pivots on the match between coach and principal. Because principals interviewed for this study had decided to continue their coaching when it was no longer mandatory, a safe assumption is that they were well-matched with their coaches. Many attributed this to chance or fate, therefore it would be sensible for coaching providers to remove as much luck from the matching process as possible and create systematic processes and the time for determining best fit between coaches and principals.

Some basic first steps would be for coaching providers to ensure regional distance between coaches and principals and likewise predetermine any conflicts of interest coaches may have with potential principals, campuses, or districts. Also, consideration should be given to involving principals in the selection of their coach. If procedurally possible, allow the end users to choose their coaches, which may contribute greatly to their participatory investment.

Careful thought should be given to the process of matching coaches to principals, as it is an artificially fashioned relationship and may lack genuineness and effectiveness

if opportunities to cultivate mutual kinship are not provided. Coaching providers should consider the use of questionnaires/surveys of values/belief systems, needs, or preferences, as well as personality profiles to ensure a positive bond between coach and client occurs.

Forms/Paperwork for the coaching process. Principals all shared that various paperwork, such as goal setting sheets and particularly coaching session prep forms, were part of the coaching experience; but some principals expressed that the coaching prep forms were not necessary or desired as the coaching relationship matured. Based on this information, an implication might be that although coaching and confidentiality agreements (required by the studied program to initiate the coaching relationship), goal setting sheets, and coaching prep forms may play a vital role at the beginning of the relationship, caution should be taken in making forms/paperwork mandatory as the coaching relationship grows and strengthens.

In no way does this mean tools such as goal setting sheets and coaching prep forms should not be utilized in the beginning coaching sessions or even, in later coaching sessions, but that they not be required. Beyond a recommended coaching and confidentiality agreement that outlines expectations of the coach and principal at the front-end of a coaching relationship, other paper forms/tools should remain available as resources to the coaching relationship, but not made to be an additional burden upon the backs of already stressed principals.

Evaluating coaching success. This study's findings offer a foundation for assessing the effectiveness of the leadership coaching experience. Based on the interviews conducted for this research, principals may begin participating in leadership

coaching without knowing what to expect, and the findings of this study could offer some foundation for assessing what an effective interaction between a coach and principal should look like. Coaching providers, through metrics or checklists designed around the coaching conditions and/or framework identified in this paper, could empower principals to be educated consumers of leadership coaching services, making sure that the qualities of the coach and coaching relationship and environment were all leading toward desired outcomes. This might enable principals to be more proactive and involved during the coaching process, and to be more aware and intercede if needs are not being met.

This idea could be expanded to include evaluations of other program components, such as the orientation to coaching and the coach-principal matching process, and expanded to include additional constituents, such as superintendents, teachers, coaching providers, and other stakeholders. Possible annual feedback surveys or pre- and post-focus groups of principals participating in leadership coaching may offer additional input and lessons learned. Coaching providers could also learn from networking with other professional coaching organizations to gain knowledge around best practices of developing, managing, and organizing effective coaching programs.

The evaluation of coaches for future use by providers is one other important implication of this research. To ensure the caliber of coaches, organizations providing coaching need to keep current on the reputations and practices of their coaches, assess coach effectiveness, and provide feedback to both principals and their coaches.

Difficulty in measuring. The benefits of leadership coaching described in this study were not about measurable performance results (the work that got done), but

instead the ways principals bettered their interactions, thought processes, relationships, etcetera (the way their work got done). The simple reality may be that organizations, coaching providers or districts, may not be able to directly ascribe benefits of coaching to immediate performance improvement. Benefits may reveal themselves more indirectly through a ripple effect, showing up in people, projects, or performance in time, further down the road.

Furthermore, while study participants agreed that the coaching experience benefited them, there was no mention of benefits in numerical or financial terms specific enough to be considered quantifiable evidence of leadership coaching's positive impact on principals and the districts within which they work. Two participants ventured that they remained in their job because of coaching; and logical conclusions can be drawn that other decisions or changes made by principals benefited the school and/or district, but there is little data in this study that speaks to what the business world refers to as return on investment (ROI). Because it is challenging to quantify the benefits of leadership coaching, benefits may be more easily conveyed anecdotally or qualitatively as a "soft" measure. With this said, some recommendations for coaching providers to bridge this divide are to:

- Use the evaluation suggestions from above to create rubrics that can be used to more quantifiably measure the benefits of leadership coaching.
- Utilize existing quantitative leadership inventories to conduct pre- and post-assessments of principals participating in leadership coaching.

- Standardize, to the extent possible, coaching program elements in order to make it easier to collect robust and usable data for program metrics and future research.
- Explore ways to blend qualitative with quantitative evidence for examining return on investment (ROI).
- Include a longitudinal component in data gathering in order to identify trends and possible benefits over time.

Promoting coaching success. In addition to the aforementioned significance of recruiting and training the right people to coach, equally important is the role of the coaching provider to expect and provide ongoing professional development of its coach community. Coaching experiences seemed to be enhanced when coaches were not only proficient at coaching, but also when they were current on education issues and relevant research; therefore it is advisable for coaching providers to offer development options through avenues such as quarterly newsletters, email updates, educational webinars, coaching literature and research. Also, coaching providers would benefit from promoting consistency around program procedures and resolution of issues by creating and maintaining a set of program guidelines.

Coaching Profession: Coaches

A final important factor identified in this study, intertwined with coaching providers, is the coach's contribution to the success of the coaching process through characteristics of experience, detachment, flexibility, knowledge and skills, orientation towards action, and personal qualities such as patience, openness, and responsiveness.

This research did not solely examine coaching methods, but the experience and benefits of having participated in coaching. Nonetheless, the findings have definite implications for coaches and the coaching process; but care should be taken in any attempts to totally govern or standardize the process, as it may be counterproductive – leadership coaching is fundamentally a personal experience relying on a human relationship.

