THE KNOWLEDGE, PRACTICES, AND LEARNING OF LEADERSHIP COACHES

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ABSTRACT

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One widespread solution suggested for improving underperforming schools is to assign leadership coaches to school principals to help principals learn to maximize the strength of the educational staff and lead the improvement of student performance. Yet, there is limited literature on what leadership coaches know and do when attempting to improve underperforming schools. This qualitative study uses coaches' voices to describe what it is like to be a leadership coach in underperforming schools, and describes their experiences when working with adults as learners. The study investigates the knowledge coaches bring to the job, the practices they use to guide adults through transformative learning, and the personal learning coaches experience as they seek to improve their coaching methods through evolving programming for veteran coaches. Three separate articles address components of leadership coaching, and use theory to explain each phenomenon.

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INTRODUCTION

Like many doctoral students, I began with no idea of what I might do for a dissertation, other than I wanted to research current trends in educational administration. Because of my former experience as a principal, I had the good fortune to be hired as a research assistant for a Midwest university program designed to assist underperforming Title I schools improve student achievement by implementing leadership coaches to assist building principals become instructional leaders. The Midwest university program worked in conjunction with the state and federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandate requiring that underperforming Title I schools receive assistance to improve student performance or face restructuring or state takeover. Leadership coaches, often retired principals or superintendents, were provided to work with the Title I schools to build the capacity of the principal and staff to lead school improvement. Mandatory attendance at quarterly trainings, provided by the university, focused on improving instructional leadership and teambuilding as a method to improve student performance. My job was to observe and record the actions of the coaches as they interacted with the principals and instructional leadership team members during the training sessions. Over the next four years, I had the opportunity to work with 57 underperforming Title I schools in three cohorts of eight-person teams (coach, principal, instructional leadership team members). Cohorts consisted of 19, 22, and 26 teams respectively. Although the majority of participating schools were high schools, schools were from various levels, (i.e., elementary, middle school, high schools) and varying contexts (i.e., public and charter, urban and rural, academies and alternative) were also involved.

It was through the experience of observing leadership coaches that I began to wonder how coaches learned to coach and how coaching made a difference in underperforming schools. Part of my work as a research assistant involved surveying leadership coaching literature. Most

leadership coaching literature focused on instructional coaching or testimonials from principals on the benefit of having a coach. There was only limited research on the process of leadership coaching, and most of it referred to executive coaching used in the business world. There appeared to be practically nothing from the leadership coaches about what it was like to be a leadership coach in education. I was concerned for lack of qualitative research using coaches' voice to describe leadership coaching experiences in underperforming schools, and wanted to fill that void in educational administrative research.

Study Design and Method

My dissertation is organized into three independent chapters: Coaching and Change in Schools: Transformative Learning Experiences; Coaching the School Principal's Capacity to Lead Underperforming Schools; and Leadership Coaching Programs: Program Evolution and Influence of Transformative Learning. The first chapter explores the personal belief changes adults experience by asking, "Why is it necessary to be a facilitator in order to help underperforming schools?" The chapter implies there is a specific process leadership coaches use to guide the thinking of adult belief change. The second chapter offers an answer to the question of "How do coaches leverage their knowledge, skills, and experiences to build the capacity of the principal to lead systematic instructional improvements and turnaround underperforming schools?" A leadership framework for systematically building capacity is suggested. The third chapter delves into the question of "How do coaching practitioners get better at their trade?" Leadership coaching is new to the educational field, and professional development is constantly evolving in order to support the needs if the coaches. Chapter three provides a history of leadership coaching programs designed to improve the coaches' skills, and investigates the reactions of the coaches' as they experience transformative learning in their role as coach.

Each chapter offers authentic voice from three leadership coaches on their collective experiences and perspectives on transformative learning, building leadership capacity, and professional development to enhance coaching skills. Separate theories in each chapter explain and confirm coaching phenomena. All chapters are based on the responses from the same three leadership coaches in order to accurately compare and contrast coaching phenomena and personal perceptions.

Participant choice

As mentioned above, I worked with three cohorts of underperforming schools and observed 57 school teams over four years before I made a final selection of coaches to interview. Since the unit of analysis was the coach, the selection was definitely purposeful and not random.. After observing and recording notes on 32 coaches, I decided I would choose three coaches that appeared to offer the **best** examples of leadership coaching for my study. I limited my selection to three because of time restraints, and because I wanted the interviews to be deep with rich conversations.

I specifically watched the interactions between the coach, principal, and the instructional leadership team. I looked for similar qualities in coaches that appeared to solicit the most engagement of the team. I observed how coaches engaged staff using clarifying, probing, and inquiry questions. I recorded participant responses. I watched and recorded body language among members. I went to lunch and on breaks with the teams to observe relationships in informal situations, and to listen to casual comments about the coaching experience. I selected coaches who built trusting relationships with team members, and gained the teams' respect as well as exhibiting respect for the team members. I selected coaches who appeared to be able to

handle conflicts easily, and refocus teams when they were off-tasks. I selected coaches who were attentive listeners, but not judgmental.

Do not misunderstand me. There were many coaches who qualified for consideration. So I had to add additional criteria to narrow my selection. The final coaches were selected for diversity by school context (urban vs. rural, public vs. charter), location in state (east, west, north), varied grade level experience (elementary, middle school, high school), gender, time involved with the Midwest university program, attendance at training events, and, most important, had demonstrated previous success as a leadership coach by turning around underperforming schools, meaning their assigned school had achieved Annual Yearly Progress (AYP).

Data collection

My primary source of data was through interviews. All together, I conducted ten interviews with leadership coaches, three interviews with principals, and two interviews with the Midwest university program director. I supplemented the interviews with field notes from observations of the coaches, principals, and instructional leadership teams while they were attending training at the university.

For personal understanding of the training goals, I collected and reviewed instructional notebooks given to each participant. Every training session provided 3-ring binders containing agendas, handouts from Power Point presentations for lectures, group assignments, activity protocols, and supplemental readings and handouts, including peer observational tools. In addition, I read the textbooks assigned to the coaches and principals so I would be prepared to understand team discussions related to the texts. Unfortunately, very few principals and teams

(and sometimes coaches) actually read the books, and there was little reference to the text materials at the university's' training sessions

For documentation, I used the state's department of education's Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) to gather background information on schools, student data, and test scores. As part of my job as a research assistant, program evaluations from coaches, principals, teachers were collected at the end of each training session, analyzed, and summarized for use by the university program director. Records of coaches' attendance and assignments were also maintained electronically for university program use. .

Methodology

Given that each chapter provides an independent study on different perspectives of leadership coaching, it was necessary to develop multiple protocols and observation tools (see appendices) to investigate the corresponding research questions. However, there were some similarities among the tools. All protocols contained 15-30 semi-structured questions and were based on preliminary categories developed from the literature review. Three interview protocols were developed for the coaches' interviews, two interview protocols were constructed for the program director's interview, and one interview protocol was designed for the principals' interview. Because my study was an embedded case study, I assured the participants that the university program was the context for my study, but my purpose was to learn about the coaches' knowledge, practices, and learning when supporting schools, principals, staff, and school improvement. Immediately following each interview, I spent time recording my impressions, and listened to the audiotapes again to see if I had overlooked anything. I listened for changes in the tone of voice to decipher areas that the coach seemed to be feel were important or noteworthy, and made notes regarding tonality on my transcripts.

To enhance my understanding of the leadership coaches' assignments and the context of their work, I arranged site visitations. Because two of my leadership coaches had multiple assignments, I was able to visit a total of eight schools and observe interactions among coaches, principals, staff, and students. I had opportunities to visit classrooms in all schools except one western urban high school, and observe student work. As I did with the interviews, I recorded impressions of the site visitation as a field note or memo upon departure from the schools,

Analysis

Qualitative software was used to assist with the disaggregation of data. Coding was predetermined based on the preliminary categories developed by the literature reviews. Interviews were read and reread to disaggregate the words of the participants into analytical units or nodes. I found that many of the responses could fit several nodes, and felt it necessary to add additional nodes to further analyze the data. Each interview was coded separately. Cross-case analysis indicated there was overlap among interviews. For instance, coaches provided more information about professional development in the first interview on transformative learning than they did during the last interview on professional development. Continual reiteration of the data, checking with coaches for verification or clarification, consolidating categories into broader themes or categories reinforced the validity of the study. Since the intent of my dissertation was to explore leadership coaches' perspectives and experiences when supporting change in educational beliefs and practices in underperforming schools, the following chapters offer coaches' voice to describe the knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to be a leadership coach.

CHAPTER 1 COACHING AND CHANGE IN SCHOOLS: TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Abstract

Leadership coaches revealed a specific process for transforming dysfunctional school cultures into functional school cultures. Coaches began the process slowly using classroom observations and conducting casual conversations with the principal and staff to develop rapport. Coach actions were cautiously deliberate in order to build trusting relationships between the coach and the principal and staff further defined as school members. Coaches mediated conversations among school members to include professional dialogue and discussions, thereby creating a learning culture. As school members evolved into a professional learning community (PLC), coaches pushed teachers to open their classrooms enabling staff members to observe each others' academic instruction. Coaches mediated follow-up conversations with school members to discuss the impact of instruction on student learning. Coaches gradually lessened direct involvement with the staff members, and delegated leadership of the PLC to the school members. School members began to refer to themselves as a team, evidenced by shared decisions-making responsibilities, shared values, and shared leadership. Team members adopted collective ownership for improving student performance, and claimed the new school culture perspective as their own creation. Findings indicated three elements of transformative adult learning (rational, emotional, and spiritual) were present and relevant as part of changing perspectives of school members. Elements of adult learning were not overtly identified as separate entities, but were recognized as infused with each other depending on the situation and the individual's learning.

The Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law of 2001 required a major shift in the way administrators, teachers, and state departments of education think about public schooling. Under the NCLB law, students in grades 3-10 take annual assessment tests administered by the state. Based on student results from the tests, schools must achieve minimum proficiency standards, called adequate yearly progress (AYP). To make AYP, schools must meet the required participation rate and students must attain minimal objectives in language arts and math. Schools are expected to progressively increase the percentage of students attaining proficiency standards each year. When schools do not meet proficiency levels, the law mandates the requirements be met and corrective actions be applied. That means, schools that fail to make AYP are required to notify parents, issue and implement school improvement plans, provide supplemental tutoring, and offer schools of choice. Underperforming schools receiving Title I funding, in particular, face serious consequences when their schools do not make adequate yearly progress (AYP), including replacement of the school principal and staff, conversion to a charter school or a state takeover. Yet many principals and staff still appear to be struggling to transform underperforming schools into high-performing schools as evidenced by their continued under-performance.

One widespread solution for resolving the issue of struggling-but-increasingly-accountable schools is to employ external "leadership" coaches. Leadership coaches are widely seen as key resources to help principals and staff members develop leadership skills to improve the school's performance to meet current requirements.

What do leadership coaches do?

Leadership coaching in schools is modeled after Edgar Schein's (1999) philosophy on organizational development for improvement as seen in the business world, and is a general

process that incorporates learning and change. Edgar Schein's (1999) work refers to interactions between a consultant and a client as *process consultation*. Schein offers three roles the consultant can choose to use in any situation depending on the need of the client, but emphasizes that help is the primary function of consultation. The first model is the "Expertise" model. This model is engaged when the client needs help to diagnose his/her own needs and relies on the expertise of the consultant to provide the remedy to the problem. The power of decision-making lies in the hands of the consultant and assumes the consultant knows what is best for the client. Schein's second model refers to the "Doctor-Patient" model. Again, this authority model empowers the consultant to diagnose, prescribe and administer a "cure" for the problem, but involves minimal decision-making on the client's part. The third, and final model, is the collaborative model known as "process consultation" .

Unlike the expert model or the doctor-patient model, process consultation involves joint decision-making, and encourages the client to resolve the problem through dialogue and reflection with the consultant. The process-consultation philosophy is to increase the client's capacity for learning so the client will acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to fix problems in the future. Process consultation focuses on building a relationship that permits both the consultant and the client to deal with reality using reciprocal conversations and reflective dialogue. Given the consultant is seen as an intervention, it becomes the client's responsibility to identify the problem, and accept ownership for resolving the issue by choosing to change personal beliefs and behaviors for the betterment of the organization (Schein, 1999).

In underperforming schools, leadership coaches work with principals and staff in the context of the school's environment to examine beliefs and values about school improvement and student achievement. Together, coaches, principals, and staff focus on instructional goals,

coherent programming, collaborative learning, and student achievement. Coaches assist principals and staff to reflect critically on what is working, what is not working, what is wanted, and what is needed to get there (Knight, 2009; Neufeld, et al., 2003; Kee, 2006; Dillon, 2008; Costa and Garmston, 2000). In order to take ownership for improving instructional quality and student learning, coaches ask the school members to be open to self-transformation through self-examination, self-awareness, and self-discipline, thereby challenging personal assumptions about ways of leading and learning in underperforming schools (Schon, 1983; Schein, 1999).

The Problem: Weak Research on Leadership Coaching

The purpose of my study is to investigate how coaches support belief changes in the principal and staff in underperforming schools in order to improve student performance. The problem is that little empirical research exists describing the actions of the coaches in the process of transforming beliefs and behaviors in underperforming schools. Further, only limited literature contains coaches' voices about their coaching experiences influencing adult learning as it impacts personal beliefs and behaviors in an educational setting.

My study suggests changing the beliefs and behaviors of adults incorporates three modalities of transformative learning- rational, emotional, and spiritual-as exemplified by what coaches know, what coaches do, and how coaches influence change. My research is organized around three research questions:

- How do coaches facilitate transformative learning in adults in underperforming schools?
- How do coaches know if the beliefs and behaviors of the principal and staff are changing?

- How does transformative learning impact coaches' personal beliefs and behaviors?

Literature Review: Defining Transformative Learning

The discipline of adult learning theory provides a substantive body of work that can be employed as a foundation for analyzing the formation and transformation of beliefs. Transformative learning is defined as any type of learning that has a lasting impact on how individuals interact with others, frame problems, and view themselves (Mezirow, 1978). The transformative learning field contains three prominent, yet divergent, theoretical positions based on the works of Mezirow (1978), Boyd (Boyd and Meyers, 1988), and Dirkx (1997).

One aspect of our human development is the uncritical absorption of ideas, norms, beliefs, and values through the interaction with others, e.g. family, peers, society. These interactions shape our perspectives and create filters through which we make sense of our world. Using these filters, we are able respond to new information by connecting it with familiar ideas and concepts. The tendency, though, is to interpret the new information through a lens of the comfortable perspective, thus making it difficult to solve problems in new ways or seeing an issue from a different point of view. Mezirow (1978) states, "What one wants to learn, his readiness to learn, the problems he chooses to act upon, his receptivity to attempts to inform or communicate with him, the source of legitimatization he requires before he will try out new ideas, his conception of what is bad and good and his determination to persevere in taking individual and collective action—all depend upon his meaning perspective."

An important part of transformative learning is for individuals to change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs, and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of thinking, acting and reacting, and altering

beliefs. Mezirow (1978, 1991) calls this *perspective transformation* to reflect change within an individual's core, and believes the process is fundamentally rational and analytical.

Transformative learning through reflective dialogue

Mezirow (1978) suggests perspective transformation leading to transformative learning occurs from a disorienting dilemma, which is triggered by a life crisis or major life transition. In my study, underperforming schools faced closure, and the principal and staff faced displacement or unemployment because the school' student performance was unacceptable according to AYP standards. To understand the urgency of the situation, it is helpful to understand the expectations of high performing schools. Literature suggests high performing schools exhibit four specific behaviors for attaining student achievement. Research indicates high functioning schools have principals who lead the instructional core of the school, referring to the relationship between the teacher, the student, and the content (Cohen and Ball, 1999; City, et al., 2009). Second, successful schools create a shared vision of ambitious student performance accompanied by quality instruction and program coherence (Schmoker, 2001; Leithwood, et al. 2004; Newmann, et al., 2001; Lambert, 2003). Third, quality schools develop the social structure of the school, sustaining a culture of adult learning and collaboration (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Corcoran & Goetz, 1995: Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001; Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2002; Coburn, 2003). Finally, high functioning schools construct a system of trusting relationships and external resources that support efforts to ensure the attainment of school goals and student achievement (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Spillane, 2005; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Lencioni, 2005; Platt, Tripp, et al., 2008).

Leadership coaches in underperforming schools recognize that the principals and staff are <u>not</u> exhibiting behaviors of quality leadership, thereby endangering the jobs of the principal and

staff, and impairing student achievement. For underperforming schools to change their "meaning schema" (i.e., beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions), Mezirow's (1991) theory suggests coaches, principals, and staff engage in critical reflection on their own beliefs as they relate to the school context. Exchanging knowledge with each other offers an opportunity for coaches to pose challenging questions and provide candid critical feedback in a supportive environment. Through reflective dialogue, coaches, principals, and staff may begin to reorder their reality, recognizing options for controlling their own lives and dealing with constraints which had previously seen as beyond their control (Mezirow, 1978; Freire, 1970). Again, referring to Mezirow's theory, reciprocal conversation may allow each to become aware of how and why past assumptions have come to constrain the way they perceive the world, examining ineffective habits, and designing new action plans for the future (Mezirow, 1991).

Transformative learning through relational trust

Critics of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning argue that the emphasis on rationality overlooks the intuitive, creative, and emotional aspects of perspective change (Cranton, 1994; Taylor, 1998). Robert Boyd's (Boyd and Meyers, 1988) work reflects the psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of adult learning. Boyd's theory suggests it is the emotional component that is the major catalyst for change, rather than the rational component. Rather than using reflection to describe the process of transformative learning, Boyd (Boyd and Meyers, 1988) describes *discernment* as the central process in transformative learning. According to Boyd, the process of discernment is composed of three activities: receptivity, recognition, and grieving. Receptivity refers to being receptive or open to receiving "alternative expressions of meaning", that is, listening and examining situations from different perspectives (Boyd and Meyers, 1988). The second activity involves the individual recognizing

the need to change their situation. Lastly, and the most significant phase according to Boyd, grieving occurs when the individual realizes old patterns or behaviors are no longer relevant to what they have to do in the future, and moves to adopt or establish new ways, integrating old and new patterns.

In leadership coaching, a normative model describing a high-functioning school begins with the end in mind: i.e., a clear image of a school that is developed in ways that support high quality instruction and ambitious student outcomes. Leadership coaches, principals, and staff develop a vision of high functioning schools that builds capacity by creating a school culture based on shared attitudes, values, beliefs, expectations, and relationships focused on student learning and achievement rather than adult needs and preferences (Peterson, 2002; Platt, Tripp, et al., 2008).

Yet, perceptual distortions, based on personal histories, preconceived ideas and beliefs, and stereotypes, must be overcome to face reality and see how things really are (Schein, 1999). If changes are to be made, and because principals and staff must be willing to explore and reveal personal thoughts with the leadership coach, a safe, interdependent environment is necessary for dialoguing, sharing feelings, ideas, and experiences (Vella, 2002; Taylor, 1998). United in a shared experience of trying to make meaning of their life experiences, relational trust sets the stage for learning. Interdependent relationships expand and deepen understanding about diverse beliefs and values (Bryk and Schneider, 2003). According to Boyd's theory, compassionate criticisms, assisting principals and staff to question their own realities, facilitates the process of discernment, and enables the coaches to assist in creating a plan of action for the future (Boyd and Meyers, 1988).

Transformative learning through spirituality

In education, the phrase, "But we've always done it that way", is a frequent mantra heard in schools, particularly in underperforming schools. Leadership coaching's challenge is to ideally change that belief, moving to another belief that is deeper, wiser, and more in tune with the needs of the school. On the other hand, letting go of entrenched beliefs and behaviors is an intensely emotional experience (Scott, 1997). Cranton's (1994) work notes that "learners will often cling stubbornly to their opinions, values, or beliefs. To change is frightening and threatening." Without a process of critically examining opinions, values and beliefs and the capacity to let go or suspend opinions, values or beliefs that no long fit the new emerging view, transformation cannot take place (Cranton, 1994; Senge, 1990; Mezirow, 1991).

As mentioned above, Boyd (Boyd and Meyers, 1988) believes grieving is the most important significant phase of change when individuals realize old patterns or behaviors are no longer relevant to what they have to do in the future. Transitioning to different ways of thinking and behaving requires new beliefs. As coaches help staff navigate through unfamiliar territory, coaches may rely on experiential knowledge and intuition to "feel" what strategies would be beneficial in supporting belief change. Knowing what to do and when to do it focuses on the spirituality of the transformative learning work involving the inner core or the "heart" of the learner (Dirkx, 1997).

In Dirkx's (1997) view, transformative learning involves personal, spiritual, emotional, and imaginative ways of knowing. Dirkx extends the theory of transformative learning to include the realm of spiritual questions such as exploration of self (Dirkx, 1997) and of one's life purpose (Kroth & Boverie, 2000, 2009). Let me be clear. Spirituality is not referring to the religious sense of the word, but the intuitive ways of knowing. Dirkx (1997) refers to this as learning through the soul. "Coming to know ourselves, from the inside out, and how we make

sense of ourselves in the world are critical aspects of learning," explains Dirkx. "Learning is not preparation for life," he says. "It *is* life, the experience of living. Knowing inside that we have fundamentally changed how we see ourselves, how we see others, and how we make sense of the world in a different way enable us to experience self-actualization."

Leadership coaching suggests a profound connectedness exists between coaches, principals and staff, allowing each to experience enlightenment through spiritually. Sharing intimate feelings of joy and pain, confidence and anxiety, success and failure, learning becomes seen as a relationship of caring. Literature suggests this trusting relationship develops a sense of possibility versus as sense of resignation. A feeling of safety empowers principals and staff to openly discuss beliefs and practices, and accept responsibility for changing beliefs and behaviors related to student outcome (Cranton & Wright,2008; Byrk and Schneider, 2003).

Study Design

The purpose of my research was to gather empirical information about how leadership coaches support belief change in underperforming schools. Using transformative learning theory, I studied what coaches know, what coaches do, and how coaches influence change when helping principals and staff lead the school improvement process in underperforming schools. The multiple case study design created a means for establishing the validity of findings, including triangulation among different categories of evidence (observations, interviews, field notes, and documents) and leveraging opportunities to explore "exceptional cases" that did not coincide with emerging themes and categories. Member checks for accuracy of facts and observations and continued surveillance of the academic literature provided additional validity to my findings.

Data collection

The use of case study designs called for a broad-based data collection in order to triangulate among multiple sources of evidence to identify points of convergence and divergence in coaches' knowledge, actions, and influence (Yin, 2009). Data for this study was collected from interviews, observations, field notes, and documentation gathered from school visitations and team participation in a coaching institute sponsored by a Midwest university. The primary source of my data collection relied on in-depth interviews with leadership coaches, as this method is effective in understanding how coaches make sense of transformative learning experiences (Esterberg, 2002). Three 90-minute semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006) with leadership coaches and one 60-minute interview with the coaches' immediate principals were conducted at the coaches' assigned school sites over a three-month interval, and digitally recorded for later transcription and analysis. On-site observations and field notes from school visitations and classrooms observations were gathered over a three-year period. Field notes regarding interactions among the leadership coach, the principal and instructional leadership team members were collected over a three-year period from a coaching institute where I worked as a research assistant. Documentation included a record of coach, principal, and leadership team attendance at the coaching institute; program evaluations from coaches, principals, and staff members collected at the end of quarterly training; thematic memos focused on relational trust, team engagement, and the role of the coach; and finally, a compilation of school testing data.

Sampling

The choice of coaches was purposeful and coaches were non-randomly selected. By that, I mean I selected coaches who provided extensive and rich information about the coaches' knowledge, actions, and influence involved in coaching (Patton, 2002; Stake 2006; Yin 2003; Maxwell, 2005). Coaches were selected based on their time with the Midwest coaching institute

and their experience in coaching in underperforming schools. As context, all underperforming schools in my study received Title I funds, and were considered high priority schools. High priority indicated high poverty and low performing schools not making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Per federal law, Title I schools received technical assistance in leadership training from coaches trained by the coaching institute. Schools involved with coaching institute included public schools, charter schools, and alternative schools. The Midwest coaching institute was a meaningful context for case study research for three reasons. First, it had a normative conception of high-functioning schools focused on the instructional core (Ball & Cohen), coherent programming (Newmann, et al., 2001), and professional communities (Elmore, 2000). Secondly, it had a normative model of leadership practice, aimed at transforming schools into teams focused on student performance (Platt, Tripp, et al., 2008). Third, it had a normative model for coaching practice, geared towards supporting, collaborating and consulting with principals and staff to exercise instructional leadership and build capacity within the context of their schools (Bloom, et al., 2005).

