The Learning Experiences of Practicing School Leadership Coaches: A Multiple Case Study

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THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF PRACTICING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP COACHES: 
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

by

Dustin Anderson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College 
in partial fulfillment of the requirements 
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy 
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Western Michigan University 
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Doctoral Committee:

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DEDICATION

I am dedicating this work to the strongest woman I know. My appreciation and admiration of her unwavering and faithful support of me amidst the tears and joys while raising our five children cannot be overstated. I am truly “The Luckiest.”
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As I reflect on the moments that have led to the completion of this dissertation, I am forced to recognize a multitude of seemingly serendipitous experiences and opportunities that fell my way because of people that trusted and believed in me. I could go back 17 years when I was blessed to be in the classroom of David Mills, an energetic and thoughtful math teacher that planted a seed of passion in me for teaching or 13 years ago when my Calculus teacher, Nancy Garman, began to sow that seed. Maybe I go could back eight years when I was given an opportunity to be an academic coach which ignited passion in me for teaching teachers and kick started my curiosity of research and evaluation. While I spend some time acknowledging those in my life that have supported this research, understand that I could easily double the length of this document to truly give everyone who had supported me on this journey the credit they deserve.

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Dustin Anderson
THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF PRACTICING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP COACHES:
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

Dustin Anderson, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 2019

In 2017, the US Department of Education awarded Western Michigan University (WMU) a Supporting Educator Effectiveness Development (SEED) grant to fund the High-Impact Leadership for School Renewal (HIL) Project. The purpose of the HIL Project is to recruit and prepare school leaders with the skills associated with instructional leadership for improving school conditions that support student achievement. Through the use of school leadership coaches (called Implementation Facilitators in the HIL Project) trained on an adaptive school leadership coaching model, the HIL Project seeks to address one of the most challenging aspects of school leadership: developing and sustaining the HIL Model for Continuous School Renewal (HIL Model).

This study investigates a new line of inquiry related to how school leadership coaches draw upon their personal knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with previous professional experiences as they support the leadership development needed to implement a school renewal initiative. This study utilized a multiple case study design to follow and describe experiences of school leadership coaches as they work with their schools to learn about and apply the HIL Model and capture all relevant contextual features associated with each case. However, this study design adapted those techniques common to multiple case studies to incorporate techniques associated with grounded theory. This design supported a new line of
inquiry with limited empirical research, and facilitated both the thick rich descriptive characteristics of case study plus the emergence of elements that could lead to theory development.

Findings from this study suggest an alternative way to understand the critical features of the onboarding process for school leadership coaches. Features suggested by this study as significant influences on the development of leadership coaches emphasizes personal knowledge and personal dispositions as two distinct ways in which new leadership coaches acclimate to their role. Findings from this study further suggest that these two ways of forming personal identity influences both how new coaches understand a given school leadership coaching model and the behaviors they chose to engage in to employ the model. Results suggest a broad set of implications including how leadership coaches are hired, trained, and supported by the designers and leaders of a given leadership coaching model.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This study will examine the issue of how school leadership coaches work to transform the behaviors of school principals and other school leaders to create conditions and processes within schools that support implementation of a research-based school improvement initiative. Changing the behavior of school principals is no easy task. Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, and Sebastian (2010) found that school principals are far more likely to refine current practices than to transform their current behaviors in response to job-embedded support. Amid calls for an extended set of choices for children in the K-12 education environment, public education is faced with constant tension to do better. This has led to an extensive set of research projects across all student grade levels, within different subgroups of students, and across various domains of student achievement at all levels of program implementation, e.g., students, teachers, principals, schools, districts. Much of the research on principal effectiveness, however, points to the need for changing the work of principals in transformative ways. Further studies suggest that the learning that needs to take place for this type of change requires sustained experiential, self-directed learning facilitated by a coach. Therefore, this study will focus on the process of developing the capacity of principals to support transformative school renewal initiatives through the use of school leadership coaches. Since school leadership coaches tend to be educators with previous leadership experience of one type or another, this study will also examine how school leadership coaches deployed through a school leadership development project, draw upon both
prior work experiences and personal cognitive capacities as a learner to connect to their role as a school leadership coach and provide adaptive support to the principals they are coaching.

**Background**

The pressure is mounting for schools to improve student achievement. More than five decades of federal education policy (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965; Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015) has placed pressure on states, school districts, and schools to improve academic performance (raise student achievement, eliminate achievement gaps, and accelerate growth rates in student achievement). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 brought additional funding to schools with vulnerable students while emphasizing equal access to education and high standards of academic performance for all students. But along with this infusion of funding came an obligation for evaluation of local school districts to provide evidence that federal funds are being used to provide a quality education to all students (McLaughlin, 1974). With additional iterations of ESEA, the federal government has used federal funding, albeit conditionally, to expand the role they play in education through re-authorizations such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) (Pelsue, 2017; Sharp, 2015; Superfine, 2011) bringing us to an era of accountability in public school education. There is now greater accountability for school districts to increase student achievement of under-performing students and for states to hold individual schools and school districts accountable for student academic growth (Pelsue, 2017). Researchers have shown that this, in turn, places a great number of responsibilities onto the shoulders of school principals who are held accountable for the operations, management, and now even more, the performance of a school (Bauer & Brazer,
Brought on by this ever-increasing accountability for both growth and equity in student outcomes against defined curriculum standards, the role of a principal has evolved over time, from that of a bureaucrat who attends to the daily managerial tasks, into a transformative leader who is expected to (a) continually develop and support the instructional core of the building (Bauer & Brazer, 2013; Davis et al., 2005), and (b) develop a school culture that facilitates the continual development of instructional practices that increase the academic achievement of students (Moore, 2009). This creates a role that is far more complex in nature, with a myriad of added responsibilities and a greater need for a clear understanding of what is most important for student learning (Davis et al., 2005).

**Principal Role in Supporting Student Outcomes**

During this century, universities and policy makers supported this need for greater clarity on the most vital aspects of the principalship with a shift in focus of principal preparation and professional development from knowledge and skills to performance standards and practices. This shift in focus was influenced by a large investment in research and research analyses that teased out specific areas of both principal leadership focus and practice that are positively associated with student achievement, changes in school conditions that support teaching and learning, and even changes in teacher practice that are positively associated with student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Quint, Akey, Rappaport, & Willner, 2007; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). While researchers are still working toward a more complete picture of principal effectiveness, these advancements in the study of the principalship suggest a need for professional learning designed
to influence principal practice or behavior and argues for professional development aimed at both developing and, in many cases, altering or refining the day-to-day practices of principals (e.g., shaping and changing principal behavior in fundamental ways to align with research-supported practices associated with positive change in student outcomes, teacher practice, and school conditions). What makes many of the necessary changes transformative for many principals is that they often require significant re-orientation to the role; new learning to fulfill expectations of the role and redefining success in the role (Gill, 2012).

**Instructional leadership.** Much of the continued research around how a principal affects learning supports focusing the principal’s energy on the instructional leadership of the building to maximize indirect impact on student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2004; Quint et al., 2007; Waters et al., 2003). The role of an instructional leader involves establishing, supporting, and sustaining systems and processes that infuse the school and its learning environments (classroom and other) with research-informed pedagogy to address both common and individual student needs that are evident from a comprehensive student and school profile (Fullan, 2018). Across a decade of studying the school principal as a leader, the Wallace Foundation (2013) reported that improving conditions that enable “teachers to teach at their best and student learn at their utmost” is a key responsibility of principals (p. 6).

**Learning centered leadership.** As the leader of the school’s instructional core, principals are called to support school reform, or to implement school improvement initiatives to create and support sustainable growth (Wise & Jacobo, 2010). Historically, this process has led to behaviors associated with a deficit-based mental model of school change with principals using lagging indicators to identify areas of the instructional core that are broken and proceeding to use single-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974) to chip away at or mask the undesirable outcomes.
What is left out of the school improvement conversation is what implications that deficit-based approach can have on school moral. Reeves (2009) noted the existence of psychological and organizational impediments to changing an organization and suggested a school principal needs to overcome those impediments in order to increase the motivation of school personnel for sustained change and enduring results. Fullan (2002) reported that, in an environment that is rapidly changing, principals need to take school change to a deeper level and both embrace constant change and further equip themselves to support the organizational capacity to implement and sustain school improvement initiatives that direct the focus for change in their schools. Schein (2010) discussed sub-cultures that can impede change toward a common mission and suggested investigation towards common values and assumptions to develop behaviors that will lead to a sense of collective responsibility that can drive constructive behaviors towards a common vision.

Only by attending to the psychology of the school are principals in a position to translate that readiness of school personnel to accept and lead change into capacity building behaviors that direct, support, and enable real change. Attention to these school conditions begin the process of building coherence of thought and purpose across a school towards a collective vision in which to integrate new ideas and learning (Fullan, 2001). Principals need to go beyond any technical checklist for change associated with a deficit-based school reform and dig deep into organizational culture to have the intended impact and sustain a given change initiative.

Shen and Cooley (2012) introduced an integrated view of school leadership through the Seven Learning-Centered Leadership Dimensions whereby school leadership teams seek to engage the whole school in a learning process across the Five Levels of Learning (adapted from Waters et al., 2003). Learning-Centered Leadership calls for school conditions and processes that
support the psychology of a school so they can build the motivation and capacity of school staff within seven content dimensions that include: commitment and passion for school renewal, safe and orderly school operation, high, cohesive, and culturally relevant expectations for students, coherent curricular programs, distributive and empowering leadership, real-time and embedded instructional assessment, and data-informed decision-making (Shen & Cooley, 2012). The literature base that serves as the foundation to these seven dimensions suggest that attention to these dimensions as a school principal and engaging in the learning process with teacher leaders will support the instructional changes within the classroom that lead to increased student achievement.

**Principal Preparation and Development**

With the sheer breadth and depth that recent increases in responsibility place upon principals, it is no surprise that many principals lack the knowledge and expertise required to thrive and make a positive impact in the principalship (Duncan & Stock, 2010; Hobson & Sharp, 2005). This is evidenced through studies of principal perception regarding their own preparation showing that many principals feel unprepared as they begin the principalship (Elmore, 2007; Lynch, 2012). In a survey of superintendent perceptions of principal readiness, 80% of superintendent respondents believed that new principals begin the job without proper preparation (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno, & Foley, 2001). Principal preparation and development efforts have responded to the calls for principal preparation to stress increased instructional and transformational leadership abilities by reconsidering the content and nature of the support provided to prospective principals (Lynch, 2012). Existing systems designed to develop and support principals include formal or traditional efforts to train principals, such as university principal preparation programs, district developed professional development, or principal
mentoring programs. These formal systems and structures aim to intentionally design opportunities for principals to learn (Spillane, Healey, & Parise, 2009). There have also been efforts to provide principals with on-the-job support through the use of school leadership coaches to provide principals with the impetus, strategies, and habits of reflective practices that lead to greater internal capacity to lead instruction and drive and sustain change (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003).

**University principal preparation programs.** Universities have responded to the calls to strengthen principal preparation with efforts to change principal preparation pre-service programs in ways that align with national principal preparation standards (Bush, 2009; White et al., 2016). However, the effectiveness of these standards-based changes is called into question with studies that suggest personal characteristics of students enrolled in university principal preparation programs are more predictive of field-related success than the features of different graduate programs (Orr & Orphanos, 2011). Since university programs are just now re-aligning their principal preparation programs around the National Policy Board for Educational Administration’s 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) (formerly known as the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium Standards), which require stronger demonstration of core competencies, future studies may yield more promising results. This will be a tough task for university principal preparation programs, which lack data systems and accountability towards meaningful programmatic outcomes (New Leaders, 2012).

What is clear from extant studies of principal preparation is that principals must continue to learn, adapt, and develop on the job. The complexity of the principal role as currently defined means that this will continue to be necessary. While their need for continued learning is only partially attributable to deficiencies in principal preparation programs, the evidence that pre-
service preparation programs do not adequately prepare principals for the actuality of leading a school through a continuous process of adaptation and change leaves both districts and training programs with what Bush (2009) called a moral obligation to develop prospective school leaders appropriately. That will likely require a combination of continuous refinements to principal preparation programs and on-the-job professional learning and support.

District provided professional development. There is evidence that school districts are accepting the moral obligation to develop and support principals by seeking to provide in-service support that align the day-to-day behaviors of a principal to practices that have been shown to support student achievement (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016; Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Honig, 2012). This job-embedded support might look like traditional professional development activities and/or on-the-job support efforts such as mentoring or coaching of principals.

Unfortunately, professional development activities tend to falter for several reasons. One being that they tend to be short in duration and lack ample opportunity for much more than knowledge transfer (Freeman, Sugai, Simonsen, & Everett, 2017). Professional development opportunities also tend to lack performance feedback on the day-to-day behaviors of a principal that make the experience more applicable to the specific daily needs of an individual school. Finally, professional development learning often goes unsustained due to the lack of a systematic and systemic approach to implementation of the school-based support (Freeman et al., 2017). Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, and Wallace (2005) noted in their synthesis of implementation literature that professional development opportunities for principals are insufficient to affect sustained change in principal practice and that more is needed.

Mentoring. Often in conjunction with professional development, states and districts look to mentorship as an on-the-job method for supporting principals. Since 2000, more than 50% of
states have required some form of mentorship for newly hired principals (Gross, 2007). Mentoring relationships have taken on a wide variety of forms (Kram & Hall, 1996; Mertz, 2004) with many descriptions including support in professional advancement by someone with expertise in a given career (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 2006; Fagenson, 1989; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Traditional mentoring programs have been used as an induction to the career of principalship and have been shown to bring benefits to newly hired principals, such as socializing new principals into the profession, sharing norms of practice (Crow & Matthews, 1998), and alleviating a sense of isolation that new principals often feel (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). Mentoring new hires to the principalship has been shown to decrease principal turnover and mitigate the stress that turnover causes to districts (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). Mentorship has also been shown to help principals address school improvement needs and reflect on personal learning needs (Della Sala et al., 2013). Such findings suggest that mentorship can be an important complement to professional development goals that a district may have for a school principal.

The worry for some researchers on principal mentoring is that the mentor enters the relationship with assumed relevant expertise which may or may not be true. Additionally, the agenda of the mentor may supersede that of the mentee (Gross, 2009; Hansford & Ehrich, 2006; Mertz, 2004). This could undercut the development of a principal by limiting the self-directedness of new learning opportunities. While this situation may take care of the immediate managerial needs of the school, one might argue the benefits are temporary as long as the principal has access to a given mentor. Upon completion of the mentoring relationship and support, the principal may be unable to adapt to new situations. Different approaches might better support the development of complexity of mind that is needed to support the internal
adaptivity of a principal to address new and complex problems (Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Shoho, Barnett, & Martinez, 2012).

**Trend Toward School Leadership Coaching**

What these traditional modes of developing principals seem to be missing are clear links to adult learning theories. Sure, most university principal preparation programs have some professional application course or require an internship. However, with the bulk of the learning in a classroom, principal recruits have little experience to build meaning and knowledge and lack the nuances involved within the sociocultural environment of a school. District provided professional development, when targeted towards principal learning, is more likely to be tied to school initiatives that are currently concerns of the principal but are still often focused on increasing the principal’s knowledge outside of the school environment and the social interactions involved in school leadership decisions and often lack the self-directed learning needs of adults. Mentoring meets many of the needs of adult learners, but in a consultation model, there is limited self-reflection and internal capacity building for self-directed learning. While there may still be a place for these support systems, building the capacity for principals in a time that has redefined the role of a principal in fundamental ways may require a more defined and systematic intervention such as coaching.

In a recent survey of a large representative sample of principals across the United States, Wise and Cavazos (2017) found that about 50% of principals had experienced coaching or mentoring support from someone outside of their school, a result that was invariant of principal characteristics. While this study shows that many school principals are receiving some type of on-the-job support, the study did not identify or explore any differences between coaching and mentoring support.
**Difference Between Mentoring and Coaching**

Evered and Selman (1989) distinguish coaching from mentorship by describing a mentor as an experienced person providing guidance to one without experience (the mentee) while a coach is someone who is there to support personal transformation from a current state to the coachee’s personal desired state. Similar distinctions are made based on the primary purpose for the two different types of engagement with the purpose of mentoring being described as a passing of experience or expertise by an experienced mentor, while much of the current coaching literature promote coaching models that are more cognitive and reflective in nature rather than prescriptive or focused on expertise transfer. In these coaching models, there is greater emphasis on raising the efficacy of the coachee as a learner to develop leadership capacity (Costa & Garmston, 2016). Under a more cognitive definition of coaching, coachees in a coaching relationship engage in guided personal reflection to establish learning and growth goals, decide on specific behaviors needed to achieve their goals, and own their own progress towards those goals. Often mentoring and coaching are conflated with many mentorship models coming closer to the definitions and intent of coaching by promoting more collaboration on interdependent learning in the relationship (Flückiger, Aas, Nicolaidou, Johnson, & Lovett, 2017). This serves to point out that the benefits of engaging a school leader in cognitive processes to support their leadership capacity are being recognized as valuable.

Along with the growing interest in coaching from the field (especially for principals of underperforming schools), researchers are also starting to pay attention to the growing trend within school districts to provide job-embedded coaching support to principals (Kay, Hagan, & Parker, 2009; Spiro, 2009; Woods, Woods, & Cowie, 2009). Findings from recent studies suggest school leadership coaching to be more impactful on the effectiveness of a principal when
compared to other professional development opportunities and principal networking. To guide this study, school leadership coaching is defined as a structured process that aims to enable the development of specific aspects of a professional’s practice to increase the leadership of a school. While this definition might create some space between school leadership coaching and principal mentoring, it still leaves room for interpretation on how to go about coaching a principal and what the primary objectives might be.

With that said, coaching is described many ways through many models. Current studies on school leadership coaching use various types of school leadership coaching models that ebb and flow along a continuum between instructional models that are comparable to mentoring and facilitative models that build the internal capacity to be an independent learning within the principal through questioning. Research studies do not always make clear whether coaching models lean more toward guided cognitive and reflective practice, expert or consultative processes, or other types of support.

What is noticeable in models of school leadership coaching is the need for consistency with certain mindsets and attitudes, or dispositions, that guide coaching behaviors. Dispositions have been referred to as those underlying values, beliefs, or perceptions that are manifested in observable behaviors (Cudahy, Finnan, Jaruszewicz, & McCarty, 2002). Others note the consistency in which dispositions influence behaviors in the absence of external motivators (Katz, 1993), which distinguish personal attitudes from dispositions (Katz & Raths, 1985). While not always referring to specific traits or attitudes as dispositions, school leadership coaching literacy calls for coaches to be active listeners, nonjudgmental, compassionate, trustworthy, and curious among many other things (Reiss, 2007). These dispositions lay the foundation for many of the skills needed as a school leadership coach.
Problem Statement

The redefinition of the principalship has cast a call for reform or change on a historically staunched system. Principals need to be developed with a different mental model of what that role entails and the cognitive capacities to lead a school instructionally within an integrated leadership structure that supports school renewal. Traditional training and development of principals has shown to be lacking in expected impact on student achievement and misaligned with the learning needs of an adult learner. School leadership coaching is a promising approach that serves to meet principals where they are at and help develop the skills that will help the school achieve their stated goals.

Practical Problem

However, while the line of inquiry around school leadership coaches is a relatively new and promising approach to principal development, several studies on school leadership coaching suggest that the implementation of school leadership coaching models often varies in dose and quality of coaching within a given study (Huff, Preston, & Goldring, 2013). This pattern was invariant across studies with more and less clarity and rigor around the recruitment, placement, and development of school leadership coaches. This variability in implementation of coaching models seems to question whether the methods for recruiting, placing, and developing school leadership coaches is adequate to support a school leadership coach in implementing a model within a unique environment and seems to leave it up to chance whether a principal will or will not benefit from a school leadership coach.

Deficiency Statement

Descriptions of how school leadership coaching models are implemented raise questions regarding how school leadership coaches develop as coaches and draw upon their former
experiences as they learn and apply an explicit coaching model. Studies on school leadership coaches lack a thorough examination around the learning needs of school leadership coaches. Learning about how school leadership coaches draw upon cognitive capacities, e.g., knowledge, skills, or dispositions, their previous work experiences, and their training to: (a) personally connect to the role of a school leadership coach; (b) understand the role of a school leadership coach; (c) choose specific behaviors; and (d) adapt their support to the local context would shed light on the development process of school leadership coaches and identify important considerations for the hiring, onboarding, and developing of school leadership coaches within a specific coaching model. Such a line of inquiry could further inform frameworks for school leadership coaching and adaptive implementation of those frameworks across various contexts.

Since the emerging research on the impacts of coaching has yet to adequately address these questions, there is a lack of evidence upon which researchers, school districts, and other providers of principal training and support can draw upon to inform the advantages and disadvantages school leadership coach applicants may have in responding to training on a specific coaching model, applying that training to their coaching role, and achieving their coaching goals within the various contexts of their schools.

**Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this multi-case study is to understand and appreciate the learning experience of school leadership coaches from various work experience backgrounds. That is, how the cognitive capacities, e.g., knowledge, skills, and dispositions that supported previous experiences might manifest into new knowledge, skills, or dispositions that support positive behaviors as a school leadership coach in response to training on the ideas, approaches, and content of a specific coaching model while applying the model in a unique context. This is
consistent with Gagné’s (1985) definition of learning: “a change in human disposition or capacity that persists over a period of time and is not simply ascribable to processes of growth” (p. 2). Adult learning theories suggest that aspects of a person’s previous experiences interact with other factors such as the environment, personal cognition, and social interpretations to explain variation in taught behaviors (Donaldson & Graham, 1999). This suggests that the former experiences of a school leadership coach, their developed cognitive capacities, and the unique social environments from which they formerly interacted, directly impact the cognitive and emotional frame in which they receive their training as a school leadership coach. Any new knowledge, skills, or dispositions associated with new training will then, along with the social environment of their implementation site, directly impact how they perform their coaching functions within school.

As the ways in which program implementers are connecting to, learning about, and employing a research-informed program has yet to be explored, this study also proposes a new analytic approach that employs grounded theory techniques within case study research. This allows me to use grounded theory techniques to abductively explore a new line of research while maintaining relevant patterns and contextual features within and across cases. Traditional features of case study and grounded theory alone would not afford the same opportunity.

As a part of an implementation evaluation of a large federally funded grant, this study explores how prior cognitive capacities associated with previous work experiences facilitate the learning of an adaptive coaching model for principals and their teacher leaders within a specific developmental learning framework, the Five Levels of Learning (Shen & Cooley, 2008). Additionally, this study investigates how school leadership coaches make use of such elements
connected to previous work experiences in how they engage within a new learning and working role and setting.

The context for this study is a multi-year leadership development program that provides trained coaches to work with principals and teacher leaders. The coaching model for this program focuses on developing school leadership capacity to achieve high integrity and fidelity implementation of a research-supported school improvement initiative within the structure and culture of the local context. Coaches work with principals and their teacher leaders an average of one day per week. While a leadership team coach for this program is officially called an “Implementation Facilitator,” in coherence with recent literature regarding school leadership coaches is one who works to influence the leadership of an entire school, I will be referring to participants as a “school leadership coach” throughout the remainder of this study.

To address the purpose of this study, I investigated the following research questions and additional sub-elements to ensure rich data capture:

1. How does a school leadership coach draw from cognitive capacities associated with previous professional experiences to make personal connections with their role as a coach?

2. After selection and placement as a school leadership coach, how does a school leadership coach draw from cognitive capacities associated with previous professional experience to:
   a. Construct an understanding of the necessary knowledge, skills, or dispositions of a school leadership coach?
   b. Respond to training on a specific coaching model?
c. Decide where, when, and how to apply aspects of an explicit coaching model to a given school context?

d. Adapt to new learning in the coaches’ training?

e. Identify and respond to opportunities for coaching engagements with the principal?

3. Over time, how does a school leadership coach draw from cognitive capacities associated with previous professional experience and/or their coaches’ training to:

a. Seek out support to address challenges?

b. Adapt to the specific coaching model of the program?

**Conceptual Framework**

This study is informed by social constructivism and a learning framework called the Five Levels of Learning. School leadership coach participants came to their role to increase a school leadership team’s capacity to support transformative school renewal initiatives with prior experience with school-change initiatives, most notably for this research study, the state defined and mandated school-improvement process (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.). In the process of coaching, the coach serves to not only support growth within the internal capacity of each individual on the school leadership team, but also bring a model of High Integrity and Fidelity of Implementation (Shen & Reeves, 2017) that holistically supports the school’s internal capacity to implement research-based change initiatives. To achieve success, school leadership coaches need to engage as a learner to comprehend a new way of looking at and supporting school improvement and this requires change in personal knowledge and behavior and knowledge and behaviors that support the development of those around them. Social constructivism is a useful frame for understanding the process of meaning making, or learning,
as a school leadership coach engages in training and support on an explicit school leadership coaching model. Coaches are being influenced concurrently by both their former social context and internal cognitive capacities related to school improvement and their new social context and cognitive capacities with which they are implementing the model. The Five Levels of Learning provide a learning framework in which to view the depth to which a school leadership coaching is connecting to, understanding, applying, and adapting their learning of the coaching model. Figure 1 shows how this study sought to understand a school leadership coach’s development across the Five Levels of Learning through reported behavioral changes associated with the interaction of former and current cognitive capacities, social environments, and project training and support.

*Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the learning process of a school leadership coach.*
A succinct description of each contribution to the conceptual framework is presented in the following subsections.

**Social Constructivism**

Constructivism is a learning perspective that developed through psychology front runners such as Bruner (1990), Dewey (1929), Kelly (1955), Piaget (1928), von Glasersfeld (1992), and Vygotsky (1978). Simply stated, constructivism asserts that the construction of knowledge and meaning is a cognitive process that occurs within each individual (Young & Collin, 2004). Martin and Sugarman (1999) developed a case against this implied dualism between mind and environment that was initially bequeathed by the writings of Descartes (1637/1960) whereby an individual’s capacity for knowledge construction and behavior is independent of their bodily experience. They, Martin and Sugarman, dispute this implied dualism, arguing that there is an observable and dynamic relation between practices within a sociocultural environment and an individual’s psychological experience, a concept they term “dynamic interactionism” (Martin & Sugarman, 1999, p. 3). Many cognitivists acknowledge that the construction of meaning, knowledge, and reality interact systematically with the social world, but would claim that those cognitive experiences also remain internal to the individual (Kelly, 1955; Piaget, 1954). Social constructivists suggest those cognitive constructions interact with the individual’s social relationships to construct meaning. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that meaning making and subsequent developmental changes in behavior are rooted in social interactions within an environment. Unlike some social constructionists, social constructivists would not go as far as to suggest that those internal cognitive processes associated with meaning and knowledge construction (Young & Collin, 2004). Martin and Sugarman articulate this delicate balance by
pointing out that “the individual is not isomorphic with, nor reducible to, the sociocultural” (Martin & Sugarman, 1999, p. 5).

This is a key frame that guided a deep exploration of the experiences of school leadership coaches as I sought to understand how they draw upon knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with their former work experiences or the social contexts in which they previously worked. Consistent with social constructivism, the experiential learning orientation towards adult learning defines learning as a process “whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). To complement this learning through training and support, school leadership coaches also engage in both formal and informal opportunities to engage in self-reflection and self-directed learning. Formal opportunities come through structured and unstructured reflective conversations that they participate in through their training workshops. Besides these planned experiences, many school leadership coaches also engage in informal reflection individually or with others as they interact with others doing the work. There are also formal and informal opportunities to engage together in self-directed learning as facilitators are asked to consider their own personal growth edges and growth targets as they progress as learners in the work, suggesting yet another social situation in and with school leadership coaches engage. These opportunities for reflection and learning have a mediating effect on the training and support school leadership coaches are provided and what learning they ultimately receive and apply from the support they receive.

The research of a social constructivist focuses on how learning is shaped by the interaction of cognitive processes and the human relationships in their current reality. So while the time that school leadership coaches receive instruction, engage with peers, or self-reflect is a place where they are learning from those social engagements, social constructivism steers the
conversation towards how school leadership coaches connect with the work, understand the work, apply the work, and adapt the work in the current social context in which they are serving. This study followed the sample of school leadership coaches through a personal journey from their former social contexts to their current application of new knowledge and brought out the most salient learnings associated with the school leadership coaching model to each individual in their own local and social contexts. Looking across and within groups that have experienced varying accounts of social interactions around school renewal initiatives support description of how school leadership coaches are drawing from previous knowledge, skills, and dispositions as they engage as learners within a given situation.

**Five Levels of Learning**

Adapted from a knowledge taxonomy from Waters, Marzano, and McNulty’s (2003) Balanced Leadership Framework, Shen and Cooley (2012) described a theory of learning and practice for adults in a complex organization. Shen and Reeves (2017) used this theory of learning and practice to articulate the Five Levels of Learning which address understanding of: (a) what work is important and why; (b) how to do that work in a contextually appropriate manner (i.e., with integrity); (c) what vital behaviors will produce results; (d) what success looks like (measurable impact); and (e) how to make systems adjustments to achieve results. These five levels of the adult learning process employed in the HIFI coaching model address five types of knowledge: experiential; declarative; procedural; contextual, and evidential (Shen & Cooley, 2012). The Five Levels of Learning framework is used to serve as insight to how a school leadership coach engages within the social community to connect to the work, gain knowledge about the work, approach and apply the model, and adapt the model to meet the needs of the local context. This study seeks to better understand how school leadership coaches access and
build off prior knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with prior social contexts as they apply new learnings associated with a school leadership coaching model while implementing that model within a new social context.

**Methods Overview**

This multiple case study investigates the stated research questions from a qualitative research tradition. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to use abductive, inductive, or deductive analyses to make sense of the meanings that people bring to problems in their natural setting (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The multiple case study approach allows the researcher to empirically investigate a phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 2009). Specifically, this study investigated cognitive capacities associated with previous experiences and behaviors of school leadership coaches with either a background as a former principal, a background as an administrator at the district or regional service agency level, or no experience in either role as they work directly with principals and school leadership teams to implement a school-renewal initiative with high fidelity and integrity. Each participating school leadership coach constitutes an individual case for in-depth study within and across the pre-determined groups (former principal, former district administrator, or neither) associated with their former experiences. A qualitative multiple case study approach enables me to distill elements of school leadership coach backgrounds within each case that support the understanding, application, and adaptation of a school leadership coaching model within a unique context to isolate and present findings that are common and unique across all cases.

Pursuant to the secondary purpose of this dissertation, this study proposes a new analysis approach that blends techniques associated with traditional multiple case study and grounded theory to investigate how an individual’s implementation of a school leadership coaching model
is influenced by personal cognitive capacities and the contextual features associated with their individual case. Using data collection and analysis methods commonly associated with grounded theory allowed this study to take the analysis to a deeper level by abductively exploring how school leadership coaches learn or grow in capacity within a social context as they implement a school leadership coaching model. This study investigation helped elucidate aspects of prior cognitive capacities, prior work experience, or training that supported the learning process for school leadership coaches as they implemented a flexibly designed research-informed model of implementation. This new approach to analyzing data can be employed to understand how other program implementors access personal cognitive capacities as they support the implementation of other adaptive research programs.

