Spring 4-28-2017

Principal Leadership Coaching: An Examination of Principal-Coach Interactions

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PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP COACHING:
AN EXAMINATION OF PRINCIPAL-COACH INTERACTIONS

by
Catherine Mary Johnson

Submitted to the University of Wyoming
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership

Laramie, Wyoming
March 28, 2017
Abstract

Principal leadership coaching is considered a valuable tool to support the development of school principals, as evidenced by its increased use in districts throughout the United States. However, the effectiveness of a leadership coaching program is highly dependent on the development of a trusting relationship between principals and their coaches which occurs, in part, through principal-coach interactions. This study examined the interactions between principals and coaches participating in a principal leadership coaching pilot conducted by a university in the Rocky Mountain region. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected to understand the characteristics of principal-coach interactions, changes in principals’ leadership practice that resulted from coaching, and participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of coaching program. Results were further analyzed to identify similarities and differences in the perceptions of principals and the perceptions of coaches. The study provided recommendations for the university’s principal coaching program and for developers of similar principal coaching programs to consider related to structures and processes to enhance the principal-coach interactions, and the development of productive principal-coach relationships. Additionally, the recommendations may inform individuals and organizations such as school districts and institutions of higher education in developing and providing ongoing support through coaching for principals.

Key words: principal leadership coaching, principal-coach interactions, principal-coach relationships, perceptions of principals and leadership coaches
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School principals are faced with extraordinary challenges today resulting from increased accountability for student achievement, rapidly changing student demographics, and diminishing financial resources. During this era of dramatic change in education, it is paramount that school leaders have the knowledge and skills to lead schools effectively and meet these challenges successfully (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; Fullan, 2002). However, these challenges have forced many school principals into a reactionary approach to leadership, while expectations such as those outlined in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders reflect the need for a more strategic approach to school-level leadership, one requiring a broad set of skills and abilities (National Policy Board for Education Administration, 2015). Similarly, McREL researchers found that effective school leadership requires focusing on instruction, school culture, and change management (Goodwin, Cameron, & Hein, 2015)—and as principals are developing these skills and abilities, they may feel overwhelmed and/or be ill-equipped to lead their schools. Moreover, there is a growing need to both attract and retain highly qualified educators to serve as principals. While the number of certified administrators has increased, the pool of principal applicants is declining as principals cite stress, salary, and time demands, as the top reasons they chose not to pursue principal positions (Gajda & Militello, 2008).

Traditional leadership development programs are typically grounded in coursework and lack the job-embedded, contextualized, problem-based opportunities necessary for principals to develop effective practices (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Indeed, despite the important role of principals in student success—second only to teacher influence (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005)—an alarming gap exists between what research shows is important to be an effective leader and how leaders actually behave (Reeves, 2008), suggesting that even when principals have the knowledge they need, they lack the ability to act on it.
One method for tackling this knowledge-action gap is the development of leadership coaching programs and coaching models that consider the needs of individual principals rather than one-size-fits-all approaches. Fullan (2002) explains that learning in context occurs when principals can “examine real problems and the solutions they have devised in their own systems” (p. 19). Therefore, leadership coaching offers a way to reduce the knowledge-action gap by embedding the application of practice, problem solving, feedback, and reflection into the process of acquiring new knowledge. Similarly, Sharratt and Fullan (2009) explain, “Leadership coaching is one approach to providing support to leaders by offering opportunities to have dialogue, seek advice, rehearse, and question key instructional leadership decisions and actions” (p. 49).

Over the last decade, several effective leadership coaching programs have been created, as described in A New Approach to Principal Preparation, that focus on principals having experiential, authentic opportunities and ongoing individual support to tackle the unique challenges they face (Cheney, Davis, Garrett, & Holleran, 2010). In these programs, the quality and quantity of principal-coach interactions are key to success. These authors further explain, “Coaching is not about the role of the coach, but is an action and a strategy for providing regular, constructive, and critical feedback” (2010, p. 66).

While providing evidence that leadership coaching is a feasible practice that increases the effectiveness of principals, the literature also points to the need for further examination of both unique settings of coaching programs, and relationships between principals and coaches. For example, Contreras (2008) suggests further case study research should be conducted due to the unique variables of each environment, and while some research suggests that coaching has
sustained impact (Green, Oades, & Grant, 2006; Libri & Kemp, 2006), studies have not provided specific details as to how such outcomes are achieved (Correia, dos Santos, & Passmore, 2016).

Also missing from the research, according to Correia et al., are “multiple perspectives from the different participants in the coaching process,” further explaining, “while studies have looked at coachee experiences or coach perceptions, few studies have involved all three stakeholders in the process; coach, coachee, and commissioning client” (2016, p. 8).

Nevertheless, engaging the commissioning client (i.e. district leadership), must not impinge on the confidentiality of principal-coach relationship, as the effectiveness of leadership coaching is highly dependent on the relationships of and interactions between coaches and principals. Grant (2011) contends that even in a well-structured coaching model or framework, variables emerging from the intimate nature of the coaching relationship can greatly impact outcomes.

In rural settings, providing principals with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and coaching they need is especially challenging as principals are often geographically and professionally isolated and lack opportunities to participate in high-quality professional development. In A Beginning Rural Principal’s Toolkit: A Guide for Success, Ashton and Duncan (2013) note that finding a mentor and establishing key relationships are essential tools in dealing with professional isolation. Recognizing this need, a university in the Rocky Mountain region created a center for educational leadership to provide principals, particularly those in rural settings, with high-quality professional development and coaching.

To address the gaps in the research, specifically understanding what factors contribute to the success of principal coaching programs, this study examined the interactions between the principals and coaches participating in a principal leadership coaching pilot program conducted by the university at the focus of this study from January 2016 to June 2016. In addition, the pilot
participants’ perceptions regarding these interactions were examined. The results of this study provide guidance to the program’s future principal-coach cohorts and inform the ongoing development of the program to maximize its success.

**Statement of the Problem**

Today’s principals face a daunting task of leading their schools through the myriad of challenges resulting from an increasingly complex environment. Furthermore, the lack of ongoing, job-embedded support which leads to principals’ feelings of isolation, has been a major contributing factor of principal turnover. Ashton and Duncan (2013) contend that professional isolation and loneliness often leaves principals overwhelmed resulting in high turnover rates. Therefore, providing principals with ongoing opportunities for collaboration and support that are embedded in the daily work of leading a school is a necessary shift. Moreover, this support must include feedback, reflective practice, and problem solving that are focused on the highest priority needs of each individual principal (Elmore, 2000).

Current literature points to leadership coaching of principals, whether an extension of principal preparation programs or a stand-alone model, as an effective way to provide this kind of ongoing, one-on-one support. The success of a coaching program, however, is highly depended on the development of a trusting relationship between the principal and the coach (Reiss, 2015), which may be developed through the intentional pairing of principals and coaches and through the principal-coach interactions. However, intentional pairing of principals and coaches is not always feasible, therefore, examining the characteristics of the interactions that contributed to the development of productive principal-coach relationships provides valuable insight for the principal coaching programs to maximize their effectiveness.
**Purpose Statement**

The university at the focus of this study created a center for educational leadership with a mission “to provide professional development for leaders at the classroom, school, district and higher education levels, for the purpose of advancing education in [the state]”. One of the centers several initiatives is a principal leadership coaching program which was piloted from January 2016 through June 2016. The pilot enabled the university to merge the theory of principal leadership coaching with practice on a small scale prior to a state-wide rollout in the following school year. Examining the interactions of principals and coaches participating in the pilot, and understanding their perceptions during the pilot phase, offered valuable insight into to inform further development of the program.

Three fundamental propositions within the construct of principal leadership support guided this study. First, that providing principals with job-embedded, ongoing support is vital to the development of their leadership skills and abilities. The second proposition is that principal leadership coaching is promising practice to build the capacity of principals to effectively lead their schools. Lastly, the effectiveness of principal leadership coaching is highly dependent on the extent to which a trusting relationship is developed between the principal and the coach. The literature cited in the introduction and literature review that follows support these propositions.

The purposes of this mixed-methods study were to understand how coaches and principals participating in a principal leadership coaching pilot program interacted with each other, to document changes in leadership practices that resulted from the interactions, and to describe the perceived effectiveness of their coaching interactions with each other. To accomplish these purposes, the researcher examined the frequency, methods used (face-to-face, virtual, phone, email), and topics discussed during the interactions along with the perceived
changes in the principals’ leadership practices that resulted from the coaching experience. Further analysis revealed similarities and differences in perceptions between the principal participants and the coach participants.

This study also expanded the current research on principal leadership coaching programs, illuminating the intimate nature of the coaching relationship through examining participants’ interactions with each other and perceptions of the effectiveness of their interaction. Furthermore, the need to examine principal leadership coaching in diverse and unique settings, such as rural environments was addressed.

**Research Questions**

To analyze the pilot participants’ perceptions of the characteristics of the principal-coach interactions during the principal leadership coaching pilot program, the following research questions are examined:

1. What were the characteristics of the principal-coach interactions during the principal leadership coaching pilot program?
2. What specific change(s) in the principals’ leadership practices resulted from the coaching experience (as perceived by both principals and coaches)?
3. What were the similarities and differences in the perceptions of the principals and the perceptions of the coaches regarding the coaching experience?

**Definitions of Terms**

An important distinction must be made between the type of supports provided to principals including the terms *mentoring* and *coaching*, which are often used interchangeably. McREL Senior Director Matthew Seebaum offers the following differentiation between the two types of support:
Whereas mentoring is focused on an experienced professional guiding and supporting a protégé as they learn more about their profession, coaching is designed to enhance performance or skills. Mentoring is generally related to individuals that are new in a position or role to offer guidance and assistance as they “learn the ropes.” Coaching is generally utilized to assist, guide and support individuals considered to have experience in their role or position, but desire or need to enhance their performance and increase their skills (personal communication, May 2, 2016).

The Leadership coach, therefore, is an individual with successful educational leadership experience and demonstrated evidence of knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to provide support to principals. Another type of principal support, induction programs, as described by Villani (2006), provide professional development focused on orienting a new principal to a school or district while increasing their knowledge, skills, and behaviors as educational leaders.

Finally, at the focus of this study are the characteristics of principal-coach interactions which include the frequency, methods used, topics discussed, and the scheduled (versus ad hoc) nature of the interactions.

**Significance of the Study**

As the role of principal increases in complexity and scope, so too does the need to provide ongoing support. For principals in rural settings faced with professional isolation and limited resources, this need is intensified. This study extends the current literature related to the skills and behaviors of effective coaches, and the relationships between principals and coaches, by examining their interactions and perceptions in the unique environment of the principal leadership coaching pilot program. The results of this study help to not only identify characteristics of the interactions that contribute to positive changes in principals’ practice, but
also inform ongoing improvements to the program. Moreover, by providing insight to the university into ways to better prepare and support principals, this study highlights the changes needed in principal preparation programs for other higher education institutions wanting to develop ongoing support for principals.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

The principal leadership coaching pilot at the focus of this study was implemented from January 2016 to June 2016. Findings from this study inform individuals and organizations seeking to support principals in the field, however, delimitations and limitations must be considered.

The study was delimited by a small convenience sample of seven principals and seven coaches participating in pilot. Although one of the principals volunteered for the coaching program, the others were selected for the pilot based on their students’ low achievement scores on a state-wide assessment, and their district superintendent’s ability to pay a small fee for the coaching. Since most of the principals did not volunteer for the coaching, their receptivity to the program may have influenced the interactions they had with their assigned coaches. The coach participants were highly experienced retired administrators, who were available for the time commitment, and paired with principals based on their proximity to or willingness to travel to the participating principals. Consequently, intentional pairing based on considerations such as similar experience and personality traits was not feasible for the pilot program due to the limited number of available educators to serve as coaches. Therefore, the pairings may have influenced the interactions between principals and coaches. Lastly, the duration of the pilot program was less than six months, which limited the examination of interactions.
Limitations of the study include the following: the participants represent only a small sample of all principals throughout the state as they were chosen based on their school’s student achievement scores. Additionally, the principal participants were a small subset of the state’s principal population; six of seven were novice principals, and the majority were from small, rural districts except for two principals working in larger districts. Therefore, generalizing findings is limited to coaching programs that serve novice and experienced principals in similar demographic areas.

