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Principal Supervisors Coaching Practices for Developing School Principals' Instructional Leadership Capacity

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MA, George Mason University, 2001

BS, North Carolina Central University, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Across the United States performance expectations of principal supervisors are shifting from a focus on compliance to a focus on instructional leadership development. The problem addressed in this study was that principal supervisors were applying feedback and coaching approaches inconsistently as they addressed school principals' growth as instructional leaders. The conceptual framework was transformational leadership, through which leaders encourage, inspire, and motivate employees to innovate and create change that can help grow and shape future academic success for the students they serve. The research questions were designed to explore how principal supervisors provide feedback and coaching to develop school principals' instructional leadership practices. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with eight supervisors from one mid-Atlantic school district. A combination of a priori and open coding was used within thematic analysis. Distilled themes included effective instructional leadership, feedback practices, coaching practices, and the evaluation process. The principal supervisors agreed on the importance of site-based leadership and collaboration and used varied ways of giving feedback and providing coaching; however, it was unclear how they customized these efforts to meet the needs of individual principals. Implications and recommendations include using data to support evaluation of principals, principal supervisors, and the supervisors of all school personnel – with the primary goal being the improvement of instructional practices for student success. Creating and expanding focused and collaborative feedback and coaching cultures within school systems can support enhanced instruction and positive social change for all learners within the schools.

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Dedication

For the ancestors who whispered, “you are our wildest dream.”

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The problem addressed in this study was that principal supervisors (PSs) inconsistently provided feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. For school principals to get the support they needed, Goldring et al. (2020) learned the role of the principal supervisor (PS) had to change and noted the role shifted to become one that is responsible for overseeing principals' instructional development. Aas and Brandmo (2016) characterized instructional leadership as a top-down approach to school leadership, which focuses on the coordination and control of instruction, and suggested that instructional leaders seek to have a direct impact on instruction in the classroom by setting goals, directly supervising teaching, and coordinating the curriculum. According to Goff et al. (2015), principals need support to develop their capacity as instructional leaders; the researchers identified the use of feedback and coaching as a viable strategy to enhance school principals' instructional leadership behaviors and practices. Goldring et al. (2020) noted that school principals altered their practice based on the feedback and coaching they had received from their supervisors. School principals described coaching as being supportive and beneficial to them and believed contributed to increased student achievement (Wise & Cavazos, 2017). The Council of Chief State School Officers (2015) determined that standards were needed for PSs to support school districts to ensure that PSs focused on instructional leadership actions rather than on operational focused tasks. Most PSs have experience supervising teachers, as Kovach (2019) highlighted, but very few school districts are investing in strategies designed to develop PSs into effective instructional

leaders. During the first 3 years of my principalship, I had three different supervisors with varying years of experience and coaching approaches. PSs must be able to lead and sustain the conversation about change, which is in the best interests of schools, teachers, staff, students, and the community (Stelter, 2019; Wilhite et al., 2018). The inconsistent level of feedback and coaching I received during my novice years as a school principal has led to my interest in studying PS coaching practices in depth.

In Chapter 1, I present the background of the study, the problem statement and purpose of the study, the research questions, and the conceptual framework. I also include a statement regarding the nature of the study, including its definitions and assumptions, scope, and delimitations and limitations; I conclude the chapter by explaining the significance of the study with a preview of Chapter 2.

Background

Districts across the nation are recalibrating school leadership, most notably as a result of increased expectations with regard to instructional improvement and teacher development (Thessin, 2019). Many school districts are rethinking the PS role and the critical work they do with school principals, paralleling PS to that of teacher supervision. The nationwide inconsistency regarding PS position descriptions and job tasks, along with many other factors, necessitated the establishment of standards to shift PSs' practice of ensuring compliance into a coaching relationship that would be ongoing, informed by multiple data sources, and grounded in learner-centered support (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Canole & Young, 2013; Stringer, 2017). PSs interviewed in Saltzman's (2016) research believed that being a strong principal did not automatically translate into success as a PS.

Goldring et al. (2020) outlined that those PSs would benefit from structures, policies, and training that deepens their knowledge of teaching and learning and facilitates their ability to collaborate with principals as coaches rather than as compliance managers.

In 2015, national standards for PSs, the Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (MPSPS), were developed to drive expectations regarding the specific actions that should be implemented to support the school principals they supervise to include the time spent coaching school principals (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2015). The expansion of leadership coaching programs and further study into the specifics of the coaching relationship between coach and school principal (Wise & Cavazos, 2017). The problem addressed in this study was that PSs inconsistently applied feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. This study was unique because despite school divisions knowing PSs' practices are associated with positive school results, the feedback and coaching approaches they implemented to develop school principals' instructional leadership capacity represented an under researched phenomenon.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was that PSs inconsistently applied feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. School principals are fundamentally important to school improvement. The roles and responsibilities of school principals are constantly evolving (Reid, 2021). Researchers have highlighted that the PSs are a potential point of leverage for supporting and developing principals (Goldring et al., 2020). In many districts, PSs have long served as

compliance monitors, evaluators, and operations managers – not as supports for principals' instructional leadership. Honig and Rainey (2020) suggested that PSs should focus on helping principals ensure high-quality teaching and learning for all students. In this regard, they developed six Principal Supervisor Performance Standards, designed to help district leaders understand and support the work of their PSs. Performance Standard 1 indicates that PSs should be dedicating their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders. Principal Supervisor Performance Standards, along with feedback from practitioners and state and district leaders, subsequently informed development of the eight MPSPS by the CCSSO. These standards were created to provide a clear and practical definition of what a PS should know and be able to do to improve the effectiveness of the school leaders with whom they work (CCSSO, 2015). Standard 2 of the MPSPS indicates that PSs should coach and support individual principals and engage in effective professional learning strategies to help principals grow as instructional leaders. Standard 7 states that PSs should engage in their own development and continuous improvement to help principals grow as instructional leaders. For the purpose of this study, Standards 2 and 7 were used.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of how PSs in a mid-Atlantic state applied feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. Identifying and documenting effective instructional leadership practices implemented by the PS adds to the understanding of a coaching relationship that encompasses mutual accountability between each dyad of a PS

and principal (CCSSO, 2015). There are many different methods of coaching used to engage school principals in the coaching and feedback process (Garvey et al., 2018). To achieve a better understanding of PS' feedback and coaching practices, I interviewed a representative sample of PSs.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do principal supervisors provide feedback to school principals for school principals to improve their instructional leadership practices?

RQ2: How do principal supervisors provide coaching to school principals for school principals to improve their instructional leadership practices?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bass's (1999) transformational leadership theory. This theory was used to achieve an understanding of the participants' knowledge of coaching and feedback approaches that develop the instructional leadership practices of school principals. Transformational leadership theory is supported by nearly 40 years of research correlating transformational leadership to positive performance outcomes, including individual, group, and organizational level variables. The leader transforms the follower by demonstrating four major behaviors: (a) idealized influence, which refers to the level of respect, trust and admiration that leaders get from their followers; (b) inspirational motivation refers to the capacity of the leader to inspire those around them and to look at the future in an optimistic way; (c) intellectual stimulation refers to the capability of leaders to arouse followers to think outside the box, to challenge their assumptions, and to come up with new ideas or solutions for the

problems they face; and (d) individual consideration, which refers to a leader's ability to understand the differences between followers and adapt their behavior accordingly (Anderson, 2017).

PSs are expected to embody qualities and skills that support and develop school principals as well as know how to sustain talent and practice innovative approaches to grow school principal's instructional leadership capacity. The foundation of transformational leadership theory enabled me to answer the RQs by focusing my interview questions on the experiences of PSs implementing feedback and coaching strategies. I used this theory to develop the interview questions found in the interview protocol (see Appendix); specifically, I used the components of this theory to prepare the interview protocol and developed 10 interview questions. Following the transcription of each interview, I used transformational leadership theory to guide data interpretation, coding, identification of themes, and final analysis.

Nature of the Study

Research is conducted to meet the need for greater understanding of a phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study was conducted using a qualitative case study design, with data gathered from semistructured interviews with eight PSs in an urban school district in a United States mid-Atlantic study state. The case study design is appropriate for researchers to investigate an issue in a particular setting or context using one or more cases (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Interviews are an appropriate method of data collection in the case study design. I did not select a quantitative research design because I did not obtain quantitative data to test findings;

qualitative scholars are interested more in the how and why of individuals' perceptions (Yin, 2017). Qualitative research is descriptive, which was appropriate for this study. I explored how PSs used feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. Upon completion of all interviews, I compiled and sorted the resulting data relevant to answer the RQs of this study.

Definitions

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Coaching: A professional relationship that is designed to an authentic learning opportunity occurring over continuous interactions, reflection, dialogue, and problem solving (Johnson, 2016).

Feedback: An interactive exchange in which interpretations are shared, meanings are negotiated, and expectations clarified (O'Donovan et al., 2021).

Instructional leadership: An influence process through which leaders identify direction for the school, motivate staff, and coordinate school and classroom-based strategies aimed at improvements in teaching and learning (Gurley et al., 2016).

Principal supervisor (PS): An instructional leader assigned the primary responsibility of supervising principals. PSs are accountable for principal development, evaluation, and school improvement consistent with transformational leadership theory, which includes the capacity of leaders to arouse followers to think creatively and to produce new ideas and solutions to challenges they may face (Stringer, 2017).

Assumptions

The first assumption of this study related to the nature of the study by presuming that a qualitative case study was the appropriate method for determining, which coaching and feedback approach PSs implement. The next assumption was based on the purpose of this study, that semistructured interviews were an appropriate data collection method. Using semistructured interviews illustrated participants' varied leadership experiences, based on how long they had been a principal, how long they had been a PS, or how long they had worked for the school division. The third assumption alluded to whether PSs would share honestly and to the best of their abilities during the semistructured interview sessions. The final assumption was based on the outcome of the study, allowing me to examine the change in the PSs' role from compliance monitor to instructional coach and highlighting whether PS participants had a uniformed competency regarding how to determine which feedback and coaching approach to select when developing the instructional leadership capacity of school principals.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative case study included the perspectives of eight PSs regarding the feedback and coaching approaches they used to develop the instructional capacity of the school principals they supervised within one school district located in a mid-Atlantic state in the United States. Eleven PSs who met the criteria were invited to participate. Despite expressed interest, school reopening COVID protocols limited participation to eight PSs (a) three elementary school PSs, (b) two middle school PSs, and (c) three high school PSs. In an effort to collect richly textured information relevant to the

phenomenon under investigation, PSs with less than 2 consecutive years in the role were excluded from this study. Face-to-face interviews were not considered due to COVID social distancing protocols. Thus, in-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted via Zoom.

Limitations

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), limitations are inherent in all studies and must be identified to point out possible weaknesses. The first limitation of this study was having than 10 participants. Thus, the findings from this study may not be generalizable to all school types such as alternative and/or specialty schools. A second limitation pertains to social desirability, drawing largely from self-reported descriptions. PSs may desire to be perceived as knowledgeable coaches and may not answer the questions wholly. It was assumed; however, that all participants responded to interview questions with authenticity. The third limitation of this qualitative case study was the possibility of researcher bias, as I was the sole person responsible for all data collection and analysis. Almalki (2016) cautioned of confirmation bias, a form of researcher bias that occurs when a researcher interprets the data to support their hypothesis or omits data that do not favor their hypothesis. Therefore, I addressed the potential issue of researcher bias by describing the specific efforts taken to improve the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this study's trustworthiness in Chapter 3.