**Significance of Study**

As those in the educational community are increasingly concerned with the implementation gap, there is an increasing number of calls for programs that meet the needs of the various contexts in which the program might be implemented (Reeves, 2007). Much of the literature regarding the implementation gap places the onus of responsibility on that which is to make the change, whether it be an individual manager or leader (Harvey & Kamvounias, 2008) or an organization (Payne, 2008; Quint, 2006; Reeves, 2007, 2009). However, some studies have shown that a variety of contextual factors across implementation sites affect the experience of participants and subsequent outcomes (Wiegand et al., 2015) so simply making structural changes may fall short in creating the same environment in which an impact study might have found a research-supported program to be effective. Implementation science has confronted the challenges associated with variety in local contexts through synthesizing the implementation literature in a way that provides guidance to practitioners in how to ready themselves or their
organization for effective implementation of a well-defined research-based intervention (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009; Fixsen et al., 2005). Fixsen et al. (2005) suggest changes to structures and policy along with re-allocations of resource to create the conditions that are necessary to keep with the tenets of the research-based program to properly implement the program. Purveyors of these research-based programs bring that technical expertise and seek to support implementation with fidelity with a technical approach to change. But we have learned that this remains a difficult task as, in dealing with complex systems, the same inputs of a program do not guarantee consistent implementation (Burdett & O’Donnell, 2016). Programs designed to provide this kind of prescriptive support to individual participants and local implementation sites must confront the additional challenges associated with the needs of the local context as evidence suggests that adapting core aspects of evidence-based decreases potential benefits (Winter & Szulanski, 2001). Individual schools or districts might already have systems, structures, or processes in place that support or hinder program implementation but not in the same way as the program activities describe.

Elsewhere in the literature, researchers have sought to attend to local context by investing in partnerships with practitioners, or Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships (RPPs). RPPs are collaborations between a research organization and a school or district that seek to address a current need of the school(s). Research on RPPs in education is showing promise with studies resulting in positive effects on outcomes such as increased use of research among practitioners (Tseng, 2012) and positive effects on persistent problems of practice associate with educational outcomes (Donovan, 2013; Fishman, Penuel, Allen, & Cheng, 2013). With a limited number of case studies on how a researcher experiences these partnerships, Coburn and Penuel (2016) call for further research on the dynamics of the partnership between researchers and practitioners and
how those experiences can address the multitude of challenges associated with RPPs accommodating multiple contexts. As RPPs are finding some success with a specific partner, they are still trying to find ways of scaling up their efforts to meet the needs of multiple contexts (Boser & McDaniels, 2018).

This approach implies that the resulting research-based programs to be implemented are not designed to be adaptable to different local contexts. Consistent messages coming from implementation science experts call for schools to adapt to program designs to realize the tested benefits. This begs the question of whether schools are the ones who need to adapt their structures, processes, and resources to get the most out of research. Alternatively, can research-informed programs be designed and tested for efficacy in ways that meet the specific needs of various school contexts?

There are growing calls for this type of research-informed programs that are designed around the needs of the local implementation sites (Schneider, 2019). Implementation of an educational program would be supported by implementers who have a deep understanding of the specific foundational research-informed principles or components underlying the program design along with a broad understanding of how local school contexts can vary so they can adapt the program’s technical features based on the current strengths and structures of a school or district in ways that do not compromise on research informed principles that underlie the program.

While it has been shown that the personal cognitive capacities that school leadership coaches bring to their role do impact the way in which they support school leaders (Backus, 2018), how and when they do this is still unexplored. Those bringing an adaptable program into a school would need to bring a deeper knowledge of the research, knowledge of the setting, and skill in confronting change in complex organization than one who brings a checklist required to
implement a program that requires a technical adoption. But again, research on how such a program implementor might experience supporting this flexible type of program design is devoid in the literature. This study seeks to capture voices of school leadership coaches implementing an adaptive program to contribute: (a) important considerations regarding the influence of personal cognitive capacities in how a school leadership coach connects to and understands their role; (b) important considerations for the hiring, onboarding, and development of school leadership coaches across distinctly different contexts; and (c) an analytical approach to education research that can inform implementation evaluations on flexibly designed programs as these designs begin to grow in number.

**Analytical Contribution**

Through the use of grounded theory elements applied in case study research, this study proposes an innovative analysis approach for how program developers can better understand how program implementors learn about, implement, and adapt research-informed models to meet the needs of the local contexts. Case study research could be considered a chameleon methodology in that case study is more defined by specific technical elements of design opposed to a certain philosophical grounding. However, the technical approach typically applied to analyzing case study research is inadequate for the purpose of this research, however also necessary to maintain contextual features associated with each case. This study proposes applying an abductive coding process within the constant comparative method to first cycle coding techniques. The rich descriptions that will result from this multiple case study analysis approach will also provide this research, and other similarly-purposed research using an adaptive design, with a set of data that will allow meaningful aspects of an individual’s background, including relevant cognitive capacities, to emerge within and across cases. As more educational programs that are flexible to
the needs of local contexts are designed, evaluators can use this analysis design to increase their own understanding of how those implementing their designs are learning about, applying, and adapting program models within a given context.

**Significance Related to School Leadership Coaching Research**

Those implementing school leadership coaching models and programs should also seek to support the wide range of contexts that the school leadership coaches might encounter. Studies on the effectiveness of school leadership coach models and state or district-initiated programs designed to support school leadership with coaching are moving forward despite sufficient empirical exploration regarding when and how a school leadership coach utilizes their previous work experience to learn about, apply, and adapt an explicit coaching model to a local context. Current practice around recruitment for studies on school leadership coaching tends to draw from convenient samples of retired principals. Researchers and school districts implementing these models potentially overlook other relevant knowledge, skills, or dispositions needed to successfully coach a principal that may or may not have been developed during an individual’s tenure in former work experiences. This study seeks to provide this unique understanding to the greater research community interested in studying school leadership coaching.

**Significance to Those Implementing Models for School leadership Coaching**

Finally, as states and districts adopt models for school leadership coaching, this study would lead to an increased sensitivity to varying features across different districts, schools, and school staff. The structures, processes, and strengths of personnel within a district or school could all play an important role in the school’s experience with a school leadership coach. This study seeks to raise awareness of important factors to consider during the recruitment, placement, and development of school leadership coaches.
Chapter 1 Closure

The remainder of this dissertation includes the following chapters: Chapter 2 reviews the principle coaching literature related to four concepts: the role and development of the principal, models of school leadership coaching, recruitment and development of school leadership coaches, and the challenges that are yet to be addressed sufficiently in the literature on how to best develop successful school leadership coaches. Chapter 3 reiterates the study purpose and explicates details regarding the study’s context and methodology. Findings from data collection and analysis will be presented in Chapter 4, followed by a discussion of the results in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study will investigate various models for school leadership coaching, initial impacts of school leadership coaching reported in the literature, and the challenges associated with the placement, development and support of school leadership coaches. Therefore, this chapter is organized into two parts. The first, which focuses on the principalship in the era of school accountability, explores the role of the principal and the ways in which principals are developmentally supported to meet the demands of the role. One of the increasingly common supports to provide principals is a school leadership coach. As such, the second part of this literature review will report on the key elements to consider when developing and implementing various models for school leadership coaching.

School Reform

The call to reshape or reform public schools is not a new conversation. Five decades of federal policy targeting school reform acknowledges a national view that our public education system is not performing in a manner that is expected. These policies have led to a greater understanding of when and where students are falling behind their peers or not receiving the full intended benefit of a public education. Changes have included the development of school ranking systems by states where schools can be labeled as failing and teacher and administrator evaluation systems that can label individuals as ineffective. Parents with sufficient resources can now opt out of their neighborhood schools and take their children to free, state-funded charter schools that pull resources away from schools with a high-percentage of children who do not
have those extra resources. And yet, how far have these policies actually moved the needle forward with student achievement? One thing is for certain: the increased federal accountability for states receiving federal dollars (all states) has driven states to develop strict accountability policies and procedures for schools and their districts. Schools can no longer hide behind the conditions of their local context to explain low student performance on state achievement tests, and it seems as though public education is failing many of our students of highest need.

Skeptics may say we have gone nowhere with public education. Skeptics might say that the system is broken beyond repair and that it is time for a new model that promotes choice and competition, “Free Market Schooling” as it were. A quick Google search can quickly pull up a list of any number of reasons why our schools are failing the kids of this country. This includes an article with nine reasons why public schools are failing, followed by another with 18 reasons, followed by yet another with 10 reasons. Regardless of whether these articles have an ounce of accuracy to them, they reflect the national narrative and feed the public criticism of public education.

What is often missed in the conversation is that educational researchers have responded and are continuing to respond. The collective knowledge regarding school reform efforts that work in the literature base is ripe for investigation, aggregation, and application. Educational research is making progress in not only how researchers are designing studies and analyzing data, but also in how to support practitioners in implementing those research-based programs. This allows subsequent analyses on resulting data to best reflect a specific program that practitioners implemented with fidelity. These advances in paying attention to implementation variables leads researchers to some rich new learnings past what might work in schools toward for whom and under what conditions a specific program is effective.
For example, research designs have become more complex and better reflect the needs of the K-12 education environment. Standards for those designs are continuously adapting to hold those designs to a high standard of rigor. The What Works Clearinghouse (n.d.) just released the fourth version of their standards and have responded to the calls to make designs more appropriate for schools by addressing regression discontinuity designs that allow schools participating in the research to ensure interventions are provided to those who need them the most. They have also expanded the rigor of designs that allow for better accuracy within impact analyses of interventions on students who may be nested within classrooms or schools. Qualitative designs are also growing in favor with more researchers promoting the thick, rich descriptions of qualitative research in order to better understand a given phenomenon or to advance theoretical frameworks that make inferences or suggest further studies (Nowell & Albrecht, 2019). The conversation on rigor or trustworthiness in qualitative research has made leaps and bounds towards the needed sophistication that increases utility of findings (Cypress, 2017).

Statistical analysis methods have also increased in sophistication to account for variation in treatment effects across various subgroups or local contexts. Yuan, Feller, and Miratrix (2018) developed an analysis method called Principal Stratification that can provide researchers with tools for analyzing causal effects for subgroups defined by post-treatment quantities. Peck (2003) also developed means of analyzing treatment effects for a social program implemented across various sites based on post-treatment choices of participants while maintaining the level of rigor associated with a true experimental design. These examples show evidence of the field of educational research constantly developing tools that allow more actionable findings that can lead to better decisions regarding reform of the current educational landscape and structures.
Others have pointed out a disconnect between evidence-based research and the application in local schools, calling it a research gap where schools do not take advantage of what is learned through high-quality research. In response to these concerns, Fixsen et al. (2005) conducted a synthesis of implementation research to increase understanding of the critical elements of implementation so that the positive outcomes associated with a given program can be realized to the fullest extent. This research led to the formation of the National Implementation Research Network and a new line of inquiry known as Implementation Science. Continued advancements in this field like those described below will continue to support reform efforts of K-12 education.

As research and implementation methods are advancing the depth and specificity of research findings, the progress in the literature base associated with school reform are worth noting as well. For example, much of the literature that guided questions regarding the role that school leadership plays in student achievement lacked an empirical base of knowledge regarding what type of leadership matters (Leithwood et al., 2004). Through the use of meta-analytic procedures and other generalizable study designs and analyses, we now know very specific behaviors of principals that have a positive impact, although indirect, on student achievement (Coelli & Green, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004; Osborne-Lampkin, Sidler Folsom, & Herrington, 2015; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). This greater understanding of the impact a principal plays in student achievement enables the field to shift leadership practices and behaviors towards those that are founded upon the research.

Increases in understanding of how the principal’s role interacts with the larger school organization have also made important contributions to those studying school reform. For example, we now better understand the conditions of a school that support organizational
learning and what specific behaviors the principal can engage in to support those school conditions (Beidinger-Burnett, 2013; Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011; Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2016). For example, Shen and Cooley (2013) have developed the Seven Dimensions of Learning Centered Leadership that support school reform. This frame for school renewal, developed from a synthesis of empirical research on the relationship between principal leadership and student achievement, ties the role of a principal to school reform efforts that are key to implementing research supported school change initiatives in schools.

When we consider whether public education is broken and whether it is time to move in a new direction, should we “throw out the baby with the bathwater”? Or might practitioners and policy makers have an obligation to apply what rigorous research has contributed to address opportunities for growth in public education? This study aligns with the latter view that might better reflect the reality of any change process associated with complex organizations with different implementation sites.

**Principalship**

What does a day in the life of a principal look like? Unlike the mounds of research-supported curriculum that are available to teachers that outline the scope and sequence of their support of student learning for a given academic content area, no such curricular resources exist for principals that provide the same day-to-day scope and sequence for their role in supporting teachers and the school throughout the year. Districts just do not provide principals with a comparable guide. Instead, they have an opportunity to support student achievement by balancing their time throughout the day, week, month, year as they (a) engage as an instructional
leader, (b) support school conditions that foster continuous renewal, and (c) develop and nurture relationships beyond the school walls.

**Instructional Leadership**

Instructional leadership, or the ability of a person to engage in practices that increase the quality of teaching and learning, is a critical key to successful schools (Leithwood, Riedlinger, Bauer, & Jantzi, 2003). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) are among the leading voices in the conversation advocating for instructional leadership behaviors such as (a) defining and focusing on school goals, (b) coordinating and monitoring instruction, (c) supporting the development of teachers, and (d) monitoring student achievement data. Instructional leadership has been reported as an important dimension of successful school leadership by several researchers (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Elmore, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2003; Robinson et al., 2008). For example, Casey’s (1980) doctoral dissertation sought to understand what principals believed to be their most important responsibilities. Results suggested that principals, even back then, understood the importance of engaging as an instructional leader and spending a large portion of time working with students and teachers in classrooms. Yet numerous observational studies from then until now suggest that principals do not allocate time in their day to establish behaviors congruent with descriptions of instructional leadership. The research of Little and Little (2001) identified instructional leadership as a key dimension to the role of a principal. Unfortunately, from the 1970s through the 21st century, this term remained largely ambiguous without empirical support of any one interpretation of what instructional leadership actually mean (Waters et al., 2003). This placed principals in a position where they were expected to choose one of the many sources on instructional leadership and hope that it was a good interpretation of the term. Waters et al. (2003) provided the field with that empirical support on
not only what effective instructional leadership looks like, but also how and when to apply those behaviors. Instructional leadership behaviors that had significant impact on student achievement include establishing and maintaining a school focus, providing teachers with resources and professional development that support effective teaching, engaging in the design, development and application of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and monitoring the implementation of those practices and the impact they are having on student achievement. The previously mentioned gains in empirical support of instructional leadership behaviors over the past decade provide districts with a vision of how meet the rise in demands for school improvement associated with the developed accountability systems from state and federal policy.

**Supporting School Renewal**

Directly tied to a principal’s ability to demonstrate the behaviors associated with instructional leadership are other practices and behaviors that support continuous school renewal. However, changing the attitudes or behaviors of people is a difficult task. Kegan and Lahey (2009) like this to the human’s immune system, where people, including those within schools, resist change or actively fight to resist change out of fear of the unknown. Thus, schools need leaders that can foster motivation within all staff as they engage as learners and begin applying new learning with changes in behavior (Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2013). While principals are working to affect the instructional core of a building, principals also need to develop and maintain the knowledge and skills associated with systemic planning and implementation processes that provide this motivation and capacity to school staff and sustain positive changes related to the instructional mission and vision of the school (Leithwood et al., 2003).
This is no light load on principals, and as stated previously, there are no guidance documents that districts can provide to principals to guide them towards achieving goals associated with school renewal. To influence change, Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, and Switzler (2013) pull from the psychology, social psychology, and organization theory literature to provide a framework that involves supporting both the motivation and capacity of individuals. Each domain of their model is then further divided into three subdomains associated with personal, social, and structural motivation or capacity. School leaders need to engage in very specific behaviors and develop systems that support specific school conditions of school renewal, e.g., positive core (Bandura, 1997; Blase & Blase, 2004; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Dweck, 2016; Francis, Palmer, & Center for Courage & Renewal, n.d.; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Sinek, 2009, 2014; Wells, n.d.; Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, & Rader, 2010), collective ownership (Donovan & Kaplan, 2013; DuFour, 2016; Marzano, Heflebower, Hoegh, Warrick, & Grift, 2016; Middleton & Petitt, 2007), evidence-based decision-making (Bernhardt, 2017; Lambert, 2003; Wellman & Lipton, 2004), and organizational learning (Blase & Blase, 2004; DuFour, 2016; Garmston & Wellman, 2016; Harnish, 2014; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Marzano et al., 2016; Palmer, 1998; Wilson & Levine, 2018) to engage all stakeholders that interact with the school in behaviors that support student learning. These school conditions not only support the motivation of school staff, i.e., positive core and collective ownership, but also the capacity of all actors through evidence-based decisions and organizational learning (Grenny et al., 2013). It is important to note that the term school renewal is being used here instead of school improvement as school improvement is often a process where a school identifies problems in the school that needs solving, while a school
engaged in school renewal collectively builds off of the strengths of each other to continuously learn and improve.

**Motivation for School Renewal**

As noted above, school renewal relies on a school staff being motivated to continuously engage as learners. To do this, school leaders must focus on the positive core of the building, appreciating and believing each other and building on current strengths while engaging all adults in the process such that ownership of school renewal is a collective endeavor of the entire staff.

**Positive core.** One school condition that supports the motivation of individuals through change initiatives is a Positive Core (Bandura, 1997; Blase & Blase, 2004; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Cooperrider et al., 2008; Dweck, 2016; Francis et al., n.d.; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Sinek, 2009, 2014; Wells, n.d.; Whitney et al., 2010). While much of psychological research has been focused on a deficit-based methodology with a focus on moving people out of negative mental states (Seligman, 1998, 2013), new lines of research have emerged that report on the advantageous effects of positivity. Fredrickson (2001) describes how experiencing positive affect can prompt an individual to engage in their social environment and incite change within those individuals. Her broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions explains how positive emotions support the building and sustaining of both physical, social, and psychological capacities. In a policy brief from the Education Policy Center at American Institute for Research (Rowland, 2017), it is noted that behind every successful school is a principal who was able to establish a positive and caring culture of learning.

In a survey on approaches to managing change, researchers found that schools often take a deficit-based approach to organizational learning and function to fix what is wrong to achieve their results opposed to recognizing and building off of the school’s current strengths.
Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is one line of inquiry that emerged at the middle of the 1980s that offers a model for a strength-based approach to supporting change through organizational systems (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Evans, Thornton, & Usinger, 2012; Whitney et al., 2010). AI supports individuals in their sense of belonging to the organization, feeling valued and heard, and being creative in their role (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) and, through greater understanding and appreciation of social interactions, has been shown to support the implementation of school reform initiatives (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

Another theoretical framework in which a principal can build a positive core in a school is what is described by Dweck (2016) as a growth mindset. A growth mindset is founded on the principles of appreciative inquiry by assuming there is a malleable foundation from which to build from as an individual or organization seeks to achieve certain goals. A growth mindset takes a strength-based approach to learning opposed to seeing deficits in a person or organization and trying to fill holes. Research has shown individual and organizational change can be positively impacted by a growth mindset (Han et al., 2018).

**Collective ownership.** Key to motivating individuals and organizations through implementing a school change initiative is gaining support from all involved (Donovan & Kaplan, 2013; DuFour, 2016; Marzano et al., 2016; Middleton & Petitt, 2007). This involves paying careful attention to and supporting the commitment of individuals toward a specific goal or vision of how to achieve the goal (Schmoker, 2018). Do the individuals have personal ownership and investment in the process? If people believe in the vision of the school, but do not agree with the process in how to achieve common goals or understand how the decisions were made, subversive behaviors can result that actively seek to sabotage the school vision. Creating
systems that support collective ownership involve valuing the voice of everyone involved and elevating the role of each individual in achieving a collective goal.

Traditional school processes and structures, such as current school improvement practices and hierarchical evaluation structures, do not promote collective ownership. These traditional processes and structures contribute to a lack of motivation for teachers to engage in school initiatives beyond what they are held accountable for in their formal evaluation. This is evidenced by studies reporting a principal’s effect on student achievement goes beyond the development of effective teachers (Coelli & Green, 2012; Le Floch et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010), to also include the recruitment and retention of effective teachers (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Coelli & Green, 2012; Fuller, Young, & Baker, 2011; Louis et al., 2010). Teachers at all development levels want to be inspired and driven by their work. Through careful development and attention to processes that support a collective voice and a shared responsibility, a principal can provide the social motivation needed to implement school change initiatives with all members involved striving towards common goals.

**Capacity for School Renewal**

School renewal also relies on a school staff having the capacity for continuous learning. School leaders need to set up processes that support evidence-based decisions and structure them systematically such that the whole organization is engaged in the learning process.

**Evidence-based decision-making.** A key finding in the meta-analysis by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) emphasizes the importance of systematically monitoring both school and classroom conditions and processes that support student achievement. While much of the state evaluation systems for school districts focus on yearly student achievement data, there
is limited use for this data in supporting meaningful change in the school environment (Bernhardt, 2017; Lambert, 2003; Wellman & Lipton, 2004). Since state assessment data typically lags well behind the school decision making processes, the data needs to be aggregated across so many domains that it lies in school improvement plans as ambiguous and unactionable (Fullan, 2005).

What then should a school use to inform decisions related to school and classroom practices? Unfortunately, the accessibility of data on leading indicators of student success associated with school conditions and school leadership are lacking (Reeves & Burt, 2006) and the only way for a school to have their intended impact on student achievement would be to create systems and processes that collect the real-time data that is needed to make informed decisions (Bernhardt, 2017; Lambert, 2003; Wellman & Lipton, 2004). This idea of monitoring school and classroom practices and conditions in real-time has direct implications for all individuals involved in student achievement. However, if all who play a role in student achievement are going to have additional behaviors and practices monitored, there needs to be a sense of trust and stability to the process (Francis et al., n.d.; Sinek, 2014). Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) speak to the delicate balance of stability and change as leaders support school personnel and how important the development and support of those individuals are through the change process. To provide that sense of stability, principals need to walk alongside of teachers to thoughtfully establish systems that profile the performance of school personnel as related to the collective goal, monitor the progress in real time, and pay attention to both leading and lagging indicators (Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011).

Collaborative Inquiry can play a major role in supporting a process with these goals. David (2009) describes Collaborative Inquiry as a cyclical process in which commonly purpose
school personnel come together to use data to make instructional decisions. Others have contributed structure to the Collaborative Inquiry Process by outlining the following three conditions that support the cycle: repeated actions followed by reflection, a group of individuals who are peers, and a common question with a common purpose (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000). Research has found that when teachers collaborate around common data of their own students, they were able to make informed decisions and corresponding adjustments to their practice (Borko, 2004; Gearhart & Osmundson, 2008). Through a Collaborative Inquiry process, school personnel can identify the key performances that need to be monitored, develop indicators and benchmarks for those performances, and use them to inform (through leading indicators) and assess (through lagging indicators) their progress along the way. In conjunction with developing teacher motivation through establishing a positive core and collective ownership, a comprehensive data-based decision-making process will provide the real time data teachers need to support the current needs of their students.

**Organizational learning.** Aspects of a positive core, collective ownership, and evidence-based decision making all support an organization that learns. However, there are specific individual and group cognitive practices that are traditionally absent from the school environment that need to be integrated into schools to support learning across the organization (Blase & Blase, 2004; DuFour, 2016; Garmston & Wellman, 2016; Harnish, 2014; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Marzano et al., 2016; Palmer, 1998; Wilson & Levine, 2018). For example, learning dispositions do not suddenly appear as a result of a professional development, but need to be modeled, developed, and cultivated within an organization. Individuals can develop learning dispositions through engaging in positive experiences associated with explicit learning processes such as reflection on-practice or double-loop learning (Argyris, 1999). While these
behaviors might arise through collaborative inquiry processes described above or interdependent thinking associated with collective ownership, a principal consciously and thoughtfully developing conditions in a school that support organizational learning is critical to continued development of the individual and organizational capacity to achieve stated goals (Blase & Blase, 2004; Francis et al., n.d.; Wilson & Levine, 2018).

Single-loop learning is common place in the typical deficit-based approach of problem solving that schools engage where solutions to problems are identified to fix the problem (Argyris, 1999). This process does include scanning of the environment for problems, setting goals to solve discovered problems, and monitoring organizational performance in relation to those objectives (Morgan, 2006). This can result in a series of processes, systems, and structures that do nothing to move the organization forward, however. This is what many people would refer to as the “band-aid” solution to a problem. This might be reflected in a case where every time a child falls off her bike, the only “fix” to the problem of her skinned-up knees is another band-aid. With our child falling off the bike example, one would need to dig deeper to assess why she keeps falling off the bike. Is it something about the bicycle that is broken, are the wheels bent, is it the surface in which she is riding, is her bike the wrong size for her, does she even know how to ride a bike? A thorough investigation of the situation might reveal more details that a quick fixed skipped over, allowing for a more informed solution.

Double-loop learning is also interested in investigating problems, but the focus is on finding solutions to the underlying causes of the problems and is essential for organizational change in values, beliefs, and assumptions (Morgan, 2006). This is important for schools to consider as they often find themselves in band-aid mode. For example, after schools receive their “most important” student assessment data from state assessments (as it directly implicates them
on their performance) well into the fall of the new school year, teachers of those students might see areas of low performance, say reading comprehension. If a school leadership team were to take that information and purchase a new reading comprehension supplement to their English Language Arts curriculum, they are rolling the dice on whether that is truly addressing the underlying cause of the problem. A principal that supports processes that utilize double-loop learning would take a collective and systems thinking approach and look to supplement that lagging, non-actionable data, the state achievement tests, with more actionable data (Blase & Blase, 2004). An organization engaging in double-loop learning would collaboratively reflect on a comprehensive data profile to challenge the current reality and their role in its construction. In doing so, individuals would create new personal and organizational capacities to extend their learning (Morgan, 2006).

Managerial Leadership

This deeper understanding of how a principal can impact student achievement through school renewal processes has placed a heavy burden on the role of a principal and done very little to take away any managerial responsibilities. In a study of 63 capacities of managers and leaders, a group of 43 experts found a considerable amount of overlap (Simonet & Tett, 2012). These leadership and management experts agreed with other researchers who make distinctions between managers and leaders with managerial roles typically involving systems and processes involved in doing things the right way and leaders doing the right things (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). Kotter (1990) includes planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, controlling and problem solving with those capacities of a manager and establishing vision, aligning people, and motivating as capacities of leaders. The shift from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, first published in 1996, to the Professional Standards for
Educational Leaders, called school leaders to leadership that was more student-centered and aligned with the research supported behaviors that impact student achievement, yet did little to take away responsibilities associated with operations and management of the school (National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), 2015). The principal responsibilities associated with being a school manager, i.e., the point person for maintaining school grounds, supporting student behavior, communicating with parents, attending extra-curricular activities, and many more are all still on the plate of a principal in addition to the recent increases in responsibilities associated with instructional leadership.

**School Leadership Frameworks**

Knowing which behaviors are associated with student learning does little to guarantee that those practices will be applied efficaciously. Experts in school leadership have developed frameworks for school leadership that might support school leaders’ capacity to achieve their goals, change systems, or grow an organization. Some of these frameworks speak of leadership as a characteristic of an individual (Ash & Persall, 2000; Bennis & Nanus, 2007; Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Nadler & Tushman, 2012; Zaccaro, 2007; Zaleznik, 1977) and others talk about leadership as a set of skills that a leader can apply to their leadership role within any organization (Katz, 1955; Mumford, Todd, Higgs, & McIntosh, 2017; Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000; Yammarino, 2000). The former suggests that people come to the table with leader-esque attributes and can step into leadership roles and apply those internal capacities and dispositions. The latter suggests that many individuals with varying capacities can be or become leaders as they learn and develop described leadership processes. A third view of leadership, as is discussed later with other frameworks, describes leadership as a condition of an organization, not of a given individual or set of individuals within an
organization (Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995; Shen & Cooley, 2012). While many of these leadership frameworks have strengths in influencing people towards a set of goals, a principal would do well to understand multiple approaches to leadership to support the conditions that are important to implementing school renewal initiatives.

**Leadership as a Set of Specific Attributes**

Some resources designed to support school principals describe leadership as a set of attributes that people come to the table with. This suggests that not only are there people that have these desirable characteristics of a leader, but that there are others that do not have them. These could be physical traits, cognitive traits, and/or social traits, each bringing a set of associated strengths. This idea of leadership can be traced back to biblical times when, as described in 1 Samuel 16: 6-7, Samuel was looking for someone to lead the Israelites. He had been led by God to the sons of Jesse and, upon first glance at the oldest, Samuel was sure this was who should lead. But the Lord instructed Samuel to not consider appearance and stature of a man’s outwardly appearance. School leader researchers developed leadership attribute theories in the 20th century from studies identifying characteristics of great leaders that set them apart from others who were not great leaders. These came to be known as the “great man” theories because these researchers believed that these people were born with such traits (Northouse, 2019). Further trait theories continued to develop to differentiate those who are great leaders from non-leaders based on their innate traits (Dinh & Lord, 2012). While trait theories began to shift away from individual differences between leaders and non-leaders towards the impact the environment has on leadership, there has been a swing back to the former area of study in the last 20 years (Northouse, 2019).
While a trait approach to leadership has decades of research behind specific traits, it begs to ask how principals can use such understanding of important traits to achieve goals associated with school reform. Is it simple enough for principals to see such traits and find ways to improve overall leadership effectiveness by striving towards developing certain characteristics? Unfortunately, while this may work in certain situations, what trait theory has failed to do is associate certain traits with specific situations (Northouse, 2019). This lack of transferability within trait theory research places the onus of responsibility on the principal or other school leader to interpret the research and determine which trait to try to develop in their current reality.

**Leadership as a Set of Skills and Behaviors**

Like the example of capacities of managers and leaders described above, some leadership frameworks provide principals with skills and behaviors to develop that will support them as leaders. For example, participatory leadership describes a leadership framework in which leaders involve the voice of non-leaders in the decision-making process (Northouse, 2019). This could no doubt take a lot of skill in managing a culture, problem solving, and making judgments about the social environment. Adaptive leadership describes a leadership framework in which leaders engage followers in processes that shift the focus and values of others. Adaptive leadership keeps the leader as the change agent in the organization, but in a role in which facilitates the adaptive shifts in organization and orientation of non-leaders. Through a teamwork approach, an organization can tackle challenges that aren’t simply technical shifts in procedures or knowledge. Other leadership frameworks, such as servant leadership (Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017; Greenleaf, 1970), transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Christie, Baling, & Turner, 2011), and authentic leadership (George, 2003; Shamir & Eilam, 2005) all provide a solid framework from which to lead, but rely on a set of skills that the leader needs to either come to the role with
or develop within the role. While a principal can very successfully exhibit specific traits or implement skills or behaviors that can support conditions within the school that embrace the implementation of school reform initiatives, the process of change, when centered around one person in one role, will always be as fleeting as the next change in person within that role. School reform needs more out of the role of a principal so that a change in staff does not halt the learning of the school staff or organization.

**Leadership as a Characteristic of an Organization**

If school renewal requires leadership that is not heavily impacted by a change of employment by one person, one might then describe leadership as a characteristic of an organization. Ogawa and Bossert (1995) make that jump and describe leadership as an organizational quality. They redefine leadership as a systemic characteristic that describes the social interactions and meanings ascribed to organizational processes of an organization. Others have translated this into the public school context and claim that all individuals serving students play a role in leadership (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2009; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). In this sense, leadership is not something that a given individual or set of individuals exhibit, but something that is felt across a school’s staff. Diamond (2013) poetically refers to leadership as the “constellation of people who seek to influence instructional practices in schools” (p. 84). This framework for leadership seems to support the school conditions necessary for school reform initiatives, but also seem to lack specific skills and behaviors that might provide more direct support to principals as they think about leading within a distributed perspective.