Three coaches provided the data for this study. For case study research, it is suggested that a limited number of case studies be included in a single study (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2006). Given the time constraints and accessibility to coaches, three cases within a multiple case study provided opportunity to initially identify themes of the cases studied as well as conduct cross-case analysis. Three seasoned coaches, unlike novices, provided a broader scope of experiences for examination. Because frequent turnovers in principals and staff occur in underperforming performing schools, coaches selected for my study had been engaged, through the coaching institute with the school's principal and staff for a minimum of two years. This was because the emphasis of year one for the coach was about establishing a presence in the building and

developing relationships with the principal and staff. I excluded coaches from schools where the building leadership had changed during the assignment of the coach, and/or the coaching-principal relationship had not been consistent.

The three coaches, two Caucasian males and one African-American female, were intentionally selected based on previous success turning underperforming schools into successful schools as evidenced by achieving annual yearly progress. All coaches had been administrators prior to becoming leadership coaches, serving in middle and high schools as principals, though not necessarily in urban schools. On the other hand, leadership coaching experiences had been at urban elementary, middle, and high school levels, including alternative high schools. During my study, two of selected coaches were assigned to public high schools, and one coach was assigned to three alternative high schools.

Analysis

Analysis was based on the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987, Miles & Huberman, 1994). I looked for themes and patterns regarding viewpoint changes, talk of "before and after" references to beliefs and/or convictions, changes in thinking, and changes in behaviors. Remarks that appeared contradictory with emerging themes and patterns were given special attention for converging and diverging interpretations, followed by subsequent analysis of field notes and observations. Iterative analysis helped refine themes and patterns, both with-in case and cross-case analysis, comparing overlaps, disconnects, divergences, and convergences. Inductive analysis generated tentative categories, connecting supportive evidence (observations, field notes, documentation) with the data itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987).

Qualitative software, Nvivo, assisted with thematic analysis. I assigned a priori codes (nodes) to initially organize respondents' replies into meaningful analytical units. Throughout the initial coding process, I continued to refine and revise codes. At the second level of analysis, I consolidated the data into codes that emerged from the words of the respondents, and identified patterns that coalesced in the data. At the third level of coding, I devised thematic constructs by connecting and consolidating the second level codes. The final four themes that emerged were culture, relationships, trust, and beliefs.

Findings

Leadership coaches revealed a specific process for transforming dysfunctional school cultures into functional school cultures. In schools, culture refers to "the way we do business here", or their method of operation (Platt, et al., 2008, p. 88). Ideally, functional school cultures embody shared norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes, and promote mutual respect and caring among all of its members. School cultures set a tone and context within which work is undertaken and goals are pursued. The work of Platt, Tripp, Fraser, Warnock, and Curtis (2008) refers to cultures as communities and use a continuum to describe school functioning and adult learning. Platt and colleagues suggest this continuum distinguishes between communities that pool their efforts to develop organizational intelligence in the service of greater student learning, i.e., Collaborative and Accountable Communities, and those groups whose interactions, intentionally or unintentionally, block improvement and protect mediocre performance by both students and adults. Platt and others (2008) refer to dysfunctional communities as the Toxic Community, the Laissez-Faire Community, and the Congenial Community. All three dysfunctional communities share similar attributes including accepting low performance from members, expecting low performance from students, attributing external factors like family

background or neighborhood conditions as causing student underperformance, deriving benefit from conditions that favor adult comfort and convenience over student needs, and finally, having limited collective experience with problem-solving skills and strategies . In each of these dysfunctional groups, conversations and interactions are largely ineffective in improving teaching and learning because information is either not shared productively regarding student performance or limited to a narrow understanding of what learning gains mean and how it applies to classroom practices (Perkins, 2003).

Coaches recognized signs of dysfunctional school cultures or communities upon entering their assignments, and all agreed the role of the coach needed to be that of a mediator of thinking, not a clinical expert. Coaches respected principals and teachers as adult learners, and referred to them collectively as staff members or school teams. Findings indicated three modalities of transformative adult learning (rational, emotional, and spiritual) existed, and were relevant when explaining the changing behaviors and beliefs of school members. Modalities were not overtly identified as separate entities, but were recognized as being infused with each other depending on the situation and the individual's learning.

For this paper, I will report on specific themes leadership coaches raised at each interview to explain the progression of how coaches transform adult learning perspectives towards intentionally improving student learning and achievement. Moving from toxic school cultures to accountable school cultures (Platt, et al., 2008), coaches described deliberate actions of how they began with a needs analysis of dysfunctional school cultures, mediated the thinking of principals and teachers, and ended with staff members claiming a new transformative and functional culture as their own. Four themes emerged to explain the coaches' process of changing adult learning perspectives: changing adult comfort to a student-learning culture,

changing social relationships to professional relationships, changing skepticism to invitational trust, and changing fixed mindsets to open mindsets.

Dysfunctional School Culture

Reflecting on their work in school systems, both as leadership coaches and as former educators, coaches emphasized the culture of the school determined how the school functioned and what was expected for student achievement. One coach explained, "It's easy to tell what's going on in a building even before you get to a classroom. As soon as you walk in the door, you can determine the weather. You can walk down the halls, stand and listen to conversations, determine the noise levels in classrooms and hear whether it is productive noise or chaotic noise. I always like to say I can judge the climate of the building by the number of teachers who keep their doors locked." In my study, underperforming schools all began with a dysfunctional school culture. Fears of unsafe schools, mindsets for limited student ability, acceptance of mediocre instruction, and lack of professional relationships were present in the schools when coaching began. The next section describes the conditions the coaches encountered in more detail, and provides relevant quotations from the coaches.

Unsafe schools

A total of six gun incidents had occurred in schools where the interviewed coaches had been assigned. Principals indicated to coaches their primary concern was to address the safety factors in the building. "Safety and security are my most important issues. My second year in this building we had back to back gun incidents. It gets to be very stressful," shared an urban high school principal." Coaches affirmed the stressfulness of the principal's position. "You can't have anarchy and expect instruction to have any meaningful impact on kids' lives. Before you can focus on ELA and math, the principals' first objective is not to be on CNN tomorrow for

the latest knifing or shooting incident. That's what principals are dealing with--the culture, climate, and community they live in. And they are overwhelmed with that." Principals further remarked that being an urban principal was not only stressful, but a burn-out job as well. As an example, one principal said he was the longest tenured principal since the '80s and had just completed his third year.

Fixed Mindsets

Awareness of the need to achieve Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) was present in the underachieving schools, but without a sense of urgency. Teachers' lack of concern for meeting AYP requirements suggested an acceptance that students were unable to achieve AYP standards. Coaches expressed concern that teachers exhibited a sense of hopelessness. One coach said, "A lot of schools I see are in an enabling kind of mindset. Teachers say this is all that our kids are able to do. We've tried everything and nothing's working. The teachers shut down their thinking to take a closed minded position about possibilities for students." Coaches observed teachers with traditional mindsets taught in outmoded ways (e.g., lecturing, seatwork) with little student interaction. Students were observed to be writing notes to friends, distracted with non-instructional peer conversations, sleeping, or creating discipline disturbances.

Acceptance of mediocre instruction

Coach observations of student instruction indicated a traditional classroom format with students in rows, facing the teacher. Coaches reported classroom work consisted of silent reading, completing worksheets, answering questions from a text, or listening to teacher lectures with little reciprocal dialogue between the teacher and students. Maintaining student control was a primary concern of teachers so student interaction was not encouraged.

Coaches acknowledged the lack of rigorous instruction, but suggested principals and teachers in underperforming schools were not aware of the components of quality instruction. Coaches explained what they looked for when observing classroom instruction, "The first thing that I look for is what the students are doing? How are they being challenged? At what level are they being challenged? Is it work that requires them to analyze something and create something that demonstrates learning? What type of questions do teacher ask to push students to think deeper? Are there discussions among students? You can go into a lot of classrooms and see students doing basic knowledge work, but you don't see the students interacting and advancing their thinking." Coaches were not critical of the teachers' oblivion to quality instruction, however, and conceded that teachers believed they were providing adequate instruction to students "to the best of their ability." Coaches mentioned that a common understanding of the instructional core (the relationship between the teacher, student, and content) did not seem to exist among staff members nor was there evidence of instructional differentiation to meet student needs. Content areas appeared be text-driven, but the number of classroom textbooks were noted to be limited or outmoded.

Lack of professional relationships

A coach observed, "I have yet to be in one underperforming school yet that doesn't have an improper balance with their culture. It's the first thing I always notice. What's happening in these underperforming schools is that the cultural thing is not working cohesively. Everyone's not working collaboratively. In a healthy atmosphere, collaborative relationships would allow student achievement the opportunity to flourish. In underperforming schools, the school's opportunity to have a dialogue that's nurturing in nature and focused on increasing student achievement is diminished. That's the culture of the school." Coaches confirmed professional

relationships were not evident in underperforming schools. Teacher autonomy supported adult comfort and convenience. Principals entered classrooms primarily to perform teacher evaluations, and adhered closely to contractual guidelines regarding teacher notification, time limit, and evaluation criteria. No shared vision or goal for student performance was visible in the school or in the classrooms. Coaches described pockets of teachers-some as excellent, some as mediocre, some needing more support of teaching-existing at every school, but always maintaining privacy about their work. Interactions among staff members were focused on personal issues, not academic-oriented.

Entering dysfunctional school cultures, where autonomy and privacy appeared to be the norm, the next section describes the actions of the coaches deliberately took in order to enter classrooms and gather insight about the quality of the instructional core. That is, the interactions between the teachers and the students in the presence of content.

Moving relationships from isolated to collaborative

The coaches' first year was devoted to establishing relationships within the school culture. This action is consistent with the transformative learning which involves analyzing the situation and creating trusting relationships (Mezirow, 1991; Boyd, 1988; Dirkx, 1997). **"**I dealt with the culture first by building relationships with people. I did it by building relationships with gang members. I did it through building relationships with other students. That's where we started. That is what we needed to do in order to make the school a safe place for the people who came here."

Coaches "dropped" into classrooms to observe. Observations were non-judgmental and non-evaluative, merely to make the staff comfortable with the coaches' presence. Teachers were assured, "I'm not your evaluator. Nothing will go to the principal. I'm just another set of eyes

and ears. My business operates on helping people help themselves." Another coach responded, "You had to create a culture for learning and understanding that coexisted among the coach, principal, and teacher. As coaches, we had to be visible. We immersed ourselves in the school. We were in the classrooms. We were in teacher meetings. We were in committee meetings. We were in principals' meetings. We were in school district and intermediate school district (ISD) meetings. It was our job to know what everyone was doing."

To create a culture for learning, the coaches' used reciprocal conversations in order to explore the thinking of the principal and staff (Mezirow, 1991; Boyd, 1988; Dirkx, 1997). Mezirow (1991) suggests dialogue is having an "equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse," and provides optimal teaching and learning. Coaches mediated dialogue through questioning, probing, paraphrasing, and protocols to stimulate the staff's reflection on personal beliefs, values, and practices. However, open conversations made staff members' feel uncomfortable, and threatened teacher autonomy. The following sections describe the resistance of school members and the process of accepting the role of the coach. Relevant reflections by both coaches and team members are included.

Staff resistance

Because the coaches' assigned schools had not made AYP and had been identified by the state's systems of support as needing leadership support, coaches initially met principals at the summer coaching institute. During the training, principals were introduced to the state's support program, and had an opportunity to become acquainted with their coach. Principals were not receptive to receiving a leadership coach, and were concerned their role as principal could be compromised in the eyes of the staff. Coaches respected the position of the principal, and chose

to concentrate on the instructional core (teacher, student, content) as the first way to develop the principal as an instructional leader.

When school opened in the fall, principals were not the only ones who were not receptive to having an "outsider" present in their building. Teachers appeared to be skeptical of the coach's value. "Because we did not have a working relationship, I posed a potential threat to them," explained one coach. A teacher reminisced, "I can remember we were very angry because he (coach) challenged our thinking, and I didn't like that very much."

Coaches' work began with a continual presence in the classrooms. In an attempt to develop a relationship with teachers, coaches cautiously offered to provide resources for teachers based on student learning needs. Coaches looked for supplemental articles for the teachers to read related to instructional strategies, and provided follow-up conversations to probe for the teachers' understanding. Other coaches offered to facilitate meetings, conduct professional development, and model lessons in the classroom.

Reciprocal dialogue about school improvement involved all staff members, and the one strategy all of the coaches incorporated in their work was the use of protocols to assist with group discussion. One coach explained, "A protocol is a guided template and a strategy that focuses conversation. Absent a protocol, dialogue is nothing more than people talking around the table. We needed to make our thinking transparent." Coaches encouraged school members to adhere to group norms, with equal participation, and "creating an atmosphere where people listen to the other person and everyone's opinion is valued" (Mezirow, 1991).

Teachers, too, saw the value of the protocol, and shared their perspectives with me when I visited their schools. "While we thought we had a lot of camaraderie, what we didn't have was professional conversation. When our coach brought protocols to the table, it completely changed

how we talked as a staff. The teacher continued to explain how professional conversations made them recognize the results of their work and the importance of staff coherence when "keeping on the path of improvement."

Principal resistance

As stated above, principals were not receptive to receiving a leadership coach, but coaches were cognizant of their principals' feelings. "Principals did feel upset about having to have a coach. I haven't found one yet that was excited about it." Coaches described principals' reactions of receiving an assigned coach ranged from hostile to resigned. Because building a relationship with the principal was critical to leadership development, building a relationship was deliberately thoughtful. Coaches clearly stated it was imperative to not overshadow the principal's authority. "I think once the principal felt comfortable that my role was purely supportive, our relationship slowly began to build. I tried to demonstrate my support through the work I did, through the conversations we had, and through the confidentiality I maintained."

Coaches reported a consistent procedure for developing relationships with the principals. "I've learned not to pressure the principal to move at the pace I wanted to because if you do that, you will lose them. They need to know I am there to assist them, not telling them what to do." Uninterrupted hour-long meetings with the principals were scheduled ahead of time. Planned conversations followed an agenda. Meetings reviewed the principal's goals for school improvement, the challenges meeting the goals and evidence of success towards the goals. Listening, questioning, and paraphrasing responses were skills identified by coaches as essential for understanding principals' beliefs. Again, confidentiality was mentioned as the key to building relations and opening conversations. "I'm very conscious of the conversations I hold

and what I say, both in the principal's office and outside of the principal's office because I don't want to violate the trust that I've built."

On occasion, though, coaches did take risks with the intent of creating a disorienting dilemma in order force a principal to experience a *perspective transformation* (Mezirow (1978, 1991). The following is an example of how a trusting relationship allowed a coach to be blunt with a principal. As the coach explained it, the principal's authoritarian behaviors and traditional approaches to student learning prevented the teachers from trying any new instructional strategies in the classroom. "It became appropriate for me at some point to take him aside and say we need to talk about your approach to kids and learning. Will you give me permission? When he agreed, I said, "What you're doing is hurting kids. Let's be honest about it.' But I had to wait until we could reach that point in our relationship so I could say that. In this case, I think we had a mutual respect for each other. For me, as the coach, it was now a matter of helping him to see the power of a shared leadership approach to resolve student achievement problems. He needed to trust the staff to become mutual decision-makers and change instructional approaches in their classrooms." The coach continued to say the principal reflected on their conversation, and began to observe classrooms to learn about the instructional core, teacher practices and analyze student work. The coach accompanied the principal to the visitations, and conducted follow-up discussions to understand what the principal observed and learned about quality classroom instruction.

Relying on trust to achieve professional growth

Coaches said creating professional learning communities (PLC) was an integral part to changing the culture and beliefs of the underperforming school. On the other hand, knowing their school was considered underperforming, and their jobs were at risk and pressure was on

them to increase student test scores, school members were hesitant to share their thoughts with each other. The process for engaging staff members in a PLC is described as follows, and includes relevant quotations from coaches.

Fostering professional learning communities

Coaches reported starting the development of professional learning communities (PLC) by meeting school members individually and listening to their concerns. As with the principals, confidentiality was crucial to building trust with the teachers so they could comfortably reveal personal thoughts and feelings. "We found people who came to us privately and said, 'You know, we want this to be a quality school. We want to help.' I think the best thing we did is that we found leaders who had been waiting for somebody to tell them they could be good leaders," reminisced a coach. Coaches indicated they initially conducted professional development in content areas (i.e., literacy, writing) that acted as a catalyst for creating learning communities in the building. Principals were present in the PLC discussions, and stated they witnessed teachers assuming different curriculum responsibilities and leadership roles within the PLC.

Peer observations-the next step

Changing the school culture involved more than discussion, however. The most challenging activity involved classroom and peer observations. One coach observed, "Teachers were just beginning to have conversations with one another about what they were doing. I think most teachers were genuinely committed to students. I think they knew they needed a higher level of teacher questioning, more thought and effort put into lesson planning, more student engagement, but we all knew we needed to have some open and honest conversations about how we would get there--what's working and what's not working." Pushing staff members towards a higher level of thinking about instruction, coaches began to facilitate peer observations. The new

approach to learning, that of entering a peer's classroom for observing instruction, created a disorienting experience (Mezirow, 1978, 1991), and a profound sense that of loss, meaning the taken-for-granted ways of teaching classrooms were going to change (Boyd, 1998). Initially, the instructional leadership team members were selected for observations. Coaches accompanied principals and teachers into their peers' classrooms to observe instruction, student engagement, and content rigor. When it was not possible for actual classroom visitation, teachers allowed their lessons to be videotaped for peers to view at a later time. At first, many teachers were uncomfortable, fearful of criticism by their peers, but coaches allayed their concerns by using a protocol for teacher discussion. As one coach explained, "I told them, let's make a protocol that will require us to say warm comments about somebody else's instruction and that's all we're going to do, just warm comments. No cool comments-just warm ones. We did that time and time again until the teachers got over the eeriness of being observed and the awkwardness of listening to peer comments. Eventually, teachers were more comfortable with the observations, and wanted more feedback. So, again we talked about how that would be phrased so we wouldn't offend anybody. We would do cool comments only if they were open to it. I said we won't do them unless the teacher says it is okay." As time went on, teachers did confirm the value of the observations. The following teacher comments were taken from program evaluations recorded at the quarterly coaching institute meetings. "I was surprised the peer observations went so well. The kids responded well, and were not bothered by having extra people in the room." "I like watching me [sic] teach on the video. I could see what I could do better."

Teachers' comments indicated the peer observations helped them learn more about each others' teaching styles and built trust among themselves. In transformative learning theory, a key role is experience and the interpretation of experiences. Comments above indicated

individuals were assessing their experiences, relating them to previous experiences, and considering how the new experiences will be used in the future (Mezirow, 1991; Boyd, 1988; Dirkx, 1997).

Moving from autonomy to joint responsibility

Over time, three to five years, coaches successfully facilitated several changes in their building including the implementation of professional learning communities. The use of peer observations, instructional rounds, and shared leadership supported a learning culture for both students and staff. Interviews, observations, and field note provided evidence of a changing school culture. Relevant comments from coaches, principals and teachers are included in the next section to provide evidence of change.

Empirical evidence of change

Transitioning to a community with a new set of assumptions is evidence of transformative learning. As a research assistant at the coaching institute, I observed the building of relationships when teams attended quarterly coaching conferences, and collected data. Observations, field notes, and thematic memos of team interactions indicated improved engagement between team members, the principal, and the coach. Transcripted team conversations referenced shared visions of instructional quality, open conversations, shared responsibility for school improvement, and collaboration. Written comments from coaches, principals, and teachers were collected at the conclusion of the coaching institutes, and analyzed into a thematic memo regarding relational trust. The memo suggested that an emphasis on the instructional core created a common understanding of what quality instruction should look like, and supported the importance of coherent instructional programs and collaboration when improving schools. Principals also recognized collaborative leadership as the necessary way to

empower staff when supporting change. A principal wrote, “Collaboration is important to making a difference. We work as a team. We are in this together. This team can effectively change the problems within our core.” A teacher wrote, “As a team member, I feel extremely excited about the progress we are making. We have different styles of teaching. It helps to share ideas with each other. We all have important things to offer.” Another teacher liked focusing on student performance and expectations. “Understanding the use of the protocol process in a team was very helpful when we looked at a classroom observation and student work**.** When my team members and I went over student work samples, I saw things that they didn’t and vice versa**.** The use of the protocol forced us to look at the same things**.”**

On-site visitations also confirmed changes in classroom instruction and student engagement. Coaches described what they observed in classrooms, and a coach explained, “We’ve had teachers change what they were doing in the classroom. We were beginning to see students working together, using think/pair/share, and turning to your elbow partner to talk. I didn’t see this when I first came, but teachers were beginning to understand that students could engage.” A different coach stated, “I saw teachers stepping up, taking ownership of their instruction. They had a set process for pretesting, formative testing, and summative testing. They looked at data to decide what objective they wanted to work on. They were actually living their school improvement plan.”

Perspective changes

As a member of the school’s professional learning communities, coaches continued mediating the team’s thinking about improved student performance. “The biggest thing for staff members was to change attitudes and beliefs about what they really thought about students. And sometimes it was painful. Sometimes what they thought, they didn’t want to verbalize because it

was not going to be well received," cited a coach. Coaches continued the practice of using non-judgmental questioning and probing to clarify team perspectives and values. All coaches emphasized "coaching is not telling, but empowering the principal and staff to reflect on practices as related to student outcome. The decision to change beliefs and behaviors ultimately belongs to the school members."

Transitioning to a functional school culture

When certain elements were present in the building, coaches recognized it was time to decrease their involvement with the school team. "I knew staff attitudes and perspectives were changing in my school because I listened to their conversations about school improvement topics we had discussed earlier. The amazing thing to me was when they told their story, it became their idea. They were saying it with such passion. They were talking about who they were and what they believed. That made me smile because when I looked at their wall posters, I observed in their classroom, or I looked at their school brochures, it had my imprint all over it. But now it was their vision, their belief. It was something that they had chosen to adopt. It was who they were and they had selected it for themselves. I knew I didn't make that change. I just helped align their reflection and their thinking." Coaches described changes in the way staff members talked with each other, exchanging strategies for student improvement, and supporting innovative practices. Classrooms were open for visitations, and staff members were visibly focused on student learning and performance.

During one of my school site visitations, teachers explained how they believed they made the changes with the support of the coach. "Our coach was really good at not telling anyone what to do. She was good at listening, and when I would ask her a question, she would come right back with a different question to make me reflect. She made me think through my problem, and

resolve my own problem.*"* Other teachers reflected on the process of assuming ownership for student improvement. "We made decisions as a group. We used our MEAP score to decide our area of focus. I think once the teachers received data, they became more aware of what they should be looking for in their instruction and started to adjust their teaching." Teachers discussed the value of participating in peer observations and instructional rounds. "We would visit about three classrooms, collaborate, and discuss what we observed. If we ran into a time issue, we would talk on our prep time. We could see our progress, and we were anxious to continue to improve."

Principals spoke openly about changes within their schools and the influence of the coach. "With the direction of the coach, we became a cohesive community. It was the way the staff members were taking on more responsibility to improve the school. They put together honors' assemblies, parent events, and offered technology training to peers. It wasn't me. I didn't have to ask them to do any of this. So sometimes I had to stop them, and say, "Let's celebrate." Another principal described the bonding of the school team. "Last year we hired new staff members that were fresh out of college. We spent about half the year trying to get them on board with how we were teaching and what we believed about student expectations. They resisted, and finally, in February, I realized that I, as the leader, had to put my foot down, and say, 'you will get on board with our system or you will not be teaching in our school.' I don't think I would've ever gotten to that point without a leadership coach coaching me to act like instructional leader."

The comments from the teachers and principal suggested a sense of enlightenment and a perspective change. Acceptance of a new personal self-image and a different perspective of one's

purpose in life supported the transformation of a dysfunctional adult-oriented school culture to a functional student-centered school culture.

Cautions

Although coaches were able to describe a coaching sequence to improve underperforming schools, coaches were realistic about the sustainability of the transformed school culture and beliefs. Two cautions were acknowledged as deterring the sustainability of change: leadership turnover and funding.