The data gathered for this study seemed to focus a great deal on the style and approach of the coach, or what came to be identified as coaching conditions, which included safety, flexibility, action-orientation, and skillful guidance. These, plus other coaching characteristics, produced a coach profile including:

- Experience working as an educational leader
- Unconnected to principal's employing district
- Ability to create a safe environment through confidentiality, impartiality, non-directedness, and encouragement
- Flexible style and approach
- Orientation towards moving principals to action through the use of goals, questioning strategies, and monitoring tools
- Skillful guidance evidenced through overall resourcefulness, asking the right questions, and ability to guide principal to discover answers within themselves.

Safety. It is recommended that coaches consistently promote safety within their relationships with principals by making certain that it is acceptable to talk about challenging or controversial topics with confidence that the coach will not share that information with others. Coaches must dependably conduct coaching interactions in a

supportive and agreeable manner that puts principals at ease and ensures the comfort of principals to openly share any personal and/or professional information. The emphasis is on establishing a strong and helping relationship, which provides a genuine connection often missing in larger districts, and offers a trusting environment needed to risk changes.

Given the importance of a safe relationship in producing positive outcomes, a coach must have the humility and foresight to back out of a coaching relationship if there are any conflicts of interest or difficulties relating to the client or maintaining an unbiased approach due to reasons of personality, proficiency, experience, or values. Humility also applies to the ability of the coach to solicit answers primarily from the client and not from the coach's own amassed skills and experience.

Flexibility. Because findings revealed a need for a customized approach, coaches need to ensure the coaching process continually revolves around the principal, his or her own personalized professional development plan. What principals need is as distinctive as their idiosyncratic performance needs, goals, experience, leadership styles, personalities, education, and networks of support, and as basic as a coach who listens, converses, encourages, reflects, asks questions, and moves the principal to action. The coach-client relationship is the conduit for any results from the interaction, and it is the relaxed comfort of this relationship that opens the door for the most significant benefits.

Some coaching programs have tried to formalize the coaching experience by setting an expectation for the number of coaching hours over the span of the school year. Based on feedback of principals in this study, coaching relationships will most likely include at least one or two coaching calls a month, plus occasional email correspondence,

but the coach being available to the principal and prepared to build upon whatever questions and concerns s/he has at the time of coaching will prove to be the most effective approach for the details of when, where, and how often.

Coaches also need to be aware of the importance of respecting the client as a person and approaching the coaching experience holistically. Principals in this study spoke to the personal benefits of coaching as well as the professional. The clear message is that principals want to be seen, and treated, as whole individuals, and that when engaged this way, the results of coaching benefit both the organization and the person.

Action-orientation. Principals highlighted the knowledge and action that emerged directly from coaching calls. According to the principal interviews, an action-oriented coach listens attentively for and records clients' needs, goals, and areas of focus, uses this information to keep the client focused and moving forward, provides well-placed questions and tools that guide the client in developing action steps/plans, and follows up at intervals to gently hold the client accountable. These basic guidelines helped lead principals to putting into practice new behaviors and taking needed action, and to the recommendations that coaches take notes/keep logs of their coaching calls in order to assist moving clients to action and end coaching calls with clients identifying actions that they will take.

Skilled guidance. According to this research, successful coaches establish collaborative relationships with principals and honor principals' perspectives. The skill and experience of the coach melds with the skill and experience of the principal, and the coach guides the principal to take time to reflect on experiences and volunteers models

and tools to assist in understanding those experiences. The focus is on “thinking with” instead of “thinking for” and directing paths of action. All this helps the principal cultivate the ability to thoughtfully handle challenges and create apt actions in future situations.

Skilled coaches are focused on expert listening, artful questioning, targeted resourcefulness, persistently drawing answers from clients, and perpetually improving and evaluating their knowledge and abilities. All these skills require not only thorough and ongoing training, but also opportunities to develop and practice these skills.

Personal and professional development. Coaches are chiefly responsible to grow and preserve the skills listed above and should be aware of their essentiality in determining the successful outcome of leadership coaching; therefore coaches need to ensure they are attending to their own professional development so that they stay at their best. This could entail personal work, such as being coached themselves, and practicing their listening, patience, flexibility, questioning, as well as increasing their knowledge around education issues and trends, strategic planning, and other school district challenges. Since principals appreciated the strategies, tools, resources, readings, and research that coaches provided, it is recommended that coaches perpetually hone their personal and professional capacity through avenues such as:

- Maintaining a network of contacts in the coaching and leadership development fields so that they have additional resources from which to pull and refer to as needed.
- Participating in regular networking opportunities with other leadership coaches.

- Reading current literature, journals, and other publications in order to stay abreast on education issues and to be able to offer resources to principals.
- Using periodic check-in points with principals and themselves, aided by aforementioned rubrics, to assess their coaching skills and ability to maintain coaching conditions of safety, flexibility, action-orientation, and skilled guidance.
- Building a question bank from which to sharpen questioning skills and draw during coaching sessions.
- Studying principals' school districts beyond the information provided by principals in order to increase credibility with principals, as well as to help comprehend and appreciate some of the dynamics impacting principals and possibly their progress.

Summary

Principals, school districts, and the coaching profession, both coaching providers and coaches, are all vital components to the coaching process and coaching relationships that mutually benefit all those involved. This study focused primarily on principal perceptions of leadership coaching, and although there are other perspectives that could be explored and yield additional insight, implications and recommendations for practice based on this research are summarized below and shared in chart form as Appendix J:

Implications and recommendations for principals.

- Need for Pausing
 - Create and protect time to reap researched benefits

- Follow a predetermined leadership coaching routine of specific time and space
- Enlist others to assist you in honoring routine
- Need for a thinking partner and advocate
 - If leadership coach is not possible, seek a comparable partner
- Need for coaching readiness
 - Get clear on the definition and purpose of leadership coaching
 - Be committed to the coaching process, agreeable to investment of time and energy, desirous to maximize opportunity
 - Participate voluntarily

Implications and recommendations for school districts.