But this ambiguity is not by accident. Researchers of distributed leadership describe the perspective as a conceptual tool to guide the thinking of school leaders opposed to a prescriptive
set of technical activities that would support their work (Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Timperley, 2008). This places distributed leadership as a guiding principle for the school principal that supports the emergence of leadership through social interactions (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Robinson et al., 2008). Principals using distributed leadership as a framework might also seek to build on the strengths of those around them, free up the creativity in the school personnel, and support a flattened-out process of collaborative inquiry with real-time and meaningful data that is actionable. So while there is not a set of descriptive steps to the work of a leader applying distributed leadership, the conceptual lens that a leader might take in distributed leadership might support progress of the school towards achieving school reform goals.

**Experiencing Traditional Principal Development**

The complexity of the principalship presents unique challenges for principal preparation programs and districts who hire, train, and support principals. Effective application of research supported behaviors associated with developing conditions with a school that will lead to increased student achievement requires careful attention to the learning needs of principals. How can principals develop the content, pedagogical, and pedagogical-content knowledge needed to support their instructional leadership and to what depth does their learning need to go in order to be effective as an instructional leader? How does a principal learn to support the positive core of a building and develop collective ownership of school reform initiatives to motivate school personnel towards collective goals? How does a principal develop and implement systems and structures to support an organization that learns and makes decisions with data? The last two decades has included vast improvements in applied social science research regarding the impact that a principal has on student achievement and has led to a redefinition of educational leadership standards and the ways in which leaders are developed (NPBEA, 2015). The Interstate School
Leader Licensure Consortium standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996) did make an initial shift in scope and depth in 2008 (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008) after initial reports on the impact that school leaders can have on student achievement, but were then replaced with the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015) in 2015 after thorough review of the empirical evidence of a school leader’s impact on student achievement (Smylie & Murphy, 2018). These standards provide guidance to how universities develop their principal preparation programs (Bush, 2009; White et al., 2016), which suggests any impact that these shifts in training can have on school reform will take some time.

This shift in understanding of the role of school leaders has implications for how current principals have experienced their training and development as principals. Calls for principal preparation programs to restructure their approach towards a more functional approach focused on supporting the instructional core of the building followed the increased empirical support of instructional leadership (Lynch, 2012) and recent research has uncovered practices and trends which suggest that the research-supported behaviors of principals that impact student achievement are not making their way into the daily practice of principals (Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2009). Principals and potential principals assert that fulfilling all responsibilities designated to the principal is impossible (Metlife, 2013) and gravitate towards behaviors associated with administrative duties, like attending to compliance documents, budgets, and maintaining relationships with those external to the school (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010). A strong majority of principals and superintendents both feel that principals enter the profession unprepared for managing all responsibilities associated with the management and leadership of the building (Elmore, 2007; Farkas et al., 2001; Lynch, 2012). So how can the supporters of public education fight off attacks pointed at the effectiveness of schools when the leaders of
schools are not engaging in the behaviors that would lead to the impact they could have on school conditions that support school reform initiatives, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement?

When thinking about pre-service support of principals, it is important to understand that this shift takes time as the research to move down the “research pipeline,” and we need to be thoughtful and realistic about what to expect out of the current population of principals. The systems and processes within university programs and the bureaucratic structures that they are situated within impede much of the change process that these programs need to go through (New Leaders, 2012). If we consider the lengths that principal preparation programs would have to go through in order to respond to these knowledge gains in the research field amidst these challenges, we might conclude that it would take more than a few years to adapt course offerings and objectives and impact cohorts of newly prepared principal candidates. New hires are stepping into district systems that are entrenched with a culture that supports archaic mental models of the principal’s role. While it is imperative that while we welcome those changes that principal preparation programs are making to support principals, it is important to recognize the need for districts to support structures and systems that further develop newly hired principals.

School districts are making efforts to provide principals with job-embedded support (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016; Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Honig, 2012). Traditional approaches to principal development tend to look like periodic or episodic professional learning opportunities designed to support a new district-wide initiative (Freeman et al., 2017). These occasional learning opportunities have little effect on the instructional core of a building and thus little to no impact on student learning (Learning Forward, n.d.). The unfortunate reality is that much of school leadership development is under resourced where districts focus their funds on
the professional development of their teachers (Manna, 2015) and school principals mostly receive professional development designed for the teacher instead of the school leaders (Rowland, 2017). When professional development opportunities are provided to principals, they tend to be instructional and not supportive of the local needs of the building, teachers, and students (Freeman et al., 2017) and insufficient to support sustained change in principal behaviors that would support school conditions critical to implementation of reform initiatives.

Principal mentorship opportunities provide principals with a different type of learning engagement where an experienced principal supports the induction of a newly hired principal into their new role. Mentors support new principals as they engage with new social interactions, understand new cultural norms, and experience the feeling of isolation commonly felt by principals (Crow & Matthews, 1998; Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). While mentorship of new principals has been shown to impact outcomes associated with principal turnover, principal knowledge, and even school conditions associated with school improvement, it has been observed that the agenda of the mentor may supersede the learning needs of the mentee and, as an adult learner, different and more facilitative approaches might better support the ongoing development of a principal’s internal capacities to lead (Gross, 2009; Hansford & Ehrich, 2006; Mertz, 2004).

**Principal Learning Needs**

Humans are engaged in the sociocultural environment that demands our participation and engages us all in learning (Gergen, 1985; Mead, 1934; Shotter, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). The internalization of these societal and cultural norms is both a passive and active process within an agentic relationship with others they engage with (Martin & Sugarman, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Within the workplace of a school principal, this suggests that the roles, relationships, and local
contexts that one engages in will shape and organize the knowledge and meaning making of the principal and their own perception of self within those relationships and context. Concomitantly, the principal’s learning will also shape the roles, relationships, and context of others with which they engage. The resulting individual behaviors, decisions, intentions are then driven and constrained by the experienced relationships within those settings (Martin & Sugarman, 1999). This supports the work of Knowles (1980) which puts the human experience at the center of learning. The experiences of a principal not only contribute to their wealth of knowledge and meanings associated with sociocultural language and symbols of a particular school and district, but also contribute to habits, dispositions, and attitudes that can hinder new ideas, perspectives, or alternative ways of thinking or doing (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012).

The learning opportunities of principals need to reflect the social, contextual, and individual nature of learning associated with behavior change, not situated outside of the social relationships in which they engage. All principals experience different social interactions with different contexts, and each interaction is an important learning opportunity within that given context. This suggests that learning opportunities need to be tied directly to what the principal is experiencing in their role on a daily basis. As soon as formal professional learning opportunities take a principal off-site, much of the context is lost and goes hidden from training providers. This leaves the experience limited in value from an adult learning perspective. Principals need to experience opportunities that are embedded in their sociocultural context and are supportive of reflection and self-direction.

**Experiential Learning**

Many forms of principal training and support happen with learning opportunities outside of the naturalistic environment and contain technical approaches to teaching a set of desired
behaviors. However, consistent with ideas associated with social constructivism (Gergen, 1985), adult learning researchers have noted the importance of learning in context and suggest shifting the attention away from the individual isolated from social interactions that come with the role and toward the place where the learning occurs (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). While some might suggest that learning happens strictly within an individual’s cognitive processes (Bartlett, 1932; Kelly, 1955; Mahoney, 1990; Piaget, 1954), those suggestions assume all important variables can be considered and described in the set-up of the exercise and embodied throughout the exercise. However valuable these exercises might be in certain situations, with the political and cultural influences within any single context, social interactions will vary by each situation and every effort should be made to provide learning experiences that are as authentic as possible (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). This type of situated learning is important because it opens up doors for self-reflection. Reflective practice, sometimes also called experiential learning, represents learning that results from reflection during or after practice (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Reflection after practice, or reflection-on-practice, typically involves a cognitive exercise after a specific engagement from which to learn from (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Reflection-on-practice allows the learner, or principal, to take all experienced variables into account, become more consciousness of those variables as they interact in similar situations, and evaluate how different actions or decisions might have affected the results of the chosen behavior (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Reflection-on-practice also provides an individual with a chance to assess the difference between their espoused theories and theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Argyris and Schon (1974) described an individual’s espoused theories as those values and beliefs that drive their intended behaviors where an individual’s theories-in-action describe the actual behaviors of an individual. Confronting incongruencies in these two theories is a key piece
of reflection-on-practice. However, Agyris and Schon also warn against self-reflection of practice in isolation as it may “reinforce entrenched beliefs or traditions of practice that may be harmful or repressive” (p. 44).

Self-Directed Learning

Another aspect of the sociocultural environment in which an individual engages cognitively is self-directed learning (SDL) (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). SDL has been described as both a process that a learner engages in to organize their personal experiences to engage as a learner (Knowles, 1975) and as a personal attribute such that a person tends to engage in an SDL process and is comfortable engaging in the learning process (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). While it may seem from this researcher’s “Western Hemisphere” point of view that SDL is a process that all individuals engage in or a personal attribute that everyone utilizes, individuals can vary in SDL based on their motivation to learn, life circumstances that support SDL, and SDL can also be strongly influenced by certain cultural norms (Brookfield, 1984; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Grow’s (1991, 1994) model represented variation of SDL within different individuals and suggests that as any individual supports the learning of another, they should consider the learner’s dependence on an instructor in being self-directed in the learning process.

Spear and Mocker (1984) showed that cognitive processes associated with SDL is mediated by interactions of one’s environment, past and current experiences, and chance encounters, also very much in line with social cognitivism. Brockett and Hiemstra (1994) studied the importance of personal ownership for learning within SDL. They found that the more responsibility one took in their learning process, the more confident they felt in the learning. As principals engage in SDL, they can also benefit from the increased confidence in the decision-
making process and better support conditions in the school that support implementation of school reform initiatives.

As principals engage as learners with the new roles and responsibilities, the demands of the principal as learner calls for careful attention to the sociocultural interactions within her/his environment and the need for cognitive processing of the new and developing relationships within that environment. The term SDL implies that the learner take ownership for the process of learning that includes planning, implementing, assessing, and adapting for learning. This is quite a tall order on the plate of a developing principal who is constantly being pulled in several directions and it would seem that only those who have SDL as a strong personal attribute would engage in the process consistently. The technical preparation that principals receive during pre-service training is a great starting point for developing a repertoire of language and ideas that can or will support the role of principal.

The role that SDL plays in the learning of an adult has direct implications for what is needed in the ongoing support of principals as learners. Reflection during practice, also called reflection-in-action, takes place as an individual engages in a given practice (Argyris & Schon, 1974). The process is very much entrenched in SDL, where a learner engages in double-loop learning during their daily activities to proactively influence the environment instead of constantly reacting to the environment. Not only does the development of principals need to take place with the lived experience of their specific context, but it also needs to be an active process that is supported within principal’s daily work. This type of practice not only reshapes the principal doing the reflection during practice, but also reshapes the environment and thus the learning that will take place by everyone else involved.
Coaching Principals

As principals are hired and expected to meet the instructional and managerial needs of their school, a full consideration of their needs as adult learners is necessary to reach their potential. The following section provides an overview on models of and impacts from school leadership coaching models along with what the literature says about the recruitment, placement, and development of school leadership coaches.

Models for Coaching School Leaders

As principals are hired and expected to meet the instructional and managerial needs of their school, section one of this chapter showed that a full consideration of their needs as adult learners is necessary for them to reach their potential. In response to research that found professional development has little impact on creating change in teacher behaviors in the classroom and coaching has led to increases in both knowledge, skills, and application of training components at a higher rate than other training settings (Collins, 1997; Joyce & Showers, 1995), scholars have suggested that principals could also benefit from the same type of support to impact behaviors that affect the school improvement process (Reiss, 2007). School leadership coaching models have since been adapted from executive, leadership, and teacher coaching models to impact goals related to school improvement (Backus, 2018; Barnett, Henry, & Vann, 2015; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Farver & Holt, 2015; Fox, 2009; Goldring et al., 2018; Krasnoff, 2015; Lackritz, 2017; Lauzon, 2015; Lee, 2010; Lochmiller, 2014; Meddaugh, 2012; Karla, 2003; LEAD Connecticut, 2013; Trujillo, 2018; Wise & Jacobo, 2010). Models for school leadership coaching come in many shapes and sizes for various purposes and bring with them different foundational principles about how coaching can support school leadership goals.
Based on the foundational principles made in designing a program model for coaching, different aspects and approaches are highlighted across different coaching models. Some of the focal points of a school leadership coaching model include: individualized support for principals that meet the needs of individuals and within their sociocultural context and formal methods of feedback (Krasnoff, 2015; Reeves & Allison, 2009; Wise & Hammack, 2011). These two aspects of school leadership coaching are found integrated in various types of models that suggest distinct approaches to the supportive relationship. The approaches include collaborative relationships between coach and principal, specific instructional support where the coach is the purveyor of knowledge and uses instructional coaching to teach the principal, and facilitative support where the principal is the purveyor of all skills and capacities needed to achieve stated goals and the coach uses mediative questions to realize the full internal capacity and self-directedness of a principal (Aguilar, 2013; Bauer & Brazer, 2013; Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; Close, 2013; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Goff, Guthrie, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014; Goldring et al., 2018; Hayashi, n.d.; Houchens, Hurt, Stobaugh, & Keedy, 2012; Huff et al., 2013; James-Ward, 2011; Krasnoff, 2015; LEAD Connecticut, 2013; Lindle et al., 2017; Lochmiller, 2014; Meddaugh, 2012; Morten & Lawler, 2016; Patti, Holzer, Stern, & Brackett, 2012; Retna, 2015; Robertson, 2009; Robinson, Horan, & Nanavati, 2009; Rogers, Hauserman, & Skytt, 2016; Silver, Lochmiller, Copland, & Tripps, 2009; Stevenson, 2017; Tally, 2011; Wise & Cavazos, 2017). Bloom et al. (2005) proposed a principal coaching model, Blended Coaching, that articulates to principal coaches the when and how of moving to and from those three types of support with the collaboration approach placed in the middle of the coaching continuum. This type of flexibly designed model is common in the literature and is described below in more detail. Finally, a more nuanced aspect of some coaching models is a purpose larger than a single
person. Many developers of school leadership coaching models seek to influence the whole school as an organization and support aspects of the school renewal process. All of these different aspects or types of school leadership coaching models are not distinctly different from each other as they have considerable overlap. A deeper dive understanding of each is critical to developing a foundational understanding of the complexity in how leadership coaches experience their role in implementing the models.

**Contextualized Coaching Support**

One aspect of coaching models that seems to be a critical component of most, if not all, school leadership models is that school leaders need support that is tailored to their personal learning needs and the context of the school in which they serve (Barnett et al., 2015; Bloom et al., 2005; Bloom et al., 2003; King & Bouchard, 2011; Retna, 2015; Rogers et al., 2016; Simkins, Coldwell, Caillau, Finlayson, & Morgan, 2006; Stevenson, 2017). Not only does this give a school leader an opportunity to receive timely learning opportunities that are tied to daily practices and experiences (Warren & Kelsen, 2013), but also allows the coach the opportunity to apply techniques that are appropriate for the individual (Bloom et al., 2005). This is consistent with Experiential Learning theories that suggest learning experiences need to be as authentic as possible (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). What is more authentic than a school leader’s actual school? Coaching a principal in their school enables the principal to construct meaning and learning off previous and current experiences as they engage in reflection-on-practice and develop self-directed learning skills to support the meta-cognition needed for reflection-in-practice (Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Houchens et al., 2012; Morten & Lawler, 2016). A strength of in-context support is the immediacy in which a principal can engage with a coach when the social interactions and cognitive processes are still conscious and tangible for the principal.
In a synthesis of school reform literature, King and Bouchard (2011) note that different supports need to be provided to different schools and that, without that individualized context-dependent support, little can be expected in organizational change. A coach not taking the time to understand the school’s context can cause frustration and tension with the principal. Studies from Rogers, Hauserman, and Skytt (2016) and Lackritz (2017) both found that a leadership coach lacking a contextual understanding of the school led to a disconnect between what the coach wanted to focus on and what the principal felt was important. That led to instances of disagreement on who was directing the interactions between coach and principal.

**Feedback**

Another critical component of school leadership coaching models is contextualized and specific feedback (Albarracín & Wyer, 2000; Bloom et al., 2005; Goff et al., 2014; Hindman, Rozzelle, Ball, & Fahey, 2015). When No Child Left Behind (2001) brought schools, school districts, and states accountability measures tied to lagging indicators of student success, these lagging indicators instantly became front and center on school progress reports and a center piece of success indicators within evaluation frameworks. This is why Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) can point out that specific, accurate, and timely feedback is absent from conversations regarding leadership development. Speck and Knipe (2005) tie feedback to a necessity of adult learning and add that the feedback needs to be positive, contextually relevant, and growth-oriented. Studies have shown that while feedback alone is insufficient to change the behaviors of school principals, leadership behaviors can be impacted when specific and timely feedback is combined with school leadership coaching (Goff et al., 2014). Feedback that is combined with leadership coaching can also increase the likelihood that a school leader will implement what they have learned (Knight, 2009). Other studies where feedback was not an integral part of the
leadership coaching model design pointed to the importance of feedback (Bloom et al., 2005; Krasnoff, 2015; Reeves & Allison, 2009; Wise & Hammack, 2011). In Blended Coaching, providing feedback is described as a foundational coaching skill that calls for the coach and school leader to agree upon what data is to be collected for what purpose and grounded in data that is aligned with current school goals (Bloom et al., 2005).

**Collaboration in Coaching Relationships**

Some coaching models identify collaboration as a key element of the school leadership coaching model (Close, 2013; Flückiger et al., 2017; Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Goldring et al., 2018; James-Ward, 2011; Lackritz, 2017; Lauzon, 2015; Meddaugh, 2012; Patti et al., 2012; Reiss, 2007; Tally, 2011). This aspect of coaching is accentuated in models that support peer or group coaching (Close, 2013; Goldring et al., 2018). Flückiger et al. (2017) make a distinction between mentoring and coaching by including collaboration that is focused on co-constructing learning as part of a coaching relationship. Robertson (2009) describes how important collaborative partnerships are in coaching relationships with school leaders and across the whole school organization to invert traditional leadership practices and develop open and trusting relationships in schools that are necessary for organizational learning. Only a few leadership coaching models in the current literature explicitly detail out the conditions in which a coach would take a collaborative approach. In the Blended Coaching model, the coach should take a collaborative approach when both principal and coach possess knowledge or skills that, when combined, can achieve a given task or goal (Bloom et al., 2005). Key to a collaborative approach in a coaching relationship would be continued reflection after the collaboration has ended. If the goal is to increase the capacity of the school leader to be an instructional leader, support a school-change initiative, build a foundation of trust in the school staff, or any other
worthy goal, the coach should pay attention to when and how they step in with any expertise and seek to build off the principal’s strengths to ensure the principal can achieve the same task or goal in the future (Bloom et al., 2005).

**Instructional Coaching Models**

Similar to school leaders mentorship models, there are school leader coaching models that put the coach in a place of expertise in a coaching relationship (Meddaugh, 2012; Retna, 2015; Tally, 2011). While it is not the focus of the Blended Coaching model, instructional coaching is called for when it is clear that the school leader lacks the capacity, be it knowledge or skills, that are required for action (Bloom et al., 2005). Developers of this model are keen to point out that this is the case only if the need for action is immediate, as a facilitative approach might miss the often-short window of time to act appropriately. Meddaugh (2012) talks about an Expertise Model of coaching where the coach acts as a consultant. The power of decision-making lies within the hands of the coach and there is an assumption that the school leader lacks the knowledge or skill to solve a problem. Retna (2015) describes a model that engages experienced principals as coaches for novice school leaders. This model relies on the coaches to use their experience to be application-oriented to challenges that the new principal faces.

What is interesting to point out is that a trusted coach is very valuable to new school leaders. In a study on how coaching impacts the performance of principals with one to five years of experience, Tally (2011) found that all seven principals that researchers interviewed pointed to the value of the school leadership coach (all retired principals) who could guide, support, and monitor their performance. While advocates of a more facilitative model of school leadership coaching might bring up a quotation about giving a man a fish or teaching him how to fish, there is something to be said about listening to the expressed needs of novice principals.
Facilitative Coaching Models

Some coaching models seek more transformational learning for the coachee by creating a relationship where the coach works to support self-directed personal learning of the coachee (Abbott, 2010; Aguilar, 2013; Barnett et al., 2015; King & Bouchard, 2011; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Houchens et al., 2012; Krasnoff, 2015; Lee, 2010; Lindle et al., 2017; Meddaugh, 2012; Morten & Lawler, 2016; Patti et al., 2012; Retna, 2015; Rogers et al., 2016; Stevenson, 2017). Such models have gained attention in the literature on principal coaching due to results observed in studies of teacher coaching (Bloom et al., 2003; Medrich, Fitzgerald, & Skomsvold, 2013). Models such as Cognitive Coaching use conversation protocols to mediate learning and increase the internal capacities of the coachee toward self-directed learning (Costa & Garmston, 2016). Aguilar (2013) suggests the use of these type of facilitative coaching, like Cognitive Coaching or her model of Transformational Coaching, to help a principal live in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) and influence, not direct, the principal’s beliefs, behaviors, and being through the habit of reflective practice. She makes a distinction between a coach and a mentor, who might provide support to a principal in navigating the system, providing technical support, or making suggestions.

In a study of a district leadership coaching initiative’s impact on the instructional leadership of novice principals in an urban district, Abbott (2010) describes an elbow-to-elbow coaching model where the school leadership coach sat alongside the school leader and applied a coaching model using reflective and conferring strategies. Robertson (2009) includes in her description of an effective coaching model the use of facilitation of the learning process. This will allow a coachee to take ownership of their own learning and work to continually develop the coaching relationship and process. There is no doubt that this type of ownership would be
beneficial as it is important for the school leader to feel intrinsically motivated to achieve the goals of the coaching relationship (Aguilar, 2017).

In bridging social psychology with school leadership coaching, Houchens, Hurt, Stobaugh, and Keedy (2012) describe a coaching protocol that is derived from the theories of practice framework articulated by Argyris and Schon (1974). Their model uses a set of reflective questions to guide a school leader through a double-loop learning protocol focused on a given challenge. Researchers guided school leaders to develop a theory of action associated with the challenge and gather feedback on that theory of action for subsequent revisions to the theory and monitoring process. Researchers likened this approach to what Bloom et al. (2005) described as Transformational Coaching because it sought a transformation in how a school leader would approach a given challenge.

**Blended Models**

Similar to ideas that describe Situational Leadership are school leadership coach models that blend instructional and facilitative coaching models into one flexibly designed model (Bloom et al., 2005; Goff et al., 2014; James-Ward, 2011; LEAD Connecticut, 2013; Lindle et al., 2017; Lochmiller, 2014; Robinson et al., 2009; Shoho et al., 2012; Silver et al., 2009;). These models call for coaches to stimulate and facilitate cognitive dissonance, often through the use of data, and use that to motivate alternative actions. Since behavioral theory suggests that a person’s awareness of a problem is not sufficient to bring about any change in behavior (Norcross, Krebs, & Prochaska, 2011), some flexible school leadership coaching models call for providing individualized support to principals that adapt to their levels of knowledge and skill around a specific problem of practice. Being flexible with these multiple styles of coaching enables the school leadership coach to help principals and other school leaders learn new practices and new
mindsets. An instructional approach would be applied when a school leadership coach is helping the coachee focus on new practices or new ways of doing something and would support the principal in increasing knowledge in skills through the coach modeling or guiding the principal towards new learning (Bloom et al., 2005). But when a coachee needs support in developing a new mindset, or a new way of being, a facilitative approach would be more appropriate (Bloom et al., 2005). A facilitative approach would support the principal constructing their own expertise through reflection. Within these types of coaching models, the support a coach provides would ebb and flow along a continuum between these two types of support. Transitioning to and from each of these styles of coaching is based on the coach’s assessment of the coachee’s needs and always in pursuit of collective goals of the coaching relationship (Bloom et al., 2003).

There are other models that seem to blend types of support provided by the school leadership coach. Goff et al. (2014) studied a set of school leadership coaches who were not directed towards a specific set of protocols for the coaching sessions, but instead focused discussion around teacher feedback on the principal’s instructional leadership. Authors described the dual purpose of the school leadership coach as facilitative in supporting the principal to make meaning out of the feedback and to suggest or motivate subsequent actions or next steps. In a study on cross-district coaching where experienced district administrators coached school-building leaders, Lindle et al. (2017) found that using a model that blends various approaches while accommodating emotions was an important aspect in coaching relationships. They developed a logic model for coaching rural school leaders where their coaches confer, monitor, and consult building leaders to influence the community, school climate, parents, teachers, and students.
Models that Impact the Organization

Some of the models described above fit in a category of school leadership coaching models that focus specifically on supporting the principal in creating an organization that learns (Aguilar, 2017; King & Bouchard, 2011; Flückiger et al., 2017; Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Goff et al., 2014; LEAD Connecticut, 2013; Wise & Hammack, 2011). These models ask coaches to use many of the aspects of and models for school leadership coaching as described above, but go further to support principals in building competencies related to relationship building, communication, facilitating learning, collecting data, providing necessary resources and support, and the ability to recognize and use best leadership practices and/or promote best instructional practices. Some of these models ground the coaching activities in a school-improvement or school renewal process (Bloom et al., 2005; King & Bouchard, 2011; LEAD Connecticut, 2013). The work of Wisconsin Idea Leadership Academy uses coaches to provide context sensitive support that generates collective ownership and builds individual and organizational capacity to develop a shared and sustained focus for the school (King & Bouchard, 2011). Another coaching model, the Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS), expands the idea of principal coaching by taking a behavioralist approach to support the principal and school leadership team (Freeman et al., 2017). Within this model, the coach seeks to develop the internal capacity of a school for implementing systemic reform initiatives through coaching the principal. This category of principal coaching model calls for coaching relationships to impact more than just the principal behaviors and extend coaching benefits to the organization through increased staff capacity and improved organizational practices.
Impacts of School Leadership Coaching

School leadership coaching requires resources. Not only monetary resources to compensate the leadership coach for the time they devote to coaching the school leader, but also in time of the school leader who, as already discussed, has become more burdened with additional responsibilities with each decade that passes. It is important to question whether or not the associated costs are worth the investment. While this specific line of inquiry is still in its infancy, there are promising results that point towards school leadership coaches having a meaningful impact on not only personal capacities of the school principal, but also school conditions, teacher practices, and most importantly student achievement.

Impact on School Leaders

Many studies on school leadership coaching look at how the intervention impacts the principal (Abbott, 2010; Barnett et al., 2015; Bauer & Brazer, 2013; Bickman, Goldring, De Andrade, Breda, & Goff, 2012; Bossi, 2008; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Drucker, 2015; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Farver & Holt, 2015; Fox, 2009; Goff et al., 2014; Hert, 2010; Houchens et al., 2012; Lackritz, 2017; Patti et al., 2012; Warren & Kelsen, 2013). For example, in a survey of principals who are receiving school leadership coaching (Goff et al., 2014), principals reported that the specific coaching competencies were directly supportive of their implementation of best practices. In studies of the impact of school leadership coaching, it is common to find some sort of analysis on the instructional leadership behaviors of the principal (Drucker, 2015; Goff et al., 2014; Warren & Kelsen, 2013). For example, Warren and Kelsen (2013) used a modified version of the Balanced Leadership Framework questionnaire along with three qualitative data sources to show how principals who received school leadership coaching had increased their capacity to build purposeful community within nine leadership responsibilities: input, affirmation,
relationship, visibility, situational awareness, communication, optimizer, ideals/beliefs, and culture. Survey results showed growth in all nine leadership responsibilities and interviews from coaches and principals, along with coaching logs, supported the observed growth in the self-assessment data. Other studies looked at instructional leadership from self-assessment surveys (Drucker, 2015), leadership coach surveys (Drucker, 2015), teacher surveys (Fox, 2009; Goff et al., 2014), or qualitative means (Abbott, 2010; Bloom et al., 2003; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Farver & Holt, 2015; Flückiger et al., 2017; Fox, 2009; Hert, 2010; Houchens et al., 2012; Lackritz, 2017; Patti et al., 2012) and all found positive impacts on instructional leadership.

Studies have also looked passed instructional leadership and into the cognitive capacities that would support a principal in their role. These studies show that school leadership coaching supports principals in gaining self-confidence (Barnett et al., 2015; Farver & Holt, 2015), emotional expression (Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Lackritz, 2017), political astuteness (Close, 2013), and self-directed learning and intellectual independence (Robinson et al., 2009). Lackritz (2017) found that school leadership coaching supported time and people management skills of experienced principals of charter schools. It is clear from the literature that coaching will have an impact on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to positively impact the behavior of school principals.

**Impact on School Conditions**

As principals increase their instructional leadership capacity by becoming better communicators, being more visible, or supporting a school’s instructional culture, the whole school is being influenced in a positive way (Aguilar, 2017; Barnett et al., 2015; Bloom et al., 2003; Farver & Holt, 2015; Patti et al., 2012; Ray, 2017; Tolhurst, 2010). By combining aspects of leadership that raise motivation and capacity of school personnel, the larger organization will
see benefits in increased staff flexibility to new roles or tasks and the systems that support the organizational goals (Tolhurst, 2010). Barnett, Henry, and Vann (2015) note that principals who engage in coaching relationships can positively affect the overall climate and culture of a building which supports all school improvement initiatives. This is done through the school leadership coach having a positive influence on the principals’ personal and professional resiliency. Bloom et al.’s (2003) comparative case studies of principals who were receiving coaching and those who did not suggests that those principals receiving the support had increased the amount of time and energy spent on instructional issues of the school.

Bossi’s (2008) study of school principals, assistant principals, and district coordinators that have received at least two years of leadership coaching from coaches certified in Blended Coaching remained in their positions longer than state averages. Research has shown that principal turnover can lead to lower student achievement, but as Mascall and Leithwood (2010) point out, lower student achievement might also cause high principal turnover. Either way, reducing the turnover of principals is a good sign that positive things are taking place or will take place within a school and might alone make the case for investing in school leadership coaches.

**Impact on Teachers**

Research into the role of the principal in impacting the success of students has led to suggestions that the principal can have a positive impact on student achievement indirectly through their support of teacher practices that directly lead to positive gains (Leithwood et al., 2003). The research on school leadership coaching shows rich preliminary evidence that the practice can impact teacher practices (Abbott, 2010; Fox, 2009; Hert, 2010; Houchens et al., 2012; Lackritz, 2017), teacher trust and collegiality (Ray, 2017) and personal problem solving skills (Farver & Holt, 2015).
Houchens et al. (2012) studied the impact of a coaching protocol that sought to enhance the instructional leadership of principals through supporting double-loop learning when interacting with struggling teachers. Each principal chose one teacher that was struggling in the school to guide coaching sessions and focus on for the year. While all four principals found the coaching protocol useful and increased both the principal’s confidence and understanding of effective instructional leadership, two of the teachers that were the object of focus failed to make sufficient instructional improvements and were let go at the end of the year. While the sample size of this study was small and the intervention dosage was among the lower amounts of leadership coaching throughout an entire year, the mixed results warrant a deeper investigation into the impact that a school leadership coach can have on teacher instructional practices and, if indeed coaching can achieve this goal, how long it would take for that impact to be meaningful.

Impact on Students

The literature on what impact school leadership coaching has on student achievement is also young and promising. Search procedures for this study resulted in only one article regarding this specific type of impact (Bossi, 2008) where student test scores were monitored from schools where 25 principals, 25 assistant principals, and district coordinators were participating in a two-year coaching program provided by coaches certified in Blended Coaching. Results suggested that not only can a school leadership coach impact student achievement within the first year of program implementation, but that student growth can be sustained in subsequent years.

Limitations of Current Literature

Of all studies included in this literature review on the impact that principal coaching can have on principals, their schools, teachers, or students, none were of rigorous design that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards with or without reservations. While such rigorous
designs do not imply findings are useful in understanding how or when a program works effectively, the mere presence of such designs suggests maturity of the specific line of inquiry as researchers and funders both agree that a specific program is developed well enough to test its impact in a large sample. The next section will explore patterns in how school leadership models and programs are implemented, e.g., how school leadership coaches are recruited for a specific school and how they are developed as coaches to implement a given coaching model.