Summary

The formidable challenges faced by principals supports the need for ongoing, job-embedded programs such as principal leadership coaching. A key component of successful coaching programs is a trusting relationship between the principal and coach which is developed, in part, through interactions between principals and their coaches. Examining the characteristics of the interactions between principals and coaches participating in the principal leadership coaching pilot provides valuable insight to inform future development of the program, and to individuals and organizations providing support to principals in the field. In the next section, a review of the literature supporting principal leadership coaching programs, particularly in rural settings, is discussed.
Review of the Literature

This literature review examines professional learning supports aimed at building principal leadership capacity that are currently available to school administrators. Coaching will be examined from the perspective of the changing role of the principal, unique challenges of principals in rural settings, and how coaching is situated within the broader continuum of school leadership development. Additionally, the literature relative to building a productive alliance between principals and their leadership coaches will be examined in the context of principal and coach interactions.

A significant body of research exists about the impact principals have on student achievement and school culture. McEwan (2003), for example, asserts that “policymakers have discovered that teachers, tests, and textbooks can’t produce results without highly effective principals to facilitate, model, and lead” (p. xxi). According to Public Agenda (2001), “Virtually all superintendents (99%) believe that behind every great school there’s a great principal” (p. 21).

While traditional support for principals has been shown to be minimally effective, principal leadership coaching—based on job-embedded, individualized support—is a promising practice to build the capacity of principals to effectively lead their schools. Though, the success of principal coaching is highly dependent on building trusting relationships through the intentional pairing of and interactions between principals and coaches (Aguilar, 2013; Bloom et al., 2005). Despite this, few studies focus on the pairing of coaches and principals, which is perhaps because pairings are not always made with intention. Since practicing administrators may not have time to commit to coaching, there is a need to rely on retired administrators who have the time and, consequently, principals and coaches can be paired based on location or
convenience rather than on personalities or needs. Thus, gaining insight into supporting relationships necessary for successful principal coaching through examining principal-coach interactions was the focus of this study.

The Changing Role of the Principal

Each day school principals tackle extraordinary challenges, demonstrating capabilities ranging from organizational and fiscal management and legal issues to instructional leadership and communicating with both internal and external stakeholders. As Bloom et al. (2005) assert, principals do all of this while navigating the increasingly complex challenges of heightened accountability and limited resources. Marzano, McNulty, and Waters (2005) describe effective leaders as those who fulfill 21 responsibilities that are linked to student achievement. Examples of these responsibilities include: challenging the status quo and leading change; establishing strong lines of communication; fostering a positive school culture through shared beliefs and a sense of school community; knowledge of and involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; establishing order with standard operating procedures and routines; outreach for both internal and external stakeholders; and gathering input from teachers when important decisions and policies are designed and implemented.

With all the responsibilities principals have, it is perhaps not surprising that the job of principal has lost some of its appeal. As Bloom et al. (2005) explain,

The complexities of the job, changing socioeconomic realities, and ever-increasing expectations are driving current and aspiring administrators away from the position. The increased state pressure of federal mandates to include standards and accountability movements have all converged into a perfect storm that now threatens to batter principals. (p. 24)
Villani (2006) suggests that while being a principal can be rewarding, the job is affected by several factors that present challenges, including, stress resulting from the number of tasks required of principals, excessive demands on time, conflicting demands of stakeholders (both internal and external), changing community demographics, student poverty, and student safety. Moreover, increasing accountability pressures starting with the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), and its subsequent reauthorization Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), are compounded by professional isolation, fear of being seen as incompetent, and at times, conflicting district and building priorities.

These challenges are underscored by the types of leadership coaching assistance requested by principals. Reiss (2015) reported that several common requests include: dealing with difficult personnel issues, managing stakeholder relationships (specifically school board, parents, and staff), aligning staff and goals, managing multiple priorities, managing time and having a personal life, strengthening leadership skills, and building confidence.

Principals are also evaluated by leadership standards such as those detailed in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015, p. 3) which includes the following ten standards of educational leadership practice:

Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values
Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms
Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students
Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel
Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff

Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community

Standard 9: Operations and Management

Standard 10: School Improvement

Given the numerous challenges outlined, it is imperative to examine ways to effectively support principals through an ongoing, job-embedded framework that enables them to examine real-world problems and solutions within their own systems. Such a context-driven approach to school improvement is reflected in the passage of *Every Student Succeeds Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), which shifts most of the oversight and authority for school accountability from the federal level to the state level. While a high level of accountability still exists, there is greater flexibility to accommodate the unique needs of districts. This flexibility is an acknowledgement that a national approach to regulating education mandated by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) does not appear to have long-term benefits. Similarly, preparing school leaders to be effective requires the opportunity to learn in context rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, as Fullan (2002) contends:

Learning in context also establishes conditions conducive to continual development, including opportunities to learn from others on the job, the daily fostering of current and future leaders, the selective retention of good ideas and best practices, and the explicit monitoring of performance. (p. 20)

**The Unique Challenges of Rural Principals**

The university’s principal leadership coaching pilot served principals in a state where, according to 2015 reporting, 52% of schools were classified as rural, and of those, 75% were classified as “remote rural,” defined as more than 25 miles from an urbanized area. For many
principals in these rural settings, the challenges of their jobs are magnified by geographic and professional isolation (Ashton & Duncan, 2013). For example, in rural settings, the school and principal are commonly focal points of the community, thereby expanding the role of the principal often beyond the school day (Ashton & Duncan, 2013). As Cruziero and Boone (2009) explain, “in a small community, the principal is never off duty” (p. 7).

In addition, many state and federal accountability requirements do not consider the challenges unique to rural environments, such as student populations and staff size (Starr & White, 2008). This, compounded by funding constraints resulting from declining populations, results in rural principals having fewer opportunities for professional development than principals in suburban or urban areas (Duncan & Stock, 2010). All of these challenges make hiring and retaining principals difficult, and rural districts are often left with a candidate pool that is less experienced compared to urban or suburban districts (Clarke & Stevens, 2009; Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009). Therefore, the need for ongoing individualized support for principals serving rural schools is vital to sustaining high quality education throughout the state.

**Providing Principals with Ongoing Support**

The formidable task of school leadership requires tremendous skill and perseverance and according to Reiss (2015), traditional approaches to professional development including workshops and conferences, are often insufficient in preparing principals to take on leadership roles. In their examination of principal preparation programs, Davis et al. (2005) found most programs were inadequate because they lacked opportunities for experiential learning. As a result of the critical need to support principals, several programs have emerged over the past decade that provide school leaders with ongoing, job-embedded training.
**Induction and Mentoring Programs.** Although induction and mentoring programs vary in structure and type of assistance, many provide individualized, job-embedded support to principals. An induction program is a commonly used process to increase the knowledge and skills of new principals while orienting them to their school and district. Techniques for induction may include, support from networks of new and experienced principals formed by the district or the state’s principal association, providing opportunities for professional development at workshops and conferences, and providing specific feedback during school site visits by district leaders. Some states and/or districts mandate induction programs for newly hired principals (Villani, 2006).

Principals at all experience levels often get support from more veteran principals. However, as Villani (2006) explains, the benefit of this relationship depends on the quality of training the veteran principal serving as mentor/coach has received and whether adequate time and effort is given to the mentoring/coaching process. Indeed, without proper training, Villani warns, “mentors may be little more than buddies” (p. 19), offering assistance in an informal manner rather than providing systematic support to the principals they serve.

**Coaching Programs.** Research has shown, both in education and in other fields, that coaching positively impacts leadership (Kampa-Kokesch, 2002). Eggers and Clarke (2000), for example, have studied leadership coaching both in and outside of education and contend, “Executives and HR managers know coaching is the most potent tool for inducing positive personal change, ensuring better-than-average odds of success, and making the change stick for the long term” (p. 67).

Aguilar (2013) describes coaching as “a form of professional development that brings out the best in people, uncovers strengths and skills, builds effective teams, cultivates compassion,
and builds emotionally resilient educators” (p. 6). However, the coaching relationship relies on the level of trust between the two individuals involved (Aguilar, 2013). Bloom et al. (2005), describe trust as “an assessment of sincerity, reliability, and competence” (p. 27), that one individual makes of another. These factors are perhaps best conveyed and reinforced through interactions between the principal and coach. Reiss (2015) describes the alliance between the coach and coachee as a collaborative discovery process, one in which the coach is primarily focused on building the capacity of the principal to solve problems him- or herself.

Reeves and Allison (2009) advocate using a principal coaching model that allows for open and candid feedback from coach to principal, encourages principals to engage in reflective practice, and is focused on goal setting and strategic planning. Similarly, Davis et al. (2005) concluded that an experienced practitioner can help principals implement best-practices by providing feedback that guides and encourages them to reflect on their practice.

**Characteristics of Principal-Coach interactions**

Reiss (2015) emphasizes that the success of a coaching program is highly dependent on the relationship between the principal and coach that is developed through their interactions, and explains that both unscheduled conversations and scheduled sessions, that are typically longer in duration, are integral to success of the program. The topics of unscheduled coaching conversations should be current issues or challenges the principal is facing, and focused on related action items that can be accomplished within two days of the interaction. These conversations generally occur by phone or e-mail. On the other hand, regularly scheduled sessions should focus on long-term professional or personal goals and generally occur face-to-face (Reiss, 2015). For these sessions, Correia, dos Santos, and Passmore (2016) explain the importance of identifying the goal(s) of the coaching program and individual sessions between
coach and principal. Goals can be external or internal; external or output goals focus on bringing about external change that is measurable and visible to outside stakeholders, while internal goals emphasize the principal’s personal development as an educational leader. Often, external goals are viewed with greater importance because they align with accountability indicators; however, it is critical to maintain focus on internal goals, as these will help build the capacity of the principal to create and sustain systemic change (Correia, dos Santos, & Passmore, 2016). Moreover, having structure in the principal-coach sessions is a key aspect of coaching, as it enables the principal and coach to stay focused (Grant, 2011).

**Summary**

The relevant literature highlights the pressure on school principals to create and sustain systemic change in order to improve their schools despite numerous challenges. Furthermore, strong evidence was examined to support the conviction that for rural principals, these pressures and challenges are intensified due to their unique challenges and limited opportunities for ongoing professional support. The conclusion that ongoing, job-embedded support for principals was markedly more effective than the traditional classroom approach to professional development was supported by the literature presented, and while many induction and mentoring programs provide individualized job-embedded support, principal leadership coaching holds great potential for building the leadership capacity of current and future principals.

Although the success of principal leadership coaching programs is highly dependent on the relationship and interactions of principals and coaches, previous leadership coaching studies have focused primarily on understanding the skills and behaviors of leadership coaches that are necessary to develop their coachees’ abilities, (Boyce & Hernez-Broome, 2010; Contreras, 2008), rather than examining the interactions between coaches and coachees. Therefore, the need
to examine these interactions is elevated as leadership coaching programs continue to increase in number. In rural settings, developing a productive alliance between principals and leadership coaches is particularly critical and was the focus of this study.
Methodology

To better understand the characteristics of the interactions between principals and coaches in the principal leadership coaching pilot both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through document reviews, surveys, interviews, and a focus group. It was necessary to apply for consent and receive approval from the University of Wyoming Institutional Review Board (IRB). Permission to conduct this study was obtained by the researcher in June 2016 (see Appendix G).

Context and Participants

Recognizing the increased need for well-trained school leaders across the state, the university at the focus of this study developed a principal leadership coaching program which was piloted from January 2016 through June 2016. The coaching program was established to address a newly adopted state-wide system of support recommendation for providing ongoing support for schools classified as Priority Improvement. Although the state department of education funded the development of the program, participating districts were required to pay for the coaches’ expenses which included small stipends, travel, and training expenses.

The participants in this study included seven principals from schools within the state and seven coaches selected to participate in the pilot. To recruit principal participants, the program director examined the state’s reporting of the 2014–2015 state-wide standardized test results, and contacted district superintendents of schools classified as Priority Improvement status based on the state’s student achievement scores. Despite financial constraints preventing many of these districts from paying the participation fee, seven principals were recruited from across the state. The principals were subsequently notified of their participation in the pilot by their superintendent or another member of the district’s leadership. However, according to coaches,
the program information provided to the principals was varied, resulting in some principals who were concerned that they were selected to participate because they were “in trouble”. Furthermore, one principal reported learning of the program on the day of the initial kick-off meeting.

The university’s principal leadership coaching program director selected participant coaches based on years of administrative experience and availability for the time commitment, therefore, seven highly experienced retired administrators served as coaches. The coaches, most of whom had no prior coaching experience, attended a two-day comprehensive training workshop to ensure the principal participants received consistent, high-quality support aimed at building their leadership capacity, and throughout the pilot, coaches attended monthly virtual training sessions where they focused on specific problems of practice. The training emphasized the use of research-based leadership strategies which the coaches, as pragmatists with successful school leadership experience, were eager to share with their principal coachees.

The seven coaches were paired with seven principals to provide the much-needed one-on-one coaching experience that has been effective in many coaching programs. The purpose of the pilot was to implement a model for principal leadership coaching to provide ongoing, job-embedded support for a selected group of principals that could be monitored and adjusted prior to the state-wide rollout which was scheduled for the following school year.

