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"She Talked Me Down Off the Ledge:" Listening to New Principals and Their Experience of Being Coached

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“She Talked Me Down Off the Ledge:"
Listing to New Principals and their Experience of Being Coached

by

Ingrid Patricia Roberson

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Spring 2011
Abstract

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Ingrid Patricia Roberson

Joint Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Sandra Hollingsworth, Chair

With increased accountability and newly introduced alternative paths to administrative licensure, stakeholders are compelled to re-conceptualize the preparation of principals from a front-loaded process during the pre-service phase to a well-distributed plan across a principal’s career. In a recent review of state policy, states have shifted their focus from university-based leadership development programs to a system of continuous professional development, specifying a shared responsibility for such development (Roach, Smith and Boutin, 2011). Such regulatory shifts force employing schools and districts to reflect upon and accept their role in supporting the successful entry of new principals, that is, to formally and informally induct new school leaders into their organization as well as the profession.

The purpose of the study is to contribute to the research base on the induction of principals by focusing on an increasingly popular induction support strategy, that is, the coaching of new principals. This study sought to thoroughly explore new principals’ experiences with coaching, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the effects of coaching to emerge from the principal’s perspective. This study utilized a mixed method, cross-case study design that began with the traditional satisfaction survey, moved to follow-up telephone interviews and then examined new principal conceptions of the coaching experience through in-depth interviewing. Rather than start with a priori definitions and codes of points of investigation, new principals emergent descriptions reveal their deeper understanding of satisfaction with an individualized induction support.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

In 2002, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) adopted the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) as an option for obtaining a California Preliminary Administrative Services Credential (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2003). The SLLA was a six-hour assessment divided into four sections, consisting of constructed-response questions to measure decision-making skills and problem-solving (CCTC, 2003). Prior to 2002, CCTC required an aspiring teacher to complete either “a program of specialized and professional preparation in administrative services” or “a one-year administrative services internship consisting of supervised in-service training through a California college or university” (CCTC, 2003). In 2010, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing renewed its commitment to a fast-track credentialing process with the approval and implementation of the California Preliminary Administrative Credential Examination (CPACE), moving away from the national SLLA towards the California-specific CPACE (CCTC, 2010). Either way, whereas previously new principals necessarily participated in an administrative credential or internship program, a teacher, with the minimal three years of required experience, could become a principal as long as they passed either the SLLA or CPACE.

As more and more states introduced legislation that allowed for alternative paths to administrative licensure similar to California, a new era of reform ushered in an unprecedented emphasis on standards, assessment, and accountability. By the early 2000’s, every state had adopted a system of standards, assessment, and accountability, as part of a tidal wave of local, state, and federal policy aimed to protect America’s public school system from “being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity” as described in “A Nation at Risk” (Hamilton, Stecher, and Yuan, 2009). By 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) would place an unprecedented emphasis on the latter two components of assessments and accountability. First of all, NCLB mandated that all students in grades 3 through 8 be tested annually. Second, with such an assessment program in place, NCLB would also mandate accountability for meeting, or rather not meeting, Annual Measurable Objectives, that is, the percentage of students proficient on state standards as measured by their state assessment. Failure to meet these objectives subjected failing schools to increasingly harsh interventions under Program Improvement such as replacing all or most school staff, including the principal (California Department of Education, 2010a). By 2010, additional competitive grant funds would be made available to Persistently Low Performing schools, however, in order to receive such funds, school would have to choose one of the following four intervention models: Turnaround, Transformation, Restart or School Closure. Only two out of the four options allowed the school to remain open and both of these options, the Turnaround model and Transformation model, required replacing the principal (California Department of Education, 2010b).

With increased accountability and newly introduced alternative paths to administrative licensure, stakeholders were compelled to re-conceptualize the preparation of principals from a front-loaded process during the pre-service phase to a well-distributed plan across a principal’s career. In a recent review of state policy supporting a “cohesive leadership system” comprised of a “five-segment continuum of standards, preparation program approval, assessment and licensure, mentoring and induction, and ongoing professional development coupled with licensure renewal,” Roach, Smith and Boutin (2011) found that states have shifted their focus from university-based leadership development programs to a system of continuous professional
development, specifying a shared responsibility for such development. Such regulatory shifts force employing schools and districts to reflect upon and accept their role in supporting the successful entry of new principals, that is, to formally and informally induct new school leaders into their organization as well as the profession.

**Purpose for the Current Study**

The purpose of the study is to contribute to the research base on the induction of principals by focusing on an increasingly popular induction support strategy, that is, the coaching of new principals. This study sought to thoroughly explore new principals’ experiences with coaching, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the effects of coaching to emerge from the principal’s perspective. Conducted in two phases, this study began by unpacking principal satisfaction with coaching as measured by a satisfaction survey through phone and in-person follow-up interviews designed to more deeply investigate their experiences. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do new principals experience their coaching program?
2. How does coaching enhance their experience as a novice administrator?

This study is organized into five chapters. The remainder of Chapter One provides the background and significance of this study. Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of the research literature on the coaching of new principals in education and related research literature on coaching within business and psychology. Chapter Three describes the two-phase approach utilized in this study to better understand new principal’s coaching experience. Chapters Four and Five present the results and implications of this study for future research and practice.

**Background**

New principals are presented with a daunting task - to simultaneously lead and learn the ins and outs of a complex organization. There are three phases of a principal’s career, including pre-service (prior to position), induction (first few years as a principal) and in-service (subsequent years as a principal) (Wiendling, 2004). The National Foundation for Education Research expands phases in a principal career to now include seven distinct stages: Stage 0 is Preparation prior to headship, Stage 1 is Entry and encounter (first months), Stage 2 is Taking hold (three to 12 months), Stage 3 is Reshaping (second year), Stage 4 is Refinement (years 3 to 4), Stage 5 is Consolidation (years 5 to 7), and Stage 6 is Plateau (years 8 and onwards) (Early and Wiendling, 2007).

Based on work with new high school principals, Parkey and Hall’s (1992) “stages model” provided a framework for studying the induction phase of a principal’s career, identifying the following five stages: survival, control, stability, educational leadership and professional actualization. Stage 1: Survival – this is the entry stage for principals who feel overwhelmed, insecurity, shock, frustration, and powerlessness. Stage 2: Control – At this stage, the survival concerns have lessened. Principals develop routines based on what is acceptable for a person in this position in order to create a sense of control. Stage 3: Stability – New principal has a realistic understanding and expectations for the position and associated tasks are manageable. Stage 4: Educational Leadership – at this stage, the principal envisions long-term success for change strategies. Stage 5: Professional Actualization – at this state, the principal co-creates with school staff the vision for success.
The first few years as an administrator are a critical time period for new principals (Bresedson, 1989). As suggested by the five stages described above, the role transition from teacher to administrator results in role strain as the new administrator navigates new professional and organization norms (Allen and van de Vliert, 1984; Bresedson, 1993). Several studies document the emotional stress such as anxiety, doubt, and frustration that new principals experience (Anderson, 1991; Daresh, 1995; and Parkay, Currie and Rhodes, 1992). Daresh (1986) finds that new principal problems fall into three categories: role clarification, technical mastery, and interpersonal relationships. Lyons (1993) find that individuals who enter the position do not fully understand nor are adequately prepared for what the position involves. With respect to technical mastery, Aiken (2002) and Crow and Mathews (1998) find that first-year stress comes from task overload in meeting a multitude of demands under intense time pressure (Parkay et al., 1992). For example, Alvy and Coladarci’s (1985) study of first and second year principals in Montana finds five areas of concern: 1) finding time to visit classroom, 2) strengthening the instructional program, 3) advocating the use of current educational findings, 4) encouraging teachers to provide differentiated instruction and 5) promoting change among experienced staff. DuBose (1986) found that financial management was a problem area for new principals. Finally, quick assimilation into a new culture adds to role strain (Aiken, 2002; Anderson, 1991; and Crow and Mathews, 1998).

While new principals are especially prone to feeling overwhelmed at the start, they are also receptive to rich learning opportunities based on the reality of their on-the-job experience (Berlow and Hall, 1966; Lashway, 2001). In this critical time period, new principals are more willing to develop in the direction of organizational expectations (Van Maanen, 1976). The first few years as a principal significantly affect subsequent attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and skills, influencing future job performance and success (Anderson, 1991; Berlow and Hall 1966; and Heck 1975).

Organizational socialization is the process that helps a new employee learn the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to become an effective member of an organization (Bauer and Erdogan, 2011). In an interactive model of successful socialization, both new employee characteristics (i.e. proactive personality, extraversion, openness, and veteran) and behaviors (i.e. information seeking, feedback seeking, and relationship building) along with organizational efforts (i.e. socialization tactics, formal orientations, recruitment and organization insiders) affect the adjustment process and outcomes (Bauer and Erdogan, 2011). While satisfaction, commitment, turnover and performance emerge as the predominant outcomes studied, Bauer and Erdogan (2011) in a comprehensive review of the research on socialization suggest the following: “Another aspect of socialization that remains understudied is the role that socialization plays in employee well-being and stress. Future research that addresses stress outcomes would be beneficial for both individuals and organizations to better understand the stressors and strains newcomers experience when adapting to new organizations” (p.60).

Specific to education, Leithwood, Steinbach and Begley (1992) define socialization as the process whereby a new principal acquires the knowledge, skills and disposition needed to adequately perform a social role. Leithwood, Steinbach and Begley (1992) looked at experiences as very helpful or not helpful, analyzing four dimensions: relationships, experiences with formal policies and procedures, formal training, and outcomes of socialization. These researchers found that those forms of socialization valued most appear to be embedded in the context of school life, focused on the role of administration and leadership. As districts accept
their role in maintaining the quality of school site administration, formal organizational socialization is of investigative importance in order to support principals’ navigation through Parkey and Hall’s (1992) five stages (e.g. survival, control, stability, educational leadership and professional actualization).

Principal induction programs are a formal mechanism to support new principals in their adjustment to new roles and responsibilities in order to relieve role strain (Lyons, 1993). Castetter (1992) defined induction programs as the “systemic organization effort to assist personnel to adjust readily and effectively to new assignments so that they can contribute maximally to the work of the system while realizing personal and position satisfaction” (p. 186). Social support systems, such as university preparation programs, school district orientation programs, regular feedback, and a professional growth plan, mediate role strain (Lyons, 1993). Holcomb (1989) in a study of elementary principal’s perception of support found that frequent formats of support are workshops, relationships with peers, discussion groups, professional reading, university courses and relationships with predecessors. Most common providers are self-initiated, supervisors, universities and colleges, and local districts.

Lyons (1993) suggests that school districts must be willing to provide a new principal a comprehensive program of principal orientation. Elsberry and Bishop (1996) identify the following as effective induction practices: summer induction conferences, orientation by school district offices, internships, and mentoring. According to Rogus and Drury (1988), an induction program should include three components: a large-group component focused on district policies and procedures, a small-group component more tightly focused on problem-solving, and a mentor/coach component focused on personal growth. Parkay and Hall (1992) propose the “tripod of support”: training, networking and coaching.

In a review of currently operating induction programs, 30 were identified in the United States with 14 states requiring such a program and another 6 states considering legislation (Weindling, 2004). In this review, all 43 international induction programs included a coaching component (Wiendling, 2004). In a more recent review of published United States regulations on principal preparation and on-going development, 25 states have regulatory language that requires the mentoring of new principals (Roach et al., 2011). Coaching as an individual induction support strategy has become a standard component of induction programs and is typically evaluated through principal’s “satisfaction” with the coaching program (Weindling, 2004). More investigation is needed, however, to find what specifically can be learned from the coaching experience to inform future programs.

**Significance of the Study**

This study will unpack new principal satisfaction with coaching. Rather than start with a priori definitions and codes of points of investigation, new principals emergent descriptions reveal their deeper understanding of satisfaction with an individualized induction support. By subjecting principals’ notions of satisfaction to more rigorous review, a deeper understanding of principal experiences of coaching are revealed.
Chapter 2
Review of the Research Literature

Introduction

While theories of learning suggest that coaching is a promising practice for principal induction, the research on coaching in general and in education especially is still in a nascent stage. According to the Global Convention on Coaching’s Working Group for Research Agenda for the Development of the Field (2008), “coaching is at the stage of an emerging discipline, and the development of coaching-specific theory and evidence-based practice is a major challenge” (p. iii). In order to better appreciate this challenge, at Harvard’s 2009 Coaching in Medicine and Leadership Conference, Dr. Anthony Grant (2009), in his review of published research, identified only 518 publications since 1937 through 2009 on executive, workplace and life coaching and of these, only 180 empirical studies had been conducted.

Given that coaching as a profession emerged in the 1990s, the literature on the coaching of new principals is also emerging as its use as an induction support strategy was non-existent within education prior to 2000 (Mitgang, 2007). A minimal number of studies focus on the leadership coaching of new principals (Silver, Lochmiller, Copland, and Tripps, 2009). However, there is a more extensive literature base of empirical studies related to the broader notion of mentoring new principals (Silver et al, 2009). In a recent review of published United States regulations focused on the preparation and development of school principals, 25 states require mentoring of new principals and of those, 12 prescribe mentoring after completion of the preparation program (Roach et al., 2011).

With a much longer history, mentoring tends to be defined as a more experienced individual paired with a less experienced individual in order to share professional and organizational knowledge (Bush, Coleman, Wall and West-Burnham, 1996; Daresh and Playko, 1993; and Kram 1985). Coaching is defined similarly, however, it tends to be more specifically focused on career competencies (Green, Holmes, and Shaw 1991; Hobson and Sharp, 2005; and Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). The distinction that can be drawn between coaching and mentoring is that coaching formally intends to improve performance whereas mentoring intends to formally or informally induct new employees into an organization. (Hobson and Sharp, 2005; and Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). This is an artificial line drawn for the purpose of clarification. Even within Executive Coaching, there is still a discussion to differentiate coaching from mentoring (Peterson, 2010). According to Peterson (2010), “the solution may be to cease trying to differentiate the two terms and instead to define clearly an appropriate solution based on the development need and then refer to the intervention by whichever term is preferred” (p. 531). Given the significant overlap between coaching and mentoring and the lack of empirical studies on the coaching of new principals, research on both the coaching and mentoring of new principals is reviewed, including its definition, a description of its practices, the outcomes of coaching support and measures of coaching processes and effectiveness, and the terms are used interchangeably throughout the next three sections.

What is Coaching?