Turnover

Coaches indicated school teams are unable to sustain cultural changes unless the principal assumes the instructional leadership role, and continues to be a part of a stable instructional team. Probing for a response as to how do schools sustain the process, a coach replied," It's already difficult for schools to bring about change. If they've got different people all the time, it's even harder to keep the momentum going. Having worked in a building, I felt it took me at least five years to get the people operating on the level they should. When you get leadership and staff turnover, that's devastating to progress." Changes in administration bring different beliefs, often inconsistent with transformed school culture. Disgruntled staff members regress to former practices or transfer to other buildings or districts.

Funding

Funding is often supplied using federal and state money to provide external coaches as systems of support. Once AYP is achieved, the funds are no longer provided, unless the district chooses to continue to finance leadership coaches. "It takes the first year to just establish the relationship and the culture. I realize money and funding change everything, but if you want the teachers to think coaching is going be around for a while, you have to agree that our work is not

a three or four month process or 12 month process. It has to be longer than that." Two coaches were able to say they had additional funding from their districts, but were unsure how long that would last.

Discussion

This study investigated how coaches support belief changes in the principal and staff in underperforming schools in order to improve student performance. My research was organized around **three research questions:**

- *How do coaches facilitate transformative learning in adults in underperforming schools?*
- *How do coaches know if the beliefs and behaviors of the principal and staff are changing?*
- *How does transformative learning impact coaches' personal beliefs and behaviors?*

My study suggested that successful leadership coaches have a deliberate approach towards influencing belief perspectives in underperforming schools. Analysis indicates that three modalities of transformative learning-rational, emotional, and spiritual-were present in the process of changing adult perspectives as facilitated by what coaches know, what coaches do, and how coaches influence change. My findings supported the presence of Mezirow's, Boyd's, and Dirkx' theories of transformative learning, but indicated the theories were infused throughout the process of moving from a dysfunctional school culture to an accountable school culture. Table 1.1 represents how the leadership coach's actions align with transformative learning theory.

Table 1.1 How leadership coaches' actions align with transformative learning theory

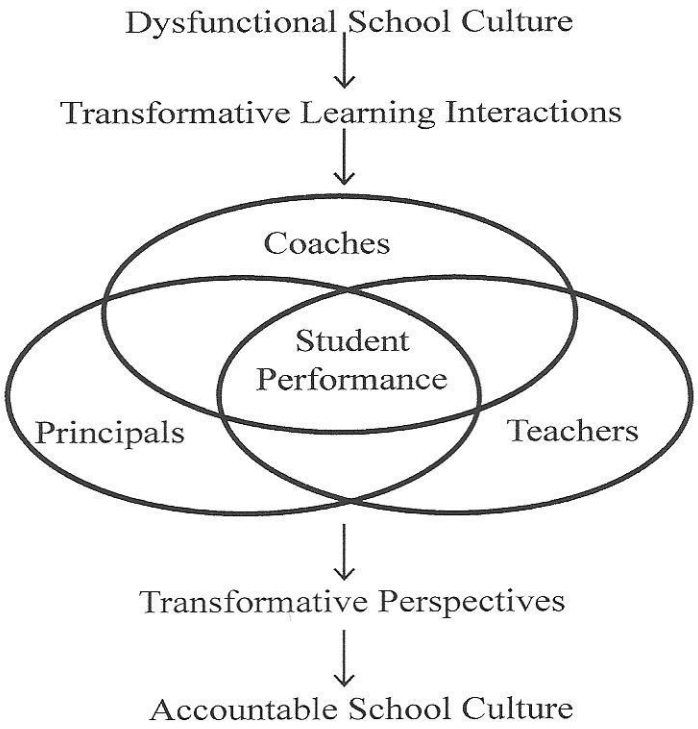
	Mezirow (rational)	Boyd (emotional)	Dirkx (spiritual)
Starting point	Analyzes school needs based on high performing school standards.	Engages in casual conversations to build safe learning environment.	Assesses student and teacher efficacy using life experience.
Builds relational trust	Establishes presence through mutual dialogue with staff members and observing in classrooms.	Encourages staff to listen and examine alternative perspectives during conversations.	Uses people skills and life experience to create trust among school members.
Listens	Mediates thinking of staff through questioning, probing, paraphrasing, and protocols to stimulate reflection on personal beliefs about student performance.	Assists staff to create a vision of ambitious student achievement.	Listens intently to conversations to understand covert meanings of coachees' words about their beliefs about student performance.
Mediates thinking	Use protocols to engage all school members in reciprocal and respectful conversations.	Mediates open conversations regarding classroom instruction and student performance that aligns with vision of academic excellence.	Asks probing, clarifying and inquiry questions to explore personal values and beliefs.
Creates culture for learning	Initiates formation of professional learning communities (PLC) to promote shared values.	Helps staff recognize accepting the need to change practices requires abandonment of comfortable beliefs.	Supports culture of learning to provide safe environment for examining and challenging comfortable beliefs and practices.
Focuses on student instructional	Participates in peer observations and instructional rounds focused on instructional core and program coherence.	Creates a safe environment for adult learning by implementing non-judgmental protocol for peer observations and follow-up conversations.	Provides opportunities to share successes, challenges, failures among team members through reflective conversations.

Table 1.1 (cont'd)

Transitioning	Encourages shared leadership and promotes ownership of new perspectives about student performance.	Empowers principal and staff to reflect on practices as related to student performance. Decisions to change beliefs and practices ultimately belong to staff members.	Provides emotional support when teachers try new instructional strategies in class. Supports principals as they assume role of instructional leader.
Accountable School Culture	School members claim functional culture as their own creation, and accept collective responsibility for student learning.	School members share attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and relationships focused on student learning rather than adult comfort.	School members experience enlightenment, and accept responsibility for student outcomes through collaborative vision for school improvement.

My findings also indicated coaching change in school cultures depends on adult interactions among the coaches, principals, and teachers. My study suggested transformative learning interactions led to transformed perspectives about student performance. Figure 1.1 represents a graphic illustration of the process and interactions within the process.

Figure 1.1 Coaching change in schools in school cultures



The process of coaching change in school cultures appears to be sequential, but not necessarily linear. Principal and staff turnover, lack of district support, funding depletion may change the dynamics of the process. The next section of the discussion focuses on the answers to my research questions and is supported by relevant theorists.

How do coaches facilitate transformative learning in adults in underperforming schools?

Coaches clearly stated the role of the coach was to empower the principals and teachers to reflect on their practices as related to student performance. Decisions to change beliefs and practices ultimately belonged to the staff. Findings were consistent with Mezirow's (1978) perspective transformation theory, Boyd's (1988) theory of discernment, and Dirkx' (1997)

theory of spirituality. Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation suggests the process is fundamentally rational and analytical. Initially, coaches analyzed the school's needs as compared to the standards of a high performance school (Mezirow, 1978). Coaches were deliberate in establishing a presence in the building, and assured staff members their job was to assist, not direct, thereby developing trust between the coach and the staff members (Boyd and Meyer, 1988; Dirkx, 1997). Coaches mediated rational dialogue with the principal and staff using questioning, probing, and paraphrasing techniques designed to support an exchange of thoughts and beliefs. Through reflective dialogue, staff members began to reorder their reality of their school culture, became aware of past assumptions about student abilities, examined ineffective instructional habits, and opened opportunities to discuss new approaches to student learning (Mezirow, 1978; Boyd and Meyer, 1988). Coaches mediated staff thinking using protocols to guide reciprocal conversations about the instructional core, program coherence, and student engagement to develop a school culture for learning (Mezirow, 1978).

Coaches initiated professional learning communities (PLC) in the schools, and used the PLC to create a vision for ambitious school achievement (Boyd and Meyer, 1988). According to Boyd's theory of discernment, three phases compose the central process to transformative learning. Receptivity refers to listening and examining situations from different perspectives. The second phase of Boyd's discernment theory involves recognizing the need to change. The third, and most significant phase, is grieving, which occurs individuals realizes old patterns of behaviors are not compatible with the emerging vision for the future. Boyd's theory suggests it is the emotional component that is the catalyst for change. Relying on reflective conversations to build relational trust, the use of the PLC's allowed coaches to push staff members to engage in activities that were out of the staff's comfort zone (Mezirow, 1978; Dirkx, 1997). Peer

observations and instructional rounds made staff members vulnerable. Opening their classroom doors to peers created high levels of anxiety for teachers. Coaches used protocols to allay personal fears of embarrassment or humiliations from verbal feedback (Dirks, 1997). By anticipating obstacles, coaches created a safe environment for risk-taking and adult learning leading to professional growth (Boyd and Meyer, 1988; Dirkx, 1997).

How do coaches know if the beliefs and behaviors of the principal and staff are changing?

Mezirow's, Boyd's, and Dirkx' theories for transformative learning aligns with the coaches' mantra that coaching is not telling, but empowering the principals and teachers to make decisions about what is best for students. Coaches listened and observed principals and teachers assume new cultural perspectives as they claimed responsibility for a transformative and functional culture focused on student outcomes. Letting go of entrenched beliefs and behaviors was an intensely emotional experience for staff members culminating in a personal enlightenment (Dirkx, 1997; Boyd and Meyer, 1988; Cranton, 1994). Dirkx (1997) refers to this enlightenment as a spiritual enlightenment or a new sense of self and purpose. Coaches relied heavily on the spiritual modality of adult learning to guide their work. Because of their life experiences in education, coaches knew how to assess the school climate of the building upon entering by looking for specific indicators such as closed classroom doors and listening to conversations. Teacher and student efficacy was assessed by observing classroom instruction, student engagement, classroom management, and teacher-student interactions (Dirkx, 1997). Coaches used people skills and life experience to build trusting relationships with the staff and convey understanding of the staff's work. Coaches listened intently to conversations to uncover staff beliefs about student abilities and how their beliefs aligned with a vision of academic excellence (Boyd and Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1997). When adequate relational trust had been

established between the coaches, principals, and teachers, the coaches determined the timing was right to challenge comfortable behaviors by initiating personal learning communities, peer observations, instructional rounds, and mediating open and honest conversations about professional behaviors (Boyd and Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1997). Coaches mediated reflective discussions about shared decision-making, shared leadership, and shared values among school members. Coaches provided emotional support to teachers implementing new instructional strategies in the classroom, and offered encouragement to principals as they assumed the role of the building's instructional leader (Mezirow, 1978; Boyd and Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1997). Finally, coaches decreased involvement with the staff when the principal and teachers claimed ownership of the new, accountable culture, and assumed collective responsibility for student outcomes (Mezirow, 1978; Boyd and Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1997).

How does transformative learning impact coaches' personal beliefs and behaviors?

Coaches within my study indicated personal satisfaction with their coaching role. Although coaches stated they had experienced mistakes as a coach, they suggested the mistakes had enhanced their knowledge of coaching, and improved their coaching skills. Through the evolution of experiences, coaches saw themselves as lifelong learners, and always willing to make sense of new learning in order to improve their service to their clients.

One universal observation was about the coaches' passion for education. Although coaches' life histories indicated they had held previous careers in fields outside of education, the coaches said they felt gravitation towards education as their final career. Deriving pleasure from teaching others appeared to be a common attribute among coaches, and served as fulfillment of their purpose in life (Dirkx, 1997).

Conclusions and Implications

Based on my findings, I suggest successful leadership coaches have a deliberate process for improving underperforming schools. Since there is limited research about leadership coaching influencing adult learning as it impacts personal beliefs and behaviors about student performance in an underperforming school setting, I suggest further qualitative research needs to be conducted to confirm whether my findings are similar to other university coaching programs. In addition, I suggest long-term studies be conducted for a more thorough analysis of the connection between leadership coaching and the sustainability of transformation changes in underperforming schools.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview for Coaches—Coaching and Change in Schools

Purpose:

- To understand how coaches facilitate transformative learning in adults in underperforming schools.
- To understand how coaches know if their work is changing beliefs.
- To understand whether coaches experience adult learning and transformative learning in their own behaviors and beliefs.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Code:
Date:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and participating in my personal research study . As you know, I am interested in understanding your perspective on coaching in this school.
(Show Letter of Informed Consent)

Before I begin, I want to assure you that there are no right answers, and that I will not identify anyone by name, either verbally or in writing, in my analysis and reporting

Do you have any questions before we begin?

(Begin audio recorder.)

Today we are going to focus on your background, and what it is like to be a coach.

<u>Interview Questions</u>

Background information

1. Please share your educational background before becoming a leadership coach..
2. What attracted you to leadership coaching?
3. Why is leadership coaching different than any previous jobs you have held?
4. Describe the training you had to prepare for a coaching position. In what ways has your training as a coach helped you think differently about what principals should be able to do?

Rational

5. What do you think causes a school to be labeled underperforming?
6. How do you organize your work in underperforming schools? Describe a typical day/week/month. Whom are you expected to coach? (e.g. individual teachers, groups of teachers, principals, district administrator?)
7. How do you look for root causes of underperformance in schools?

8. Describe how you work with principals in underperforming schools.
    a. Length of time
    b. Relationship
    c. Goal setting
    d. Facilitating instructional change
9. How do you help principals develop new skills?

Emotional

10. What have you done to facilitate your relationship with the principal?
11. What do you think is the most important aspect of the principal-coach relationship?
12. How have you been able to shape your principal's thinking? How do you push your principal to think deeply? How does that make you feel?
13. How do you think your coach-principal relationship has changed you?
14. What challenges do you face as a leadership coach?
15. Tell me about a time when you were not successful as a coach. Tell me about a time when you were successful.

Spiritual

16. What does coaching mean to you?
17. How has coaching influenced your beliefs about education and school leadership?
18. How has coaching shaped your learning? In what ways do you feel you have grown?
19. What learning experiences have been the most powerful for you? What did you learn?

Closing

Thank you so much for your time. We will be meeting for two more interviews. I'd like to set up tentative dates and times at this point. In our second interview we'll be talking more about your specific responsibilities as a coach, and our third interview will focus on your professional development.

APPENDIX B

Table 1.2 Observation Guide—Coaching and Change in Schools

	Coach	Principal
Rational	• Coach-principal directional conversation flow • Conversational techniques (pause, paraphrase, probe, descriptive, evaluative) • Reflective questioning techniques (clarify, extend) • Listening techniques	• Coach-principal directional conversation flow • Conversational responses (defensive vs. thoughtful) • Reflective questioning responses (clarify, extend) • Listening techniques
Emotional	• Building trust and rapport, positive supposition • Respecting life and professional experience • Paraphrasing • Probing • Conversational language (tone, descriptive vs. evaluative) • Listening techniques • Body language • Eye contact	• Conversational language (tone, descriptive vs. evaluative) • Exhibits trust by sharing thoughts and push-backs, if warranted • Listening techniques • Body language • Eye contact
Spiritual	• Probing questions to elicit personal reflection	• Reflective responses

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CHAPTER 2 COACHING THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S CAPACITY TO LEAD UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS

Abstract

Underperforming schools, defined as not making Annual Year Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law faced serious consequences. If the school continued to fail to make AYP for three years or more, schools faced corrective actions. Schools receiving Title I funding were especially vulnerable to sanctions because of their high rates of students in poverty and inequity of achievement based on ethnicity. Corrective actions entailed receiving assistance from the State System of Support (SSoS) which included receiving an experienced leadership coach to develop principals' capabilities to lead underperforming schools to improve instruction. The qualitative study confirms leadership coaches can play a critical role in building the capacity of principals. Coaches influenced principals' thinking to focus on the instructional core and program coherence, but realized classroom changes only occurred when a common vision of student excellence existed between the principal and the staff, and teachers were actively part of the instructional change movement. Conversely, sustaining changes depended on the consistency of principal leadership which was impacted by consistency of district administrative leadership.

The Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law of 2001 has changed the way administrators, teachers, and state departments of education think about public schooling. The NCLB law places educators under pressure to increase the achievement of all students and to narrow the achievement gap that exists between economically advantaged students and students who are from different economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, as well as students with disabilities. To measure progress, NCLB requires that states administer tests to all public school students. The states set proficiency standards, called adequate yearly progress (AYP), that progressively increase the percentage of students in a district that must meet the proficiency standard. If a school district does not meet these proficiency levels, the law mandates the requirements be met and corrective actions applied. Corrective actions could include school restructuring, reassignment of the school principal, conversion to a charter school or a state takeover. Despite the possibility of losing their job, many principals still appear to be struggling to transform underperforming schools into high-performing schools as evidenced by their school's continued under-performance.

One widespread solution for resolving the issue of struggling-but-increasingly-accountable principals is to employ external leadership coaches. The job of the leadership coach is to help principals improve instruction by focusing on the instructional program, the professional community, and the environmental resources, requirements, and relationships. A current set of leading ideas regarding school improvement centers on the work of principals in developing and coordinating capabilities throughout the school for the purpose of improving student achievement, and distributing responsibility for student success among all staff members (Spillane, 2004, 2005; Lambert, 2003). These ideas are based on a model of school organizational theory as explained in the following section.

The Instructional Core

At the heart of a coherent model of school improvement is the instructional core—the interactions between teachers, students and content in the classroom. Researchers argue that systematically improving the quality of the instructional core is one key strategy for increasing learning over time (Cohen and Ball, 1999; City, A., Elmore, R. F., Fiarman, S., and Teitel. L., 2009). Cohen and Ball (1999) argue it is the relationship between the teacher, the student, and the content—not the qualities of any one of them by themselves—that determines the nature of instructional practice, and each component equally contributes to the instructional process. Doyle (1983) locates the instructional task as the center of instructional core. Simply stated, the instructional task is the actual work the students are asked to do in the process of instruction. The task must match the instruction to the student performance to be successful. To be clear, it is not what the teachers *think* they are asking the student to do, or what the curriculum *says* the students are asked to do, but what the students are *actually* asked to do. City and associates (2009) use the example that memorizing the elements of the periodic table is not same as understanding the properties of the elements.

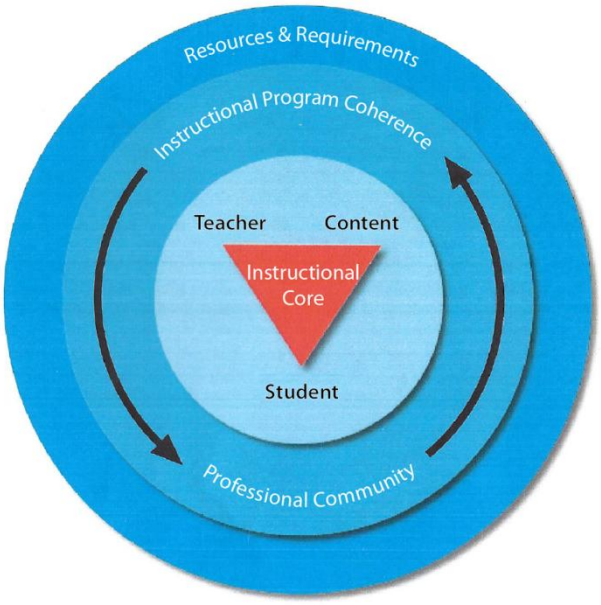
In the normative model of high functioning schools, the model of the instructional core provides a basic instructional framework for how to intervene in the instructional process to improve the quality and level of student learning. Research suggests increases in student learning occur because of improvements in the level of content, teacher's knowledge and skill, and student engagement (City, et al., 2009). If any element of the instructional core changes, the other two must change to affect student learning. (City, et al., 2009) Implementing a new math curriculum, for instance, requires changes in teaching practices and expectations of student work. If only the curriculum materials are changed without providing training to deepen the skills and

understanding of the teacher, the teaching practices will remain the same. Little or no change in student work expectation will occur.

The Instructional Framework

While the instructional core represents the heart of coherent school improvement, research indicates systematically improving the quality of instruction depends on the level of coherence within a school's instructional framework. Three conditions support coherence: instruction program coherence, professional community, and environmental resources and requirements. That means, building a coherent instructional program requires a strong professional community focused on student instruction. Maintaining coherence means buffering staff from superfluous requirements and using all available resources to support improving the instructional core (Ball and Cohen, 1999). Figure 2.1 represents a graphic framework of a coherent system.

Figure 2.1 Leadership for Coherence Framework (Michigan State University, K-12 Outreach) For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation. The text in this figure is in a font size that is unable to be enlarged. The text says: At the top of the figure in the outer circle, "Resources and Requirements"; in the middle of the circle at the top, "Instructional Program Coherence"; in the middle circle at the bottom, "Professional Community"; and the center circle. "Teacher Content Student." The text in the triangle says, "Instructional Core."



A Model of School Organization

To understand the importance of the instructional program, the professional community, and environmental resources, it is necessary to understand school organizational theory. R. Scott (2003) proposes a general model of organizations which examines organizational activity as the

product of interactions among rational, natural, and open systems. Because schools are organizations concerned with structure, relationships, and interdependence (Scott, 2003; Chance, 2009), understanding the three systems and their interactions helps develop a framework for school improvement where principals and teachers are accountable for student results, curriculum is aligned, and learning is student-oriented, not text driven, all in ways that support the work of instruction as defined immediately above.

Rational Systems: Coherent Instructional Programs

From a rational systems perspective, Scott states organizations are instruments designed to attain specified goals. Rational systems are "purposeful" with a high degree of formalization; the cooperation among participants is "conscious and deliberate; the structure of relationships explicit." The instructional core—the interactions between students, teachers, and content in the classroom—is the heart of a coherent model of school. Researchers argue that systematically improving the quality of the instructional core is one key strategy for increasing learning over time (Cohen and Ball, 1999; City, et al., 2009). Anchoring Scott's rational systems in schools, Newmann and colleagues (2001) argue that school improvement requires strengthening program coherence within the schools. Newmann define instructional program coherence as "a set of interrelated programs for students and staff that are guided by a common framework for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and learning climate and are pursued over a sustained period." What that means is that the formal resources of the school (e.g., curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessments of students) are coordinated among teachers within a grade level or department. Curriculum and assessments of students proceed logically from one grade level to the next, offering a progression of complex subject matter with an expectation of deeper understanding at each level.

Newmann and others indicate instructional program coherence aligns school improvement goals with the instructional framework and professional development to support the goals. However, for professional development to have a profound impact on student outcomes, adult learning must also be sustained over time. To be effective, researchers say professional development must be embedded in teachers' classroom work with children, specific to grade level or academic content, and creates collaboration and sense of community among educators in the school (Russo, 2004; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco, et al., 2003; Ball and Cohen, 1999). It is through the sense of community that a common vision is shared and leadership capacity is built. School improvement occurs because everyone is on the same page, meaning every person is a learner.

The Natural System: Professional Communities of Learners

Scott defines a natural system as "an organization whose participants share a common interest in the survival of the system and who engage in collective activities, informally structured, to secure this end." Applying this model to schools, high functioning schools build capacity by creating a culture based on shared attitudes, values and beliefs, expectations, and relationships focused on student learning and achievement rather than adult needs and preferences (Peterson, 2002; Platt, A., Tripp, C., Fraser, R., Warnock, J., and Curtis, R., 2008). The literature suggests opportunities for collaboration, inquiry, and feedback creates a community of learners that can sustain a focus on student and professional growth (Corcoran & Goertz, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Researchers argue ownership for student achievement becomes a collective responsibility. In principle, high performing communities of school personnel believe that effective effort rather than innate ability accounts for student performance in meeting academic standards and intellectual

challenges. Therefore, arguments hold that teachers assume their ability to motivate and engage students makes the difference, and are continually seeking ways to improve their instructional practices. They feel safe trying new and/or different strategies and openly promote robust discussion about teaching practices and learning. (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2002; Coburn, 2003). This concept challenges the tradition of teacher autonomy, and requires the presence of trust, shared values, and a commitment to working collaboratively on instructional improvement (Platt, Tripp, et al., 2008). Mutual respect and relational trust are argued to allow critical reflections to focus on (and sometimes confront) policies, values, beliefs, and principles among school members (Bryk and Schnieider, 2003; Robertson, 2005; Clarke, 2005). It is a community of learners that contributes to coherent program instruction, consistent teaching practices, and establishing quality instructional norms (Newmann, et al., 2001; Elmore, 2000; Clarke, 2005).

The Open System: Environmental Resources, Requirements, and Relationships

Organizations defined as open systems, and as described by Scott (2003), experience constant change, endure cycles of events, respond to critical feedback, and continually adapt to changes in their environment. Scott emphasizes the salient characteristic of an open system is self-maintenance, transforming itself as needed, based on "a process of resources from the environment and interaction with the environment within which it operates." It is interdependencies and connections within the organization that create a survival advantage for the system.