Research Questions

This study addressed three research questions: (1) What were the characteristics of the principal-coach interactions during the principal leadership coaching program pilot? (2) What specific change(s) in the principals’ leadership practices resulted from the coaching experience (as perceived by both principals and coaches)? (3) What were the similarities and differences in
the perceptions of the principals and the perceptions of the coaches regarding the coaching experience?

Research Design

A Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design, as described by Creswell (2014), was chosen as the optimum approach to examine the characteristics of the principal-coach interactions, and the perceptions of participants in the principal leadership coaching pilot. In this design, qualitative and quantitative data were collected from three types of sources and merged to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem and interpretation of the results of the study. As Creswell and Clark (2007) assert, “the use of quantitative and qualitative approach in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone” (p. 5). Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data using parallel constructs allows for triangulation of complementary data, as Creswell (2014) explains to “compare and contrast quantitative statistical results with qualitative findings, or to validate or expand quantitative results with qualitative data” (p. 62).

Data collection was conducted from June 2016 through August 2016 and included a review of Coach Planning and Summary documents (see appendix F) completed by the participating coaches after each interaction they had with their principal (coachee) during the pilot. Additionally, two electronic surveys, one for principals and one for coaches (see Appendices A and B), were administered at the end of the pilot program, a focus group with coaches (see Appendix D), and individual interviews with principals were conducted (see Appendix C).

The Coach Planning and Summary documents provided quantitative data as a tally system was used to record the frequency and method used for interactions, and a coding system
captured the topics discussed during each interaction. To ensure consistency in the coding process, a coding manual was developed and maintained that aided in the recording of topics discussed during principal-coach interactions.

Quantitative data were also collected from surveys that were administered to principals and coaches participating in the pilot. The surveys for the principals and the coaches included questions with parallel constructs, however, the wording was slightly modified to align with the participant’s role. Results of these surveys both confirmed and complemented the data collected through the document review by providing quantitative data on the characteristics of the principal and the participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the interactions.

To aid in the comparison and integration of findings, qualitative data were collected through a focus group and individual interviews. Questions were designed to further confirm and expand on data from other sources relating perceptions and attitudes from the participants; factors which may not be detected through the document review and surveys. Using a semi-structured question protocol helped to ensure a fundamental consistency existed in the responses that allowed for comparisons between participant groups, while providing the researcher with flexibility to inquire deeper into specific insights with each participant. deMarrais and Lapan (2004) encourage the use of qualitative interviews and focus groups “when researchers desire to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experience, or set of experiences” (p. 52). The qualitative and quantitative data from the three types of data sources, Coach Planning and Summary documents, the surveys, focus group and interviews, were combined during analysis to provide a source of triangulation, thus adding to the reliability and validity of the results.
Conceptual Framework

Pragmatist Theory provided a starting point for the conceptual framework of this study—and a lens through which professional socialization theory was explored. Pragmatism posits that the consequences of research based on the use of multiple methods of data collection is of primary importance to identify what works in practice (Creswell & Clarke, 2007). Thus, the tendency of experienced administrators serving as principal leadership coaches, would be to approach their role in a pragmatic manner, focusing on what works in practice as they provide ongoing support to principals. However, to identify a principal’s positioning to learn, an examination of “professional socialization,” a term coined by Van Maanen and Schien in 1979 to describe the process of developing an identity as a member of a professional community, will help leadership coaches to differentiate support for principals based on their current needs. Parkay, Currie, and Rhodes (1992), describe this socialization process in five stages, which is further contextualized for the role of principal.

Stage 1: Survival

In this stage, a new principal is overwhelmed and often feels ill-prepared to take on the responsibilities of school leadership. With high professional insecurity, new principals may tend to overreact.

Stage 2: Control

A principal’s primary concern in this stage is gaining control of the situation. The principal usually relies on his/her positional power rather than personal power to lead.

Stage 3: Stability
Having attained veteran status, a principal in this stage has established daily routines, and handles management-related tasks efficiently and effectively.

Stage 4: Educational Leadership

Moving past the routine management of the school, a principal in this stage shifts focus to curriculum and instruction. The principal may seek validation of his/her leadership skills from the external sources such as faculty and colleagues.

Stage 5: Professional Actualization

In this stage, a principal’s approach to leadership is more authentic as he/she develops a professional identity. With a primary focus of building a culture of learning and developing their staff, the principals’ validation of leadership comes from within.

The success of principal coaching is maximized by recognizing and addressing the individual needs of principals based on where they are in the socialization process and their unique school setting. As applied to this study, the review of literature on professional socialization through the lens of pragmatism provided the foundation for the development of research questions, methodology, data collection, and analysis of this study.

Instrumentation

Three types of instruments were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for the Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design of the study. The review of the literature on principal and coach interactions revealed a distinction between the nature of scheduled coaching sessions and unscheduled, or ad hoc, conversations. Therefore, to fully understand the characteristics of the principal and coach interactions and the perceptions of the participants, it was necessary to segregate the data for the two types of interactions, to the extent possible,
throughout the data collection process. This approach was reflected in the instruments and data collection process.

To facilitate objectivity and validity, a document review checklist, surveys, and questionnaires for both the focus group and interviews were developed to reflect relevant topics highlighted in principal standards and current literature, and the framework of the university coaching program. The two surveys and the semi-structured focus group and interview questionnaires were also designed to align with the role of each participant group of principals and coaches. A description of each instrument used in the study follows.

**Coach Planning and Summary Documents.** After the pilot was complete, the researcher reviewed all Coach Planning and Summary documents completed during the pilot by the coaches after each interaction they had with their principals. This enabled the researcher to determine the frequency, method used, and topic(s) discussed for each principal-coach interaction. The results of the document review were integrated and merged with the additional results for both interactions that were captured through surveys, principal interviews, and a focus group.

**Principal and Coach Surveys.** Participants were asked to reflect on the principal-coach interactions and respond to questions related to the frequency, methods used, and topics discussed during the principal-coach interactions. Part 1 of each survey asked respondents to reflect only on the scheduled interactions throughout the pilot while responding to questions 1 through 6. Respondents were provided with a range of choices when asked to indicate the frequency and method used for the scheduled interactions throughout the pilot. They also had the option of selecting “other,” and to describe a response that was not reflected in the choices given. To record the frequency of topics discussed in sessions, respondents were provided a list of
topics that reflected both the literature review and national principal leadership standards using a five-point frequency scale: (1) not at all, (2) rarely, (3) occasionally/moderately, (4) often, and (5) frequently. Part 2 of the survey (questions 7 through 12) used the same format of questioning as it related to unscheduled interactions during the pilot. Participants were also asked to indicate if they had no unscheduled interactions.

Finally, Part 3 of the surveys asked participants to rate the topics of discussion that they perceived led to positive changes in the principal’s leadership style or practice. For the ratings, participants used a four-point scale: (1) no impact on leadership, (2) slight impact on leadership, (3) moderate impact on leadership, and (4) significant impact on leadership. An additional response of not applicable was provided for topics listed that were not discussed during the pilot interactions. Although the principal and coach surveys asked similar questions, the wording was modified slightly to reflect the role of the participant groups. For example, the principal survey (see Appendix A) asked principals if they felt the interactions had an impact on their leadership practice, while the coach survey (see Appendix B) asked coaches if they felt the interactions had an impact on their principal’s (coachee’s) leadership practice.

**Principal Interviews and Coach Focus Group.** A focus group with coaches and individual interviews with principals were conducted to confirm results of the document review and surveys and further identify attitudes and perceptions of the participants. The focus group and interview questions were open-ended to allow the principals and coaches to share information that could not otherwise be conveyed through quantitative results, and to provide further explanations or examples to support their perceptions. Separate protocols for the principal interviews (see Appendix C) and coach focus group (see Appendix D) included questions using parallel constructs to enable comparison of responses between the principals’ perceptions and the
coaches’ perceptions. Each question was followed by additional prompts, if needed, which enabled the researcher to gain deeper insight into the research questions.

Validity

**Quantitative.** Creswell and Clark (2007), described validity as the degree to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. Validity of the surveys and focus group/interview protocols was achieved by an expert panel review. The panel, consisting of two principal leadership coaching specialists and two researchers, reviewed both the principal and coach surveys and protocols for the coach focus group and principal interviews. Panel members were provided with a summary of the study including the research questions (see Appendix E) to provide a frame of reference for the review. Each member of the expert panel provided feedback as to the validity of the surveys and focus group/interview protocols.

Based on the information provided, the expert panel agreed that the survey instruments and focus group/interview protocols would accurately capture the characteristics of the principal-coach interactions, the perceptions of the study participants relative to the interactions, and the changes in the principals’ practices that resulted from the principal-coach interactions.

**Qualitative.** Creswell and Clarke (2011) explain that “overall, checking for qualitative validity means assessment of whether the information obtained through qualitative data collection is accurate” (p. 211). To address qualitative validity, member checks were conducted to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings from the focus group and interviews, as all participants were provided with transcripts of the discussions and asked to offer feedback to determine if the findings were an accurate reflection of their experience. Responses from all principal participants and four of the seven coach participants confirmed the accuracy of the
findings. Additionally, triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data revealed results were mutually corroborated which further validated the study findings.

Reliability

Quantitative. Quantitative reliability refers to the consistency of scores, and is frequently achieved through intercoder reliability checks (Creswell & Clarke, 2011). While the frequency and method used for interactions was tallied on the Coach Planning and Summary documents, the topics discussed were reported as text. Therefore, to ensure reliability of the Coach Planning and Summary document coding, a cross-check process was implemented with an independent researcher to confirm that intercoder agreement of the topics discussed was achieved. Although several survey questions were not measured on scales, the researcher could assume reliability of surveys based on the determination of the surveys’ validity.

Qualitative. Reliability in qualitative research is also addressed primarily through intercoder reliability during the process of coding text to identify common concepts and ideas. Boyatzis (1998), underscores the importance of reliability in thematic analysis, which was the approach used in this study. Defining it as “consistency of observation, labeling, or interpretation” (p. 144), Boyatzis refers to both consistencies among various viewers, and consistencies over time or events. Therefore, both types of consistency were attained with an intercoder reliability process whereby an independent researcher coded several segments of textual data which were used for comparison.

Data Collection

Data from three different sources were collected and analyzed for the study. First, all coaches participating in the principal leadership coaching pilot completed Coach Planning and
Summary documents detailing the characteristics of each interaction they had with their principals during the pilot which spanned January 2016 through June 2016. Coaches granted permission to review the documents which were provided by the center’s director in June 2016. All identifying information was redacted by the program administrator from the documents before the review to ensure the anonymity of all participants. Quantitative data of each scheduled interaction, including the date, method used for the interaction, and topics discussed were gained from a review of the coach’s summary reports.

Next, a link to an electronic survey was emailed on June 15, 2016, to all participants in the pilot program. Six of the seven coaches completed the survey on either June 15th or June 16th. All principal participants completed the survey between June 22nd and September 6th. Three email reminders were sent to principal participants from June 29th to August 29th, and coach participants received one reminder on June 22nd. The results of the 13 surveys provided quantitative data of the characteristics of the principal and coach interactions and perceptions of the participants.

Finally, qualitative data were collected through one face-to-face focus group with six coaches, and individual phone interviews with one coach and six principals. The coaches’ focus group was conducted on June 15, 2016, during a previously scheduled debrief and planning meeting with the coaches. Coaches provided written permission to participate in a focus group and the organizers of the meeting allowed the researcher to conduct the 60-minute coach focus group which was recorded and later transcribed. The researcher scheduled phone interviews with one coach and six principal participants in the period of July 1, 2016 through August 31, 2016.
Data Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative data collected were integrated and merged to aid in the analysis and interpretation of findings. The analysis process enabled the researcher to understand the characteristics of the principal and coach interactions and the perceptions of the pilot participants. Further analysis revealed similarities and differences in the perceptions of the principals and the perceptions of the coaches.

Quantitative Analysis. The review of the Coach Planning and Summary documents and the principal and coach surveys provided the results for the quantitative phase of the study. Using SPSS, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated on the results of the Coach Planning Summary document review and the survey responses to determine the frequencies, methods used, and topics discussed during the principal-coach interactions. Additionally, principal and coach responses on survey questions 6, 12, and 13 were compared using effect sizes to identify the magnitude of the differences in the perceptions of each group. The calculation for the corrected factor, Hedges’ g, was used due to the small sample size.