**Implementation of School Leadership Coaching Models**

With all the potential benefits that school leadership coaching can bring to principals and their schools, teachers and students, it is prudent to consider the consistency of these programs, so when two different researchers are both talking about school leadership coaching, it is safe to say they are talking about the same thing. Through a thorough review of the literature, there are two main aspects of school leadership coaching programs that impact the implementation of the programs. Bloom et al. (2003) identified these two aspects early on in the nascent conversation on school leadership coaches when they noted that “coaches must be carefully selected … and must receive training” (p. 23). Below is a review of what emerges from the literature to be important in who is recruited for school leadership coach positions, how they are selected and matched to schools, what training experiences are provided prior to placement, and how they are further supported during coaching assignment.

**Selection of a Coach**

Several researchers on school leadership coaching provide guidance on who should deliver coaching to school leaders. Ellison and Hayes (2006) identify technical factors associated with hiring a district leadership coach such as district finances along with being thoughtful regarding the culture and history of principal support within the district. This would influence
decisions regarding what type of support is needed, how often, and whether the support should be provided by an internal or external school leadership coach. Another discussion relates to what qualifications a school leadership coach should have, with some suggesting that former principal experience is not necessary (Aguilar, 2017; Bloom et al., 2005; Reiss, 2007), while others give reasons why such former experience is so important (Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Lauzon, 2015). Each of these topics is discussed in further detail below; however, the most important thread across the literature on the selection of a school leadership coach is the value of the relationship that is about to develop between the school leader and his or her coach.

**Trust and rapport.** Key to a successful coaching relationship, particularly between a principal and his or her coach, is the connection between the coach and coachee (Bloom et al., 2005; Bloom et al., 2003; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Farver & Holt, 2015; Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Hobson, 2003; Krasnoff, 2015; Lauzon, 2015; Robertson, 2009; Shoho et al., 2012; Stevenson, 2017; Tally, 2011; Wise & Hammack, 2011). As a school leadership coach comes into a school, a principal can feel like their leadership is being challenged or embarrassed that their need for support is on display for the whole staff to see. This could create an environment that does not feel safe for a principal and necessitates that coaches diligently work on building a trusting relationship where the principal feels secure in their ability to continue leading the school (Stevenson, 2017).

To build this trusting relationship, there are many nuggets of wisdom in the literature on school leadership coaching. One suggestion is to trust the facilitative coaching process (Ray, 2017). The metacognition, self-reflection, alignment of thoughts and understanding through paraphrasing all support the development of trust. Coaching also aids in aligning the values and
goals of the individual and organization, which also develops trust between the coach and coachee (Ray, 2017). Other suggestions raise awareness of the importance for a heavy dose of time between the coach and school leaders at the beginning of the relationship to kick start safe, trusting, and honest relationships (Rogers et al., 2016). Bloom et al. (2005) elaborate further by recommending that coaches remain fully present for the coach when they are together, provide emotional support as needed, and demonstrate sincerity, reliability, and competence. Reiss (2007) describes establishing trust as a core competency of school leadership coaches with the coach keeping the focus of their time on the school leader while showing concern for their individual needs. And due to the various situations and individual needs that a school leader might have at the onset of a coaching relationship, Reiss devotes a whole chapter of her book to approaching the relationship with care and concern for the coach, relieving fears, suspending judgment, and aligning vision to overcome any initial resistance from the school leader.

The critical need for trust between school leaders and their coach has showed up in virtually every study on school leadership coaches. Stevenson (2017) notes that all principals in their study believed that their coach wanted what was best for them as individuals, which opened doors for all other goals that needed to be achieved. This was also true in the study of seven novice principals from urban schools. A major finding from a study on school leadership coaching is that the presence of a trusting relationship enables the skill development of the principal (Tally, 2011). These two studies suggest that a solid relational foundation is necessary to develop the capacity of school leaders and any conversation regarding the selection of school leadership principals must place the relationship as a key factor from the very beginning.

**Former professional experiences.** Regardless of stance on whether one believes that former experience in a given role is necessary or not as a coach, the research is clear that the
competencies of a coach outweigh the skills that are associated with a given former role. For example, Shoho et al. (2012) note how the success of a former principal does not guarantee one would come to the table with those tools needed to be a successful school leadership coach. Bloom et al. (2005) support this idea, noting that exceptional school leaders may not have the professional knowledge of a school leadership coach or the interpersonal skills needed for the role. But indeed, this conversation matters as reflected through a phenomenological study of how school leadership coaches experience their role as coaches. Backus (2018) found that school leadership coaches reported that they personally drew from their professional background to help the school leaders develop and grow.

Within the range of models being utilized with the various skills necessary across the different coaching frameworks, recruitment efforts of principal coaches often lean toward applicants with prior experience as a principal (Bauer & Brazer, 2013; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Robinson et al., 2009). In an effort to improve principal coaching practices, Huff et al. (2013) recruited seven coaches who were all former principals to implement a multi-phase coaching model. Retired principals were also used for the studies by Houchens et al. (2012), Haller (2016), Robinson et al. (2009), James-Ward (2011), Lindle et al. (2017), Morton and Lawler (2016), Rogers et al. (2016), Tally (2011), and Warren and Kelsen (2013). Researchers have found the reputation that a previously successful principal brings to their role as a school leadership coach matters to the psyche of the principals being coached (Lauzon, 2015) and the commitment of the coach themselves (Tally, 2011). An important dimension of the coaching relationship, the trust that the school leaders has in the coach, is further supported when a coach has shown expertise in the content knowledge required as a school leader (Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017).
Studies on school leadership coaching have utilized district administrators as the coaches (Goff et al., 2014; Goldring et al., 2018) although some researchers argue against the use of district administrators, or those in superordinate positions of authority of a principal, as a leadership coach citing the difficulty a principal would have in developing a completely open and vulnerable relationship with a supervisor (Bloom et al., 2005). Others recognize this situation as sensitive and suggest that if a supervisor is to coach a school leader, it must not be connected to supervision or evaluation processes (Aguilar, 2017). A study funded by the Wallace Foundation looked to empower and equip principal supervisors at the district level to increase the instructional leadership of the principal (Goldring et al., 2018). This leveraged time that is already being spent by senior level administrators at the central office supporting principals as a building manager to also include supporting the principal with instructional leadership. Researchers found that there was often a high need for supporting these district administrators in their understanding of high-quality instruction, which took time away from conversations regarding how to increase the instructional leadership of the principal (Goldring et al., 2018). This could be the result of the current work force coming through the ranks to their district position prior to the shift in our understanding of the practices of a principal that are positively associated with student achievement. Despite ongoing job-embedded and non-job-embedded training for these district administrators, there was still a meaningful amount of variation in the implementation of the coaching model in frequency and intensity across principals with some principals feeling as though they had not been coached. However, the district administrators did increase their understanding of instructional leadership and high-quality instruction, while also increasing the amount of attention given to instructional leadership, when meeting with assigned school leaders. Other studies also included district administrators as coaches for school
leadership; however none noted any specific benefits of having school leaders coached by school leadership coaches (James-Ward, 2011; Lindle et al., 2017; Silver et al., 2009).

Studies on leadership coaching have also pulled from convenience samples of those already acting as leadership coaches. James-Ward’s (2011) study seeking to develop an effective coaching process for school leaders used those who had extensive experience supporting principals in the district as mentors. Researchers used the perspectives of these experienced school leadership mentors to gain insights on how to develop a coaching process that was flexible to the varying contexts within schools across a single district. The recruitment efforts of Lochmiller’s (2014) study on the support principal coaches provide to principals included coaches who had already been working as principal coaches who also completed a three-day training on blended coaching. Goff et al.’s (2015) study of the effectiveness of principal coaching on leadership behaviors recruited both former principals and instructional leaders that had been specifically trained to coach leadership within schools. Yet it is worth nothing that in these studies, researchers found discrepancies in both the type and amount of coaching support provided to principals.

Application process. Even though the careful selection of school leadership coaches has been suggested to be a critical process to the success of a coaching relationship (Bloom et al., 2003) there are few studies that speak to how their coaches were selected. For example, their evaluation of how school leadership coaches implemented a multi-phase coaching model, Huff et al. (2013) described a selection process that required candidates to submit written responses to questions that were posed to them along with an interview protocol for each candidate. This gave the researchers opportunities to assess each candidate’s ability to provoke meaningful conversation about a set of teacher perception data while decreasing the defensiveness and
increasing the motivation of a principal. Others suggest activities such as asking for letters of recommendations that specifically address competencies associated with coaching, checking references, or requiring credentialing certification from the an organization like the International Coach Federation or the International Association of Coaches (Bloom et al., 2005; Reiss, 2007). What these studies have found is that the knowledge and skills associated with both instructional leadership and coaching are critical to the coaching experience and need to be considered during the application process.

Matching of school leadership coaches. The matching of a school leadership coach with a particular principal is the kickoff to a critical relationship and, as such, needs to be approached with prudence. As noted above, the importance of trust and rapport cannot be understated. To this end, researchers suggest the conversation regarding such matches include the needs of the principal as much as possible (Bloom et al., 2005; Lochmiller, 2014). In addition to any identified personal needs that might be taken into consideration, careful consideration should be given to match leadership coaches with situations that they are familiar or comfortable (Shoho et al., 2012; Silver et al., 2009; Warren & Kelsen, 2013). For example, in a study on a school leadership coaching program for new principals as they transition out of a university-based principal preparation program, Silver et al. (2009) found that when researchers placed a school leadership coach in an unfamiliar context, it led to misunderstandings between coach and principal. While the school leadership coaching literature rarely describes the matching process, Lochmiller (2014) described a process where the program director played a heavy role in matching school leadership coaches with a particular school. Researchers considered responses from a survey of principals and biographical information on the coach to facilitate the matching process. The program director used multiple sources of data that included a self-assessment of
the principal, school characteristics, and the skills of the coach. While this proved to be the most thorough description of the matching process for coaches and school leaders, there was no conversation regarding where and how the process was successful.

Another aspect to sensibly consider in matching a school leader with a coach is whether an internal or external coach would work best for the particular school leader (Bloom et al., 2005; Reiss, 2007). Those who advocate for an external coach point to the outside perspective that an external coach can bring, but also note how important the reputation is when an external coach is brought in to a district (Bloom et al., 2003; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Ray, 2017). Some, however, note specific benefits that can be realized when an internal coach is considered. Those benefits include a shorter time to develop trust and rapport between coach and school leader (Ellison & Hayes, 2006), quicker access to contextual knowledge of school and district processes and procedures (Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017), and a relationship of trust and confidentiality between coach and principal (Tally, 2011). Despite the importance placed on the selection and matching process, no study described a process in which principals or other school leaders played a role or had a voice in which school leadership coach researchers matched with their school. With what we know about the importance of these coaching relationships is that including principal voices in the process could help develop trust and rapport at the onset of the relationship and could lead to a more consistent implementation of the coaching model.

Development of School Leadership Coaches

As noted above, few studies of leadership coaches describe selection processes that go passed the former work experiences of the candidates. A minimum experience as a former principal often seems to be the sole determinant of whether a candidate is selected as a leadership coach with only a few studies, as described above, having also tapped into current or former
district administrators or those already acting as a leadership coach or mentor in an alternative setting. This leads to a conversation regarding whether a demonstrated command of the role of a principal is a necessary condition for a successful leadership coaching relationship. Reiss (2007) contends that a coach does not need content expertise in the field of the coachee as the communication and relational skills of the coach can, independent from content expertise, facilitate the learning. She also suggests that situations where the coach has professional experience regarding the current situation of the coachee, it is difficult for the coach to remain in coaching mode and not break out of that role and consult the principal based on their own experiences. Reeves and Allison (2009) also promote a model of leadership coaching that is not dependent on the coach’s expertise with the profession of the coachee. They do, however, acknowledge the important role that a person with that associated expertise, like a consultant or mentor, can play in the development of a principal. Other researchers describe a cognitive affect that a school leadership coach’s previous success in a leadership role can have (Bloom et al., 2005; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Lauzon, 2015). They suggest that a positive reputation of the school leadership coach creates a safety net for the school leader and sets a foundation of trust and respect that is so important to the coaching relationship.

Nonetheless, all researchers studying school leadership coaching agree that the success of a coaching relationship rests upon the school leadership coach having the cognitive capacity to establish trust and adapt their support to meet individual needs of the school leaders. This includes very specific types of knowledge, a wide-variety of skills, and certain dispositions that are supportive of a given coaching model.

With all the variation in school leadership coaching models, researchers and districts supporting school leaders through coaching should design training and development
opportunities that align with the cognitive capacities, e.g., knowledge, skills, dispositions, that will support model implementation and work with the selected candidates to accentuate their strengths and provide additional support to the coach when growth or refinement is needed.

**Cognitive capacities of a school leadership coach.** If former experience as a school or district leader is not in itself sufficient for a school leadership coach to successfully implement a school leadership coaching model, what is the knowledge that is important for school leadership coaches to have? What are the skills that support their work? What dispositions will support an effective coaching relationship with a school leader? A more complete understanding of these necessary cognitive capacities can support the development of coaching initiatives or programs for school leaders.

The literature on school leadership coaching suggests that coaches need knowledge in two important domains. First, going back to the ability to build trust and rapport, some researchers suggest a high degree of knowledge around the important decisions that principals make as they manage the school, support the instructional core, and access district resources to support the school improvement process (Abbott, 2010; Aguilar, 2017; Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017). This knowledge works to assure school leaders that they are moving in a positive direction. Coaching school leaders, similar to other coaching situations, also requires a great depth of knowledge associated with different coaching strategies (Bloom et al., 2005; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Neumerski, 2013; Reiss, 2007; Shoho et al., 2012) and adult learning (Aguilar, 2017). For example, the developers of Cognitive Coaching promote skills associated with paralanguage, response behaviors, structuring, and questioning (Costa & Garmston, 2016). This requires a great deal of knowledge about the importance of each practice and time to deepen
learning through ample opportunities applying the skills to identify, assess, and increase the efficacy, craftsmanship, consciousness, and flexibility of the coachee.

To successfully apply this knowledge into positive behaviors, as noted in the example above, it is important that school leadership coaches acquire the skill set that facilitates successful implementation of the coaching model. For example, when school leadership coaching models are instructional in nature or ask coaches to use a flexible model, coaches may be required to model for a school leader or provide very explicit directions in how to perform a given task. This requires not just the knowledge of instructional leadership or managerial processes, but also the ability to perform the task effectively.

As most school leadership models include the mediation of thinking as some part of their model, applying the knowledge of coaching skills is also of upmost importance (Aguilar, 2017; Bloom et al., 2005; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Krasnoff, 2015; Reiss, 2007; Simkins et al., 2006; Stevenson, 2017; Wise & Hammack, 2011). The skills that stand out in these conversations in the literature include: communicating effectively (Aguilar, 2017; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Krasnoff, 2015; Reiss, 2007; Wise & Hammack, 2011), flexibly applying skills to meet the needs of a variety of situations and coachees (Bloom et al., 2005; King & Bouchard, 2011; Neumerski, 2013; Retna, 2015; Robertson, 2009; Simkins et al., 2006), developing relationships of mutual trust, respect, and rapport (Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Krasnoff, 2015; Reiss, 2007; Wise & Hammack, 2011), and mediating thinking towards relevant goals (Aguilar, 2017; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Krasnoff, 2015; Reiss, 2007; Stevenson, 2017; Wise & Hammack, 2011).

Also present in the school leadership coaching literature is an emphasis on specific dispositions that are important in the relationship between school leaders and their coach. While included in these dispositions are that of being: a listener (Bloom et al., 2005; Gibson &
McDaniel-Hall, 2017), relational (Bloom et al., 2005; Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Farver & Holt, 2015; Krasnoff, 2015; Neumerski, 2013; Reiss, 2003), mindful (Bloom et al., 2005), and flexible (Krasnoff, 2015; Lackritz, 2017; Neumerski, 2013), the most important of dispositions across the literature of a school leadership coach is that of a learner (Aguilar, 2017; Huff et al., 2013; Reiss, 2003; Robertson, 2009). Robertson (2009) describes a successful coach as one who enters the relationship as a co-learner that is ever present to maximize the learning of both self and the coachee, along with the coach continually adapting to the moment.

While it could be assumed that a former successful school principal or district administrator would have many of the cognitive capacities described above, it would not be so wise to assume that they have all the competencies needed to be a successful coach in any given situation. Even if a sample of former principals or district administrators were thought to have the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions, they would all have likely faced different experiences in their former roles and thus come to the table with different understandings of the work that needs to be done and what model of coaching might be most appropriate within a given initiative. For a school leadership coaching model to be applied in concert with the research foundation that informed the model, careful selection and matching of school leadership coaches must be followed by sound training and development.

The complexity of the cognitive capacities that a school leadership coach brings to the table in another important aspect of school leadership coaching programs. With such intricacy in the role, it is important to understand what the knowledge base advises on how to train, develop, and support recruited school leadership coaches for school leadership coaching roles. The cognitive capacities described above can be new to a retired principal or district administrator whose role required little to no knowledge or skills associated with coaching (Reiss, 2007). What
we know about adult learners is that they need to connect new knowledge to their current social environment and build new learning from previous experiences. A principal or district administrator position can be quite different than a coaching role. Thus, training and development efforts are crucial for school leadership coaches to monitor their understanding and respond to identified growth edges as to continually support refinement the knowledge, skills, and dispositions as a coach.

**Pre-service training.** After the recruitment, onboarding, and placement of school leadership coaches, new coaches need support in understanding the coaching model and what the nature of the coaching role prior to entering the school. Bloom et al. (2005) suggest a formal training experience even prior to the selection period. In a study of a coaching program for supporting experienced principals in Australia, Barnett et al. (2015) describe a program’s two-day preservice training where coaches learn about their role, the stages of the coaching model to be implemented, and to explore effective coaching skills. While two days seems like a minimal amount of training compared to certification programs described above, this is typical of the amount of training provided for studies of school leadership coaching initiatives which, based on the yield of research for this study, range from one day to 40 hours of pre-service training, if any training was discussed at all.

**Job-embedded support.** What is described slightly more in the literature is the amount and nature of in-service support that school leadership coaches are provided upon placement at a school site. While some school leadership coaching programs have the coaches and principals attend the same professional development activities, Aguilar (2017) suggests that districts support leadership coaches with their own professional development opportunities that continue to build their unique craft. Bloom et al. (2005) suggest two types of support to provide school
leadership coaches: opportunities for peer observations and a community of practice for coaches. Through these two supports, the authors point to directing attention to what will increase coaches’ understanding of processes that support school improvement, the dispositions important to the coaching model, and specific coaching strategies they can flexibly apply in different situations.

In studies of school leadership programs or initiatives, the amount of in-service support provided to the coach varied by type and content. For example, in a program described by Abbott (2010), coaches attended training with their principals that focused on processes, systems, and structures that support school improvement. This seems to neglect the learning needs that a school leadership coach may have on those cognitive capacities associated with their role as a coach. Other studies focus in-service support of school leadership coaches on activities related to coaching (Bossi, 2008; Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Lindle et al., 2017; Lochmiller, 2014; Meddaugh, 2012; Silver et al., 2009). Goldring et al. (2018) described a school leadership coaching program that, in addition to providing training on the content of the coaching (instructional leadership), they also provided opportunities for coaches to receive feedback on their coaching. Within the program, coaches received one-on-one coaching and participated in peer observations with other coaches. Along the lines of supporting coaching activities, Huff et al. (2013) describe in-service training support for school leadership coaches that supports understanding of the phases within their coaching model, strategies for each phase, practice time for coaches, and coaches can receive feedback on observed coaching. These studies not only provide the content necessary to establish school leaders’ confidence in the knowledge and skills of the coach, but also the coaching strategies that can facilitate the thinking of school leaders.
While the amount of in-service support described in the literature ranged from two conversations per year (Lochmiller, 2014) to monthly meetings (Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017), what is clear is the importance of the job-embedded support. School leadership coaches have articulated their struggle with their own capacity to provide the needed support with discomfort with both coaching related content (Backus, 2018) and content associated with instructional leadership (Goldring et al., 2018). Other studies showed how the coaches enter into an unfamiliar role and need support to develop an understanding of their role and how to perform the role successfully (Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017; James-Ward, 2011).

An effective coaching model would have common objectives and clear protocols for how to achieve those goals and monitor progress and process along the way (Reeves & Allison, 2009). Bloom et al. (2005) advise that one of the critical components of a successful school leadership coach is one who has had sufficient professional development around the coaching process. The wide variation in how much coaching school leaders actually receive, along with the lack of detail about how coaches are selected, developed, and supported within research on school leadership coaching, calls into question any inferences that can be made about the impact of a given coaching model. For impact studies to accurately assess the effect that school leadership coaching can have on a school, further maturation of the research is needed to direct researchers and districts servicing school leaders with coaching initiatives toward selection, matching, and development practices that support consistent implementation of a given coaching model. Studies on school leadership coaching have questioned what type of support a school leader was actually provided (Abbott, 2010) and most reports describe very little detail about their approach to developing coaches. To mitigate program or intervention dilution, carefully
selected and placed school leadership coaches need on-going real-time support in understanding the research-based elements of the coaching model.

Chapter 2 Closure

The remainder of this dissertation includes the following chapters: Chapter 3 discusses the study’s context and methodology in light of the purpose and research questions. Findings from data collection and analysis will be presented in Chapter 4, followed by a discussion of the results in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology and the specific and intentional choices made in designing the study to meet the needs associated with the research questions. The purpose of this multi-case study was to understand and appreciate the learning experience of school leadership coaches who brought different strengths to their role and came from various prior work experiences. School leadership coaches’ experiences were explored within their social contexts through an adult learning framework called the Five Levels of Learning (Shen & Reeves, 2017). In addition, this study also proposed a new qualitative analytic approach using grounded theory elements within multiple case study research to meet the needs of a new line of inquiry where findings would require retaining the structure of individual cases. This served to inform the nature in which program implementers personally connected with, learned about, and lived out their role as school leadership coaches to meet the needs of the local context in which they served.

Research Purpose, Approach, and Rationale

The purpose of this multi-case study was to understand and appreciate the learning experiences of school leadership coaches with various strengths who came from several work experience backgrounds. That is, how the cognitive capacities, e.g., knowledge, skills, and dispositions that supported previous experiences manifested into new knowledge, skills, or dispositions that supported positive school leadership coach behaviors in response to training on
the ideas, approaches, and content of a specific coaching model while applying the model in a unique context.

To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions were investigated:

1. How does a school leadership coach draw from cognitive capacities associated with previous professional experiences to make personal connections with their role as a coach?

2. After selection and placement as a school leadership coach, how does a school leadership coach draw from cognitive capacities associated with previous professional experience to:
   a. Construct an understanding of the necessary knowledge, skills, or dispositions of a school leadership coach?
   b. Respond to training on a specific coaching model?
   c. Decide where, when, and how to apply aspects of an explicit coaching model to a given school context?
   d. Adapt to new learning in the coaches’ training?
   e. Identify and respond to opportunities for coaching engagements with the principal?

3. Over time, how does a school leadership coach draw from cognitive capacities associated with previous professional experience and/or their coaches’ training to:
   a. Seek out support to address challenges?
   b. Adapt to the specific coaching model of the program?

In this chapter, the methodological tradition of this research is described, followed by an in-depth explanation of the multi-case approach. A detailed methods section follows that
specifies steps regarding sample selection, data collection, and a new approach to data analysis, which blended techniques from grounded theory within a multiple case study approach to explore this new line of research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and a statement of researcher reflexivity.

**Blended Research Approach and Rationale**

This multiple case study investigated the stated research questions from a qualitative research tradition. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to choose among abductive, inductive and/or deductive analysis approaches to make sense of the meanings that individuals bring to problems in their natural setting (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The multiple case study approach allows the researcher to empirically investigate a phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 2009) across several distinct cases. This study also drew from elements of grounded theory within a case study design to investigate how school leadership coaches drew from capacities and dispositions associated with their previous work experiences as a former principal, a background as an administrator at the district or regional service agency level, or no experience in either role as they work directly with principals to develop the leadership systems, strategies, and behaviors needed to implement a school-renewal initiative with high fidelity and integrity. This new blended approach was necessary to navigate the new learning expected from a line of inquiry researchers have not yet explored.

**Contributions from multiple case study.** A multiple case study design was of paramount importance to answering this study’s research questions. Case study research relies on an in-depth study within and across cases, with each case representing a phenomenon bounded by a specified context (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). For this study, each school leadership coach represents a case for study within and across pre-determined groups associated
with their former experience (principal, district administrator, or neither). Key to case study research, this study sought to use thick description to build a careful descriptive analysis for each case that allows for relevant features of the local context to influence the analysis. Each case was instrumental to learning about the uniqueness and commonalities in how school leadership coaches engaged in the process of learning and applied a specific coaching model within a unique context. Cross case comparisons contributed to a deeper understanding of learning processes and how local features of each case impacted the learning. Without deep understanding of relevant dynamics within each case, cross-case analysis would be devoid of meaning (Bazeley, 2013). This study capitalized on the multi-case approach to distill common and relevant elements across cases that may influence elements of the perceptions, understandings, and behaviors associated with the work of school leadership coaches.

To meet the above goals, case study research uses data collection and analytical methods that focus on descriptive goals from the use of thick description of each case (Given, 2008). This approach facilitated the identification of commonalities and variations across all experiences of school leadership coaches. However, an analysis in multiple case study research often relies on an inductive or deductive analysis that begin with theories associated with the unit of study to compete with or complement such theories and explain complex causal events (Given, 2008; Yin, 2009). With the limited depth of the empirical research on school leadership coaching, a strong conceptual framework or theoretical basis from which to build the analysis is lacking. This study seeks to contribute to such a foundation and thus needs to adapt multiple case study techniques to allow for the interpretation of a particular social process (e.g., school leadership coaching), which is where tools of grounded theory are of upmost value (Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2018).
Contributions from grounded theory. Within an interactionism frame, grounded theory utilizes abductive reasoning within a systematic data collection and analysis frame to support theory construction (Clarke et al., 2018; Given, 2008). This study used such an abductive approach to investigate and interpret emerging concepts within the experiences and learning of school leadership coaches and to expand the set of plausible explanations for reported learning and behaviors that might not have been considered with an inductive or deductive approach (Danermark, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The in-depth description of a phenomenon bounded in a context of case study research is strengthened by the selection of cases that are theoretically important in that they are examples for or counter to specific theories (Given, 2008). Since the theoretical foundation around the experiences of school leadership coaches is in its infancy, this study utilizes selection criteria aligned with grounded theory research that sensitizes the analysis to theory through maximizing variation across the sample (Clarke et al., 2018).

The strengths of grounded theory methods are in theory development, which is key to beginning the conversation regarding how school leadership coaches draw from knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with their former work experiences. However, grounded theory techniques are focused on a single social unit experiencing a given phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, solely focusing on grounded theory collection and analysis techniques would have limited the findings of the study. While the aggregation of school leadership coaches to a singular social unit as described above has its benefits, it would also limit the study findings as our sample of school leadership coaches, as described below, bring prior professional experiences from many different social units within various levels of K-12 education and thus each present a unique case worthy of study. While participants in this study are sharing
experiences related to a social unit, e.g., school leadership coaches, this study required the development of a new analysis approach that drew from strengths associated with both grounded theory for the benefits described above and case study research to maintain the distinct contextual form of each case.

The pendulum within the field of educational research has brought many to develop research designs and analytic methods that provide increasingly reliable and valid information to practitioners about what works in education. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) has developed the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) to review existing literature of high-quality research and to communicate the effectiveness of interventions to educators and policymakers. The WWC then translates those reviews into practice guides that educators can then use to address specific challenges in their schools and classrooms (WWC, n.d.). However, educators feel that the research is not useful when the research doesn’t speak to the specific contextual factors that they experience in their school and district (Dynarski, 2015). This study’s development of a new qualitative approach meets a unique challenge that the greater educational research community faces as they look to investigate important factors associated with the implementation of flexible programs that can adapt to the needs of local contexts around a set of research-informed principles.

**Setting, Population, and Sample**

**Setting**

The setting for this study was through a broader study funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program to strengthen principal leadership and develop potential principal leaders among the teaching staff. Each of the participating schools, principals, and teacher leaders were focusing their leadership development
work on implementing research supported literacy initiatives with integrity and fidelity. All schools participating in the SEED Grant had made a commitment to improving literacy results for all students as part of a statewide literacy initiative and collaboration called the Reading Now Network. The schools that served as the setting for this dissertation study are all located in the western half of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula.

Within the SEED Grant Project, called the High Impact Leadership (HIL) Project, researchers from Western Michigan University used a variation on school leadership coaching called Implementation Facilitation to support 75 school principals and their teams of teacher leaders in implementing the High Impact Leadership Model for School Renewal (HIL Model). This involved the application of high impact (i.e., evidenced-based) leadership strategies to achieve transformative change in the school’s literacy program. The role of the Implementation Facilitators (i.e., school leadership coaches) was to situationally interact with the principal and school leadership team in learning, applying, and building school level processes that support the leadership practices that lead to high integrity and fidelity implementation and sustainability of a change initiative (in the case of this study, that initiative is literacy). We define high integrity and fidelity of implementation (i.e., HIFI) as implementation that adheres to the foundational principles, ideas, and theories of a research-supported initiative in a manner that is contextually appropriate for the school (Shen & Reeves, 2017). The HIL Model employs an adaptive training model for adult learning in a complex organization (Shen & Reeves, 2017), focused on the Five Levels of Learning to develop each school leadership coach’s capacity to support school leaders in independently implementing the HIL Model.

The school sites where the study participants served as Implementation Facilitators (i.e., school leadership coaches) serve both rural and urban areas. Twenty-seven schools were part of
three large urban districts and the rest are in more rural areas of the state. All 75 schools were identified as low achieving schools serving high poverty student populations. These schools also served as a first of two cohorts to receive the coaching intervention.

**Population**

The recruitment and selection process for HIL Project Facilitators (coaches) resulted in a pool of 47 potential participants with diverse backgrounds. This presented a unique opportunity to look for any evidence regarding how school leadership coaches were drawing upon those different previous work experiences to employ the coaching model for this grant project. As part of the formative evaluation for the HIL Project, project coordinators were also interested in using the understandings derived from HIL Project Facilitators (coaches) to adapt the manner in which the Project provides support to Facilitators during and after training to best meet their individual and collective needs. This dissertation study was a subset of an overall monitoring and evaluation plan for the HIL Project and served to provide insights on a timely and relevant line of research inquiry.

**Study Sample**

The population that the participants were selected from included 47 coaches placed in 75 elementary schools working with the HIL Project. Key to the recruitment and placement procedures that assigned school leadership coaches and schools together was giving the schools, school districts, and associated county educational services agencies the opportunity to determine which implementation facilitator candidates would be matched with each of their schools. Allowing for various voices in this process led to greater variety of backgrounds in the pool of likely candidates ultimately hired as school leadership coaches. For this study, the coaches were sorted into three distinct categories based on previous experiences. Some facilitators had
significant (four or more years) previous experience as a school principal, while others had significant previous administration experience at the district or service agency level (four or more years), and some were placed in a school without at least four years of experience at either level of administration.

Participants

The 2014 School Leaders Network report suggests that a principal with at least four years of principalship experience may have more command of the role than most of their peers, as 50% of principals are not retained after three years of being a principal. To ensure participants have sufficient capacities and dispositions associated with their prior experience to draw from in support of their learning, four years of principal or administration experience at the district or regional service agency served as the standard to categorize participants according to their previous work experience. HIL Project records were explored to identify which coaches meet these criteria.