Significance

PSs are now expected to dedicate their time to coaching and helping principals grow as instructional leaders; however, they often resort to directive and supervisory

behaviors (CCSSO, 2015). Principal supervision leadership coaching moves might not be readily implemented unless adequate training and organizational reform occurs (Lackritz et al., 2019; Lochmiller, 2018). The standards for principal supervision reflect that coaching, when partnered with feedback about teaching and learning, may support the development of school principals' instructional leadership capacity (Lochmiller, 2018). The potential findings may influence the type of professional development PSs receive and provide to influence instructional change. In addition, the findings may help PSs enhance how they provide support to school principals with varying levels of knowledge and experience. The strategies and practices of principal supervision play a crucial and indispensable role in the attainment and continuation of high student achievement outcomes for all. The implications for positive social change within the local school district may include an influence on both policy and practice. Establishing a normed criterion to determine which feedback and coaching approach, strategy, and frequency is most appropriate to develop school principals' instructional leadership could uncover and provide an opportunity to address any leadership development inequities that may exist within the district.

Summary

PSs help to shape and develop school principals' instructional leadership. The purpose of this research was to examine the feedback and coaching practices PSs apply to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. The problem addressed in this study was that PSs inconsistently applied feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. The nationwide inconsistency

regarding PS position descriptions and job tasks, along with many other factors, necessitated the establishment of standards to shift PSs' practice of ensuring compliance into a coaching relationship that would be ongoing, informed by multiple data sources, and grounded in learner-centered support (Stringer, 2017). According to Farmer (2017), improving student proficiency calls for a collective effort to include those who supervise principals. Gaining a better understanding about how evidence-based practices, like on-the-job coaching and differentiated professional learning, is implemented could yield substantial benefits in student achievement. Identifying and documenting effective instructional leadership practices implemented by the PS adds to the understanding of a coaching relationship that encompasses mutual accountability between each dyad of a PS and principal (CCSSO, 2015). The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bass's (1999) transformational leadership theory, which is supported by nearly 40 years of research correlating transformational leadership to positive performance outcomes, including individual, group, and organizational level variables. This study was conducted using a qualitative case study design, with data gathered from semistructured interviews with eight PSs in an urban school district in a United States mid-Atlantic study state. The case study design was appropriate for me to investigate an issue in a particular setting or context using one or more cases (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Principal supervision leadership coaching moves might not be readily implemented unless adequate training and organizational reform occur (Lochmiller, 2018). The standards for principal supervision reflect coaching, when partnered with feedback about teaching and learning, may support the development of school principals' instructional leadership capacity

(Lochmiller, 2018). I studied this phenomenon to gain a better understanding of PSs' feedback and coaching practices.

In Chapter 1, I included the introduction, problem statement, RQs, conceptual framework, significance, assumptions, and limitations. In Chapter 1, I also provided the background that supports the research and purpose statement. Specific definitions provided clarification for the terms used in this study, which outlined a problematic circumstance regarding principal supervision instructional leadership development strategies. In Chapter 2, I present a review of the literature on transformational leadership, and the leadership behaviors and practices of PSs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem addressed in this study was that PSs inconsistently applied feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of how PSs apply feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. The population was PSs assigned to supervise elementary, middle, and high school principals in a United States mid-Atlantic state. I begin this chapter with an explanation of the literature search strategy, continue with a detailed conceptual framework through which the foundational theory of transformational leadership is explored to highlight the importance of PSs' applying feedback and coaching approaches as a part of their leadership practice, and conclude with a literature review related to the key concepts in the study, along with an associated summary and conclusions drawn from literature.

Literature Search Strategy

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of how PSs applied feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. I conducted a systematic search of the literature using the Walden University library; the databases included ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, and EBSCO. The keywords that guided the literature search were *qualitative research, coaching and feedback, principal supervisors, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, effective leadership,* and *student achievement.* These searches produced the research results needed to inform, outline, and plan this study. When limited research regarding

these key words was yielded, I searched for terms, such as *executive coaching*, *coaching methods*, and *central office administrators*. In addition, I reviewed abstracts, case studies, dissertations, articles, books, and publications from the past 5 years.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative case study was based on Bass's transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership theory postulates five leadership factors (Bass & Riggio, 2006):

1. The transformational leader shifts the follower from self-interest toward accomplishment for greater good.
2. Leadership behaviors that are associated with the leaders' values and beliefs and their sense of purpose, and their ethical and moral orientation are involved in transformational leadership.
3. Leaders inspire and motivate followers to act and reach goals that seem unreachable.
4. Leaders appeal to the followers' intellect, which sparks innovative and creative solutions to problems.
5. Leaders provide individualized socioeconomic support and develop and empower their followers.

Bass (1999) described transformational leaders as people who exude a sense of purpose and collaborate jointly with their followers toward a larger purpose. Transformational leadership is among the most enduring of the many leadership models

(Bush, 2017). Its contribution to schools began to gain momentum in the 1990s in tandem with its growing recognition in business literature (Kwan, 2020).

Bass (1985), in his seminal work in the business field. proposed two forms of leadership: transactional and transformational. Transactional leaders reward subordinates who comply with performance expectations, while transformational leaders, in contrast, believe their followers inherently aspire for accomplishment and attempt to induce them to embrace and internalize the organizational goals, thereby motivating them to take on more responsibilities (Kwan, 2020). Andersen et al. (2018) explained that transformational leadership is appropriate for school settings because of its emphasis on preparing employees to learn new things, building and strengthening new organizational norms, establishing new meaning and ways of thinking, and helping leaders break established norms and establish new norms that transform school culture.

Transformational leaders coach, mentor, and constantly try to encourage personal development of their followers. These leaders raise the consciousness of their followers about the importance of organizational goals (Tan et al., 2020). In contrast to transactional leadership, transformational leaders strive to make the organizational vision clear for its employees. Andersen et al. (2018) found that this process makes it plausible that the employees develop the same understanding of professional quality as the leader and that they increase their efforts to achieve professional quality. The finding implies that transformational leadership is positively related to the level of professional quality (Andersen et al., 2018).

Transformational leadership theory is key to conceptualizing ideal school leadership by focusing on inspiring and developing followers to be innovative problem solvers (Berkovich, 2016). Exploring leadership styles and approaches that will strengthen an educational leader's ability to manage and lead schools in this new era is logical and necessary (Anderson, 2017). In this study, transformational leadership theory enabled understanding regarding how PSs applied coaching and feedback approaches to improve site-based instructional leadership.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

In many districts, PSs have long served as compliance monitors, evaluators, and operations managers and not as supports for principals' instructional leadership. Honig and Rainey's (2020) noted that despite districts taking concrete steps to focus on principal supervision and supporting principals' growth as instructional leaders, the results have been uneven and at times have even impeded school principals' ability to lead instructional improvement. In light of recent events like widespread school closures caused by COVID-19, the urgency for school leaders to have strong instructional leadership practices has heightened the focus on how PSs facilitate instructional improvement with principals. The CCSSO's development of the MPSPS, which was the first document to define the roles and responsibilities of the PS as a coach rather than a compliance officer, was grounded in the following theory of action: If PSs shift from focusing on compliance to shaping principals' instructional leadership capabilities, and if the supervisors are provided with the right training, support, and number of principals to supervise, the instructional leadership capacity of the principals with whom they work

will improve and result in effective instruction and the highest levels of student learning and achievement (CCSSO, 2015).

The MPSPS highlight some of the expected leadership practices of PSs when developing the capacity of principals:

- Standard 1: PS dedicate their time to helping principals to grow as instructional leaders.
- Standard 2: PS coach and support individual principals and engage in effective professional learning strategies to help principals grow as instructional leaders.
- Standard 3: PS use evidence of principals' effectiveness to determine necessary improvements in principals' practice to foster a positive educational environment that supports the diverse cultural and learning needs of students.
- Standard 4: PS engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help them grow as instructional leaders.

These standards serve as a tool for school districts to develop or revamp PS job descriptions to focus on research-based, results-oriented work practices as a means to help PS support equitable outcomes for all students, as well as to offer PS a tool for self-reflection regarding their own effectiveness and growth.

Role Transformation

The supervision of school principals is evolving from a role that has traditionally focused on managerial tasks to one dedicated to developing and supporting principals to

be effective instructional leaders. Prompted by national conferences and new principal supervisor standards, school district personnel have revised their approach to principal supervision (Cochran, 2020). Districts have become more specific about their expectations for PSs and have charged them to develop productive professional relationships, provide effective feedback to improve practice, and support the instructional leadership of school principals (Henderson et al., 2019). Traditionally, central office administrators have provided administrative oversight regarding functions that included the selection of curriculum materials, staff assignments, labor negotiations, and monitoring revenues and expenditures (Ochoa, 2018). However, focusing on these organizational management tasks has often removed PSs from supporting the development of instructional skills needed for effective site-based leadership (Goldring et al., 2020).

Successful, highly effective schools need principals who can manage both instructional and operational demands (Grissom et al., 2018). Thus, transforming the way PSs evaluate principals has also shifted and moved toward a climate that promotes formative feedback as an essential practice for improving instructional leadership. The performance evaluation process has been reformed to allow for PSs and school principals to interact with one another and look beyond accountability and compliance and more toward assisting principals in honing their craft as instructional leaders. PSs have started to receive professional development that provides an understanding of their new role and how it contributes to the ultimate outcome of increased student achievement. As a result, school principals have been afforded the opportunity to receive consistent and targeted

feedback to support their growth and development as instructional leaders. PSs have increased the frequency of their school visits, enabling them to better affirm principals for the significant work they are doing to improve teaching and learning. Despite refining the role, Hvidston et al. (2018) reported that PSs continue to demonstrate unsystematic methods for delivering meaningful, timely feedback.

Driven to examine the role of PSs, many school districts across the country and started requiring PSs to develop the skills needed to coach staff toward improvement. District's executive leadership desired to create a culture of coaching throughout their divisions, realizing that leadership coaching served as a means for retaining school principals (Stringer, 2017). The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing identified leadership coaching as the vehicle to help school leaders to see the difference between their intentions and their thinking or actions (Hayashi, 2016) and needed the ability to replicate the results to scale (Honig et al., 2017). Baker and Bloom (2017) recommended that districts change to a new structure for principal supervision by clarifying the position's roles and responsibilities and identifying the required competencies for the position. Corcoran et al. (2020) recommended that districts establish a set of well-defined core competencies for their PS and align them to the district's vision and strategic priorities. The recommendations from these studies resulted in the CCSSO's development of the MPSPS, the first document to define the role and responsibility of PSs serving as coaches rather than compliance officers. The MPSPS were grounded in the following theory of action:

> If PSs shift from focusing on compliance to shaping principals' instructional leadership capabilities, and if they are provided with the right training, support, and number of principals to supervise, then the instructional leadership capacity of the principals with whom they work will improve and result in effective instruction and the highest levels of student learning and achievement. (CCSSO, 2015, p. 3)

Consultation occurs with various central office departments, senior district officials, sitting PSs and school principals, and external technical assistance providers such as the Center for Educational Leadership, New Leaders, and the New York City Leadership Academy. Many district staff at the study site reported that they considered revising the job description to be one of the easier tasks of shifting the expectations of the role. Revising PSs' job descriptions impacted other central office positions and required those roles be changed as well, establishing a delineation between central office and site-based support and supervisory work in supporting principals. As a result, many districts have determined that maintaining key relationships with central office staff is necessary for PSs to advocate for principals and schools. Recognizing that principals could not focus on instructional leadership if operational problems consumed their energies, identifying the types of tasks essential for principal support was essential. Thus, reducing the case load of assigned schools for PSs and freeing them to spend more time with principals for coaching, mentoring, and instructional leadership development was a major component of transforming the PS role. Adjusting organizational structures by hiring more PSs and shifting away from a system of regional superintendents to an

organizational structure that assigned PS by level (e.g., elementary, middle, and high school) created early quick wins following transforming the PS role (Lear, 2018).