Qualitative Analysis. Thematic analyses were conducted, using MAXQDA software, on the focus group and interview transcripts. These analyses involved iterative readings of the focus group and interview transcripts, which required creating a priori codes using key words and phrases derived from the research questions, the literature review, and conceptual framework for the study. Examples of these codes included: frequency of interactions and changes in leadership style (research questions); school improvement and rapport building (literature review); and effective leadership practices and personal concerns (conceptual framework).

Boyatzis (1998) further emphasizes that researchers must be open to and ready for receiving all pertinent information through emergent codes. These codes capture ideas, concepts,
and themes that come up in the data and are different from a priori codes. Examples of emergent codes included: rescheduling, principals’ lack of understanding, and “alligators.” During the coding process, the coding scheme was further refined as codes were collapsed, expanded, and refined. One such example was merging effective leadership practice with changes in leadership style, as participants addressed these themes in combination. Marginal remarks made throughout the coding process aided in the interpretation phase.

Through the intercoder reliability process, the coding of independent reviewers was compared and minor differences were discussed resulting in further refinement of the coding scheme. One such example was eliminating the school improvement code, which was considered wide-ranging, resulting in more specific coding of key words and phrases such as classroom instruction and accountability.

**Summary**

A mixed methods approach was used to gain insight into the perceptions of the principal leadership coaching pilot participants relative to the characteristics of the principal and coach interactions. Data were collected and analyzed from a document review, surveys, a focus group, and interviews. Triangulation of the data aided in confirming the findings outlined in the study and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, key findings, and conclusions based on the data analysis are reported.
Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate how coaches and principals participating in a university’s principal coaching pilot program interacted, how they perceived the effectiveness of their coaching interactions, and what changes were observed in the principals’ leadership practices that resulted from the interactions. Following is a description of the study participants and quantitative and qualitative findings of the study. The quantitative reporting includes frequencies, means, standard deviations, and effect sizes as they relate to each research question, followed by qualitative findings that emerged from the focus group and individual interviews.

Participants and Data Collection

All participants in the university’s principal coaching program pilot agreed to participate in the study, which included seven principals from schools within the state, and seven coaches, six of whom resided within the state. The university’s principal leadership coaching program director selected participant coaches based on years of administrative experience and availability for the time commitment. Additionally, the program director examined the state’s reporting of the 2014–2015 state-wide standardized test results, and selected principals from schools classified as Priority Improvement status based on the state’s student achievement scores. While principals reported a range of prior experience administrative experience from 1 to 10 years on survey responses, during individual interviews only one principal indicated having prior experience as a principal.

Three types of instruments were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for the Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design of the study. Data collection was conducted from June 2016 through August 2016 and included quantitative data sources from Coach Planning and Summary documents and two electronic surveys, one for principals and one for
coaches, described in detail under methodology (see Appendices A and B). Qualitative data from a focus group and individual interviews (see Appendices C and D) were compared and integrated with the quantitative findings during analysis to identify common themes and address the study research questions. Findings related to each research question are described based on both quantitative and qualitative data.

**Characteristics of the Principal-Coach Interactions**

*What were the characteristics of the principal-coach interactions during the principal leadership coaching pilot program?* The characteristics of principal-coach interactions examined for this study included the frequency of interactions, method used for interactions, topics discussed, and the scheduled (versus ad hoc) nature of the interactions. Findings related to this research question are organized by characteristic.

**Frequency of interactions.** Results of the Coach Planning and Summary document review and the principal and coach surveys provided quantitative findings related to the frequency of the principal-coach interactions. Qualitative findings were provided through discussions with participants during the focus group and individual interviews.

**Document review results.** A total of 55 scheduled and unscheduled principal-coach interactions were recorded on Coach Planning and Summary documents, which were completed by coaches after each interaction they had with their principals during the pilot. The interactions for the principal-coach pairs ranged in frequency from 6 to 11, with a mean frequency of 7.86 and standard deviation of 2.41. Most scheduled and unscheduled interactions occurred during the months of February, March, and April. The time span of the pilot included only two weeks in January and June which explains the low number of interactions during those months, however, during the month of May, principal-coach interactions were substantially lower than in the
previous months. The frequencies reported by the coaches of both scheduled and unscheduled interactions and are presented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Number of Scheduled and Unscheduled Interactions by Month.](image)

**Figure 1.** Based on the review of the Coach Planning and Summary documents completed by coaches after each interaction with principals. Includes both scheduled and unscheduled interactions.

**Survey results.** Principal and coach survey questions 1 through 3, addressed the frequency of scheduled interactions during the pilot. Survey questions 7 through 9 addressed the frequency of unscheduled interactions during the pilot. Survey findings were consistent with the document review findings, as most survey respondents indicated that both scheduled and unscheduled interactions occurred less than one time per week which aligns with the mean frequency of 7.86 identified in the document review.

Similarly, the varied responses on survey questions related to the change in frequency of both scheduled and unscheduled interactions reflected the timing of interactions, reported by coaches on the Coach Planning and Summary documents, indicating some principal-coach pairs met more frequently in some months than others. Finally, survey results indicated only four
principal-coach pairs engaged in unscheduled interactions which were initiated by both principals and coaches. Survey findings related to frequency of interactions are detailed below.

Table 1

*Frequency of Interactions for Principals and Coaches based on Survey Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of questions and possible responses</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Coaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How often did you have scheduled interactions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one time per week</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once per week</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice per week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than two times per week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) How did the frequency of scheduled interactions change?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They increased over time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They decreased over time</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They stayed about the same over time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What is the ideal frequency for scheduled interactions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only when requested</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one time per week</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One time per week</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two times per week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than two times per week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2_a</td>
<td>2_b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) How often did you have unscheduled interactions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one time per week</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once per week</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice per week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than two times per week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varied too much to determine an “average”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1_c</td>
<td>2_d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) How did frequency of unscheduled interactions change?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They increased over time</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They decreased over time</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They stayed about the same over time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable- there were no unscheduled interactions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Who initiated the unscheduled interactions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually requested the interactions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My principal/coach usually requested the interactions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We both requested interactions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable- there were no unscheduled interactions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* a = comments: it depends on need, and every 3-4 weeks for scheduled, b = comments: 2 per month, c = comments: didn’t happen, d = comments: never, some weeks three unscheduled interactions- some weeks no contact.
Focus group and individual interview results. The focus group and individual interviews with participants provided qualitative findings related to the frequency of principal-coach interactions. During the focus group and individual interviews, both principals and coaches indicated the program goal was to have at least one scheduled face-to-face meeting and one meeting using an alternative method each month of the pilot. Additionally, they reported that frequency of scheduled interactions varied among the principal-coach pairs and also varied throughout the duration of the pilot. Scheduled interactions were set in advance, as both principals and coaches established meetings based on mutually agreed upon days and times. An effective practice described by both principals and coaches was scheduling the following interaction at the end of a meeting. Additionally, several coaches routinely reminded their principals of the scheduled interactions one or two days prior to the established time. Often, the reminder prompts would result in the principals needing to reschedule the appointment due to a conflict that arose; however, both principal and coach participants reported that they were usually able to find an alternate time to meet within 1 to 2 weeks after the cancelled meeting.

In addition to geographic challenges experienced by principals and coaches in rural areas, a common theme emerged in discussions with coaches and principals as they reflected on the rescheduled meetings. While at times coaches requested a meeting change, principals and coaches reported that often urgent school issues necessitated a meeting change initiated by principals. Several coaches voiced agreement with one coach who explained, “overlapping issues and things that came up for [my principal] that demanded [the principal’s] attention on the days we had scheduled so [he/she] had to cancel.” While another coach reported that “there were definitely obstacles [to meeting], multiple times [my principal] would email and say ‘I have to change [our meeting]’ because something would come up so we would have to reschedule
meetings,” further estimating the rescheduling occurred “about one-fourth of the time” over the duration of the pilot. Both principals and coaches indicated rescheduling and cancelling of meetings occurred more frequently towards the end of the school year which may explain the low number of interactions identified in the document review results. While the meeting delays perhaps reduced the overall frequency of interactions, all principal participants expressed appreciation for their coach’s availability, flexibility, and willingness to change appointments when necessary. Principal comments included, “[my coach] was so incredibly available to me and would make time whenever I needed help with something,” and when discussing the need to reschedule, another coach indicated, “without a doubt [my coach] was very, very accessible and available.”

During the coach focus group and principal interviews, participants explained that often unscheduled interactions would occur as either a follow-up to previous discussions, or during reminder calls/emails from coaches about upcoming scheduled interactions. While survey results indicated both parties initiated unscheduled interactions, during the focus group and interviews, principals and coaches reported the interactions were primarily initiated by coaches.

Principals and coaches confirmed that only four of the seven pairs engaged in unscheduled interactions as reported on the surveys. Discussions with coaches and principals as to possible reasons unscheduled interactions did not occur revealed that some principals were perhaps less willing to meet with coaches as they lacked understanding about the purpose of the principal coaching program. Several principals reported they questioned both why they were selected for the pilot, and the mid-year timing of the pilot program. Principals indicated they understood the criteria for principal selection was based on student achievement scores in the prior year; however, as one principal stated, “The test scores were not necessarily reflective of
my leadership but more where the building was at the time.” Furthermore, principals indicated they may have benefitted more from coaching before the school year started.

Similarly, coaches pointed to the timing and principals’ lack of understanding as possible influences on the principals’ willingness to initiate interactions with their coaches. While this issue may have hindered the frequency of the interactions for some of the principal-coach pairs, one principal, a self-described skeptic of the program, recounted how his/her willingness to meet with the coach increased as their relationship evolved. “I think the most valuable part was that the relationship building with my coach was good, and as time went on, I think we were more comfortable talking with each other, and I was able to share and reflect openly over time.” Another principal, who expressed a strong willingness to participate in the pilot and had frequent coach interactions stated, “as a rural leader out all by myself, it was a pretty important program,” further claiming, “I don’t know if I would still be principal if I hadn’t had the program.” Both principals expressed a strong desire to continue with the program the following year.

**Methods used for interactions.** Quantitative findings from the review of the Coach Planning and Summary documents and survey responses revealed that a variety of methods were used for the 55 interactions. These results were compared to, and expanded by, qualitative findings from the focus group and individual interviews.

**Document review results.** A variety of methods including, face-to-face, phone, email, and video conferencing were used for the 55 scheduled and unscheduled interactions reported on the Coach Planning and Summary documents. However, the majority (60%) occurred face-to-face. Figure 2 provides for details of the document review findings related to methods used for principal-coach interactions.
Survey results. Principal and Coach Survey questions 4 and 5 addressed the methods used for scheduled interactions and questions 10 and 11 addressed method of unscheduled interactions during the pilot. The results of the survey responses, separated into scheduled and unscheduled interactions, revealed that the preferred and most often method used for scheduled interactions was face-to-face. For unscheduled interactions, survey respondents reported a variety of methods were used and results of the preferred method were mixed. These quantitative survey results are detailed in Table 2.
Table 2

*Frequency of Methods Used for Interactions based on Survey Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of questions and possible responses</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Coaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4) Which method of interaction was used most often for scheduled interactions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skype, Zoom, or other video conferencing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1(^a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5) Which method of interaction do you think was most effective for scheduled interactions?

| Face-to-face                                     | 4          | 3       |
| Phone                                           | 1          | 1       |
| Email                                           | 0          | 0       |
| Skype, Zoom, or other video conferencing         | 2          | 0       |
| Other                                           | 0          | 2\(^b\) |

10) Which method of interactions was used most often for unscheduled interactions?

| Face-to-face                                     | 1          | 0       |
| Phone                                           | 1          | 2       |
| Email                                           | 1          | 1       |
| Skype, Zoom, or other video conferencing         | 1          | 0       |
| Other                                           | 2\(^c\)    | 3\(^d\) |

11) Which method of interaction do you think was most effective for unscheduled interactions?

| Face-to-face                                     | 1          | 0       |
| Phone                                           | 0          | 1       |
| Email                                           | 2          | 1       |
| Skype, Zoom, or other video conferencing         | 1          | 0       |
| Other                                           | 0          | 2\(^e\) |

*Note:* a = comment: because I lived in the same town, face-to-face was best; b = comments: both phone and face-to-face, off campus face-to-face; c = didn’t happen; d = comment: both phone and email; e = comments: it depended on the topic.

**Focus group and individual interview results.** During the focus groups and interviews, coaches and principals emphasized that the on-campus, face-to-face interactions were critical as they both facilitated rapport building and enabled the coach to provide feedback to the principals that was specific to leading their school. As one principal explained, “I thought face to face was
absolutely the most beneficial because for my coach to be in the building and seeing what we were talking about and see things in action was most helpful.” Further explaining, “we weren’t talking in generalities at that point, we were dealing in specifics and that was helpful.” Similarly, coaches stated a preference for face-to-face interactions at least initially, “I want to see them in their environment and how they act with their staff,” as one coach reported the school visits provided additional clarity about situations for subsequent discussions. One principal from a remote rural district expressed the need for more frequent face-to-face contact, while acknowledging the geographic challenges to doing this.