Consistent with the literature on socialization and induction, coaches and mentors of new principals fulfill profession, career, and psycho-social functions. Mentors socialize new
principals into the profession, sharing with neophytes the norms of being a leader (Crow and Matthews, 1998). Coaches also enhance or advance the career of new principals through sponsorship, exposure, and visibility (Kram, 1985). Finally, mentors serve a psycho-social function by providing a relationship that alleviates new principals’ sense of isolation and anxiety.

Coaching strategies tend to fall into two categories: the teaching relationship and the personal relationship. The teaching relationship is characterized by knowledge-transmission where the veteran administrator shares strategies for solving managerial and instructional problems. The personal relationship is characterized by knowledge-construction where the veteran administrator listens to and reflects back neophyte concerns and then co-create understandings of the profession, the organization, and other related performance-impeding issues (Dukess, 2001; Strong, Barrett, and Bloom, 2003). Reviewing the related literature of executive coaching, the coaching process tends to be initiated with a more comprehensive needs assessment. For example, executive coaches will collect data systematically, including 360 degree feedback data (e.g. interviews of superordinates, peers and subordinates), and psychometric data (e.g. results from Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and the LifeStyles Inventory) (Wasylyshyn, 2003). This needs assessment identifies the executive’s areas of strength and weakness and determines goals and objectives for a professional growth plan that can focus on specific skills to a more comprehensive approach (Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, and Doyle, 1996, Peterson, 1996; Tobias 1996). Executive coaching is described as a consultant relationship driven by client needs (Peterson, 1996).

Coaching relationships, it is suggested, should be characterized by mutual trust (Peterson, 1996.) Research suggests that relationships should be confidential and non-supervisory in order to develop trust (Dukess, 2001). However, research also suggests that mentor selection, matching, and training may be more important determiners of relationship success. In selecting mentors, mentors should have a record of success, be respected, have expertise, committed to lifelong learning, and have time to mentor (Crow and Matthews, 1998). Matching of a coach to a new principal should take into account the mentor’s age, gender, organizational position, power, and self-confidence (Hunt and Michael, 1983). Preparatory and on-going training are also important for developing facilitation, reflection and communication skills (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, and Weindling, 1995; Weindling, 2004).

**What Are the Benefits Associated with Coaching?**

The result of being in a coaching relationship first and foremost is an enhanced sense of psycho-social well-being for the new principal. New principals appreciate having an identified person to go to who will listen to their problems – a conversation that is confidential and non-judgmental, reducing their sense of isolation and anxiety (Coleman, Low, Bush and Chew, 1996; Dukess, 2001). Providing another perspective, these conversations also improve their self-confidence and self-esteem as a leader understanding that the problems they encounter are not unique and their solutions are adequate (Bolam et al, 1995). Second, new principals seem to improve skills important for leadership such as problem analysis, perception, facilitation, organization and team building by observing veteran administrators in action or sharing of strategies with their coach (Bolam et al., 1995, Coleman et al., 1996, Boon, 1998, and Dukess, 2001). Third, coaching improves career opportunities through visibility with key personnel, protection from career-damaging situations, and opportunities for challenging assignments (Bolam et al., 1995).
Though not as well researched, coaching also has benefits for the mentor as well as the organization. For the mentor, coaching enhances their on-going professional growth primarily through critically reflective practice (Bush and Coleman, 1995; Daresh and Playko, 1993, 1997; and Hopkins and Thompson, 2000;). Through mentor preparation, mentors also improve their skills such as attentive listening and reflective conversation (Bolam et al, 1995). Mentors also seem to experience a renewed commitment to leadership and education in general (Daresh and Playko, 1993, 1997).

What is the Evidence to Substantiate the Claims for Coaching?

The next three sections present research on coaching within education, business and psychology. References are made to related literature (e.g. executive coaching and life coaching); however, the goal is not to review these related literatures in detail but rather to suggest how insights gained from them can contribute to the understanding of coaching.

Education: Principal Coaching

Research on the mentoring and coaching of new principals is in an embryonic stage. In a review of research conducted from 1984 to 1994 on the mentoring of in-service and pre-service principals, Daresh (1995b) found 77 studies. Hobson and Sharp (2005) in a recent review of research literature on the mentoring of principals found only 24 articles directly related to the mentoring of in-service, not aspiring, principals. Specific to coaching, in the Winter 2011 issue of the University Council for Educational Administration Review, O’Doherty (2011) remarked “a recent search of peer-reviewed literature in the EBSCO database using terms such as leadership preparation, principals, and coaching returned fewer than 30 articles. These included just a few empirical research studies (p. 21).” Empirical studies tend to be evaluations of coaching programs or induction programs with a specific focus on the coaching component, utilizing researcher-designed surveys and interviews (Dukess, 2001; Crews and Weakley, 1996; Grover, 1993; and Weingartner, 2001).

Empirical studies conducted in the United States tend to be small evaluation studies of district and regional coaching initiatives. For example, the New York City Public School System was referenced in three studies of district coaching initiatives (Dukess, 2001; Grover, 1993; and Willen, 2001). In a study of six principal coach programs, Grover (1993) administered a satisfaction survey to all 109 principals where respondent’s (only 40 percent) rated their experience on a five-point Likert scale. Strong et al. (2003) conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of a regional service provider’s coaching program for the greater Bay Area in San Francisco. Thirty-one principals participated in the study, with 27 enrolled in the New Administrator’s Program and 4 serving as a comparison. Electronic questionnaires were sent to all of the principals at the beginning and the end of the school year, focusing on program expectations and satisfaction. Their case study component included seven principals and two coaches, consisting of monthly telephone interviews and four shadow observations throughout the year to get a feel for the typical administrator day.

Three studies, published in peer-reviewed journals, are described in detail as exemplars of the type of research emerging on the mentoring and coaching of principals. A recent study investigated the relationship between the mentoring of new principals and developing instructional leadership skills. Focused on the effectiveness of District-Created Mentoring
Program (DCMP) and a statewide Administrator Mentoring Program (AMP) in Missouri, this study interviewed six program participants using a semi-structured interviewing protocol, Support of Mentors Developing Instructional Leadership Skills, with documents such as logs providing supplemental data (Gettys, Martin and Bigby, 2010). Results from this study indicated that both mentoring programs were “weak” in developing instructional leadership skills as determined by the mixed reviews from the six program participants. For example, with respect to the first standard, while one participants identified “number one is the communication between my mentor and me,” another participating principal described that same type of communication as “It’s really not been a very instructional process for me, other than I’ve had someone who has had experience and talked about common experiences we’ve had (p. 100).” The six instructional standards that were investigated are: “(a) Lead schools by placing priority on student and adult learning, (b) Develop high expectations and standards, (c) Demand content and instruction that ensures student achievement, (d) Create a culture of adult learning, (e) Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools and (f) Actively engaging the community (p. 100)” (Gettys et al., 2010). While the focus of the study was on instructional leadership skills, new principals did identify the following as important elements of an effective mentoring program: communication, making a proper match to develop a supportive relationship, amount and method of support provided, and the need for guidelines for content within the program (Gettys et al., 2010).

In another peer-reviewed study, researchers investigated a university-based coaching program. Seventeen program participants were interviewed in coaching pairs (Silver et al, 2009). Interviews were also conducted with coaching program personnel and internship supervisors. New administrators viewed the program positively, citing that it was a personalized form of professional support. For example, “participants viewed personalization as the ability of leadership coaches to tailor the support they provided to the new administrators to the circumstances in the school or to the specific challenges faced by the new administrators” (p. 224) (Silver et al, 2009). The researchers noted that this high level of support, which included email and phone communication, distinguished coaching from other forms of professional development, however, the degree to which the support was personalized depended on the nature of the relationship.

Finally, an in-depth case study was conducted of one pair, an early career principal, Ms. Sanders and her mentor, Ms Jones, utilizing a feminist post-structuralist framework (Peters, 2010). This was an instrumental case study where the case was selected for race, gender and demographic region, that is, a first-year African American female elementary school principal working in a large urban school district in the Midwest. The main finding from this study was a deconstructing of the traditional hierarchical conceptualization of mentoring. According to Peters (2010), “traditional understandings of mentoring relationships would support the growth of the protege professionally, opposed to both personally and professionally. The mutual learning and mutual professional growth that occurred between Ms. Sanders and Ms. Jones was fostered by the ‘connected’ relationship they established together. In the relationship between Ms. Sanders and Ms. Jones, they were able to establish a friendship as a positive result of their affirming mentoring relationship.”

At the international level, a small number of studies have investigated mentoring and coaching more intently as part of the larger International Study of Principal Preparation (Scott, 2010). There were a series of mixed methods studies of the British Headteacher Mentoring Pilot
Scheme in England and Wales (Bolam et al., 1995; Southworth, 1995). This national evaluation included 238 surveys (65 percent response rate) from new principals and 303 surveys (68 percent response rate) from experienced principals. Sixty-six percent of new principals and 73% of the experience principals rated the mentoring program as “successful” or “very successful” (Bolam et al., 1995). 16 case studies of new principal-mentor pairs were conducted, meaning that new principals and mentors were interviewed individually to explain and expand upon their survey ratings. At the same time, Bush and Coleman (1995) conducted a study comparing the English to a Singaporean experience through seven contrastive case studies. Each of the seven pairs (mentor and principal) participated in an entry and exit interview and an observation of one meeting between the two. They also completed logs following some of their meetings. Bush and Coleman (1995) found that while participants in both countries rated their program as successful, English participants described relationships with their mentors as peer relationships focused on “mutual learning” whereas their Singaporean counterparts described relationships with their mentors as coaching relationships focused on skill acquisition. Building off of this initial work, Bolam et. al. (2000) sent a survey to 700 principals from five countries: Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Wales for an international comparative analysis of mentoring, finding that nearly 66% of respondents rated informal support from local principals as helpful and 48% rated mentor support as helpful, suggesting national differences in the way which mentoring work is unfolding in different countries.

**Business: Executive Coaching**

Executive coaching within business enjoys a much longer history as compared to principal coaching within education. Harris (1999) (as cited by Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001), delineates three phases of executive coaching: 1) Phase One being from 1950-1979 with the use of psychological techniques with executives, 2) Phase Two being from 1980-1994 with the start of professionalization of coaches, and 3) the current phase from 1995 to present with increased professionalization and beginnings of standardization with the International Coaching Federation. Judge and Cowell (1997) determine that the widespread adoption of coaching by consulting firms began around 1990 where this intervention has now moved from the introductory to the growth phase.

As compared to research within education, there is a rapidly growing number of research studies that investigate coaching empirically. Researchers are explicitly developing, testing and refining models of coaching (e.g. Laske’s developmental model, Kilburg’s 17 dimensional model, etc.) through empirical studies, even those that only include interview and survey data (Kilburg, 2004, Laske, 1999). This reflects the field’s own development in distinguishing itself from mentoring, consulting, and therapy (Peterson, 2010). For example, based on a comprehensive review of research on executive coaching, Peterson (2010) defined executive coaching as the following: one-to-one, relationship-based, methodology-based, provided by a professional coach, scheduled in multiple-sessions over time, goal-oriented for both organizational and individual benefit, customized to the person and intended to enhance the person’s ability to learn and develop independently. Peterson (2010) identified four types of coaches to incude: feedback coaches who focus on insight, accountability coaches who focus on identifying, clarifying and accomplishing goals, content coaches who focus on skills and knowledge executives need to know, and finally development-process coaches who focus on the process of learning and psychology of human behavior.
However, there is still surprisingly little empirical evidence demonstrating its
effectiveness. In a research literature review conducted by Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson
(2001), they were only able to identify seven studies. Four years later, in a review conducted by
Feldman and Lankau (2005), the number of empirical studies that investigate executive coaching
had grown to twenty. In a more recent review, De Meuse, Dai and Lee (2009) conducted a
content analysis of 10 retrospective studies, finding that coachees were very satisfied with
coaching: “The percentage of participants reporting favorable ratings in different studies ranged
between 75% and 95%” (p. 121). They also conducted a meta-analysis of 12 empirical studies on
the outcome of executive coaching, finding a moderate-to-large effect in the improvement in job
skill and performance ratings. Mackie (2007) observed that a significant number of published
studies utilize surveys that simply report perceptions of effectiveness and also noted that there
were a limited number of case studies documenting individual changes as a result of coaching.

Psychology: Workplace and Life Coaching

Studies within psychology extend coaching to include workplace (non-executives) and
life coaching to enhance work and life experience for normal, non-clinical populations in
defining a coaching psychology. Grant and Cavanagh (2007), in a review of research on
executive, workplace, and life coaching, found the many of the 128 empirical studies were
survey or descriptive studies into the nature and perception of coaching. Sixty-nine outcome
studies were identified. Of these outcome studies, Grant and Cavanagh (2007) found that there
was little consistency in outcome measures with many having “simplistic ‘satisfaction with
coaching’ surveys” (p. 247). A proponent of coaching as applied positive psychology, Grant and
Cavanagh (2007) found few studies used “well-validated measures of mental health and well-
being or constructs such as resilience” (p. 247). To better illustrate the implication of this finding
for education, one study is reviewed in detail to suggest possible ideas to be incorporated into
future research.

Tapping into its psychological roots, in a recent study, the impact of coaching on goal
attainment, mental health, workplace well-being, and resilience was investigated in an education
setting. Forty-four Australian high school teachers were randomly assigned to either the
treatment group, with treatment consisting of 10 coaching sessions with a professional coach in a
20-week period, or a wait-list control group. Findings from the study indicated that coaching
was associated with increased goal attainment, reduced stress, and enhanced workplace well-
being and resilience (Grant, Green, and Rynsaardt, 2010). Of investigative interest is the
emphasis on not just enhanced performance but more affective domains such as stress,
depression and anxiety. According to the authors, “given that this study and past research has
demonstrated that coaching can improve mental health and well-being, future research could
examine whether coaching is indeed an effective prophylactic in educational settings. We
consider this to be an important point for future research, given the high levels of stress
frequently associated with the teaching profession (Van Dick & Wanger, 2001)” (p. 164) (Grant
et al, 2010). This particular study is highlighted for its implications for the coaching of
principals that has not been deeply explored, that is, the effect of coaching for enhanced mental
health and well-being.
Discussion

If one were to create a typology then of research designs on coaching, it would appear that research designs move from program-specific evaluations to theory-generating basic research. Within education, empirical research on principal coaching tends to be program-specific evaluation, using program-specific instruments to generate program-specific findings. Within business and psychology, empirical research on coaching tends to be designed to test and refine proposed models and theories of coaching. For the purpose of furthering research within education, additional design elements and theoretical frameworks could be added as taken from the business and psychology literature and adapted appropriately to education.