Research acknowledges schools exist in complex, often turbulent, environments, facing internal and external demands that impact school improvement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). The development of new state standards for specific content areas, the district requirement for staff to use new formative assessments in reading and math, a drop in student enrollment, parent

dissatisfaction, and uncertainties in educational funding are examples of external interferences that divert the school's attention from teaching and learning.

Policy coherence is a seldom achieved education goal. The work of Honig and Hatch (2004) defines policy coherence as "a process, which involves schools and school district central offices working together to craft or continually negotiate the fit between external demands and schools' own goals and strategies." Ideally, crafting coherence involves schools determining school-wide goals and strategies that are specific to their building context (i.e., a school improvement plan). Schools use those goals and strategies to decide whether to bridge themselves to or buffer themselves from external demands and resources. Bridging refers to collaborating with external resources and buffering refers to limiting external resources. School district central offices support these school level decisions. From this perspective, school principals act as judges or informed interpreters of their multiple demands, and central office administrators become interpreters and supporters of schools' local decisions (Cossentino, 2004; Shulman, 1983).

Proactive school organizations invite (bridge) or limit (buffer) external resources to advance and/or enhance implementation of the school's goals and strategies (Honig and Hatch, 2004). Research reports that engagement of policy demands can provide opportunities for schools to attract additional resources (funding, access to professional networks, and knowledge), to negotiate with stakeholders, and to innovate for improved performance (Newmann, et al., 2001). For example, selective engagement of external agencies through business and school partnerships might provide opportunities for schools to attract resources such as funding and supplemental services. Networking with local colleges and university may create opportunities for staff to enhance informational knowledge and hone skills to improve

student performance (Newmann, et al., 2001). Creating parent/community committees may provide a vehicle for building support for the school's mission when members are actively involved with decision making (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

On the other hand, schools may advance their goals and strategies by buffering themselves from external demands by strategically deciding to engage in external demands in a limited way, or when the external agency's intent does not coincide with the school's goals and visions. Periods of buffering can help schools incubate ideas and ignore negative feedback that can derail their decision-making (Honig & Hatch, 2004).

Challenges for School Leadership

The preceding organizational theory of a high functioning school suggests essential dimensions of principals' practice in transforming weak schools into strong schools. In theory, principals would need to develop the instructional core of the school. They would need to develop the school as a rational system, focusing on a shared vision of ambitious student performance fueled by quality instruction and program coherence (Schmoker, 2001; Leithwood, et al. 2004; Newmann, et al., 2001; Lambert, 2003). They would need to develop the social structure of the school, creating a culture of adult learning and collaboration (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Corcoran & Goetz, 1995: Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2002; Coburn, 2003). Heeding the ideas of bridging and buffering, they would need to construct a system of relationships and resources that support (but do not hinder) efforts to improve the rational and natural systems. (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Spillane, 2005; Byrk & Schneider, 2003; Lencioni, 2005; Platt, Tripp, et al., 2008). They would need to coordinate all of these individual improvements into a coherent, functioning system.

Indeed, research on turnaround schools bear out this characterization. For example, research studies point out that school leadership is a key part of school change. School principals signal a commitment to change by communicating a clear purpose to staff, focusing on student instruction, creating high expectations and values, sharing leadership and authority, and building a cohesive culture (Picucci et al., 2002; Whiteside, 2006; Duke, 2006). Research also suggests turnaround school leaders demonstrate a commitment to developing a professional community for students and staff, with the primary focus of the school on learning and with staff and students working together to achieve that goal (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

However, pressure on principals to lead high functioning schools is not limited to underperforming schools. Currently, the field of school leadership in the United States is coalescing around The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) "Standards for School Leaders" as another way to make all principals accountable for leading high functioning schools. These standards, adopted in 1996, provide the basis for what leaders should know and do. Each set of standards address key roles principals of the 21st century should fulfill: (1) instructional leadership focusing on teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision-making, and accountability; (2) community leadership including shared leadership among educators, community partners, and parents advocating building capacity and mobilizing resources; (3) visionary leadership demonstrating in a conviction that all children will learn at high levels (Usdan, M., McCloud, B., Podmostko, M., 2000).

The Problem

Given the organizational theory of effective schools and implied effective leadership practices, a premise of my study was that principals in underperforming schools did not exhibit qualities of effective principals. Principals lacked training and/or experience in transforming

weak schools in high-performing schools by coordinating instructional frameworks, instructional programs, professional communities, and external resources. Thus, I posited leadership coaches were necessary to develop principals' capabilities to lead schools in underperforming schools to improve instruction by building coherent instructional programs, improving professional communities, and bridging or buffering environmental resources and requirements. The problem was that only limited qualitative research existed on how leadership coaches actually support principals to create high functioning schools, and contained coaches' voices describing their experiences.

Research questions

To study the influence of leadership coaches, my research questions were:

- How do coaches leverage their knowledge, skills, and experience to build the capacity of principals to lead systematic instructional improvements and turnaround underperforming schools?
    - Instruction
        - In what ways do coaching practices support the effective leadership concepts?
    - Professional Learning Communities
        - In what ways does coaching influence the development of professional communities and encourage adult collaboration?
    - Environmental Resources and Requirements
        - How do coaching practices leverage the role of the principal in determining the impact of external resources on implementing school improvement goals?

Study Design

The purpose of my research was to gather empirical information about how coaches leveraged their practices, knowledge, and influence when supporting principals to lead school improvement in underperforming schools. For the purposes of my research, the multiple-embedded case study allowed opportunities to provide descriptive accounts of how coach practices, knowledge, and influence impacted the practices of the building principal (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2006). In addition, the multiple case study design created a means for establishing the validity of findings, including triangulation among different categories of evidence (observations, interviews, field notes, and documents) and leveraging opportunities to explore "exceptional cases" that did not coincide with emerging themes and categories. Member checks for accuracy of facts and observations and continued surveillance of the academic literature provided additional validity to my findings.

Data Collection

The use of case study designs called for a broad-based data collection in order to triangulate among multiple sources of evidence to identify points of convergence and divergence in coaches' knowledge, actions, and influence (Yin, 2009). Data for this study was collected from interviews, observations, field notes, and documentation gathered from school visitations and team participation in a coaching institute sponsored by a Midwest university. The primary source of my data collection relied on in-depth interviews with leadership coaches, as this method is effective in understanding how coaches support principals in changing practices and beliefs. Three 90-minute semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006) with leadership coaches and one 60-minute interview with the coaches' immediate principals were conducted at the coaches' assigned school sites over a three-month interval, and digitally recorded for later

transcription and analysis. On-site observations and field notes from school visitations and classrooms observations were gathered over a three-year period. Field notes regarding interactions among the leadership coach, the principal and instructional leadership team members were collected over a three-year period from a coaching institute where I worked as a research assistant. Documentation included a record of coach, principal, and leadership team attendance at the coaching institute; thematic memos focused on relational trust, team engagement, and the role of the coach; and finally, a compilation of school testing data and school profiles.

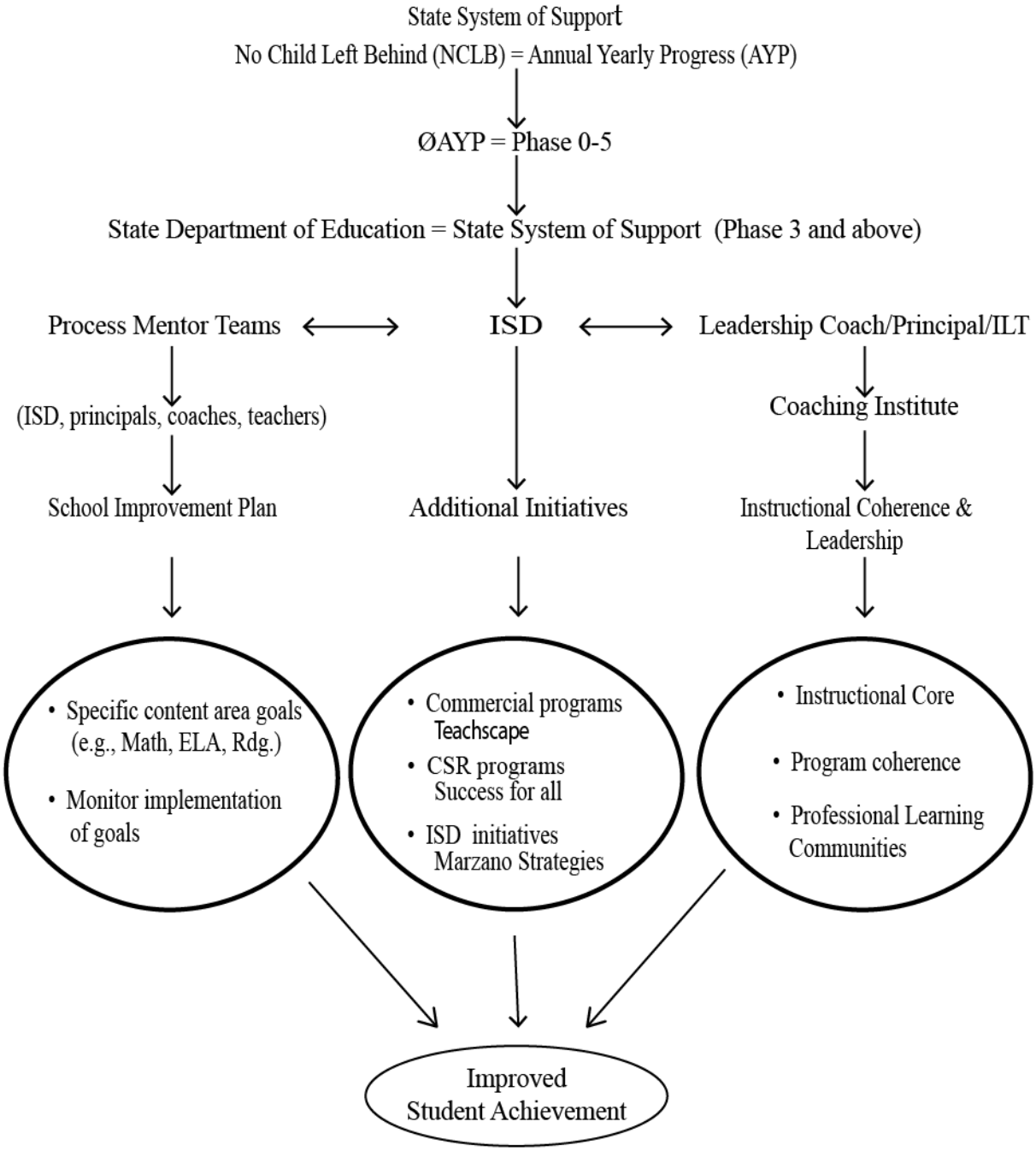
Sample.

The choice of coaches was purposeful and coaches were non-randomly selected By that, I mean I selected coaches who provided extensive and rich information about the coaches' knowledge, actions, and influence involved in coaching (Patton, 2002; Stake 2006; Yin 2003; Maxwell, 2005). Coaches were selected based on their time with the Midwest Coaching Institute and their experience in coaching in underperforming schools. As context, all underperforming schools in my study received Title I funds, and were considered high priority schools. High priority indicated high poverty and low performing schools not making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Per federal law, Title I schools received technical assistance in leadership training from coaches trained by the Midwest Coaching Institute. Schools involved with Midwest Coaching Institute included public schools, charter schools, and alternative schools. The Midwest Coaching Institute was a meaningful context for case study research for three reasons. First, it had a normative conception of high-functioning schools focused on the instructional core, i.e., interactions between the teacher, student, and the presence of content (Ball & Cohen), coherent programming (Newmann, et al., 2001), and professional communities (Elmore, 2000). Secondly, it had a normative model of leadership practice, aimed at transforming schools into teams

focused on student performance (Platt, Tripp, et al., 2008). Third, it had a normative model for coaching practice, geared towards supporting, collaborating and consulting with principals and staff to exercise instructional leadership and build capacity within the context of their schools (Bloom, et al., 2005).

The coaches in my study were assigned to schools that had been identified for corrective actions and in need of assistance from the State System of Support. The State Systems of Support (SSoS) consisted of two components—process mentoring and leadership training. Intermediate school districts (ISD) coordinated the implementation of the two components by employing both the process mentor and leadership coach. The objective of the process mentor (i.e., consultant) was to oversee the development of school improvement plans, based on reading and math goals, and to monitor the execution of the plan. The second component, leadership training, dealt with providing on-site leadership coaches to assist the principal with leadership skills to improve instructional programs, professional community, and effective uses of resources. Originally, the SSoS plan called for the coaches to work exclusively with principal, but the coaching role was expanded to include instructional staff as members of the leadership team to increase the quality of the instructional program, the coherence of instructional programs, and the building of a strong professional community. The SSoS plan required principals and instructional leadership teams to attend training at the Midwest Coaching Institute concentrating on the instructional core, program coherence, and professional learning communities. Additional initiatives, provided by the ISDs, such as commercial school improvement programs (e.g., Teachscape), comprehensive school reform (CSR) programs (e.g., Success for All), and professional development programs (e.g., Marzano High Yield strategies), supplemented the SSoS efforts to improve student achievement.

Figure 2.2 Graphic repesenting the State System of Support (SSoS)



Key:
CSR = Comprehensive School Reform
ELA = English Language Arts
ILT = InstructionalLeadersuip Team
(e.g., school staff)
ISD = Intermediate School District

I examined three coaches, each having extensive coaching experience and each having experienced school turnaround as defined by the school's ability to attain AYP. Coaches worked in multiple schools, with different contexts, school levels, and a range of principal proficiencies. My study is a compilation of principals and their interactions with their coach. To further understand the coaches, I will describe the coach, the principals, and the context of the coaching as relayed to me during the coaches' interviews.

Table 2.1 Coaches' data

Coaches	Bill			
Principal	Mr. T	Mrs. O	Mr. E	Mr. G
School	Oakwood Academy	Oakwood Academy	Elmwood Academy	Greenwood High School
School Level	Alt. HS	Alt. HS	Alt. HS	Alt. HS
Years w/Coach	3	5	NA*	NA*
Context of School	City	City	City	Village
Student Enrollment	104	104	163	91
Status Description	Efficacy	Efficacy	Jeopardy	Jeopardy

*Not applicable

Coaches	Joe		Ann	
Principal	Mr. M	Mr. A	Mrs. R	Ms. W.
School	Miller Middle	Abbott HS	Richards Elem	Wooden HS
School Level	MS	HS	EL	HS
Years w/Coach	3	2	3	1
Context of School	Urban	Urban	Urban	Urban
Student Enrollment	443	914	480	851
Status Description	Efficacy	Potential	Efficacy	Jeopardy

Context

Coach Bill

Bill's experiences prior to becoming a leadership coach included being a high school teacher, Technology Director, Assistant Principal, Alternative Education principal, and middle school principal. For Bill, coaching came about because of his success with creating teamwork in his building. Bill was requested to conduct professional development sessions for other professionals on how to achieve success through teamwork. Experience as a consultant led Bill to become involved with the Midwest Coaching Institute where he was invited to be a leadership coach.

Bill has coached ten schools during his seven years as a coach with the many of his schools identified as alternative. When I met Bill, he was currently coaching principals in three alternative high schools, and he suggested I observe him in each school because each school was at different stages of coaching.

Oakwood Academy was located in the northwestern part of the state, near a small municipal city, and was an alternative high school academy. Oakwood was now a model of successful coaching, according to Bill, but stated that was not always the case. Bill related how difficult it was originally to work with the principal, Mr. T., because he was very resistant to receiving external assistance. Mr. T. had been hired by a charter school organization to manage the school and "get it under control." Mr. T. had been a former probation officer, and was familiar with authoritarian methods of control, but was not familiar with instructional leadership. After three years of leadership coaching and relationship building, Bill was able to mold Mr. T. into an educational leader, but then Mr. T. left the school to assume a new position with a charter

school organization. Before Mr. T. left, he appointed Mrs. O., his assistant director, as the director of the school.

Mrs. O. did not have a teachable major, but was working on completing a master's degree in counseling. Since Bill had been working as a leadership coach with entire staff, Mrs. O. was familiar with Bill's role, and readily accepted Bill as her coach to guide her in her new position. Mrs. O appreciated Bill's work as an instructional leader. "He taught me what to do in the course of an observation, and he showed me how to give feedback to teachers." On the other hand, Mrs. O's counseling background surfaced as she described her vision for her school. Character qualities, leadership skills, and understanding of career opportunities dominated her goals. Mrs. O explained that she hoped to develop her charter school as an option for all students in the county, not just alternative students. She believed students leaving her school should have life skills that will help them develop as a whole person, not just as an academic student. Propelled by significant grant money from state and federal agencies, she planned to encourage her staff to attend seminars and conferences to enhance their knowledge and skills so she can have "the best teachers anywhere on earth" teaching at Oakwood Academy.

Bill's second assignment, Elmwood Academy, was another alternative high school academy, and was located inside of a small city on the western side of the state. Bill had only worked with the school since September, 2012. At the time of the interview, a new principal, Mr. E., had been assigned to the building by the charter management organization, but was not expected to be permanent. Since it was unknown how long Mr. E. would be working at the school, and even though Bill's initial strategy was to develop a relationship with the principal, Bill also made his presence known to the staff members in the building as part of his team building strategy. Much of Bill's work at Elmwood Academy focused on identifying problems

in the school, observing instruction in the classroom, building relationships with staff members, and strategizing how to facilitate the principal and staff's thinking about academic goals. Greenwood High School was Bill's third, and most recent leadership coaching assignment. Greenwood High School was an alternative high school located in a small, northern, rural community, and was a consortium of three surrounding school districts with students being admitted after being referred from their sending school. When I visited the school, Bill had been coaching there less than a month. The former principal was now district superintendent, and Mr. G., a longtime teacher in the building, had recently been appointed as the school principal.

I arrived early for my meeting with Bill, and met the principal, Mr. G., only briefly. He appeared nervous, and rifled through a file cabinet searching for the school improvement plan. Mr. G explained to me that he would be meeting with the intermediate school district to write a school improvement plan. "It should take a couple of hours," he says. "Well, here's one from 2008," Mr. G told the secretary. "We will have to use this one for the meeting with ISD people today." Bill arrived, and Mr. G handed Bill the plan. "I cannot find the current plan, but I know it is here some place. I am just learning where everything is in this office," said Mr. G. Bill accepted it, and indicated the two of them will talk later. Bill shared the plan with me later at our meeting. The school improvement plan was less than five pages, and had no specified academic goals or narratives. Bill pointed out that the mission of the building is not academic oriented, but, again, was focused on the whole child as evidenced by the school's mission statement. The mission statement emphasized the worth of each student by dedicating resources to the development of the uniqueness of the individual.

Bill explained, "This school is technically in Phase VII and has not made AYP for seven years. On the other hand, since the school had been not receiving Title I funding, no corrective

action was taken by the state. However, last year, the district reported an increased percentage of free and reduced lunch participants in order to qualify for Title I money. "What the district did not understand were the requirements and expectations attached to the funding," reported Bill. Bill sensed the district would have refused Title I funds had they originally understood the details. Bill explained the district was wary of state mandates because they believed the state focused on the needs of urban communities, not rural communities. "In smaller communities," explained Bill, "the school is the last place where the community feels like they can have a say in government." Bill planned to work with the Mr. G., the superintendent, and support team members from the intermediate school district to develop a revised school improvement plan. Like Elmwood Academy, Bill planned to work concurrently with Mr. G and the staff observing classroom instruction, building relationships, and facilitating the principal and staff's thinking about student academic goals.

When reviewing observations of Bill's schools, I noted similarities between the schools. All of the schools were located in small communities. All three of the alternative education buildings were housed in former elementary buildings. All buildings were constructed in the same manner with a gymnasium at one end and one long hallway with classrooms each side. Outside doors were open for public entrance with the main office located just inside the front door. Secretaries greeted me, and acknowledged that they knew I would be visiting. Staff members were cordial and were comfortable with my presence. School populations were small, ranging from 91-163 students. Bill's schools were predominately Caucasian (81%, 56%, 76% respectively), with a significant Hispanic population (34%) at Greenwood Academy, and a small Native American population (15%) at Oakwood. Percentages of Black and Asian students enrolled were 5% or less in each building.

Coach Joe

Joe began his coaching career as a school turnaround specialist following his retirement from public education—23 years as a teacher and 19 years as middle school principal. Shortly after retiring, Joe was contacted by a regional director of schools in the western part of the state to become a turnaround specialist for underperforming Title I urban schools. Joe and another retired administrator, Gary, were hired to be turnaround specialists, but received no training for the position. Joe and Gary entered Miller Middle School, a Phase VII public middle school, and directed to "take over the school." Miller Middle School served 443 students in grades 6-8, with a predominantly Hispanic population (77%), but also housed an African American population of 13%, and a Caucasian population of 4%. Joe said Miller's principal of the school, Mr. X, was passive resistant to external assistance. "He felt threatened by our work. He would cancel meetings with us, or avoid us in the building. He did not feel our role was necessary for him to succeed. We had a very tenuous relationship." At the end of the first school year, Miller's Mr. X was dismissed by the district, and the majority of the staff was reassigned. The new principal, Mr. M., was designated as the administrator for the following school year, and Joe and Gary remained at the school for two more years as turnaround specialists.

During his tenure at Miller as a turnaround specialist, Joe joined the Midwest Coaching Institute in 2007 as part of the state system of support (SSoS). Miller Middle School was one of the earliest schools targeted for state assistance, and Joe credited the Midwest Coaching Institute for developing his leadership coaching skills. Joe said he previously relied on his principal experience as a top/down manager to guide him through his assignment at Miller, but confided it the Midwest Coaching Institute who helped him understand the power of collaboration and team building. Joe said he had been viewing himself as a mentor, not a coach. "Mentoring is telling a

principal what to do based on your experience," explained Joe. "Coaching is about building the capacity of the principal to resolve issues based on the principal's decision-making abilities." After two years with the SSoS, Joe's underperforming Miller Middle School achieved AYP, and was no longer in need of coaching assistance. Joe moved on to his next assignment, Abbott High School, a public high school, but did not begin his assignment until late fall.

Abbott High School, a large urban secondary school, was a complete contrast to Bill's alternative high schools. Abbott High school was built in 1923 and was one of the first high schools to receive accreditation from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) in 1926. The school from the start was intended to have a fine arts and academic emphasis as evidence by its elaborate exterior architecture, interior design and its pride in achieving accreditation. The current context of the school was different than the original conception. Abbott High School housed 914 students, had a predominantly African American population (71%), a 90% free and reduced lunch rate, and was targeted for SSoS support. Despite its well-kept exterior appearance, there was a sense that all was not well when I arrived to meet the coach and principal. Entry doors were locked, visitors were screened before entering the building, and security guards were present. Once inside of the building, though, the school was beautiful with brightly colored walls, immaculate hallways, orderly student movement, and congenial staff members. I was greeted warmly and chaperoned to the main office to meet Joe and the principal, Mr. A.

I had selected Joe for my study because, while I knew he had had success with his former SSoS middle school assignment, I was more curious about what turnaround specialists were supposed to do as compared to leadership coaches. As mentioned above, I was surprised to learn he only had on-the-job training and past administrative experience to guide him as a turnaround

specialist, but credited the Midwest Coaching Institute for changing his coaching strategies. For me, that indicated Joe would be able to provide contrasting perspectives about the work of leadership coaching.

Joe started our interview by openly sharing his concerns when he first accepted his assignment at Abbott. "I was not certain I wanted to work with high schools," said Joe. "My experience had always been at the middle school level. When I did start at the high school, I was surprised by the commonality between the middle and high school students needs. I was able to dialogue with teachers about student performance exactly as I had at the middle school. I began to enjoy my new assignment." Joe continued to explain how comfortable he felt building rapport with the staff and creating a strong instructional team.

Joe's new principal, Mr. A., was in his 30's, eager, energetic, and highly motivated to make changes in the building. Mr. A told me he had been a classroom teacher eight years, an assistant principal and Athletic Director for two years, and a K-8 building principal before becoming Abbott's principal. Mr. A reminisced about his early days at Abbott. "My first year I received a brand new administrative team. We really had a dynamite team. (Note: Eventually, three out of four of Mr. A's assistant principals became head principals in other local high schools.) We were under pressure because we were a Phase V school meaning we had not made AYP for five years." Mr. A said he felt his administrative team needed to focus on improving the non-instructional problems before addressing instructional programming, although he indicated he saw himself as an instructional leader and valued quality instruction.