A survey conducted by the Vanderbilt University Principal Supervisor Initiative (as cited in Goldring et al., 2020) indicated that in the 2015-2016 school year, 59% of PS agreed or strongly agreed that they did not have time to visit particular schools as often as needed; during this same survey year, 32% agreed or strongly agreed that they supervised too many principals to provide enough support. The number of PSs who agreed or strongly agreed that they did not have enough time to visit particular schools fell to 50%, just as PSs who agreed or strongly agreed that they supervised too many principals to provide support dropped to 16%. According to the survey results, principals perceived that they were receiving better support because they had greater access to their supervisors, noting they saw their supervisors more frequently. This success was not without some districts being confronted by challenges. Budget constraints represented a barrier for some districts: (a) some PSs held other roles, causing their caseloads to be smaller than PSs who had a single focus on supervision; and (b) some districts identified certain schools as priority or low-performing schools with an increased need for support, resulting in their PSs having smaller caseloads than others (Goldring et al., 2020). Instability was another challenge that districts had to address from year-to-year reassignments due to PSs' turnover and the influence of new hires contributed to this challenge. These changes made it difficult for PSs to build trust. Districts noted that stability was needed to build relationships and to best understand the specific needs of the principals and the schools for which they were responsible. As evidenced in this literature

review, conducting research on how PSs used feedback and coaching to develop principals' instructional capacity is timely, significant, and relevant (Goldring et al., 2020).

Professional Development for PSs

Most PSs have had plenty of practice supervising teachers but have rarely been a part of discussions about the systematic supervision of principals or how to improve their practices. School districts have deliberately focused on developing the capacity of PSs by establishing programs to train new and aspiring supervisors. PSs being adept and skilled enough to identify and differentiate their supports based on the needs of each school principal and their school is an essential skill to their role. Baker and Bloom (2017) asserted that the primary focus of principal supervision should be grounded in a coaching relationship. In support, Goldring et al. (2020) highlighted PSs' need for more training and development on coaching strategies to provide ongoing support of school principals that aligns to the principal's growth from year-to-year.

PSs' professional development should be targeted, specific, and differentiated to meet the needs of the individual (Goldring et al., 2020). Professional learning should be developed with the goal of decreasing variance in approach (Turnbull et al., 2015) not only with regard to identifying high quality instruction, developing feedback, and coaching skills for the principal as instructional leader, but also for supporting principals in how to give teachers actionable feedback. Canole and Young (2013) recommended that districts examine their training structures and utilize existing expertise to support PSs in using new strategies and approaches independently across their caseloads.

Referenced training structures include both job-embedded and nonjob-embedded structures. Nonjob-embedded structures, such as conferences and group meetings, assist PSs in learning systemic approaches to coaching to improve their work with principals. Training that involved role playing coaching conversations, implementing school-visit tools, studying student academic standards, and using the principal evaluation tool contributed to an increase in PSs' ability to better evaluate the quality of instruction during school visits (Garvey et al., 2018; Goldring et al., 2020; Nadeem & Garvey, 2020; Thessin, 2019). Researchers (Goldring et al., 2020; Thessin, 2019) found that PSs viewed conferences as a good opportunity for networking with supervisors from other districts, which offered them an opportunity to self-select topics aligned with their own perceived needs. Job-embedded structures, such as one-on-one coaching and peer observations, have been identified by PSs as more transformative; they reported receiving real-time feedback, and they appreciated learning about and implementing tools and skills acquired in nonjob-embedded settings. Challenges to improving PSs' capacity centered largely on determining the right balance, prioritizing quality of training content, and providing adequate time for professional development and reflection on implementation (Goldring et al., 2020; Thessin, 2019).

Goldring et al. (2020) noted the need for more training for PSs, as well as development of their coaching strategies to support principals. Training focused on high-quality instruction was highlighted in a Vanderbilt University study, A New Role Emerges for PSs (Goldring et al., 2020). Many districts have thought the capacity to recognize high-quality instruction needed to be standardized as a precursor to

instructional leadership. Professional development has been needed to reach a common understanding about matters, such as creating instructional delivery standards, calibrating observations, and learning walk protocols (Goldring et al., 2020). Corcoran et al. (2020) noted that progress toward providing professional development and evaluation of PSs has remained uneven. Although districts have effectively redefined PSs as instructional leaders, districts have not always developed systematic and tailored instruction and content-oriented professional learning to sufficiently equip them for these roles. According to Goldring et al. (2020), when PSs participate in genuine communities of practice, they not only model professional development for the rest of the system, but they also demonstrate their commitment to their own continuous improvement; documents such as the MPSPS were created to be used to develop coherent professional practices within the PS community.

The 2015 MPSPS

The MPSPS were released by the CCSSO in December 2015 and constituted a refresh of the Professional Standards for Education Leaders (PSEL). The CCSSO recognized that the duties of a PS will likely change over time and provided guidance for transforming the PS role to one focused on supporting school principals with developing instructional leadership practices. Although the functions that most effectively build the instructional leadership capacity of principals are represented within these standards, also included are other functions for which a PS may be responsible. The MPSPS fall into three categories. The first category identifies the work surrounding educational leadership. The primary focus of this category is the PSs' actions toward improving the

principals' capacity regarding instructional leadership; the first four of the eight standards focus specifically on this work.

Standard 1 implies that PSs dedicate their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders. This standard is essential to the redesign of the new PS's position. The research has suggested that PSs must spend the majority of their time at school sites and with principals (Canole & Young, 2013):

Standard 2 implies PSs coach and support individual principals and engage in effective professional learning strategies to help principals grow as instructional leaders. The work of PSs is focused primarily on instructional leadership. PSs are expected to model the leadership behaviors they expect principals to exhibit. The following actions are recommended for PSs to meet this standard: (a) communicate effectively the components of instructional leadership, (b) model best practices, (c) differentiate the support to each principal and instructional needs of the school, and (d) shift from being a coach to a supervisor as necessary to facilitate the learning of each principal (CCSSO, 2015).

Standard 3 implies that PSs use evidence of principals' effectiveness to determine necessary improvements in principals' practice to foster a positive educational environment that supports the diverse cultural and learning needs of students. Gathering a variety of artifacts, evidence, and data are an essential component of the role of the PS as they conduct school site visits. PS must use objective data to effectively focus principals' learning and differentiate their feedback and coaching support. PSs are recommended to take the following actions to meet this standard: (a) gather evidence (e.g., qualitative,

quantitative and observational); (b) provide purposeful, timely, goal-aligned, and actionable feedback to principals; and (c) monitor the effects of principals' implementation of provided actionable feedback (CCSSO, 2015).

Standard 4 implies PSs engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help them grow as instructional leaders. Goldring et al. (2020) revealed a need to allow employees the ability to define their needs and have ongoing feedback from their manager, including a professional learning plan to support and hold principals accountable for continuous improvement. The main idea is that each principal receives an individual and personal "professional growth plan" (Canole & Young, 2013, p. 15). Honig et al. (2017) conducted a report in 2010 about improvement and transformation of the central office. Collaborative conversation between the PS and principal is the essential component of an on-the-job training and support plan (CCSSO, 2015).

The second category of the MPSPS (comprising Standards 5 and 6) involves the effective functioning of the PS's role as a liaison between central office and individual schools. Research conducted at the University of Washington noted that "it will be crucial for districts to ensure that they have not simply created single points of contact" for schools but rather the central office needs to shift to support districtwide teaching and learning improvement (Rainey & Honig, 2015, para 1). Partnerships are essential through the PS, but the entire central office must transform as well to support PS in achieving these standards. PS actions aligned to this standard involve: (a) examining school-level goals and ensuring alignment with central office; (b) communicating central office's

vision, goals, and strategies with all internal and external stakeholders; (c) connecting principals to resources and personnel; (d) assisting principals in learning to allocate school resources; and (e) evaluating the effectiveness of the district's systems to support schools and student learning (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Standard 5 implies PSs advocate for and inform the coherence of organizational vision, policies, and strategies to support schools and student learning. PSs serve as conduits for two-way communication between the central office and individual school sites. They communicate district vision and ensure alignment between school sites and central office. In addition to being a change agent, the PS also must support the transformation of central office for supporting school sites. Fullan and Quinn (2016) discussed the idea that central offices must develop partnerships between departments to support school sites. Such partnerships could result in the development of common language, a knowledge base, and resource management ideas across the central office to communicate more effectively and consistently support the schools and classrooms in teaching and learning (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Standard 6 implies that PSs assist the district in ensuring the community of schools with which they engage are culturally/socially responsive and have equitable access to resources necessary for the success of each student. PSs work with principals to ensure that each principal is addressing the school and community's diverse cultural, linguistic, social, political, and any other special status resources. Equity is the primary concern behind this standard. The PS has the main responsibility for making sure that the principal and school leaders are looking at the school's data and focusing on student

learning for each individual student. To ensure alignment to this standard, PS ensure: (a) equity and access for all students, (b) ensure that staff are treated fairly and equitably within a collaborative work environment, (c) ask reflective questions about data and actively listen, and (d) monitor schools for equity (Riley et al., 2017).

The third category of the MPSPS (comprising Standards 7 and 8) involves improving the capacity and effectiveness of the PS as a district leader. Researchers have found from interviews with PS that being a good principal is quite different from being an effective principal coach. All school leaders deserve access to a coaching relationship and benefit from learning through a continuous improvement process.

Standard 7 implies PSs engage in their own development and continuous improvement to help principals grow as instructional leaders. The two main functions of this standard delineate the expectation that PSs continue to improve their leadership practices through being a part of their own professional learning communities tied to their daily work, assessing student learning at schools, assessing principal development, and practicing their coaching skills (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). PSs are recommended to take the following actions to meet these standards: (a) understand the dimensions and challenges of professional growth; (b) use relationships and experiences to inform and improve leadership practice; (c) remain current on the latest research on areas that impact the principal role; (d) set learning goals to improve leadership practice; (e) share goals with supervisors and principals to garner support and accountability; (f) engage in activities to meet goals; and (g) evaluate and adjust as necessary (CCSSO, 2015).

Standard 8 implies PSs lead strategic change that continuously elevates the performance of schools and sustains high-quality educational programs and opportunities across the district. Fullan and Quinn (2016) defined a collaborative inquiry process that outlines how PS are responsible for improving the performance of schools and how they must work through partnerships with principals to identify needs at school sites, determine an implementation strategy and a plan, and then enact change that results in increased performance. There are four key steps in this process, whereby the principal and the PSs: (a) assess the data and school site, (b) create a plan with a specific strategy for the principal, (c) act and, finally, and (d) reflect (CCSSO, 2015; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). The standards recommend that PSs: (a) use evidence from a variety of data sources to identify areas that need improvement in each school to inform district responses focused on problem solving; (b) employ innovative thinking and planning that is differentiated for each school and leader; and (c) assess the principal's effectiveness in leading change at the school level (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

The MPSPS also require PSs to demonstrate other transformational leadership dispositions, including the following:

- Growth oriented: Transformational education leaders believe that students, education professionals, educational organizations, and the community can continuously grow and improve to realize a shared vision for student success through dedication and hard work.
- Collaborative**:** Transformational education leaders share the responsibility and the work for realizing a shared vision of student success.

- Innovative: Transformational education leaders break from established ways of doing things to pursue fundamentally new and more effective approaches when needed.
- Analytical: Transformational education leaders gather evidence and engage in rigorous data analysis to develop, manage, refine, and evaluate new and more effective approaches.
- Ethical: Transformational education leaders explicitly and consciously follow laws, policies, and principles of right and wrong in everything they do.
- Perseverant: Transformational education leaders are courageous and persevere in doing what is best for students even when challenged by fear, risk, and doubt.
- Reflective: Transformational education leaders reexamine their practices and dispositions habitually to develop the "wisdom of practice" needed to succeed in pursuing new and more effective approaches.
- Equity minded: Transformational education leaders ensure that all students are treated fairly and equitably and that they have access to excellent teachers and necessary resources.
- Systems focused: Transformational education leaders are committed to developing systems and solutions that are sustainable and effective district wide and that generate equitable outcomes for all schools and stakeholders.