- Leadership coaching could positively impact the efficacy of principals and entire district
 - Create a coaching environment
 - Recognize possible benefits and encourage practice of coaching
 - Use the language of coaching
 - Aim to educate all staff about leadership coaching through definitions, examples, and case studies
 - Raise awareness of how others are applying leadership coaching
 - Spread the wealth of leadership coaching opportunities
 - Offer other forms of coaching
 - Be thoughtful in design and approach

- Remain flexible in implementation; avoid formalized or one-size-fits-all models
- Pay attention to individual needs and preferences of principals
- Use coaching as one option on a menu of possible approaches to individualized PD
- Ensure participation is voluntary
- Respect the notion of coaching readiness
- Ensure coaches and coaching providers are reputable and clear on district's goals for coaching, while also respecting confidentiality of relationship
 - Use leadership coaches from outside the district
 - Confirm leadership coaches have appropriate training and experience, and reliable systems are in place for matching coach to client and evaluating services
- Provide other support systems
 - If budgets cannot support leadership coaching, provide some other type of similar leadership support for principals desiring
 - Embed time/opportunities within trainings/meetings for reflection and planning
 - Consider on-demand coaching
 - Provide training and support for principals around effective communication, especially regarding difficult conversations

Implications and recommendations for coaching profession: Providers.

- Coaching providers are in the most influential position to design and refine operating aspects of leadership coaching profession
 - Develop and communicate clear guidelines and standards
 - Craft clear definitions of leadership coaching
 - Use chapter 2 to gain comprehensive understanding
 - Listen to principals who have experienced leadership coaching
 - Distinguish between mentoring and leadership coaching
 - Use definitions crafted in marketing, communications, trainings, and readiness assessments
 - Leverage the use of leadership coaching testimonials/stories of success
 - Promote networking of principals participating in coaching
 - Create an operating framework or model on which to guide the implementation of leadership coaching systems.
 - Implement systems to:
 - Find and train the right people to coach
 - Assess principal readiness
 - Match coach to principal/client
 - Regulate forms/paperwork
 - Evaluate coaching success
 - Promote coaching success

- Find and train the right people to coach
 - Heed what coached principals appreciated about their coaches (coaching conditions of safety, flexibility, action-orientation, skillful guidance)
 - Make education experience a requirement for leadership coaches
 - Create applications, interviews, and trainings that filter coaches through their aptitudes of delivering identified coaching conditions
- Not all principals are ready to participate in coaching
 - Develop processes and/or tools that assess client readiness (ability to open up, comfort in talking, desire to learn and grow)
- Matching coach to principal is pivotal in creating strong coaching relationship
 - Create systematic processes and time for determining best match between coaches and principals
 - Ensure regional distance between coaches and principals
 - Predetermine any conflicts of interest coaches may have
 - If possible, allow principals to choose or play major role in choosing their coaches
 - Provide opportunities for principals and coaches to cultivate mutual kinship
 - Use personality profiles and questionnaires/ surveys of values/belief systems, needs, or preferences to ensure positive bond between coach and client

- Coaching forms/paperwork were not necessary or desired as the coaching relationship matured
 - Use coaching and confidentiality agreements to outline expectations of coach and principal at beginning of relationship
 - Use goal setting sheets, coaching prep forms, and other paper tools as necessary to strengthen coaching process
 - Use caution in making forms/paperwork mandatory as the coaching relationship matures

- Study findings offer a foundation for assessing the effectiveness of the leadership coaching experience
 - Use findings to design metrics or checklists to be used in assessing what effective interactions between coach and principal should look like
 - Use metrics or checklists to empower principals to be educated consumers of leadership coaching services
 - Expand evaluations to include other program components (coaching orientations, matching process, etc.)
 - Expand evaluations to include additional constituents like superintendents, teachers, and coaching providers
 - Use annual feedback survey and pre- and post-focus groups of coached principals to offer additional input and lessons learned
 - Network with other coaching organizations to learn best practices of effective coaching programs

- Ensure caliber of coaches by:
 - Keeping current on coaches' reputations and practices
 - Assessing coaches' effectiveness
 - Providing coaches and their principals feedback
- Leadership coaching is difficult to measure, especially in regard to quantifiable evidence of positive impact
 - Continue conveying benefits anecdotally or qualitatively
 - Create various rubrics that can be used to more quantifiably measure the benefits of coaching
 - Utilize existing quantitative leadership inventories to conduct pre- and post-assessments of principals participating in leadership coaching
 - Standardize, to the extent possible, coaching program elements in order to make it easier to collect robust and usable data for program metrics and research
 - Explore ways to blend qualitative and quantitative evidence for examining return on investment
 - Gather longitudinal data in order to identify trends and possible long-term benefits
- Coaching experiences are enhanced when coaches are proficient at coaching, but also current on education issues and relevant research
 - Promote coaching success through the expectation and provision of ongoing PD for coaching community

- Provide quarterly newsletters, email updates, educational webinars, coaching literature and research
- Promote coaching consistency around program procedures and resolution of issues by creating and maintaining a program guidelines

Implications and recommendations for coaching profession: Coaches.