Joe's biggest challenge was to help Mr. A focus on instructional priorities and team building. Unfortunately, there had been three gun incidents at the school that fall, and the principal's bravado was shattered. Mr. A described the incident as "the worst two days in my career. I

know it is an anomaly when things go wrong, but now it is always on my mind." Much of Joe's first year at the high school was persuading Mr. A. and his staff to regain their composure, and focus on student instruction

Abbott High School achieved AYP while Joe was coaching, this returning to Phase 0. Once a school attains AYP, the SSoS guidelines provides one more year, known as a transitional year, for the coach to prepare the staff for his departure. However, during this transition year, Abbott did not make AYP again. The district had the option of re-enrolling Abbott in the Midwest Coaching Institute and retaining Joe as the leadership coach. The district chose not to fund Abbott's re-enrollment with Midwest Coaching Institute because it was no longer mandatory, and it would be at the district's expense. Mr. A. expressed disappointment with the district's decision. "Joe was very helpful because he knew everything going on in the building. Because I cannot get to everything, Joe was there to give me accurate information about what was happening with our PLCs (professional learning communities) and content areas meetings. Now he's gone, and that hurts." Joe was still considered a welcomed visitor at Abbott by staff members. Mr. A, on the other hand, accepted a central office position as a curriculum director, and left Abbott mid-year. As expected , one of Abbott' assistant principals was assigned for the remainder of the school year.

Coach Ann

Ann had been a leadership coach for five years with the Midwest Coaching Institute, but had prior training as an instructional coach. Ann had received four degrees, including a Ph.D., and possessed experience as a classroom teacher, an assistant principal, an elementary and middle school principal, and had taught Masters' level college courses. Ann was one of first members with the Midwest Coaching Institute, and relayed, "I came in on the ground floor and

had an opportunity to be part of the design team." Ann continued to be an active member of the institute's design team, monitoring and modifying coaching programs as needed.

During her early years with the Midwest Coaching Institute, Ann served as a leadership coach for an elementary principal in an underperforming public school located near a large urban city in the eastern part of the state. Technically, Ann was not supposed to be at the school according to state guidelines because the school was only at Phase 2, but the school district wanted a coach, and Ann was happy to oblige. Richards Elementary was a large school housing 480 students in grades K-6 in a declining neighborhood. "If you have looked at the neighborhood, you have looked at the vacant spaces and vacant houses. This community relied on the auto industry for its livelihood, but the industry is gone," Ann told me. "Now we are dealing with social and economic issue caused by its demise." Richards had a 97% poverty level, and a 30% transiency rate with students moving in or out of the district on a daily basis. The school was also home to a Headstart program with an enrollment of 170 preschool children, a self-contained Early Childhood Developmentally Delayed (ECDD) program, and five special education classrooms. At the time of my interview, the school had recently undergone a special education audit because a cognitively impaired student had not been properly evaluated, thus causing all special needs students with Individual Education Plans (IEP) to be re-assessed for accurate placement.

Besides having to deal with the special education auditors, Mrs. R, the principal, appeared to be distraught over the chaotic state of her school district caused by the constant turnover of administrators. "We have a lot of hoopla in this district. So far this year, we have had four superintendents." She also expressed she was overwhelmed by state sanctions, corrective actions, and SSoS requirements demanded of her because her school had not made

AYP. “Everybody seems to have different initiatives, but they don’t all match. I cannot figure out whose demands I need to meet first.” Ann’s presence seemed to calm Mrs. R, and guide her through complex administrative issues so she could focus on instructional issues.

Ann was a firm believer that building trusting relationships with the principal and the staff was the key to improving schools and achieving student success. “When I started at Richards Elementary, I was assigned to Mrs. R, but I needed to know the staff,” she said,” so I began meeting with them individually to listen to their concerns. First, it was individually, and then as a team.” Ann worked closely with Mrs. R and her staff to support positive changes in the building. Rather than having weekly staff meetings, Mrs. R. dedicated the time for teachers to work together as professional community. Ann observed teachers taking ownership for instruction, reviewing formative and summative assessments of student work, and working as a team to make decisions in the best interest of the students. “You could see teachers emerging as leaders, taking on more responsibility. They were actually living their school improvement plan.” Ann immersed herself in the building, often providing additional attention to students with special needs, dialoguing with teachers, and accompanying the principal on instructional rounds. Richards Elementary continued to progress, made AYP, and Ann moved on to her next assignment. Mrs. R was transferred to Central Office the following school year to be in charge of state and federal programs, but still maintained social contact with Ann.

Knowing Ann emphasized the importance of staff stability to sustain changes in a building, I asked Ann how she felt about Mrs. R.’s departure. “I was happy for her to step into a new position, but I was sad for her staff. I am hoping they can maintain their enthusiasm for the changes they made.” Ann described the fluidity of an urban district. “Administration is not

consistent. Teachers are laid off, called back, reassigned, and traded between schools. The good news is that teachers in this district are resilient, and accept the inevitable."

Ann's current coaching assignment was at Wooden High School. Wooden High School was an urban public high school on the city's north side with a student population of 851 including a 94% African-American population, and 5% Caucasian population, with a 65% free and reduced lunch rate. The school was originally built in 1928, but the current building was erected on the same site in the 1970s. Wooden was one of three urban high schools in the city, and was recognized for its athletic programming, producing several well-known professional athletes. Conversely, the school was challenged academically and was ranked at the 0%ile in state's ranking of schools. The school was in Phase VIII meaning the 8th year of failing to make AYP.

Arriving at the school, I immediately noticed the lack of exterior care. The parking lot had potholes and the asphalt was patched several places to cover the cracks. Although relatively free of debris, there were traces of fast food wrappers blowing over the minimally maintained grounds. There were two parking lots, one in back of the school for staff, and one in the front of the school for students. All doors were locked, except for one door at the student entrance. Everyone entering the building passed through a metal detector. After I passed through the metal detector, a security officer was present with a hand wand for further scanning. Because I was a visitor, I was required to sign in at the booth just past the metal detector. A different security officer manned the booth, checked my identification, asked me where I was going and asked me to describe the purpose of my visit. Notes were made in the log. Security indicated they did not know my coach, but suggested I check in at the school office, and watched me as I left. (I later found out most people only knew Ann by her professional title, Dr. Ann.) The office was not far

from the front door, and I entered the office expecting someone to greet me. Office personnel remained at their desks, and did not acknowledge my presence. I finally said I had an appointment with Coach Ann, and one of the secretaries called her office. Coach Ann quickly arrived, and escorted me back to her office. The interior office area was a maze of small, windowless offices tucked among a series of short hallways.

Ann's office had room for a desk¸ file cabinet, and chair. Ann told me the school was working on its third principal in about a year and a half since Ann started as a leadership coach at the school. She had had to build relationships with each of them, and said, "There's a lot of movement in this district, and administration is not consistent. Mrs. W (currently assigned principal) is in her second year, but she has been on medical leave several months." As could be expected, the school year at Wooden High School did not start smoothly, but Ann said the assistant principals had "stepped up to the plate" to carry out administrative duties.
Despite a rocky start, Ann was looking forward to meeting the challenges of her newest assignment. "This is my third year here and the school has not made AYP, but I love my job. I feed off the challenges." She will continue to coach Ms. W. when she returns from her medical leave, but, in the meantime, planned to coach school improvement team members facilitate data team meetings, and conduct instructional rounds.

Analysis

Analysis was based on the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987, Miles & Huberman, 1994). I looked for themes of changes in instructional practices, relationships, and environmental resources when building the capacity of the building principal to lead improvement in underperforming schools. Remarks that appeared contradictory with emerging themes and patterns were given special attention for converging and diverging

interpretations, followed by subsequent analysis of field notes and observations. Iterative analysis helped refine themes and patterns, both with-in case and cross-case analysis, comparing overlaps, disconnects, divergences, and convergences. Inductive analysis generated tentative categories, connecting supportive evidence (observations, field notes, documentation) with the data itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987).

Qualitative software, Nvivo, assisted with thematic analysis. I assigned a priori codes (nodes) to initially organize respondents' replies into meaningful analytical units. Throughout the initial coding process, I continued to refine and revise codes. At the second level of analysis, I consolidated the data into codes that emerged from the words of the respondents, and identified patterns that coalesced in the data. At the third level of coding, I devised thematic constructs by connecting and consolidating the second level codes into three categories: structure, relationships, and interdependence. These categories coincided with the rational, natural, and open systems. While two categories emerged indicating the influence of rational and natural systems on building the capacity of the principal, the open systems category suggested the environmental impact had the most significant influence on building capacity of the principal and the sustainability of change.

Findings

Coaches entered underperforming Title I schools to face monumental challenges. These schools were in Phase V and above, meaning the school had not achieved AYP for 5 years or more. Lack of safe learning environments for staff and students, dysfunctional school cultures, and poor student academic performance further complicated the conditions of the schools. The schools had been targeted by the state as needing corrective action and external supports (e.g., leadership coaches) as a last resort before restructuring or closing the facilities. Yet, the

principals in the schools resisted external coaching because they viewed themselves as effective leaders.

For this paper, I will report on how coaches influenced the principals' capacity to improve the instructional core, build coherent instructional programs, implement professional learning communities and bridge or buffer environmental influences. I will conclude by examining the impact of open systems on the sustainability of leadership.

Changing Mindsets: Overcoming principal resistance

When the initial work with the principals in underperforming schools began, coaches encountered resistance from the principals. The principals perceived their primary responsibilities to be managers of the building, not instructional leaders. For principals, that meant, dealing with school safety issues, student discipline problems, angry parents, and teacher conflicts. Mr. A said, "I don't mean to sound arrogant, but I don't feel like I need a coach, someone to help me run this building. I know how to run a lunchroom, how to observe a teacher, and how to deal with kids. I'm that firm guy telling kids to get to class or there will be consequences for their actions." Coach Joe referenced his turnaround coaching situation where he described the defunct principal, Mr. X, as the "enforcer" of rules, delegating instructional responsibilities to the data and technology person.

The belief instructional decisions were not the responsibility of the building principal, but the district's central office responsibility seemed to permeate underperforming schools. Mrs. R candidly stated, "My district just hired a new curriculum person last year. When the Midwest Coaching Institute suggested we (i.e., principal and staff) conduct a curriculum audit in our building, it was pointless because we have hired someone for that job. The curriculum directors should be dictating the curriculum to us. That is why they are paid." Yet, the SSoS required

principals to build their capacity to lead instruction, and accept responsibility for improving student learning and performance. The following sections report the process.

Improving the Instructional Core: Helping principals lead instruction

In order for underperforming schools to turnaround, research has consistently emphasized the role of the school principal as the instructional leader who focuses on the development of teachers' knowledge and skills, monitors program coherence, and promotes a professional learning community aimed at improving student learning and performance (Newmann, King and Youngs, 2000; Fink & Resnick, 2001). Yet, several of the principals in this study did not have an education background. For example, Mr. T had been a former probation officer, Mrs. O had been a social worker, and Mr. X had worked for the Department of State in the educational field, but without classroom experience. None of the individuals possessed educational administrative certification. Although coaches acknowledged the importance of having an education background, coaches were undaunted by the challenges, and stated they could train principals to become instructional leaders. Coach Bill said, "You have to work more intensely with the principals to enable them to see things through your eyes as the educator. You have to help those principals become instructional leaders, not by title alone, but by gaining the respect of the staff."

All three coaches indicated the process of working with the principal needed to be slow and deliberate. Coach Bill elaborated, "The first year is about relationships. I often started by making my presence known in the school by observing instruction in the classroom first. I did less work with the principal at the beginning. To create change, the principal has to consider you a trusted ally so you can work as a team. That type of relationship takes time to build." Coach Joe preferred to build relationships with principals by offering scholarly journal articles to the

principals for reading and discussions with the coach. He described the process as mediating the principal's thinking around instruction, but added, "The principal had to be open to learning and listening in an unbiased manner." Yet, principals found ways to avoid interactions with the coaches, particularly when discussing instruction, so Coach Ann conducted conversations while walking through the halls with the principals." I would ask them about their priorities for teachers. What were their priorities for students? I tried to help them make instruction a priority in their day."

Coaches suggested principals did not know how to value good instruction and had not been trained in observing good instruction focused on the instructional core. The instructional core refers to the relationship between the teacher and the student in the presence of content in the classroom (Cohen and Ball, 1999). Coaches encouraged viewing video clips of effective classroom instruction, provided by the Midwest Coaching Institute, when training the principals. Principals crafted descriptions of what they saw the teacher doing, the student doing, and the rigor of the content. Reflective conversations followed between the principal and the coach about what each of them observed. "It was an eye-opening experience for principals to discover the impact of teachers' choices on student learning," remarked Coach Bill.

When coaches witnessed growth in the principals' abilities to recognize quality instruction using videotapes, coaches moved principals into actual classrooms to observe instruction. Principals, particularly Mr. T and Mrs. O who did not have educational backgrounds and were unsure how to observe instruction in classrooms, indicated a reluctance to spend time in the classrooms, preferring to remain in their offices to attend to managerial tasks. "As I explained," said Coach Bill, "You have to visit classrooms. You have to be in the trenches where the teachers do their work in order to understand student learning. If that's not happening, you

are not an instructional leader. You may think you are, but you are not." To alleviate concerns and guide observations, coaches provided protocols (i.e., templates), designed by the Midwest Coaching Institute, for the principals to use when observing instruction, and accompanied principals into the classrooms. "As coaches, we totally immersed ourselves in our work of building principal capacity, so it was assumed we would accompany principals into the classroom," recalled Coach Joe. Coaches conducted reflective discussions with their principals following the observations in order to decipher principals' knowledge and understanding of the instruction that was observed. "When we shared our descriptions of our instructional observations, Mr. T became acutely aware that I was seeing many more things than he was seeing. That was a turning point. Mr. T began to value our relationship because he realized I had something to offer him," said Coach Bill.

During my interviews, I inquired about how the teacher unions reacted to the principals' presence in the classroom for purposes other than evaluation. Coach Ann was clear about how contractual issues were avoided. "We met with the union leaders in the building to set the stage up front that our work was not meant to be an evaluative process, and we wanted teacher input. We asked teachers to volunteer their classrooms, and agreed to share the results of our observations with the teachers. We were transparent with our purpose and our work. I do not know how many teachers actually favored what we were doing, but they did comply." My findings indicated no union issues occurred during the coaches' tenure at their schools, but teacher participation in the project was voluntary and usually involved members of the instructional leadership team (ILT) who were already involved with the Midwest Coaching Institute.

Once principals understood the instructional core as the basis for good instruction, coaches expanded the concept to develop program coherence. The next section of findings addresses a vision for school improvement and aligning the school program.

Establishing Program Coherence: Helping principals lead change

Developing principals as instructional leaders, however, provided challenges for coaches. Coaches described reflective conversations to mediate principals' thoughts about developing a school vision. Coach Bill reflected "I facilitate the principals' thinking so I can get them in the frame of mind to develop visions. At first, they might not even know they need a vision or their vision may be way off base from what the school needs." Interviews with principals indicated visions were lofty, unattainable, generic, but sometimes honest. Mr. A said, "I want to do better in every area." Mrs. O told me, "My vision is to have the best teachers on the earth." Mrs. R confessed, "We just picked a subject area because that's what the district told us to do." Still another principal, Mr. G, emphasized the importance of individual uniqueness rather than focusing on academic achievement.

Coaches recognized developing a school vision was a delicate area, but one for which the principal could assume responsibility. Coach Joe explained, "It can't be the coach's vision for improvement. I think a district can determine a vision to a point, but the building has to operate under the vision of the principal." Coach Ann remembered, "I did a great deal of consultation my first year with Mrs. R. I kept asking, 'How can you improve your school?' How do you get there? Baby steps, gigantic steps--we talked about scaffolding to reach Mrs. R's vision."

Yet, all coaches said changes occurred in schools when the principals and the staff had a common understanding and belief about what was needed to happen in order for the school to improve student learning. "I have a firm belief that if you can't make teaching and learning

changes in a classroom, you are not going to make changes in the school's performance," stated Coach Joe. To make changes in the classroom, coaches implemented instructional rounds and peer observations as suggested by the Midwest Coaching Institute. Midwest Coaching Institute emphasized instructional program coherence and strongly encouraged the implementation of instructional rounds and peer observations as a form of professional development. Instructional rounds referred to a set of protocols and processes for observing, analyzing, discussing and understanding instruction used to improve student learning. Peer observations referred to teacher-to-teacher observation of classroom instruction which provided a means of sharing instructional techniques and ideologies between and among teachers.

Instructional rounds and peer observations involved the principal, the coach, and teachers visiting classrooms to observe instruction, recording what they saw the teaching doing, the students doing, and the rigor of the content. Recorded observations were descriptive, not evaluative. Coaches became an integral part of the instructional rounds. Coach Joe said, "I went into the classroom, not as a coach, but as another participant, and another set of eyes and ears." Designed to have teachers and principals become equal partners in learning, follow-up conversations were guided by protocols to mediate thinking about instruction. Coach Ann explained, "We looked at the observations in terms of patterns. We reported patterns in vivid descriptions, and sent the report to all of the teachers. We did not provide individual feedback because it was never the intention of instructional rounds." Teachers responded positively to instructional rounds, both as the observer and as the observed, as evidenced from written comments teachers submitted to the Midwest Coaching Institute as part of the institute's program evaluation.

Principals, on the other hand, found it difficult to manage their time for consistent participation in instructional rounds. Mrs. O described how she compartmentalized her job when she said, "There are times when you have to wear the administrative hat, and there are times when you can be an instructional leader. Last year, I only made it to classrooms three times, but I did watch the videos teachers taped of each other." Mrs. R expressed her frustration with the unpredictability of the school day which caused her inability to complete instructional rounds. "At first, I tried to get into every room to observe, at least once a week, if not twice. Then, reality set in. You're tied down with discipline issues. Parents show up unexpectedly, and the list goes on and on. You can never plan your day." Having been principals themselves, coaches expressed understanding. "It's a juggling act for principals, and, as coaches, we have to be conscious and respectful of the organizational piece of the principals' job," explained Coach Ann. She indicated she helped Mrs. R and Mrs. W. prioritize their schedules to join instructional rounds and discussion by planning ahead, and delegating daily administrative tasks to others.

Despite limited participation in instructional rounds and time restraints for follow-up discussions, principals reported they observed improvements in the instructional core as evidenced by instructional changes in the classrooms. Mr. A reported, "I'm seeing more hands-on activities, more group activities. I'm seeing less lecturing and fewer worksheets." Mrs. O observed, "I watched teachers using think/pair/share. Teachers are chunking information, helping students learn using smaller segments of information." Principals were also more cognizant of ineffective classroom management when students were not actively engaged in learning, or the rigor of the content was not stimulating or challenging.

Opening classrooms for observation allowed a paradigm shift in the principals and teachers relationships. Both coaches and principals reported that the alienation that existed

between the principal/teacher relationships eased. Mrs. O remarked, "Coach Bill brought protocols which changed the way we (the principal and staff) talked to each other professionally." Coach Joe observed that principals and teachers began to share instructional decisions based on student work. A vision of improved teaching and learning emerged from reciprocal conversations. Thus, the coaches' next step in building the capacity of the principal to lead school improvement was to develop professional learning communities. The following section discusses principal-teacher collaboration to improve student achievement.

Developing Professional Learning Communities-Helping principals share leadership

Implementation of instructional rounds and peer observations encouraged the role of professional learning communities as a way to discuss student performance and achievement, but Coach Ann said initially teachers were reluctant to even have a conversation with each other in an educational sense."It goes back to teachers not trusting each other enough to give professional feedback about teaching skills." Yet, building a coherent instructional program required a strong professional community. Teachers had to be able to observe each other teach and have candid conversations about the instructional core, with open conversations about what they did, and what was or not working.

Coaches reported taking the initiative to create professional learning communities (PLC) within their assigned buildings. Coach Bill said creating a culture for learning that coexisted between the coach, the principal, and the teacher was the key for developing trusting relationships. "When you have a healthy relationship, you can talk about anything without people becoming defensive. You can discuss the art of instruction, student engagement, observing classrooms, but without relational trust, the door is shut", explained Coach Bill.

All three coaches said they conducted professional development sessions for staff members, including the principal. Initial topics for discussion were related to the building's immediate issues of concern. Coach Bill conducted sessions on how teachers could develop responsible thinking behaviors with students to improve their attendance and complete assignments. Coach Joe's professional development focused on improving student academic vocabulary and enhancing student literacy skills. Coach Ann addressed differentiation instruction to meet student needs.

Findings indicated PLC members viewed collaboration as a positive experience. Coaches mediated discussions during PLC meetings using listening skills to paraphrase comments from principals and staff, and asked questions using probing, inquiry, and clarifying techniques to promote deeper thinking. "There were times," said Coach Joe, "that I felt I had to nudge the team to clarify their thinking, but the more questions you generate, the more conversation there is about teaching and learning." Coach Joe described how he observed staff behaviors changing, melding into a team. "I've seen a nice transition from departmentalization to more collaboration between teams. We are now at the point where teams are blending. There was a new esprit de corps amongst departments. But the end of the year, I heard their message—regardless of what differences we may have, we will support one another."

Not all schools had a common preparation, and district professional days were often designated for specific activities, finding time to meet as a PLC, however, presented problems for the schools. "It's difficult to try to find a common time to get together" was a consistent comment from both the principals and the teachers. Coaches acknowledged required attendance at the Midwest Coaching Institute provided opportunities for principals and staff to focus on school improvement and confront issues impairing student success. Coach Joe remarked, "The

team has grown in terms of the staff being much more involved in instruction, examining student work, discussing teaching strategies, and supporting student achievement goals." Mr. A corroborated this statement saying, "I believe, as a team, we learned from each other." Because schools were encouraged to carpool, reflective conversations, fueled by the discussions and activities generated at the Midwest Institute were reported to have continued on the drive home.

Coaches continued monitoring the PLC throughout their tenure at the schools, encouraging open discussions about student achievement. Establishing norms and using protocols created a safe environment for PLC members to speak openly, especially about controversial practices and beliefs. For example, one PLC incident, described by Coach Joe, addressed the high student failure rate at Abbott High School. The PLC team was asked to examine how the problem could be resolved. In-depth conversations exposed that teachers were failing to use formative assessments throughout a unit of study, only administering one summative assessment at the conclusion of the course. Once the team realized the problem, the principal and teachers made it a rule, no unit would run six weeks, and formative assessments would be conducted throughout the course of the unit. Failing to believe all students were capable of learning was another issue that needed to be discussed openly cited Coach Ann. As she explained, "When you are working in a school that has not made AYP for six or seven years, there are some real questions to be asked about what teachers really believe about students. I think that's the elephant in the room. I think teachers will not admit it." Coach Ann's disclosed that PLC conversations at both Richards Elementary and Wooden High school indicated that not everyone understood the needs of students living in poverty, especially urban, inner city African American children. On the other hand, Coach Ann suggested the PLC provided the opportunity

to have honest conversations to create a common understanding about what was needed to improve student learning and the process to increase student achievement.

As a result of collaborative conversations, findings indicated the principals and staff felt empowered to make shared decisions about school improvement and student performance. Principals spoke highly of shared leadership. "I really like the shared leadership model," said Mrs. O. "The structure of our building has changed because the teachers are helping make decisions to lead the building well. We have professional conversations about student achievement." Mrs. R reported, "The implementation of instructional rounds has helped my staff become leaders. The staff members are taking more responsibility. With the direction of the coach, we have developed task forces so we can engage more staff and help focus on areas of need in our building." When asked if the shared leadership diminished the authority of the principal, Mrs. O shared, "I realized I had more power through collaboration." Coaches described the role of the principal as changing, but realized the process was slow. Coach Ann stated, "Ideally, I see the role of the principal as being dynamic, fluid, facilitating what teachers need so the teachers are better able to serve students. Principals should know their teachers, and provide support through allocating resources and collaborative time for improving classroom instruction. Principals should not try to do it all. They should be building capacity among their staff, but that takes time."

Successful schools, referring to schools who attained AYP status, created different cultures that included shared values, shared leadership, and a shared vision for ambitious student performance, but external pressures hindered progress as explained in the following section.