The MPSPS standards were created in response to shifts that were already underway and related specifically to the actions that PSs were being encouraged to

uphold and demonstrate in their work of supporting principals. Rather than overseeing and approving the improvement efforts of principals and serving as a resource in specific challenging situations, PSs have been asked to develop principals as coaches of ongoing learning and to collaborate with them as partners to jointly facilitate improved student achievement (Thessin & Louis, 2019). The MPSPS have been written in general terms, outlining characteristics that have been highlighted as instructional leadership behaviors. The standards draw on research in educational leadership transformation and reflect an understanding that the PS role can be delineated into two functions: evaluation and support (Zepeda, 2016). This dualism in role may create conflict because it requires supervisors to engage in both the development and the judgment of principal performance.

Research has highlighted the impact of principal leadership skills on school outcomes. There has been a central debate about two distinct models of leadership: instructional leadership and transformational leadership. The most common model of instructional leadership is the one developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1986), which proposed three dimensions of instructional leadership: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate. The measure of instructional leadership developed Singh (2019) focused on three principal roles: developing teacher instructional capacities, evaluation of classroom instruction, and management of instruction via professional development and program evaluation.

Transformational leadership has been defined as the ability of leaders to motivate and inspire followers to go beyond their transactional expectations to promote the common good of the organization (Northouse, 2016). Classical definitions of transformational leadership have focused on leaders' abilities to behave in charismatic ways and provide followers with inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985; Burns, 2005). These definitions also have described transformational leadership as a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for instructional leadership. Day et al. (2016) examined the most commonly researched leadership models: instructional and transformational leadership, noting when transformational and shared instructional leadership coexist in an integrated form of leadership, the influence on school performance, measured by the quality of its pedagogy and the achievement of its students, is substantial. The idea of integrated leadership that blended transformational leadership and its reform orientation with shared instructional leadership and its collaborative work with regard to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, organizations learn and perform at high levels (Day et al., 2016).

Sebastian et al. (2016) suggested that effective instructional leadership is reflected in an understanding of the instructional needs of the school coupled with the ability to target resources where needed, hire the best available teachers, and keep the school running smoothly. Hitt and Tucker, (2016) conducted a systematic review of key leader practices found to influence student achievement and identified three noteworthy frameworks that utilized empirical evidence to define effective leader behaviors: (a) Leithwood's (2012) Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF), (b) Murphy et al. (2006)

Learning-Centered Leadership Framework (LCL), and (c) Sebring et al. (2006) Essential Supports Framework. Hitt and Tucker (2016) organized and united the domains of the aforementioned frameworks and identified five essential broad areas of effective leader practices: (a) establishing and conveying the vision, (b) facilitating high-quality learning experiences for students, (c) building professional capacity, (d) creating a supporting organization for learning, and (e) connecting with external partners.

Establishing and Conveying the Vision

Establishing a purpose and providing clarity and common purpose is not enough for leaders to decide the goals for the school in isolation. The practice in this regard is more about how to set the direction for a school in a way that encourages teachers to both initially support the vision and continue to see it through for the long term. Leaders should find ways for teachers to see the vision of the broader organizational needs. The direction-setting process includes leaders' developing, articulating, implementing, and stewarding the vision for learning by utilizing processes that prioritize collaboration. Creating shared meaning is an opportunity to define how individuals contribute to attainment of the vision. Leaders in some ways are on display by virtue of their formal roles; others notice what they do and how they do it. Effective leaders accept this heightened level of the organization's awareness and capitalize on it by modeling behaviors that reflect what they are asking teachers to do. Effective leaders establish regular, two-way communication with stakeholders, to include both the sending and receiving of progress updates and changes. These leaders continually communicate different aspects of the vision, including the following: encouraging and expecting

teachers to examine data within department, subject, and/or grade level teams; they also provide regular status updates to maintain and keep stakeholders apprised of the vision and to make sure it is foremost in everyone's mind. Principals' solicitation of those who are making good progress toward the goals to help spread the importance of the vision adds credibility to the vision. Effective leaders utilize the vision to keep motivation levels high and cynicism levels limited (Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

Building Professional Capacity

Effective leaders address teacher efficacy by recruiting and choosing strong and capable practitioners and soliciting input from faculty who can identify individuals to complement the members of an existing department. Effective leaders not only grow and develop teachers, but they also protect the existing composition of the faculty; moreover, they counsel poor teachers to leave the profession (Sebastian et al., 2016). By creating learning opportunities for teachers, they exert an indirect influence on student learning. By establishing trusting relationships as well as a workspace that demonstrates a genuine concern for teachers and their lives outside school, they show teachers that their leader sees them as individuals. Identifying and differentiating opportunities to develop needed skills and knowledge is an effective leadership strategy to support all teachers who need to gain proficiency. Effective leaders preserve and protect both instructional time and teacher work time. Liebowitz and Porter (2019) found doing this had significant effects on student achievement and teacher collective efficacy. Effective leaders establish a structured schedule that allows for job-embedded learning on a regular basis. Inviting teachers to use innovation, encouraging staff to set high self-expectations, and promoting

an environment in which teachers assume collective responsibility for meeting defined goals enhance student achievement outcomes. Recognizing and celebrating high-quality teaching as measured by improved student performance, linked to incentives and rewards, maintains high teacher efficacy.

Creating a Supportive Organization for Learning

Hitt and Tucker (2016) proposed that leadership has a dual focus. Ideally, leader practices progress in two realms: task oriented and relationship oriented. These realms are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually beneficial, as accomplishing work strengthens relationships, and the quality of accomplishments is improved when relationships exist. Effective leaders involve teachers in the broader definition of organizational culture and decision making and establish trusting relationships with all constituencies. Leaders who positively influence student achievement think carefully about how to construct a school environment that both demonstrates a concern for the people of the organization and enables these same adults to achieve personal and organizational goals. Under this domain, leaders approach their organizations from a strengths-based perspective in that they see the best in people and situations and also allow for development and growth in themselves (Gray, 2018). Leaders who influence student achievement positively insist on and expect high performance and make those performance expectations public and transparent.

Facilitating a High-Quality Learning Experience for Students

School personnel who identify and then incorporate and reflect students' backgrounds in the construction of the instructional program and learning environment

see a positive influence on student achievement (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019) An effective instructional leader assists teachers in identifying the diverse types of social and intellectual capital students bring with them to school and leverages those assets in their interaction with students, creating ways for students to exercise leadership and personal responsibility and designing learning experiences that are personally and individually engaging for students (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Effective leaders monitor and evaluate continuously the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment across all programs; they emphasize the instructional program by equipping themselves with a deep knowledge of pedagogy and devoting a large portion of time to advancing teaching (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). Instructional time is protected by such practices as prohibiting the scheduling of noninstructional school events during the instructional day, encouraging student and teacher attendance, and limiting the time individuals are pulled from their classrooms. School leaders are often drawn in many directions; in this domain leaders are actively and directly involved in matters related to instruction and curriculum. Active involvement requires that leaders not only participate in discussions but also have influence on the vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum. These actions include regular classroom observations partnered with timely feedback, along with clear expectations of specific teacher practices. In addition, school leaders are expected to protect the learning environment by ensuring safety and order, without which educational goals can become lofty rhetoric (Sebastian et al., 2016). Leaders regard assessment as pivotal to the measurement of student progress as well as the development of data from which to make programmatic adjustments. Leaders facilitate this data collection and

subsequent analysis in ways that permit disaggregation of indicators important to the school's improvement goals.

Connecting With External Partners

Effective leaders make connections with the community to promote broad participation from parents, families, and other stakeholders who can contribute to a positive learning experience for students (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019) which will; thereby, facilitate increased student achievement. Effective leaders recognize that engaging parents by creating welcoming and inclusive environments on a regular basis supports students' need for continual positive influence. Finding ways for parents and community to perceive a sense of influence in their schools surfaced as a critical component of this domain.

Summary and Conclusions

Supporting principal's growth as instructional leaders has been a focus for many school districts across the United States, yet despite revamping the PSs' role and central office structures the improvement of school principal's instructional leadership has been uneven. The MPSPS were developed in an effort to norm performance expectations. PSs' roles transformed from that of a compliance officer to a focus on instructional leadership development. School districts became more intentional about providing professional development for PSs in an effort to help them better understand how to focus their supervision on establishing a coaching relationship that facilitates high-quality teaching and learning experiences for students and staff. Some of the reviewed research indicated that PSs should: (a) spend the majority of their time at school sites and with principals,

(b) model the leadership behaviors they expect school principals to exhibit, (c) use objective data to effectively focus school principals' learning and differentiate their feedback and coaching support, and (d) ensure that each school principal they supervise receives an individual and personal professional learning plan to hold principals accountable for continuous improvement (Canole & Young, 2013). PSs are being held accountable for providing coaching and feedback to school principals. Ample research exists regarding the importance of PSs providing school principals with coaching and feedback as a strategy to develop their instructional leadership practices (Aguilar, 2017); however, additional study was needed to explore which coaching approaches were being implemented.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology of this qualitative case study. I include the manner in which the participants were invited, and all of the details related to the instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. I also explain how I safeguarded the study participants' rights and confidentiality.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the feedback and coaching practices PSs in a mid-Atlantic state apply to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. In this chapter, I describe the research method for this study, including the design, rationale, and the role of the researcher. I explore a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives regarding how they support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. The ethical implications, trustworthiness, interview procedures, and a summary are also presented in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design for this inquiry was a qualitative case study. I conducted one-to-one interviews to investigate how PSs applied feedback and coaching approaches with regard to the following RQs:

RQ1: How do PSs provide feedback to school principals for school principals to improve their instructional leadership practices?

RQ2: How do PSs provide coaching to school principals for school principals to improve their instructional leadership practices?

The nature of qualitative research dictates that the data collected be obtained through the experiences and observation of those within that group (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Qualitative research dictates that data be obtained through observations, interviews, documents, and artifacts of those being studied (Saldaña, 2016). The role of the PS has shifted. Amid recent shifts, PSs are expected to provide feedback and coaching support focused on instructional leadership practices that improve student

achievement. Through this study, I aimed to determine if Bass's (1999) transformational leadership theory influences how PSs provide feedback and coaching.

Other qualitative designs considered for this study were ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry. Ethnography was not chosen because researchers using that design are expected to observe and/or interact with the study participants in their real-life environments (Burkholder et al., 2016). Using this approach would have compromised confidentiality of school principals; in addition, the participants may not have acted naturally during the observation period. Phenomenological studies seek to understand the lived experiences of a set of individuals who share a common experience. The purpose of this type of study is to describe the lived experiences of individuals in relation to an identified phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I did not select this methodology because I interviewed PSs from a bounded unit, rather than from multiple locations (Burkholder et al., 2016). Narrative inquiry is understood as a spoken or written text giving account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronology connected (Burkholder et al., 2016). Narrative inquiry focuses on studying one or two individuals, gathering data through a collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I did not select this approach because this study involved a larger sample of eight participants and determining a chronological order of their feedback and coaching practices would have been challenging.

A quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study because the purpose did not require statistical information for data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Yazan

(2015) provided an overview of the elements influencing the effectiveness of a qualitative study: (a) type of RQs, (b) the control of the researcher over events under investigation, and (c) the degree of contemporary focus on the research. I used the RQs to address how and why a phenomenon happens without employing control of the events around it.