Recognizing that meeting face-to-face was not always feasible when the principal and coach did not reside in close proximity, other methods such as video conferencing and phone were considered effective alternatives. Moreover, some coaches observed that there was less of a tendency to get distracted or deviate from planned topics and goals when a method other than face-to-face was used, and one coach found that meeting with the principal at an off-campus location enabled them to focus more intentionally during their interactions.

For most principal-coach pairs, it was necessary for the pilot participants to travel for the face-to-face meetings. Consequently, most unscheduled meetings occurred by phone, email, and/or video conferencing as reported in the survey results. Both principals and coaches considered these alternative methods effective for unscheduled interactions as the discussions were generally brief and focused on specific issues. Using a variety of methods, as one coach stated, “validated our work that was not face-to-face.” Several other coaches agreed.

**Topics discussed during interactions.** Quantitative findings related to topics discussed during principal-coach interactions were produced from the review of the Coach Summary and Planning documents and the principal and coach survey responses. Discussion with principal and
coach study participants during the focus groups and individual interviews provided qualitative findings related to topics discussed during both scheduled and unscheduled interactions.

**Documents review results.** The two most frequently discussed topics recorded on the Coach Planning and Summary documents during the 55 principal-coach interactions were personnel issues (32 times) and school culture and climate (20 times), often appearing together as part of the same discussion. Similarly, classroom instruction and accountability issues were frequently discussed together. Specific areas of professional growth discussions included developing principals’ skills in relationship building with staff and colleagues, sharing leadership responsibilities, identifying leadership strengths, and developing goals. The total number of discussions for each topic discussed during the 55 principal-coach interactions are presented in Figure 3.

*Figure 3. Frequency of Topics Discussed.*

![Figure 3. Frequency of Topics Discussed.](image)

Based on the review of the Coach Planning and Summary documents completed by coaches after each interaction with principals. Includes both scheduled and unscheduled interactions.
**Survey results.** Principals and coaches were asked to indicate the frequency of topics discussed during both scheduled interactions (question 6) and unscheduled interactions (question 12). Possible responses were (1) not at all, (2) rarely, (3) occasionally, (4) often, and (5) very frequently. Mean frequencies corresponding to the possible responses were calculated. For example, a mean frequency score for principal responses of 3.43 for a specific topic indicates the principals reported the topic was discussed more than *occasionally* (3) but less than *often* (4).

For scheduled interactions, both principals and coaches identified school culture and climate, classroom instruction, and personnel issues as the most frequently discussed topics. These findings, presented in Figure 4.

![Figure 4. Mean Frequencies of Topics Discussed during Scheduled Interactions](chart)

*Figure 4. Based on principal and coach responses to survey question 6. Possible responses were (1) not at all, (2) rarely, (3) occasionally, (4) often, and (5) very frequently.*
Findings for topics discussed during unscheduled interactions showed several discrepancies between the principals’ responses and coaches’ responses. The most notable differences corresponded to the topics of classroom instruction, personnel issues, accountability, and professional growth. For each of these topics, principals reported they were discussed more frequently than coaches. These findings are consistent with the document review results and are presented in Figure 5.

![Figure 5. Mean Frequencies of Topics Discussed during Unscheduled Interactions.]

Focus group and individual interview results. During the focus group, coaches stated they planned topics for scheduled sessions that considered the research on areas shown to have a positive impact on student achievement. Several of these topics were addressed through coaches’ feedback on staff and leadership team meetings, professional learning community meetings, and
classroom observations. However, as one coach explained, “The topics evolved into a two-sided set of goals; what the principals needed right then and there, and on the other side, what we know to be strong instructional strategies to move the school out of the ‘needs improvement’ category.” Indeed, principals reported that they often proposed topics during scheduled interactions, to address urgent matters that arose such as personnel or school community issues.

While the scheduled interactions allowed time for addressing principals’ chosen topics, coaches explained they often allowed the principals to discuss his/her issues first, as they recognized it may be difficult for the principal to focus on more strategic topics if he/she was “pre-occupied” with an immediate need. They also recognized that focusing on the principals’ immediate needs fostered relationship building with their principal. The coaches coined the term “alligators” to describe the principals’ frequently emerging urgent matters, and as one coach explained, “sometimes you can’t get to the instructional things until you kill the alligators,” further emphasizing the need to help principals develop strategies to balance the urgent matters that frequently developed with a more strategic approach to leading a building.

In contrast, one principal described his/her coach’s more structured approach to meeting topics, whereby the principal and coach mutually agreed upon a topic for the next meeting, and the coach provided the principal with a related action plan. The coach would check on the progress of the action plan approximately weekly, resulting in additional brief scheduled interactions. This principal-coach pair also engaged in frequent unscheduled interactions, initiated by the principal, to address his/her immediate or urgent needs.

Unlike the scheduled interactions, topics discussed during unscheduled interactions were reported as mostly follow-ups to previous conversations, or focused on specific or immediate needs of the principal. One principal reported contacting the coach to discuss accountability
scores and classroom instruction, although principals and coaches reported that often, unscheduled interactions focused on personnel issues and their influence on school culture and climate. Most principals confirmed they would frequently introduce topics during their unscheduled interactions based on a current need or upcoming or anticipated event. These examples both confirm and provide additional insight to the survey findings.

**Summary of Characteristics of the Principal-Coach Interactions**

An examination of the findings related to the frequency of interactions among the seven principal-coach pairs revealed the frequency of interactions varied among the principal-coach pairs, and also varied from month-to-month as the frequency was highest during the months of February, March, and April. An examination into explanations for the varied frequencies revealed two possible contributing factors: 1) principals’ lack of understanding about the coaching program and 2) conflicts in the principals’ schedules resulting in delayed interactions.

Findings related to the method used for interactions revealed that both principals and coaches preferred to meet face-to-face for scheduled interactions. This was particularly important for the initial meetings, as coaches described the benefits for building rapport and seeing the principal in his/her environment. Similarly, principals described the benefits of receiving feedback specific to their school setting. The travel required for face-to-face interactions presented a challenge for several principal-coach pairs; therefore, a variety of methods were used for both scheduled and unscheduled interactions, which were considered effective.

Findings indicated the topics of personnel issues, classroom instruction, and school culture and climate were among the most frequent topics discussed during both scheduled and unscheduled interactions. Although coaches planned specific topics for scheduled interactions with principals, most coaches indicated a shift in topics often occurred due to principals’
immediate needs. Principals reported issues related to personnel, culture and climate, and school management arose frequently during the pilot. Recognizing the importance of providing guidance on topics relevant to the principals, coaches grappled with balancing the focus on principals’ urgent or immediate needs with more strategic topics relevant to school leadership and school improvement.

**Changes in Principals’ Leadership Style/Practice**

*What specific change(s) in the principals’ leadership practices resulted from the coaching experience (as perceived by both principals and coaches)?* Findings related to this research question include quantitative results of the principal and coach surveys, and the qualitative results of the focus group and individual interviews.

**Survey results.** Question 13 on the surveys asked both principals and coaches to indicate the extent to which focus topics led to positive changes in principals’ leadership style/practice during the pilot. Possible responses were (1) no impact on leadership, (2) slight impact on leadership, (3) moderate impact on leadership, (4) significant impact on leadership, and not applicable, meaning the topic was not discussed. Means for each topic’s perceived impact on the principals’ leadership practice (i.e. *impact score*) were calculated using the response scale of 1 to 4. For example, a mean impact score for principal responses of 2.57 on a specific topic indicates the principals reported discussing the topic had between a *slight impact* and *moderate impact* on their leadership practice.

Overall, coaches’ mean impact scores were slightly higher than that of principals. The highest mean impact score for coaches was a 3 (moderate impact) compared to the highest mean impact score for principals of 2.83. Principals and coaches reported similar topics that slightly or moderately impacted principals’ leadership style/practice, such as, school culture and climate,
personnel issues, and professional growth. However, the largest discrepancy in the principals’ and coaches’ mean impact score corresponded to the topic of time management. Coaches reported focusing on time management had a moderate impact on principals’ leadership (mean score = 3), whereas principals reported the focus had between no impact and slight impact (mean score = 1.67). These results are presented in Figure 6.

![Figure 6. Mean Impact Score of Topics Discussed](image)

*Figure 6. Based on principal and coach responses to survey question 13. Possible responses: (1) no impact on leadership, (2) slight impact on leadership, (3) moderate impact on leadership, (4) significant impact on leadership.*

**Focus group and individual interview results.** During the focus group discussion and individual interviews, coaches provided several examples of changes in the principals’ leadership style or practice during the pilot. For instance, one coach stated that his principal, as a result of taking the *Strengths Finder* inventory and learning about his individual strengths, became more reflective and focused on using strengths to lead more effectively. Other coaches noted a
significant change in decision making practices, with principals shifting from making all decisions themselves to engaging other staff in decision making. These principals discovered their staffs were willing to share in leadership decision making, which one coach described as a “transformative change” for the school. Another coach reported a principal’s approach to conducting classroom observations was more effective as a result of developing a deeper understanding the observation tool, and further described a focus on writing a new school improvement plan, which led to the principal designing a plan that outlined detailed goals, timelines, and strategies, focused on increasing student achievement. In another case, one principal’s leadership team improved its effectiveness by establishing collective commitments among its members. Several coaches reported that their principals, in general, became more reflective about their leadership practices and more focused on instruction.

The principals provided examples of changes that reflected what the coaches reported. One principal, for example, described the benefit of shifting from trying to take on numerous initiatives to focusing on a few goals. Similarly, others recounted positive changes resulting from sharing leadership responsibilities with staff. One principal reported “working with my coach made me much more effective in my evaluation and supervising practices,” while another reported receiving time-management tools in June to plan the upcoming school year explaining, “I won’t be scrambling in mid-October to figure out what I’m going to do to recognize staff members or recognize student achievement.” Overall, principals commented that receiving affirmation from coaches for their work enabled them to lead more confidently, and that learning how to lead with their strengths caused them to become more reflective about their leadership practices.
Summary of Changes in Principals’ Leadership Style/Practice

Despite the short time frame of the principal leadership pilot, principals and coaches highlighted examples of positive changes of the principals’ leadership style or practice. Survey results showed that, overall, coaches rated the program’s impact higher than the principals, although for both groups the topics with the greatest impact included school culture and climate, personnel issues, and professional growth.

Qualitative findings from the focus group and individual interviews corroborated the quantitative results and provided further insight into the changes in the principals’ style or practice during resulting from the pilot. Principals and coaches described similar examples of changes in the principals’ leadership style/practice that reflected the survey results.

Comparing Perceptions of Principals and Coaches

What were the similarities and differences in the perceptions of the principals and the perceptions of the coaches regarding the coaching experience? Findings related to this research question include results from the principal and coach surveys, the individual interviews, and the focus group.

Survey results. Similarities and differences in the perceptions of principals and coaches were determined by comparing responses from results of survey questions 6, 12, and 13, for which responses were measured on similar scales. Due to the small sample size, Hedges’ g (Hedges & Olkin, 1985) was used to calculate effect size using the formula:

\[ \text{Hedge’s } g = \frac{M_P - M_C}{\text{SD pooled}} \]

\[ \text{and SD pooled} = \sqrt{\frac{(n_P - 1)SD_1^2 + (n_C - 1)SD_2^2}{n_1P + n_2C - 2}} \]

Where \( M_P \) = mean for principal group, \( M_C \) = mean coach group, \( \text{SD pooled} \) = pooled standard deviation.
The resulting effect size quantifies the magnitude or size of the difference between the principals’ and coaches’ responses, with a positive effect size indicating the mean of principals’ responses was higher than that of coaches.

Although effect sizes of .20 as “small”, .50 as “medium”, and .80 as “large”, defined by Cohen (1988), are commonly cited as standards for assessing the magnitude of effects, he cautions researchers in general use of these standards as using these categories across disciplines may be misleading. Cohen instead posits that effect sizes should be interpreted in the context of the study, considering the characteristics of the outcome variable, the sample, and the intervention conditions (Lipsey, Puzio, Yun, Herbert, Steinka-Fry, Cole, Roberts, Anthony, & Busick, 2012). Therefore, the interpretation of effect sizes in this study are discussed as a comparison of their relative size. Furthermore, Coe (2002) states “the practical implication of an effect depends entirely on its relative costs and benefits” (p. 5), suggesting the primary consideration for interpretation of an effect size must be its relevance in a practical sense.