Based on the proposed sampling frame, this study sought to include four to five school leadership coaches from each type of background to maximize variation and increase theoretical sensitivity, as consistent in grounded theory studies. To identify the required number of participants from each experience or category, I have conducted a review of the previous work experiences of all 47 active HIL Project school leadership coaches. This yielded a pool of potential participants as follows:

- There are 12 individuals that have at least four years of principalship experience,
- There are 18 individuals that meet the four-year requirement for administration experience at a district or regional service agency
• There are 17 individuals that met neither of these requirements but had other relevant educational experiences

Since only one school leadership coach in the HIL Project served four or more schools, I excluded her data from the sample to ensure anonymity in all subsequent reporting. This made for a total pool of 46 coaches who qualified for this study.

All HIL Project school leadership coaches participated in the data collection proposed for the study as standard practice in the HIL Project evaluation plan so this study only used secondary data that has been de-identified through standard practice of the HIL formative evaluation. Through this process, I de-identified all school leadership coach information and coded relevant characteristics of each school leadership coach i.e., previous work experience, previous educational experiences, etc., and school characteristics, i.e., school type and with unique identifiers. I placed the de-identified data from HIL Project school leadership coaches in one of the three study categories and used project records to maximize variation across the size and type of each school and size and type of their districts with the goal of having a sample of five school leadership coaches from each category. Varying across school and district types is consistent with data collection procedures within grounded theory to support the development of theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978). Those who I did not select as part of this process did not know if their data was or was not part of the data set for this study.

**Data Collection**

**Data Sources**

This study utilized qualitative data collection methods within a multiple case study design with grounded theory elements for data analysis. Each of the school leadership coaches constitutes a single case in this study. Data was collected through three modes of collection to
support the investigation of the full experience that a school leadership coach is having within their assigned school:

- Semi-structured interviews were used with each school leadership coach in the environment in which the coaches work at a date and time that is convenient for them
- Direct observations preceded or followed the semi-structured interview depending on what was most comfortable for each participant
- Documents that were developed to support the implementation of the school’s literacy plan were collected in paper or digital form at the preference of the school leadership coach

Multiple modes of data collection were necessary to gather sufficient information regarding school leadership coach’s perceptions of themselves in the work, their understandings of the coaching model, and how they applied different aspects of the model in response to the context of the school. Semi-structured interviews supported an investigation into the various levels of knowledge and application of the Implementation Facilitation coaching model across the Five Levels of Learning. By utilizing good interviewing techniques, this study used the interview as a gateway into the lived experience of the school leadership coach to gain deep description of that lived experience and to provide depth to the examination of the research questions (Seidman, 2006). The goal of the interview was to engage the participants in their own learning zone across the Five Levels of Learning. The interviewer used probing questions to explore the thick, rich descriptions of the principals’ coaching experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) in supporting the implementation of a program that is adaptive to the strengths and needs of the local context. The role of this interview was to support deep reflection into not only what the school leadership coach knows or how the model is applied, but to allow features of either past
experiences, their training as HIL Project school leadership coaches, and/or the context of the school to emerge as they described their personal understanding or exhibited behaviors.

**Procedures**

I estimated that each structured interview would take 40-50 minutes and each interview took place on a day and time determined by the school leadership coach. I used the location of the interview to place the school leadership coach in the performance zone where they may feel more comfortable talking about their work with confidence. Over the course of several months, all HIL Project school leadership coaches participated in the same data collection activities for purposes of the project formative evaluation.

Per standard practice of the HIL Project formative evaluation, I used voice recordings to provide an accurate record of the interview (Seidman, 2006). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed through a modified verbatim approach, eliminating non-word conversation fillers, pauses, and other non-verbal cues. Once I had conducted and recorded all interviews, I conducted quality checks by listening through each recording while reading the transcript and fixing any errors that occurred during transcription.

While the recording process can be more reliable than effective listening skills of the interviewer, it can also make participants feel uncomfortable knowing they are being recorded. As stated in the interview protocol, I used techniques such as pausing, paraphrasing, and mirroring to mitigate this discomfort of the school leadership coach and deepen the conversation as these techniques have been reported to develop and support rapport and relationship in a safe environment (Costa & Garmston, 2016). To be cautious of the influence I had as the interviewer, I limited the use of paraphrasing to acknowledgement of content and emotion and restrained from using paraphrasing to mediate thinking through organizing or shifting the focus of the
school leadership coach’s thoughts. I monitored my use of these cognitive tools for building rapport and creating a safe environment during the interview through attention to non-verbal indicators. I utilized the strategies whenever the body posture reflected tension and when responses were immediate and short. When participant’s body posture shifted in ways that reflected a more relaxed state and when the school leadership coach engaged in thoughtful communication that reflected deep self-reflection, I withdrew from pausing, paraphrasing, and mirroring to limit any further influence.

I also conducted onsite passive field observations to directly explore the lived experience of school leadership coaches. To best accommodate their schedule and reduce any costs to the school leadership coach associated with participation, each school leadership coach determined the date of the field observation.

While field observations gave a small sample of what behaviors a school leadership coach was engaging in within their school, the goal of the observations was to get at the meaning behind their behaviors (Berg & Lune, 2012) as they relate to their understanding and application of the Implementation Facilitation coaching model (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Therefore, I conducted post-observation conversations whereby the school leadership coach dialogued me about what I observed in the onsite observation. I took notes during the post-observation dialogues and included them within the observation notes for subsequent analyses.

To better detect and understand the meaning behind observed behaviors during onsite observations, I sought to gain cooperation of all involved actors to best reflect the naturalistic environment. I used the school leadership coach as the gatekeeper to the rest of the staff that they interact with at the school to communicate the importance of the observation and assure all participants of anonymity in data collection. If any school personnel felt uncomfortable taking
part in the observation of the school leadership coach, the school leadership coach arranged a different observation time to respect the vulnerability of school personnel.

To enhance the credibility of observations, I attended to specific data gathering techniques during the observation. Through the piloting of the observation tool, I was able to identify the most important information to be collected relevant to the research questions and build an observation guide to focus on key points of interest and reflect on how I may be impacting the observed data. During observation, I did not engage as a participant, which would change the observational data. I also used the observation protocol (Appendix B) to remain consistent across observations (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

For the final mode of data collection, I asked all participants for any artifacts they personally developed to support their work in schools and for any self-reflections of their work that reflect work done with the school leaders. School leadership coaches delivered complex visual representations of their school’s progress on display boards and monitoring plan documents from their work as a HIL Project school leadership coach along with simple agendas that they had developed. School leadership coaches had also developed or borrowed documents that support the application of the HIL Model. Finally, school leadership coaches submit weekly work records on their work in the schools. These HIL Project work records provided a reporting and reflection device that school leadership coaches used in tracking their own work and planning forward. These artifacts all served as symbols of the self-reflexivity that school leadership coaches experienced through their work, reflect how they assigned meaning to their learning, and reflect how they employed the coaching model (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).
Data Analysis

While the data collected for the research study was also collected from each active HIL Project school leadership coach as part of their contracted obligation and to inform the project formative evaluation, the data analysis plan described here is specific to the analysis of data captured from those school leadership coaches whose secondary data was used for this study.

In order to capitalize on a new line of research, I developed a new qualitative data analysis approach in which I applied grounded theory techniques, i.e., abductive reasoning and the constant comparative method, to multiple case study research so patterns and prominent contextual features can emerge within and across cases. Using this approach to explore how the cognitive capacities associated with varying backgrounds of coaches within their contexts flowed through two cycles of coding. In the first cycle of open coding, I used abductive reasoning as I explored plausible ways in which facilitators drew upon features of their previous work experience to understand and employ a specific coaching model within predetermine typologies associated with the Five Levels of Learning (Shen & Cooley, 2015, adapted from Waters et al., 2003). An abductive approach was employed to investigate and interpret emerging concepts within the research questions. Also consistent with grounded theory research, I maximized variation in the characteristics of the school leadership coaches and the schools they serve to expand the realm of plausible explanations that might have otherwise been omitted with an inductive or deductive approach (Danermark, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I used the constant comparative method in this first cycle of data analysis to further refine each code to sufficient depth and remain consistent when applying a given code within and across cases.

The Five Levels of Learning provided the cognitive analysis frame for which to find meaning from the school leadership coaches use of their former capacities and dispositions as
they reflect on their learning. I first used attribute coding to capture all aspects and attributes of the school leadership coaches and the situational elements within the context of their work. I then used process coding and causation coding with abductive reasoning to posit plausible contextually related concepts within each of the Five Levels of Learning, to compare incidents of each concept within and across cases, and to continue to redefine codes for each concept based on these cross- and within-case analyses. Values coding and Process coding (Saldana, 2016) identified specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with features of either past experiences, their training as HIL Project school leadership coaches, and/or the context of the school as school leadership coaches described how they were understanding, applying, and adapting the model within their local context across the Five Levels of Learning. I used causation coding to support the abductive process by bringing to the forefront the reasoning of the school leadership coaches and allow the researcher to make connect the learning and behaviors of coaches to the Five Levels of Learning.

As concepts began to stand out and cohere to one another across multiple instances within and across cases and sources of data, I started to shift away from an abductive approach with the raw data toward inductively identifying patterns and categories within the Five Levels of Learning. Pattern coding and selective coding began this aggregation of concepts into broader categories (Saldana, 2014) and aided the search for patterns within each of the Five Levels of Learning. This shift emerged slowly during the first cycle of coding with a continued conscious effort to compare all incidents that collapsed into a pattern or category within and across cases. Analysis ended with an inductive exploration of similarities and differences of the patterns and categories across the Five Levels of Learning. I used these patterns and categories to point to common themes associated with the experiences of school leadership coaches as they connected
to, learned about, and provided adaptive support to school leaders implementing a school renewal initiative. I then reconstituted the data within the cases and presented the data through a series of case vignettes to serve as illustrations of the emerged patterns and themes.

**Trustworthiness**

Ideas regarding the quality of qualitative research have developed over the years. Guba and Lincoln (1989) associated reliability with dependability, objectivity with confirmability, internal validity with credibility, and external validity with transferability to link terms related to quality in quantitative research with terms used in qualitative research. For the present study, I sought to support the trustworthiness of this research through multiple layers of quality control. I supported the dependability and transferability of findings to other related contexts as deemed appropriate by the reader through the use of thick description. I used an audit trail to capture a detailed log trail of steps in conducting the research from participant recruitment through data analysis and the use of myself as an instrument, along with a strong reflexivity process to bracket my background, position, and other emerging researcher responses supports the confirmability of the findings as being shaped by the data. Triangulation between the three sources of data supports confirmability and credibility of the findings. Credibility was also supported through the use of member checks after each interview which gave participants the opportunity to review the transcripts and either confirm the accuracy of their statements or make clarifications and/or additions to what they had expressed in the interview.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

This study examined how 15 school leadership coaches drew upon capacities and dispositions associated with their previous work experience as they engaged with training around and applied an explicit coaching model. While I pulled the study sample from three groups with
distinctly different previous work experience, this study did not seek to make inferences regarding group differences. This purpose of this study was not to make inferences that I could generalize to the larger population of school leadership coaches. Instead, I sought to understand the social nature in which school leadership coaches engaged as a learner as they applied an explicit and adaptive coaching model. As this study enters into the early stages of this line of inquiry, this study proposed a new analytics approach that allowed for the emergence of a set of plausible questions that future studies can test to produce new knowledge.

**Ethical Considerations**

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix C) was obtained to complete the study using secondary data resulting from the formative evaluation of the HIL Project (see Appendix D). As standard practice for the HIL Project, interviews were recorded and immediately transcribed in vivo with all references to self, school, school district, or any specific individual given specific pseudonyms. Files of the interview, observation, and participant provided documents were immediately encrypted and saved on two external hard drives that were locked in a drawer in the Tate Center at Western Michigan University when not in use for three years after the research project is completed. The Tate Center is a locked environment from 7 p.m. to 8 a.m. every weekday and locked through the weekends. I assigned subjects a random number that was used to connect all files associated with that participant and information regarding subject background and school characteristics. A coding key was developed and stored on a separate encrypted external hard drive.

**Chapter 3 Closure**

To gather experiences and behaviors from how school leadership coaches drew from features of their previous work experience, their training on a specific coaching model, and the
local context in which they served, this study employed a multiple-case study approach through naturalistic inquiry. Each school leadership coach represents a case for in-depth study and analysis with a sample of maximal variation across pre-determined groups associated with school leadership coaches’ former work experiences: previous experience as a principal, district administrator, or no experience in either role and school size and type. The personnel from a broader study funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Supporting Effective Educator Development program that is supporting the implementation of a flexibly designed program to develop high impact leadership in 76 elementary schools provided the sampling frame for participant selection. To collect data, I interviewed and observed participants at their assigned school and collected work-related documents created by each participant. As strengths association with multiple case study and grounded theory both contribute to the analysis of a new line of research, a new approach to data analysis is proposed that blends techniques from both traditions. Without the blending of these two qualitative traditions, data analysis would have fallen short in understanding key factors associated with the school leadership coaches that influence their understanding and employment of a school leadership coaching model.

Findings from data collection and analysis will be presented in Chapter 4, revealing patterns that emerged within and across groups of school leadership coaches. Chapter 5 will discuss these results in light of the study’s research questions, the extant literature related to school leadership coaching, and implications for practice, policy and future research.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Overview of Chapter 4

This study explored how school leadership coaches drew from personal capacities and dispositions associated with former professional experiences to understand and employ a specific coaching model. This chapter presents a summary of results of the data analysis of data gathered through a multiple case study involving 15 school leadership coaches. The first section includes a profile of participants. The second section outlines the data analysis procedures followed by a third section that reports the findings from the data analysis. A brief chapter summary will conclude this chapter.

School Leadership Coach Profiles

Fifteen school leadership coaches participated in this study. They all were actively supporting one or more schools in implementing the HIL Model for school renewal and sustainable, high fidelity and integrity implementation as part of the HIL Project. As part of standard procedures for the HIL Project formative evaluation, each school leadership coach participated in both a semi-structured in-depth interview (see protocol in Appendix A) and an on-site observation at one school where the participant served as a leadership coach (see protocol in Appendix B). This chapter represents the 15 male and female participants with female pseudonyms to protect their identities. My goal with sampling procedures was to select five school leadership coaches with at least four year of experience as a central office administrator, five with at least five years’ experience as a principal, and five without principal experience, but
an at least five years’ experience in another role teaching, coaching, consulting, training, facilitating, or some other form of leadership role. To maximize variation in the size and type of schools the participating coaches serve in the HIL Project within each group of coaches, I ended up having six school leadership coaches with at least four year of experience as a central office administrator, four with at least four years as a principal without four or more years in central office, and five with neither type of experience, but some other form of experience related to the coaching role served in the HIL Project. Table 1 shows background information of the study’s sample.

Table 1

*School Leadership Coach Background*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Internal or External Placement</th>
<th>Highest Degree Obtained</th>
<th>Years as Elementary Principal</th>
<th>Years as Central Office Administrator</th>
<th>Total Years in Education</th>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Denise</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
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<td>Masters</td>
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</table>
Data Analysis

I asked the school leadership coaches a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured one-on-one interview (Appendix A). I also conducted interviews to investigate how school leadership coaches connected to and understood their role as a coach across the Five Levels of Learning (Shen & Cooley, 2008), which I used as a guiding frame in developing the interview questions. First and second cycles of data analysis revealed an emergence of five different ways in which school leadership coaches approach their role within their schools. As they work to employ a coaching model focused on the implementation of a research-based model for school renewal, school leadership coaches approached their work through a lens of their own personal dispositions, i.e., relational investors or interdependent learners, or the knowledge they bring to the table, i.e., expertise in school improvement, instructional leadership, or literacy.

Data Collection Procedures

As I interviewed participants, I encouraged them to control the flow of the conversation toward what has been most meaningful in the work as they understand, apply, and adapt the HIL Model. I then allowed participants to talk about how they connect to the work and how they have navigated their learning journey to gain a command of the HIL Model for renewal and their role as facilitator, while probing for deeper understanding of an idea or statement when appropriate. This flexible approach to the interview necessitated that I listen for responses to all questions within the interview protocol from the beginning of the conversation and only refer to a given question if the school leadership coach had not yet already answered the question. At the same time, I had to listen intently for relevant points and turns in the interview conversations, so as not to miss an important opportunity to probe deeper. This was a new way of listening for me and the following memo describes my thoughts about the semi-structured interview.
Something I notice about the (school leadership coaches) is that they will often answer several questions at one time, like when they're describing a strength in the context of a problem or a challenge that they faced. When they're talking about multiple questions at one time, I am making either a mental note or a note on a note sheet that identifies the fact that they're answering multiple questions and then I start immediately thinking about what probing questions are associated with both questions, I try to keep in mind that while I do want to probe around all the pre-determined questions, I want to make sure I’m flexible enough to explore what is so meaningful to this (school leadership coach) that they would bring up something else. Specifically, I am looking at what cognitive capacities they carry that might facilitate something coming to their mind at a given point in the conversation or with that question that I had just asked.

I used an on-site observation (Appendix B) protocol to triangulate interview content for each school leadership coach and gain a fuller understanding of how they connect to, understand, apply, and adapt the HIL Model with their school staff. As the observer, I took the role as a passive, non-participant observer and sought to view each school leadership coach engaging with school staff in their natural environment. In setting up a time for the observation, I made it clear to the school leadership coaches that I would be looking for a chance to see them doing the same work they would be doing were I not present and observing. As the observer, I sought to gain information regarding who the school leadership coach was interacting with, the nature of the interactions and relationships between them, and the nature of the work being done.

As I scheduled each onsite observation, I asked school leadership coaches to assemble a set of documents that reflected the work being done in the school. While some coaches were able to provide documents that reflected the work they were doing, several were not; thus, this form of data triangulation was not as strong as I had hoped. This was an inconsistent part of the data collection process with some school leadership coaches providing a great deal of information while others provided very little in the way of documents or artifacts that illustrated how they used tools or resources from their training workshops on the HIL Project Model. One reason for this is the adaptive nature of the HIL Model required the coaches to work with the school
leadership in ways that adapt to the structures and processes that were already in place at the school. Documents that were submitted were included in the coding process and used to triangulate findings from interviews and observations. However, artifacts often reflected the school’s progress in implementing the HIL Model and provided little information regarding the nature of the work of the school leadership coach or their nuanced understanding of the work.

First Cycle of Data Analysis.

Per standard practice of the HIL Project formative evaluation, I used the same interview and observation protocols for all school leadership coaches. In the first cycle of data analysis, I looked for the emergence of a coding structure for conceptually related themes. Using an abductive approach, I used values, process, and causation coding (Saldana, 2016) line by line through the interview transcripts to extract codes that infer ways in which school leadership coaches were connecting to, understanding, and employing the work of a school leadership coach whose role is to help a principal and the principal’s teacher leadership team employ a specific, but adaptive, model for change and sustainable implementation. Through the constant comparative method, I used the first case to develop an initial coding frame. The initial frame included codes that represented dispositions, values, beliefs, strengths, focus of the work, work processes, content of the work, and challenges.

One initial category of codes represented instances where leadership coaches describe personal connections to the work. I isolated these codes by listening for when leadership coaches talked about why they are doing the work or what the work means to them or to their school. This general category of codes also includes what cognitive capacities the leadership coaches identified as they talked about their passion for the work. Within the first case analyzed, the school leadership coach, Anna, described ways she was connecting to the work from former
personal experience and previous professional work experiences. Two codes were then created to capture both instances in future cases.

I also began a general code for instances when the coaches described the content of the work, the delivery process for doing the work, and specific behaviors coaches identified as they share their current understanding of their role. I also began a code that represented references coaches made to meeting the contextual needs of a particular school or individual.

Codes in the initial analysis frame also included when and how school leadership coaches are making connections to the content of the work and engaging as learners. Another set of codes captured when and how coaches utilize project supports like their assigned coordinator, other school leadership coaches, or content, activities, and resources from their training workshops. The first case only identified project workshops and other trainings she had attended as supportive of her learning, but I added a coding category to represent any support from the school leadership coach coordinators and summits for other potential codes that might arise in future data. In analyzing this first case, I also created codes to pay particular attention to the social nature of the learning process that school leadership coaches experience. The first case made three references describing how she was learning right alongside her school leaders and staff.

The first case also presented challenges and described how she was responding to those challenges. I created a general code to collect all references to challenges that school leadership coaches face and their response to those challenges. Creating this initial coding category in a broad way to capture all challenges coaches describe ensured that I could create sub-categories to differentiate various types of challenges if needed later in the constant comparison process.
Upon analyzing a second case, I added additional codes based on different categories of information provided by the second case, but not noted in the first case. For example, the second leadership coach interviewed mentioned that some of her learning was taking place both in collaboration with other school leadership coaches and in time spent in self-reflection. I added codes to reflect school leadership coaches who mention those ways of learning about the work. In line with the constant comparative method, I then went through the interview and observation from the first case with a more sensitized lens for all codes and looked for instances of any newly created codes.

Not only did I add additional codes through analysis of the second case, but I identified categories of common codes almost immediately as well. For example, the interviews of the first two school leadership coaches revealed potential personal dispositions that guided their work. While the two coaches identified different personal dispositions as important to their work, they were still very similar in how important these dispositions were in shaping how each coach supported assigned schools. So while I coded each reference to a disposition as “Dispositions”, each reference also identified a specific code for each disposition. The first case revealed dispositions of co-learner, appreciative, and interdependent, while thoughtful, appreciative, and listener emerged as dispositions for the second case. So “thoughtful” and “listener” were added as dispositions for future coding of all cases as a result of analyzing the second case. Since both cases made references to the disposition of “appreciative,” I then analyzed both instances of this code across the two cases to verify the code represented a similar disposition in each case.

I repeated this process of comparing codes across and within cases, developing new codes, and then going back to recode previous cases through all fifteen cases. Further iterations of the coding frame included codes that differentiated between whether school leadership
coaches are attributing their passion for their work as coaches for this specific project to former personal and/or work experience, or to current experiences and relationships developed in doing their current work of a leadership coach. The process of abductive coding was also important in isolating codes that represent what school leadership coaches identified as success indicators; how coaches are making systemic adaptations based on their personal reflections or the monitoring of progress; and when coaches spoke about engaging in roles that are managerial in nature.

Along with the process of writing memos describing the development of the coding frame, I created and maintained an audit trail that included descriptions of codes as I created and, in some cases, where I made amendments. When different nuances were identified within or across cases, those were noted and new codes were considered for subtle differences. For example, I initially thought that identifying dispositions in the interview transcripts would be a straightforward process because the first two coaches spoke so clearly about them. However, as I engaged with the abductive process, I began to identify dispositions for school leadership coaches even when the coach did not explicitly state them. Such instances of implicit dispositions emerged when coaches described behaviors that aligned with a specific disposition. As my lens became more and more sensitive to the relationship between dispositions and behaviors, I found myself questioning whether an already coded disposition was actually applicable to a participant, even if they explicitly identified it about themselves. Memos show that it was important to me that I have a consistent way of identifying dispositions in this process:
Disposition Memo:

This is a tricky concept. I consider a disposition to be a prevailing attitude that subconsciously impacts observed behavior. School leadership coaches may assign a specific disposition to themselves very clearly, but then describe behaviors that may or may not align with that specific disposition. Coaches can also not identify any specific dispositions as part of their nature, but a disposition can begin to appear in ways that coaches describe their attitudes, values, or behaviors. I know that these have come up very explicitly in some of the interviews, but not all. I will use this code when I see an alignment of consistent behaviors with a stated attitude and when I identify an underlying attitude that seems to be guiding how a school leadership coach talks or acts in the interview and observational data.

The above memo is one example of how I worked through coding questions as they emerged through the constant comparative method. For instance, I wrote other memos for such areas as, defining success indicators; examining how school leadership coaches describe the focus of the school’s work; noting when coaches are stepping into a managerial role; and noting how they are identifying challenges. These memos served as a self-reflective process and developed more precise language around each category of codes and the codes within them; thus, they helped me maintain reflexivity throughout the coding process.

As the first cycle of data analysis was taking shape, I noticed how the data naturally began to cluster around a couple patterns that were emerging in how school leadership coaches connect to and approach their work as they employ the HIL Model with their school leaders. This led me to move from the abductive approach of my first cycle coding and enter into second cycle coding using inductive reasoning. As patterns began to take shape, I started to engage with pattern coding and selective coding in the second cycle of data analysis.

Second Cycle of Data Analysis.

From looking at the coding structure that emerged from the first cycle of data analysis and constantly revisiting cases within the constant comparative method, I started to notice alignment between how school leadership coaches described their strengths and the behaviors
they exhibited in the observation and/or described in the interview as necessary to do the work. I went back through each case and defined these connections to investigate what patterns might emerge. My memo at the time described my thoughts and the process I used to explore those patterns.

It is amazing how I can immediately connect a person’s stated strengths that they personally bring to the work with the behaviors that they then engage in. I am also noticing a strong relationship between those identified strengths and how they talk about responding to specific challenges. It’s like they are hard-wired to work within their own strengths. I am going to start describing these connections and look for conceptually related concepts between the strengths and behaviors of the (school leadership coaches). I need to get them all in one place so I can see them all at once and start to group related interactions.

This memo describes my first step into selective coding. I searched within what I thought might be significant codes to develop salient categories of how school leadership coaches approached the work of the HIL model with their school leaders and five unique approaches emerged. Participants employed the HIL Model by investing in relationships to do the work (relational investors), engaging in learning independently (interdependent learners), guiding the work through their developed expertise in school improvement (school improvement experts), building the instructional leadership of the school (instructional leader experts), or utilizing their literacy pedagogy (literacy experts).

Once these groups emerged, I re-engaged with pattern coding to conduct a cross-case analysis of the school leadership coaches within each group of coaches who approached the work in similar fashion. This led to the identification of patterns of behavior within each group as school leadership coaches who approached their role in similar fashion as other coaches had other commonalities within their group.

The findings of that analysis led me to identify further patterns across the groups of school leadership coaches of similar approach. The relational investors and interdependent
learners largely approached the work while relying on identified personal dispositions, speaking about those personal dispositions as a conscious identity they held their role as a school leadership coach. School leadership coaches who approached the work with a strong reliance on the knowledge and skills developed from previous work experiences, i.e., instructional leadership experts, school leadership experts, and literacy experts, all came to the work with an identity associated with their personal knowledge and skills and allowed that knowledge to guide the substantive work in their schools.

I began the final phase of selective coding with the Five Levels of Learning as the frame for which to identify patterns within these two aggregate groups in how school leadership coaches identified with their role. Through the use of qualitative coding software, I inspected pre-determined codes associated with each level of learning within each aggregate group independent of each other. Categories emerged in those predetermined codes within the first four levels of learning: (a) what work is important and why; (b) how to do that work in a contextually appropriate manner; (c) what vital behaviors will produce results; and (d) what success looks like. While the interview protocol did explore all Five Levels of Learning, it must be noted that participants of this study had only one year of experience in this role. Coaches seemed as though they were still working on the development of the big picture and had yet to engage in much self-reflection about the appropriateness of their own personal approach to supporting the school. This led to very little information to draw from regarding the fifth level of learning that explored how school leadership coaches made systems adjustments to achieve results.

Section 3 of this chapter reports the patterns that emerged in how school leadership coaches approach the work followed by a profile of each participant within each group. These participant profiles detail the interaction between their stated strengths as a coach and the
approach they take to the work of employing the HIL Model. Evidence from the data showed consistent patterns in behaviors between those school leadership coaches who connect to the work with an identity associated with personal dispositions and those who connect to the work with an identity associated with their personal knowledge. Following the participant profiles, I then explore the aggregation of these five approaches into two patterns of prominent identities.

**Approaches to the Work of School Leadership Coaches**

In this third section of reported findings, I describe the results from the first cycle of data analysis. Through the first cycle of coding, five patterns emerged across cases in how school leadership coaches approached their work as a school leadership coach while they employed the HIL Model. In the following sub-sections, I describe the results from first and second cycles of data analysis that resulted in the identification of the patterns within school leadership coaches who described their approach to the work through a lens of either their own personal dispositions, i.e., relational investors or interdependent learners, or the knowledge they bring to the table, i.e., school improvement experts, instructional leadership experts, or literacy experts.

**Prominent Approaches to School Leadership Coaches**

As school leadership coaches talked about how they learn about and employ the HIL Model with school leaders, first cycle coding led to the emergence of distinct patterns in how the coaches approached school leaders with new learning. Evidence from both interviews and onsite observations show these approaches affected both the social nature of the work done at each school and the school conditions in which school personnel completed the work. Those approaches include coaches who invest in relationships to do the work (relational investors), engage in learning interdependently (interdependent learners), or guide the work through their developed expertise in school improvement (school improvement experts), instructional
leadership (instructional leadership experts), or literacy pedagogy (literacy experts). The following sections explore patterns and significant codes that constitute each specific approach. I then profile each case within each category of approaches with a thick description of how each school leadership coach approached the work with their school leadership team using evidence from the interviews and observations.

Relational investors. One theme that emerged within a group of school leadership coaches was a reliance on building relationships to employ the coaching model. Betty, Anna, and Emma each had distinct descriptions of their work that suggested similar personal dispositions that guided them as school leadership coaches and the processes they used to do the work. They each showed an eagerness in doing whatever it took to build the relationships that would serve as a foundation for their work as a school leadership coach and made it clear that they were walking alongside the school leaders and not determining the direction for the work. Evidence from both interviews and observations revealed that facilitators built strong relationships with members of the school leadership team and those across all staff in the buildings they served. These patterns across the coaches point to their value for and ability in developing relationships in ways that facilitated the application of the coaching model within the school.

Betty. Betty approached the work with a reliance on the relationships she built in doing the work. In the interview, Betty talked very specifically about her lack of experience in literacy and leadership, but how her ability to walk alongside of her school leaders made her the right person for the job.

Betty stated strengths in how she looks for the big picture and in how she sits back and watches carefully to think about the whole situation before ever responding. She also stated that she was a listener, which I also labeled as a disposition as it was consistent with descriptions of
how she works to develop relationships with school leaders. Betty also built relationships by being very appreciative, which was on display during her on-site observation and in how she speaks of the team that she is working with at her school. The last disposition I noted that is consistent with how she described her work with the school leadership team is that of a learner. What jumped out about her learning style was that it was all in a social context. On multiple occasions throughout the interview, she framed the work as a cooperative exercise through statements such as “we learned” this, “we put this together,” or “we dug into this.”

Through Betty’s personal description of her work walking alongside of the school leaders in her school, she described how she approached the work even further by noting her own ability to pull people together and engage in exploration with them.

So bringing that skill into it, not being the top resolver, but being the explorer with them. They can see their problems, but I think about how I can let them come to that point with me. What I see valuable is that the HIL grant has provided so many school leadership so much human contact, so much relationship and appreciative relationship-type building.

Betty then talked about how important it was for her to empathize with the tough work that school leaders are tasked with by bringing the leadership team together towards a common why and a common purpose.

With the right set of eyes, with the right set of heart, with the right set of mind, and with those skills of developing not only norms for our Hill group but for our behavior when we go into the schools. We're not coming in here to add one more thing to your plate and to turn your whole world upside down.

Betty’s description of her approach to developing relationships with school leaders also led to validation of the work on behalf of the school leaders.

I think the relational piece helps to validate what you're trying to do for them with the money and with the skills to go behind it with the literacy essentials and be the researcher for them. And I don't think you always get that with grants so I think that's been pretty unique.
An important aspect of Betty’s journey in this work was the development of self-confidence in who she was as a person and what strength she brought to the table that supports her school leaders. She spoke about how her personal strength of listening mitigated any negative impact that the lack of expertise or experience in leadership may have had in her ability to support the work.