I aimed to understand and describe the lived experiences of those who are tasked with implementing principles of transformational leadership theory to influence and affect those they supervise. Denzin and Lincoln (2017) described qualitative research as focusing on the interpretation of phenomena in their natural settings to make sense in terms of the meanings people bring to these settings. After considering the various qualitative research methods, using a method that involved an in-depth exploration of a program from multiple perspectives within a real-life context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) one that included using data collection based on personal experiences and introspection captured through interviews to understand and explain a social phenomenon seemed fitting. Therefore, the qualitative exploratory case study approach was selected as the most appropriate for this research study.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and enters into an intimate relationship with the setting, the participants, and the data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, I did not engage in any activities with the participants; instead, I interviewed them and examined related archival documents. Researchers using archival data information already stored by organizations is often a valuable resource and has become an increasingly popular means of supporting information-based decision-

making technique called data mining (Burkholder et al., 2016). The data found in archival documents were fixed and were reviewed to identify data patterns. The benefits of being an observer participant included facility of recording data contemporaneously with observations, along with the opportunity to collect data within settings and from groups to which I did not have access to (Burkholder et al., 2016). Burkholder et al. defined reflexivity as the process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher, "the human as the instrument" (2016, p. 183). According to Galdas (2017), being aware of my partisan opinion required me to be reflexive about the process used to collect, analyze, and present my findings or bias regarding PSs' ability to provide feedback and coaching.

As the researcher, I recruited the participants and ensured the participants understood that their participation in the study was voluntary with the option to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. I conducted the interviews, transcribed the recordings verbatim, and analyzed the data. I did not have a supervisory relationship with any of the participants, and I did not allow my preferences as a subordinate to interfere with the research. To mitigate biases, I asked each participant to review the transcripts to ensure the transcriptions reflected what they wished to share. I also asked them to review my interpretations to ensure that I accurately presented the meaning of their data appropriately. Throughout this process, I ensured that personal perceptions did not interfere with my developing trust with the participants.

Methodology

This qualitative case study was designed to better understand how PSs applied feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. In this section, the methodology is discussed with the intent of other researchers being able to replicate the study. I collected data through one-to-one, semistructured Zoom interviews with eight PSs. This approach provided insight into principal supervisor feedback and coaching practices.

Participant Selection

The participants selected for a qualitative study should be those who can contribute the most to addressing the research problem and RQs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that a sample size of three to 10 participants is sufficient for a qualitative research design in exploring a phenomenon. It was my goal to have 12 PSs participate in this study. The research participants should be selected according to clearly established guidelines to ensure the study's validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Merriam (2009) explained that qualitative research often includes the technique of purposeful sampling, which involves selecting research participants from a specific group to understand a predetermined phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I selected PSs using homogeneous sampling, a type of purposeful sampling in which participants are selected as a result of membership in a specific group with defined characteristics (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Instrumentation

Interviews are an essential source of data in a qualitative case study (Yin, 2017). They are necessary when the researcher cannot observe behaviors, feelings, or ways in which people interpret the world around them, and it is sometimes the only way to obtain data (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) also noted that the researcher should determine the extent of structure desired in the interview, such as highly structured, semistructured, or unstructured. In this qualitative case study, I posed questions during individual, in-depth, semistructured Zoom interviews in conjunction with archival documents. In-depth interviews are a qualitative method of inquiry often combined with a predetermined set of open-ended questions that prompt discussions, thereby allowing interviewers to explore themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The use of open-ended questions allow participants the opportunity to speak freely about their experiences. Open discussions are an effective method of gathering data related to nonverbal behavior (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The interview questions were formulated from the two RQs. I formulated the interview questions using Bass's (1999) transformational leadership and the PSs' MPSPS. Each question encompassed components that aligned with leadership development practices that emphasized how participants motivated and developed school principals to set and reach purposeful goals, in addition to how PSs provided timely actionable feedback and coaching aligned to set goals to support school principals' growth as school leaders. According to Saldaña (2016), questions posed should be worded so that the participants can respond using their knowledge and personal work experiences. Lastly, I shared my interview questions with my dissertation committee and

solicited feedback from former PSs and other experts within the field to ensure my interview protocol was concise and appropriately aligned to the phenomenon being studied.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I completed the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research human research protections training. I applied for Internal Review Board (IRB) approval through Walden University. Once I received IRB approval from Walden University (IRB# 07-29-21-0753082), I sent an invitational email to 12 PSs to request their participation in an in-depth semistructured interview. The email invitation described the informed consent process as well as the purpose of the study. PSs who chose to participate were sent their informed consent form via email. A mutually agreeable date and time were set, and a Zoom link was provided for the interviews. I confirmed their participation through a follow-up Google calendar invitation.

Before starting the interview process, I provided time for the participants to reread the informed consent information and confirmed their voluntary participation by stating aloud, “I consent to participate in this study” during the recorded Zoom meeting. I reviewed the interview norms to maximize time on task and to protect confidentiality. Participants were informed that due to the lack of research regarding this aspect of educational leadership, their participation could have the potential to influence social change by improving the ways in which PSs applied feedback and used coaching approaches to support school principals’ growth in leadership practices. I also used a separate digital audio-recording as a backup to the Zoom recording. Once the interviews

were complete, I transcribed each recording by typing the responses verbatim and then emailed the interview transcripts to the participants to review for accuracy. The participants were asked to thoroughly review their answers and return for any modifications within 5 days.

Data Analysis Plan

In education, interviewing is probably the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data analysis for this study began with the collection, familiarization and management of the interview transcripts using open coding and thematic analysis based on guidelines established by Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Creswell and Poth (2018). I audio recorded the interviews using Zoom and transcribed each individual recording and systematically reduced specific words, phrases, and sentences into codes, and categories specific to coaching and feedback.

The process of coding entails “assigning meaning to data” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 248). Researchers usually conduct two or more rounds of coding to ensure the accuracy of their interpretations (Saldaña, 2016). First-cycle coding is a means to take note of words or phrases in participant responses; second-cycle coding allows a researcher to organize numerous initial codes and conduct analysis across participants

(Saldaña, 2016). I conducted two cycles of coding, preliminary and open, and generated themes from the patterns in the data.

I began coding data with the first-cycle technique of preliminary coding. Based on my findings from the literature review, I developed a set of preliminary codes. These codes were useful as I conducted preliminary coding of the interview transcripts. Following preliminary coding was open coding, which is a means to condense a large amount of data into more manageable words, phrases, and commonalities. In NVivo coding is an appropriate open coding technique for qualitative researchers who seek to identify the words, ideas, or stories of participants rather than to assign codes generated by the researcher (Manning, 2017). In NVivo codes are the exact words of participants, which I annotated as I first read the transcripts. In addition to highlighting sections of the text and making notes in the margins, I colored-coded similar words, phrases, or topics across transcripts. I also took notes in a separate journal through analytic memo writing. I continued to populate these memos as I reflected upon the transcripts I reviewed and what information seemed evocative, unique, or especially insightful.

Pattern coding is a type of second-cycle coding by which a researcher groups similarly coded material from the first round into broader categories or labels (Saldaña, 2016). Researchers use pattern coding to identify causes and explanations for actions, decisions, or events (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). I performed pattern coding as I reread transcripts, taking a closer look at the words and phrases I noted. Patterns may emerge from similarities, differences, frequencies, or sequences (Saldaña, 2016). I

created a table in Microsoft Excel, where I listed all my open codes and pattern codes in two columns. Excel was used to view the codes in a single location.

In thematic analysis, a researcher seeks to identify patterns of meaning or themes, in data (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is a means to identify, organize, describe, and report related topics among collected data (Nowell et al., 2017), in this case, from participant responses. To do this, I reviewed the table of codes to identify patterns and categories of codes. From these patterns and categories, I identified a set of themes that represented all of the data. I developed my findings by consistently relating all data analysis back to the RQs to support a focused and convergent analysis of the data (see Yin, 2017).

Trustworthiness

Credibility

The creation of trustworthy research results begins with establishing credibility (Shenton, 2004) within the methodology of the overall project, specifically the data collection. Credibility is often established by applying triangulation strategies, such as using multiple sources of data or methods; having repeated contact with participants, such as peer debriefing during which questions are shared about the research process and additional perspectives on analysis and interpretation are obtained; and through the use of participant member checks to verify with participants that the findings accurately reflect their experiences. To ensure the authenticity of participant experiences, I recruited PSs who served in the role for a minimum of 2 consecutive years. In addition, I ensured the participants remained anonymous to one another during the study.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which qualitative results are applicable to other settings or samples (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I achieved transferability by providing a description of the data collected through interviews and archival data analysis (Yin, 2017), detailing the steps of this study, including sampling, context, demographics, and participant characteristics (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). As noted by Korstjens and Moser (2018), a thick description of the phenomena under study is necessary to provide deep roots in the data analysis and reporting of the data. I recorded my observations, perspectives, and interpretations regarding the interviewee's experiences. I kept a reflexive journal, took notes about each interview, and captured particulars about the interview environment. Richly detailed information allows readers to draw their own conclusions based on the information a researcher has provided (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In presenting the findings of this study, I drew a clear connection with the transformational leadership theory.

Dependability

Dependability addresses the quality of integrity with regard to the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I established an audit trail by completing reflective journaling about the collection and transcription of the data. I recorded all the interviews using digital recording tools and equipment. Accuracy and consistency in recording and interpreting the data are of utmost importance. Thus, to strengthen this study's dependability, I emailed the transcripts to the participants for their review and verification of the interpretations (Yin, 2017).

Confirmability

Confirmability denotes the degree to which the participants can confirm the results of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, participants had the opportunity to confirm their responses to the interviews. Moreover, I analyzed and interpreted all the data that pertained to the study. I recorded and took notes during all interviews. After each interview, I recorded my impressions as well. As a novice researcher, I was consistent with reflexive practice and journal writing, and recognized my personal biases, behaviors, and assumptions aligned to feedback and coaching stances and practices (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Ethical Procedures

To manage the potential bias and ethical issues that can arise, I maintained formality throughout the process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Treatment of human participants was conducted in accordance with the landmark Belmont Report. The study participants were formally and thoroughly advised of their rights before, during, and after the study. No ethical concerns are anticipated during the recruitment of the participants. Confidentiality was maintained by keeping all data and notes secured in a locked location within my home and on a password-protected computer, to include all storage devices and platforms, such as external hard drives, web-based storage drives, or clouds. These documents will be kept secure for 5 years, at which time I will destroy all documents and notes accumulated during my research. The research was not conducted until final IRB approval by Walden University was received.

Summary

This chapter included details related to the design and rationale for the study. A qualitative case study design was chosen for this study due to the need for rich description of the phenomena derived from the beliefs of various participants. The role of the researcher was described with supporting analysis of potential power differentials and applicable ethical considerations. A thorough description of the methodology was included in the chapter to illustrate how and why participants were selected for the study, along with detailed accounting and rationale for the use of the study's data collection instrumentation. A detailed data analysis plan was offered to describe the rationale for how interviews and archival data were analyzed in the study. Subsequent explanations regarding trustworthiness and ethical procedures concluded the chapter. In Chapter 4, I discuss the results and findings of this qualitative study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of how PSs apply feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. The RQs that guided this study were as follows:

RQ1: How do PSs provide feedback to school principals for school principals to improve their instructional leadership practices?

RQ2: How do PSs provide coaching to school principals for school principals to improve their instructional leadership practices?

In this chapter, I describe the study setting, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Next, I present an explanation of the results in relation to the four themes emerging from the participant interviews and discuss the evidence of the trustworthiness of the study specific to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as initially discussed in Chapter 3. The chapter ends with a summary of the answers to the RQs and a preview of Chapter 5.