- Based on findings, coaches should:
 - Have experience as educational leaders
 - Be unconnected to principal's employing district
 - Possess ability to create a safe environment through confidentiality, impartiality, non-directedness, and encouragement
 - Practice a flexible style and approach
 - Orient towards moving principals to action through the use of goals, questioning strategies, and monitoring tools
 - Use skillful guidance evidenced through overall resourcefulness, asking the right questions, and ability to guide principal to discover answers within themselves
- Create a safe environment
 - Make certain that it is acceptable to talk about challenging or controversial topics with confidence that information will remain confidential
 - Coach in a supportive and agreeable manner that puts principals at ease to openly share

- Have humility and foresight to back out of a coaching relationship if there are any conflicts of interest or difficulties relating to client
- Have humility to solicit answers primarily from the principal/ client and not from the coach's amassed skills and experience
- Use flexible style and approach
 - Ensure coaching process continually revolves around the principal, his or her own personalized professional development plan
 - Do not set an expectation for the number of coaching hours over the span of the school year; include at least one or two coaching calls a month, plus occasional email correspondence, but also be available to the principal and prepared to build upon whatever questions and concerns s/he has at the time
 - Respect the principal as a person and approach the coaching experience holistically
- Remain action-oriented
 - Listen attentively for and record clients' needs, goals, and areas of focus
 - Use this information to keep client focused and moving forward
 - Use well-placed questions and tools that guide principal to develop action steps/plans
 - Follow-up at intervals to gently hold principal accountable
 - Use skillful guidance

- Establish collaborative relationships with principals that honor principals' perspectives
- Focus on “thinking with” instead of “thinking for”/directing paths of action
- Attend to personal and professional development in order to stay at best
 - Employ a personal coach
 - Practice skills of listening, patience, flexibility, and questioning
 - Increase knowledge around education issues and trends, strategic planning, and other school district challenges
 - Maintain network of contacts in coaching and leadership development fields for additional resources
 - Participate in regular networking opportunities with other leadership coaches
 - Read current literature, journals, and other publications to stay abreast in education and be able to offer resources to principals
- Use periodic check-in points with principals and themselves, aided by rubrics, to assess coaching skills and ability to maintain coaching conditions
- Build a question bank from which to sharpen questioning skills and draw

- Study principals' school districts to increase credibility with principals and to help comprehend and appreciate dynamics impacting principals and their progress

Closing Thoughts

While much has been written around executive coaching in the business world and there is growing literature about how executive coaching programs can inform educational leadership (Hobson, 2003), still few leadership coaching programs/models exist for experienced school principals. For this reason, the leadership coaching researched for this study and subsequent findings hold significance for principals, school districts, and the coaching profession: organizations providing coaching and coaches. Not only did this research extend through its findings what is currently known about coaching for principals, but it also corroborates prior discoveries and explanations by coaching scholars, such as Barnett & O'Mahony; Bloom, Castagna, & Warren; Reiss; and others, around effective leadership coaching,

For instance, if thought was given to the guiding structures and components that comprise effective coaching programs for school leaders, one might refer to Hopkins-Thompson's (2000) five interconnected elements of successful coaching programs: organizational support, clearly defined outcomes, screening, selecting, and training coaches, focus on learner needs, and continual monitoring and evaluation. Each of these features were revealed in the findings and discussed in the implications and recommendations of this current study.

If an explanation of foundational guiding principles for successful leadership coaching programs was sought, Jan Robertson's (2005) work might be cited. Once again, there appears to be alignment between the findings and implications of the present research and Robertson's theories. She describes an effective leadership coaching process as one where the:

- Process is dynamic and meets changing needs.
- Coach is a facilitator, not a "teacher" of how to do or not do something.
- Coached person takes responsibility for own learning and sets the agenda.
- Coach and client understand each other's roles.
- Coaching relationship takes time to develop effectively and sustain.
- Process requires interpersonal, communication, and coaching skills in order to work. (p. 29)

Based on this study, leadership coaching for principals is described in similar fashion: Leadership coaching is a relationship between a trained/skilled coach and willing principal, intended to create action through assisting principals in discovering and creating pragmatic strategies that meet their individualized needs. It is far from being didactic; instead, a leadership coach aids a principal in creating her or his own solutions from her/his own knowledge and experience base, thus adding genuineness to the solutions. The practice is action-oriented, non-directive, solution-focused, and performance-driven. Leadership coaching is proposed as a customized, one-on-one program to support school principals in improving their effectiveness by highlighting and developing their already existing talents, skills, and intelligence, resulting in personal, professional, and organizational benefits.

Program Changes

The results of this study confirm the importance of leadership coaching for principals. Since the study began two years ago, the coaching program providing the coaching for the principals interviewed for this study, what is now known as the Coaching and Leadership Development Center (CLDC – www.txcldc.net), has evaluated and further developed its services. Programmatic changes made parallel many of the findings in this study and the implications and recommendations suggested. Some of the modifications since made to the studied coaching program include:

- Clearer coaching definitions have been crafted.
- Coaching testimonials are commonly used in coaching orientations.
- Program guidelines have been refined and include clearly articulated coaching goals.
- Participation in coaching is always voluntary.
- More attention is being paid to coaching readiness and the matching process.
- Expectations and opportunities for ongoing PD for coaches have increased through avenues such as practice coaching calls, extended learning calls, summer seminars, and a monthly newsletter.

These changes attest to the value and importance still being placed on coaching principals in Texas, and further endorse the results of this study.

Summary

Mounting job stress and retirements of school principals combined with growing anxiety around finding and retaining their replacements has raised the urgency around

finding ways to support and develop principals that reflect the needs and practices of what actually occurs in schools. Many current leadership development programs focus solely on external obligations, such as influencing school performance through teaching and learning. These responsibilities are important, but they often supersede internal matters of leadership, such as leader individuality in thinking and behavior, which are precisely what leadership coaching is designed to address.

Australia seemed to understand this specific need for building leadership capacity when they pioneered a coaching program for their experienced principals and stated in their national blueprint:

The Government recognizes the critical role and responsibilities of principals in improving the educational outcomes of students in their schools....Within the system we must provide principals with the support they need to develop a culture of high performance and continuous improvement. By investing in leadership development, the Government will ensure that school leaders are equipped to meet the demands and challenges of their role within the system. (cited in Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007, p. 6)

Leadership coaching is a current example of how needed and ongoing professional support and development can be offered and customized to equip and meet the individual needs of school principals of all experience levels. Based on this qualitative research examining the experience and benefits of principals participating in leadership coaching, it was determined that this thoughtfully created partnership between a competent coach and a ready principal resulted in personal, professional, and organizational benefits, due to a strong relationship and coaching conditions of safety, flexibility, action-orientation, and skillful guidance. This study advances the notion that leadership coaching is a positive and beneficial experience that will support principals in

navigating the complexity of school leadership's ever-changing demands, helping to ensure that all students are academically successful.