... it isn’t necessarily what I lack as a coach or an administrator background that was as important as the ability to listen to what people are saying to me at [school].

With that discovery of self-confidence, Betty fully believed that she is the right person in the right place with the right goals for her school leaders. She attributed that belief to her concerted effort to being a listener and building a foundational relationship that was more than sufficient to support her school leaders.

While she identifies several personal dispositions, her relational disposition is most prominent in how she approached school leaders to implement the HIL Model. In piecing together the interview and observational data, Betty served as a model in how one could support the work of the HIL Model though developing real and authentic relationships built on respect and empathy.

Anna. Codes involving Anna’s description of her learning and her approach to the work of a school leadership coach were consistent with those of Betty’s as a relational investor. Anna showed a distinct interest in building the capacity of all those around her to not only carry forward the work within the school(s), but also for those school leaders to find personal success in the work. It was very important to Anna that she was as authentic as possible so that she built relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

Anna immediately described the relationships that she has been able to build upon from her role as a leader in the county regional service agency as one of her strengths. She also talked
about her experience as an instructional leader but expressed that in a way that had her listening to people, bringing people together, and being ok with uncomfortable conversations. Central to her identity as a school leadership coach was the idea that the HIL Model had coaches walk alongside school leaders in a way that was most contextually appropriate for that school.

I think what is extremely helpful in this project is we have people on the ground working to support the literacy. So often we know that one-and-done’s don’t work. We know that bringing somebody in and doing a workshop is just not going to work. We have to have the walking side by side with school leaders, someone that will walk at their own pace.

During the interview, Anna’s choice of language magnified her passion for empowering those around her through how she spoke about the school leaders. In talking about a specific teacher leader, Anna described how she was investing in the leadership of a specific teacher leader. “I can see her leading her grade level. When I leave, she's going to continue to lead her grade level.” Anna reflected this passion for investing in individuals as she spoke about her work with the school’s principal as well. This pattern presents insight into how important it was to Anna that she invested in people as she implemented the HIL Model opposed to only caring about the development of the systems and processes that supported the work.

Consistent with this passion for investing in the people, Anna took a collaborative approach to supporting the development of the school leaders she worked with. She spent time working alongside the principal and teacher leaders and lets each of them set the direction and pace for their own learning. “The principal has been very open to learning and walking together, doing walkthroughs together and talking about what we're learning, and what are the next steps? How do we go forward?” Anna’s interview reflects the value that Anna has for the individuals that she is working with and how she focuses on building a sense of self-efficacy into the school leaders so they believe in themselves and each other to carry the work forward.
My hope, what I've gone to at this point, is to try to give the teachers as much belief in themselves that they are the leader in that room and within themselves, and that you have the knowledge, or you can find the knowledge, so that you yourself become the leader.

A moment of learning that Anna brought into the conversation was revealed when she talked about how the school leaders were responding to her support. Similar to how Betty described the importance of relationships in validating the work, Anna validated her work through the relationships that she was building.

... being able to sit side by side with them and show them actual strategies, and having them so excited that they're giving you hugs at the end, I didn't know how to do that, I think this model makes that huge difference.

It is clear that not only was Anna developing relationships with the school leaders at her school, she was also attributing personal growth and success in having those efforts in building relationships come to fruition.

This profile of how Anna approached the work shows that she thought it very important to invest in the personal success of each individual school leader. It is clear that she had a desire to not just build relationships with individuals, but also support group relationships by bringing them together. Similar to the other relational investors, these relationships served as the foundation from which Anna employed the HIL Model in her school(s).

**Emma.** Emma’s approach to the work also stemmed from how she described herself as a relational person and the values she brought to the work of a school leadership coach. Evidence from her observation showed that in just a year’s time, Emma worked herself into the fabric of her school’s culture. And although Emma served a small school with limited resources, the growth in passion for literacy across the K-12 systems was visible from room to room.

When I asked her about her personal strengths, Emma responded by talking about personal dispositions that she attributed to herself. She identified listening as a personal strength
and described how important that characteristic of hers has been in developing relationships in both her previous roles and her current role as a school leadership coach. Emma brought up this trait several times throughout the interview through statements like: “They have their own sense of what's going to be good for the school. They have their own ideas.”

Being a listener was not enough for Emma. She had to take it a step further and do what she could do to build a relationship of trust. Emma focused her approach to building relationships on establishing a community of learners to do the work of school renewal. She saw this opportunity to engage as a school leadership coach in a small rural school with a high proportion of students living in poverty as one that connected with her personally.

I love the small school. I love the community feeling. I feel like this is such a good fit for me compared to if I were in one of the bigger schools because it's my background. I feel like these kids need every benefit they can get. They work hard. The parents work hard. They don't have jobs. They don't have money for food. They break my heart. They don't have money for the dentist. Whatever I can do to make this community better I want to do it and if I can help them with their education, that's what I want to do and whatever it takes.

Her personal disposition towards building relationships can be seen in how she describes her ability to bring people together into a community of learners. Emma talked about how she brings a calming influence to groups of people. When there was controversy, she helped group discussions remain calm. Emma talked about her success in bringing people to consensus and attributes this success to her relational skills to her personality.

Emma also sought to have people feel valued and would go outside the scope of her job description to ensure people felt that value she had for them and model the work of the HIL Project through her service to the school.

Before school started in the summer, I came several days and helped with the bulletin boards and brought doughnuts and that kind of thing. It really makes a difference. It makes people feel like they're valued. I think with those times we've had together that that's just helped them (school staff) understand the project more.
This shows how Emma was attentive to the needs of others and adjusted her plans to suit the needs of the school leaders she works with. In her interview, Emma gave several examples of how she has learned to read people in her role as a school leadership coach and would instantly lose her own agenda in search for supporting the person in front of her.

This profile of Emma’s approach to the work shows that she very much valued the relationships that she was building to do the work and would do whatever it took to support the people doing the work. While she was thoughtful about how the HIL Model can best be implemented in her school(s), it was important to Emma that she also valued what each team member brought to the table and found ways to mesh that with the goals of the project.

*Relational investors summary.* When looking across these three school leadership coaches, several common threads emerge. One is that each of these school leadership coaches showed the commitment to do whatever it took to build the relationships that would keep the work moving forward. Betty took the lead in setting up and running family night at her school, Anna adapted her support to the learning style and pace of each individual, and Emma showed a constant willingness to engage in the work in ways that were adapted to the needs of the school leaders she served. Consistent with their relational approach to the work, each of the school leadership coaches spoke about the idea of walking alongside of their principal and teacher leaders. This idea is a personal and professional way of employing the HIL Model as they used the relationships they were building to foster personal and collective capacity. A final common thread across these three coaches that reflects their relational touch to the work was the familiarity and personal relationships that each of these three school leadership coaches had across the entire school.
**Interdependent learners.** A second theme that emerged in how a group of school leadership coaches approached their role as a school leadership coach was through a firm commitment to engage as a co-learner with school leaders in a purposeful manner as they explored the content of the HIL Model with the school leaders they served. Tonya, Yvonne, Mallory, and Denise each spoke about the importance of fostering collective ownership in the determination of their school’s focus and the importance of building personal and organizational capacity. While each school leadership coach had distinct descriptions of their behaviors in doing the work, findings point to their shared intentionality in how they developed interdependent teams to facilitate the application of the coaching model within the school.

**Tonya.** Having already been employed by the school district for seven years, Tonya brought to her work a foundation of quality relationships and quickly expressed the importance of including them in her learning journey as she employed the HIL Model. While she expressed a lot of love for the district and the people in the district, she did not talk about needing to approach the work through those relationships, possibly because they already existed. Instead, she explained her approach to the work through a description of her personal strengths that support the work and very specific behaviors that show her proclivity towards learning with and from others.

Tonya identified three personal strengths that support her work as a school leadership coach: knowledge of building/history, knowledge of SIP, and her own personal leadership. However, instead of relying on prior knowledge to lead the work, Tonya engaged as a learner, describing how she and the principal spent many hours engaging with all of the HIL Project documents to build a new understanding of how school improvement should happen.
While Tonya spoke about bringing in expertise on the state-issued school improvement process and described herself as a systems thinker, she did not come with prior experience as a principal leading that process. She saw this as a strength, possibly thinking that she might have received this new way of thinking about change differently had she already had a mental model for change in schools. “Maybe it's good I didn't have all those experiences because to me, this seems like the way that you should be leading change wherever you are.”

In what might explain her interest in engaging as a learner with a new process and not trying to fit the HIL Model into her personal mental model of school improvement, Tonya talked about how the state school improvement process fell short at her school. She spoke about the lack of collective ownership in her school with the current school improvement process. She said that while it was tough to get that ownership with the school improvement process, they now have permission to focus on one thing and develop confidence and expertise with one thing and teachers are now personally invested in the process.

It's really hard to get ownership with school improvement. It's hard to get people excited about that, because it's just one more thing. Teachers just feel like it's “now I have to do this, now I have to do that.” It's so much. That's the challenge. To make sure that you have all that input, and that there's that shared ownership of whatever is created.

To implement the HIL Model, it is clear from Tonya’s interview and observation that she does not come in and direct the focus of the building. When she talked about the focus for the building, she said “when we chose curriculum, to me that was a natural fit.” This suggests that it was not only a collective decision with the school improvement team, but that it was their choice.

Tonya took her approach for leading change by engaging in new learning with other school leadership coaches and her school. While she spoke of the learning with her school team, it was clear that it was important for her to learn with her team and school and let the group voice determine the direction of the work to support collective ownership of that direction.
Yvonne. Like Tonya, Yvonne is also a school leadership coach that, in addition to being placed as a school leadership coach for a school, she was also concurrently serving her school and district in a role that supported the school improvement process. Findings from interview and observational data reveal that Yvonne also brought quality relationships with her into the role but talks about her work in a way that has her focusing on learning with the school staff to determine the direction for the work and to move it forward.

In her interview, Yvonne spoke of her personal strengths in literacy knowledge and how she shared that knowledge with others leadership coaches. This, however, is not the foundation from which she approached the work. Yvonne is very much a learner and she is very aware of that disposition as it is a conscious part of her identity that she leans on often. As she talked about making sense of the HIL Model in her interview, it was clear that her learning was very much a social process for her. Yvonne talked about taking a coaching role to supporting the work where everyone is learning, making sure that she supported the learning process and did not get in the way so that the learning process could continue when she was no longer serving as a school leadership coach.

It's not just about me, but I've been able to help them learn so that hopefully they'll be able to continue to do the learning even if I'm not there. So as I engage as a coach, I'm just kind of this person that's kind of helping them pull it all together, but they're really doing a lot of the work.

As an internal school leadership coach without prior experiences as a school leader, Yvonne had some trepidation about being able to support her school’s leaders due to her lack of formal training around school improvement. But as someone who was already engaging with the principal and other school district personnel with the school improvement process, she thought she would be the best person for the job. Her approach was to dive right into the role of a school leadership coach and the learning, not on her own, but with her principal.
I went right back to her and said it was my job. I'm just going to help you like I already do and I'm just going to bring in new learning and hopefully we'll figure it out together. And that has been a huge piece for her. I think she didn't feel threatened by somebody else coming in.

To foster collective ownership, Yvonne and the others on the school leadership team distributed roles and responsibility across the staff so that every staff member could engage as learners and have a voice in the implementation of the HIL Model.

And the fact that we've started talking about what every person in the building does. How can they play a role in this initiative that we're working with? Then they also already know that the next steps are going to be how are we going to make this an ongoing system that is going to be able to be, you know, not just something for this year, but how's it going to be implemented the next year? And what if I leave the building and what if they leave the building? How is going to be something that's going to be renewable all the time?

It is clear that Yvonne was very intentional about not being the decision maker. She described her approach to the work of a school leadership coach as a cheerleader and an encourager for the staff. She noted that she is working with the staff to pull the pieces of the HIL Model together to support the collective ownership that the entire staff needed to engage in sustainable organizational learning processes.

**Mallory.** Mallory’s interview and observation revealed consistent and intentional efforts to engage the principal and teacher leaders in the learning process. She attributed her approach to her desire for collective ownership of the implementation processes needed for successful implementation of the HIL Model.

Mallory’s description of personal strengths during the interview also focused on who she was as a person. Her description of personal strengths were all about how she was a patient observer that learns as much as she can about a given situation before speaking or acting.

One of my main strengths is that I'm an observer first. I feel that when you're entering into a new situation, you kind of sit back, watch and become a learner of that situation to kind of see where you can fit in, where you can make some progress, where you can
guide some things. Not necessarily a passive role, but just more of a listening, learning role.

Mallory also described her passion for children as a strength, which resonated in the entire conversation, but most notably in his description of how she wants teachers interacting with one another.

It’s easy for teachers to have water cooler talks of, “Oh, this is this and this is that,” and it’s all negative. Rather than saying, “Okay, I saw what you did with that child, that was awesome. How can I do that with so-and-so.

While Mallory did not specifically state that her learning style was social in nature, she made several statements that spoke to an interdependent learning disposition as her primary approach for moving the work of the HIL Project forward in her school. For example, instead of focusing on the technical aspects of the HIL Model when describing the work, she spoke about the collective ownership she was fostering around the work and how she felt it was her job to build that collective ownership. Mallory described her effort to bring an appreciative and strength-based lens to every interaction she had whenever she was in the building to build collective ownership.

Mallory spoke of the challenge of being someone new to a building and having a principal who primarily focused on student behavior in a reactive way. The principal wanted Mallory to lead the work related to literacy and be the instructional leader of the building because student disciplinary issues took over much of her focus and attention as a principal. Mallory spoke about how she focused on engaging with the principal as a learner at her own pace to “empower the principal while not letting go of the empathy.” Mallory followed this statement with a description of further conversations that brought the two of them together as learners.
To shift it even forward further, that strength of collective ownership rather than simply focusing on behavior, we began to have conversations, "Why don't we focus on that and academics? Why don't we figure out, how can we work in unison where we're improving the behavioral structures and improving the academic structures?

On multiple occasions during the interview, Mallory described her growth as a professional. She said that working as a school leadership coach for the HIL Project “opened her eyes to a whole different world.” The growth Mallory was experiencing is evidence in how she talked about, if given the opportunity to be a principal again, her commitment to applying the leadership principles in the HIL Model within the school. A transcript of her interview did not adequately capture the excitement and appreciation she had for being a learner as she answered the interview questions. However, Mallory summarized the learning approach she took to the work in her final statement as she said:

The grant itself has opened up my eyes to a whole different world. When I see people walk it, walk the work, talk the work and are able to articulate that work, and then I see the benefits in the faces of the children, that's all that matters to me. If we can create systems that will benefit an entire generation of children, I'm all for it. I mean, that's what I think the HIL Project is for me. I mean, I gave up everything I knew [to do this work] so I didn't have an option, to be honest. I'm a full believer and I've very rarely ever been in my life like a true believer of the work. It's because I came in as a learner.

In the on-site observation of Mallory, she spent much of the time engaging with the school principal planning for an upcoming staff professional development. From the onset of the conversation, Mallory engaged in the conversation through reflective questions. Not only did the questions help clarify for the principal what the purpose and expected outcomes were from the upcoming professional development, but also which behaviors will be important for her to be mindful of as she seeks to achieve those outcomes. Never did it appear that Mallory had any answers or expertise in the conversation. Instead, she engaged in group reflection and back and forth collaboration that showed she, along with the principal, were each trying to use each other to make sense of what needed to happen to achieve the intended outcomes.
Mallory’s acknowledgment of herself as a learner, along with her efforts to engage all around her in co-learning, suggest that she took an interdependent learner approach to the work of the HIL Model. Like other interdependent learner school leadership coaches, collective ownership was a high priority for Mallory and she stayed true to how she felt the work needed to be done for successful implementation of the HIL Model.

**Denise.** Denise came to the work with a very successful career in supporting teachers with literacy instructional support and school leaders at the school and district level. She came in with a wealth of knowledge about how children and adults learn and is a well-known literacy expert. Yet to employ the HIL Model in her school, Denise took a very patient approach and engaged as a learner around what would be best for her individual school while considering the student population they serve and the personal strengths of the teachers and school leaders. Denise used her personal knowledge and experience to support their leadership in self-directed learning instead of bringing the learning to them in an instructional way.

In her interview, Denise described strengths associated with her technical and deep knowledge of the teaching process along with a comprehensive description of her qualifications and past professional experiences. While Denise initially identified patience as a personal strength, she then worked herself back from thinking she was patient and landed on the idea that she was even-tempered. This led me to think that Denise is very conscious about the approach that she is taking and allows the team to work interdependently with her. In other words, while Denise comes in with credentials and experiences that would stir the desire to learn from her out of any educator, she did not enter the social environment of the school as that expert.

In terms of my own mindset or my approach to work, not necessarily having to have it all go my way, but helping to bring up other thoughts or bring up other options or ideas? I don't know. I guess it's just that idea of being a school leadership coach, so not necessarily having to die on the decision that's made.
This was not the only instance where Denise talked about how she was flexible with decisions and that she would rather have invested in someone else and let them make a decision than get attached to any one direction. This patience through interdependent thinking was a tangible effort of Denise during her observation where her behaviors worked to keep the focus for the meeting on the high-level purpose and allowed the teacher leaders to engage with the principal in deciding how to best collect real-time data from their students using the resources available at the school.

Denise did speak of the need to step in and be more instructional with school leaders when they do not have the skills to reflect on and she spoke confidently about how her work is much about engaging with her school leaders as a co-learner and collaborator:

I think when I'm thinking about just doing the day to day work that might be unfamiliar to [principal] I can share my ideas more readily. Then I think it moves into that more collaboration, and more of a reflective process. This shows her flexibility with taking a mentor-type role when needed but being conscious of when she needs to step back and continue with an interdependent approach.

Denise ended the conversation with a description of her own learning journey with this work. In her description, she provided a glimpse of what it is like for school leadership coaches to be influenced by a coaching model and choose different behaviors than they might have chosen in the past. She also showed herself to be someone who has well developed metacognitive skills that helped her stay true to how she saw her role as a school leadership coach.

I mean, it is in my personality as well to be critical, to find that place of, what can be improved, you know what I mean, just in terms of my own personality as well as just kind of way I've always had to catch myself in my own reflections. But even more so that's been important for me to think about the work from a strength-based model. I still struggle with that a little bit in the sense of that I still have to recognize and work to make sure that I'm thinking about what is being done well and what is in place to build from.
Like for example, today when we were doing walkthroughs [principal] said, "Tell me. I'm interested just in your feedback, what you're seeing, and then I'll share what I saw." For me it was like, I was ready to go right to what I saw as the problem, you know what I mean, in the classroom. I didn't. I stopped myself.

This quote provided clarity around how Denise came into her role as a school leadership coach open to learning. Her clear description of the new personal learning shows that she was more than ready to use her knowledge and skill set to understand and implement the HIL Model instead of adapting the HIL Model to fit her mental models of school improvement and instructional leadership. Her approach in doing this was manifested in how she allowed her school teams to engage in problem solving around what will be best for their school. Instead of having the school leaders look to her as the expert, she allowed them space to grow together as learners and problem solvers.

**Interdependent learners summary.** The autobiographical description of Denise’s learning provided a glimpse into what each of the school leadership coaches who are interdependent learners went through. Each of these school leadership coaches talked about the joy they have for learning and engaging with others as they learn. Being interdependent seemed to be more than just the approach that these school leadership coaches were taking to support their school. It was also how they were living their own life on a day-to-day basis.

**School improvement experts.** Another common approach that emerged within a group of school leadership coaches was an approach that relied on their experience and expertise with the state school improvement processes. Addelyne, Claire, and Rachel used their expertise to engage with school leaders in a purposeful manner to build systems that would support continuous renewal. Each coach brought explicit descriptions of their work to the interview that detailed similar behaviors, processes, and goals pointing to their efforts to guide the development
of systems that would adapt the HIL Model within their schools to fill the needs of state school improvement process.

**Addelyne.** Addelyn was a school leadership coach for a school that was an internal placement from the district office. She served the schools of the district as the curriculum director and has played a key role in the state school improvement process for the district. This district role may have influenced the approach that she took in implementing the HIL Model within her school as she focused her time and efforts on using her expertise in the school improvement process to guide the school towards school improvement goals and processes with little mention of building the capacity in the school leaders to do the work within their school.

Addelyn identified several strengths that she brought to her role as the school leadership coach. Her ability to observe classrooms, provide feedback to teachers, and understand the school improvement process were the three strengths mentioned in her in-depth interview. Addelyn stated that her most pressing concern in her role as the school leadership coach is that the focus on specific instructional strategies would result in observable behavior changes in the classroom.

I mean, we can sit in here and plan and make all these plans, in our school improvement plan and in our monitoring plan and our action plan. But if it's not being done in the classrooms, it isn't gonna matter. Our scores are not gonna reflect any of that work. It's really the boots to the ground, what are teachers doing.

In this statement, you can see that Addelyn was conscious of what learning is important for the school and has already integrated that learning into the school improvement process and what she sees as important to doing the work.

Addelyn also worked to adapt the language of the HIL Model to language that is already embedded in the school improvement process. When asked about what new learning she has experienced in being a school leadership coach, Addelyn said that much of the language being
used is new, “but it just might be called something different.” To do this work, Addelyn focused her efforts on observing classrooms and providing feedback to teachers from those observations. She also worked with the principal to support the transition of the school’s focus into observable classroom practice behaviors.

When asked what her support looks like for the school principal, Addelyn described a relationship that was both instructional with aspects of the school improvement process and collaborative with trying to implement the plan within classrooms.

It's nothing for her to call me and say, "Okay, this is what I noticed today. What are you thinking?" So even other times or like that webinar. "[principal] can you come and watch it with us?" So we sat in her office and watched the webinar together and then I talked about what it would look like and how we can make changes to how we're doing things. At this point it's more, I will ask her what she needs because I'm not finding that she needs a lot.

The observation of Addelyn was consistent with the above description of her work. During the observation, Addelyn checked in with the principal to see if she needed anything from her that day. After a brief update of the principal’s schedule, Addelyn went into classrooms and took notes on general instructional practices that teachers were using in each classroom. She said she intends to send her notes to each of the teachers and have follow up conversations. She talked about the importance of her engaging in these behaviors to make the school improvement plan real for the teachers so it can actually have an impact instead of sitting on a shelf for the year.

The interview and observation both show that Addelyn’s approach to the work was very hands on as you might expect with a school leadership coach with an internal role at the district level. While Addelyn placed much effort in the implementation of classroom instructional practices, it was clear that her focus for implementing the HIL Model was to support the school
improvement process and she used her expertise to focus the attention of school leaders on that process.

**Claire.** The interview and observation of Claire reflected a very competent school leadership coach that spends a considerable amount of time preparing herself for the work, learning about her school, and leading the school in implementing the HIL Model within the state school improvement process. It seems as though it was not enough for Claire to go into a situation with a direction of where to go. She wanted to have thought out the situation so that she not only has a clear picture of where the school is heading, but also understands the steps they will need to get there. Upon developing that vision for her school, Claire is then thoughtful about engaging in behaviors that will help the school realize that vision.

After coding Claire's interview, it is clear that one of her personal dispositions was that of a learner. She talked about how she seeks out any learning that she can use to build her own efficacy in any role that she plays, but particularly in her role as a leadership coach.

I look for the learning opportunities. I have appreciated the workshops and the summits as opportunities to, not only grow my own learning, but I always look at as the lines of, "What can I take back? Or what might I need to take back to those that I work with?"

She also reported spending a great deal of time in self-directed learning to understand the work and talked in her interview about this as a behavior that brought her success in former roles as well.

Besides the personal disposition of being a learner, Clair also self-identified several personal strengths of hers, including her understanding of adult learning, knowing and being flexible with school improvement or school renewal blueprints, her understanding of curriculum and curriculum alignment, being a coach, her ability to simplify complex processes, and being able to see the big picture. As she supported the school’s implementation the HIL Model, Claire
spoke of her efforts to develop a complete understanding of the processes and how she sees the role of the school improvement coach as one who brings the work into the schools they serve.

Well, again, I think it's knowing the end of where we need to be, that we're (coaches) just trying to get them there.

In the on-site observation of a school improvement team meeting, it was clear that she was providing the school with the direction for the school’s focus and was seen by those in the room as the expert. She also worked to make sure that each of the schools value the content that she brings to the table as worth the time it takes. Claire described the reaction that her school has when she brings back HIL related content:

They're really good about saying, "All right, is this a hoop that we need to do for HIL, or is this something that we really can do to benefit our work? Is this something that we can modify?"

Like Addelyne, Claire also brought the HIL Process to the school through their school improvement process.

School improvement, although I had moved on to the thinking of it as a school renewal and aligning the professional development that I provided in coaching around those goals and around that student data.

Claire talked extensively about her role in bringing focus on the work to the building by being there every week and by holding everyone accountable for doing the work together.

I know from my experience in [former school] the importance of setting up the meeting every week with the principal is just to check in. It aligns our work, but also, they appreciate it knowing that I was going to help hold them accountable and help them be successful. And that's what I bring here, so I look at their goals that they've established with The HIL Project and what we've mapped out.

This painting of the work that Claire was doing within her school(s) reflects the effort she has spent in learning about her school and the staff to develop that vision for where they need to go. She was thoughtful in how to build value for the work within the school staff and was intentional
with her own behaviors as she helped school leaders learn about and engage in their role in supporting the continuous implementation of the HIL Model.

**Rachel.** Rachel’s approach to the work was similar to the approaches of Addelyn and Claire in that she also took a direct approach in aligning the school improvement process with the goals of the HIL Project. This reliance on her experience and expertise with the school improvement process can be seen in how Rachel took a very direct role in guiding the school leaders’ role as she implements the HIL Model within her school(s).

During the interview, Rachel spoke about how her understanding of school improvement guided how she approached the work, which required patience with her school leaders. She talked about how her work as a school improvement coach aligns well with her previous work experience as a principal and her understanding of the school improvement process.

School improvement was a big part for me as a principal, and this falls right in line with school improvement and what we're doing. The phases made perfect sense to me.

Rachel approached the work very instructionally with her principal by taking a consultative approach with the content that she feels comfortable and confident with. This was not limited to the work that involves the school improvement process, but any knowledge that she has or acquires. For example, after diving into more learning around literacy, Rachel stated that she told her team “let's dive into this because I have that background knowledge now that I didn't have before.”

Seeing needed growth areas in the school’s leadership, Rachel took a special interest in supporting the leadership development of the school principal.

[Principal] and I spent time talking and working around the building and talking about the kinds of changes that need to occur. Not only the physical changes, which he understands that management part, but the leadership part and how much it's like the classroom. The staff becomes your students and you need to project that confidence, and that understanding that we're losing here.
She also spoke about the principal acting only as a building manager and she was working to put together a handbook for him that would help him clarify to the staff what goes on at their school with the school improvement process and a complete calendar to communicate all events to staff and parents.

Rachel’s knowledge and understanding of the school improvement process served as the foundation for how she approached her school leaders. By taking a direct approach to leading the school leaders, she hoped that her principal could step out of being just a school manager and be a leader in the school improvement process.

**School improvement experts summary.** As shown above, the school leadership coaches who approached the work as an expert in school improvement tended to take a much more hands on approach with their school teams. Each school leadership coach in this category explicitly stated a strength of knowledge with the school improvement process and used specific school improvement language when possible to represent processes outlined in the HIL Model. There was also a strong tendency for these school leadership coaches to bring back content of the HIL Model in an instructional way so that it could be merged and aligned to the school improvement plan at each school.

**Literacy experts.** A fourth theme that emerged within a group of school leadership coaches was an approach that relied on experience and expertise with the teaching of literacy as coaches engaged with school leaders in a purposeful manner to build systems that would support continuous renewal of their literacy program. Miley and Michaela each gave explicit descriptions of their work that detailed similar behaviors, processes, and goals that pointed to their ability to facilitate the application of the coaching model within the school through explicit and direct support around the school’s literacy program.
Miley. Miley approached her role as a school leadership coach by equipping teachers and school leaders with new tools and strategies for teaching literacy. She spent a great deal of her time modeling for them research-based instructional strategies and strategies for accessing real-time student data to measure progress towards student literacy goals, constantly relying on her expertise in literacy to guide their work.

Miley began the interview talking about her strengths as a literacy coach and reading specialist. She talked about how her focus on supporting the school’s literacy program filled a gap in the school that would normally be filled by a literacy coach.

I think the fact that I can bring a lot of literacy experience, we don't have a literacy coach. Now, maybe that is something they'll think about, get that kind of support as I start fading out. We don't have another person that we can tap into, so I think that's a big plus.

The literacy capacity of the building was very much a theme of Miley’s interview. She immediately began the work by building the literacy capacity of teacher leaders. She used various tools such as school onsite professional development sessions along with cognitive coaching sessions, but the goal was to increase the capacity of teacher leader’s with teaching reading.

In the observation of Miley, she noted that she began the support of her school by creating systems that support organizational learning around literacy, but then shifted her support towards investing in the capacity of individuals so they could lead the work. To do this, she engaged in behaviors that could model the work for them so they could see the value in the strategies that Miley brought to the table. I also observed this behavior during her on-site observation where Miley spent two hours assessing the reading levels of students for teachers to support the monitoring of any progress teachers were making with the students. However, instead of modeling or guiding teachers through this process, Miley was doing the assessments
for them so they could later interact with the data and see its utility. Statements in her interview shed light on this approach.

I'm pushing them to think about what needs to be doing next. I think that probably is something they're not used to and I think something that is going to, in the long-run, really going to help them become that questioning, critical-thinking learner that we want them to be, leader, whatever and leader that we want them to be.

Miley approached the work of a school leadership coach by seeking to equip teachers and school leaders with new tools. To equip the teachers, she models for them the needed behaviors in order to show the value of the information collected. This approach highlights Miley’s knowledge of literacy and allows that personal expertise drive the focus of the school.

**Michaela.** Michaela also approached the work as a literacy expert. She engaged as a school leadership coach much like a literacy consultant would, by putting many ideas on the table for the school leadership team. Michaela felt this would help guide the school toward how they can best implement the HIL Model in a way that was fit the school. While Michaela did not show any evidence of personal investment in any one of her ideas, she continued to rely on her expertise in literacy to put ideas on the table that would guide the school towards implementing the HIL Model.

When asked about personal strengths she brings to the work, Michaela noted that she brings a lot of experience working with many schools and many literacy coaches so she has a broad understanding of where schools can be and what they might need. She also mentioned that one of her strengths is in listening through the lens of a teacher and being flexible with feedback.

I think the most important skill that I use is flexibility, being able to look and remember the lens of the teacher also. I try to really listen to the underlying thing they're telling me. I've always got an option B, so I can work from another angle. It's sort of more the skills of me in my time as a reading consultant and then also in the time that I spent out in buildings, but I'm using both skills.
This comment spoke very much to the approach that Michaela brought to the work of a school leadership coach as one who wants to give ideas out and listen for reasons why the idea was picked up or not so she can be flexible with her next idea, if needed. Consistently throughout the interview, Michaela talked about how she brought her knowledge about developing a curriculum for literacy and wanting teachers to have clarity with what a sound curriculum included. But whenever there was push back, she listened for the underlying reason for the resistance and sought to find an alternative suggestion, a compromise, or re-clarified the goals that she was trying to achieve.

Often, somebody is resistant, not to be resistant, but because they doubt themselves. Or they're inflexible because they like being a certain way, and they can't undo and change.