After reviewing the research literature, it is clear that the promise of coaching should be investigated through a well-designed study that moves beyond survey data. In this respect, work from executive coaching to life coaching may be more fruitful in offering robust conceptual frameworks to guide future research. Future studies must be carefully designed so that the existence of a relationship is not in of itself the sole positive finding, but rather the content of the relationship, meaning the focus of conversations, should come under intense scrutiny. For example, Southworth (1995) found that mentors transmit more traditional model of teaching where teacher is knowledge-giver. Therefore, implicit in this finding is the content of mentoring may not necessarily lead to desired ends of more reform-minded program designers. However, it seems that most studies on principal coaching programs are constructed to capture participants’ sense of satisfaction with the relationship and not unpack the nature of the principal’s experience.
Chapter 3
Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This study used a mixed-methods, cross-case study design in order to deeply explore the coaching experiences of six new principals (Coburn, 2006). As highlighted in the previous chapter, the empirical studies reviewed on principal coaching and mentoring were predominantly evaluation studies of coaching programs, focused on the effectiveness of coaching on predetermined formative and summative indicators. While this is a necessary line of inquiry, given that the coaching of principals emerged rather recently as an induction support strategy, it was surprising to find so few research studies that investigated the coaching experience of new principals similar to Peters’ (2010) in-depth case study of a single early career, African American principal and her mentor in Midwest urban school district. Therefore, in order to address this research gap, I chose to utilize a mixed method, cross-case study design that began with the traditional satisfaction survey, moved to follow-up telephone interviews and then examined new principal conceptions of the coaching experience through in-depth interviewing. This study sought to reveal the subtle nuances of new principal coaching experiences beyond satisfaction with the coaching relationship. My research focused on the following questions:

1. How do new principals experience their coaching program?
2. How does coaching enhance their experience as a novice administrator?

Context

All six case studies were new principals in the same mid-size urban school district located in California. I selected this particular district because it is an urban school district with a four-year new principal coaching program. As this mid-size urban school district is ethnically, linguistically, racially and socio-economically diverse, it provided a fertile ground for a richness of experiences. The district had a coaching program that had been in place for four years, providing each new principal with a coach during the first two years as an administrator. Informed by the work at a nearby university, the specific program strategies included: on-site, one-on-one coaching twice a month with unlimited email and phone contact, coaches who do not work in the district, coaching based on the on-going work of principals, and monthly meetings among the coaches for collaborative problem-solving.

Phase 1: Identifying Information-Rich Cases

This study was conducted in two phases in order to identify the most information-rich cases (Patton, 1990). Phase I began with the district’s satisfaction survey as the starting point for selecting the necessary cases. The district’s research and evaluation department developed the survey, consisting of 57 questions designed to obtain information about the principals and their perception of the impact of the coaching program. To capture pertinent information across domains, the survey was divided into the following sections: background information, contact time between principal and coach; characteristics of the principal-coach relationship, effectiveness of coaching and additional professional development (see Appendix I). Survey data were included in this study for the comparability of first, research participants’ level of
satisfaction to current and prior program participants and second, individual research participant’s responses in relation to subsequent phone and in-person interview data.

All 23 principals who completed the survey were contacted to participate in a one-hour phone interview. While all 23 principals initially agreed to participate, only 17 principals ultimately participated in the phone interviews. The other six principals did not participate due to scheduling issues. The phone interviews provided more detailed data to develop an understanding of the new principal’s conceptions of coaching experience. For example, new principals were asked “Now I’d like to get a sense of the ways you worked with your coach by asking you to focus on a particular coaching session. Is there one that stands out in your memory? Tell me about that coaching session—why does it stand out for you?”

To capture critical information across domains, the follow-up phone interview was divided into four sections: content, engagement, and influence on practice (see Appendix 2). Phone interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. Phone interviews were recorded, and following each interview, tape recordings were transcribed. The transcripts were hand-coded for analysis. As aligned with phone interview protocol, the coding system consisted of the following categories: 1. Content of conversations (e.g. curriculum and instruction, human resources, policies and procedures, budget and accounting, reflective leadership and problem-solving), 2. Relationship with Coach (e.g. reliable/trustworthy, resourceful, and credible), 3. Contact Time with Coach (e.g. in-person, phone and e-mail), 4. Influence on Practice and 5. Memorable Coaching Session. The purpose of this initial coding system was to validate survey ratings and to identify information-rich cases. After the initial phone interviews were completed, I analyzed the transcripts for patterns and themes to guide the selection of new principals for inclusion into the case study portion of the study. After completing the analysis, I selected six new principals for the second phase of data collection that involved in-depth interviewing.

Phase 2: In-Depth Interviewing of Six New Principals

Six new principals were selected to participate in the main part of the study. Maximum variation sampling was used for this phase of the study (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The six principals were selected based on the criteria of representative years of experience, school levels, and degree of satisfaction with coaching as captured by the survey as these were the only demographic variables collected (see Appendix I). This resulted in the following cases, representative of the principals in the prior phase:
Table 1

Demographic Information of Principals Responding (n=17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristic</th>
<th>Telephone Interview Participants</th>
<th>Case Study Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>14 (82%)</td>
<td>5 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>2 (12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>16 (94%)</td>
<td>5 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experience as Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>9 (53%)</td>
<td>3 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>2 (12%)</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 years</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase II of the study involved two additional face-to-face interviews to follow-up on what was learned during their initial phone interview. These were semi-structured interviews in order to allow for new principals’ conceptions of the coaching experience and its impact on them to naturally emerge. According to Henning (2004), “we do not want to place this understanding in the boundaries of an instrument that we designed beforehand, because the boundaries of the instrument will limit the data to those very boundaries” (p.9). Each interview was tape-recorded and following each interview, tape recordings were transcribed. Participation in face-to-face interviews required 60-90 minutes of time for each interview with two in-depth interviews conducted per participant for a total of 120-180 minutes.

Data from the six case studies were first analyzed using a within case analysis and followed by a cross-case study analysis. A descriptive write up of each case study was developed from the three interviews. According to Eisenhardt (1989), the purpose of the within case study analysis allows the researcher to become familiar with each case on its own, allowing unique patterns to emerge before prematurely moving to cross case comparisons. After the initial within case analysis was conducted, then cross-case study analysis was conducted by selecting recurring categories and looking for emergent patterns (Eisenhardt, 1989).
Limitations

This study is situated in a qualitative research paradigm, emphasizing new principals’ understandings of the coaching experience and its impact on them. As such, this study included a small number of participants, specifically six new principals, located in one mid-size urban school district. There was also only one new principal in a high school setting and no new principal from a middle school setting, limiting its generalizability. Further, this study focuses on and as a result, reports from the principal’s perspective only (see Celoria, D., 2008 for a companion piece centered on the coach’s perspective). This study does not attempt to make causal or correlational statements regarding improvement in school effectiveness or student achievement, more appropriate to other research designs.
Chapter 4
Results: Listening to New Principals

Introduction

On August 21st, 2006, six principals started their first year as school administrators of elementary, middle, and high schools in an urban school district located within a mid-size metropolitan city. On this day, children and parents from diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds arrived at the doorstep of their schools ready to learn. On this day, the responsibility of realizing each child’s learning potential was placed squarely on the shoulders of these new principals.

Given that the school district understood that these (and all new principals) would face many challenges, every new principal was partnered with a coach. The coaches were retired administrators with significant experience in urban or suburban school settings. They had also received training in the latest coaching research and methods from a local university recognized as a leading national resource for beginning principals. As part of the district’s principal coaching program, new principals were expected to meet in-person with their coach at least twice a month, in addition to phone calls and emails as needed. (For an in-depth study from the coach’s perspective, please refer to Celoria, D. 2008.)

To understand the subtle differences in their coaching experiences, six principals were recruited from the twenty-three to participate in a case study that consisted of a series of individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the cross-case study was to go deeper into the coaching experiences than is possible with the traditional satisfaction surveys (see the literature reviewed in Chapter 2). Based on specific methodological criteria delineated in Chapter 3, Hannah, Giselle, Mateus, Constance, Sam and Cynthia, introduced below, were selected to participate in this cross-case study. The names of principals and schools were changed so that their collective story could be told while maintaining confidentiality. The terms principal and administrator are used interchangeably throughout the rest of Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

The Principals

Soft-spoken and small in stature, there was a quiet calmness to Giselle. She was the principal of Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School, located in a beautiful red brick building, where a colorful mural captured the cultural richness of the predominantly Asian and Latino neighborhood and student population. From teacher turned coach turned administrator all within the same district, Giselle accepted the challenge to lead Roosevelt Elementary from a school initially known for its unpredictable student progress to becoming one known for steady student growth.

Exuding what seemed like infinite energy, Hannah was one who could easily start each day with an early morning run. She would answer her emails, call back a parent or two, and meet with a teacher - all before being out on the schoolyard to greet students who were lining up in time for the first morning bell. Phillip Randolf Junior Elementary was a school in transition where different communities and community interests clashed and collided. As a result, Hannah was charged to lead community-building efforts from student to teachers to parents.
Tall and slim with chestnut brown hair, Mateus was the principal of Dolores Huerta Elementary School where he had been a classroom teacher and an instructional coach for several years. Mateus was very thoughtful about his work, participating in an education study group with other principals. Dolores Huerta was a school known for its stability with teachers and administrators, however, it was also known for its lackluster results.

One to smile and laugh a lot, Constance was a seasoned administrator with prior principal experience in the same district before the district had a coaching program. She took a break from being the site leader for several years in order to better balance family and career. She returned to the position of principal when the unique opportunity to return to the school where she began as a teacher presented itself. Eisenhower Elementary School was a large elementary school with a predominately Asian student population. It was a school with a solid reputation given their good achievement test scores and a veteran teaching faculty. She had been carefully placed at this flagship school with the hopes of continuing its performance after the most recent well-loved principal retired.

Samantha or Sam as she liked to be called was also an experienced administrator, returning to the principalship after a brief break from the politics of it all. She had been a principal in a few different districts and had a coach once as a new principal in one of those districts. Her small, slight figure concealed the fierce personality that attacked problems with a no-holds-barred approach. Sam was quite out-spoken, fearless in her appraisal of the school, and her role within a web of complex relationships at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. Lincoln Elementary School was a school identified by central office leadership in need of an intervention. Intentionally chosen for the charge of transforming Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, Sam was to guide the staff and the greater community through this transformative process.

With a solid self-assurance, Cynthia stood out from among the other case studies. She had served as a district administrator prior to becoming a site administrator. Therefore, she was not as new to administration as Giselle, Hannah and Mateus, however, she was not a returning site administrator either like Constance and Sam. Cynthia asked to be placed at Ulysses S. Grant High School, a school located in a high crime, high poverty area. The district hoped to transform Grant High into a model for 21st Century learning and Cynthia was regarded as the perfect fit for moving the school forward.

The results presented here on the experience of being coached were based on the perspectives of these six case studies: Hannah, Giselle, Mateus, Constance, Sam and Cynthia. The next four sections present the main themes that emerged across five out of the six case study principals’ experience of coaching:

1) Shaping Reflective, Instructionally-Focused Practice,
2) Feeling Supported during Emotionally Stressful Times,
3) Having an Authentic, Trusting Relationship and
4) Enhancing Relationship-Building through Technology.

The four main themes are then followed by a portrait of the sixth principal, Cynthia, who was an outlier in this study due to her overall dissatisfaction with her coaching experience. Her single case study lends insight to an often unexplored and understudied perspective on coaching within educational settings.
Theme 1: Shaping Reflective, Instructionally-Focused Practice

According to five of the six case study principals, coaching affected their leadership practice from learning basic administrative tasks to reflecting critically on their actions. New principals fell along a spectrum regarding prior site administrative experience. Giselle, Hannah and Mateus were entirely new to being site administrators. Both Constance and Sam had been site administrators, taken a break, and then returned to the position. Prior experience factored into how coaching affected emerging or established leadership practice.

Shaping emerging practice: New principals with no prior administrative experience
All three of the new principals without prior administrative experience, Giselle, Hannah, and Mateus, identified the immediate focus of coaching on administrative basics. Giselle described her first year of coaching as learning key administrative tasks such as analyzing student data and developing a school budget: “My first year was more like [my coach] helped me with data, the budget, presentations, and getting through meetings (PI.1.1, 7.14.08).” In one example, the coach helped her understand the complex school budget so that she could confidently present the budget to her School Site Council for the required approval of federal and state categorical funds.

Similar to Giselle, Hannah remembered her first coaching experiences as emphasizing basic administrative skills.

I think the coach realizes that in the beginning, just like a teacher, the paperwork is overwhelming and you really are not getting to the business of leadership. The coach just kind of keeps you on track, helps you with developing your protocols and your skills... (PI.2.1, 7.15.08)

Hannah was quick to frame the coaching experience as an overwhelming learning experience. She remembered encountering a series of “firsts” in disparate domains from curriculum to budget to personnel.

You are just so full of questions in the beginning anyway. Many of your questions are survival based, like how do I do this because I need to do that tomorrow, how do I prepare for my first staff meeting because I need to prepare for that tomorrow, how do I handle this important parent meetings, everything in the beginning just seems so important and I think also the coach helps you to prioritize. (PI.2.1, 7.15.08)

Hannah described in detail both the breadth and depth to which her coach walked her through leadership tasks from design to completion, including conducting a school site council meeting, evaluating staff, applying for a grant, and writing the school plan. Hannah felt strongly that no program could prepare one for the principalship, suggesting that there was a situated learning aspect to administration that required situated support such as a coach: “I think there is no program that can prepare you for this job so therefore a coach is critical to a new administrator. (PI.2.1, 7.15.08)”

Mateus also recalled the first year as focused on building structures and routines “that kind of ebb and flow of the year” as he described it.
I think that initially helping me get structures in place, beginning of the year routines, so structures and routines really. If those are not in place, it’s really easy to get distracted with a lot of the other stuff that takes place. But once the leadership team is in place, you have the beginning of the year, end of the year routines, certain letters that go out, that kind of ebb and flow of the year. (PI.3.1., 7.7.08)

For all three new professionals on the job then, their first year was a series of firsts: the first staff meeting, the first bus schedule, the first budget transfer, the first teacher evaluation and so on. Coaching then focused on their immediate needs, many of them, as Hannah described, “survival-based.” It was only later in the first year and even more in the second year of coaching that critical reflection and courageous action or risk-taking took place.