The Setting

The study was conducted in a large U.S. mid-Atlantic state public-school district. The study district had approximately 22,000 employees, 200 schools and centers, and over 130,000 students, of which approximately 94% identified as students of color. Approximately 66% of students received free-and-reduced meals and approximately 21% were English language learners. The school district divided schools into three instructional areas: Area I: elementary schools, Area II: middle schools, and Area III: high schools. There were 15 PSs who met the criteria for the study of which 11

responded to the email invitation and gave their consent to participate in this study. However, due to COVID-19, leadership responsibilities increased during the reopening of schools, resulting in only eight of the 11 respondents participating in interviews process. Of the eight participants interviewed, three were assigned to aforementioned Area I, supervising 22 elementary school principals each; two were assigned to the aforementioned Area II, supervising 12 middle school principals each; and three were assigned to the aforementioned Area III, supervising a range of 10 to 12 high school principals each. The interviewees had 79 years of combined principal supervision experience. Seven of the eight participants had experience supervising elementary, middle, and high school principals. Three of the eight participants previously served as assistant superintendents, and one of the eight previously served as a superintendent. Six of the eight participants were female.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant #	Gender	Age	Years as principal supervisor	Assignment
1	Female	50	4	Elem. School
2	Female	58	9	Elem. School
3	Female	65	15	Elem. School
4	Female	46	17	Middle School
5	Female	60	9	Middle School
6	Male	55	11	High School
7	Male	53	4	High School
8	Female	49	10	High School

Data Collection

The results of this qualitative study were based on interviews and an analysis of archival data. As the researcher for this study, I was the primary instrument. I created and used an interview protocol during each of the eight interviews. The interview protocol allowed for a collection of rich data that aligned with the conceptual framework (Yin, 2017). In order to ensure the confidentiality of the participants and the information shared, all data were collected in a private meeting room using Zoom. I conducted interviews over a 4-week period to accommodate participant schedules and lasted about 1 hour. No follow-up interviews were conducted.

I emailed interview invitations to all participants using their district email addresses. The email contained the information in the Leader Consent Form, which provided each participant with a broad overview of the study and their rights if they chose to participate. I provided participants the opportunity to ask any questions about the study prior to consenting. Each participant sent a confirmation email agreeing to be part of the study prior to being interviewed. After receiving the participants' confirmation emails agreeing to participate in the study, I sent follow-up emails to schedule the individual interviews at a mutually agreed upon time. No other communication occurred between the participants and me regarding the study prior to the interviews.

Creswell and Creswell (2017) noted that recording interviews allow researchers to accurately capture participants' words and frees the interviewer to focus on the speaker rather than having to document everything the interviewee says. In this study, all interview sessions were conducted and recorded using a password protected video

conferencing platform. An additional password protected recording device was used as a secondary method to guard against any unexpected damage to the primary recording source. I assigned all participants a number and each participant was asked the same questions. Based on participant responses, I also asked the probing questions captured in the interview protocol. I concluded each interview session expressing my gratitude for their participation and reminding them of their opportunity to member check the interview transcripts for corrections, edits, and accuracy.

During each interview I began the analysis process by journaling about nuances from the discussion and noted observed patterns that were emerging from the data. After each interview, the recordings were replayed for clarity and transcription. For more reliable data analysis, I listened to the recordings a second time to ensure transcription accuracy and to gain more familiarity with the content. No variations or unusual circumstances were encountered during any stage of the data collection process.

To protect participant identity and ensure confidentiality, all electronic and hard copies of consent forms, audio recordings and transcripts are securely stored in password protected electronic file and device. Data will remain in a secured place for 5 years in compliance with Walden University IRB requirements. After 5 years, I will personally destroy all electronic and paper copies of the data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is iterative, recursive, and should include a variety of strategies to make sense of the data, construct themes, and turn themes into findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study a thematic

analysis was used to analyze two forms of data semistructured interview transcripts and archival documents10 rolling agendas from monthly systemic principals' meetings. The notes, transcripts, and archival documents were used in an inductive approach to identify codes, categories, and themes from specific words, phrases, and responses to interview questions. Analysis of the archival documents provided confirmation for the data gathered from the semistructured interviews.

I started my data analysis by transcribing all the interview recordings. I color coded interview responses that aligned to the two RQs. I used my interview notes to further identify codes to generate categories and identify major themes of the data. I also reviewed key quotes from the interviews to compare the data and further identify codes, categories, and themes. No discrepant cases needed to be addressed as all interviews and archival data contributed to the results and conclusions of the study. The results from theses codes, categories, and themes were then related directly to the RQs to support a focused and convergent analysis of the data (see Yin, 2017). Four themes emerged: (a) effective instructional leadership, (b) feedback practices, (c) coaching practices, and (d) evaluation practices. Table 2 shows the grouping of themes, categories, and codes used in the data analysis process.

Table 2

Codes, Categories, and Themes Used in Data Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Themes	Categories	Codes
Theme 1: Effective instructional leadership	1. Principal leadership dispositions	1. Love children 2. Inspiration 3. Motivation 4. Enthusiastic 5. Passionate 6. Belief-system 7. Respectful 8. Trustworthy
	2. Principal leadership actions	1. Decisive 2. Data-driven 3. Mission-oriented 4. Knowledgeable 5. Shared leadership 6. Shared accountability 7. Collaborative 8. Empowers others 9. Visionary 10. Oversight 11. Monitors instruction 12. Organized
	3. Principal supervisor continuous professional growth	1. Curriculum and instruction content supervisors 2. Conferences 3. Webinars 4. School district content trainings 5. Book studies 6. Membership in PS professional learning communities 7. Personal mentors 8. PS colleagues 9. Self-reflection – data analysis

Themes	Categories	Codes
Theme 2: Feedback practices	1. School visit Frequency	1. Quarterly 2. When problems arise 3. A few days a week 4. Once a week 5. Every other week 6. Every three weeks 7. Once a month
	2. Feedback frequency	1. After each school visit 2. After formal observations 3. Quarterly 4. After planning sessions
	5. Feedback methods	1. School visit tracker 2. Communication logs 3. Rolling agendas 4. Emails 5. Formal written correspondences 6. Rolling agendas 7. Feedback: Non-evaluative and evaluative
Theme 3: Coaching practices	1. Weekly coaching percentages	1. 50% 2. 50-60% 3. 50-75% 4. 50-80% 5. 60% 6. 80%
	2. Research-based models	1. Modeling 2. Art of coaching 3. Coaching conversation model 4. Get better faster 5. Life coach certification 6. Mentoring matters 7. Metacognitive coaching 8. Racer model (Center of Creative Leadership) 9. Simon Sinek approach

Themes	Categories	Codes
		10. Gallup Strength Finders
	3. Differentiated support	1. Professional development (individual, small group/clusters, large group/systemic) 2. Principal experience 3. School data trends
	4. Motivation strategies	1. Mutual accountability 2. Accessibility after hours 3. Advocate for school resources 4. Cheerleader 5. Lending a listening ear 6. Never denying leave requests 7. Caring about them as a person 8. Celebratory conversations 9. Praise notes
Theme 4: Evaluation process	1. Data analysis	2. Performance spreadsheets 3. Attendance data 4. Frequency of constituent concerns 5. Student performance data (LEA/State) 6. School climate surveys 7. Discipline data 8. Operational management concerns 9. Teacher retention data
	2. Evidence sources	1. Professional standards for educational leaders (PSEL) rubrics 2. Goal setting conferences (beginning, middle and end of year) 3. Community engagement initiatives

Themes	Categories	Codes
		4. Observations (formal/informal)

The analysis of the archival documents was conducted similarly to the interview data. The use of pattern coding showed commonalities in the words captured within the monthly meeting agendas leading to the identification of three themes: (a) motivational leadership, (b) monitoring and accountability, and (c) professional learning and leadership. Table 3 shows the grouping of themes, categories and codes used in the data analysis process. The next section presents the themes of the data.

Table 3

Codes, Categories, and Themes Used in Data Analysis of Archival Documents

Themes	Categories	Codes
Theme 1: Motivational leadership	1. Celebrations and highlights	1. Courage under fire 2. Pearls of wisdom 3. CEO address 4. Achievement accolades 5. Weekly newsletter accolades 6. School initiatives
Theme 2: Monitoring and accountability	7. Adult progress indicators	1. OEPE evaluation 2. eDoctrina 3. Student growth measures 4. Student learning objectives 5. Performance objectives 6. Performance outcomes 7. Formal observation 8. Next step action Planner 9. Data clinics 10. Learning café 11. VALED survey 12. Observation feedback calibration sessions
	8. School performance	1. Data analysis 2. Strategic plan 3. Circle of influence 4. Goal-setting conferences 5. Stat meeting 6. PMAPP 7. 9th grade Academy 8. Promotion and retention 9. School climate survey 10. Summer leadership institute 11. SAT/PSAT 12. State report card (star ratings)
Theme 3:	1. Curriculum updates	1. Content specific instructional look-fors

Themes	Categories	Codes
Professional learning and leadership		2. Content specific observation rubrics 3. Systemic principals meeting (all levels) 4. Cluster principal meetings (principal supervisor led) 5. Systemic elementary principals' meetings
	2. Transformational leadership	1. Gallup Strengthfinders 2. Communication protocols 3. 1:1 Coaching visits 4. Systemic principals meeting (all levels) 5. Cluster principal meetings (principal supervisor led) 6. Systemic elementary principals' meetings 7. Peer presentations (school principals)

The Results

Four major themes emerged from thematic analysis. These themes were (a) effective instructional leadership, (b) feedback practices, (c) coaching practices, and (d) evaluation practices. Following are summaries of the findings by theme, with excerpts from the interview transcripts and text from the archival documents.

Theme 1: Effective Instructional Leadership

PSs used frequently occurring words and phrases that formed three categories: (a) school principal leadership dispositions, (b) principal leadership actions, and (c) PSs' continuous professional growth. PSs shared that school principals should love children and are able to inspire and motivate others and demonstrate trustworthiness. The

participants discussed leadership behaviors such as being data-driven and collaborative. The participants expressed that they joined webinars, attended conferences and school district content trainings, and leveraged their relationships with central office content specialists to stay current with instructional updates and trends. Excerpts from the interviews are used to illustrate results.

Participant 1 stated,

> It's important for principals to love children. Being collaborative and working with others, because there's more work than any person can do by themselves, so bringing a collaborative spirit to the work is vital to the effectiveness of schools. I think being tenacious is also a critically important component, because being a building administrator is hard. It's very challenging and there are many obstacles that will threaten to take the building off course, so having a vision and being willing to really support others in getting to that space and realizing that vision is vital.

According to Participant 4,

> Principals should be intentional about their daily practices like being in classrooms to monitor that the teachers are actually teaching the curriculum as written; at least 80% of their day should be in classrooms, focused on instruction. My principals ensure planning is occurring and they make sure to be present to hear the conversations. I think principals must make sure these conversations include data, and they must know how to model effective teaching strategies.

Participant 6 shared, “We are helping our principals to understand transformational leadership. An effective instructional leader must be data-driven, implement distributed leadership, and understand how to coach and mentor teachers.”

Data from the archival documents supported this theme. For example, the agendas reflected multiple notes regarding celebrating and highlighting school performance and student achievement accolades captured within weekly newsletters, as well as during meetings with principals. In addition to motivational leadership practices, the archival data documented specific notes regarding school performance. Promotion and retention, state report cards, and school climate surveys were referenced as evidence of a school principal’s instructional leadership.

Theme 2: Feedback Practices

Participants used frequently occurring words and phrases that formed three categories, school visit frequency, feedback frequency, and feedback methods. The participants shared they determine the frequency of school visits based on how they tiered the principals they supervise. Excerpts from the interviews are also used to illustrate results.

In the words of Participant 2, “Principals have been placed in quadrants, based on indicators such as school performance data, leadership experience and performance. This quadrant system guides how frequently I visit their schools.” Similarly, Participant 8 said, “I have my principals tiered at three levels, principals I visit every two weeks, every three weeks, and once a month. I try really hard to visit all schools every other week, but it is very difficult.” Participant 6 noted, “I do not visit all principals for the same amount of

time. The visits were dependent on the needs of the principal. My more experienced principals do not receive as frequent visits as my new or novice principals receive."

Participant 3 stated,

> Feedback for me is most effective when it's timely, honest, and rooted in low inference data. We have a document that we use to provide feedback. Sometimes we fill it out after the school visit, and sometimes we fill it out at the school and share it with the principals immediately. I use this school visit rolling agenda to document my face-to-face feedback and next steps.