Appendices

Appendix A: Emailed Request to Participate

TO: Principal
FROM: Michael Greenwalt
SUBJECT: Leadership Coaching Study

Principals participating in leadership coaching,

My name is Michael Greenwalt. I currently serve as a Coordinator for the School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC) at Region 13 Education Service Center and am a doctoral candidate at The University of Texas at Austin. I am conducting a study on leadership coaching for school principals, and because you are currently participating in the leadership coaching provided by Region 13, I am writing to ask for your assistance in completing my research.

While there is adequate research on the use of leadership coaching in the business world for executives, only recently has this form of support begun to be used for school and district leaders, and therefore research surrounding the experience of leadership coaching for principals is still in infancy stages. The goal of this study is to learn about the experience of leadership coaching from a participating principal's perspective.

I know how swamped you are as a principal, a motivating reason for me doing this research, yet I am asking your support by volunteering to be interviewed by me around the coaching in which you are participating. The interview process and any associated activities should take no more than two hours of your time. I am hopeful that you will help me in this significant endeavor to learn more about the experience of leadership coaching from your perspective.

For informational purposes only, please read the attached consent form and complete the short five-question survey located at the link below. The survey should take less than one minute to complete and obligates you to nothing. If you volunteer to participate and are chosen to be interviewed, I will communicate with you further and provide you a hard copy of the consent form for your signature.

www.surveymonkey.....

Let me know if you have any questions and MANY thanks in advance. I wish you all the best regarding your students' upcoming tests.

Michael Greenwalt
Coordinator, School Improvement Resource Center, Region 13 ESC

Appendix B: Consent Form

**Informed Consent Form for Research Study of
The Influence of Leadership Coaching as Perceived by Secondary Principals**

Conducted by Michael Greenwalt
Doctoral Candidate, University of Texas
michael.greenwalt@esc13.txed.net

The Study

Leadership coaching for new and experienced principals is growing as a form of professional development and support provided by districts and state-sponsored programs. The purpose of this research is to learn about the experience of leadership coaching from the perspective of the participating principal and whether or not the practice has any benefits. The final research results will contribute to educational practitioners' understanding of leadership coaching as it relates to the development of secondary school principals at Title I campuses in Texas.

The study will rely primarily on participant interviews. Involvement in the interview process and supporting activities (document review and observations), if needed, should require no more than two hours of the participant's time. As a token of the researcher's appreciation for this commitment, a \$10 donation to an education-related charity will be made on behalf of each participant chosen for and completing the interview process.

To ensure accurate data reporting, interviews will be recorded and responses transcribed. These transcripts will be sent to each participant for verification. Also, a summary of the research findings and implications will be made available to participants at the conclusion of the study.

Risks to participants are considered minimal. Although general descriptive data such as the participant's school size and years of experience will be shared in the study, names of participants, schools, and districts will remain confidential at all times, known only to the researcher. All data gathered will be stored in a secure location and destroyed shortly after the completion of the study.

Consent

I hereby consent to participate in the above research project. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may change my mind and refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. I may refuse to answer any questions or I may stop the interview. I understand that some of the things that I say may be directly quoted in the text of the final report, and subsequent publications, but all responses will remain confidential and my name will not be associated in any way.

I hereby agree to participate in the above research:

Participant Signature

Printed Name

Date

Appendix C: Participant Selection Survey

- Name
- Years as a principal
 - ✓ First year
 - ✓ 2-5 years
 - ✓ 6-15 years
 - ✓ 16-25 years
 - ✓ More than 25 years
- Approximate years participating in leadership coaching (count the 2009-2010 school year as one full year):
 - ✓ 0-1
 - ✓ 2
 - ✓ 3
 - ✓ 4+
- Would you be willing to participate in this study and allow me to interview you to discuss your leadership coaching experience?
 - ✓ Yes
 - ✓ Seriously considering it, but need more information
 - ✓ No
 - ✓ Other _____
- Any questions or comments?

Appendix D: Principal Interview Guide

Introduce/Describe interview process:

- ✓ Introduce yourself and thank participant for his/her time.
- ✓ Describe purpose of research.
- ✓ Remind participant that research will be kept confidential, and that s/he will have the opportunity to review the transcript of her/his interview.
- ✓ Remind participant that the interview will be recorded to provide study accuracy and that you may occasionally take some notes.
- ✓ Assure participant that there are no expectations as to how they will answer questions; there are no “correct” answers.

Review/confirm descriptive data:

- ✓ Name
- ✓ Years as a principal
- ✓ School Name
- ✓ Students served
- ✓ Student population
- ✓ School location
- ✓ Size of professional faculty
- ✓ Years coached as a leader

Reminders

To enrich the conversation:

- Use the probes below each major starter statement.
- Use follow-up statements such as “tell me more”, “talk to me about that”, “please explain”, “what do you mean?”, “how so?”, etc.

To address sought-after secondary sources of data, when changes in knowledge, skills, behaviors, etc. are indicated as a result of from coaching, ask for one or more of the following:

- Supporting documents
- How change/result might be observed/seen in action at work.

Questions

Describe your experience with leadership coaching.

- ✓ What was happening with you when you started your coaching?
- ✓ What were your initial expectations about coaching? Have your expectations changed?
- ✓ What does leadership coaching mean for/to you?
- ✓ What does it feel like to be coached?

- ✓ How would you describe the experience to someone who did not know anything about leadership coaching?
- ✓ On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the experience?
- ✓ Are there any thoughts about the coaching experience that stand out to you?
- ✓ What do you feel are the advantages or disadvantages of participating in coaching?
- ✓ What factors affect the coaching experience?
- ✓ What advantages or disadvantages have you experienced as a result of your leadership coaching?

Describe how, if in any way, the experience of leadership coaching has affected you.