In Giselle’s second year, coaching conversations invited critical reflection on relational issues with teachers as turning around a school called for significant changes in its instructional and curricular programs. In approaching what Giselle described as “hard conversations” and “hard personalities,” she identified her coach as building up her ability to deal with negative people.

I would usually talk through with her about me having to deal with hard conversations or having to deal with major hard personalities here at the school… that’s always been one of the things I work with her. She works with me in terms of building up my ability to be stronger in dealing with people, negative people… It’s mainly been a lot of staffing stuff and evaluation and just hard conversations with people (PI.1.1 7.14.08)

In building up her ability, Giselle’s coach would explicitly talk through past and future conversations. For example, the coach would debrief tough conversations that occurred, asking her questions such as “What’s the background of this person? What lead to her freaking out? How did I handle it? Did you think about doing this?” According to Giselle, such questioning strategies pushed her to think through multiple factors that affected such talks and identified those that were within her control. Another coaching strategy used was role-playing for imminent conversations.

She would role-play… She would pretend she was one of the teachers and then she’d make me talk it through and kind of practice or we would predict or at least we would just come up with worst case scenarios of what could happen next and prepare myself mentally of what would or would not come from having a next conversation with somebody or a decision I would have to make. (PI.1.1, 7.14.08)

By role-playing, Giselle was able to prepare for “worst case scenarios.” In this example, her coach pushed her to think through the intended and unintended consequences of conversations and decisions, role-playing possible future scenarios.

In completing work-situated tasks, Hannah recalled how the coach pushed her to reflect critically upon administrative tasks such as grade-level assignments. Hannah described how her coach posed questions that pushed her thinking forward on seemingly small decisions as captured by the quote below:
She challenged me to think critically about things, what are the ramifications of one act. So for example, if you decide to do this one staffing change, how is this going to affect your community, how is it going to affect the collaborative models like grade levels. She just really made me see more of the big picture. (PI.2.1, 7.15.08)

Hannah’s examples illustrated how coaching questions challenged the novice principal to think through intended and as important, unintended consequences of seemingly small decisions such as a staffing change. This was an example of the “blended coaching” that the coaches learned in their university program. Hannah’s coach pushed her to remember the big picture in building a more cohesive community by asking her “how is this going to affect your community?” (PI.2.1, 7.15.08)

With structures in place, the work of the second year for Mateus focused on “going deep with the work.” Going deeper constituted questioning the reasons for the very structures that were in place, taking a critical lens to the givens.

It’s going beyond the scaffolding to what’s the real purpose behind these things, going deep with the work, so why do we have these conferences? Are we getting parents here? Why not? Let’s look at it differently. What do we want to get out of this as a community? So she also helped me to push in that direction… And so, going to other people’s place, going to a church, outside of the school for parent meetings if parents aren’t coming here, it’s kind of like, doing the deeper changing, you have the structures but let’s change them now to do what works for the school. (PI.3.1, 7.7.08)

In this quote, Mateus provided examples of the questioning techniques used in the second year to push principal thinking towards thoughtful reflection and ultimately, action. Mateus identified the “lasting influence” where he internalized this blended coaching style, able to ask himself a series of questions and critical questions to push his thinking.

The lasting influence is the practices, the habits of mind, the structures. And then I would say for me with her it was the cognitive coaching kind of style so that I do that with myself. So I would say a perfect example is ‘what do you want to get out of this?’ ‘what outcome do you hope to have?’… I think really trying to document and identify, not just having it as an anecdotal. ‘This is happening. I’m having this reaction with or relationship with a teacher. So what am I doing that might be causing it? What language am I using, looking at the things that I’m doing that may be impacting this in this way?” (PI.3.1, 7.7.08)

Mateus felt that he had internalized the very same questioning techniques utilized by the coach. He engaged in self-dialogue, probing himself to go deeper around for example interactions with teachers, able to ask himself such questions as “what am I doing that might be causing it? What language am I using?” (PI.3.1, 7.7.08).

Shaping established practice: New principals with prior administrative experience In contrast to the new principals, returning principals Constance and Sam, described their coaching experience in ways that started with critical reflection around basic
Constance delved deeply into two examples of coaching support that pushed her thinking around the administrative work: one focused on backward mapping for professional development and the other on data analysis. While the more novice principals also mentioned planning and data analysis, Constance’s description made explicit connections to instructional leadership rather than only the task itself.

Constance described a planning session for professional development focused on grade-level standards. She identified the need for more within grade-level and across grade-level articulation. However, in her prior planning method, she would start with the discreet activity. Her coach, instead, started with the expected outcome, specifically horizontal and vertical articulation, and backward mapped from there as described:

[My coach] taught me to always look at what you want your outcome to be and to work backwards from there. So what are you going to do in order to get to that outcome. I think that planning session for me was monumental because it got me to think differently. I always started at the beginning and worked, added steps, to come to an ending, but thinking about the end and then steps to get there made me think in a more specific manner. (PI.4.1, 7.22.08)

In this example, the coach modeled the desired behavior, backward mapping, that is, “look at what you want your outcome to be and to work backwards from there”. As the principal identified the desired outcome to be within grade-level and across grade-level articulation, the coach backward mapped from that outcome. She delineated the need for several professional development days dedicated to this work in order to reach the desired outcome. Constance described the effect of this coaching session as “monumental,” shifting her from activity to outcome. Constance elaborated further to describe the “wow’s” from her coaching experiences, especially on identifying the instructional gaps within a grade and across grades:

…Fourth and fifth met together and fourth said ‘wow fifth grade, you guys have so much more. There’s this big gap between where we end in fourth grade and where you start in fifth grade so that shows us we need to do a little bit more in math and in language arts’ and that was really eye opening and it was really great… It was just such a good feeling. I felt that not only was there only grade level collaboration but cross-grade level. I was really thrilled with the result. (PI.4.1, 7.22.08)

This quote demonstrates a deviation in description of basic administrative tasks that makes an explicit link to instructional programming with suggested implications for teaching and student learning.

Constance provided another example of a basic administrative task, specifically data analysis. She expressed her “big worry” about how to get teachers looking at data on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, then using those data to do things differently inside their classrooms to help struggling students, rather than automatically referring them to a Student Study Team or Resource Specialist. She wanted teachers to use data to answer the question “What can I do differently before I refer a student?” (PI.4.1, 7.22.10) The interaction illustrates how Constance and her coach discussed her “big worry”: 
Constance: Oh my god, the teachers all learned how to use [data software program]. Now they’re not [using it]. Now, how do I get them to keep looking at it because we really want them to know how the kids are doing?

Coach: Well, is [data software program] something that will capture what children are doing on a daily basis?

Constance: Ah [pause] no.

Coach: Well, then what are children doing on a daily basis? Are they writing in a journal? Are they doing their math practice work? Is there something that they do on a daily basis that you can check into that maybe another teacher says oh yeah, look at it? (PI.4.1, 7.22.10)

As this interaction illustrates, the coach’s questioning strategy shifted Constance’s focus from data analysis to assessment practices through the use of the operative word “daily”: “is [data software program] something that will capture what children are doing on a daily basis?” From these initial conversations with her coach, Constance decided to lead a professional development day for her staff, focusing on authentic assessment using student work samples:

Have the entire third grade team bring in the writing the kids did in response to this prompts and have each teacher pick out the best and then see how best compares among the six classrooms and then from there they can gage and decide ‘wow why did we select this as best when this one is really so much better’ or ‘this one really needs to develop’, then you start getting an idea of like a rubric idea in your head, ‘oh, yeah, this does look good because it meets these particular standards punctuation, capitalization, the quotation marks…’(PI.4.1, 7.22.10)

Having experienced a shift in her thinking, Constance was able to facilitate a shift for her staff, rather than have them all remain confined to a data software program. This shift in thinking resulted in her school adding student portfolios to supplement yearly test scores that were weak in providing information on how teachers could improve instruction and learning.

Similar to Constance, Sam recollected a couple of coaching sessions around planning and budgeting that supported her vision of teaching and learning. She described her coach as giving up week-ends to help her with data dives and budgeting. With her coach at her side, Sam was able to attend to creating conditions for differentiated teaching and accelerated learning:

What coach comes in on a Saturday morning to meet with somebody and sit down and roll up the sleeves and say ‘okay, who are the English language learners and what’s going on here? Let’s look how we are going to move these kids and what are we going to do here.’ Now I can do that with the [my teachers on special assignment] but it’s different with [the coach] because she has a bigger picture of it. She understands the instructional reform piece but she also understands the practicalities of saying that one is going to accelerate learning, not just intervene, but really accelerate it and what is the energy and quantum physics of saying that we are going to do that… (PI.5.1, 7.22.08)
Sam appreciated her coach’s instructional know-how, both in theory and in application, or as Sam described it “the practicalities of saying that one is going to accelerate learning” or “the energy and quantum physics of saying that we are going to do that.” For Sam, with many years of teaching and coaching under her belt, her coach was the real deal, able to connect budgeting decisions to instructional ones as captured in the example below:

[She] and I can sit down and look at the budget and say ‘look I’ve got this and this and I’m going to use this categorical money on oratory and oral language for black kids, for black learners’ and sort of talk through the rationale for that, and sort of talk through ‘well, if this is the vision, what am I going to have to do to get the staff to see that oral language, fluency, being able to speak in the classroom, being able to talk to each other and practice that language is important.’ (PI.5.1, 7.22.08)

As compared to the novice principals, Sam made the connection between budgeting and instructional decisions, recognized her coach’s role in supporting such connections, rather than only describing the mechanics of learning to budget divorced from curriculum and instruction.

These examples suggest that for Sam and Constance coaching pushed their thinking to a deeper understanding of administrative tasks. Both new principals were returning principals, new to their schools, but not new to the district. It appeared then that the coaches acknowledged their past experiences and capitalized on their instructional strengths and on opportunities for professional growth within their established leadership practice. In comparison, Giselle, Mateus, and Hannah’s coaching focused first on basic administrative tasks and then moved towards critical reflection, sometimes in their second year. For returning principals Constance and Sam, coaching tended to combine the learning of new administrative procedures with critical reflection.

**Theme 2: Feeling Supported during Emotionally Stressful Times**

Whether new or returning, five out of the six case study participants described an emotional intensity to the position and for four, the resulting emotional support provided by their coach. For Giselle, Hannah, and Mateus, each vividly remembered feeling overwhelmed to the point of contemplating leaving the profession, that is, the metaphorical ledge. For Constance and Sam, each felt the stress of the onslaught of administrative demands, however, they did not express the same need to leave the profession.

**Supporting first year survival: New principal with no prior administrative experience** For Giselle, the constant onslaught of hard conversations with hard people, in addition to the role demands of being a site administrator, resulted in negative feelings. Her coach helped alleviate these feelings through verbal affirmations.

I would find myself feeling not so deflated from situations or not so like ‘Oh, this is hopeless’ …It would reassure me I was on the right path or take a risk and do something for a next step… I think in terms of receiving affirmation. There are times where the position is just so lonely and you just question ‘Am I doing this right?’ and I think with a coach, who has had principal experience and everything, would reassure me ‘Hey, for a first year principal, you’re not doing so bad and
hey that’s fine.’ …Just keeping me, reassuring me, I’m not a failure. (PI.1.2, 7.21.08)

The above quote captures the emotional charge of Giselle’s experience. As she articulated, at times, she felt “hopeless” and “lonely.” Coaching kept her from feeling like a “failure.” Her coach created a space to articulate these feelings free from recourse or retribution:

I think I felt I wasn’t being judged by her. She really just was ‘hey, girl what’s up.’ I’m not going to be self-editing myself. Is this going to go on any record? I could be on the verge of crying or saying ‘I don’t think I’m coming back. I don’t think I can do it.’ (PI.1.2, 7.21.08)

Once again, Giselle described the emotional intensity of coaching conversations where she was “on the verge of crying.” Giselle met with her coach every other week over the course of two years. From this quote, one can easily imagine Giselle meeting with her coach at the end of a long day filled with “hard conversations” with “hard people,” “crying or saying I don’t think I’m coming back. I don’t think I can do it.” However often these type of conversations occurred, Giselle was clearly grateful to her coach for the time and space dedicated to her. Given the demands placed on new principals, Giselle described herself as “lucky” for having a coach “who would totally listen and have the time every time” (PI.1.2, 7.21.08). Evidently, she utilized this time to discuss difficult situations to the point of her contemplating her own resignation.

While Hannah’s initial interviews emphasized only the learning that occurred during her coaching experience, in the end, she expressed the overall sense of being supported. Using a developmental framework, she drew a parallel where principals, like teachers, go through a developmental trajectory where the first year was an overwhelming one given the sheer amount of paperwork and protocols. In surviving the first year, the idea of a coach was supportive in of itself, knowing that there was someone she could go to for even as she puts it the “lamest questions.”

I think you feel more assured in your decisions for having had a coach just because, especially in the beginning, especially in your first say couple of years, there’s always this sense I could have done it differently or I could have done it better or there is no right or wrong answer. And the coach, just the idea of the coach and working with a coach just really builds your sense of self in the job and because you can go to them for like the lamest question like ‘I don’t know how to do a bus schedule.’ You can share with them things that I don’t think that most people would share even with their peer or even with their friend. (PI.2.2, 7.21.08)

Hannah echoed Giselle’s same sentiment of “Am I doing this right?” This sense of not knowing, of not really being sure and the coach coming in to reassure them that yes, there are doing okay. Consistent with her earlier description of coach as “lifeline” and “lifesaver” was this idea that even if she did not need to use that lifeline, the idea that it was there provided a sense of security.

For me the coach is a great experience. You know how they have The Apprentice [tv show], we don’t have that in administration. We don’t have a silent mentor to back you and support you and that’s what the coach does. They see when you
fall, they see you when you do well. It’s just a different role. It’s just someone you can go to because the position is just so isolating. (PI.1.2, 7.21.08)

Hannah was able to share her “worst” with her coach. For Hannah, the coach really was a “lifeline”, a “lifesaver” as connected to the difficult tasks demanding her time and attention. Her coach helped her prioritize tasks and then actually tackle individual tasks, many of them new.

Similar to Giselle and Hannah, Mateus described moments of “feeling down” and “isolated” especially as an elementary school principal who is typically the lone administrator at a site.