Bridging and buffering: Helping principals maneuver the politics of education

Despite the fact the state offered a system of support for underperforming schools, the reality was that if student performance did not improve, the school faced restructuring or closure. Principals and teachers faced loss of their jobs or reassignment. Because of the state's increasing expectations for student performance and pressure from outside sources—superintendents, boards, auditors, parents, and community—principals doubted their abilities to lead. Mrs. O confessed, "I do not let myself ruminate on it because if I did, it would sour me to the point where I could not do my job." Mr. A offered the following story:

> "The first year I made AYP, I was elated. The newspaper was writing praises about our school. The paper called me an instructional leader. I saw myself talking to other urban schools around the state telling them what I had done to make those academic gains. I envisioned billboards on street corners boasting of my school's success. Then, the next year we missed AYP by four students. Just like that. You are back to reality. We have really got to pull a rabbit out of a hat if we expect to reach AYP again."

Coaches provided emotional support to the principals by suggesting a different perspective that was positive and focused on student progress. Coaches cited improved student attendance and increased graduation rates as evidence their schools were changing. "Not all of the reasons for not making AYP dealt with poor student performance," said Coach Joe. "Failure to meet AYP expectations because of clerical oversights such as failing to test enough special population students or completing paperwork in a timely manner accounted for some of the reasons for not making AYP. This was a problem that could be fixed." Principals praised the presence of the coach as a continual support and focusing them. "My coach came in during a lot of chaos, and helped me, sometimes with just my mental stability," said Mrs R. "It was nice to have someone in my building who wasn't my boss, someone I could confide in," stated Mr. A. "My coach told me not to lose sight of my main goal which was improving instruction so

students could achieve," remarked Mrs. O. Developing camaraderie between the principal and coach appeared to inspire confidence in the principals to lead school improvement.

Besides supporting principals emotionally, coaches also acted as liaisons between the Midwest Coaching Institute, the intermediate school district, and the principals. When the principals initially attended the Midwest Coaching Institute, principals were confused and irritated by the lack of coordination between of SSoS Midwest Coaching Institute and the ISD initiatives. Principals openly expressed frustration with the amount of time principals and teachers were being pulled from the building to participate in requirements and initiatives. "I had a teacher that was out of the classroom 80+ days for attending process mentoring committee meetings, school improvement planning meetings, instructional rounds, and professional development," complained Mrs. R. "If student attendance is one of our biggest problems, what message are we sending to students when we tell them it is important to be in school, but their teachers are out almost two days a week?" questioned Mr. A. Mrs. O bluntly said, "I'm thankful that the institute has been on the weekends. If we had to carve that time out of our school days, it would never happen." Coaches listened and understood principals were overwhelmed by the demands. Coaches pushed for the development of a common understanding that could dovetail the programs and approached Midwest Institute design team for assistance. The coaching institute accepted the criticisms, and revamped its program using the instructional core as a way to fuse program coherence between the SSoS and ISD initiatives. "I think focusing on the instructional core concept provided us with the ability to see the parallel between the state requirements, the ISD initiatives and their relationship to the training at the coaching institute. That helped us move forward," said Coach Joe.

Because of a common understanding following the resolution of the program incoherence, findings indicated principals exhibited behavioral changes by changing daily practices, focusing on instruction, and building teamwork. "Coach Bill built my capacity become an instructional leader," shared Mrs. O. "I've learned to provide feedback to teachers, and using instructional rounds to understand the implications of quality teaching." Principals shared surprises about the impact of instructional monitoring. "Coach Joe taught me that what gets measured, gets done," said Mr. A. Principals indicated a positive perspective about involving teachers as shared instructional leaders. Mrs. R described her building as "close knit", with teachers making decisions to lead the building.

Yet, despite evidence of significant instructional change, the ability to sustain change depended on the sustainability of the leadership as discussed in the next section.

Sustaining the change: Two different perspectives

During the interviews, the principals suggested they might have ambitions beyond being a building administrator. "I would like to be an assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum someday. And then, after a few years, I might consider a superintendency," confided Mr. A. Another principal, Mrs. O, indicated a desire to participate in a commercial leadership program focused on leadership skills, but was unsure what her future plans might entail. She did express frustration with "red tape" involved in being an administrator, and suggested the paperwork could cause her to seek a new position. At the time of her interview, the third principal, Mrs. R, had a different ambition from the other principals. She intended to remain in her position as an elementary principal because, "My staff and I focused on the goals we accomplished this year. As a staff, we decided our next steps will be to sustain our program using dialogue, leadership, and learning." As it turned out, shortly after our interview, Mr. A and Mrs. R received positions

at their district's Central Office—Mr. A as a curriculum director, and Mrs. R as director of federal and state programs.

Findings suggested the loss of consistent leadership was not uncommon in urban schools. The turnover of superintendents contributed to constant changes in leadership styles and beliefs. With the hiring of new superintendents, administrative assignments changes occurred regularly, both at the building and central office levels, leaving little leadership stability. In addition, due to the economic climate, schools closed or were consolidated. Principals and staff members resigned or were transferred to other buildings. Coach Ann suggested change was a way of life in urban districts. "Principals and teachers tend to take the changes in stride," she said.

Whether instructional changes were sustained after the coaches' departure were questionable. State test scores indicated students were continuing to maintain AYP at Miller Middle School and Richards Elementary, but there was no way to verify the consistency of the instructional changes in the classrooms. Coach Ann said, "I do not know what's going on there now. Many of my teacher leaders at Richards Elementary have moved on. My principal has moved on. There's a different administrator who has not had the benefit of coaching and has a different philosophy and leadership style. I do not know if teachers who remain there are continuing with what was started with the former principal." A similar story was related by Coach Joe. Coach Joe said when he visited the school two years after coaching Miller Middle School, he did not recognize over half the staff. The remaining staff members shared their disappointment that the shared leadership philosophy had not continued after Joe left.

On the other hand, because Coach Bill's schools were located in rural communities rather than urban, he offered an entirely different perspective about why sustaining change might be difficult to maintain. Coach Bill discussed how the "laws of the land" dominated community

beliefs and acceptance of change. Laws of the land refer to the community culture meaning the way the community does things. Bill alluded to lifestyle of the communities and how rural communities value isolation from outsiders (i.e., governmental authorities), and may choose to ignore educational rules and regulations because they are wary that state educational decisions are based on the needs of urban communities, not rural communities. In a smaller community, the schools are the lifeblood of the community explained Bill. Values differ from urban communities with the emphasis on the whole child. Bill said, "The phrase "the whole child" refers to the self-efficacy of how to be a personable, likeable, civil human being." Maintaining and protecting the values of the rural community are priorities with citizens saying "we like things as they are", and "we raise our children to have our same beliefs." Thus, when the local superintendent suggests the local schools are failing and change is necessary to improve student academic performance, the community feels affronted. Issues become personal. The entire community becomes involved, questioning, probing, and controlling. Community members are active participants at local school board meetings, and can control board decisions because they have board members or school employees who are often relatives. Monitoring decisions for the school is the last place where the community feels like they can have a investment in government, and choose to exercise their rights to decide what is best for their community.

Discussion

My study confirmed principals in underperforming schools were unprepared to serve as instructional leaders, and benefitted from leadership coaching. That meant, unlike effective school principals, underperforming school principals did not possess a vision for high academic student performance and a culture of adult collaboration and commitment.

My study suggested coaches were able to influence principals' practices to lead instructional change by concentrating on the instructional core and program coherence to build a vision for ambitious student achievement (Cohen, Roudenbush, & Bush, 2003; Newmann, et al., 2001); creating professional communities using adult learning and collaboration to develop shared leadership, shared decision-making, and shared beliefs focused on student performance (Newmann & Wehlage; Coburn, 2003; Spillane, 2005)); and finally, encouraging interdependent relationships between principals and staff to bridge and buffer environmental resources and external interferences (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Findings were analyzed using the categories of structure, relationships, and interdependence that corresponded to R. Scott's theory of organizational systems-rational, natural, and open-as a way to explain the connection between coaches' practices and building the principals' capacity to lead systemic school improvement. Findings generally aligned with supportive research literature.

Rational systems: A structure for improved instruction and achievement

Rational systems are focused on structure. In my study, structure referred to the instructional core (i.e. the relationship between the teacher, student, and content), a common vision of increased student performance, and instructional program coherence (Cohen and Ball, 1999; City, et al., 2009; Newmann, et al., 2001), which derives from aligning the instruction with the school's goals and providing professional development to support the goals.

Findings confirmed principals were not prepared to be instructional leaders, but had been prepared to be organizational managers. Urban principals explained their college preparation in educational administration had emphasized managerial concept, such as budget management and organizational theory. Charter school principals did not need administrative certification, but said they were chosen on their abilities to maintain student discipline. Using a procedural

approach, coaches helped principals' change their perception of leader as an autonomous authority figure into a collaborative, instructional colleague focused on student performance. Evidence indicated coaches shaped perspectives by accompanying principals when observing classrooms, and sharing mutual descriptions of instruction. Learning to observe classroom instruction as a non-judgmental observer rather than as an evaluator encouraged principals to identify quality instruction. My study identified that a key turning point occurred when teachers were invited to be part of the SSoS instructional leadership team. As a team, principals and teachers were required to examine instructional practices and student performance in their underperforming buildings. Coaches implemented peer observations and instructional rounds as professional development to encourage a common understanding about quality instruction and decentralize teacher autonomy.

On the other hand, while teachers exhibited an enthusiasm for visiting their peer classrooms and collaborative discussions, principals found it difficult to fully participate in instructional rounds and reflective discussions due to uncontrollable factors, such administrative interruptions, unexpected parent visits, and problems with student behaviors. Urban school principals also indicated they were very likely to be controlled by decisions made by Central Office making building decisions and sometimes had little to say about their buildings. As Mr. A. explained, "When you're not in district leadership, you just have to keep your mouth shut. And say okay, this too shall pass." Building empowerment and decision-making were, in reality, limited, when district leadership determined educational priorities based on external political demands.

Natural systems: Creating a culture of collaboration

Natural systems create a culture based on shared attitudes, values, beliefs, expectations, and relationships focusing on student learning and achievement rather than adult needs and preferences (Peterson, 2002; Platt, Tripp, et al., 2008). Findings confirmed professional learning communities made ownership for student achievement become a collective responsibility. By developing a common vision for ambitious student performance, collaborative relationships, shared decision-making, and shared leadership responsibilities promoted a professional culture for adult and student learning (Spillane, 2004, 2005).

Interviews with participants indicated that prior to leadership coaches entering the underperforming schools, limited professional conversations occurred between the principals and teachers, even between the teachers themselves. Teachers exhibited classroom autonomy, buffering visitors and administrators from entering the classrooms. Although teachers enjoyed interacting socially with each other, there was little evidence to suggest teachers collaborated to focus on instructional practices and student performance. Findings highlight that implementation of peer observations and instructional rounds contributed significantly to adult collaborations and changed teachers' practices.

However, since relational trust had been limited in underperforming schools, the establishment of a safe learning environment appeared to be crucial before changes could occur. Urban schools teachers and principals often expressed feelings of disconnect with district leadership, and felt powerless to control educational decisions affecting their classrooms. Historical mistrust had existed between district administrators and teachers. Teachers relied on unions to protect them from what they viewed as classroom intrusion. Charter school teachers, who did not have the benefit of a union to protect them, expressed job insecurity and fear of unannounced dismissal by their management organization. Recognizing the absence of

relational trust and mutual respect among school members, coaches implemented protocols, group norms, and reflective, but professional, conversations that made it possible for candid conversations about instructional practices and student performance to occur (Bryk and Schnieider, 2003; Robertson, 2005; Clarke, 2005; Vella, 2002). My research indicated that as teachers became more involved in instructional decision-making, teacher leaders emerged and assumed more responsibility for student progress (Spillane, 2004, 2005).

Adult learning and collaboration appeared to create a sense of community among educators in the school to build leadership capacity to focus on instructional practices and student performance. These behavior changes signaled a belief change, which supported the instructional core and program coherence (Cohen and Ball, 1999; City, et al., 2009; Newmann et al., 2001). Teacher buy-in to the instructional core, program coherence, and professional community appeared to be essential to building a cohesive team, but evidence indicates teachers were not able to sustain changes without stable building leadership as reporteded in the following section.

Open systems: Interdependence and environmental impact

Open systems experience constant change, endure cycles of events, respond to critical feedback, and continually adapt to changes in their environment (Scott, 2003). Findings underscore that underperforming schools were able to use the instructional core, program coherence, and professional learning communities to begin implementation of school-wide goals and strategies that were specific to their building context (e.g., a school improvement plan). Common goals created a cohesive staff focused on student learning and performance allowing schools to bridge or buffer themselves from external resources or interferences (Cossentino, 2004; Shulman, 1983). Even so, these schools existed in complex, often turbulent,

environments, facing internal and external demands that impacted school improvement success (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

Analysis of data guided by the rational and natural systems pointed to consensus changes. Specifically, I identified team made decisions, changes in instructional strategies, and collective ownership for student performance. Teams were able to cope with new circumstances, and supported each other because of shared visions, beliefs and attitudes about aligned curriculum, professional communities, and student capabilities. Contrary to cohesiveness, open systems represented uncontrollable circumstances that often resulted in leadership instability and destroyed established teamwork.

My research confirmed that changes in leadership, both principal and teacher leadership, generated different beliefs, different modes of operation, and new policies creating instructional and cultural fragmentation which violated the rational system of structure and the natural system of collaboration (Honig and Hatch, 2004). Not mincing words, Coach Ann and Coach Joe described principal and staff turnover as "devastating", saying it took three to five years to build a stable building team only to have it demolished by an outside decision. Superintendency turnovers appeared to be one of the major forces contributing to underperforming schools, particularly in urban settings. The urban schools experienced superintendent fluidity which caused chain reactions in principal and staff movement or reassignment. Conflicts with board members, community leaders, and politics contributed to the frequent dismissal of the superintendent. As a result, apprehension about job assignments led principals to feel uncertain about building tenure and made them less involved with instructional leadership. Principals of charter schools experienced similar job security concerns, but were even less able to predict their tenure. Charter management companies controlled the schools, and had the ability to fire

principals or close schools. My research confirmed that stable building leadership, particularly teacher leadership, sustained instructional changes temporarily, but noted that the departure of building principals eventually caused teamwork to dissolve. Coaches reported visiting formerly assigned schools that had attained AYP, only to find that under new building leadership, classroom autonomy had returned as a standard mode of operation (Marris, 1974). These findings are consistent with Scott's theory of open systems (2003) where relentless demands are disjointed resulting in fragmentation and incoherence.

Limitations

There are three limitations to my study. First, my sample size is small, and includes only coaches who have demonstrated success in turning around underperforming schools. A second limitation involves the time restraint for interviewing and school visitations. Given the three month time period to gather material, interviews were restricted to three 90-minute interviews, and school observations were limited to availability of the coach or principal to escort me to classrooms. The third limitation is that my study entails only one coaching institute, and findings cannot be generalized to other types of coaching institutes.

Conclusions and implications

Leadership coaches can play a critical role in building the capacity of principals to lead underperforming schools. Coaches influenced principals' thinking to focus on the instructional core and program coherence, but realized classroom changes only occurred when a common vision of student excellence existed between the principal and the staff, and teachers were actively part of the instructional change movement. Coaches led the process of creating professional learning communities where adult learning and collaboration occurred, and ownership for improving student performance was shared.

Sustaining classroom changes depended on the consistency of the leadership, particularly the principal. Superintendent turnover contributed significantly to the stability of building leadership, and caused changes in district policy, assignments, and philosophies. If principals were reassigned or removed, teacher leaders were able to retain instructional practices and collaboration, but only temporarily, before team orientations to professional work began to dissolve.

Somewhat optimistically, test data indicated that schools who had achieved AYP through the SSoS process continued to maintain that status to the present despite staff turnover and the departure of the leadership coach. Why the schools were the schools were able to sustain these outcomes, even though the collaborative teacher learning had dissolved, is not clear and further research needs to be conducted to investigate this phenomenon. Though my study was not designed to explore the influence of the parent community in sustaining or turning around low performance, the importance of local community values was suggested by several participants and warrants further study.

Finally, given that leadership instability, particularly in urban districts, appears to be inevitable, investigation needs to be conducted on whether current principal preparation programs address building the capacity of the principal to prepare school members to sustain program cohesiveness and professional collaboration in the event of leadership turnover.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX C

Interview for Coaches—Coaching School Principals' Capacity to Lead

Purpose: Understanding how coaches help principals turn around underperforming schools by building the principal's capacity to lead systematic instructional improvements.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Code:
Date:

Thank you for meeting with me today. Our focus today will be on what you do as a coach and how you feel about it.

Interview Questions

1. Instructional core
    1. Describe a typical meeting with your principal.
    2. In what ways do you as a coach help the principal create a vision of academic excellence?
    3. What does effective instruction look like in your building?
    4. How do you help principals monitor instruction?
    5. What types of data does your school use to improve student performance?
    6. How do you know if students are succeeding?
    7. What role does the principal play in analyzing student work as a result of classroom instruction?
- Coherent program
    1. What do you think instructional coherence looks like? How do you help the principal evaluate the extent to which the instructional program is developing coherence?
    2. What do instructional rounds look like in your building?
    3. What is your role in instructional rounds? What is the principal's role?
    4. Describe a debriefing session following instructional rounds. (participants, instructional conversations)?
    5. If there are conflicts or differences of opinions between the principal and teachers on instruction, how do you intervene strategically without complicating an already complicated situation?
- Professional community
    1. How do you evaluate the extent the professional community is developing?
    2. Describe a typical meeting with the school leadership team. (who, what, where, when, why).

3. Describe the principal's role with the school team.
4. How do you watch principals work with teachers?
5. How do you help the principal become an active member of the professional learning community?
6. How do you provide feedback to the principals about observed behaviors and interactions?
7. As a coach, what do you see as your role in the school's professional community?
8. How do you support the principal and staff in collaborating to create organizational change? Please give specifics.
9. How do you help the principal think about sustaining organizational changes?

- Resources
  1. There is much external interference in a principal's job. How does the principal determine priorities?
  2. How do you see yourself as a resource for the principal? How do you see yourself as a resource for other school leaders?
  3. What does professional development look like in your building? Who decides on the type of professional development? (Building, district, ISD, state requirements, outside funding sources, universities, etc.)
  4. Some schools hire additional coaches for literacy and math. How do you coordinate your leadership services with the additional coaches?
- Student Discipline
  i. Our conversation has focused on instructional improvement. How do student behavior goals mesh with student performance goals?
  ii. What is your role in guiding the principals with student management?

This concludes the questions I have for you today. Do you have anything else you would like to add to our conversation?

Thank you for meeting with me. Our next meeting is scheduled for _____. I will be checking with you to confirm the date and time. You have my e-mail and phone numbers, if for any reason you need to contact me.

APPENDIX D

Interview for Building Principals—Coaching School Principals' Capacity to Lead

Purpose: Understanding how coaches help principals turn around underperforming schools by building the principal's capacity to lead systematic instructional improvements.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Code:
Date:

Thank you for participating in my research study. As you know, I am interested in understanding your perspective on coaching in this school.
(Show Letter of Informed Consent)

Before I begin, I want to assure you that there are no right answers, and that I will not identify anyone by name, either verbally or in writing, in my analysis and reporting. This is not an evaluation of either the school or the coach, but rather an effort designed to better understand how the coaching relationship works in different contexts.

Do you have any questions before we begin?
(Begin tape recorder.)

Interview Questions

1) Personal History
    a. Tell me a little about your background. (years as an educator, teaching, administration, types of schools you've worked in)
    b. Tell me about your academic preparation for your job (internships, advanced degrees).
    c. Describe your career goals.
    d. How would you characterize your leadership style?
        i. Instructional knowledge
        ii. Willingness and ability to share authority
        iii. Facilitator of adult learning
        iv. Other?
2) Instructional core
    a. What is your vision for your school?
    b. What does effective instruction look like in your school?
    c. How do you monitor instruction?
    d. How do you know if students are achieving?
    e. Describe the type of data you use to make to make decisions.
3) Coherent programming
    a. What is your idea of coherent programming?

b. What do instructional rounds look like in your building?
c. What is your role in instructional rounds? What is the coach's role?
d. How are instructional rounds conversations structured? Describe a debriefing meeting after rounds. Who attends? Where and when? Outcomes?

4) Professional communities
   a. How do you evaluate the extent the professional community is developing?
   b. Describe a typical meeting with the school leadership team.
   c. Describe your role with the school team.
   d. How does your coach become an active member of the professional learning community?
   e. How do you observe behaviors and interactions within the professional learning community?
   f. How does your coach support you and your staff in collaborating to create organizational change? Please give specifics.
   g. What do you think will happen to the organizational changes when the coach leaves?
5) Environmental Resources and requirements
   a. What role does central office play in the decisions made for your school?
   b. How are professional development decisions made?
   c. What external resources are available for you and your staff? (ISD, universities, business partnerships, additional coaches)
   d. How do you respond to outside expectations such as new policies, state requirements, parent support or interference?
   e. How does having a leadership coach make a difference in your educational perspective and practices as a principal?
6) Student Discipline
   a. Our conversation has centered on instructional improvement. Now I would like to know how you think student behavior goals mesh with student performance goals.
   b. What do you think the role of the coach should be in guiding the principal with student management?
7) Has having a leadership coaching changed your personal life? If so, how?
8) Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience working with your coach?

Close

Thank you very much for your time. As you know, I am interviewing others regarding coaching in high-priority schools. I plan to interview other principals and coaches, but I want to assure you that our conversation today is confidential, and will only be used for research purposes. Do you have any questions for me at this point? Is it okay if I call you if I have any follow-up questions? You have my e-mail and phone numbers, if for any reason you need to contact me. Thank you, again. It has been a pleasure talking with you.

APPENDIX E

Table 2.2 Observation Guide-- Coaching School Principals' Capacity to Lead

Categories	Coach	Principal
Instructional core	• Analysis/review/debrief of ongoing student work	• Analysis/review/debrief of ongoing student work
Instructional coherence	• Instructional rounds • Instructional conversations • Coherence issues	• Instructional rounds • Instructional conversations • Coherence issues
Professional Learning Community	• ILT Meetings and agendas focused on school improvement goals and student achievement • Data use for decision-making • Collaborative decision-making • Professional conversations about student progress • Evidence of PD implementation (protocols, strategies)	• ILT Meetings and agendas focused on school improvement goals and student achievement • Data use for decision-making • Collaborative decision-making • Professional conversations about student progress • Evidence of PD implementation (protocols, strategies)
Environmental Resources and requirements	• External resources (ISD, universities, business partnerships) • Parent participation • Central office support	• External resources (ISD, universities, business partnerships) • Parent participation • Central office support

Table 2.2 (cont'd)

Interactions	• Coach-principal • Coach-teacher • Coach-student • Conversational techniques (pause, paraphrase, probe, descriptive, evaluative) • Questioning • techniques (clarify, extend) • Listening techniques • Body language	• Principal-coach • Principal –teacher • Principal-student • Conversational techniques (pause, paraphrase, probe, descriptive, evaluative) • Questioning techniques (clarify, extend) • Listening techniques • Body language

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CHAPTER 3 LEADERSHIP COACHING PROGRAMS: PROGRAM EVOLUTION AND INLUENCE OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Abstract

Leadership coaching in underperforming schools is a relatively new phenomenon, and is designed to enhance principals' instructional leadership skills to lead school improvement and improve student performance. Leadership coaches possess prior experience as principals, consultants, curriculum directors, or superintendents, but only limited research exists about the additional kinds of training leadership coaches need to augment their experiential knowledge, the way training programs influence coaching practices, and the impact professional development has on changing coaches' behaviors and beliefs. The following qualitative study provides a description of evolving professional development programs for leadership coaches, examines the nature of the programs' content, and investigates how transformative learning theory influences coaches' beliefs and practices. The study concludes with leadership coaches describing their own personal, transformative learning experiences as they participate in the evolving professional development programs.

Since the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 has been enacted, the pressures on education have increased. Schools are being held accountable for the academic proficiencies of every student as demonstrated on standardized tests. If Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) is not attained for two years or more, principals face losing their jobs, teachers fear reassignments, and schools anticipate conversion to charter schools, or a state takeover. One suggested solution for improving struggling schools is to employ external coaches, known as leadership coaches. Leadership coaches are seen as key resources to help principals develop leadership skills to improve the school's performance to meet current requirements.

Leadership coaches bring varying knowledge and educational experience, many having been former principals, superintendents, or consultants. Yet, coaches also need to consistently hone their knowledge and skills in order to tailor their coaching to meet the needs of the school leaders with whom they work. Coaches are expected to learn and grow through the coaching process, refining their skills, and furthering their understanding of adult learning and organizational change (Robertson, 2008). Like the leaders they coach, coaches, too, are adult learners, and assume different perspectives as they learn.