Questions 6 and 12 asked both principals and coaches to indicate the frequency of focus on topics discussed during scheduled (question 6) and unscheduled (question 12) interactions. Possible responses included (1) not at all, (2) rarely, (3) occasionally, (4) often, and (5) very frequently. Question 13 asked both principals and coaches to indicate the extent to which focus areas led to positive changes in principals’ leadership style or practice during the pilot. Possible responses included (1) no impact on leadership, (2) slight impact on leadership, (3) moderate impact on leadership, (4) significant impact on leadership. Effect sizes were calculated to determine the similarities and differences in the perceptions of principals and coaches.

While effect size calculations related to topics discussed during scheduled interactions were small, indicating principals and coaches responded similarly, this was not the case for
topics discussed during unscheduled interactions. Larger effect sizes, indicating greater
differences in principals’ and coaches’ responses on topics discussed during unscheduled
interactions were observed. Noteworthy effect sizes corresponded to survey responses for the
frequency of focus on classroom instruction ($g = 1.03$), accountability ($g = 1.16$), and assessment
($g = 1.60$). These positive effect sizes indicate principals reported the topics were discussed more
frequently during unscheduled interactions than coaches. Another notable difference in coaches’
and principals’ responses related to the topics of discussion that led to changes in the principals’
leadership style/practice. In this case, the negative effect size corresponding to time
management, ($g = -1.11$), indicated coaches reported focusing on this topic had more of an
impact on the principals’ leadership style/practice compared to principals’ responses. Effect sizes
and 95% confidence intervals are provided in Table 3.
Table 3

**Hedges’ g Effect Sizes and 95% Confidence Intervals Comparing Principal and Coach Responses to Survey Questions 6, 12, and 13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics Discussed</th>
<th>g</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>During scheduled interactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom instruction</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>[-0.97, 1.30]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including professional learning communities, teacher collaboration, and planning)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel issues</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>[-1.58, 0.74]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including supervision and evaluation, and master scheduling)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-related issues</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>[-1.02, 1.16]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including family or safety concerns, and discipline)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture and climate</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>[-0.89, 1.29]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>[-1.21, 0.97]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>[-1.27, 1.00]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Growth</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>[-0.92, 1.38]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including rapport building with staff, communications, goal setting)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During unscheduled interactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom instruction</td>
<td>1.03</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Accountability</td>
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<td>Professional Growth</td>
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<td>[-1.54, 0.75]</td>
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<td>(including rapport building with staff, communications, goal setting)</td>
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Focus group and individual interview results. Several similarities were noted in comments made by coaches and principals relating to the frequency of and methods used for both scheduled and unscheduled interactions. Moreover, the principals echoed coaches’ comments when providing examples of topics discussed during scheduled and unscheduled interactions and descriptions of changes in their leadership style.

However, one noticeable difference in the perceptions of principals and coaches related to the impact of topics discussed on the principals’ leadership. While the both the principals and coaches commented on the frequency of “alligators”, or urgent matters, arising during the pilot, an underlying difference in viewpoint was revealed in their descriptions. Coaches reported, “[we] didn’t fully grasp how much we would be needed for…the management stuff,” referring to several principal-led topics collectively as time management issues. In contrast, principals described the same topics such as, staffing/personnel issues, administering standardized assessments, and accountability as individual matters. By considering these issues as discrete topics, the principals perhaps viewed them with greater urgency, and thus, as higher priorities than the coaches who considered them more broadly as time management issues. Coaches, therefore, placed a high priority on building the principals’ capacity to manage their time more effectively. This difference in point of view may explain the large effect size calculations corresponding to these specific topics.

Summary of Comparing Perceptions of Principals and Coaches

Quantitative findings based on Hedges’ $g$ effect size calculations of the principal and coach responses on survey questions 6, 12, and 13, and qualitative findings from the focus group and individual interviews revealed both similarities and differences in the perceptions of principals and coaches. Principals and coaches responded similarly to survey question 6, which
asked respondents to identify the most frequently discussed topics during scheduled interactions. Additionally, principals and coaches described similar examples of changes in principals’ leadership style/practice in discussion.

The most noteworthy differences were revealed in survey question 12, which asked respondents to identify the frequency of topics discussed during unscheduled interactions which were generally a follow-up to previous coaching sessions or focused on a principal’s immediate need. Principals reported greater frequency of focus on classroom instruction, assessment, accountability, and personnel issues than coaches. Finally, one notable difference was discovered in the perceptions of principals and coaches related to topics that impacted changes in leadership style/practice. Coaches reported that discussion of time management had a greater impact on principals’ leadership style/practice than principals reported. A possible explanation was offered as principals described individual situations that arose during the pilot, while coaches viewed these collectively as time management issues.
Discussion

This study began with a review of the literature to identify the challenges and key components of effective support structures for principals, particularly in rural communities. From this review, principal coaching emerged as an effective strategy to provide principals with ongoing support specific to their unique environment as it provides principals with individualized, job-embedded support (Cheney et al., 2010; Davis et al., 2005), that is especially critical for principals in rural environments who may not otherwise have access to high quality professional development (Duncan & Stock, 2010).

The establishment of a trusting relationship between the principal and coach was identified as a key element of successful principal coaching programs (Aguilar, 2013, Reiss, 2015). These alliances can be formed through intentional pairing of coaches and principals based on personality traits and similar experiences, however, this is not always feasible. Such was the case for the principal coaching program at the focus of this study, therefore, building trusting relationships through meaningful principal-coach interactions was necessary and provided the rationale for the focus of this study.

To fully understand the nature of trusting relationships, the researcher referenced the multifaceted definition of trust provided by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), which expands the more commonly recognized aspects of trust; honestly, openness, and benevolence, to include trust in another’s reliability and competence. These facets of trust are often intertwined, illustrating the complexity and challenges for principals and coaches to develop a trusting relationship within the six-month duration of the pilot.
Principals and coaches participating in the university principal leadership coaching pilot were the subjects of this study, and both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to analyze their interactions and address the following research questions.

1. What were the characteristics of the principal-coach interactions during the principal leadership coaching pilot program?

2. What specific change(s) in the principals’ leadership practices resulted from the coaching experience (as perceived by both principals and coaches)?

3. What were the similarities and differences in the perceptions of the principals and the perceptions of the coaches regarding the coaching experience?

Three overarching themes were revealed in the findings that impacted the principal-coach interactions: 1) several principals lacked understanding of the purpose of the leadership program and why they were selected: 2) principals struggled to effectively manage frequently emerging critical matters with other leadership responsibilities: and 3) principals and coaches approached school leadership from two opposing points of view. These themes, which are closely aligned with research on leadership coaching both in and outside of education, are addressed in the conclusions and recommendations.

**Purpose and Limitations of the study**

It is important to consider both the purpose and limitations of this study in the context of conclusions and recommendations presented. The principals who participated in the coaching pilot study were chosen based on their school’s student achievement scores and therefore represent only a small sample of all principals in the state. Moreover, six out of seven were novice principals, and the majority worked in small, rural districts. The conclusions and recommendations align with the study findings of the pilot program, and although they are
primarily aimed at improving the university’s program, they are also germane to the improvement of coaching programs that serve principals with similar levels of experience in similar demographic areas. The following section reports the conclusions of the study as they relate to each of the research questions.

**Conclusions**

**What were the characteristics of the principal-coach interactions during the principal leadership coaching pilot program?** Aguilar (2013) emphasizes, the development of a trusting relationship is essential for effective coaching, and similarly, study participants, principals and coaches alike, recognized that establishing trusting relationships and providing specific, actionable feedback were key to the success of the principal coaching program. While participants concluded that the coaching pilot was not long enough to fully develop relationships, they identified specific characteristics of the interactions that helped with both relationship building and providing effective feedback.

**Frequency of interactions.** Findings revealed the frequency of interactions varied among the principal-coach pairs during the pilot. One factor, reported by several principals and coaches, that possibly influenced the frequency of interactions was the principals’ lack of understanding of the purpose and timing of the pilot, and reasons they were selected to participate. Principals perhaps viewed this absence of communication as a lack openness on the part of the district and/or coaches, thereby contributing to some principals’ unwillingness to fully participate in the coaching program.

To underscore the importance of consistent communication, Correia et al. (2016) recommend gaining multiple perspectives of different participant groups, such as the commissioning organization (district), to assess the effectiveness of a program. In addition to
receiving valuable input related to the principal coaching program, two-way communication with the district would have enabled the leadership coaching program director to emphasize the need for districts to communicate a consistent message to principals about the program’s purpose and principal selection process.

Findings also showed the frequency of interactions varied over the duration of the pilot which spanned mid-January to mid-June. Coaches and principals reported having to reschedule interactions due to matters that frequently arose during the pilot. Consequently, the recorded interactions were lowest during the month of May which corresponds with the time-period when principals are often faced with additional tasks and school management issues such as end of year events, standardized testing, evaluations, and planning for the upcoming school year. This finding also brought to light the principals’ positioning in the professional socialization process (Parkay et al., 1992). The principals, most of whom were in the survival stage, prioritized their immediate (survival) needs ahead of previously scheduled coaching meetings, resulting in delays or reductions in the frequency of interactions. In contrast, the coaches recognized the need to build principals’ capacity to manage their time more effectively, which would in turn, increase the principals’ reliability to keep their scheduled appointments with coaches. Additionally, the coaches’ strategic, pragmatic approach of addressing time management is consistent with principals’ commonly requested support for managing multiple priorities as reported by Reiss (2015).

Method used for interactions. With relationship building and specific actionable feedback as key elements of effective coaching, both principals and coaches reported their preference for scheduled face-to-face interactions, particularly in the initial stage of the program. Principals and coaches stated meeting in person fostered relationship building, and enabled the
coaches to provide the specific actionable feedback necessary to improve their skills as effective school leaders.

The distinction between the scheduled versus unscheduled (ad hoc) nature of the interactions, both of which are integral to effective coaching programs (Reiss, 2015), is particularly relevant in the context of methods used. Principals and coaches considered phone calls, email, and video conferencing as appropriate methods to use for unscheduled interactions as the discussions were generally shorter in length and focused on a specific topic (Reiss, 2015). This finding suggests the program’s current goal of having at least one face-to-face interaction per month and allowing for flexibility in the method used for other interactions is effective.

*Topics discussed during interactions.* Several coaches reported a disproportionate amount of time spent on topics related to the urgent or immediate needs of the principal, rather than on strategic topics, supported by research, that coaches knew would lead to school improvement. This illustrated opposing views of principals and coaches that are highlighted in research; that of the coaches who, as pragmatists, desired to focus on strategic topics to develop effective leadership practices that lead to school improvement; and that of the principals, most of whom were in the survival stage of the professional socialization process, and desired to focus on topics corresponding with their immediate or urgent (survival) needs (Parkay et al., 1992).

Moreover, Grant (2011) suggests that having structure in coaching sessions enables the principal and coach to remained focused, and Correia et al. (2016), further emphasize that focusing on internal goals, those leading to principals’ personal development as educators, leads to sustained changes in principals’ practice. While research supports the coaches’ two-sided approach to topics, coaches stated that often addressing principals’ immediate needs would take
an entire session, suggesting the need for greater structure that allows time for both the principals’ proposed topics and topics presented by coaches.

What specific change(s) in the principals’ leadership practices resulted from the coaching experience (as perceived by both principals and coaches)? Principals and coaches cited similar examples of changes in the principals’ leadership that resulted from the coaching they received. Furthermore, the changes were primarily the result of specific, actionable feedback provided by the coach. These findings further support the need for coaches to meet face-to-face with their principals to develop trusting relationships, as the principals who met more frequently with their coach could readily cite positive changes resulting from the coaching they received. Conversely, principals who did not engage in unscheduled interactions, either did not readily recall examples of changes in their leadership practice, or were somewhat vague in their descriptions.