Having the coach once a month is also very nurturing. They can also build confidence ‘oh look at what you're doing.’ If you’re feeling down, ‘oh, look at what you did.’ It’s like reinforcing the positive and it’s so often, especially at an elementary site, there’s no other administrators, it’s super isolating and not having the validation. Getting validated for the work you are doing and the growth that they see in you and kind of documenting it. (PI.3.2, 7.8.08)

His coach played a “nurturing” and “validating” role for a new principal: one that Mateus identified as pivotal in his staying in the position.

Without those, boy, it could have been really. I don’t know that I would have stayed. Many moments that I just didn’t want to do it anymore and I would call the coach, and she talked me down of the ledge. Literally, ‘why am I doing this? I hate it. I have this teacher grieving me and this is happening and you know.’ And it’s like ‘well, you know - think about this.’ Just kind of naming it, framing it, this is normal. This is what you are going to do to help.’ Not having the guidance would have been really - it would have been too much, at least for me personally. (PI.3.2, 7.8.08)

Mateus invoked a powerful image in depicting his not wanting to stay in the position – “she talked me down off the ledge.” Once again, coach was depicted as “lifesaver” to use Hannah’s image. Similar to Giselle, Mateus also described an emotional intensity to coaching conversations with him feeling like “I just didn’t want to do it anymore” and saying “why am I doing this? I hate it.” Either way, both of these images taken together, the “lifesaver” who “talked me down off the ledge” brought to bear the emotional life of a new principals and the professional toll such a role takes on an individual.

Supporting first year stress: New principal with prior administrative experience Even though Constance was returning to administration, she was clear that administration had changed, demanding so much more of a school principal than in her prior experience. Her coach then provided her with the type of support that was needed at the time.

You know because the demands on administration are so much more, it just feels like so much more work… it’s like a quilt. They keep adding layer after layer after layer. The first year of administration I could either scream or cry that’s how I felt. To have had the gift of a coach and at that time, to put things into perspective for me, to make sense out of what I was saying and she said, ‘oh yeah,
I understand, I get it, this is where you’re headed.’ …To have somebody and to have the time with somebody to just sit down and work it through with you is invaluable. (PI.4.2, 7.23.08)

While a seasoned administrator who was returning to the role after a prolonged break, Constance echoes the same emotional experience where she could “either scream or cry.” So though she was able to connect administrative tasks to the deeper work, it was not without an emotional toll. For her, the coach was able to provide this needed emotional support.

“I think [the coach] always gave me that support, emotional, professional, whatever type of support that she realized that I needed be it I was ranting and raving and just going on and on and on, she would give it to me. (PI.4.2, 7.23.08)

In “ranting and raving,” Constance described her coach’s strategy of affirming and reminding her of her good work, as illustrated in this interaction between her and her coach:

Coach: You have 34 certificated teachers. How many can you not move at this point?
Principal: Well I think it is about two or three.
Coach: Well, what is it that they are not doing? What is it that you want them to do, and why do you perceive them as not moving? Are they in school every day? Are they teaching? Are the kids meeting their standards?
Principal: Yes, yes, yes.
Coach: What more do you want?
Principal: I want them to share their expertise with their other colleagues or grade-level or colleagues in different grade-levels.
Coach: Maybe they are just not that type of person. If you got everybody else doing what you wanted them to do, consider yourself that you’ve achieved what you wanted to do.
Principal: Oh yeah.

And here I was ‘oh, man I’m so disappointed because these people won’t do something.’ They are teaching. They have great relationships with the kids. The kids were learning. The teachers were at school every day. I had no other issues with the teachers other than ‘gee, I wish they would open up and share a little bit more with their colleagues.’ (PI.4.2, 7.23.08)

Therefore, while she was a seasoned principal, as this interaction illustrates, her coach played an affirmative role, reframing disappointments as achievements. Through the use of questions, her coach reframed the situation: “What is it that you want them to do, and why do you perceive them as not moving?” Through these questions, the coach made clear that only two or three out of 34 teachers were “not moving” and that for Constance, “not moving” meant not sharing their expertise with other colleagues.
Sam was quick to describe the intense interactions with both staff and the broader community at Washington, such as being called “satan” or “evil.” She even described a day when a disgruntled grandmother swung a bright orange traffic cone at her. The district placed Sam at Washington Elementary School where it was in the process of implementing a new program—a change that was not welcomed by all of the school’s staff nor the parent community. The coach then provided the space to react to such emotionally intense, if not hostile, interactions by “being just as incredulous.” For Sam, she was convinced that “nobody would ever believe it,” but the coach did.

I think another role she played was being just as incredulous as I about some of the very bizarre behaviors that one runs across or runs into in this job. Nobody would ever believe it. Nobody. No, they just wouldn’t believe it… Whether it’s equating me with satan or my being evil or whether it’s a misunderstanding. I’ve tried. [My coach] has allowed me to have the space to reflect on those pieces, that work, and to be able to shift my role and relationship whether it’s with staff or with families, with community based organizations. (PI.5.2, 7.24.08)

For Sam, life at Washington Elementary School was like a soap opera, suggesting the drama of the every day from being called “satan” to swinging traffic cones. In telling her story as an administrator at Washington, Sam conveyed not only the interpersonal struggle, but the intrapersonal one as well, that is, her own internalization of these intense emotions.

There’s a lot of us and them. There’s a lot of feelings of ‘I could lose my job at this site or be consolidated because of these people or this program and the principal is endorsing it and therefore she can’t be endorsing me.’ It’s an either or, black or white. I think there are going to be some challenges, being transparent. That’s one of the hardest pieces with this job. It’s that coming up against resistance. If one doesn’t have avenues, places to sort of go back to vent and get perspective, it can feel personalized. It can feel like it’s an attack. It’s really not. It’s not about me as a person. It may be directed that way but it’s really about the fear and concerns of the person who said them. (PI.5.2, 7.24.08)

In having an “avenue,” “places to sort of go back to vent and get perspective,” she was able to depersonalize the interaction. In contrast to Giselle, Hannah, and Mateus, neither Sam nor Constance described a moment of contemplating leaving the principalship. In Sam’s own words, “it can feel like it’s an attack,” however by talking it out with a trusted confidant such as the coach, she was able to diffuse the interaction for herself. Unlike Giselle who had similar emotionally-charged interactions with the staff, Sam came to a place, a perspective that “it’s not about me as a person.” She was even able to find the humor in the situation.

**Theme 3: Having an Authentic, Trusting Relationship**

In order for honest and intimate conversations to occur, five of the six case study principals felt that their coach was a critical friend, one who would be with them even when the formal relationship ended. Again, new principals described these relationships differently based on their prior administrative experience. For principals completely new to the administrative position,
they experienced coaching as a nurturing relationship, whereas, returning principals described coaching as a more collegial relationship.

**Developing nurturing relationships: New principal with no prior administrative experience** The three new principals described their coaching relationship as nurturing. In fact, Giselle, Hannah, and Mateus noted that they were still connected to their coach even after the formal program had ended.

We actually continued talking, not on a regular basis, check-in when needed, informally get together… It’s like she’s continued to be a sounding board for major highlights or updates. Things that are going on here that I kinda throw out to her or she’ll just pop by and say ‘hey, I want to come by and check in with you,’ and I’ll give her an update. (PI.1.2, 7.21.08)

I feel like I had a support and to this day, I still feel supported by her. I feel like even if she is not my mentor I could call her right now and give her a real live problem I am dealing with and I feel like she would be really helpful (PI.2.2, 7.21.08))

Oh, we still stay in touch. I feel like she was in the true sense a mentor and friend that I respect and value her so much that I still call her; she calls me and checks in… She’s such a part of my life at this point. It’s just continued even though she’s not my coach anymore. (PI.3.2, 7.8.08)

For Giselle, her two years of coaching were marked by having “hard conversations” with “hard people” in order for improved instruction to occur. Coaching for her centered on managing personnel. Giselle felt that such highly-sensitive conversations occurred due to the trust she had in her coach.

To be honest, with the whole trust issue, there are things that I told her that I didn’t hear. It didn’t come back to me through a different grapevine. (PI.1.2, 7.21.08)

With trust in place, Giselle also felt that she wasn’t being judged, allowing her to freely talk.

I think I felt I wasn’t being judged by her. She really just was ‘hey, girl what’s up’. I’m not going to be self-editing my self. Is this going to go on any record? I could be on the verge of crying ‘I don’t think I’m coming back. I don’t think I can do it.’ (PI.1.2, 7.21.08)

Similar to Giselle, Hannah identified the key factors, namely trust, confidentiality and reliability that allowed coaching to take place.

I think in the sense of, all of the things that made her a great coach and made our relationship strong, was the strong sense of trust. She was reliable. I felt she was confidential. (PI.2.2, 7.21.08)
Confident that she could trust her coach, Hannah was free to ask questions about even the most basic tasks or “lamest question” such as how to do a bus schedule. Hannah was quick to point out that her coach provided timely answers and resources based on over 10 years of principal experience.

Sometimes you just want to go to someone and say ‘how did you do it and she wasn’t just vague like throw out some ideas. She’d actually bring stuff to me and if I needed to, she’d actually do a planning session’ (PI.2.2, 7.21.08).

Mateus’ coach transformed into mentor and friend. He was tied to his coach in a deep sense that continued after the formal connection ceased. He felt a deep sense of trust with her.

I had confidence that she always was looking out for my best interest. She would not only listen but push back as well. Not only say ‘that’s okay’, but also try to help me in whatever I needed. You know the more trusting experiences you have… It’s the trust building. Without it, forget it. If you don’t feel that with your coach, ‘Oh, they’re here again. They’re making me go through the motions.’ (PI.3.2, 7.8.08)

As captured in this quote, without the trust, coaching, like other relationships, becomes one of “going through the motions”. Mateus felt that his coach brought expertise both as a veteran administrator and as coach. He likened the coaching relationship to that of the mother bird that pushes the baby bird out of the nest.

There’s such a huge curve, a learning curve as an administrator. The novice to expert slope is really steep and having someone that had been doing it for so long. The lens that they bring to just say “hey, you’re here and here are some things that I think can take you’re here” and just really kind of like the mama bird that pushes you out of the nest and you figure out how to fly, but they are still there to feed you when you come back to the nest. (PI.3.2, 7.8.08)

In likening the coach to a “mama bird,” one really gets a sense of the nurturing aspect of the coaching relationship between novice principal and coach, necessary when dealing with “such a huge curve, a learning curve as an administrator.”

**Developing collegial relationships: New principal with prior administrative experience** In comparison, the two returning principals regarded their coaches as knowledgeable and trustworthy colleagues. Constance regarded the coaching relationship as a confidential, non-evaluative relationship.

[My coach] in the very beginning told me that whatever we said together that was our time together. She wasn’t going to go and report it or it wouldn’t become part of my evaluation. Well, once that comes out in the forefront then you do have that feeling like ‘ah, good. This is someone I can talk to and be my inquiring minded person. I can be free to be myself, I can be myself with her.’ (PI.4.2, 7.23.08).
In addition to the non-evaluative aspect of the relationship, Constance regarded her coach as a competent in administration. “She was so professional, and her having been a site administrator and being so in tune with the educational literature that’s out there” (PI.4.2, 7.23.08). Constance was impressed with the research-based resources her coach brought to the table that were relevant to the work of the day. For example, while the principal was working on staff culture, the coach informed her of research on Professional Learning Communities. The effect for Constance was described as “a shot in the arm, literature, research-based literature and then, ideas about how to implement them” (PI.4.2, 7.23.08).

Sam was very satisfied with her coaching experience. According to her, “first thing, she and I will always be good friends from this” (PI.5.2, 7.24.08). Mirroring the same sentiment as other new principals, Sam’s coach had transcended her formal role into one of friendship that would outlive the program itself. Similar to Constance, her coach was more of a colleague, a comrade.

It’s the discourse. It’s the conversation. It’s the combination of camaraderie, critical friend, sort of a thinking partner to speculate and wonder there’s this option, there’s that option. To be able to look at a situation that we’ve both been in. (PI.5.2, 7.24.08).

In Sam’s case, who was both a principal and coach, she felt that the coach could assist her in analyzing complex situations from a micro to macro political lens, all the while remaining true to both her and the kids.

I think that the other piece, the other match for me, she can be global or detail, now that’s just [her], that’s just who she is as a person… [She] has a macro-centric view of things as opposed to an egocentric and or even an allocentric because she’s looking at the whole picture and she’s looking out for me and she’s looking out for the kids and the school… (PI.5.2, 7.24.08).

The coach was a loyal and trustworthy colleague, trust being paramount. Sam described an alternative situation when she was new to administration and assigned a coach.

I just feel that. I feel that I can really trust her. And I need to tell you… when I had a coach when I was first principal before, she went to my supervisor and had a conversation with my supervisor without my permission and it was used in my evaluation. I’ve had the alternative experience. (PI.5.2, 7.24.08).

As a returning principal, Sam experienced an entirely different coaching relationship where she could have emotionally-honest conversations such as the one that follows:

Coach: ‘oh my god, (hit your forehead) Sam, you didn’t say that.’
Sam: I did. I was really pissed and I said it.
Coach: Oh my god, girl what have you done!

And we would go on. And we could commiserate about my fuckups or we could say ‘okay, and then what happened’ and really sort of celebrate the successes. So I felt a very close bond and a lot of trust obviously which allowed me to be myself and more open and more reflective. (PI.5.2, 7.24.08).
The coach as “confidant” suggests a trusting, intimate relationship where she can share privately what she cannot share publicly. The coaching relationship provides the space to release being “really pissed at someone” with someone who “understands.”

**Theme 4: Enhancing Relationship-Building through Technology**

Five out of the six case study participants identified the emails between coach and principal as an important part of the coaching process. As Giselle described, these emails were akin to “another administrator colleague” – one with the time and energy dedicated to reflective listening.

> It was like a weekly check-in, the email. It was just constant. It was the closest to having just another administrator colleague who had the time to talk about an issue or a couple issues versus calling another real, another current principal colleague who really wouldn’t have the time, who will have their own major issues on their own plate. (PI.1.1, 7.14.08)

Giselle, Hannah, Mateus, Constance and Sam described the actual content of the emails as summarizing in detail coaching conversations. These summaries or “synopsis” provided reminders of and guidance around important topics and identified next steps as described by Hannah below:

> It was really good to memorialize a conversation. There is so much that you are talking about and learning even in your planning meetings. You feel like as a new principal you could just easily be overwhelmed and even doing step one is kind of hard and that’s why you would go back to the documentation and kinds of use it as a guiding force, a guiding force, as a guidance (laughs) (PI.2.1, 7.15.08)

Similar to Hannah, Constance described an actual example of how these email summaries helped her in following through and completing tasks.