On the other hand, research regarding professional development for coaches is in the early stages (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Shuster, 2010). As such, limited research exists about the additional kinds of training leadership coaches need to augment their experiential knowledge, the way training programs influence coaching practices, and the impact professional development has on changing coaches' beliefs and behaviors. The purpose of this study is to examine a professional development program at the Midwest Coaching Institute which is designed to support leadership coaches and enhance their coaching capacity. As part of a State System of Support (SSoS), the program is designed

for leadership coaches who are actively providing coaching services in underperforming Title I schools. Underperforming refer to schools not AYP for three years or more. The Institute's program provides theory, strategies, and interactive practices for coaching practitioners. This paper seeks to understand the nature of the leadership coaches' professional development program content, and how it relates to the coaches' ability to improve their skills as change agents. My work is structured in three parts. I begin by examining adult learning theories with the intent of understanding what it means to be an adult learner, and how learning theory impacts program design. Secondly, I describe the evolution of the professional development for leadership coaches 'program at Midwest Coaching Institute, and the influences impacting the metamorphosis of the program content and dynamics. Finally, I present coaches' voices offering personal reflections on adult learning, collaboration, and transformative thinking. Specifically, I ask the following questions to guide my research:

How do coaching practitioners get better at their trade?

- How does professional development leverage the practices of coaching**?**
- In what ways do professional dialogues support professional growth?
- What types of experiential activities provide opportunities to transfer new knowledge to daily situations?

Learning as an adult

While there is limited research on the kinds of programs coaching practitioners need to improve their coaching skills, there is a substantial body of literature focusing on the characteristics of the adult learner which begs consideration when designing a program for coaching practitioners. Here I describe the principles of adult learning followed by strategies to enhance coaches' engagement in professional development.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

Adult learners are different than elementary and adolescent learners, but are rarely acknowledged as needing different approaches to learning. Adults, as learners, seek control of their own learning, and have different perspectives about the reason for learning. Unlike the traditional teacher-driven instruction most people identify as pedagogy, Malcolm Knowles publicized the term "andragogy" in his book, "The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy" in 1970. He describes andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn. For Knowles, andragogy is process-based rather than content-based, and is anchored in four (later five) assumptions about adult learners. Knowles describes adult learning as the process in which adults have self-directed goals, use life experience as a resource for learning, orient learning tasks towards their social roles, are problem-centered oriented and interested in the immediate application of the learning, and are internally motivated to learn (added in 1984).

Understanding the concept of andragogy enhances the chances of creating a professional development programs that are compatible with the needs of the coach practitioners. Scholars recognize learners bring a variety of life experiences that shape their readiness and willingness to learn (Cranton, 1996; Merriam & Caffarella, 2007; Mezirow, 2000; Knowles, 1970; Speck & Knipe, 2001; Lawler, 2003). This implies adults seek knowledge that applies to their current life situation, and want to understand how new information will make a difference in their personal and professional lives (Brookfield, 1987; Knowles, 1970; Speck & Knipe, 2001). To make learning applicable to their lives, adult learners want to be the origin of their own learning, and have control over the what, who, how, why, when and where of their learning. Adult learners

reflect on the relevance of the new learning, and decide whether it coincides with their current beliefs or whether a shift in perspective is necessary (Knowles, 1970; Bee, 2000; Lawler, 2003).

Yet, despite an emphasis on the desire to control their learning, it is critical to understand adults are skeptical of new learning, and resist activities they see as an attack on their competence (Speck & Knipe, 2001). Adult learners come to the learning process with a wide range of experience, knowledge, interests, and competencies, but fear the judgment of others (Speck & Knipe, 2001; Taylor, 1994; Boud & Walker, 1998). Acknowledging life experience and diversity of the adult learners suggests creating a safe environment by providing adequate time for reciprocal conversations between the instructor and classroom peers in order to share varying perspectives (Vella, 2002; Speck & Knipe, 2001).

Lastly, adult learners enjoy novelty and variety in their learning experiences, and prefer active learning (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). This implies that program development designs consider learning as both an active and an interactive process. For example, opportunities to practice new skills and receive structured feedback appeals to the adult learners' need for an understanding of how to apply the new learning. Designing activities to address diversity of learning styles, real life experience, and application to social context suggests respect for the adult learner (Knowles, 1970; Zepeda, 2008; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). Incorporating small groups as part of the design is another strategy often employed to enable adult learners to move from simply understanding new material on a surface level to dialoguing, reflecting, analyzing, and practicing the learning experiences with others in order to deepen personal understanding (Mezirow, 2000; Bloom, et al., 2009; Platt, et al., 2008).

Adult learning and constructivist-developmental theories

Adult learning offers the learner opportunities to accept a shift in beliefs that is referred to as transformational learning. Jack Mezirow (1978) introduced the theory of transformative learning to adult learning. Central to his theory is the importance of critical reflection on one's personal assumptions, actions, and behaviors that are developed based on internal and external life experiences, and how one interprets those experiences. Transformative learning, according to Mezirow, is the process of transforming one's taken-for-granted habits of mind and frames of reference and changing them to reflect new ways of thinking by exhibiting new behaviors. He, like other scholars (Brookfield, 1987; Cranton, 1994, 1996), point to the connection between self-examination and transformative learning. As an example, the current educational movement towards shared leadership and decision-making challenges the traditional belief that the role of the school principal is to make autocratic decisions. In order to shift perspectives, the principal must make sense of the movement, reflect on current practices, establish goals compatible with the new perspective, and accept new values and beliefs necessary to achieve the goals.

Surrendering former beliefs and assumptions, understanding different perspectives, and accepting the need to change involves processing and reflection. On the other hand, letting go of entrenched beliefs and behaviors is an intensely emotional experience (Scott, 1997). Cranton's (1994) work notes that "learners will often cling stubbornly to their opinions, values, or beliefs. To change is frightening and threatening." To support the process of transformative learning, Kegan & Lahey (1984)explain it is first necessary to understand the person's current epistemology (i.e., his way of knowing) which Kegan & Lahey call the process of "meaning-forming." Next is the process of "reforming the meaning-forming". When transformative learning occurs, Kegan & Lahey assert, there is a change in the structure of a person's meaning-making system. This means transformational learning is a gradual process of renegotiating ways

of knowing and maximizing opportunities for personal growth. Without a process of critically examining opinions, values and beliefs and the capacity to let go or suspend opinions, values or beliefs that no long fit the new emerging viewpoint, transformation cannot take place (Cranton, 1994; Senge, 1990; Mezirow, 1991).

Designing programs for coaching practitioners

In order for coach practitioners to experience transformative learning through on-going professional development as adult learners, research suggests the importance of context, collaboration, and dialogue play a significant part of program design (Cranton, 1997; Boud & Walker, 1998; Zepeda, 2008). Brookfield (1986) indicates that when "adults teach and learn in one another's company, they find themselves engaging in a challenging, passionate, and creative activity." An inclusive environment fosters dialogue among members, and encourages opportunities to listen to others' beliefs and experiences, followed by open discussion and reflection (Zepeda, 2008). Dialogue among members may challenge participants' assumptions, beliefs, values, and image of themselves, but may encourage self-reflection and enable the participants to create a more meaningful and holistic vision of themselves (Dirkx, 1998).

Coaches arrive with a variety of backgrounds and experiences that color their interpretations and understandings of their work. Therefore, the context for the coaches' learning implies a safe and supportive environment needs to exist. This means the learning environment promotes respect for expertise, social interaction with practicing peers, trust for collaborative inquiry and a common language shared among coaching members (Byrk & Schneider, 2003; Reiss, 2007; Boud & Walker, 1998; Lawler & King, 2000). Engaging coaches as active participants in professional dialoguing offers the opportunity for open discussions, reciprocal conversations, and shared experiences. Researchers indicate the value of collaborative

and cooperative learning is that it provides the opportunity to shift learning paradigms, beliefs, and values (Lawler, 1991; Lawler & King, 2000; Caffarella, 2002). Reflective conversations to explore different perspectives are crucial for change to take place (Cranton, 1997; Mezirow, 2000; Boud & Walker, 1998, Brookfield, 1987). For instance, coach practitioners analyze personal perspectives by reflecting on past experiences in light of their current position and knowledge (Boud, Koegh, & Walker, et al., 1985). Participating in reciprocal conversations with coaching peers offers opportunities to become aware of how and why past assumptions have come to constrain the way coaches perceive their work by examining ineffective habits and designing new action plans for the future (Mezirow, 1991). Collegial exchange and dialogue contribute to the coaches' personal examinations of habitual patterns of actions, thoughts, and assumptions, thereby, suggesting new insight to personal learning. (Mezirow, 1991; Robertson, 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009; Boud, et al., 1985).

Literature also suggests, within the boundaries of professional development programs, opportunities exist for coaches' to create a collaborative community of practice that extends beyond the training seminars. Research suggests it is the process of sharing information and experiences among coaching members that builds relational trust and creates a network of learners (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Critical to this network is a common language and understanding representing shared values, knowledge, technology and procedures (Friedman, 2001). A diversity of viewpoints and perspectives leads to a purposeful construction of a shared language which reflects a collective wisdom about coaching principles and practices. Participating as part of a collaborative network offers opportunities for coaches to regularly converse, reflect, and evolve as professionals. (Bloom, et al., 2009; Platt, et al., 2008).

Study Design and Methods

Study Design

In 2004, the Midwest Coaching Institute was established as part of a state grant to expand the state's ability to assist high priority schools. The terms of the grant required high-priority schools meet performance standards, as specified by NCLB, by receiving assistance from school improvement coaches, but did not specify what school improvement coaches meant. The Midwest Coaching Institute chose to focus on providing leadership coaches to assist the building principals build capacity to lead underperforming schools

In 2006, the Midwest Coaching Institute became part of the State System of Support (SSoS) which was a mandatory program for Title I schools failing to make AYP for three years or more. All principals serving underperforming Title I schools were required to attend leadership seminars and received a leadership coach for on-site follow-up. As such, the Midwest Coaching Institute was responsible for providing the program content that focused on the skills of leadership. In addition to organizing the SSoS seminars, the Institute provided simultaneous training for the leadership coaches. Quarterly professional development programs provided theory, strategies, and interactive practices for coaching practitioners to extend their skills, knowledge, and mindsets about coaching when working with principals, and eventually instructional leadership teams, to lead systemic instructional improvement and increase student achievement. The purpose of my study was to understand the nature of the leadership coaches' professional development programs' content, and how the programs influenced coaching practices and beliefs when the leadership coaches acted as change agents in underperforming schools.

For the purposes of my research, the multiple-embedded case study allowed opportunities to provide descriptive accounts of how professional development influenced the coaching

practices, knowledge, and learning of coach practitioners (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2006). In addition, the multiple case study design created a means for establishing the validity of findings, including triangulation among different categories of evidence (observations, interviews, field notes, and documents) and leveraging opportunities to explore "exceptional cases" that did not coincide with emerging themes and categories. Member checks for accuracy of facts and observations and continued surveillance of the academic literature provided additional validity to my findings.

Sampling Plan

Participants chosen for my study were purposeful and non-random. By that I mean, I selected three veteran coaches who had attended the Midwest Coaching Institute for five or more years, and had been active participants in the coaches' trainings provided by the Institute during these years. These coaches provided rich and extensive information about their experience with the leadership coaching program as well as a historical perspective about the program's evolution. In addition, I selected a program director that appeared to have the greatest impact on the development of the leadership coaching program because of her extensive coaching experience and involvement with the program design and implementation. To further understand the nature of the participants, I will describe each person's background and experience in the next section.

Participants

Coach Ann

Coach Ann had been a leadership coach for five years with the Midwest Coaching Institute, but had prior training as an instructional coach. Coach Ann had received four degrees, including a Ph.D., and possessed experience as a classroom teacher, an assistant principal, an elementary principal, a middle school principal, and had taught Masters' level college courses.

Coach Ann was one of first members with the Midwest Coaching Institute, and had been actively involved with the design team for the leadership coaching program. "In 2007, I came in on the ground floor and had an opportunity to be part of the design team." Currently, Coach Ann coaches in an urban school, and continues to be an active member of the Institute's design team, monitoring and modifying the coaching program as needed.

Coach Joe

Coach Joe began his coaching career as a school turnaround specialist following his retirement from public education—23 years as a teacher of art and science, and 19 years as a middle school principal. Shortly after retiring, Joe was contacted by a regional director of schools in the western part of the state to become a turnaround specialist for underperforming Title I urban schools. During his tenure as a turnaround specialist, Coach Joe joined the Midwest Coaching Institute in 2007 as part of the state system of support (SSoS). Coach Joe had not received any training as a turnaround specialist, and had relied on on-the-job training and past administrative experience to guide him as a turnaround specialist. "I was a turnaround specialist and was told to go into the school and take it over." Coach Joe credited the Midwest Coaching Institute for changing his coaching philosophy and developing his leadership coaching skills. Currently, Coach Joe is assisting the Institute design an instructional website for practicing coaches to access for reviewing or updating coaching skills.

Coach Bill

Coach Bill brought extraordinary life experience to the program at Midwest Coaching Institute. After achieving degrees in accounting and business management, Coach Bill joined the military. Experience using computers in the military led him an opportunity to work for the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. Realizing this was not a career for him,

Coach Bill returned to college and completed a degree in curriculum and instruction. After completing his student teaching, Coach Bill said, "I realized I really liked education, and decided to pursue it as my life's career." Bill's experiences prior to becoming a leadership coach with the Midwest Coaching Institute included being a high school teacher, a girls' volleyball coach, Technology Director, Assistant Principal, Alternative Education principal, and middle school principal.

For Coach Bill, leadership coaching came about because of his success with creating teamwork in his building. Coach Bill was requested to conduct professional development sessions for other professionals on how to achieve success through teamwork. Experience as a consultant led Coach Bill to become involved with the Midwest Coaching Institute in 2007 where he was invited to be a leadership coach. Coach Bill has coached ten schools during his seven years as a coach with the many of his schools identified as "alternative"—meaning they follow non-traditional methods in serving at-risk students. Currently, Coach Bill continues to coach three alternative school principals, and works with Midwest Coaching Institute to create informational videos promoting the leadership coaches' professional development program.

Dr. Abby Walters

Dr. Abby Walters has served as the Program Development Director for the Midwest Coaching Institute since 2009. Prior to accepting the role, she had over 30 years experience in education and curriculum development, had extensive training and facilitation experience and had practiced as a cognitive coach. In previous capacities, she served as a Program Supervisor for an urban school district and was responsible for designing, organizing, presenting and facilitating professional developments. Dr. Walters also spent nine years as a national trainer and educational consultant for Efficacy Institute where she was responsible for the delivery and

facilitation of seminars to educational and human service institutes throughout the United States. Professionally, Dr. Walters received a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with a cognate in Educational Psychology. She received additional degrees in Special Education and Instructional Technology.

Data collection

The use of case study designs called for a broad-based data collection in order to triangulate among multiple sources of evidence to identify points of convergence and divergence in coaches' knowledge, actions, and influence (Yin, 2009). Data was collected for this study in the fall of 2007 through the summer of 2011 during the Midwest Coaching Institute's quarterly training sessions for leadership coaches. Data included interviews, observations, field notes, and documentation over the four year time span. The primary source of my data collection relied on in-depth interviews with three leadership coaches and one program development director since this method is effective in understanding how coaches perceive the impact of their professional development. Three 90-minute semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006) with leadership coaches and two 60-minute interviews with the program development director were conducted and digitally recorded for later transcription and analysis. Because I was a research assistant for the Midwest Coaching Institute from 2007-2011, on-site observations of the coaches' trainings provided opportunities to observe and gather field notes regarding leadership coaches' participation and interaction during the sessions. Documentation collected included records of coach attendance at the coaching institute trainings, program agendas, and resource materials, including textbooks and handouts.

Data Analysis

Analysis was based on the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987, Miles & Huberman, 1994). I looked for patterns and developments with regard to coaches' engagement in the change process. Remarks that appeared contradictory with emerging themes and patterns were given special attention for converging and diverging interpretations, followed by subsequent analysis of field notes and observations. Iterative analysis helped refine themes and patterns, both with-in case and cross-case analysis, comparing overlaps, disconnects, divergences, and convergences. Inductive analysis generated tentative categories, connecting supportive evidence (observations, field notes, documentation) with the data itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987).

Qualitative software, Nvivo, assisted with thematic analysis. I assigned a priori codes (nodes) to initially organize respondents' replies into meaningful analytical units. Throughout the initial coding process, I continued to refine and revise codes. At the second level of analysis, I consolidated the data into codes that emerged from the words of the respondents, and identified patterns that coalesced in the data. At the third level of coding, I devised thematic constructs by connecting and consolidating the second level codes into three categories: program evolution, adult learning, and professional collaboration.

Findings

The Midwest Coaching Institute provided a professional development program to support and enhance the skills of leadership coaches employed as part of the State System of Support (SSoS). Findings indicated the professional development program content for Midwest Coaching Institute evolved substantially over a period of 8 years in order to meet changing SSoS requirements. Program director changes, philosophy changes, and content changes affected program focus, and coaching techniques were adapted to fit the changing coaching program

criteria. As the professional development program content changed, evidence of the coaches' perception changes were reflected in behavioral changes that were consistent with adult learning theory.

Background-ABCS and Midwest Coaching Institute

Findings from historical documents indicated the inception of the Midwest Coaching Institute occurred in 2004 when the Alliance for Building Capabilities in Schools (ABCS), a collaborative effort of the state's leading educational associations and organizations, was awarded a grant from the state department of education for the purpose of establishing an academic coaching institute to expand the state's capacity to assist schools identified as high priority by NCLB. ABCS created the Midwest Coaching Institute, and developed a single model curriculum for effective coaching. The "curriculum" acknowledged that successful school improvement required sustained on-site work with school practitioners; "effective" meant coaches worked with the principal, the teachers, and support personnel to analyze student demographic and achievement data, identify school needs and goals, and establish a plan of improvement incorporating new approaches to teaching, learning, and leadership. Veteran educators, primarily retired principals, were recruited and trained to become leadership coaches and would assist principals to become instructional leaders, build school capacity, and improve school achievement.

Originally, the Midwest Coaching Institute was grounded in the principles of process consultation as developed by organizational development expert, Edgar Schein (1999). Process consultation was a common technique used in business to mentor executives, and in this case, school principals, to improve leadership skills. Leadership coaches completed 12 training sessions in the principles of process consultation. Coaching candidates were videotaped

performing a role-playing exercise practicing coaching skills, completed a reflection log, and, eventually, faced a three person panel for a live role-playing performance to demonstrate coaching proficiency. At the end of the training, 160 candidates submitted resumes, 83 were offered candidacies, and 78 accepted offers. The grant required ABCS to post and maintain a registry of certified ABCS coaches for hire by state schools on its website.

The early years—ABCS and Center for Competent Leadership (C)

Schein's (1999) theory of process consultation was cited in the grant as the theory guiding the leadership coaching program, and offered a focus for the new endeavor. Process consultation was considered the process of building a mentoring relationship between the coach and the principal. Schein (1999) believed the leadership coach should have the ability to move easily between the roles of process consultant, content expert, and diagnostician/prescription in order to guide the principals' actions to lead underperforming schools. While the intent was that the coach would serve as the expert and act as a consultant, findings indicated principals preferred to use the coach as a problem solver who would resolve issues for them. "While it was good for principals to be told what to do because that is what some of the principals needed," recalled Dr. Walters, "the distinction between giving answers and helping people find their own answers was not emphasized. When a principal is coaching another principal, and giving only their expertise, they are coming from their own world view, not the world view of the principal in that context."

Field notes reinforced Dr. Walter's comment because coaches who had participated in the ABCS training indicated they had been uncomfortable playing the role of the expert, and felt pressure to have all the answers. ABCS coaches relayed that they relied heavily on past experience to advise principals. "As a former principal, I could relate to the problems the

principal encountered. I believed I was building rapport when I shared how I handled a similar situation," said Coach Jim. As such, principals were not always receptive to another principal's advice nor did they see the connections to similar situations. Coach Bill spoke openly about his negative reception when he first entered an underperforming school as the leadership coach. "The principal's not sure you are there for his own good. He wonders how you are going to change things in his building. He worries about his image as the building authority with his staff and parents." Coaches expressed concerns to the Midwest Institute directors about their frustrations to see any significant changes in principals' behaviors that would lead to improved student achievement, and they felt needed more training on how to coach principals to lead.

Program directors were reliant on the coaches' feedback to shape the direction of the program. "The program directors admitted they were feeling their way through. Some coaches at the beginning, felt there was too much ivory tower type of procedure, but I believe we just all kind of grew up together," reminisced Coach Joe. Contracting with the Center for Competent Leadership (CCL), the Institute's professional development changed its approach to coaching. The CCL program provided nationally recognized presenters who provided a structured leadership program to both coaches and principals. Leadership experts offered strategies for improving leadership, and exposed coaches and principals to interpersonal leadership skills, personal reflection and self-awareness. Small group discussions and interactive participation were strategies engaging both the coach and the principal. "I was an equal contributor with a principal and the leadership team," remembered Coach Bill. These comments suggest the CCL recognized the need to engage coaches as adult learners as well as the principals. The role of the coach as learner was significant because it changed the role of the coach to peer rather than expert.

Shortly after the CCL became a main provider for the Institute's professional development program, the SSoS extended the school leadership team to include teachers. This appeared to require both the principal and the coach to experience a paradigm shift. "It was new to bring teams to the Institute. It took a while to get everybody on board. What we found was a mismatch between what was happening in the districts and what was being done at the Institute. At times, there was dissidence within the teams," said Coach Joe. When principals and coaches attempted to implement strategies learned in the Institute, they met resistance or non-support back in the school. Coach Ann corroborated Joe's statement, "There was not always follow-through or coordination with what was happening back at the school districts. Principals felt torn between the district's expectations, the intermediate districts' initiatives, and the Institute's requirements." Field notes recorded the frustration of the coaches, the principals, and the instructional leadership teams with the Institute, and perceived the Institute to be oblivious to the demands placed on the schools at the district levels. Coaches pushed for the development of a common understanding that could dovetail the Institute's expectations with the federal, state, district requirements, and approached the Institute's program design team. Findings support constructivist theory that people need to make sense of change. In order to address the need for sense-making, the focus of the Institute's program shifted.

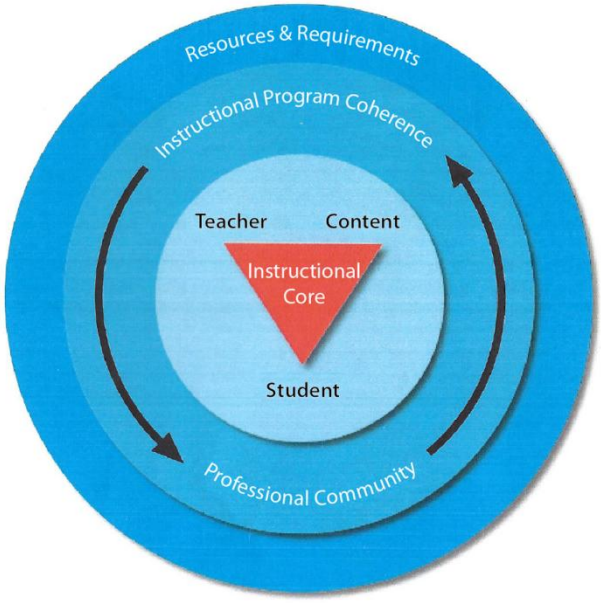
Moving towards collaboration- The Instructional Core

The Midwest Coaching Institute accepted the criticisms, and revamped its program using the instructional core as a way to fuse program coherence between the various initiatives. "I think focusing on the instructional core concept provided us with the ability to see the parallel between the state requirements, the ISD initiatives and their relationship to the training at the coaching institute. That helped us move forward," said Coach Joe. The instructional core (Cohen

and Ball, 1999) was defined as the relationship between the teacher, student, and the presence of content. Findings suggest this was a key turning point in the Institute's professional development program because it advocated for a team approach to improving school instruction and student achievement. The Institute developed a graphic that exhibited a leadership coherence framework, and the visual became a staple at the opening of every Institute training session (see Figure 3.1). A common language was established which enhanced shared understanding of the instructional core, program coherence, professional learning community, and resources and requirements as the essential components of a high functioning school. Protocols were used as learning formats to assure that team members had equal opportunity to engage in conversations about the instructional framework.