A critical aspect of the perceived effectiveness of coaching was revealed as one principal struggled to describe a change in practice that resulted from the coaching and indicated that although the coach was “a very nice [person], [the coach] wasn’t familiar with the local educational environment”, further reporting, “I will say I don’t feel [the coaching] changed the direction of where we [the staff] were going and didn’t change my overall leadership with the work.” In contrast, other principals stated they valued their coaches’ knowledge of the local education environment. While overall, principals reported their coaches were well-experienced and knowledgeable, expertise in the local education environment, or lack thereof, seemed to impact the principals’ perceptions relative to the coaches’ competence – an essential facet of developing a trusting relationship (Hoy & Tschannen- Moran, 1999).
What were the similarities and differences in the perceptions of the principals and the perceptions of the coaches regarding the coaching experience? Both similarities and differences in the perceptions of principals and coaches were reported in the findings. While study participants shared similar views, such as the importance of relationship building and the value of getting specific feedback, coaches and principals differed in their perceptions of the frequency of discussions on certain topics, and of the impact of these discussions on changes in the principals’ practice, which were uncovered in relatively large effect size calculations. Yet, the fundamental question of whether the effect sizes are large enough to have practical meaning must be considered in the context of potential costs and benefits of changes to the program (Coe, 2002). These observed differences between the principal group, from Priority Improvement schools, and coach group likely stemmed from differences in each group’s perceived importance or urgency of the topics discussed, which resulted in the principals’ higher frequency ratings for the topics of accountability, assessment, and classroom instruction during unscheduled interactions, and the coaches’ higher impact ratings for time management. Moreover, the differences in perceived importance or urgency of topics was attributable to the principals’ positioning in the survival stage of the professional socialization framework (Parkay et al., 1992), coupled with the coaches’ desire to approach their role in a more strategic and pragmatic manner. Thus, the implication for practice is to augment the coaches’ training program to include an emphasis on Van Maanen and Schien’s Professional Socialization process which would result in greater awareness of the principals’ positioning while providing individualized coaching support.

A connection was also observed between principals’ perceptions of the value of the coaching program, and the quality of the relationship they had with their coach. While most
principals described the program as beneficial and worthwhile, two principals who expressed a strong desire to continue with the program, both described the development of an open, trusting, relationship with their coach. Their comments provide evidence of their coach’s benevolence, reliability, and competence throughout the pilot.

- “Having a support person who wasn’t judging me but just helping me to be better was an incredible experience for me.”
- “[my coach] helped me with trying to get a network of principals that were in a similar situation as me.”
- “This had to be the best professional development that I have had. I think the most valuable part was the of relationship building with my coach… I was able to share and reflect openly over time.”
- “My coach’s experience as an administrator was very helpful because [my coach] understood what was going on when things came up with my situation at school and it was really good to know that I had a coach to turn to and rely on when I needed it.”

When asked whether rural or non-rural principals would benefit more from leadership coaching, both principals and coaches stated the program was valuable for principals in either setting, and when asked to compare the potential value of leadership coaching for novice and veteran principals, participants again stated both groups would benefit equally. After describing the benefits for novice principals, one principal explained that for veteran principals, “it [the coaching] can provide them with some fresh ideas or an outside perspective coming into the school.” Most of the participants also reported the leadership coaching program would benefit principals from both large and small districts, as participants emphasized two key aspects of the principal-coach relationship were confidentiality and gaining an outside perspective.
Finally, principals and coaches were given an opportunity to provide input on program changes. Common themes included: communicating the purpose and details of the coaching program to principals more explicitly; pairing principals with coaches that reside in close proximity; and focusing on the principals’ evaluation during the coaching to individualize the support provided to the principal. The suggested change of connecting coaching support to the principal’s evaluation reflects the need to provide principals with individualized support (Cheney et al., 2010; Davis et al., 2005), and the need for principals to adopt a more strategic approach to school-level leadership that requires a broad set of skills and abilities (National Policy Board for Education Administration, 2015). However, focusing on the principal’s evaluation must not hinder the confidential nature of the principal-coach relationship.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are aimed primarily at the improvement and development of the university’s principal coaching program, and secondarily, for developers of similar principal coaching programs to consider when implementing structures and processes for principal-coach interactions, and for pairing of principals and coaches. On a broader scale, the recommendations may inform individuals and organizations such as school districts and institutions of higher education in developing and providing ongoing support through coaching for principals.

- Recognize that when intentional pairing of coaches and principals is not feasible, coaches must, at a minimum, be familiar with the state and regional education environment as well as the unique educational climate experienced by the principal they are supporting.
• Ensure coaches are trained to know, understand, and recognize, a principal’s professional socialization stage, and customize the coaching support to develop the principal’s ability to lead the school accordingly (Parkay et al., 1992).

• Emphasize building principals’ capacity to effectively prioritize tasks and manage their time effectively throughout the coaching program. Coaches may accomplish this by addressing time management at the beginning of the program, and during each interaction, providing principals with specific time management tools and strategies to address their individual needs (Reiss, 2015).

• Establish structures and processes to ensure principals are willing participants or, at a minimum, understand the purpose(s) and benefits of the coaching program. Measures to increase principal buy-in may include: ensuring principals receive consistent communication regarding the program from their district leaders, involving district leadership in an initial participant gathering to underscore the district’s commitment to principals, deepening principals’ knowledge of the program by explicitly emphasizing its value for both novice and experienced principals, and/or providing principals with the rationale for their selection to the program.

• Communicate with, and seek input from, district leadership regularly throughout the coaching program (Correia et al., 2016). This would help to maintain the districts’ ongoing commitment, and provide the coaching program administrators feedback that could be used formatively to make program improvements in a timely manner. However, to uphold confidentiality of specific principal-coach discussions, which is critical to the development of trusting relationships, this communication should occur between the
coaching program administrator and the district leaders (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

- Start the coaching program in the early summer to help ensure principals and coaches have adequate time to develop structures and processes that are focused on school improvement for the upcoming school year. Furthermore, meeting in the summer would allow time for principals and coaches to foster a relationship before the beginning of the school year.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

The information contained in this study provides a starting point for further research on providing principals in the field with ongoing support through a coaching program. The findings and conclusions of this study lead to the following suggestions.

- Further research might include an analysis of the impact of principal coaching programs on student achievement.
- Districts’ fiscal constraints often impact the supports they provide to principals, therefore, expanding research to identify the differential benefits of coaching on novice and experienced, or rural and suburban principals, may help districts make better-informed decisions for targeted principal leadership coaching support.
- Additional research might include a longitudinal study on the impact of principal coaching programs to identify the factors that contribute to long-term changes in principal practice.

**Summary**

Providing principals with ongoing, individualized, job-embedded support, is necessary to meet the challenges of school leadership. Principal leadership coaching is considered an effective
means to providing high quality support as evidenced by its increased use in districts throughout the country. However, the success of a leadership coaching program is highly dependent on the ability of principals and coaches to develop trusting relationships, in large part, through the principal-coach interactions.

By examining the interactions of principals and coaches during a coaching pilot conducted by a university in the Rocky Mountain region, this study sought to identify characteristics of principal-coach interactions that participants perceived as being most effective, record changes in the principals’ leadership practices, and identify similarities and differences in the perceptions of principals and coaches. The findings provide a foundation to guide future cohorts of the university’s principal leadership coaching program and the development of other programs to maximize their effectiveness.
References


Appendix A

Principal Survey

As a part of this study, you will be asked to participate in two activities. One is this anonymous survey and the other is an interview (conducted either by phone or Skype) at a pre-arranged time. Please check the boxes below as an acknowledgement of your consent to participate. Thank you- Catherine Johnson

☐ I agree to complete this anonymous survey as part of the study (1)
☐ I agree to participate in an interview (either by phone or Skype) at a pre-arranged date and time (2)

Please indicate the number of years you have been a school principal total, either in your current position or at another school:

☐ This is my first year as a principal (1)
☐ More than one year up to three years (2)
☐ More than three years up to five years (3)
☐ More than five years up to 10 years (4)
☐ More than 10 years (5)

The following survey questions are about the interactions (both scheduled and "ad hoc" or unscheduled) you had with your coach during the principal leadership coaching pilot. Please select the response that most accurately reflects your experience. If you choose "other" please provide additional details in the space provided.

Part 1: You probably had interactions with your coach during the pilot that were both scheduled and unscheduled (ad hoc). For questions 1-6, please reflect only on those interactions that were scheduled.

1. During an Average week, how often did you have scheduled interactions with your coach?

☐ Less than one time per week (1)
☐ Once per week (2)
☐ Twice per week (3)
☐ More than two times per week (4)
☐ Other (please specify) (5) ____________________

2. How did the frequency of scheduled interactions change with your coach during the pilot?

☐ They increased over time (1)
☐ They decreased over time (2)
☐ They stayed about the same over time (3)
3. What do you think is the ideal frequency for scheduled interactions with your coach?

- Only when I/they request to meet (1)
- Less than one time per week (2)
- One time per week (3)
- Two times per week (4)
- More than two times per week (5)
- Other (please specify) (6) ____________________

4. Which mode of interaction did you engage in most often with your coach for scheduled interactions?

- Face-to-face (1)
- Phone (2)
- Email (3)
- Skype, Zoom, or other type of video conferencing (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) ____________________

5. Which mode of interaction with your coach did you think was most effective for scheduled interactions?

- Face-to-face (1)
- Phone (2)
- Email (3)
- Skype, Zoom, or other type of video conferencing (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) ____________________
6. Please indicate how often you focused on the following topics during your scheduled interactions with your coach:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Not at all (1)</th>
<th>Rarely (2)</th>
<th>Occasionally (3)</th>
<th>Often (4)</th>
<th>Very Frequently (5)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom instruction (1)</td>
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<td>Student related issues (including discipline, safety, &amp; other student concerns) (3)</td>
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<td>other (please specify) (10)</td>
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</table>

Part 2: Now I’d like you to think about the interactions you had with your coach that were not scheduled. For questions 7-12, please reflect on only those interactions that were unscheduled (ad hoc). If you did not have unscheduled interactions, please indicate on question #7 and skip questions 8-12.

7. During an average week, how often did you have unscheduled interactions with your coach?

- ○ Less than one time per week (1)
- ○ Once per week (2)
- ○ Twice per week (3)
- ○ More than two times per week (4)
- ○ Varied too much from week to week to determine an "average" (5)
- ○ Other (please specify) (6) ____________________
8. How did the frequency of unscheduled interactions change with your coach during the pilot?

- They increased over time (1)
- They decreased over time (2)
- They stayed about the same over time (3)
- Not applicable; there were no unscheduled interactions (4)

9. Which statement best describes how unscheduled interactions with your coach were initiated during the pilot?

- I usually requested the unscheduled interactions (1)
- My coach usually requested the unscheduled interactions (2)
- We both requested the unscheduled interactions equally (3)
- Other (please specify) (4) ____________________
- Not applicable; there were no unscheduled interactions (5)

10. Which mode of interaction did you engage in most often with your coach for unscheduled interactions?

- Face-to-face (1)
- Phone (2)
- Email (3)
- Skype, Zoom, or other type of video conference (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) ____________________

11. Which mode of interaction with your coach did you think was most effective for unscheduled interactions?

- Face-to-face (1)
- Phone (2)
- Email (3)
- Skype, Zoom, or other type of video conference (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) ____________________
12. Please indicate how often you focused on the following topics during your unscheduled interactions with your coach:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Not at all (1)</th>
<th>Rarely (2)</th>
<th>Occasionally/moderately (3)</th>
<th>Often (4)</th>
<th>Very Frequently (5)</th>
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<td>Classroom instruction (1)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Other (please specify) (10)</td>
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Part 3: Now I'd like you to reflect on all interactions (both scheduled and unscheduled) you had with your coach during the pilot while responding to questions 13-14.
13. Please indicate the extent to which the following focus areas led to positive changes in your leadership style or practice during the pilot:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>No impact on his/her leadership (1)</th>
<th>Slight impact on his/her leadership (2)</th>
<th>Moderate impact on his/her leadership (3)</th>
<th>Significant impact on his/her leadership (4)</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom instruction (1)</td>
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<td>Personnel issues (including supervision &amp; evaluation) (2)</td>
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<td>Student related issues (including discipline, safety, or other student concerns) (3)</td>
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14. If you would like to share any additional information regarding the interactions you had with your coach that may benefit future principals and coaches or the principal leadership coaching program development, please use the space provided. Thank you again for sharing your insight.
Appendix B

Coach Survey

The following survey questions are about the interactions (both scheduled and "ad hoc" or unscheduled) you had with your principal during the principal leadership coaching pilot. Please select the response that most accurately reflects your experience. If you choose "other" please provide additional details in the space provided.

Part I: You probably had interactions with your principal during the pilot that were both scheduled and unscheduled (ad hoc). For questions 1-6, please reflect only on those interactions that were scheduled.

1. During an Average week, how often did you have scheduled interactions with your principal?
   - Less than one time per week (1)
   - Once per week (2)
   - Twice per week (3)
   - More than two times per week (4)
   - Other (please specify) (5) ____________________

2. How did the frequency of scheduled interactions change with your principal during the pilot?
   - They increased over time (1)
   - They decreased over time (2)
   - They stayed about the same over time (3)

3. What do you think is the ideal frequency for scheduled interactions with your principal?
   - Only when I/they request to meet (1)
   - Less than one time per week (2)
   - One time per week (3)
   - Two times per week (4)
   - More than two times per week (5)
   - Other (please specify) (6) ____________________

4. Which mode of interaction did you engage in most often with your principal for scheduled interactions?
   - Face-to-face (1)
   - Phone (2)
   - Email (3)
   - Skype, Zoom, or other type of video conferencing (4)
   - Other (please specify) (5) ____________________
5. Which mode of interaction with your principal did you think was most effective for scheduled interactions?