> For example, I was concerned about a teacher and whether or not I could move her to a different grade level and when would I have to let her know. She would always write ‘we discussed this, this and this and the pros and cons in discussing this of the person, and we looked at the contract so please follow-up on the contract…. It really did help me to plan and to make sure that I was doing what I really wanted to do. (PI.4.1, 7.22.08)

As the above example captures, emails brought kept the important issues front and center, allowing Constance “to plan and to make sure that I was doing what I really wanted to do.” Rather than having issues discussed remaining adrift, email allowed coach and coachee to have another point of contact to ensure follow-through.

> The email summaries also served as a form of validation through the documentation of all that a principal accomplished as illustrated here by Mateus

> I can go back and look at them still. She would, she’d take notes, and then paraphrase and then put them into a summary form. And I would go back and read them afterwards. It would help to follow-up but also, we talked about this,
you were feeling this way, we talked about this, I offered this, you were going to contact [this person]... Yeah, I was keeping all of them…. Sometimes I would get caught up in something else and go “oh yeah I really need to come back” and also it would help me to say “oh, okay I am doing a good job.” It’s validating also. (PI.3.1, 7.7.08)

Like Mateus, Sam also identified the email summaries as reminding her of positives:

And she always puts it in writing. So she’ll send me an email. It’s always coming back. It’s always looking at the positive, bringing it back to those goals, bringing it back to the growth and so on and so forth… (PI.5.1, 7.22.08)

From these above examples, it appears that coaches used emails to not only summarize in-person discussions but to also to attend to the affective needs of the new principals.

Giselle, Hannah, Mateus, Constance and Sam experienced the email as being supportive. The timely and detailed emails served as a reminder of all they had accomplished as a site leader as well as all that still needed to be accomplished. According to Mateus, it was a form of “journaling”, captured by the coach. In fact, five out of six principals had kept the emails from their coach, some almost three years old, as evidence of their importance to the new principal. On the other hand, when there is not a good relationship between the coach and principal, there is limited or even negative impact on the principal’s experience. To close this chapter, we’ll look at Cynthia, the sixth case study – the one outlier who did not have a positive experience.

**The Sixth Case Study: A Portrait of the Dissatisfied Principal**

In stark contrast to the other five principals’ experience with coaching described above in the themes that emerged across those experiences, Cynthia is the sixth and final case in this study. She is also the outlier case in this qualitative study as she was the one principal who was dissatisfied with her coaching experience. However, while an outlier, her experience illuminates the importance of the four themes that emerged in her peers’ more positive experience with coaching.

Cynthia, a new school administrator but experienced district administrator, expected support from her coach in her first year at a school site. In discussing the different domains of leadership practice, Cynthia’s responses consisted of “very general stuff” and “very general, she doesn’t have any specific guidance or questions about curriculum.” Cynthia’s growing frustration was palpable with each question. At which point, she went into a very detailed description of how coaching did not meet her needs.

It seems like it was very general… She wanted to come and chat, that can be helpful but it is not what I need… quite frankly… I asked for… One thing I really struggle with, organizational management systems, how to really make sure I maximize my administrative team. I decided to be explicit with her. Sent her something for feedback, put structures in place… whether it be filing, calendaring, ways of distributing… she gave no feedback on different duties. After that point I don’t how much more explicit I could be. She wasn’t stepping up. (PI.6.1, 7.9.08)
Similar to the new principals with no prior site administrative experience, she had asked for assistance to “put structures in place.” However, unlike Giselle, Hannah, and Mateus, coaching never met her more basic needs around learning and completing basic administrative tasks such as implementing “organizational management systems.”

While both new and returning principals felt emotionally supported by their coaches, Cynthia experienced coaching sessions as emotionally-draining. During the interview, Cynthia paused frequently as if flashing through the emotions of the time and restraining herself from saying more. She felt that she had been explicit about what she needed to the point of bitterness.

After that point I don’t how much more explicit I could be. She wasn’t stepping up. I had to move the session after school, due to value of time, uninterrupted time… she didn’t do any background homework, here is how I did it, let me work, let’s sit down and do a calendar… I got bitter. I had to give her specific suggestions… I did not want generalized talking sessions. (PI.6.1, 7.9.08)

In contrast to the other five principals, coaching became a source of emotional stress to the point that Cynthia moved the coaching sessions to after school. Therefore, while coaching could be a source of sustenance through emotionally trying times, it could also be a source of frustration as was the case with Cynthia.

In Cynthia’s opinion, the coach “wasn’t stepping up.” This extended to offering basic help with day-to-day administrative tasks.

My first year, I had personnel issues. The [counselor] was out. An assistant was out. It was really just my self. No, ‘wow, that must really be tough.’ No outreach [from her]. ‘Wow, let me help you.’ No help with documentation. Didn’t look at any of it. (PI.6.1, 7.9.08)

Therefore, at a critical time, Cynthia’s first year without school staff in place, her coach did not reach out and help her with basic tasks.

To better appreciate the difference in experience, Hannah recalled her coach being present on the first day of school, saying “She helped in the office because the secretary wasn’t able to man the phone all by herself” (PI.2.1, 7.15.08) For Hannah, her coach’s example of being responsive and reliable left a lasting impression on her.

My coach – and I still remember and this is one thing I definitely still take me – she always said to me, because again she would do everything with me, yard duty, cafeteria duty, whatever I was doing, she helped answer phones that first day of school. I totally remember that. She always had that ‘If not me then who, if not now then when.’ And whenever I’ve had to do something that I consider menial or not within my job description that adage always come to mind ‘If not me then who, if not now then when.’ (PI.2.1, 7.15.08)

Hannah’s example was in direct contrast to Cynthia’s experience of a similar situation, highlighting the importance of coaches being hands-on during real-time crisis. The result of the lack of outreach surely affected Cynthia’s perception of coach as unwilling, not just unable, to provide needed support.
According to Cynthia, “I didn’t know why, didn’t want to, didn’t know… She was a really nice person. She is a very lovely person.” While Cynthia described her coach as a lovely person, she recalled feeling like her coach was waiting for something.

Personally we got along really fine, a lovely person, warm, easy to talk to, professionally no benefit. She’s new. I’m new. It’s not much help. I got really explicit. I don’t know. I got the feeling that she was waiting for more from me… I actually put those suggestions in writing. I didn’t know how to be more specific. It wasn’t site or district specific. I would have brought the planner in… What I’m envisioning is big sheet of paper, map across the wall. I was telling her. (PI.6.1, 7.9.08)

For Cynthia, she was left with a feeling of frustration. For her, coaching conversations were at cross-purposes, a coach “waiting for more” and a new principal “telling her.”

Interestingly, even Cynthia mentioned the emails, although to the opposite effect. She noted the public way with which her coach would email: “And then, after every meeting, she would send an email, cc other people from [the program]” (PI.6.1, 7.9.08). This statement was a departure from the other recollections of new principals and their experience with email. She disliked the public nature of the emails and as a result, she responded in the same manner as she became more frustrated.

I even wrote it in email, I cc’d other people, ‘like I said before the biggest thing is how to help us work through organizational management systems’. I actually put those suggestions in writing. I didn’t know how to be more specific… What I’m envisioning is big sheet of paper, map across the wall. I was telling her. (PI.6.1, 7.9.08)

In contrast to the other new principals, Cynthia’s experienced email as a very public exposure of the failings of her coaching relationship.

Summary

What this chapter has demonstrated is the importance of using cross-case studies and outlier case studies in order to gain insight into the principal coaching experience. Again, this study was conducted in two phases in order to identify the most information-rich cases. Phase I began with the satisfaction survey and follow-up telephone interviews as the starting point for selecting the necessary six case studies. Phase II of the study involved two additional face-to-face semi-structured interviews in order to allow for new principals’ conceptions of the coaching experience and its impact on them to naturally emerge. Unlike the usual way of determining whether a coaching program has an effect on practice—the “satisfaction survey,” this approach focused on the subtle differences in the experience and impact of coaching as best captured through deep interview data. The themes recurring through this chapter, 1) Shaping Reflective, Instructionally-Focused Practice, 2) Feeling Supported during Emotionally Stressful Times, 3) Having an Authentic, Trusting Relationship and 4) Enhancing Relationship-Building through Technology. The implications of these results as they relate to each other and the literature will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.
Chapter 5
Implications: Rethinking Principal Coaching

Introduction

Through the very personal stories of six new principals, the analyses (in Chapter 4) revealed more nuanced results around their experiences of being coached. The implications of the emerging themes described in Chapter 4 are captured in these implications for practice:

1. The Importance of Timing in Principal Support;
2. The Critical Nature of Principal Psycho-Social Functioning,
3. The Place for Ongoing Conversations, and
4. The Consideration of Outliers

These four implications for further research and practice are warranted in this chapter by cross-referencing data from the emerging themes and by connecting both to the overall research base on principal support.

Implication 1: The Importance of Timing in Principal Support

Among five out of the six case study participants, the balance between basic administrative tasks and critical reflection as areas of affected practice partially depended upon the new principal’s “newness” to the position of site administrator. For Giselle, Hannah, and Mateus who were true neophytes, coaching first focused on basic administrative tasks and gradually moved towards critical reflection. The following exemplar from Hannah illustrated how a coach walked her through the basic steps of planning for a community picnic:

[For the community picnic], she would actually ask me ‘What’s the schedule of the day?’ She would ask me, ‘what are you going to need for that?’ We would map out, almost like a task analysis. We would map at what we would need. She didn’t expect everything to come up by myself. She would ask me questions to make me think about it then, when I didn’t really know, that’s when she’d bring in resources.’ (PI.1.1, 7.14.08)

The coach’s task analysis with a new principal concentrated on the logistical steps needed to hold a community picnic. Giselle, Hannah, and Mateus provided similar examples of learning basic administrative tasks from bus scheduling to budgeting.

For those returning to the position, Constance and Sam, coaching was more balanced between administrative tasks and critical reflection. They both described the same type of administrative tasks such as data analysis and budgeting, however, they described these tasks in ways that supported or furthered their vision for teaching and learning as captured by this quote:

And if I need to look at data, look, we’ve got to look at this. Let’s put this out… Let’s look how we are going to move these kids and what are we going to do here.’ Now I can do that with the [my teachers on special assignment] but it’s different with [the coach] because she has a bigger picture of it. She understands the instructional reform piece but she also understands the practicalities of saying...
that one is going to accelerate learning, not just intervene, but really accelerate it and what is the energy and quantum physics of saying that we are gong to do that…” (PI.5.1, 7.22.08)

For Sam, coaching around data analysis was part of a bigger picture, “the instructional reform piece,” rather than just analyzing data in of itself.

Parkey and Hall’s (1992) research on the induction phase of a principal’s career provides one framework for understanding the six new principal’s experiences during their first two years as a site administrator. Stage 1: Survival is the entry stage for principals when they feel overwhelmed, insecure, shock, frustration, and powerlessness. During Stage 2: Control, as survival concerns lessen, principals develop routines based on what is acceptable for a person in this position in order to create a sense of control. In Stage 3: Stability, new principals have a realistic understanding and expectations for the position and associated tasks are manageable. At Stage 4: Educational Leadership, principals envision long-term success for change strategies and in Stage 5: Professional Actualization, the principal co-creates with school staff the vision for success.

During the first year, all three new principals described their principal experience and aligned coaching support as moving through the first three stages from Stage One: Survival to Stage Three: Stability as illustrated by these three quotes:

My first year was more like she helped me with data, the budget, presentations, and getting through meetings (PI.1.1, 7.14.08)

You are just so full of questions in the beginning anyway. Many of your questions are survival based, like how do I do this because I need to do that tomorrow, how do I prepare for my first staff meeting because I need to prepare for that tomorrow… (PI.2.1, 7.15.08)

I think that initially helping me get structures in place, beginning of the year routines, so structures and routines really. If those are not in place, it’s really easy to get distracted with a lot of the other stuff that takes place. (PI.3.1, 7.7.08)

For these three, many of their questions and concerns were “survival based,” a series of firsts such as the first staff meeting, the first community meeting and so forth.

In comparison, for Constance and Sam who were returning to the position of principal after a brief break, their descriptions were more consistent with the latter two stages of Parkey and Hall’s framework. Administrative tasks were described in ways that supported their instructional vision for long-term success.

[My coach] taught me to always look at what you want your outcome to be and to work backwards from there. So what are you going to do in order to get to that outcome. I think that planning session for me was monumental because it got me to think differently. I always started at the beginning and worked, added steps, to come to an ending, but thinking about the end and then steps to get there made me think in a more specific manner. (PI.4.1, 7.22.08)
As these data suggest, coaching appeared to have started with critical reflection on basic administrative tasks such as analyzing data and planning professional development as opportunities to further their instructional vision. Both Constance and Sam described coaching sessions focused on instructional leadership, not on administrative leadership. Unlike Giselle, Hannah, and Mateus, returning principals did not describe coaching focused on administrative basics of planning and running a meeting. Their rather thick descriptions were more consistent with Stage Four and Stage Five. Throughout their interviews, Constance and Sam continued to focus on their overall vision and goals for their respective schools, the big picture. They were not bogged down on how to do the basics, but rather how to make the basics support the vision.

The importance of such an understanding was illuminated by Cynthia’s frustrating experience with being coached. In her first year, several key school staff were not in place. She felt that her coach “wasn’t stepping up,” offering to help at such a critical time.

My first year, I had personnel issues. The [counselor] was out. An assistant was out. It was really just my self. No, ‘wow, that must really be tough.’ No outreach [from her]. ‘Wow, let me help you.’ No help with documentation. Didn’t look at any of it.

At this time, Cynthia was clearly in Stage 1: Survival with the stress of “personnel issues.” However, in her opinion, the coach wanted to “chat.”

It seems like it was very general… She wanted to come and chat, that can be helpful but it is not what I need. …I did not want generalized talking sessions.

While the other new principals did describe the value of talking through past and potential situations, Giselle, Hannah, and Mateus appeared to have had their more basic “survival” needs met first. For Cynthia, more similar to the neophytes, early in her adjustment trajectory, the timing of this coaching function transformed talking into chatting with quite negative results.