- ✓ Has any aspect of your life changed through the coaching experience?
 - Personally
 - Professionally
 - Do you attribute any changes directly to the coaching experience?
- ✓ Have you learned anything through the experience of being coached?
- ✓ Is there anything you do and/or see differently as a result of your coaching experience?
- ✓ Describe your time with your coach.
 - On what have you focused?
 - On what do you focus?
 - On what will you focus?
- ✓ How would you determine if leadership coaching has been successful for you?
- ✓ How would someone other than you determine if leadership coaching has been successful for you?
- ✓ Has there been any feedback you have received from others since being coached?
- ✓ Would you recommend coaching to another secondary principal? Why or why not?

Is there any response you have provided during our time together on which you would like to elaborate?

Is there anything else about the experience of being coached that you would like me to know?

Appendix E: List of Documents Referenced and Examined

1. Campus AEIS (Academic Excellence Indicator System) Reports (all)
2. Campus AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) Reports (all)
3. Formal coaching forms
 - a. Pre-coaching questions/focus (Krystal, Martha)
 - b. Goal sheet (Ron)
4. Informal coaching notes/Post-it notes (Krystal, Martha)
5. Research articles and notes around specific topics of coaching sessions (Krystal)
6. Meeting journal (Krystal)
7. Charts and tables of data/scores
 - a. Math scores (Martha)
 - b. District benchmarks (Martha)
 - c. Student enrollment/numbers (Sally)
8. Data assessment discussion tool (Martha)
9. Action plans (John, Ron, Krystal)
 - a. Movement of 22 teachers/classrooms (John)
 - b. Timetable for opening new school (John)
 - c. Beginning of year (Ron)
 - d. Crucial conversation map (Krystal)
 - e. Post-it notes of talking points (Krystal)
10. Informal emails between coach and principal (Krystal)
11. Campus needs assessment sheets from Summer Planning Academy (Martha)

Appendix F: Participant Pseudonyms and Professional Profile Summary

Participant Pseudonym	Profile
John	3 rd year as principal of a suburban middle school; former middle school assistant principal, high school associate principal, and charter school principal
Krystal	2 nd year as turnaround principal of an urban high school; former middle school assistant principal
Lori	10 th year as turnaround principal of an urban high school and on-campus dropout recovery charter school; brought out of retirement; former superintendent and principal
Martha	4 th year as principal of middle school in a district of approximately 20,000 students; former assistant principal
Sally	3 rd year as principal of a Pre-K through 12 th grade charter school in a metropolitan area
Ron	1 st year as principal of a rural high school; former middle school principal, assistant principal, and technology director

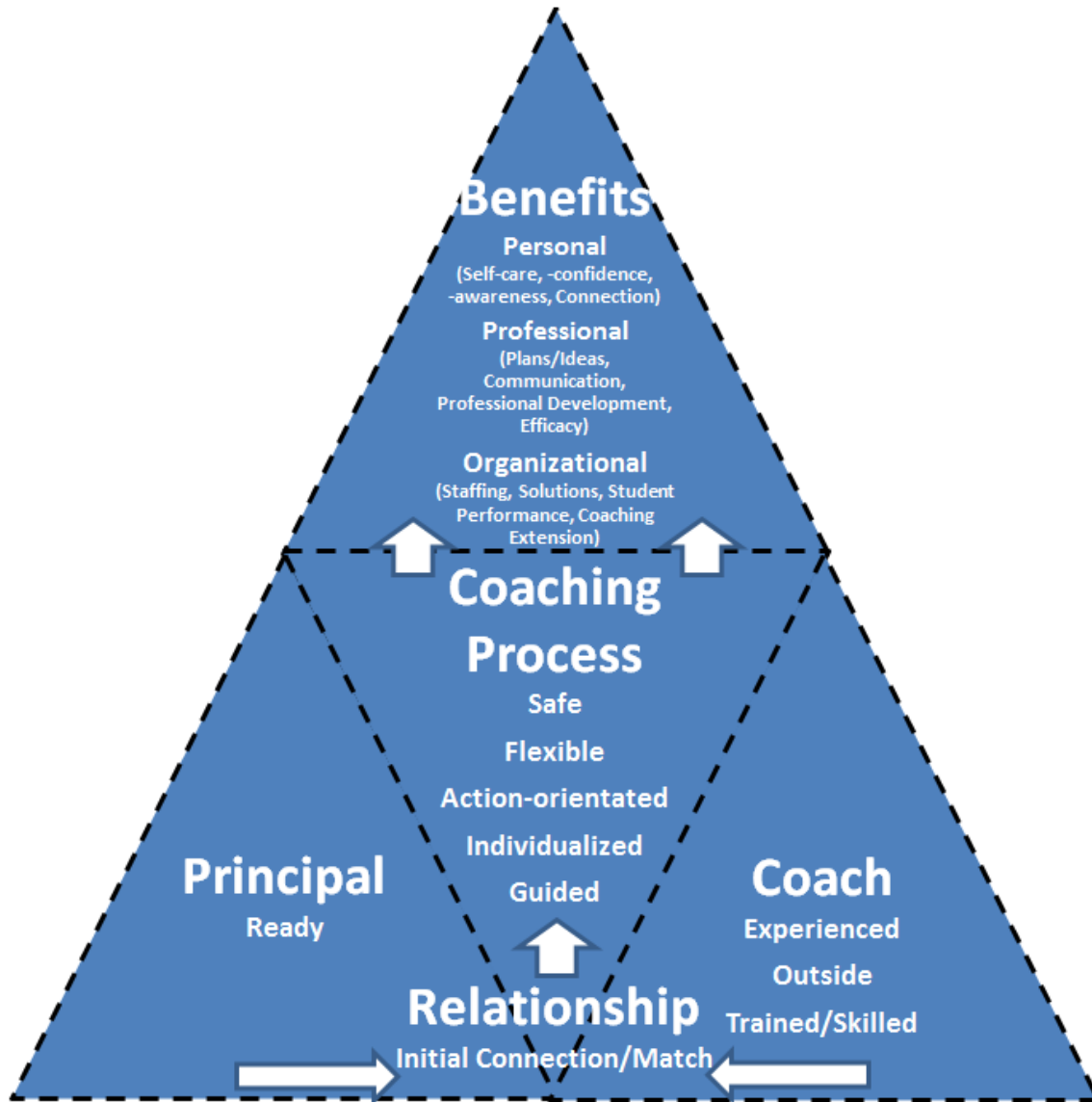
Appendix G: Codes Identified Across Four or More Principals and Numbers of References