This all spoke to a very consultative approach to implementing the HIL Model where Michaela was bringing the ideas and the knowledge and guiding the staff in how to implement the model. Other statements, however, spoke to a more supervisory role where Michaela used elements of the HIL Process to coerce school leaders into specific aspects of the work. If someone else brought an idea to the table that did not fit with her vision for the work, she would push back using the HIL Model as the guide for pushing for specific school-wide decisions.

And then my mantra for this work is Integrity and Fidelity. That helps with our mavericks that, I'm saying no because it's not fitting in to that HIFI Model.

Prior to the on-site observation, Michaela stated that I would see some tense moments with the teachers and she was right. One teacher leader was visibly opposed to most every idea Michaela put on the table and the principal would speak up in support of the teacher’s perspective in these instances. However, when the principal provided an alternative idea that gave the teacher leader a strong choice and voice in the matter the teacher leader came right on board and showed enthusiasm toward the idea.
These examples from the interview and observation of Michaela spoke to her reliance on her own expertise as her guide to the school leaders. She had a vision for how the HIL Model should be implemented in her school(s) and took an approach that was both direct and flexible to implementing the HIL Model. When an idea of hers met resistance, she would counter with an alternative idea or used her understanding of the HIL Model to keep things moving in the direction that she felt best fit.

**Literacy experts summary.** The school leadership coaches who relied on their literacy expertise in how they approach the work tended to take a much more hands on approach to guiding the work with their school teams. They both seemed to have a clear vision for where their school(s) needed to go and went about their work in realizing that vision through modeling and consulting. Both school leadership coaches in this category recognized their knowledge of literacy was essential for their school to move the work forward and brought to the table the direction they felt the school needed to go.

**Instructional leadership experts.** A final theme emerged within a group of school leadership coaches with those that took an approach that utilized and focused on their experience and expertise with instructional leadership. Caroline, Grace, and Judy each talked about their work in ways that acknowledged their personal understanding of instructional leadership and thoughtfulness towards building the instructional leadership capacity of their school leaders. These three school leadership coaches engaged with school leaders in a purposeful manner to develop the instructional leadership that supports continuous renewal of their literacy program. They each worked to build instructional leaders at their school to lead the work of school renewal and were all thoughtful regarding the school leaders as adult learners.
Caroline. Caroline’s interview and observation revealed her perception of her own strengths as an instructional leader. She used her knowledge of instructional leadership to promote specific behaviors in the school leaders that would support teachers instructionally in ways that were mindful and sensitive to her understanding of adult learning.

During the interview, Caroline spoke immediately about her strengths in understanding adult learners, understanding brain research, and adult motivation. This understanding of adult learning seemed to be highly influential of the approach that she took in supporting the school leaders at her school. Caroline seemed very intentional about how she utilized questions to guide the work of the school leaders. Instead of building the capacity of the school leaders instructionally, Caroline used cognitive questions to help the school leaders build their capacity for the work of school renewal. If a particular question did not get the response that she was hoping for, she was confident enough in what needed to be done that she could let go of that idea for the time and come back to it later.

It's kind of like when I was a principal, I started changing my mindset of okay, so when I'm gone, what do I want to give to the organization for when I'm gone? It's not like me doing all the time, but it's me trying to empower other people by modeling, by including, by ... and how I do that is different every time. Sometimes it's like the same thing you're doing now, asking powerful questions. Sometimes it's me kind of asking questions, stepping back, then having to ask the question again because sometimes it doesn't get heard and sometimes having to ask it again.

From this and other similar statements made during the interview and observations, it was clear that Caroline was trying to build instructional leaders in her school that would have the knowledge and skills to carry the work forward when she was no longer there.

Caroline did not shy away from using her expertise to guide school leaders. She spoke about needing to step in and provide more direction when a particular school leader lacked the knowledge or skills needed of an instructional leader. She did, however, seek to find a balance
and make sure that she did not seem pushy. If a school leader did not respond to her recommendations in the way that she intended for them to, Caroline would try again later or consider what other things they might need to hear so she could come back to the topic later.

So it's one of those pieces that if you push too hard you can push yourself right out the door so quickly. It is such a delicate dance because it's like, are they ready to hear this? or, Are too many other things that we have to drill down to first? Did I go too far?

This second reference to what she is referring here to a “delicate dance” with school leaders shows Caroline’s approach with questions to be more directive than interdependent. Not to imply that Caroline is not constantly learning, but that her use of questions places her at the center of the learning and her questions are needed to guide the implementation of the HIL Model.

Finally, the interview and observations gave us clues to what information Caroline prioritized for her school. While she maintained careful attention to her persistence in the direction that she was trying to maneuver the school towards, the focus was definitely in regards to what she felt was most important with literacy instruction. Caroline saw that building instructional leadership into the principal and teacher leaders was the top priority for implementing the HIL Model and sustaining the processes that were being built.

But I have to be careful with literacy too because I can't push the school improvement team too hard with my ideas. I have to kind of ... This is why I love the essentials (Essential Instructional Practices for Early Literacy). Because the essentials are research-based, and this is their bang for the buck so people are not wasting their time.

In both interview and observation, Caroline mentioned her master’s degree in literacy and that she had strong opinions regarding literacy. What she appreciated about the HIL Project was that she was able to bring a set of instructional practices to the school that were research-based, so it was not just her pushing her own opinions. Caroline also expressed that the school she served did hire a literacy person, but that person engaged mostly with student discipline issues. During the observation, Caroline expressed concern that the literacy consultant felt like Caroline
was stepping on her toes. Caroline began to lead an Instructional Rounds initiative at the school with the goal of the principal growing in understanding of the current state of instructional practices around literacy so he could ensure that teachers were working with students who need it the most.

Through these efforts, Caroline was working hard to ensure that when she no longer served the school, they would have the leadership necessary to provide quality instructional leadership. Her vision of strong instructional leadership guided the direction of her support while her understanding of adult learners guided how she moved her school leaders in that direction.

Grace. Grace came to her role as a school leadership coach after several years of leading underperforming schools as a principal and developing expertise in instructional leadership from a mentorship initiative. During both her interview and observation, Grace talked about how she brought that experience and expertise as an instructional leader to her role as a school leadership coach. The behaviors exhibited during the onsite observation and talked about during the interview showed that Grace focused on building the instructional leadership of the principal at her school and using techniques that were thoughtful of adults as learners.

When asked about the personal strengths Grace brought to the work in the interview, Grace talked immediately about her personal experience in underperforming schools and knowledge about being an instructional leader. She mentioned coaching as a strength that she brought from her former experiences and talked in both interview and observation about how her focus was going to be on building the instructional leadership of the principal she was working with.

So one of the things I can bring to [principal], because you know when I met her, she's feeling pretty hopeless, like, "I can't do this, I don't have the skills. It's too hard, the work is too hard." I'm able to say to her, "It looks hard, but trust me, we're side by side and
things will get better. They will get better." So I think that's one of the important pieces that I take.

Grace brought a set of tools around instructional leadership to her school and a mindset that her principal could improve. She wanted to equip her principal with those tools

So I've had this whole idea that with the right kind of support, like anything else, most principals will improve. So I guess that's the strength I bring is that I have the mindset that things will improve if you do certain things. And it's about convincing [principal] that's true.

During the on-site observation, Grace worked with the principal to observe teacher classrooms and then engaged in cognitive conversations with those teachers. Prior to the classroom observation, Grace reminded the principal what was important in doing a classroom observation, most often through questions seeing if the principal could recall what she had said was important in previous conversation. After the observation, Grace would discuss with the principal what behaviors were important for her to pay attention to when she discussed the observation with the teacher. Her questions again reflected information that they had previously discussed about behaviors that Grace was trying to reinforce. After each conversation, Grace asked the principal to reflect on how well she did in sticking to her goals for the conversation. Grace had very little interaction with any teachers during the observation or post-observation reflection and instead focused her efforts toward a mix of didactic support followed by cognitive reflection questions to develop the principal as an instructional leader.

This account of her observation, along with statements made during the interview show that Grace was very confident in her understanding of what it takes to be an instructional leader. Her approach to the work of implementing the HIL Model in her school(s) was to equip the building principal(s) with those skills. While she took a didactic approach, she also allocated a significant amount of time for reflecting on progress towards those instructional leadership goals.
Judy. Judy’s interview and observation revealed much about how she approached her work in building instructional leaders at her school that could develop the capacity to implement the HIL Model as designed for when she would no longer be at the school. While she brought in a wealth of knowledge regarding instructional leadership, Judy took a very passive role in being the instructional leader. Instead, she approached the leaders at her school as adults and gave them opportunities to build up their expertise to lead this work.

During the interview, Judy talked about her ability to see the big picture and understand what was needed in complex systems, along with an understanding of curricular programs. She spoke of developing that knowledge within the context of her former work experiences.

I think one of the strengths I bring is that I've worked with different schools, different committees, to work on literacy improvement, to work on professional development, to work on school improvement, to kinda see that big picture and what's needed in a system. We're trying to look at some systems that we need, but then sometimes you have to drill down and get to the details too.

A prevailing attitude that emerged in the conversation detailed the strength-based lens with which she approached the work of the HIL Project with her school leaders. Her experience at looking for the strengths of those in the school began with the initial Instructional Rounds process. Judy spoke about how this was a profound experience for her and said that being a school leadership coach for the HIL Project gave her permission to take an approach that she immediately valued.

I love looking at strengths, so I love that the Hill Grant focuses on that, because I like to as well, and I think it's really powerful to do that rather than a gotcha program where you just look at the negative pieces. To me, that makes all the difference. I'm in awe of what they do here. There's some amazing educators here. Coming in with that kinda attitude is a lot better than coming in with an attitude I can fix this, because it's not up to me.

Another major aspect of the work that Judy latched onto when talking about how she employed the HIL Model was the idea that it takes a systems approach to support sustainability
of HIL Processes. To build such systems, Judy invested in the instructional leadership of the teacher leaders. During the interview, Judy spoke of how she focused on making sure the teacher leaders of the building are leading the meetings regarding classroom instructional practices.

This group, they can take a staff meeting, and run it very well. The teachers respect them because they know they're the teacher leaders. The principal may be in and out, or not even there, and they're still running a meeting, and taking it to places that we need to go. They're still putting literacy at the forefront. They know that's bottom line, the most important thing.

During the on-site observation, Judy participated in a school leadership team meeting that discussed the development of a real-time assessment tools that could be used to monitor and assess adult behaviors and any resulting changes in student performance. Judy talked about how her role in the meeting was to help set up the goals of the meeting, point to what might be important things for the teacher leaders to consider during the meeting, and that she then stepped back and allowed the teacher leaders to run the meeting with the principal acting as an observer. After the meeting, Judy reflected with the teacher leaders on what they learned and how they were learning so the teacher leaders can use that reflection as they influence the rest of the building. Judy stated during her interview that she saw the work of school improvement as a big puzzle and had the primary goal of helping her school leaders put the puzzle together in a strength-based way so that they could take the work to the rest of the classroom teachers.

Judy’s thoughtfulness about how to use her own expertise in instructional leadership to guide the work of her teacher leaders was consistent in what she stated in the interview and what I observed while she engaged as a school leadership coach. Supporting her teacher leaders in reflection on their own learning to build their capacities as instructional leaders was a thoughtful way to approach adult learners and also ensure that she maintained her focus on developing instructional leaders.
Instructional leadership experts summary. One noticeable trend with Caroline, Grace, and Judy was that they each explicitly stated a strength of knowledge of instructional strategies and worked to align their expertise with processes outlined in the HIL Model. Each of these school leadership coaches approached the work as an expert in instructional leadership but went about influencing the school leaders in different ways. They each brought an approach to doing that work that they thought would be best for the school. Each school leadership coach in this category also had a strong tendency to bring content of the HIL Model to school leaders in a way that was thoughtful of adult learners.

Patterns Within Prominent Identities

Across these five groups of school leadership coaches, there were two clear patterns of how school leadership coaches approached the work of employing the HIL Model in their schools. Two groups, relational investors and interdependent learners, largely approached the work by relying on aspects of the personal dispositions they identified in themselves, speaking about those personal dispositions as their identity in the work. Through analysis of interview and observational data, common themes emerged across the Five Levels of Learning when personal dispositions guided the approach of school leadership coaches. Data revealed patterns across four of the Five Levels of Learning in how each of these coaches supported their school in developing a unique focus for the school (what work is important and why), how learning occurred within the school leadership teams (how to do the work), in the variety of on-site support behaviors that were talked about or observed (what behaviors will produce results), and in how they each talked about their personal successes in the work (what success looks like).

School leadership coaches who approached the work with a strong reliance on the knowledge and skills they have developed in previous work experiences, i.e., instructional
leadership experts, school leadership expects, and literacy experts, all came to the work with an identity associated with their personal knowledge and skills. While each of these school leadership coaches all talked about their personal knowledge as the primary resource for guiding the work within schools, patterns also emerged across three of the Five Levels of Learning in how they guided the work that needed to be accomplished (what work is important and why) and the strong stance each took toward leading the school leadership team in that direction (how to do the work and what behaviors will produce results). The following sections show evidence from the data of how school leadership coaches employed the work of the HIL Project and how they adopted a personal identity in the work with one of these two lenses.

Identity Through Personal Dispositions

As I asked each school leadership coach what strengths they personally brought to the table as a school leadership coach, many of the coaches described dispositions they identified in themselves as a person. Several of these coaches then spoke about and engaged in behaviors that showed those personal dispositions impacted their identity as a school leadership coach. The school leadership coaches described above as “relational investors” or “interdependent learners” not only described their personal dispositions as who they were in the work, but they then they either reported or I observed them engaging in specific behaviors that aligned with that identity.

For example, Betty described how growing up around people of all different cultures led her to develop into a strong listener who built relationships with people by seeking to learn about them. Then she described how that translated into specific behaviors as a school leadership coach where she guided the work through listening:

So bringing that skill into it, not being the top resolver, but being the explorer with them, they can see the problem but letting them come to that point with you and how you can bring them to that point. So I'd have to say that I've used that a lot in my past and in my present as well, but I think that that is a super, super important skill.
This was a common pattern in how relational investors and interdependent learners described themselves and their work. Emma said that she was not one to take charge but engaged as a listener and guided conversations when needed. She attributed these dispositions to why being a school leadership coach came naturally for her. Anna spoke about how she was a very relational person and how having relationships within the school and district prior to becoming the school’s leadership coach was a key to her success. Her interview followed with how developing new relationships within the school, being an astute listener, and engaging in deep conversations were so important to her work as the school leadership coach.

Because there was direct alignment between how each of these school leadership coaches described their personal character dispositions and how they engaged with school leaders to employ the HIL Model, it was worth investigating other patterns in how they described their understanding of or behaviors in the work of a school leadership coach. While there is a clear distinction between the two groups in that the relational investors approached the work through building relationships, there was also considerable overlap. Through a second cycle of selective coding guided by the Five Levels of Learning as a frame for which to explore each aggregate group of school leadership coaches, the data revealed patterns in how each of these coaches engaged with their school to develop a unique focus for the school, how learning occurred within the school leadership teams, in the variety of on-site support behaviors that school leadership coaches talked about or engaged in during onsite observations, and in how the coaches talked about specific success indicators for their work.

**Determining the pace and direction for the school.** As the relational investors and interdependent learners engaged with the school leaders around the work, one finding common to all of them was in how they each maintained a strong commitment to having all teacher
leaders and the principal come together to define and own the focus for their school and work toward that focus together. This speaks to both what work they felt is important and why and how they believed the work should be done. While their own prior professional experiences may have suggested a specific starting direction or prompted them to start with suggestions in where to start, each coach instead sat with school leaders and developed the direction through dialogue and collaboration. Despite challenges that any school might face, the approach of relational investors and interdependent learners seemed conducive to pulling and keeping people together in relationship and learning as they defined goals for the work that the school most needed and walked with school leaders to achieving those goals.

Attaining this collective focus and responsibility was no walk in the park as not all schools within the project had the systems and structures in place that would facilitate such collaboration. For example, Mallory and Yvonne both spoke about contractual issues that impeded collaboration in the past. Yvonne described how teachers at her school did not have a contract at the onset of the HIL Project and how the school staff refused to participate in the project until the district ratified the teacher’s contract. In her interview, Yvonne described how the HIL Project redefined professional learning for her teachers and how teachers took ownership of one of three of the school’s strategies for achieving their priority student growth target. The principal that Tonya worked with was reluctant to engage with the work and, as Tonya described, wanted very little to do with being an instructional leader. She described her efforts to pull the principal into the work to not only access the strengths that the principal brought, but to also be a model learner for the staff.

As these two groups of school leadership coaches sought to do the work collectively with the school leaders at the school, they allowed the school leaders to control the pace and direction
of the implementation of the HIL Process. Although Tonya and Yvonne became school leadership coaches without having prior experience as a principal or district administrator, they were instrumental in supporting the school improvement process and were highly knowledgeable of what the state required. Instead of adapting the HIL Model to fit into the school improvement process that they had been supporting for several years, Tonya and Yvonne fully engaged as learners of the HIL Model with their school leaders and aligned the school improvement process to what they were developing with the school leaders. Betty, also coming to the role of school leadership coach without a background as a principal or district administrator, built relationships with her principal and teacher leaders and, just like the independent learners, let the collective knowledge and passion of the group control the pace and direction of their learning and efforts. Anna, Emma, and Denise brought a strong command of instruction to their role as school leadership coach with many years of experience as instructional leaders, yet left their egos at the doorstep and believed that working interdependently would result in the greatest sustainable impact. Mallory entered a building with a very experienced principal that was looking for Mallory to be the instructional support the classroom teachers needed. Instead, Mallory worked with the principal and teacher leaders to develop passion for research-based and data-informed classroom instruction and let them take the helm in determining the direction and pace of the school’s learning.

Each of the coaches who came in as a relational investor or interdependent learner stayed committed to developing a collective vision with their school leaders and worked to develop their ability to lead the way to that vision. Instead of bringing in their experience and expertise as their identity in their role to engage as consultants for the school, they instead engaged as learners with each school’s leadership team to work together to determine what work was
important for their individual school, why that work was important, and then developed the road map together that would achieve their goals.

**Variety of tasks.** A third pattern that emerged across those school leadership coaches who allowed their personal dispositions to develop their identity in the work emerged in the data with how they engaged in a wide variety of tasks or activities. I was personally struck at how far away from the school leadership coach’s scope of work these school leadership coaches were willing to go to build personal or interdependent relationships with their school leaders. This speaks to what they believed were the vital behaviors that would produce results as they sought to build independent and self-directed school leaders. Most of them described instances where they went beyond their call of duty to model the passion and investment they have for their school.

For example, Emma described a day that she spent as a substitute teacher because a teacher needed to leave for a medical emergency. She said she often wondered what others would think if they knew what she was doing at her school in support of the staff there. However, she remained committed to motivating them to do what is best for kids.

> If I can support them and if they feel good about it, if it helps them then to want to try a little bit harder on something else or listen to what I have to say, I'm willing to do that.

Emma and Betty also took on the task of leading community engagement events. Emma organized an event where the school matched each secondary student with an elementary student and they spent time reading together. Betty worked to lead a community event that celebrated student literacy progress, and Denise, Emma, and Denise all spoke of the time they supported the ordering, sorting, and labeling of thousands of new books for classroom libraries. Yvonne and Mallory each talked about coming in well before or after work hours to accommodate busy schedules while Denise, Mallory, Emma, Tonya, Yvonne talked about spending considerable
amounts of time with district administrators to figure out how other schools in the district could benefit from the work. After her on-site observation, Mallory talked about how she would always go above and beyond for the school because she wanted to model a vision of serving and putting children first.

Staying true to one’s identity as a person emerged as a common theme in the work of these school leadership coaches. In staying true to their identity, they allowed themselves to be servant leaders willing to engage in any behavior that would support the implementation of the HIL Model into their schools. These behaviors not only relieved others of stress commonly felt by educators who have much piled on their plate, but also built a team spirit that showed that these coaches were personally experiencing the mess alongside of their school leaders and staff.

**Identifying success.** A final pattern that emerged out of selective coding with those that identify with the work through their personal dispositions was how they defined success in the work. While no single interview question targeted this fourth of the Five Levels of Learning, I believed information on how school leadership coaches perceived success would come out of their descriptions of their own work and learning. And this was very much the case with these coaches as they often described moments that told them they were on the right track. These moments were directly related to their relational and interdependent approaches to the work.

For example, interdependent learners talked about moments where people came together or engaged in the work together as moments of success. Tonya not only talked about the challenge of getting her principal engaged, but the surprise she felt in how using cognitive coaching has helped her principal come around to be more active in the work. Yvonne and Mallory also spoke of the challenges associated with engaging the principal in the work and the success that they were having with the collaborative learning of their principals. These coaches
did not limit success to engaging the principal. Tonya, Yvonne, and Denise each talked about how everyone in their school was coming together in the work as something they were excited about.

Among the relational investors, Emma talked about how caring her teachers have been as they engage in the work and that she worked hard to make people she works with feel individually valued. Anna talked about needing to spend time one-on-one with teacher leaders so that each one of them felt valued by her. A heartwarming topic of Betty’s interview was when she described how wonderful she felt now that the teachers were inviting her into their classrooms. This was validating for her as someone who did not come in with the “letters behind her name” or the experience as a school leader.

There is a stark difference in how the relational investors and interdependent learners talked about the success they were seeing. But as this study looked across these coaches who hold true to their personal dispositions, it was clear that they were noticing success directly tied to those identified character traits that guided their approach to the work.

**Identity Associated with Personal Expertise**

Those school leadership coaches described above as instructional leadership experts, school improvement experts, or literacy experts spent a considerable amount of time during the on-site observation or interview describing what knowledge or skills they had that guided how they approached the work. Each of them then went on to describe specific behaviors that aligned with the diffusion of their expertise into the school staff. For example, Grace described how the knowledge she had developed with instructional leadership had brought her success as a principal in a low-performing school and as a mentor for other principals in similar buildings.
Then she described specific behaviors as a school leadership coach where she took a didactic approach to working with her school principal:

I think because [P] was so fresh on the job as principal right out of the classroom. I think that he was a little fearful of being a leader in terms of not being friends with teachers. My biggest challenge, and he'll tell you that, is like, "You're principal, you're not their friend, and if you don't do your job they won't respect you. And if you do your job, they may not like you, but they'll respect you." I think that is something he's really had to wrestle with.

This tendency for school leadership coaches to guide school leaders towards their own personal strengths was a common thread across how instructional leadership experts, school improvement experts, and literacy experts approached the work and understood their role as a school leadership coach. Caroline used questions to guide the work, Claire, Addelyn and Judy modeled the behaviors they wanted school leaders to engage in, and Michaela and Rachel brought many ideas to the table to keep the group moving forward. While there was a clear distinction between school improvement experts, instructional leadership experts, and literacy experts, as each group was bringing a different lens of expertise, there was also considerable overlap across the Five Levels of Learning in how they determined what work was important and why, how they understood how the process needed to move the work forward, and how they engaged in behaviors to produce the work. Patterns between the instructional leadership, school improvement, and literacy experts emerged in how each coach tended to model desired behaviors and facilitate team learning.

**Leading team learning.** One pattern that emerged in how school leadership coaches who brought an identity of an expert of a related field was how these coaches determined what work was important and in how they did the work. These coaches had a tendency to direct and/or lead the work of learning at their school. Whether this was by leading the whole school leadership
team or explicitly directing a few individuals in how to lead the work, these coaches made efforts to establish and maintain the direction of the work for their schools.

For example Grace was very directive with the principal and outlined the direction for the work and coached the principal in how to move the staff in that direction. Michaela made many suggestions to the school leadership team for what would come next and even noted needing to filter staff suggestions if she felt they were not in line with the fidelity and integrity of the HIL Project. When Claire brought back what she learned from HIL Project supports, the members of the leadership team looked to her to tell them if the work was a hoop they had to jump through or if it would be meaningful work. These findings revealed that those school leadership coaches who brought an expert identity to the work found themselves in a position to both establish the focus for the school and direct subsequent learning and actions needed to implement the HIL Model.

**Modeling of desired behaviors.** Another finding among school leadership coaches whose identity in the work stems from the expertise from previous professional experiences was how they described and engaged in the vital behaviors that would produce results. Each of these school leadership coaches described engaging in or modeling behaviors that served as an example of what the school leaders should do. This nature of the work being modeled was imperative to what would need to be delivered by school staff to sustain the HIL Processes for when the school leadership coach would leave the building. Having a model to guide the work would then result in the school leaders gaining the knowledge and confidence needed to engage in those behaviors independently.

For example, during the observation, Caroline talked about how she became the “data girl” for the staff. She put the student data together for the school team and then they came
together to reflect on the information. At the time, Caroline was hoping to start working with the literacy coach to empower her to fill Caroline’s shoes when she would leave the school. Judy labeled hundreds of new books and organized them into a library that students used to choose reading materials at their identified reading level. Judy hoped that the teachers would find such value in the effort that they would spend the time to continue this effort as the shared library continued to build. Miley spent time collecting data on students so teachers could see the value in having real-time assessment of student literacy. Michaela spent time observing classrooms and providing feedback to the classroom teachers. Rachel put together a communications handbook for her principal to give to the staff to communicate the work and would tell the principal what to communicate to the staff and by when. All of these behaviors continued to move the work forward in the direction that the coach had determined was most appropriate for the school. This pattern of school leadership coaches doing work for the school that would otherwise have needed to be performed by someone else shows their commitment and confidence in their own prior experiences and the knowledge that they have to so confidently lead the work for others to see.

**Notable Comparisons Across Groups**

While several school leadership coaches allowed their dispositions as a person to guide their approach to the work, this did not mean that they did not allow their school leadership teams access to the knowledge and skills that they developed from prior personal and professional work experiences. For example, prior to coming to this work, Betty, Yvonne, and Denise had all developed expertise in literacy. Anna, Emma, Tonya, Yvonne, and Denise all had extensive experience working with and supporting the school improvement process. Anna and Denise had experienced high levels of success in supporting classroom teachers with instructional support and principals with instructional leadership. Yet these school leadership
coaches did not bring that expertise to guide the focus of the school’s work in their respective schools. Instead, they built relationships and worked interdependently to find the school’s focus with a facilitative approach to building capacity.

On the other hand, school leadership coaches who took a more direct and instructional approach to building capacity in school leaders also spoke of personal dispositions. Caroline, Grace, Michaela, and Rachel all talked about how patience was a key to how they were approaching the work. In the observations of Caroline and Michaela, I saw these two coaches place suggestions on the table but not push their agenda if it was not immediately accepted by the school leaders. In the interviews of Caroline, Michaela, and Rachel, they also spoke about how they had a lot of ideas but were flexible and patient if one was not accepted by the school leaders. Although patience was a strong identity for several of the school leadership coaches, patience was not observed or described in such a way that was a primary device for doing the work. Instead, these school leadership coaches assumed an identity associated with their knowledge in doing the work with their school teams and utilized patience to allow the school leaders to come around to their ideas or would modify their ideas to counter push back.

A unique commonality across all school leadership coaches was their value for social interactions with those doing similar work. During the interview, I asked all school leadership coaches how they draw upon the different project supports to learn about the HIL Model. No matter how a coach identified with their role or approached the work, each of them spoke about the value of hearing the different ways that others were applying their role. Denise talked about this as part of the workshops that all school leaderships attend as part of their training.

I guess the most significant way is the meetings, and having the small group time, having time with my region. I do like having time with the whole group, and I have some connections there just from previous relationships, so being able to go to a facilitator [school leadership coach] and say, “Hey, how are things going in your school.”
And while this sentiment would be expected from Denise, who based on her interview and onsite observation I categorized as an interdependent learner, all other facilitators equally shared this sentiment and minimized the value of other project supports in comparison to the social network of school leadership coaches. Anna expressed this by saying “I know that I could go to [my coordinator] or to anyone within the project with questions, but it's been most helpful for me to connect with the colleagues who are right here who kind of know what we're living.”

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored findings associated with how school leadership coaches accessed knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with prior professional experiences to connect to, understand, and employ the work of a school leadership coach. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of how these findings address this study’s research questions, how these findings add to the conversation in the literature, and what the implications of these findings are for practice, policy, and research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This study explored how school leadership coaches drew upon their personal knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with previous professional experiences to understand and employ a school leadership coaching model that supports sustainable implementation of school renewal initiatives. A secondary purpose for this study was to propose an innovative analysis approach for exploring the experiences of those implementing programs that are adaptable to the local context. In order to achieve this study’s primary purpose, I investigated the following research questions:

1. How does a school leadership coach draw from cognitive capacities associated with previous professional experiences to make personal connections with their role as a coach?

2. After selection and placement as a principal coach, how does a school leadership coach draw from cognitive capacities associated with previous professional experience to:

   a. Construct an understanding of the necessary knowledge, skills, or dispositions of a school leadership coach?

   b. Respond to training on a specific coaching model?

   c. Decide where, when, and how to apply aspects of an explicit coaching model to a given school context?

   d. Adapt to new learning in the coaches’ training?
e. Identify and respond to opportunities for coaching engagements with the school leaders?

3. Over time, how does a school leadership coach draw from cognitive capacities associated with previous professional experience and/or their coaches’ training to:
   a. Seek out support to address challenges?
   b. Adapt to the specific coaching model of the program?

The findings of this study identified two ways in which school leadership coaches identified with their role: through that which is shaped by their personal dispositions or defined by their personal knowledge. Within these two ways in which coaches shaped their identity in their role of a school leadership coach, this study identified five distinct approaches as school leadership coaches engaged with school leaders: relational investors, interdependent learners, school improvement experts, instructional leadership experts, and literacy experts.

The findings related to the secondary purpose of this study point to the value in the newly developed analysis approach that blended multiple case study research with elements of grounded theory. The abductive approach of the constant comparative method commonly associated with grounded theory was essential for exploring new voices and perspectives of program implementers of a school leadership coaching model (i.e., school leadership coaches). The importance of techniques retained from multiple case study that facilitated the thick rich descriptive characteristics of case study allowed for codes to emerge within and across cases and allowed for a new story to be told about what is important in the lives of school leadership coaches as program implementers within the context of each case.
The remainder of this chapter will discuss these findings as they relate to the study’s research questions, the conversation in the school leadership literature, and implications of these findings for practice, policy, and research.

**Discussion Responding to Research Questions**

**Research Question 1**

The first research question asked how school leadership coaches drew from personal capacities and dispositions associated with previous professional experiences to make personal connections with their role as a school leadership coach. While I designed the first part of the interview protocol to seek information from participants related to this research question, findings suggest that the connection between how these school leadership coaches drew from personal capacities and dispositions resonated throughout the entire interview. Results of this study revealed several ways in which school leadership coaches drew from personal capacities and dispositions to make personal connections with the work. The school leadership coaches who participated in this study described two distinct ways in which they drew from personal capacities and/or dispositions to employ the coaching model that they were being trained. Other participants drew from knowledge and skills that they identified as personal strengths to make personal connections to the work. In both cases, it seems that these school leadership coaches personally connected to the work with that which they could immediately contribute to moving the work forward in their schools.

When looking across school leadership coaches from three distinct groups associated with their previous professional experience, there was no connection between coaches who adopted the identity of a content expert and the former roles that they had experienced. However, when school leadership coaches do identify with the work in a way that matches their expertise,
coaches described how their prior work experiences were important in developing that expertise. This is not to imply that coaches who came to this role without principal or district administrator experience did not have an area of expertise that led their approach to the work as a school leadership coach. To the contrary, two of the five coaches without such leadership experience came to the work with expertise in school improvement and two came with literacy expertise and only one of each pair personally connected to their work through that experience.

Others school leadership coaches drew from dispositions they believed to be part of their character. These facilitators connected to the work, not with what they knew, but with who they described themselves as human beings. They talked about how important the work was to them and what they believed school leaders needed from them. They believed that relationships or collective ownership were key to unlocking the potential within their school leaders and believed they had the dispositions as a person to be a successful school leadership coach.