While all six case study principals were “officially” in the induction phase of the principalship, defined as the first two years as a site administrator, a framework, such as Parkey and Hall’s (1992), would introduce the stages a new principal passes through within that phase. In related literature on organizational socialization, studies attempt to address the trajectory of newcomer adjustment, collecting data at entry, 3 months, 6 months, 9 months and 1 year after entry (Bauer and Erdogan, 2011). Further, research on organizational socialization found that experienced employees have a somewhat different adjustment process, able to use their insight from previous job to assist with their adjustment (Bauer and Erdogan, 2011). Adding a time dimension in developing a theory of coaching would result in a more nuanced understanding of the induction phase of a principal’s career. In practice, coaching training programs would include such an understanding of the adjustment trajectory in the development of coaches based on both a theoretical and practical knowledge-base.

**Implication 2: The Critical Nature of Principal Psycho-Social Functioning**

While the coaching literature within education has been consistent in its stance that coaching is not therapy (Daresh, 2006; Hobson and Sharp, 2005), this study demonstrates that new principal’s stressful first year experiences warrant revisiting the discussion of including
therapeutic-like coaching strategies that intentionally enhance their psycho-social functioning. Because of the nature of the relationships with their coaches, that is authentic, confidential, and trusting, five out of the six case study participants, both new and returning principals, recalled sharing the emotional impact of the principalship with their coach. Coaching as an induction support should acknowledge the highly emotionally stressful lives of a new principal by selecting and preparing coaches for the following situations as described below:

I could be on the verge of crying or saying ‘I don’t think I’m coming back. I don’t think I can do it.’ (PI.1.2, 7.21.08))

Many moments that I just didn’t want to do it anymore and I would call the coach, and she talked me down of the ledge. Literally, ‘why am I doing this, I hate it. I have this teacher grieving me and this is happening...’ (PI.3.2, 7.8.08))

For the principals entirely new to the administrative profession—Giselle, Hannah, and Mateus—their descriptions were consistent with findings from other studies on the induction phase. Several studies document the emotional stress such as anxiety, doubt, and frustration that new principals experience (Anderson, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1990; Parkay, Curries and Rhodes, 1992; Daresh, 1995b) as exemplified by these quotes below:

There are times where the position is just so lonely and you just question ‘Am I doing this right?’ and I think with a coach, who has had principal experience and everything, would reassure me ‘Hey, for a first year principal, you’re not doing so bad and hey that’s fine.’ …Just keeping me, reassuring me, I’m not a failure. (PI.1.2, 7.21.08)

I think you feel more assured in your decisions for having had a coach just because, especially in the beginning, especially in your first say couple of years, there’s always this sense I could have done it differently or I could have done it better or there is no right or wrong answer. (PI.2.2, 7.21.08)

Having the coach once a month is also very nurturing. They can also build confidence ‘oh look at what you’re doing.’ If you’re feeling down, ‘oh, look at what you did.’ It’s like reinforcing the positive and it’s so often, especially at an elementary site. There [are] no other administrators. It’s super isolating and not having the validation. (PI.3.2, 7.8.08)

Clearly the feelings of anxiety, doubt, and frustration come through in these quotes, the sense of “Am I doing this right?” or “…I could have done it better.” All three new principals felt their coaches provided them with needed emotional support. According to the literature, new principals appreciated having an identified person to go to who will listen to their problems – a conversation that is confidential and non-judgmental, reducing their sense of isolation and anxiety (Coleman et al., 1996; Dukess, 2001). Providing another perspective, these conversations also improved their self-confidence and self-esteem as a leader understanding that the problems they encounter are not unique and their solutions are adequate (Bolam et al., 1995). Even for the returning principals, who did not express the same degree of doubt and anxiety, Constance and Sam did express frustration as they encountered resistance against school
improvement efforts. For Constance and Sam, their frustration came more from the interpersonal interaction, rather than lack of role clarity or technical mastery.

Somebody did say to me, “why didn’t you just leave everything the way [he] had it.” My response in my head was “get over it, get over it” but I didn’t say anything and what [my coach] helped me come to terms with, “Constance, you are not [him]. You will do things your own way and it’s perfectly fine to do it your own way.” I needed to hear that. (PI.4.2, 7.23.08)

That’s one of the hardest pieces with this job. It’s that coming up against resistance. If one doesn’t have avenues, places to sort of go back to vent and get perspective, it can feel personalized. It can feel like it’s an attack. It’s really not. It’s not about me as a person. It may be directed that way but it’s really about the fear and concerns of the person who said them. (PI.5.2, 7.24.08)

Returning principals’ emotional stress then came from a different place. According to Alvy’s (1985) study of first and second year principals, he found encouraging teachers to provide differentiated instruction and promoting change among experienced staff to be an area of concern. Daresh (1987) found that new principal problems in part come from managing interpersonal relationships. Whether emotional stress comes from anxiety and doubt around role clarity and technical mastery or frustration with interpersonal relationships and resistance, all of the case study principals vividly described stressful professional lives. This suggests that those charged for supporting them during their induction phase, namely the coach, should be selected and prepared to effectively handle such stress, especially in light that these relationships are one of the more authentic, confidential and trusting relationships new principals have in their first two years.

Four of the six case study participants described deep connections with their coach, transforming from that of coach to mentor for the novice principals and colleague for the more experienced one. For Constance, while she did not express the same personal connection, she did identify a solid professional connection. Giselle, Hannah, Mateus, Constance and Sam each described the coaching relationship as trusting and confidential.

To be honest, with the whole trust issue, there are things that I told her that I didn’t hear. It didn’t come back to me through a different grapevine. (PI.1.2, 7.21.08)

I think in the sense of, all of the things that made her a great coach and made our relationship strong, was the strong sense of trust. (PI.2.2, 7.21.08)

I feel that I can really trust her. And I need to tell you… when I had a coach when I was first principal before, she went to my supervisor and had a conversation with my supervisor without my permission and it was used in my evaluation. I’ve had the alternative experience. (PI.5.2, 7.24.08)

Previous research suggests that coaching relationships should be characterized by mutual trust (Peterson, 1996.) Research further suggests that relationships should be confidential and non-supervisory in order to develop trust (Dukess, 2001). Five of the six case study principals firmly believed that their coach kept their conversations in confidence, and did not share information
with their immediate supervisors. Such trusting, confidential relationships allowed honest conversations to occur on the part of the principal.

Further, five out of the six case study principals believed their coaches to be willing to roll up their sleeves and work from the most mundane of tasks such as lunch duty to more strategic ones such as the strategic budget. Their willingness, as demonstrated by being there for the first day of school for Hannah or coming in on a Saturday for Sam, was bolstered by the coach bringing relevant knowledge and expertise. Again this was consistent with the research where mentors should have a record of success, be respected, have expertise, committed to lifelong learning, and have time to mentor (Crow and Matthews, 1998).

Cynthia provided an interesting case in contrast to the other five positive experiences. For Cynthia, she perceived her coach positively on a personal level, however, it was the lack of professional connection that over-shadowed the coaching relationship.

Personally we got along really fine, a lovely person, warm, easy to talk to, professionally no benefit. She’s new. I’m new. It’s not much help. I got really explicit. I don’t know. I got the feeling that she was waiting for more from me. (PI.6.1, 7.9.08)

For Cynthia, she was left with a feeling of frustration. For her, coaching conversations were at cross-purposes, a coach “waiting for more” and a new principal “telling her.” Cynthia suggested that they as coach and coachee could have been better served by making coaching explicitly tied to competencies for administrators.

Now that we have those competencies, identify areas want to work on, have coaches be responsible for reflecting on that work. I’m really strong in curriculum but I’m not organized enough. Struck me as odd. Set some specific outcomes. To me that would have made more sense. My needs are based on past experiences. (PI.6.1, 7.9.08)

It was clear that Cynthia perceived herself as highly competent in some domains, “really strong in curriculum.” However, she did not seem to perceive the coach as enhancing her curricular knowledge and its application.

She doesn’t have any specific guidance or questions about curriculum. She was part of a team [on instruction observations], came to the [instructional observations]. We got accolades and some things to work on. She came to the [instructional observations]. There should have been more follow-up afterwards. What I would have liked her to say is ‘here some articles and suggestions, here are some ways.’ (PI.6.1, 7.9.08)

Cynthia could not provide examples of specific support in her interviews. She was able to envision the type of support she would have liked to receive, mirroring the type of support other interviewed principals were able to recall.

Though it was apparent from previous research that trust was important, this study emphasizes even more strongly that coaching relationships matter. Coaching relies on relational learning where the veteran administrator listens to and reflects back new principal concerns and
then co-creates understandings of the profession, the organization, and other related performance-impeding issues (Dukess, 2001; Strong, 2003). Research suggests that mentor selection, matching, and training may be more important determiners of relationship success. Matching of a coach to a new principal should take into account the mentor’s age, gender, organizational position, power, and self-confidence (Hunt and Michael, 1983). Therefore, while a personal connection was an additional benefit for principals, a professional connection was paramount for learning and reflecting to occur. Both Constance and Cynthia were the case in point. For Constance, while she did not describe a personal connection, she did describe in detail the professional connection and resulting learning that occurred. For Cynthia, who self-assessed as strong in curriculum, she did not perceive her coach as demonstrating her relevant expertise and knowledge.

Within business, there has been a scholarly and practitioner debate regarding who is best qualified to coach in an unregulated field, those with a background in psychology or those knowledgeable about the business (Kilburg, 1996; Sperry, 1996, Tobias, 1996, Brotman, Liberi, & Wasylyshyn, 1998, and Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). Researchers have tried to distill the executive coaching relationship from the advising, career counseling, mentor and therapeutic relationships. However, according to Feldman and Lankau (2005), rather than focus on delineating conceptual distinctions among developmental relationships (i.e. coaching, mentoring, counseling), the focus should be on patterns of coaching behavior that tend to occur or are most beneficial to clients.

Furthermore, within the research community on executive coaching, there is a robust, and healthy, debate as to what outcomes are most beneficial to the clients. For example, in Issue 2 of the 2009 Industrial and Organizational Psychology, the focal article, entitled Hidden in Plain Sight: The Active Ingredients of Executive Coaching, McKenna and David (2209) state: “We propose that I/O psychologists who coach executives have overlooked psychotherapy outcome research as a source of information and ideas that can be used to improve our executive coaching practices (p. 244).” The rest of the issue contains responses from other scholars who focus on executive coaching. Grant, Curtayne, and Burton (2009) have argued that coaching is essentially applied positive psychology, that is, “the coaching relationship is one in which the coach and coachee form a collaborative working alliance, set mutually defined goals and devise specific action steps which lead to goal attainment (p. 397).” As such, coaching should be investigated as a positive individual change methodology on such outcome indicators as reduced stress, anxiety and depression and enhanced well-being, and resilience (Grant et al, 2009).

The reality is, without adequate preparation and expectation about the emotional reality of new principals, coaching runs the risk of adding to the stress as exemplified by Cynthia’s story. As a new principal, Cynthia expected specific support from her coach, especially during the beginning of the year when she was barely surviving, lacking administrative school staff. During her interview, the perceived lack of support had left a lasting impression, one that was vividly and viscerally recalled during the interview. This suggests that even though “therapeutic” strategies in coaching practices have not been adequately investigated, they clearly are warranted. More research needs to be conducted on this aspect of coaching.
Implication 3: The Place for Ongoing Conversations

The importance of ongoing emails between principal and coach was an unexpected theme. Five out of the six case study principals identified the emails between coach and principal as an important part of the coaching process. Principals identified three distinct ways in which emails supporting the coaching process, a meaningful point of connection that alleviated the feelings of isolation and inadequacy, summaries that captured their experiences for further reflection, and related to this, as an action plan for future work.

Given the isolating nature of the principalship, new principals described the emails as providing a quality point of connection with their coach as demonstrated by the quote below:

It was like a weekly check-in, the email. It was just constant. It was the closest to having just another administrator colleague who had the time to talk about an issue or a couple issues... (PI.1.1, 7.14.08)

And I was always amazed at the detail of the memory that she really captured, sometimes half-day sessions together in a paragraph, it was really like, it would also come back in a couple of days. Sometimes I would get caught up in something else and go, ‘oh yeah, I really need to come back’ and also it would help me to say ‘oh, okay. I am doing a good job.’ It’s validating. (PI.3.1, 7.7.08)

This data captured how the “constant” emails felt like having “another administrator colleague.” For Giselle, the email fulfilled the function of having someone to listen and to sift through her major issues. For Mateus, the emails provided much needed validation. In light of the previous finding, the intentional enhancement of psycho-social functioning, a new principal’s perception that email filled a vital function of feeling constantly supported and validated is significant.

New principals also identified the summaries of their coaching sessions as beneficial for further reflection on their emerging practice:

It was really good to memorialize a conversation. Like you know, there is so much that you are talking about and learning. Even in your planning meetings, you feel like as a new principal, you are just, you just could, just easily be overwhelmed and like even doing step one is kind of hard and that’s why you would go back to the documentation and kind of use it as a guiding force, a guiding force, as a guidance (PI.2.1, 7.15.08)

She was great at wrapping up our meetings and putting the meeting language into email like little dots of ‘okay, these are your concerns. This is what you said you were going to do. This is something I would suggest that you should consider.’ And so it was really good because while you’re talking, you hear things where you’re like ‘this is really good’ and then when she would write it and send it to me and it was there. ‘Okay this is what I wanna do.’ It kept me honest. It kept me on task. (PI.4.1, 7.22.08)

The electronic “memorializing” of the coaching sessions served new principals by capturing the job-embedded concerns that were discussed and further, synthesizing them into manageable “little dots” of concerns with coach’s advice for how to address. The
summaries effectively became an action plan for principals based on discussion, feedback and decisions made in their coaching sessions:

I had to go through my first basic progressive discipline with a staff member and also nonrelection. And so, she was really on top of it in terms of reminding me [about] deadlines. I mean I already had a sense. Obviously, I already had the paperwork. But she would even email like the week before and want to see a draft. (PI.2.1, 7.15.08)

The above data demonstrated how action-oriented these emails were. Email appears to have extended the coaching relationship, beyond the bi-monthly face-to-face meeting, providing a way for the coach to check-in around strands of real work such as writing an evaluation or checking in on the union contract.

Speaking volumes to the significance emails played in the coaching process, it should be noted that during the course of extensive interviewing, all three of the novice principals indicated that they had kept most, if not all, of the emails sent to them by their coach. According to Mateus, “Yeah, I was keeping all of them… It was more like journaling” (PI.3.1, 7.7.08). In the course of the interviewing, during the discussion of emails, two out of the six case study principals immediately shared their emails to provide some illustrative examples for the researcher. To begin to understand the potential power of e-coaching, the following example is provided:

Dear [Principal],

Thank you for meeting with me [in the] afternoon. I did so enjoy our visit. I just got back from a graduation luncheon and I was thinking of you and your family’s celebration. I am sure you are having a great time.