Participant 3 continued by stating,

> Feedback should be actionable, and time bound. It can also be a discussion. I implement the Six Steps of Effective Feedback approach. This approach talks about structuring the conversation to help the person receiving the feedback be reflective about their work.

Participant 4 agreed and shared,

> Feedback is an immediate response to what has been observed. It can be provided verbally or as written feedback. I provide feedback to my principals after every school visit. As an area office we keep a feedback file. It's literally a rolling agenda that has the objectives for the day or whatever we're going to work on that day with the principal. It gives us a place to jot down what we noticed and things like that. It gives next steps for the principal and next steps for me. I walk away with what my work is to continue to help and support them.

Data from the archival documents in support of this theme were minimal. These documents captured content regarding how PSs monitored and held school principals' accountable, to include the compliance protocols of formal observations and school visits but did not explicitly demonstrate how they implement feedback protocols or practices.

Theme 3: Coaching Practices

Participants used frequently occurring words and phrases that formed four categories, weekly coaching percentages, researched-based models, differentiated support, and motivation strategies. The transcripts showed the participants spent an average of 65% of their time coaching school principals. The data also showed despite PSs reports of differentiating their coaching support, the research-based coaching approaches they implemented were not normed and did not align with a differentiation process. The following are excerpts from the interviews:

Participant 5 noted,

> The time I spend actually engaged in a conversation, listening, coaching, and asking probing questions is at least 50% of my time with principals. The texture of my current role is being a coach as well as being an evaluator. I am intentional in my approach.

Participant 8 shared,

> I would say probably 80% of my schedule is focused on coaching. I coach on how to navigate difficult conversations that principals have to encounter. I also try to keep my principals motivated. We have celebratory moments before we engage in

> any work. I tell them the great things I've seen them do, or I may leave them little praise notes.

Participant 7 shared a different point of view:

> I think every interaction that I have, it is my intent to be a coach, which is different from a lot of PSs. I try to make my coaching more of a collaborative conversation, and at least 90% of my conversations are from a coaching perspective. So, coaching is always ongoing.

Data from the archival documents in support of this theme were minimal, and there appeared to be a misalignment. Similar to the feedback practices theme, the content captured spoke more specifically to how school principals' would be monitored and held accountable for their performance. The archival documents recorded topics that were more focused on compliance driven expectations, rather than the instructional leadership development of school principals.

Theme 4: Evaluation Process

The last theme to emerge from the codes, was evaluation process. The participants used words and phrases that formed two categories: (a) performance and data analysis and (b) performance evaluation tools.

Participant 2 shared,

> I really want my principals to understand that everything we discuss is grounded in evidence. I align the work with the 10 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). I want to ensure they know the difference between evidence and an activity.

Another illustration of this theme came from Participant 7,

> I developed a communication summary that captures each PSEL. I gather evidence by participating in collaborative planning sessions, leadership team and parent meetings. Some of my evidence comes directly from principal actions that I observe personally. I then summarize the visit on the communication summary document. The PSELs that align to the visit are also captured on the summary document.

Participant 4 had a different perspective and shared,

> I don't think it's necessary to monitor unless I have somebody on an identified growth plan. I make a chart of what principals have identified as their goals, I overlap that with what I would like to see as a performance measure for the school, the principal, and the school's leadership team. I try to collect evidence across all 10 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders.

Data from the archival documents confirmed this theme. The agendas captured multiple notes regarding how school principals would be monitored and held accountable. The content identified adult progress indicators that included information regarding their formal evaluation process, performance objectives, data clinics, and next step action planners that had to be completed at the conclusion of the systemic principals' meetings.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research findings must have trustworthiness if they are to be believable, reliable, and transferable (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The trustworthiness of a study refers to the trust or confidence there is in the data gathered and the methods used

to ensure the quality of the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The trustworthiness of this case study was established by analyzing the study's credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credible research findings are believable interpretations of data (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Nowell et al. (2017) stated that credibility can be thought as the thin line between the respondents' views and the researchers' representation of them. To ensure the credibility of this case study, I interviewed PSs who supervised and evaluated school principals on all levels to include charter and alternative schools within the study district. After conducting each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts were sent to the participants to validate the accuracy of the transcription. Transcript review and member checking help establish the credibility of the data collected by giving all participants an opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview to declare and verify the accuracy of their statements (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used member checking to determine if both the interview and the interpretation of the findings were an accurate representation of each participants perspectives. Each participant received a copy of their transcript and were offered an opportunity to participate in a member checking video-conference meeting, all participants declined the meeting invitation and did not suggest any changes or addendums be made to their interview transcripts. Next, I performed multiple rounds of coding on the interview transcripts and archival documents to generate codes, categories, and themes.

In addition, I engaged an experienced qualitative researcher with a confirmed terminal degree to serve as a peer reviewer. First, I invited the peer reviewer to give feedback on my study. Upon their confirmation, I provided the peer reviewer with a draft of the study. The qualified executive provided notes and then discussed with me the justification for their suggestions. Following the review session, I made edits to the dissertation based on the peer reviewer's input.

As Yin (2017) explained, the construct validity of case studies is stronger when multiple sources of evidence are used. The data for this study came from audio recordings of semistructured interviews and archival data gathered from the participants. I kept a reflexive journal before, during and after the interview and data analysis processes. The journal kept me informed of my feelings and thoughts while data were collected and analyzed to avoid bias and reactivity. I captured notes of when I agreed, disagreed, or internally questioned a practice or philosophy expressed by the participants.

Transferability

Transferability is defined as the degree to which the results of a study can be generalized to other settings outside of the context the research was conducted (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I interviewed eight PSs within the study district to gain perspective on feedback and coaching strategies PSs use to develop school principals' instructional leadership capacity. Based on the context of the study, the participant variance, and approach taken to analyze the data, transferability can be achieved for future research on using feedback and coaching strategies for instructional leadership

development or the broader concepts from this study to other K-12 organizational structures or settings.

Dependability

A qualitative study has dependability if its results hold over time, indicating that findings came from data, not from the researcher's preconceptions or biases (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability also occurs when researchers can ensure the process is clearly documented, logical, and traceable (Nowell et al., 2017). In order to establish the dependability of this case study, I saved electronic copies of interview transcripts. I kept reflexive journal notes that included my thoughts and insights as I analyzed the data and maintained multiple drafts of my work with file names that included the date in which I redrafted the content. Additionally, I used no identifiable information about the participants. Due to the impact of the pandemic, all interviews were safely conducted and recorded using Zoom, a video conferencing platform. Furthermore, the dependability of this study was ensured by cross-checking multiple data sources. I provided the research participants the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy and appropriateness, as well as the opportunity to offer recommendations for any necessary edits.

Confirmability

A study with confirmability shows that data represent the participants' views, rather than the bias of the researcher who collected the data and should trace and explore the possible ways that personal prejudice might have suffused the collection and analysis of the data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I established confirmability through continuous reflection and note-taking to remain aware of my personal biases, beliefs, and

assumptions related to instructional leadership development. Maintaining a reflexive journal at every stage of this study allowed me to understand my subjectivity during the research process. Journaling allowed me to focus the purpose of the study and kept me from allowing my professional experiences or opinions to impede upon the data analysis process.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how PSs apply feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. I conducted semistructured interviews with eight PSs, using a video conferencing platform. Two RQs aligned to the purpose of this study and helped to guide the collection and analysis of the data. In this chapter, I summarized the results of my analysis of the interview transcripts and archival documents. After analyzing the data, four themes emerged: (a) effective instructional leadership, (b) feedback practices, (c) coaching practices, and (d) evaluation process.

In Chapter 5, I focus on the interpretations and limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications of the results. I begin with a review and discussion of the findings presented in this chapter, and how they confirm, disconfirm, or extended conclusions of previous researchers. Next, I present recommendations based on findings for further research. Lastly, I conclude with a discussion regarding the implications for positive social change at the district level, followed by closing remarks.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of how PSs in a mid-Atlantic state applied feedback and coaching approaches to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. The results of this study extended the limited knowledge regarding which feedback and coaching approaches PSs implemented to build the instructional leadership capacity of school principals. The sample for this study included eight PSs who had served in their role for 2 or more consecutive years. All participants held doctorate degrees in educational leadership and served as a school principal for a minimum of 5 years.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bass's (1999) transformational leadership theory, which was key to conceptualizing ideal school leadership, by focusing on inspiring and developing followers to be innovative problem solvers (see Berkovich, 2016). Transformational leadership theory informed the purpose of this study by exploring how PSs coach and encourage the instructional leadership capacity of their followers. The literature review revealed that additional study was needed to explore which feedback and coaching approaches were being implemented. I collected data by using an interview protocol to conduct one-on-one semistructured virtual interviews. The two RQs that informed this study were as follows:

RQ1: How do PSs provide feedback to school principals to improve their instructional leadership practices?

RQ2: How do PSs provide coaching to school principals to improve their instructional leadership practices?

Data analysis indicated four themes across the eight participants' interview transcripts and archival documents. The themes were: (a) effective instructional leadership, (b) feedback practices, (c) coaching practices, and (d) evaluation practices.

Interpretation of the Findings

Effective instructional leadership was the first theme identified. The findings of this study revealed that PSs emphasized that school principals' leadership dispositions, actions, and knowledge are critical attributes of effective instructional leadership. The literature reviewed showed that scholars continue to examine the importance of cultivating the development of leadership dispositions and reinforce the notion that the development of school leaders is incomplete without addressing to the development of dispositions. The Welch-Bussey framework of the essential dispositions of school leaders defined leader dispositions as attributes or qualities that characterize a person or individual (Welch & Hodge, 2018).

The participants of this study described effective instructional leaders as persons who are trustworthy, respectful, passionate, and motivational. Participant 5 shared, "We're talking about someone who has knowledge of and understands the impact of effective instruction. It's not just their technical skills, it's also that humanistic part of leadership." Participant 3 offered, "I think an effective leader is really driven around the ability to influence and move the work through people. They build capacity and influence relationships."

Researchers' critiques of instructional leadership point to excessive focus on the principal's role as the single instructional leader and its failure to incorporate others'

contributions to teaching and learning practices within a school organization (Ahn et al., 2021). The participants of this study identified effective instructional leaders as those who enact collaborative leadership and shared accountability practices and empowerment structures. Participant 7 emphasized that instructional leaders "create structures to support collaboration." Participant 2 noted that an effective instructional leader is "someone who is willing to empower others. Who sees themselves as a part of the team." According to Daniëls et al. (2019), effective instructional leaders maintain good internal and external relations, and they give voice and involvement in the decision-making process. This facilitation of collaboration is an aspect of the schools' culture and has a positive effect on student achievement.

PSs direct support of school principals' professional development has evolved from a focus on supervision to one centered on coaching, mentoring, and partnering with the specific goal of improving student achievement (Thessin, 2019). This study's findings illustrate the point: The participants spoke in general to effective instructional leaders being knowledgeable, and more specifically, to their own continuous professional growth. Participant 1 shared one aspect of his development:

> My colleagues and supervisor would join me on a site visit with a principal. At the conclusion of the visit, while providing the principal with feedback or coaching support, my colleagues were observing me. Then, at a later time, those same colleagues provided me with feedback and coaching support about my interaction with the principal.

Similarly, Honig and Rainey (2020) found that PSs' efforts to lead their own learning appeared consistent with the patterns of principal supervision. PSs regularly collaborated with their colleagues to grow in their own ability to serve as an effective instructional leader. PSs also noted that they contributed to their own professional knowledge by personally funding their attendance to conferences, engaging in district level professional development, routine check-ins with their supervisors, self-paced book studies, and participation in communities of practice.