Looking across school leadership coaches from the same three groups associated with previous roles each of them had served in, no distinct patterns emerged within any group. School leadership coaches who connected to the role through personal dispositions did so regardless of the expertise that they brought into the work and regardless of the level of leadership they have previously held within a school or district. Other school leadership coaches who brought in an identity associated with the knowledge that they bring to the table did so across all three groups of coaches with different prior leadership experiences as well.

Regardless of how a school leadership coach personally connects to the work, these coaches did it with fervent passion and belief in themselves. The self-efficacy exuded from each coach came from their identity in the work and their belief that their work was exactly what their school(s) needed from them. From Betty, who came in with no formal expertise in leadership or
literacy but nonetheless believed that she was taking care of people in a way that was moving the work forward as needed to Caroline who knew that she could use cognitive questions to direct the school’s principal towards who he needed to be as an instructional leader, all facilitators used their strengths with confidence that they were applying the HIL Model in the way that was most appropriate for their school.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question dives deeper into how school leadership coaches, once placed in a school, choose to employ the school leadership coaching model and engage as learners to support those behaviors. I used interviews and onsite observations to triangulate the data and capture in detail behaviors of school leadership coaches and their description of themselves as learners of the work. While much of the discussion in the interview seemed to always rebound back to how facilitators were personally connecting to the work, patterns did emerge in how they employed the HIL Model and how they engaged as learners to do such. The results reflect the tendency for school leadership coaches to approach the work with specific behaviors that were consistent with how they personally connected to their role as a school leadership coach and to engage in learning that directly supports their approach to their role.

As facilitators spoke about how they supported school leaders implement the HIL Model, they described behaviors that were aligned to the personal strengths that they identified to begin the interview protocol. Their approaches were either associated with their ability to connect with and bring people together in relationships (relational investors), foster collective ownership through supporting interdependent practices (interdependent learners), or drive the work through content expertise in literacy (literacy experts), school improvement (school improvement experts), or instructional leadership (instructional leadership experts). Behaviors described by
and observed of relational investors were very focused on building trust and rapport with the school leaders and placing primary importance on emotional support over instructional support. Interdependent learners described and engaged in co-authorship of the work as a primary approach to defining the work of the HIL Model within their schools. Those depending on the content expertise that they bring to the work engaged in behaviors that drove the work forward, relying on their own knowledge and skills in their efforts to move the work forward in the direction they best saw fit.

Not only did those strengths in content expertise or personal dispositions guide behaviors, but they also guided the learning that the school leadership coaches connected with. Relational investors and interdependent learners spoke a great deal about their learning associated with appreciative and strength-based approach and school leadership coaches from both groups talked about learning with the school leaders opposed to guiding the work. Interdependent learners also talked about how important the learning about and focus on building collective ownership was for the work they were doing. Literacy experts talked very little about their own learning. Instead, they spoke about how important the research supported literacy resource was to their work so they could defend the direction they wanted to go with research. The school improvement and instructional leadership experts each talked about how the HIL Model supported their understanding of how the HIL Model needs to be implemented within schools with some noting specific technical terms associated with their operationalization of the HIL Process within their school. However, much of what they shared has the most value to their understanding of their role was the sharing of documents and ideas they can take back to their school and implement. Their learning was more of an operationalization of their own mental model of what work needs to be done at their school.
Regardless of whether the learning was coming in ways that shaped the school leadership coaches’ identity or added ideas to enact their vision for their school, there was a resounding value in the collaboration that they shared with each other as coaches. While there were project coordinators that supported their work in regions across the state, school leadership coaches spoke of that support as secondary to the support that they give and receive with each other. They developed close-knit communities of learners that bounced ideas off and invested in the development of each other. This community became essential to their reflection on the work that needs to be done in their schools, the varying context that each school leadership coach was dealing with, and the confidence in their own behaviors as they moved the work forward.

Research Question 3

The third research question looked into how, over time, school leadership coaches were able to assess their personal work in relation to the progress that was most important for the school to make. As school leadership coaches then responded to this self-assessment, how did they seek out support to address challenges and systemically adapt to the growing understanding of their role and school. While I designed and asked interview questions to gain perspectives that could respond to these questions, coaches struggled to understand the meaning of these questions. The first such question asked coaches how their understanding of school renewal had evolved over the past year from how they previously saw school renewal through their former lens. While many responses reflected the learning journey they had experienced to just understand the school renewal process, they were unable to yet describe changes in behaviors in response to that learning. In retrospect, the school leadership coaches had been in place for just one school year and had yet to complete full training on the entirety of the HIL Model. This training included one full day workshop each month where school leadership coaches received
content related to the HIL Model and time to apply that content to the current social context of the school(s) they served. While it was clear that many of them remained in the learning zone in their role of a leadership coach as they applied the HIL Model, these coaches had not yet developed enough command of the work to self-assess the adequacy of their own approach to meeting the needs of their school outside of the knowledge, skills, or dispositions that they personally brought to the work.

**Discussion Relating to Existing Literature**

Research on school leadership coaching currently in the literature focuses much effort on understanding the impacts that school leadership coaching initiatives can have on a school, the principal, classroom teachers, or students. The approaches to school leadership coaching that these studies describe are similar to the variation on school leadership coaching called Implementation Facilitation in which HIL Project staff trained study participants. Table 2 reports any patterns that emerged in how school leadership coaches in this study attended to any of these approaches or common features of school leadership coaching.

Unfortunately, the peer reviewed literature related to school leadership coaching has yet to open the black box to answer questions such as from whom does school leadership coaching work for and under what conditions. However, those with experience coaching school leaders and studying school leaders have begun to develop clarity around factors that are important to the success of school leadership coaching initiatives. Table 3 consolidates much of that conversation in the literature while describing how those features showed up in the voices of the participants in this study.
### Table 2

**Common Features and Approaches to School Leadership Coaching in the Literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approaches to or features of school leadership coaching common in the literature</th>
<th>Study participants who assumed an identity associated with their personal dispositions</th>
<th>Study participants who assumed an identity associated with their personal expertise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coaching Approaches</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative (Bloom et al., 2005; Gibson &amp; McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Meddaugh, 2012; Stevenson, 2017)</td>
<td>These coaches were more likely to engage in collaboration with the school leaders they serve</td>
<td>One out of eight of these coaches mentioned collaboration as part of their work with school leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultative (Bauer &amp; Brazer, 2013; Bloom et al., 2005; Retna, 2015; Tally, 2011)</td>
<td>These coaches did not use a consultative approach</td>
<td>These coaches described an understanding of their role and behaviors that were consistent with a consultative approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational (Abbott, 2010; Aguilar, 2017; Barnett et al., 2015; Bloom et al., 2005; King &amp; Bouchard, 2011; Ellison &amp; Hayes, 2006; Goldring et al., 2018; Houchens et al., 2012; Huff et al., 2013; Krasnoff, 2015; Morten &amp; Lawler, 2016; Patti et al., 2012; Retna, 2015)</td>
<td>These coaches were more likely to describe an approach that sought to support personal transformation of the school leaders they served</td>
<td>These coaches did not utilize this approach to coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Aspects of Coaching Model</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and Rapport (Bloom et al., 2005, 2003; Celoria &amp; Roberson, 2015; Ellison &amp; Hayes, 2006; Farver &amp; Holt, 2015; Gibson &amp; McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Krasnoff, 2015; Shoho et al., 2012; Stevenson, 2017; Tally, 2011; Wise &amp; Hammack, 2011)</td>
<td>These coaches spoke of building trusting relationships and walking side by side with their school leaders</td>
<td>These coaches spoke very little about building relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback (Krasnoff, 2015; Reeves, 2009; Wise &amp; Hammack, 2011)</td>
<td>As the interview did not ask about feedback, these coaches did not speak about the feedback they provide to school leaders</td>
<td>While the interview did not ask about feedback, these coaches used their past experience to guide the feedback they provided to school leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality (Bloom et al., 2005; Ellison &amp; Hayes, 2006; Fox, 2009; Gibson &amp; McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Hayashi, n.d.; Krasnoff, 2015; Lauzon, 2015; Meddaugh, 2012; Silver et al., 2009; Trujillo, 2018; Wise &amp; Hammack, 2011)</td>
<td>While all study participants signed a confidentiality agreement, they did not share information regarding the importance of confidentiality in their relationships with school leaders</td>
<td>While all study participants signed a confidentiality agreement, they did not share information regarding the importance of confidentiality in their relationships with school leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Factors Important to the Success of School Leadership Coaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications of a school leadership coach</th>
<th>Factors in the literature</th>
<th>Factors revealed in this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior experience as a principal</td>
<td>School leadership coaches who did not bring this experience in did not report or show any deficiencies from not having brought principal experience to their role.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal supervisor</td>
<td>School leadership coaches who have not been principal supervisors in the past did not report or show any deficiencies from not having brought that experience to their role.</td>
<td>The personal strengths that a school leadership coach brought to their role emerged as a more impactful factor of a coach's background than whether they were an internal or external placement to their school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal or external considerations</td>
<td>The personal strengths that a school leadership coach brought to their role emerged as a more impactful factor of a coach's background than whether they were an internal or external placement to their school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive capacities of a school leadership coach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>The knowledge that a coach brought in to their role, at times, emerged as a key contributor to how the coach understood and employed their role.</td>
<td>The skills that a coach brought in to their role generally facilitated the delivery of how they understood their role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>The personal dispositions that a coach brought in to their role, at times, emerged as a key contributor to how the coach understood and employed their role.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dispositions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 3—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors in the literature</th>
<th>Factors revealed in this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training of coaches</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-service training</td>
<td>Pre-service training was not mentioned as a significant contributor of learning by study participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Barnett et al., 2015; Bloom et al., 2005; Huff et al., 2013; James-Ward, 2011; Rogers et al., 2016; Silver et al., 2009; Simkins et al., 2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-service training</td>
<td>In-service training was not specifically mentioned as a significant contributor of learning by study participants except for the opportunities to collaborate with other coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Abbott, 2010; Aguilar, 2017; Bloom et al., 2005; Bossi, 2008; Goldring et al., 2018; Huff et al., 2013; James-Ward, 2011; Lee, 2010; Lochmiller, 2014; Silver et al., 2009; Simkins et al., 2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative community of learners (Backus, 2018; Bloom et al., 2005; Libby, 2010; Meddaugh, 2012)</td>
<td>This study’s sample highly valued and appreciated engaging with other school leadership coaches to learn with and from through sharing of ideas and listening to each other.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following sections describe ways in which this study confirms literature related to the above factors or adds new insight to the current knowledge base associated with school leadership coaching.

**Factors Important to Onboarding School Leadership Coaches**

Research on the selection and onboarding of school leadership coaches is devoid in the literature. This study contributes to not only broadens the conversation regarding who district leaders might consider for school leadership coaching positions, but also to what possible dispositions and prior experiences an individual might bring to their role as a school leadership coach.

Research is clear that prior experiences will impact an individual’s learning of a school leadership coaching model (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). This strong line of research has been used to support claims that programs utilizing school leadership
coaches should hire candidates that bring former successful experience as a principal to the role.

While this requirement for successful principal experience has been the norm for all studies involving school leadership coaching reviewed in the literature review in chapter two, none of the studies brought a complete description of what standard researchers have used to characterize applicants as a successful principal. A few studies went beyond this slim description for the selection of coaches. For example, Huff et al. (2013) described how researchers assessed school leadership coach applicants prior to placement with a role play activity based on their questioning and relational skills along with their ability to understand and interpret a teacher survey. While many school leadership coaching researchers contend that prior experience as a principal is a minimum qualification for being a school leadership coach, if nothing else to bring a reputation that builds trust and rapport, this study contends that trust and rapport can be built quite successfully with individuals that do not bring that prior experience with them. Table 4 shows how previous professional experiences seemed to have no impact on how school leadership coaches approached the work in this study.

Table 4

| Approaches to School Leadership Coaching Based on Former Professional Experiences |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
|                                 | Coaches with prior experience as a district administrator | Coaches with prior experience as a school principal | Coaches with prior experience in other roles |
| Relational investors            | 0                        | 2                           | 1                         |
| Interdependent learners         | 1                        | 1                           | 2                         |
| Instructional leadership experts| 0                        | 1                           | 2                         |
| Literacy experts                | 1                        | 0                           | 1                         |
| School improvement experts      | 1                        | 1                           | 1                         |
Reiss (2007) suggests that having an individual with strong coaching skills come to the role of a school leadership coach without prior experience as a principal could be very successful. This study confirms this assertion by describing the success of school leadership coaches who were able to step into the role without experience as a principal and still have a strong influence on the school leaders in their schools. Bloom et al. (2005) share a similar sentiment when mentioning that an individual having a reputation as an exceptional school leader does not mean they have the requisite skills to be a successful coach. This is not to suggest that a person coming to the role with prior experience as a principal would in some way be hindered in how they learn or employ a school leadership coaching model. There was just not evidence from this study that suggested that experience had a meaningful impact on how an individual approached the work and engaged with the school leaders they served.

Within the peer reviewed literature, there are a few articles that explicate a clear coaching model that the coaches are to employ and how to employ it (Freeman et al., 2017; Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Houchens et al., 2012; Huff et al., 2013; LEAD Connecticut, 2013; Lindle et al., 2017; Patti et al., 2012) while others seem to leave the content of the coaching up to the direction of the coach (Abbott, 2010; Goff et al., 2014; Goldring et al., 2018). Those articles that clearly described the coaching delivery model leave no room for discussion within the articles about how the characteristics of the individual participants influenced the implementation of the coaching program. Backus (2018) found that school leadership coaches draw from their own personal and professional backgrounds, but left no detail in the nature of that influence on their role. This study confirms the findings of Backus that school leadership coaches draw from both personal and professional experiences to support school leaders and expands the literature specific factors from personal dispositions and previous professional experiences that may
influence the work. Figure 2 reflects the observed patterns in how coaches in this study approached the work and identified with their role as school leadership coaches.

The literature has identified important factors for the onboarding and support of new coaches for developers of leadership coaching models to consider. The picture painted in the literature highlights former professional experiences as extremely important and discusses what factors to consider when determining if a school or district should consider an internal or external hire. The literature then goes on to suggests certain cognitive capacities, i.e., knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are important for a successful coaching relationship with school leaders. This study’s set of participants expanded the current literature by showing a whole different way to understand how individuals come to the coaching role.

**Figure 2.** Patterns across school leadership coaches in approaching the work and identifying with their role.
Implementation Variation of School Leadership Coaching Models

Within those impact studies of school leadership coaching models, the discussion regarding the implementation of the coaching models reflected in this dissertation’s literature review shows significant variability in the dosage and quality of implementation. Given that studies have acknowledged that school leadership coaches bring a wealth of experiences, knowledge, and skills to their role (Ellison & Hayes, 2006; Gibson & McDaniel-Hall, 2017; Lauzon, 2015) along with a set of personal beliefs and dispositions that may influence how they connect to or approach the work (Backus, 2018), this study extends the conversation in the literature with the voices of those individuals in the role. This study adds to this literature that those completing their first year of learning about and implementing a specific school leadership coaching model are still in the learning process and working within the mental model of the work that they brought to their role. This adds some explanation to the literature in why researchers report variation in dose and quality in other studies involving school leadership coaching as they are still in the learning process and each individual is bringing so much of their personal identity into how they express themselves in their role. This study suggests that those implementing school leadership coaching models might expect to see variation in dose and quantity and support school leadership coaches in connecting their identities with aspects of the coaching model to facilitate self-assessments that might lead to increased abilities to employ the model as intended.

Needs of School Leadership Coach to Learn in Community

Based on his research of adult learning, Bandura (1986) proposed a model for learning that showed an interaction between a person’s cognition and their social environment. Schunk’s (1996) research on adult learning shows that adults learn by interacting within a community or
social environment to acquire an understanding of the usefulness of certain behaviors. The results of this study confirm the findings of other social cognitivist research as the school leadership coach participants presented a resounded declaration of appreciation for each other as they described when and how they were learning about the HIL Model. This study suggests that engaging school leadership coaches as a community of learners in ways that allow for self-assessment and reflection within a community would provide new coaches with an environment that supports fidelity of implementation of a research-supported coaching model.

**Implications**

**Implications for Practice**

The results of this study show that the personal dispositions, knowledge, and skills that each coach has previously developed guided their learning of a school leadership coaching model. The experiences shared across all groups of school leadership coaches (see Figure 2) reflect a “demonstration of self” in how each of them understood and employed the HIL Model rather than a swift acceptance of new knowledge, skills, and specific behaviors that defined a role that was new to them. Social constructivists suggest that learning requires an interaction between new knowledge a person receives and their social environment (Martin & Sugarman, 1999; Young & Collin, 2004) and an individual creates, not obtains, new knowledge through “the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). This is relevant to those who coordinate the pre-service training of new school leadership coaches (Bloom et al., 2005). The literature shows that pre-service training of coaches across studies of school leadership coaching ranges from one day to 40 total hours (Lochmiller, 2014; Rogers et al., 2016; Simkins et al., 2006), yet, no study has reported any specific amount of pre-service training that was successful in circumventing the variation in dosage and quality of implementation. Figure 2 offers another
frame for how we might think about hiring, onboarding, and supporting school leadership coaches. Since no patterns within groups of coaches with similar backgrounds emerged within this study’s sample, program developers might instead think about looking at candidates through a different lens associated with the strengths of the individuals, whether that be in who they are as a person or what knowledge and skills they bring to the role. Program developers might use their understanding of these strengths to carefully place coaches within schools that would benefit most from a specific type of support. But most important to the continued development of these individuals as coaches, program developers might consider providing opportunities for school leadership coaches to carefully assess their current strengths and where opportunities exist for each of them to grow. While our sample provides an assortment of approaches that align with the strengths that each of them brought to their role, the combined expertise across coaches paints a stunning picture of what could exist if program coordinators supported the diffusion of strengths across the sample of coaches they support.

While there is no description of what the pre-service training of school leadership coaches should look like in the literature, this study reveals what might be important content of such trainings. Highly detailed technical descriptions of the coaching model, especially that which the coach may not experience for a while, may lack the impact on the coach’s learning and behavior. Instead, findings from this study suggest that pre-service training might anticipate this “demonstration of self” and provide learning opportunities that support self-assessment of any needed transformation of self. School leadership coaches could engage in conversations regarding who each coach is as a person and what that means for how they might approach their work as they gain understanding of the research-informed model to be implemented. School leadership coaches might also get a chance to engage socially around what strengths each of
them brings to the table and how coaching can support the development of those strengths within school leaders. When and where possible, these conversations might be coupled with experiences of school leadership coaches in the field whereby those training pre-service coaches can help apply those conversations to the model of coaching to be employed. This could begin the process of transformation prior to experience through connecting when and how personal strengths can best support the coaching model.

The school leadership coaching literature also calls for job-embedded support that is specific to the craft of school leadership coaching and within a community of like-coaches. This study reveals the upmost importance in engaging school leadership coaches in job-embedded development rife with reflection opportunities to apply current behaviors with the coaching model. While the behaviors of the school leadership coaches participating in this study are all moving their school leaders forward in implementing the HIL Model, some of the coaches may be under or over utilizing the knowledge base with which they came to their role. As participants described their own learning, they focused on aspects of the HIL Model that are most applicable to the particular way in which they connected to their role. Engaging in job-embedded development that has school leadership coaches continually assess the strengths and growth edges of the schools they are supporting would help them reflect on what behaviors from them would provide the most appropriate support to affect self-transformation.

Finally, this study has practical implications for how the developers of school leadership coaching model hire coaches. Results suggest that more than just the prior work experience of an individual be considered when hiring school leadership coaches. Individuals with and without principal or district administration experience have shown and ability to step in and direct the work when they deem appropriate and engage with school leaders to foster collective ownership.
and distribute responsibility and leadership across the school. They have been able truly build upon the strengths already in place in each building and district and support the implementation of the HIL Model.

Another conversation regarding the hiring of school leadership coaches is on whether they are internal or external candidates. The conversation in the literature points to internal candidates having a better hold on district processes and the inner workings of schools. Evidence from this study reveals this to be true. However, external candidates have shown themselves to integrate seamlessly with school and district processes at a very quick pace. Internal and external candidates have both shown to have been able to develop strong and positive relationships with school leaders that they can come in without principal experience and contribute strongly in bring people together around the school improvement process and engage the whole organization in learning. Table 5 shows the distribution of how coaches who were internal and external to their school approached the work.

Table 5

*Approaches Taken by Internal and External Candidates*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Internal Placements</th>
<th>External Placements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational investors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent learners</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional leadership experts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy experts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School improvement experts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there doesn’t seem to be enough participants that were internal to their building to constitute a pattern, there does seem to be a higher concentration of internal candidates from our
sample that identified with their role in ways associated with their personal dispositions (relational investors and interdependent learners) over those that identified to the role based on their personal expertise.

**Implications for Policy**

This study explored an analysis approach for investigating variables that would be important in the hiring, placing, and development of school leadership coaches. Knowing how and when school leadership coaches draw from personal dispositions and prior experiences give program developers insight to what type of support coaches will need to implement the program model with fidelity. The findings of this study suggest practical implications that these school leadership coaches need pre-service training that builds the metacognitive skills of coaches to reflect on how their past experiences can be used effectively to support school leaders. Further job-embedded support needs to include ways in which coaches can reflect on the current state of their school leaders in ways that are and are not aligned with their own personal strengths. This type of support provides individuals with a way of expanding their own mental models of the work.

However, to apply these findings to only school leadership coaches would be short sighted. School leaders also step into their role drawing from personal dispositions and previous experiences to support a complex organization. Just as much as school leadership coaches bring personal dispositions and prior work experiences to their role, school leaders do as well and need the type of support that school leadership coaching can bring. Policy makers and funders should consider school leadership coaches for any school-change initiative that may require behavior changes for school leaders so they can also move past their own mental models in the direction of a true assessment of their school’s progress toward school renewal goals. Only then can they
see how their strengths as an individual can support the achievement of complex organizational goals.

As the implementation gap remains a concern for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers, calls are emerging for programs to be designed for and tested for efficacy that can adapt to the needs of specific school sites (Schneider, 2019). Using school leadership coaches is just one way of implementing a research-based program into schools. Regardless of how school leadership coaches deliver a school leadership program to schools, they need to be able to adapt to the local context of schools. Change is hard enough for complex organizations! To adequately build motivation in schools for organizational change, it is imperative that policy makers learn from positive psychology and take a strength-based approach to school renewal. Schools are not completely broken and approaching a school with an appreciative and strength-based lens will impact how school personnel receive and value support.

Policy makers and funders need to encourage those designing programs to develop models from research-based frameworks that are adaptable to the existing structures, policies, and processes of each local context. Program implementers have a unique opportunity to build up the efficacy of school leaders to make change or contribute to the cycles of shiny new program after shiny new program in schools. By truly adapting to the context of the school, programs will then have an approach to school change that is sustainable passed a single individual or set of individuals.

Implications for Future Research

The conceptual framework that emerged from this study in how school leadership coaches learn about and employ a coaching model suggest ways in which future studies can build. Future studies might look at how specific coaching approaches impact the principal and
classroom teachers. This would give practitioners and researchers a better understanding of when a given approach might be more appropriate than another. This would be an added dimension to the knowledge base around school leadership coaching that is yet to take shape.

A secondary purpose of this study was to propose an analysis design for exploring the ways in which an individual draws from personal dispositions, knowledge, and skills to implement a research-based model of school renewal. Developing a blended model was important because there lacked sufficient understanding in the literature to suggest a specific direction in which to explore why school leadership models seem to vary in quality and dosage of support. Considering this, an abductive approach that allowed for new theories to emerge was as important as providing a thick rich description of the contextual features associated with each case. Had I let the limited conversation in the literature around minimum qualifications guide the research questions of this study, the focus for questions and coding would have begun with factors such as previous work experiences and the internal or external placement of school leadership coaches. These features of the hiring, onboarding, and training of school leadership coaches did not emerge as meaningful constructs with this study’s set of participants. Designing a new approach that blended multiple case study and grounded theory techniques allowed the analysis to explore plausible ideas and concepts and allowed new ideas to emerge from the data while maintaining the thick rich description to capture important contextual features of each case.

This combination of techniques is a new application of these two qualitative methodologies. Abductive reasoning within the constant comparative method, commonly applied within grounded theory studies, allowed patterns within this study’s research questions to emerge from the data within the context of coaches supporting school leaders. The structure of and
common techniques within multiple case study were important for this study as they provided some structure to the abductive process within cases that could allow for patterns across groups of cases to emerge. The field of educational research is ripe with opportunities to apply this analysis approach to learn more about how individuals are applying research-based models or frameworks to supporting school change. In cases where an individual is supporting the implementation of either an adaptively or technically defined program for school change, this analysis approach can help program designers better understand those implementing such programs so they can better support the consistent implementation of the programs.

**Chapter Summary**

A theme in the development of psychology in the late 20th century has been the growing awareness of the need to take into account the complexities of social context in order to understand the functioning of the mind. This applies as much to intelligence and cognition as it does to theories of the self. Indeed, with the increasing recognition of social context’s role in the development of cognition, it becomes impossible to talk of the development of cognition separately from the formation of selves. (Tennant, 2012, p. 80)

Social constructivists suggest that learning requires an interaction between new knowledge a person receives and their social environment (Martin & Sugarman, 1999; Young & Collin, 2004) and new knowledge is created, not obtained, through “the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). This resonates with me as I consider the findings of this study in light of my educator past. Too often, we as educators think about learning as something we can give to children and adults. Less often do we think about the development needed for self-transformation to be possible with new learning. Learning how to be a school leadership coach is no different. Relative to the wide spectrum of what happens in education across many different
contexts and cultures, an individual with previous experiences in a few settings and a few roles brings a narrow view of the whole picture.

The literature on school leadership coaching paints a picture of successful principals going into schools and applying a coaching model to support school leaders in developing the individual capacity to lead school change. However, using a model of recruitment, onboarding, and development of coaches similar to what might be used to match a school leader with a mentor might be misguided when the models for each type of support can meaningfully vary. Coaches of school leaders are going to need more support in developing the ways of authentically assessing the needs of school leaders and authentically assessing the strengths and growth edges of their personal self in supporting the needs of the school leaders. They need to develop and transform, starting with their current strength, modeling learning for their school leaders.
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Appendix A

School Leadership Coach Interview Protocol
School Leadership Coach Interview Protocol

1. As a facilitator, what do you think are the strengths that you personally bring to the table from your previous role as a ________ that support the work you are doing with your school?

2. As you think about change initiatives in the past, what value do you think the HIL Project is bringing to the Cohort A Schools?

3. Among those elements of the Project, what do you see as the most critical elements?

4. How have you been able to draw upon your former work experience to support the work with your school?

5. How have you been able to draw upon elements of the training to support the work?
   - Can you describe the readiness of the school/principal/SLT for that kind of support?

6. What ah-ha’s have you experienced as a learner?
   - How has that supported your work with the school/principal/SLT?

7. What new perspectives did you observe in the trainings?
   - How has that supported your work with the school/principal/SLT?

8. What is a challenge you have faced in this work that your previous work experience might not have prepared you for?
   - How did you respond?

9. When have you seen your school’s principal have an ah-ha, or a light bulb go off in his/her head in regard to this work?
   - How did you respond?
10. How has your understanding of school renewal evolved over the past year from how you saw school renewal through your former principal/former district administrator/former teacher lens?

11. How has that evolution supported your work with your school?
Appendix B

Observation Protocol
Observation Protocol

Core Assumptions of the Facilitator Observations:

- Facilitators are providing support that meets the needs of their individual school(s)
- Facilitators are drawing upon strengths from their prior experiences or their training to provide that support
- How a facilitator is learning about the work will be partly evidenced by their behaviors
- WMU Team member is present only as a passive observer and learner
- This observation is a natural slice of the work of the facilitator

Guiding Questions to Observe:

- How are facilitators engaging with school staff? Principal? Teacher Leaders? Teachers? Students? District personnel?
  - Who is the facilitator engaging with?
  - Who is leading the conversation?
  - What is the conversation about?
  - What is the nature of the interactions?
- How are facilitators supporting the school staff across Facilitator VBs? Principal? Teacher Leaders? Teachers? Students? District Personnel?
  - Where are you observing the facilitator is either leading, sharing leadership, or supporting others in their leadership?
- What is the nature of the work (across School VBs)?
  - Which School VB(s) does the facilitator appear to be supporting?
- What is the nature of the interactions of school staff?
  - Who from the school or district are interacting with each other?
  - What is the nature of those interactions?
  - What is the facilitator doing during these interactions?

Pre-observation checklist:

- Pre-planned goals for the day tied to School VBs: ________________________________
- Pre-planned level of support: _______________________________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Planned Strategies</th>
<th>Observations</th>
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Post Observation Dialogue Notes:
Appendix C

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Letter of Approval
Date: February 19, 2019

To: Patricia Reeves, Principal Investigator
    Dustin Anderson, Student Investigator for Dissertation

From: Amy Nangle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 19-02-14

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "High Impact Leadership for School Renewal" has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., add an investigator, increase number of subjects beyond the number stated in your application, etc.). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

A status report is required on or prior to (no more than 30 days) February 18, 2020 and each year thereafter until closing of the study. The IRB will send a request.

When this study closes, submit the required Final Report found at https://wmich.edu/research/forms.

Note: All research data must be kept in a secure location on the WMU campus for at least three (3) years after the study closes.
Appendix D

Background on the High Impact Leadership Project
EMPOWERED LEADERS
CONFIDENT READERS
SCHOOLS THAT WORK FOR ALL

The High Impact Leadership for School Renewal (HIL) Project is a grant-funded project to support school principals and teacher leaders. Its goal is to develop high-impact school leadership for school renewal, with a focus on implementing the GELN Literacy Essentials in Reading Now Network (RNN) elementary schools.

76 + 76 SCHOOLS

$12,500,000 Federal grant funding over 3 years

www.HILWMU.org
Fact Sheet

The High-Impact Leadership for School Renewal (HIL) Project works with school leaders to make literacy success for all students job #1.

HIL equips school leaders with renewal strategies that actually result in change.

We help schools implement the GELN “Literacy Essentials” with greater intentionality and strategic processes.

We support school and district commitments to the goals of the Reading Now Network (RNN).

We provide on-site facilitation coaching by educators skilled and experienced in literacy and leadership.

Our facilitation coaches are trained, guided, and supported by a core team of implementation, leadership, and literacy experts through Western Michigan University (WMU).

We develop a diverse and well-trained pool of teacher leaders who can help lead school renewal initiatives.

We emphasize high-integrity and high-fidelity implementation and sustainability for research-based school renewal initiatives—starting with literacy.

Key ways we support schools
- On-site support by facilitators
- Literacy and leadership summits for principals and teacher-leaders
- Supplemental funds for schools

Key practices & processes
- Unwavering literacy focus
- High-impact literacy strategies
- Appreciative inquiry
- Strengths-based growth and support
- Shared ownership and responsibility
- Distributed and empowered leadership
- Evidence-based decision making
- Literacy-based instructional rounds
- Prioritized student growth targets
- Adult behaviors aligned to growth targets

Timeline
- Initial grant: 2017–2020 serving 76 schools
- Extended grant: 2020–2023 serving 76 more schools

Key Partners and collaborators
- Western Michigan University
- The Reading Now Network (RNN)
- The MAISA General Education Leadership Network (GELN)
- Intermediate school districts/educational service agencies (ISOS, ESAs)
- U.S. Department of Education
- Michigan Department of Education (MDE)
- Selected education, business, and philanthropic organizations

February 2019

WWW.HILWMU.ORG