Morning Shooting In [School’s] Neighborhood

• We talked about the shooting that killed a [person this] morning within two blocks of your school community. Your immediate supervisor was out of the city so you worked with the Associate Superintendent and Public Relations [Officer].

• You did a lock-down [today] after you learned of the shooting. You also prepared a letter based on a model from the crisis response binder. You discussed the contents of the letter with the Public Relations Officer in preparation for what you wanted to say. The public information officer reviewed it before it went home. It was important for you to let the community know that it was not random, that it was a targeted attack; however, you did not want to say it was a gang-related incident. Several of your families knew the victim and/or were related to him. They were sure it was not gang-related although later you learned from the police that they thought it might be a gang-related incident. We talked about different ways to word this message. I also assured you that you should never hesitate to call me for additional help when writing letters. It is helpful for several people to look at these sensitive messages that have such emotional impact with the
community. Your letter said it just the right way, expressing concern, demonstrating caution, but not inflaming emotions when not necessary.

State Grant

- I am going to try to go to the grant meeting this [day] from 8:00-9:30. I know the meeting goes until 10:00 AM, but I also have a meeting in [town] so I will be leaving a little early.

- It is difficult for you to prepare the budget and determine the exact plan without information regarding the parameters of the grant. Hopefully, that will become known at the meeting this [day].

Staffing

- You will have several openings and that concerns you because you don’t know if you will be able to fill them all at this time. You have some specialty areas such as the teacher on special assignment position, the literacy specialist, the math coach, and special day class teachers that need to be filled.

- We talked about so many different aspects of staffing for next year, too many to summarize here. I did give you some materials regarding interview rubrics and questions.

End of the Year and Next Year

- You and [teacher] already prepared many of the end-of-the-year protocols. We reviewed some, including what dates to give teachers regarding building access. Also we talked about collecting all keys.

- I gave you some materials to consider in preparing your speeches and final words for the community.

We talked about the good, the bad, and the beautiful. What a year! Let me know about how [this day’s] visit goes. E-mail anything you would like for me to read. I am available always and will be scheduling our next appointment soon; but in the meantime, call if you have anything with which you think I may be of help. I will see you at the meeting.

Coach (PI.2.2, 7.21.08)

This excerpt first of all illustrates the stressful situations new principals are presented with such as school lock-downs due to violent crimes and the space to debrief such a traumatic event with a trusted confident, namely the coach. In this email, the coach re-assured the new principal in her communication to the community, writing “Your letter said it just the right way, expressing concern, demonstrating caution, but not inflaming emotions when not necessary.” From the traumatic to the more mundane, relatively, the coach also reminded the new principal about end-of-the-year protocols such as collecting keys and giving dates for when to return to work for the new school year.

As research on coaching is still in a nascent stage, then research on coaching via “computer-mediated communication” (CMC) is in an embryonic stage. The closest related
literature is the emerging research on “online mentoring” that is exploring CMC-only, CMC-primary and CMC-supplemental to face-to-face interaction (Ensher, Heun, & Blanchard, 2003). Of interest is how the technological interface changes the quality of the interaction, connection and learning as compared to the more traditional face-to-face interaction (Ensher et al., 2003). Benefits associated with CMC-supplemental are increased communication between mentor and protégée given its independence of location. As a result of increased communication, mentor and protégée experience increased connectedness with the supplemental mode of communication. Essentially, researchers propose that the traditional benefits of face-to-face interaction are enhanced when computer-mediated communication is supplemental. However, challenges unique to CMC are proposed, specifically, 1) likelihood of miscommunication, 2) requires competency in written communication and technical skills, 3) computer malfunctions, and 4) issues of privacy and confidentiality (Ensher et al. 2003).

These findings suggest that the addition of computer-mediated communication supplements face-to-face interaction. In this study, on the survey, all but one of the originally 23 surveyed principals agreed or strongly agreed that their “coach was accessible by email” and that “the amount of time I spent with my coach through email was adequate in supporting my professional needs.” However, while nearly every principal was satisfied with the amount of time and the quality of that time, principals varied in the amount of email contact. Sixty five percent of principals emailed their coach two to five times a month and another 25% of principals sent emails to their coaches six to nine times month. This suggests that there were real differences in the dosage of coaching for the principal who had email contact once a week as compared to the new principal who emailed their coach twice a week. However, it is unknown what this difference translates into in terms of the relationship and the professional knowledge and skill enhancement as well as psycho-social enhancement.

The one outlier case of, Cynthia, also implicates emails in a negative way, that is, it further reinforced her negative perception of being coached. After describing her on-going frustration with her coach, she noted the public way in which her coach would email: “And THEN, after every meeting, she would send an email, cc other people from [the program].” She then stated that she felt she needed to send her emails in the same manner, sending the email to the coach, district administrators, and others from the program. This statement was a departure from the other recollections of new principals and their experience with email.

Email as a means for effective mentorship is starting to receive attention within the education community. In the March 2009 issue of Phi Delta Kappan , “Dear Gayle, Dear Sheryl: Using Email for a Principal Mentorship”, Boris-Schacter and Vonasek (2009), the actual mentor and new principal, found that their email exchanges enhanced their practice, build their relationship and promote professional stability. As the usage of emerging technologies will undoubtedly increase, including video-conferencing via smartphones and computers using such programs as Skype, research need to deeply investigate the quality and content of these technology-mediated interactions.

Implication 4 - The Consideration of Outliers

Similar to Peters’ (2009) study that deeply investigated the experience of one new principal from a critical research perspective, the inclusion of a negative case study, that is, Cynthia, the district-administrator turned principal, who described a negative experience with
coaching, provided fresh insight into the coaching of new principals from a personally critical perspective. According to the Working Group on a Research Agenda for Developing the Field (2009), while the research on coaching is growing, much of that research is described as “lots of tick-the-box happy sheets, lots of self-estimated return on investment, lots of self-promotion studies (p. 6).” As applied to research on the coaching of principals, for the few studies that specifically focus on the coaching of new principals, most feature the satisfaction survey. While this study also included such a survey, it departed from previous research by featuring case studies that included in-depth interviewing as a method for deeply exploring coaching experiences and producing much more nuanced data.

Negative case methodology opens opportunities for the development and refinement of theory through anomalous cases. Such a method has its roots in John Stuart Mill’s four comparative methods: method of agreement, method of difference, method of concomitant variables and method of residues (Emigh, 1997). This method of difference was then modified into its more recent application as deviant case analysis. Proponents of this method argue that such an analysis does the following: “to show the limits of generalizing the theory, to present an analysis of particularly paradoxical empirical evidence, or to provide suggestions for further questions and problems for examination” (Emigh, 1997). In essence, negative cases force us to rethink our emerging theories, that might over-simplify complex phenomenon such as coaching relationships.

The study of negative cases can also lead to the continuous refinement of measurement. For example, Pearce (2002) suggests combining survey analysis and sampling techniques with ethnographic methods for identifying and studying negative cases. Combining these methods, that author argues, allows for a depth of understanding of anomalous cases difficult to achieve by survey analysis alone. Given the prolific use of surveys in coaching research, a worthwhile study for consideration would be to conduct a follow-up study of the dis-satisfied principals. To make this point more salient, in this study’s district survey, yearly satisfaction ratings on different domains varied from 85-95%, providing program evaluation evidence for the overwhelming success of the program. However, there is a depth of learning that can be gained by seeking out the 5-15% who were not satisfied, an understudied perspective and voice in the emerging research literature on the coaching of new principals.

Summary

This study sought to unpack new principal satisfaction with coaching through a more rigorous review. Rather than start with a priori definitions and codes of points of investigation, principal’s voices, including the dis-satisfied principal, an often unexplored and understudied perspective on coaching within educational settings, defined and described the coaching experience and its impact on them professionally and personally. The results and their implications hopefully push researchers, program developers, and practitioners to rethink our collective conceptions of the coaching process, the legitimate outcomes of coaching and the ways in which we study this induction support strategy.
References


Weingartner, C. J. (2001). Albuquerque principals have ESP. *Principal* 80(4), 40-42.


Appendix I
Survey

Your completing this survey will provide valuable input in evaluating the effectiveness of the [initiative]. Responses to this survey are completely confidential and will be reported only as aggregated data and not individually.

SCHOOL: ____________________________________________________________

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Total Number of Years as a Principal  Total Number of Years as a Teacher
Number of Years as a Principal in (district)  Number of Years as a Teacher in (district)

CONTACT TIME WITH COACH
How often did you meet with your coach on a monthly basis? _____

On a weekly basis, how often did you talk with your coach over the phone? _____

On a weekly basis, how often did you communicate with your coach through email? _____

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact time with coach</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My coach was accessible in-person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The amount of time I spent with my coach in-person was adequate in supporting my professional needs.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. My coach was accessible by phone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The amount of time I spent with my coach on the phone was adequate in supporting my professional needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. My coach was accessible through email.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The amount of time I spent with my coach through email was adequate in supporting my professional needs.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

CHARACTERISTICS OF COACH AND PRINCIPAL-COACH RELATIONSHIP

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree that your coach possessed the following characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coach</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Relevant expertise (similar school level, size, students, etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Relevant experience (similar school level, size, students, etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Up-to-date knowledge about curriculum and instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Up-to-date knowledge about federal/state/district policies</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Good listener and communicator</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Reliable and trustworthy</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Resourceful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree that your relationship can be described as the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal-Coach Relationship</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. Well matched in terms of professional needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Well matched in terms of emerging leadership style</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Well matched in terms of school level, school type, etc.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Based on honesty and trust</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To what extent did coaching have an IMPACT on your leadership practice in the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>None at all</th>
<th>Significant Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18. Plan and manage school budget</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Understand “unwritten” rules, procedures and expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Plan and direct improvement in curriculum and instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Understand district goals, philosophy and expectations of principals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Assess relevance of instruction, curriculum and evaluate program outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Understand and implement school board policies, district rules and administrative procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Supervise accounting procedures for school monies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Understand curriculum content, objectives, and organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Understand and work through district decision making processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Assess community needs, problems and expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Develop master schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Set goals and develop long-range plans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Supervise and evaluate staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Deal with staff concerns and resolve conflicts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>32. Help staff improve and plan staff development activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Select, assign, and orient staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>34. Insure that there is a safe, clean school environment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>35. Supervise special programs (e.g. Special Education, Multilingual Education, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>36. Oversee purchasing process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>37. Be reflective and critical of practice</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In which of the following areas do you need additional professional development?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Additional Support</th>
<th>None Needed</th>
<th>Substantial Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Plan and manage school budget</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Understand “unwritten” rules, procedures and expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Plan and direct improvement in curriculum and instruction</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Understand district goals, philosophy and expectations of principals</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Assess relevance of instruction, curriculum and evaluate program outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Understand and implement school board policies, district rules and administrative procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Supervise accounting procedures for school monies</td>
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<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Understand curriculum content, objectives, and organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>Understand and work through district decision making processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Assess community needs, problems and expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Develop master schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Set goals and develop long-range plans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>Supervise and evaluate staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>Deal with staff concerns and resolve conflicts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.</td>
<td>Help staff improve and plan staff development activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>Select, assign, and orient staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.</td>
<td>Insure that there is a safe, clean school environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.</td>
<td>Supervise special programs (e.g. Special Education, Multilingual Education, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.</td>
<td>Oversee purchasing process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.</td>
<td>Be reflective and critical of practice</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In addition to coaching, what type of professional development support do you think was needed?

☐ a. Mentor (senior district principal)
☐ b. Meetings with New Principals (Cohort model)
☐ c. School site visits (to other schools)
☐ d. Workshops targeted to New Principals
☐ e. Binder with essential district tools (policies/procedures)
☐ f. Other: ___________________________
☐ g. Other: ___________________________
Overall, do you feel that there was adequate support for you as a new principal? Why or Why Not?

Thank you for completing this survey!
Appendix II

Telephone Interview

INTRODUCTION OF INTERVIEW
I really appreciate you taking the time to answer our questions. As I mentioned earlier, your answers will be treated confidentially, so you don’t have to worry about any negative consequences coming from anything you say. Also, I am going to be tape-recording the interview so I can get everything you say accurately, and so I don’t have to take up so much of your time writing down your answers. The tapes will be destroyed after we use them to make sure we have all the data accurately recorded. Are you all right with me taping the interview?

In this first part of the interview, I am going to ask you somewhat detailed questions about your coaching sessions. I know you did this a long time ago, but it will really help us if you can think back.

CP CONTENT
Most principals address some but not all areas of leadership with their coaches, and we are trying to figure out exactly which area people were able to address. Can I go through them one-by-one with you? This part may feel a bit tedious, but it is needed for the next part of the interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget and Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If YES: How did you and your coach address this area? Can you give me an example?

CP ENGAGEMENT
Thanks for going through that process. Now I’d like to get a sense of the ways you worked with your coach by asking you to focus on a particular coaching session. Is there one that stands out in your memory? Tell me about that coaching session—why does it stand out for you?
PROBE: What did you focus on in that coaching session?

Now I want to ask you some more questions about the way you worked with your coach.

About how often, and for how long, do you think you met with your coach?

   PROBE: In-person on a monthly basis?
   PROBE: Over the phone?
   PROBE: Through email?

What exactly would you discuss and do with your coach?

   PROBE for Leadership Content

Now I want to ask you a question about the rapport between you and your coach.

How would you characterize the working relationship with your coach?

   PROBE: Relevant expertise, experience
   PROBE: Knowledgeable about curriculum, instruction and policy.
   PROBE: Good listener/communicator, reliable/trustworthy, and resourceful

Conclusion of Interview
We’re almost done with the formal interview; I have one more question.

Now that you've gained experience as a principal and you're no longer involved with the Coaching Principals program, how useful or relevant was your experience in the program? In other words, did CP have an influence on the way you lead now?

   PROBE if no specifics: Can you give me a specific example of the way your coaching experiences influence the way you lead now?

   PROBE for problem solving: Can you offer me example of the way your induction experiences influence how you solve problems?

   PROBE until no more forthcoming: Can you offer me another example of the way your induction experiences influence the way you lead now?

Thank you for participating in the interview.