The findings of this study revealed that PSs have a grounded understanding regarding the construct of effective site-based instructional leadership. Participant 1 stated, "School principals are collaborative and work with others to develop the capacity of the staff." Participant 6 stated "a site-based leader is data-driven decision maker and align their actions to not only the school's vision, but the district's vision." Participant 8 shared, "A strong site-based instructional leader has a high EQ and are able to build the capacity of individuals in their building. They have a strong ability to impact and support the teaching and learning practices of their staff." These findings were supported by the research emphasizing that leaders who positively influenced student achievement think carefully about how to construct a school environment that both demonstrates a concern for the people of the organization and enables these same adults to achieve personal and organizational goals (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Similarly, Hallinger and Murphy (1986) found that effective leaders monitor and evaluate continuously the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment across all programs.

Despite the ample literature that confirms providing feedback to teachers as a best practice in schools (Reiss, 2015), the second theme, feedback practices of PSs specifically, is less common within the literature. The collected data in this study specified participants had a normed perspective of how feedback is defined. Participant 3 proclaimed, “Feedback is supposed to be prescriptive and specific.” Participant 2 reported, “I think feedback should be actionable, realistic and useful.” Participant 5 stated, “When I am giving feedback to someone, I’m talking about their performance.” In addition, findings revealed that PSs memorialized their feedback using a feedback template they completed following most school visits or contacts with school principals. A rolling agenda, completed by PSs only, captures the date of contact, type of contact (phone, email, visit, or other), context of their work (instructional, staffing, budgetary, facilities), PSEL alignment, coaching focus (components and key process), a pulse check, description of work/communication, reflection on professional practice, next step action items for the principal, and follow-up action items for the PSs. Feedback is best defined as specific ideas about the progress of a learner with a laser focus on guiding the individual to areas of improvement and can be delivered verbally or in writing, directly or indirectly. However, it remains unclear how PSs identify which school principals should receive more or less feedback support. In the absence of measurable feedback frequency criteria, PSs may be left to rely on subjectivity to determine their feedback frequency. This void could create a culture of PSs providing feedback in an inconsistent and/or inequitable manner.

Coaching practices was the third theme to emerge in this study. It is unlikely that feedback alone will change school principals' practices. Thus, this is the reason researchers recommend coaching as a viable tool for improving principals' leadership (Thessin, 2019). The interview data in this study specified that participants had a normed perspective of how coaching is defined. Participant 8 proclaimed, "Coaching is more reciprocal, it's about reciprocal learning." Participant 1 reflected, "Coaching is the larger act of building the capacity of someone you are supporting through a number of different means, whether it be effective feedback or modeling, or maybe even working side-by-side collaboratively." Participant 6 shared a similar thought she stated,

> When I'm coaching, I'm thinking about a plan that I'm developing to enhance practice. I'm actually planning out each session to ultimately get to the end point I want for that person to grow. I have done a crosswalk between three different, yet similar research-based models, to create a blended coaching model.

The literature supported this finding. For instance, Lackritz et al. (2019) defined coaching as a process that enables individuals to reflect, think and act in new ways to bring about change, thus making it consistent with best practices for school leadership development. Hastings and Kane (2018) offered, "Coaching for leadership development is a formal, one-on-one individualized process designed to develop understanding of leadership behaviors and the impact of those behaviors for improved personal and/or organizational leadership effectiveness" (p. 12). Abel and Nair (2015) asserted that leadership coaching is an experiential and individualized approach to leader development that builds a leader's ability to achieve short- and long-term development goals.

In addition, the data demonstrated that the coaching approaches PSs implemented varied greatly. The participants referenced coaching approaches and/or strategies established in the literature on leadership, mentoring, and school transformation. However, it remains unclear if PSs differentiate the coaching approach they implement with school principals they support. Additionally, it is unclear what criteria PSs use to determine which coaching approach they will implement to support school principals. The variance in coaching approaches also indicates that the study district has not normed a specific set of coaching approaches for PSs to select and implement for differentiated support of school principals.

The evaluation process was the fourth common theme among the participants' responses. PSs are expected to dedicate their time to help school principals grow as instructional leaders, to coach and support individual school principals, and to engage school principals in the formal evaluation process, using evidence to determine school principals' effectiveness. The findings illuminated that PSs rely primarily on the study district's evaluation process and tools to support school principals' growth and development. Participants of this study described the frequency of their feedback, their weekly coaching percentages, and types of evidence they collect to support their evaluation of school principals. This theme was identified in all the transcripts. The participants of this study shared that their feedback frequency varied from after each school visit, after formal observations, after planning sessions, and/or quarterly. Principals' supervisors shared that they spent on average 65% of their week coaching school principals. In addition, PSs discussed the evidence sources they collect. Participant

5 shared, “Based on what we expect principals to do, my focus is centered around the 10 PSEL.” Participant 3 explained, “I look at academic and instructional data, parent concerns, teacher turnover rates, suspension, and retention data. One piece of data cannot tell a full story.” Participant 2 expressed,

> We always have to look at quantifiable data like assessments and attendance, but we also look at school performance plans, their rolling agendas, their data, and other artifacts they collect. Many times, we look at their observation feedback, because I want to see how they are giving feedback to their staff, including their assistant principals.

Participant 2 stated, “Although coaching and feedback does not strictly align with the need for it to be evaluative, I keep our discussions grounded in evidence aligned with the 10 PESL.” Participant 7 stated, “Majority of my evidence is based on what I can actually observe.” The literature highlights that PSs who do not spend adequate time visiting, observing, and assessing the performance of school principals cannot effectively gauge the performance of their principals and are unlikely to be able to identify any significant deficiencies in their practice. Furthermore, when deficits are not addressed, there is little chance that principals will be able to improve their performance or that of their schools (Alkaabi & Almaamari, 2020; Micheaux & Parvin, 2018).

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study involved the small participant pool. Although the trustworthiness of the study was not compromised, the small sample may limit the use of the study’s findings. The second limitation was the truthfulness of the data, as PSs may

have embellished the truth in a manner that shed a positive light on their expertise and may not have accurately reflected the work they did with their assigned school principals. I also acknowledge the limitations of drawing largely from interview data as self-reported descriptions. As a former school principal within the research district, the previously established subordinate relationships that existed between some of the participants and me posed a minimal risk of producing unintended biases in the study. Despite not working directly with or supervising any of the study participants, I took appropriate steps to consistently monitor bias throughout the research, including keeping all recordings, transcripts, and data confidential and securely stored.

Recommendations

The instructional leader facilitates school transformation. Therefore, all school leaders must be deliberate in their efforts to provide meaningful, productive feedback. Turnbull et al. (2015) identified that PSs' effectiveness as instructional leaders is determined by their ability to identify high quality instruction and develop feedback that supports school principals' ability to provide teachers with actionable feedback. At its best, coaching is a collaborative and developmental relationship, established through a formal process of professional support that uses expertise and interpretative evaluation of performance data (Lucas, 2017).

Based on the findings of this qualitative case study, further research is needed to determine the criteria used to measure the effectiveness of PSs' feedback and coaching practices. Extending the participant pool to include both school principals and supervisors of PSs may provide insight on how PSs are supported and developed. A deeper analysis

may reveal whether selected feedback practices and coaching approaches have been normed to offer differentiated support to school principals. School principals' perceptions may provide supervisors of PSs with performance feedback needed to ensure a culture of transformational leadership is evident on all levels. Additional data may provide a deeper understanding of the specific professional learning opportunities provided to PSs that focuses on coaching principles, approaches, and techniques.

Implications

This study has contributed to existing research and may have several implications for social change on the organizational and individual levels by providing a better understanding of how PSs can support the development of high-quality site-based instructional leadership for the purposes of improving teacher practice and student performance outcomes. First, the findings of this study can be used to address needed additions to professional development offerings for instructional leaders on all levels, including PSs. It is critical that PSs realize the emotional impact of their feedback and coaching practices and consider what school principals will do with the feedback comments and new learning (Winstone et al., 2017). Data collected can be used to ensure that selected feedback designs and coaching approaches are differentiated and delivered in a manner that are easily understood and enacted upon.

On an individual level, these findings can be used to support the professional growth of teachers. Principal effectiveness can change the culture and collective practice of a teaching staff. Instructional leadership is an interpersonal process that involves

complex social dynamics. Developing these skills support increasing teacher retention rates (Becker & Grob, 2021; Redding & Smith, 2016).

This qualitative case study confirmed a connection between transformational leadership theory as proposed by Bass (1985) and the context of educational leadership. Perhaps this study may have implications for using more educational learning theories. It makes sense that other educational theories such as adult learning theory, cognitive theory, and constructivism learning theory may also have merit for research focused on instructional leadership development. District leaders, PSs, and school principals alike should understand how learning theories may support the development of specific instructional strategies and teaching techniques.

Conclusion

Mounting performance expectations placed on school principals to improve student achievement outcomes have shifted the PSs' role from a focus on compliance to that of instructional leadership development. As Zepeda (2016) indicated, one prerequisite to substantial principal growth and improvement is a supportive structure to encapsulate formative, ongoing, developmental, and differentiated supervisory approaches. Effective instructional leadership is developed by cultivating leadership dispositions and practices that leverage relationships to influence teaching and learning. PSs are now expected to be familiar with various feedback designs and coaching approaches in order to differentiate how they support school principals with achieving individual and organizational goals. An effective leadership coach enables sustained change on the part of the leader being coached. These coaches tap into a leader's ideal

self to kindle the innate desire for growth and development (Taylor et al., 2016). Transformational leadership, as identified by Bass (1985), served as the foundation of this study. In Bass's (1999) transformational model of leadership, transformational leaders convey high expectations, inspire trust, influence their followers, encourage creative and proactive problem-solving approaches, and establish interpersonal connections with those they lead. Supervision can be defined as a specific form of coaching. Thus, a mindset of robust coaching supervision is unlikely to be achieved, unless supervisors of PSs establish an organizational culture that promotes and expects iterative performance improvements on all levels of the instructional leadership pipeline.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Date:
Time:
Interviewee Code:
Interview Platform:

Interview Components	Interview Questions and Notes
Introduction	Hello, I am Jamila M. Mannie. I want to thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this interview is to explore the feedback and coaching practices PSs apply to support school principals' growth as instructional leaders. This interview has been scheduled to last for approximately 60 minutes. Once the interview has concluded, your responses will be analyzed. Your identity will not be included in any of my documents, and no one will be able to identify you with the responses provided. You can stop this interview at any time. Lastly, please remember this interview will be recorded for transcription purposes. Do you have any clarifying questions I can answer at this time? Are you ready to start?
Question #1	Have you ever served as a school principal? Probing question(s): If yes, when? For how many years? Were you an elementary, middle, or high school principal?
Question #2	Please describe the characteristics of an effective site-based instructional leader?
Question #3	Which research supported coaching approach(es) do you use to help principals grow as instructional leaders? *Probing questions:* How do you determine which coaching approach is best for the school principals you supervise?
Question #4	What percentage of your weekly schedule do you allot for coaching school principals? *Probing question:* How is this data recorded and tallied?
Question #5	Describe the type(s) of evidence sources you gather and analyze in order to provide instructional feedback to school principals. *Probing question:* How frequently do you collect and share this data with school principals?
Question #6	What communication methods do you use to provide instructional feedback to school principals?

	Probing question: Are principals required to complete any follow up actions as a result of your feedback? If so, please describe.
Question #7	How do you keep abreast of shifting instructional approaches that affect student achievement outcomes and school performance? *Probing question:* In what ways do you model your new learning for the principals you supervise?
Question #8	What strategies do you use to motivate the school principals you supervise? *Probing question:* How do you know this method has been effective?
Question #9	What strategies to you use to help school principals identify their instructional leadership goals? *Probing question:* Do you monitor their progress toward their goals? If so, please describe.
Question #10	What specific data sources do you use to assist you with reflecting on your effectiveness of coaching school leaders? *Probing question:* Describe the types of professional training you have received to develop your capacity to coach school principals?