Codes Identified	≥ 4 Principals	References
1. Difficulty describing coaching	4	6
2. Evolution/feelings about coaching now	6	58
3. Expectations prior to coaching	6	24
4. Experience of coach/able to relate	4	12
5. Flexibility/customization of coaching	6	23
6. Help/learning from coaching	5	17
7. Advice from an experienced coach	5	29
8. Affirm/encourage/build confidence	6	45
9. Awareness/gain perspective	6	36
10. Calming	5	10
11. Coach myself and others	4	14
12. Coached areas	6	83
i. Personal/career	5	21
ii. Professional/job-embedded	6	62
13. Decisions/think through	5	14
14. Find answers/ideas by myself	6	18
15. Goals/accountability	5	20
16. Move to action	5	23
17. Pre-plan crucial conversations	4	23
18. Priorities/refocus/clarity	6	26
19. Questions from coach	5	20
20. Reflection/post conversations/events	6	20
21. Relationship/friendship/company	6	25
22. Research/resources	4	10
23. Safety/non-judgment/outside	6	24
24. Sounding board/someone to talk/vent to	6	57
25. Match of coach	4	9
26. Meaning of leadership coaching	6	53
27. Process/procedures	6	36
28. Recommend coaching for others	6	31
29. Stress/pressure of job	6	64
30. Time constraints	6	27
31. Varied experiences/not for everyone	6	41

Appendix H: Core Themes with Associated Codes

Core Themes	Associated Codes
Experience: Taking the Time to Pause	Expectations prior to coaching Calming Stress/pressure of job Time constraints Sounding board/someone to talk/vent to Evolution/feelings about coaching now
Experience: Connecting with the Coach (<i>Client Readiness, Coach Experience, Coach Distance</i>)	Match of coach Advice from an experienced coach Experience of coach/able to relate Varied experiences/not for everyone
Experience: Building and Sustaining a Healthy Coaching Relationship (<i>Safety, Flexibility, Action-orientation, Skillful Guidance</i>)	Flexibility/customization of coaching Move to action Safety/non-judgment/outside Relationship/friendship/company Find answers/ideas by myself Questions from coach Goals/accountability Help/learning from coaching
Benefits: Personal -Better Self-Care	Stress/Pressure of job Calming Sounding board/someone to talk/vent to
Benefits: Personal -Reduced Isolation	Relationship/friendship/company Sounding board/someone to talk/vent to
Benefits: Personal -Increased Self-confidence	Affirm/encourage/build confidence
Benefits: Personal -Heightened Self-Awareness	Awareness/gain perspective
Benefits: Professional -Generation of Plans/Ideas	Find answers/ideas by myself Goals/accountability
Benefits: Professional -Improved Communication	Pre-plan crucial conversations Safety/non-judgment/outside
Benefits: Professional -Individualized Professional Development	Flexibility/customization of coaching Experience of coach/able to relate Advice from an experienced coach Pre-plan crucial conversations Help/learning from coaching Questions from coach Research/resources
Benefits: Professional -Enhanced Sense of Efficacy (<i>Clarity/Focus, Taking Action, Reflective Practice</i>)	Move to action Priorities/refocus/clarity Reflection/post conversations/events Decisions/think through Goals/accountability
Benefits: Organizational -Staffing	Pre-plan crucial conversations
Benefits: Organizational -Solutions	Coached Areas
Benefits: Organizational -Student Performance	Coached Areas
Benefits: Organizational -Extending coaching to others	Coach myself and others

Appendix I: Leadership Coaching Model



Appendix J: Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Principals	School Districts	Coaching Organizations	Coaches
<p>Need for Pausing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -create and protect time to reap researched benefits -follow a predetermined leadership coaching routine of specific time and space -enlist others to assist you in honoring routine 	<p>Leadership coaching could positively impact the efficacy of principals and entire district</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -create a coaching environment -be thoughtful in design and approach -provide other support systems 	<p>Coaching providers are in the most influential position to design and refine operating aspects of leadership coaching profession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -develop and communicate clear guidelines and standards 	<p>Based on findings, coaches should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -have experience as an educational leader -be unconnected to principal's employing district -possess ability to create a safe environment through confidentiality, impartiality, non-directedness, and encouragement -practice a flexible style and approach -orient towards moving principals to action through the use of goals, questioning strategies, and monitoring tools -use skillful guidance evidenced through overall resourcefulness, asking the right questions, and ability to guide principal to discover answers within themselves
<p>Need for a thinking partner and advocate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -if leadership coach is not possible, seek a comparable partner 	<p>Create a coaching environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -recognize possible benefits and encourage practice of coaching -use the language of coaching -aim to educate all staff about leadership coaching through definitions, examples, and case studies -raise awareness of how others are applying leadership coaching -spread the wealth of leadership coaching opportunities -offer other forms of coaching 	<p>Craft clear definitions of leadership coaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -use chapter 2 to gain comprehensive understanding -listen to principals who have experienced leadership coaching -distinguish between mentoring and leadership coaching -use definitions crafted in marketing, communications, trainings, and readiness assessments -leverage the use of leadership coaching testimonials/stories of success -promote networking of principals participating in coaching 	<p>Create a safe environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -make certain that it is acceptable to talk about challenging or controversial topics with confidence that information will remain confidential -coach in a supportive and agreeable manner that puts principals at ease to openly share -have humility and foresight to back out of a coaching relationship if there are any conflicts of interest or difficulties relating to client -have humility to solicit answers primarily from the principal/ client and not from the coach's amassed skills and experience
<p>Need for coaching readiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -get clear on the definition and purpose of leadership coaching -be committed to the coaching process, agreeable to investment of time and energy, desirous to maximize opportunity -participate voluntarily 	<p>Be thoughtful in design and approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -remain flexible in implementation; avoid formalized or one-size-fits-all models -pay attention to individual needs and preferences of principals -use coaching as one option on a menu of possible approaches to individualized PD -ensure participation is voluntary -respect the notion of coaching readiness -ensure coaches and coaching providers are reputable and clear on district's goals for coaching, while also 	<p>Create an operating framework or model on which to guide the implementation of leadership coaching systems.</p>	<p>Use flexible style and approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -ensure coaching process continually revolves around the principal, his or her own personalized professional development plan -do not set an expectation for the number of coaching hours over the span of the school year; include at least one or two coaching calls a month, plus occasional email correspondence, but also be available to the principal and prepared to build upon whatever questions and concerns s/he has at the time -respect the principal as a person and approach the coaching experience holistically