- Face-to-face (1)
- Phone (2)
- Email (3)
- Skype, Zoom, or other type of video conferencing (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) ____________________

6. Please indicate how often you focused on the following topics during your scheduled interactions with your principal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Not at all (1)</th>
<th>Rarely (2)</th>
<th>Occasionally (3)</th>
<th>Often (4)</th>
<th>Very Frequently (5)</th>
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</table>

Part 2: Now I’d like you to think about the interactions you had with your principal that were not scheduled. For questions 7-12, please reflect on only those interactions that were unscheduled (ad hoc). If you did not have unscheduled interactions, please indicate on question #7 and skip questions 8-12.
7. During an average week, how often did you have unscheduled interactions with your principal?

- Less than one time per week (1)
- Once per week (2)
- Twice per week (3)
- More than two times per week (4)
- Varied too much from week to week to determine an "average" (5)
- Other (please specify) (6) ____________________

8. How did the frequency of unscheduled interactions change with your principal during the pilot?

- They increased over time (1)
- They decreased over time (2)
- They stayed about the same over time (3)
- Not applicable; there were no unscheduled interactions (4)

9. Which statement best describes how unscheduled interactions with your principal initiated during the pilot?

- I usually requested the unscheduled interactions (1)
- My principal usually requested the unscheduled interactions (2)
- We both requested the unscheduled interactions equally (3)
- Other (please specify) (4) ____________________
- Not applicable; there were no unscheduled interactions (5)

10. Which mode of interaction did you engage in most often with your principal for unscheduled interactions?

- Face-to-face (1)
- Phone (2)
- Email (3)
- Skype, Zoom, or other type of video conference (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) ____________________

11. Which mode of interaction with your principal did you think was most effective for unscheduled interactions?

- Face-to-face (1)
- Phone (2)
- Email (3)
- Skype, Zoom, or other type of video conference (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) ____________________
12. Please indicate how often you focused on the following topics during your unscheduled interactions with your principal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Not at all (1)</th>
<th>Rarely (2)</th>
<th>Occasionally/moderately (3)</th>
<th>Often (4)</th>
<th>Very Frequently (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom instruction (1)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel issues (including supervisory &amp; evaluation) (2)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student related issues (including discipline, safety, and other student concerns) (3)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture/climate (4)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum (5)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment (6)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management (7)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability (8)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional growth (9)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify) (10)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part 3: Now I’d like you to reflect on all interactions (both scheduled and unscheduled) you had with your principal during the pilot while responding to questions 13-14.
13. Please indicate the extent to which the following focus areas led to positive changes in the leadership style or practice of your principal during the pilot:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>No impact on his/her leadership (1)</th>
<th>Slight impact on his/her leadership (2)</th>
<th>Moderate impact on his/her leadership (3)</th>
<th>Significant impact on his/her leadership (4)</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom instruction (1)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel issues (including supervision &amp; evaluation) (2)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student related issues (including discipline, safety, or other student concerns) (3)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>School culture/climate (4)</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment (6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time management (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accountability (8)</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional growth (9)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify) (10)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. If you would like to share any additional information regarding the interactions you had with your principal that may benefit future coaches of the principal leadership coaching program development, please use the space provided. Thank you again for sharing your insight.
Appendix C

Principal Interview Protocol

Opening Statement. Thank you for participating in this interview. Your input is valuable to this study and will help to inform changes to the principal leadership coaching program. Your answers are confidential so please be assured that your name, school or district will not be identified in this study. I want to ask you a few questions as a follow up to the survey you took earlier about your coaching experience. If at any time in our discussion you are not completely comfortable sharing your view, you can decline to respond- that will not be a problem.

Questions

1. Can you give me your overall view of the coaching program?
   
   **Additional probes:**
   
   a. What aspect of the coaching program did you benefit from the most?
   b. What specific changes have you seen in your leadership as a result of the coaching you received?
   c. Can you give me an example of a time that the coaching led to a positive change in your leadership skills/practice?
   d. Can you give an example of something that you felt wasn’t helpful or that you would have changed about the coaching program?

2. Let’s focus on the characteristics of the interactions you had with your coach, both the scheduled “sessions” and the ad hoc, or unplanned “conversations” Did you feel your coaches available to you throughout the pilot?
   
   **Additional probes:**
   
   a. Who initiated most of the contacts, was it you or the coach?
   b. Was there enough flexibility in the schedule for the sessions? Or do you prefer a more structured schedule?
   c. How did you prefer to interact with your coach (face-to-face, phone, email, etc.)? Why?
   d. What barriers (if any) were there to meeting with your coachee? How could you/did you overcome the barriers?
   e. Regarding the characteristics of interactions. What changes (if any) do you think would help to make the coaching program more effective?

3. Now I’d like you to turn your attention to the topics you discussed with your coach during the interactions. Were the topics predetermined or were they determined by what you needed at the time?
   
   **Additional probes:**
   
   a. What specific topics did you find most valuable? And why were they helpful?
   b. Can you give an example of a topic that was discussed that led to changes in your leadership style/practice?
   c. Was there any topic that you discussed that wasn’t particularly helpful? How did this discussion come about and why didn’t you find it helpful?
   d. How did you address an urgent topic (i.e. crisis or urgent school matter)?

4. Is there anything that I haven’t asked about your coaching experience that you would like to share? Just a reminder that anything you say is confidential and that my objectives is to present findings that will lead to improvement in the coaching program.
   
   **Additional probe:**
   
   a. Do you think the coaching program benefits both veteran principals and novice principals? Why or why not?
Thank you so much for your willingness to speak with me. Your responses have provided me with valuable insight that will be used to inform the ongoing development of the principal leadership coaching Program. If you have any questions or need to contact me for additional information, please feel free to contact me at cjohn135@uwyo.edu or by phone at xxx.xxx.xxxx.
Appendix D

Coach Focus Group Protocol

Opening Statement. Thank you for participating in this interview. Your input is valuable to this study and will help to inform changes to the principal leadership coaching program. Your answers are confidential so please be assured that you will not be identified in this study. I want to ask you a few questions as a follow up to the surveys you took earlier about experience as a coach. I am recording our discussion so that I can be sure I have accurately captured your views. After I’ve compiled my information, I will erase the recordings so that no-one will have access to them. Also, if at any time in our discussion you are not completely comfortable sharing your view, you can decline to respond- that will not be a problem.

Questions

1. Can you give me your overall view of the coaching program?
   Additional probes:
   e. What aspect of the coaching program did you believe your principal benefitted from the most?
   f. What specific changes have you seen in your principals’ leadership as a result of the coaching you received?
   g. Can you give me an example of a time that the coaching led to a positive change in your principals’ leadership skills/practice?
   h. Can you give an example of something that you felt wasn’t helpful for your principal or that you would have changed about the coaching program?

2. Let’s focus on the characteristics of the interactions you had with your principal. Both the scheduled “sessions” and the ad hoc or unscheduled “conversations”. Did you feel your principal was available to meet with you throughout the pilot?
   Additional probes:
   f. Who initiated most of the contacts, was it you or the principal?
   g. Was there enough flexibility in the schedule for the sessions? Or do you prefer a more structured schedule?
   h. How did you prefer to interact with your principal (face-to-face, phone, email, etc.)? Why? Did your principal have the same preference.
   i. What barriers (if any) were there to meeting with your principal? How could you/did you overcome the barriers?
   j. Regarding the characteristics of interactions. What changes (if any) do you think would help to make the coaching program more effective?

3. Now I’d like you to turn your attention to the topics you discussed with your principal during the interactions. Were the topics predetermined or were they determined by what your principal needed at the time?
   Additional probes:
   e. What specific topics did you believe were most valuable to your principal? And why were they helpful?
   f. Can you give an example of a topic that was discussed that led to changes in your principal’s leadership style/practice?
   g. Was there any topic that you discussed that wasn’t particularly helpful to your principal? How did this discussion come about and why didn’t you believe it helpful?
   h. How did your principal address an urgent topic (i.e. crisis or urgent school matter)?
4. Is there anything that I haven’t asked about your experience as a coach that you would like to share? Just a reminder that anything you say is confidential and that my objectives is to present findings that will lead to improvement in the coaching program.

Additional probe:

b. Do you think the coaching program benefits both veteran principals and novice principals? Why or why not?

Thank you so much for your willingness to meet with me. Your responses have provided me with valuable insight that will be used to inform the ongoing development of the principal leadership coaching Program. If you have any questions or need to contact me for additional information, please feel free to contact me at cjohn135@uwyo.edu or by phone at xxx.xxx.xxxx.
Appendix E

Expert Panel Introductory Letter

Dear Drs. Davis, Gutierrez, Hubach, and Shebby,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my Expert Panel to review the data collection procedure and instruments I will be using for my University of Wyoming doctoral project. Below you will find a brief summary of the project including research questions. I’ll be providing more information during our meeting but thought it may help to provide you with some information in advance.

Summary
To assist principals as they navigate the challenges of their role, including rurality and changing demographics, a Rocky Mountain region university created a center for educational leadership to provide ongoing support to principals for the purpose of advancing education throughout the state. To address the need for ongoing and individualized support, the university launched a principal leadership coaching program which is currently in the pilot phase. Understanding program participants’ perceptions during the pilot phase of the program will provide valuable insight to inform program changes and development prior to the launching the first cohort of principals and coaches in the 2016-2017 school year.

Research questions
To analyze the pilot participants’ perceptions of the factors that contributed to effective leadership coaching, the following research questions will be examined:

1. What was the type and frequency of interactions between the principals and coaches in the pilot and what type and frequency did they perceive was most effective?
2. What was the focus of the principal –coach interactions and what focus areas did they perceive as most effective to their performance/growth or change in practice?
3. What were the differences in the perceptions of pilot participants based on years of principal experience?

Research design
The research design for this study will follow a protocol outlined by Creswell and Clark (2007), Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design, to examine the characteristics of the principal-coach interactions and the perceptions of the participants of the principal leadership coaching program pilot. In this design, the quantitative and qualitative data will be collected from three different sources and merged to provide a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the results of the study. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data using parallel constructs will enable me to triangulate the data for a more accurate interpretation.

The three sources of data are:
1) A review of the Coach Planning and Summary documents that are completed after each principal-coach interaction during the pilot. A tally system will be used to record the frequency and mode of interactions. Additionally, I have designed a coding system to capture topics discussed during each interaction. I’ll be using a combination of predetermined and emerging codes. The predetermined codes are topics that align with the national principal leadership standards and a review of the literature of common principal requests for assistance. Allowing flexibility in the design is critical as additional topics may emerge during data analysis.
2). Two separate electronic surveys, one for principals and one for coaches, that include similar questions with slightly different wording to align with the participant's role. To capture the characteristics of the principal-coach interactions, the surveys will ask more specific questions about the frequency and mode of interactions in addition to topics discussed during the interactions.

3) Two separate semi-structured protocols for focus groups, one for principals and one for coaches. Similar to the surveys, the questions focus on parallel constructs using slightly modified wording to align with the role of the participant. Triangulation of complementary data will be used to compare the quantitative results with qualitative findings.

I am requesting feedback on the instruments though I welcome any additional feedback on my research design and research questions

Sincerely,
Catherine M. Johnson
# Appendix F

## Coach Planning & Summary Form

This form is completed by the coach for every coaching session.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coach:</th>
<th>Coachee:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach #</td>
<td>Coachee #</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Start time:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>End time:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Type of Interaction** (face-to-face, email, phone, video conference, etc.):

**Session Focus:**

**Session Questions/Prompts:**

**Session Summary:**

**Next Steps Coach:**

**Next Steps Coachee:**

**Next Meeting:**

This form is intended to be used for internal planning and record keeping for the coaching project, and should only be used by Coaches for the purposes of documenting, planning and summarizing coaching interactions.
Appendix G

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING
Vice President for Research & Economic Development
1000 E. University Avenue, Department 3355 • Room 305/308, Old Main • Laramie, WY 82071
(307) 766-5353 • (307) 766-5320 • fax (307) 766-2608 • www.uwyo.edu/research
June 10, 2016

Catherine Mary Johnson
Doctoral Student
Educational Leadership-Professional Studies
University of Wyoming
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Suzanne Young

Protocol #20160610CJ01219
Re: IRB Proposal “Executive Leadership Coaching Pilot: Examining Participants’ Perceptions of Coach and Principal Interactions”

Dear Ms. Johnson:

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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

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