Principals	School Districts	Coaching Organizations	Coaches
	<p>respecting confidentiality of relationship ---use leadership coaches from outside the district ---confirm leadership coaches have appropriate training and experience, and reliable systems are in place for matching coach to client and evaluating services</p>		
	<p>Provide other support systems -if budgets cannot support leadership coaching, provide some other type of similar leadership support for principals desiring -embed time/ opportunities within trainings/meetings for reflection and planning -consider on-demand coaching -provide training and support for principals around effective communication, especially regarding difficult conversations</p>	<p>Implement systems to: -find and train the right people to coach -assess principal readiness -match coach to principal/client -regulate forms/ paperwork -evaluate coaching success -promote coaching success</p>	<p>Remain action-oriented -listen attentively for and record clients' needs, goals, and areas of focus ---use this information to keep client focused and moving forward ---use well-placed questions and tools that guide principal to develop action steps/plans ---follow-up at intervals to gently hold principal accountable</p>
		<p>Find and train the right people to coach -heed what coached principals appreciated about their coaches (coaching conditions of safety, flexibility, action-orientation, skillful guidance) -make education experience a requirement for leadership coaches -create applications, interviews, and trainings that filter coaches through their aptitudes of delivering identified coaching conditions</p>	<p>Use skillful guidance -establish collaborative relationships with principals that honor principals' perspectives -focus on "thinking with" instead of "thinking for"/directing paths of action -attend to personal and professional development in order to stay at best ---employ a personal coach ---practice skills of listening, patience, flexibility, and questioning ---increase knowledge around education issues and trends, strategic planning, and other school district challenges ---maintain network of contacts in coaching and leadership development fields for additional resources ---participate in regular networking opportunities with other leadership coaches ---read current literature, journals, and other publications to stay abreast in education and be able to offer resources to principals -use periodic check-in points with principals and themselves, aided by rubrics, to assess coaching skills and ability to maintain coaching conditions -build a question bank from which to sharpen questioning skills and draw -study principals' school districts to increase credibility with principals and to help comprehend and appreciate</p>

Principals	School Districts	Coaching Organizations	Coaches
			dynamics impacting principals and their progress
		<p>Not all principals are ready to participate in coaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -develop processes and/or tools that assess client readiness (ability to open up, comfort in talking, desire to learn and grow) 	
		<p>Matching coach to principal is pivotal in creating strong coaching relationship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create systematic processes and time for determining best match between coaches and principals ---ensure regional distance between coaches and principals ---predetermine any conflicts of interest coaches may have ---if possible, allow principals to choose or play major role in choosing their coaches ---provide opportunities for principals and coaches to cultivate mutual kinship ---use personality profiles and questionnaires/ surveys of values/belief systems, needs, or preferences to ensure positive bond between coach and client 	
		<p>Coaching forms/paperwork were not necessary or desired as the coaching relationship matured</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -use coaching and confidentiality agreements to outline expectations of coach and principal at beginning of relationship -use goal setting sheets, coaching prep forms, and other paper tools as necessary to strengthen coaching process -use caution in making forms/paperwork mandatory as the coaching relationship matures 	
		<p>Study findings offer a foundation for assessing the effectiveness of the leadership coaching experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -use findings to design metrics or checklists to be used in assessing what effective interactions between coach and principal should look like ---use metrics or checklists to empower principals to be educated consumers of leadership coaching services -expand evaluations to include other program components (coaching orientations, matching process, etc.) -expand evaluations to include additional constituents like superintendents, teachers, and coaching providers -use annual feedback survey and pre- and post-focus groups of coached 	

Principals	School Districts	Coaching Organizations	Coaches
		principals to offer additional input and lessons learned -network with other coaching organizations to learn best practices of effective coaching programs	
		Ensure caliber of coaches by: -keeping current on coaches' reputations and practices -assessing coaches' effectiveness -providing coaches and their principals feedback	
		Leadership coaching is difficult to measure, especially in regard to quantifiable evidence of positive impact -continue conveying benefits anecdotally or qualitatively -create various rubrics that can be used to more quantifiably measure the benefits of coaching -utilize existing quantitative leadership inventories to conduct pre- and post-assessments of principals participating in leadership coaching -standardize, to the extent possible, coaching program elements in order to make it easier to collect robust and usable data for program metrics and research -explore ways to blend qualitative and quantitative evidence for examining return on investment -gather longitudinal data in order to identify trends and possible long-term benefits	
		Coaching experiences are enhanced when coaches are proficient at coaching, but also current on education issues and relevant research -promote coaching success through the expectation and provision of ongoing PD for coaching community ---provide quarterly newsletters, email updates, educational webinars, coaching literature and research -promote coaching consistency around program procedures and resolution of issues by creating and maintaining a program guidelines	

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