Figure 3.1. Leadership for Coherence Framework (Michigan State University, K-12 Outreach)

The text in this figure is in a font size that is unable to be enlarged. The text in this figure is in a font size that is unable to be enlarged. The text says: At the top of the figure in the outer circle, “Resources and Requirements”; in the middle of the circle at the top, “Instructional Program Coherence”; in the middle circle at the bottom, “Professional Community”; and the center circle says. “Teacher Content Student.” The text in the triangle says, “Instructional Core.”



Transforming coaches-Cognitive Coaching and Adaptive Schools

In 2009, the Institute's Program Director changed, and Dr. Walter arrived. Dr. Walters displayed a different philosophy towards coaching. Dr. Walter believed leadership coaches did not have the basic skills of coaching, and brought a paradigm shift in the way coaches coached. Dr. Walters' background was in cognitive coaching (Costa & Garmston, 1994) and Adaptive Schools (Wells & Garmsten, 1994) training. That said, her work focused on developing skills in dialogue, discussion, inquiry, and collaboration. "When I came on board, I found the leadership coaches didn't have a background in fundamental coaching skills. The ABCS coaching model was a one-on-one model to coach principals, but it was not a cognitive model, not a mediational model. Coaches thought about coaching as telling, but it is not telling. It is mediating thinking."

The significance of cognitive coaching was in the design and execution of coaching. Cognitive coaching changed the role of the coach from being a mentor to a coach in order to influence principals' beliefs and behaviors. Coach Joe described "the difference between a mentor and a coach as bringing about change within the other person, not you," while Coach Bill referred to cognitive coaching as "using inquiry to bring out personal thinking." Coach Ann said cognitive coaching meant, "Coaches had to listen and realize that the coaching process was not about finding solutions for the principal. It was about empowering that principal to find his or her own solutions and, as a result, talking about what was going to occur, how the planning was going to go, stepping out of the coaching role, and then facilitating the principal's next steps." Coaches appeared to be receptive to cognitive coaching. "Once I understood the coaching process was not about me, it took a lot of burden off me. When I learned how to probe, talk to the principal, and find out what she wanted, it allowed me to listen, and really hear what the principal was saying," reflected Coach Ann. Comments suggest a positive attitude shift towards

working with the principals, and suggest a feeling of transformation within the coaches' mindsets. Findings imply coaches' experiences affirm Mezirow's (1978) theory of transformative learning which is the process if transforming one's habits of mind and frames of reference, and changing them to reflect new ways of thinking by exhibiting new behaviors.

On the other hand, the shift to coaching the principal and a team presented a challenge to the new director and her design team. Because CCL, the former development provider did not have a team model, Dr. Walter resorted to her Adaptive Schools experience, together with her design team of experienced cognitive coaches, created a team model for the institute. Her program content contained elements addressing conflict resolution, data-driven decision making, and problem solving. During her interviews, she specifically referred to the role of the coach as "wearing different hats of leadership" while they were facilitating, presenting, coaching, and consulting, but emphasized facilitating group work was the primary skill needed to promote belief and behavior changes.

Findings reflect there was an emphasis on adult learning when implementing the cognitive model. Specifically, Dr. Walters recognized adult learners needed practical application and connectivity, not theory. "They resist theoretical rhetoric. They don't mind some of it, but want to know how theory relates to what they are doing. They like small chunks of information, not more than about an hour and a half. Adults learners enjoy constructing meaning by talking with one another and interacting with each other," said Dr. Walters. These comments are in line with adult learning characteristics (Cranton, 1996; Merriam & Caffarella, 2007; Mezirow, 2000; Knowles, 1970; Speck & Knipe, 2001; Lawler, 2003), and are consistent with program designs for adults (Cranton, 1997; Mezirow, 2000; Boud & Walker, 1998, Brookfield, 1987).

Spreading the coaching movement-Coaching 101

Because Dr. Walters was responsible for developing and honing leadership coaches skills, leadership coaches became a part of an allied program designed to build a knowledge base for all coaches (e.g., leadership, literacy, math, specific content, and data coaches), and ensure that all educational coaches shared a basic understanding of the fundamentals of effective coaching. In response to the state's Department of Education request in 2010 for a program to provide coherent instructional support to SSoS schools, Dr. Walters and her design team received a $1.6 million grant to create and administer a program entitled Coaching School Success (CSS). The essence of the program was to develop a common coaching language and consistent approach to delivering effective coaching to administrators, principals, and teachers working in Title I schools. The elements of the CSS program were compatible with current literature on leadership coaching program design (Bloom, et al., 2005; Kee, et al., 2010). Coaching skills encompassed listening, paraphrasing, questioning, and reflecting. Accompanying skills included making eye contact and aligning tone and body language to develop unconscious rapport with the coachee (e.g., principal, teacher), and create an affective sense of support and understanding. Mediating thinking meant helping the coachee identify goals for improving school performance and developing a plan of action to achieve the goals. Questioning involved clarifying, probing, and inquiry techniques. An examination was administered at the conclusion of the CSS four-day training program. Successful completion of CSS program was required by the state of all leadership, instructional, and content coaches before certification. Failure to pass the exam resulted in attending remedial sessions before retaking the exam.[1]

[1] As a side note, because the program was mandatory for all coaches in the state, there was no cost to the coaches, but costs to administer the sessions depended on the site and the number of attendees, and ranged from $1500 to $6500 per session, paid for by grant money. As of this writing, over 400 coaches have been trained and certified.

Veteran leadership coaches, just finally understanding the instructional core and its components, offered initial resistance to the CSS program because they viewed it as another external requirement. Once the leadership coaches participated in the training, however, research indicates all of the coaches believed the program was a validation of their work. I suggest this is a key finding indicating coaches experienced a transformative learning experience. "The CSS model has helped me become transparent in my understanding of coaching. It actually puts names to my coaching techniques," marveled Coach Bill. "The CSS program helped me refine the art and science of coaching. Through the training, I had the opportunity to practice my questioning techniques, key in on the listening aspects of coaching, and focus on what the coachee was really saying," reflected Coach Ann. Coach Joe corroborated both statements by saying, "The CSS model acted as a verification of what I knew and had done in the past, but at the same time it offered new learning. I recognized how the professional development programs interacted [that is, programs for coaches and programs for principals and their school teams], and I understood the value of having a common language to support conversational skills when working with my principal and the leadership team."

The CSS program continued to evolve to another level for veteran coaches. Dr. Walters explained, "I'm taking the leadership coaches more deeply into the mediational process, the anatomy of mediational questioning, and the power of mediation when working with principals. I want there to be automaticity. It's not just asking a clarifying or probing question. It's about listening so intently to the principal that you automatically know the right kind of a question will facilitate the thinking of the principal." Veteran coaches indicated the advanced sessions provided them with extensive practice opportunities to receive peer feedback. Videotaping their coaching sessions provided them with evidence of their coaching capacity. Interacting closely to

improve coaching skills, coaches suggested their professional relationships improved because of access to improved technology and social networking. The findings confirm active learning is effective and compatible with adult learning theory.

To summarize, coaching expectations changed dramatically over 8 years. Dominated by the ever-changing requirements of the SSoS, my research suggests leadership coaches learned to adapt to coaching programs and methodologies, yet they were consistent in holding a solid belief that their work was to improve student performance regardless of the promoted coaching programs. The creation of a leadership framework, focused on the instructional core, implementing cohesive programming, building a professional community, and bridging or buffering external resources appeared to offer a solidified approach to school improvement through team building. When the program directorship changed, coaches were introduced to a cognitive approach to coaching. Although the leadership coaches were initially resistant to more instruction, it was soon determined the cognitive coaching program reinforced the work they were doing, identifying coaching techniques, validating behaviors, and simplifying the steps of the complex work of coaching. I suggest this is a key finding indicating coaches experienced a transformative learning experience, and became receptive to new ways of interacting with principals.

The literature on transformative learning theory, based on Mezirow's theory, affirms this suggestion. As coaches participated in evolving coaching programs, coaches examined personal beliefs and assumptions through the process of dialoguing, collaboration and reflection. Coaches' comments indicate structural changes occurred within the coaches' epistemology (meaning-making system or way of knowing) so that coaches were able to let go or suspend opinions, former beliefs or values that no longer fit the new, emerging perspectives. The

following section contains the actual words of the coaches that they shared during their interviews about their learning experiences.

Coaches' Thinking about Improving Leadership Coaching Skills

In addition to relating a historical account of the Midwest Coaching Institute's evolving leadership coaching programs, my study also considered coaches' perceptions of their learning experiences as part of the leadership coaching programs. Responses revealed the coaches' experiences with the program evolution pushed the coaches to grow intellectually grow, change perceptions about coaching, and create a network of learners.

The effect of life experiences to guide learning

"You are always a learner," was the frequent comment uttered by all of the leadership coaches, and while each coach expressed an enthusiasm for learning, each saw the value of professional development in their own way. Coach Bill was the most candid, coming from broad life experiences, moving from business to military experience, and, after acquiring three academic degrees, finally determining education was his niche:

> For me, learning is always a growing process. I worked in between degrees, and it allowed me to evaluate what I had learned and how it applied to my job experience. This caused my thinking to change and progress over the years. With leadership coaching, I developed very firm beliefs. For example, if you have not been a building principal, I believe you cannot be effective as a leadership coach. You have to understand the stress and pain in leading a building with its students, teachers, and parents.

That statement led Bill to express criticism of the early academic leadership who lacked personal experience as building administrators, designing professional development programs with direct instruction for coaching practitioners, but failing to provide opportunities for reciprocal dialogue. Coach Bill believed the leadership coaches felt underappreciated, and were not tapped for more input on program design. This finding is contrary to the Institute's perception that the program

was modeled to meet the needs of the leadership coaches based on the program evaluations they received at the conclusion of each training seminar. On the other hand, the finding was consistent with the need for adult learners to self-direct their learning.

For the most part, Coach Ann and Coach Jim had progressed through the traditional chain of educational hierarchy. While experienced as building principals and district administrators, both coaches professed a profound feeling of relief when their coaching commitments did not require them to direct others, and they could now act as resources, aiding and abetting instructional change. Findings suggested all of the coaches understood the necessity of moving flexibly between the roles of being a coach, collaborator, facilitator, and counselor, and felt they had the knowledge and the skill to do so based on their previous administrative experiences. Coach Ann described her ability to change identities. "I'm not a coach 100% of the time. I step out of my coaching role to provide resources or facilitate a meeting. Some days, I switch my identity, and I'm a counselor, I play the role of the listener, but I don't give advice. I weave in and out of identities based on what I am hearing, but I have the skill set to help me facilitate the conversation with whoever needs it." Coaches often referred to "listening with your ears, but hearing from your heart," suggesting an intuitive ability to understand the type of identity necessary to invite productive conversations. However, coaches gained more confidence in shifting their roles and approaches as the Institute developed and matured. Coaching interviews indicated the use of cognitive coaching reinforced the skill of knowing when to change identities, and provided the questioning techniques to push for the transformative change of the principal and team.

Transformative learning

The Coaching School Success (CSS) program validated the coaches' worth, according to the coaches' comments, and helped coaches' understand themselves and their behaviors. By identifying specific coaching behaviors the coaches were already practicing, coaches expressed a new understanding of themselves and how to use the now identified coaching skills when interacting with their clients. These finding support Mezirow's (1978) and Kegan & Lahey's (1984) theories of transformational learning suggesting the coaches had "made sense" of their new learning, and were able to adapt the learning to create a new understanding of the coaching process. The following comments are examples of how coaches made sense of their new learning. "The CSS program provided coherence for what we were doing," shared Coach Bill. Consistent with transformative learning, Coach Bill's comments imply that he was able to interpret his coaching practices in a different way, thus, created a new epistemology for himself. Originally skeptical of organized programming, Bill's perspective on CSS suggested a change in his ability to see how professional development offers opportunities to experience new learning through dialogue, collaboration, and reflection with peers. Coach Jim expressed a concrete example of his sense-making during his involvement with the CSS program by providing an analogy. "The CSS program clarified my thinking about the purpose of my work. Coaching is much like teaching. When you arm yourself with different ways to respond, the better chance you have to affect the life of the student. In coaching, that means more ways to influence the principals' thinking about leadership," reflected Coach Jim. Because coaches developed new epistemologies about coaching, coaches did not appear to have difficulty reconciling coaching programs. When asked if the coaches thought the cognitive approach to coaching conflicted with use of protocols, findings indicated none of the coaches saw a conflict. "Protocols provide a conversation agenda. Cognitive coaching provides the means to expand the thinking of the

participants during the conversation," explained Coach Ann. The reference to expanding the client's thinking implies Coach Ann understood the transformative learning as a process, and saw her role as a mediator of thought.

Collaboration

Coaches practiced the art of listening, paraphrasing, questioning, and reflecting with each other, in groups, and even at home with family members. Role plays offered opportunities to sharpen the skills of coaching, collaborating, facilitating, and consulting. By developing a common language of coaching, coaches indicated there was more open conversation among them as peers, and more of a willingness to collaborate. When asked to explain what that meant, coaches responded by saying they shared experiences and sought the advice of others. "I think we learn together. It's okay to be honest," offered Coach Ann. Coach Jim added, "The tone the Institute has set is that you are learners. You learn from your mistakes." This was a significant finding because earlier interviews indicated coaches did not have a feeling of professional community, were selective about whom they chose to share experiences, and relied heavily on local agencies (e.g., school districts, intermediate school districts) to provide professional interaction.

Findings also suggested a change in collaborative coaching practice sessions. Earlier trainings used video cameras to record coaching simulations, giving the coaches a CD to review at a later time in the privacy of their home. Field notes from follow-up trainings indicated the coaches did not necessarily review the CD, and if they did, it was usually only once following their training. Working in teams, coaches were now issued iPads to record their coaching simulations during the training. Specific times were set aside for the teams to review and critique the videos using their cognitive skills of listening, paraphrasing, and questioning to provide

feedback to each other. Coaches also indicated they were using technology to communicate, and were interested in joining social networks, such as Twitter, to extend their learning. Coach Jim was outspoken on the issue. "Twitter has been taken over by learners. I think it is critical that you become a part of that network. You don't learn alone, and you don't learn coaching alone." Although coaches used e-mail frequently for personal communication, notes from earlier conversations with the coaches indicated they rarely used the Institute's website for information or communication. This finding suggests coaches were more apt use technology when conversations were in real time, and information exchange was direct.

As a summary of the coaches' reflections, coaches used life experience to guide their perceptions of the value of new learning, and used sense-making to decide how the learning would fit their personal schema, given the context of their current coaching situations. Coaches appeared to encounter a personal transformative learning experience when participating in the CSS program. Coaches expressed a new understanding of themselves and a new vision of how they intended to use their identified coaching skills when interacting with their clients. Finally, coaches implied a collaborative community of coaches was emerging, and was enhanced by the convenience of improved technology.

Discussion-Top-down to bottom-up

The study of the professional development for leadership coaches at Midwest Coaching Institute describes the evolution of the program, moving from mentoring the principal to coaching a school team to improve school performance, and finally, implementing a cognitive coaching to mediate thinking of the coaching clients (See Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Evolution of Leadership Coaching Programs

Programs	**Theory**	**Role of the Coach**
Alliance for Building Capabilities in Schools (ABCS)	Schein's (1999) Process mentoring	Expertise
Center of Competent Leadership (CCL)	Schwartz's (1994) Group processing and protocol usage	Facilitative leader
Coaching School Success (CSS)	Costa and Garmston's (1994) Cognitive Coaching Wells and Garmston's (1999) Adaptive Schools	Mediator of thinking

Originally, the ABCS coaching model was based on the process mentoring theory of Edwin Schein (1999). Schein's work, designed to mentor business executives, offered a diagnostic approach to leadership improvement with the leadership coach serving as the expert. According to Schein, the leadership coach would use his expertise to guide the decisions of the executive that would improve organizational practices. Adapting Schein's model, the use of former principals as coaches in the ABCS model was designed to build rapport and establish trusting relationships between the coach and the principal in order to encourage the principal to become the instructional leader for the building, and improve student performance (Bryk and Schneider, 2003). Unlike business executives who sought external help to improve their practices, building principals in underperforming, and sometimes failing, schools were required to participate in the SSSoS), and receive a leadership coach.

Despite a sense of urgency to improve their schools, the study implies principals were not receptive to outside assistance, often believing assistance was an indicator of personal weakness, and thereby publicly signaling their inability to lead their school. If the assigned coach did not have administrative experience in a high poverty, low performing school setting, the principals' reluctance to accept help was particularly accentuated. This finding is indicative of the characteristics of adult learners because adult learners seek new learning experiences by choice, and want to self-direct the learning experience. Participating in a mandatory program left no choice option for learning (Cranton, 1996; Merriam & Caffarella, 2007; Knowles, 1970). Likewise, coaches were uncomfortable posing as experts and expressed dissatisfaction with the Institute's top-down model for them. Coaches encouraged the program design committee to consider an external provider for providing professional development for leadership coaches and principals.

Contracting with CCL proved to be a positive experience for coaches and principals, primarily because of the quality of the presenters, but findings reveal was, once again, was a top-down approach, driven by research-based professional leadership experts in executive education. When the SSoS expanded the school leadership team to include teachers, the CCL activities provided self-awareness activities and protocols (Schwartz, 1994) for the coaches to use when facilitating group work and team building exercises. The study implies the coaches received training prior to presenting the protocols to teams to ensure authentic implementation. Coaches' were comfortable in the role of facilitator, having been former teachers and administrators themselves, and became equal partners in learning and collaboration.

When the Institute's program leadership changed and Dr. Walter arrived, there was a significant shift in the coaching philosophy. Although still encouraging the coaches to

collaborate with principal and leadership teams in CCL activities, Dr. Walters believed the coaches did not possess basic coaching skills, and began to instruct the leadership coaches in cognitive coaching. If principals were to become instructional leaders rather than building managers, she believed it was necessary to "mediate thinking" in order to change the mindsets and beliefs of the principals. This implies the responsibility for shifting beliefs lies with the coachee, with the coach acting as the supporter, not the director, of change.

Findings suggest Dr. Walters' was well aware of adult learning characteristics as she designed her professional development program for coaches (Cranton, 1996; Merriam & Caffarella, 2007; Mezirow, 2000; Knowles, 1970; Speck & Knipe, 2001; Lawler, 2003). She limited the content on theory, provided information in small chunks, and incorporated extensive opportunities for group discussion and reflective activities. Dr. Walters addressed practical applications of coaching by providing sessions on conflict resolution, data-driven instruction, decision-making and problem solving. As a result, coaches were free to actively participate as equal member of the leadership team, and share leadership responsibilities with other team members.

The most significant event occurred when coaches were introduced to Dr. Walters' Coaching School Success (CSS) program. Although meant to be a foundational program on basic cognitive coaching skills, it validated the practices of leadership coaching. By identifying coaching practices by name (e.g., active listening), coaches were able to reflect on personal coaching experiences, and recognize the effective strategies they had already incorporated into their work. This not only verified the coaches' worth, it provided a transformative learning experience for the coaches. It was through this experience that coaches recognized the purpose of their coaching was to guide the principal through his own transformational experience, if

sustainable change were to occur. Findings imply their new learning caused coaches to interact differently with principals by using mediational thinking to encourage reflection and dialogue by the principal. Just as the instructional core provided a common language based on instructional programming and professional community for the principals and coaches, the coaches now shared a common perspective on the process of mediating thinking, and a mutual understanding of why it was important to mediate thinking as a way to promote change. (Mezirow 1978, 1991; Kegan, 1984). Findings suggest sharing a common perspective encouraged coaches to develop a community of practitioners and enhance communication.

Limitations

There are three limitations to my study. First, my sample size of leadership coaches is small, and includes only veteran coaches who had attended the Midwest Coaching Institute for five or more years. Secondly, I selected only the program director that appeared to have the greatest impact on the leadership coaching professional development. Together these facts limit the ability to generalize findings to other types of coaching programs. The third limitation is that my study entails only one coaching institute, and therefore findings cannot be generalized to other types of coaching institutes.

Conclusions and implications

Given leadership coaching in schools is a relatively new phenomenon, professional development for leadership coaches continues to evolve. The purpose of my study was to provide a description of an evolving professional development program for leadership coaches and examine the nature of its content. The study concludes leadership coaches become more effective when they learn how to influence the thinking of the principal to resolve problems

using personal decision-making skills rather than posing as an expert in leadership, and offering problem solutions.

Consistent program development, however, was impacted by the fluctuating demands of the SSoS causing an inability to study any long-term effects of the SSoS leadership coaching programs. Since funding for Midwest Coaching Institute was grant dependent, leadership coaching programs were frequently redesigned to remain consistent with the SSoS requirements and expectations. It became apparent the focus on how to improve underperforming schools was again changing when another state grant provided new money to expand training to include all types of coaches (instructional, literacy, math, data), not just leadership. Successfully completing the foundational coaching skills program, the Coaching Successful Schools (CSS) and passing a written examination raised the stakes on improving schools through the use of coaches. Without certification, coaches could not be hired by school districts to provide instructional services, regardless of past coaching experience. Although reluctant to attend yet another training, leadership coaches were pleasantly surprised to find the program validated their work and provided them with a new understanding of how to use their skills when interacting with their clients. Advanced training in the CSS program allowed additional opportunities for the coaches to perfect skills, partnering with each other for feedback, and thus, building a community of practice. The enhancement of technology appeared to encourage networking among coaching peers.

I suggest further study is required to investigate the continual support of leadership coaching through the Midwest Coaching Institute to determine whether leadership coaching is an effective way to improve high poverty, underperforming schools.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX F

Third Interview for Coaches—Leadership Coaching Programs

Purpose: Understanding how coaches learn and grow through the coaching process, refining their skills, and furthering their understanding of adult learning and organizational change

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Code:
Date:

Thank you for meeting with me today. Our focus today will be on your professional development experiences.

Interview Questions

- Context
    1. What would you say is the value of professional development?
    2. Talk about ways the University's leadership coaching programs contribute to your learning. (*Usefulness of sessions, time commitment, use of time during session, type of material being presented,, facilitation during training, relevance or applicability of topics covered, ease of implementation of content)*
    3. What changes in professional development for leadership coaches have you seen over your time as a coach?
    4. What supplemental trainings have you attended? How do these programs impact your coaching? Describe an effective training for you.
    5. Thinking about the other leadership programs (via ISD, like Teachscape, IFL, state standards), how consistent would you say the goals and strategies are between the various training programs? What differences do you see?
    6. What part does your background experience play in evaluating the value of the professional development training?
- Reflective
    1. What do your employers expect you to know and do?
    2. How are your coaching practices influenced by professional development?
    3. What types of professional trainings challenge your thinking?
    4. Tell me about a training that did not contribute to your professional learning.
    5. What is it like for you to be a learner? How do you prefer to learn? Describe your experiences as adult learner vs. as a student learner.
    6. As a professional in practice, what additional knowledge and skills do you see you need to improve your coaching?
    7. What does a community of practice mean to you?
    8. What type of conversations do you have with your coaching peers? What do you talk about?
    9. What do you learn from each other?

10. How do your conversations support each other? Challenge each other? Inspire each other? Give me an example of a powerful question you might ask each other?
11. In your opinion, do you think a community of learners exists among leadership coaches? What evidence do you have to support your answer?

- Collaboration
    1. What type of professional learning activities offer you the most opportunity to practice your trade? What types of activities do you like best?
    2. How do you adapt your learning to your school settings? What part does your experience play is deciding how to implement your learning to your school settings?
    3. What does adult learning look like in your school setting? Give me an example of team learning.
    4. Who provides support for adult learning? That is,what types of follow-up exists for implementation of instructional strategies?
    5. When your coaching is finished at your school, how do you think adult learning will continue?

This concludes the questions I have for you today. Do you have anything else you would like to add to our conversation?

Thank you for meeting with me. Your willingness to contribute to my research is greatly appreciated. With your permission, I may be contacting you in the future for further clarifications on your responses or to verify any information you have shared. You have my e-mail and phone numbers, if for any reason you need to contact me. Again, thank you for your time and cooperation. It has been my pleasure to work with you.

APPENDIX G

Interview for Program Director—Leadership Coaching Programs

Purpose: Gather information about leadership coaching program

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Code:
Date:

(Show Letter of Informed Consent)

Before I begin, I want to assure you that there are no right answers, and that I will not identify anyone by name, either verbally or in writing, in my analysis and reporting

Do you have any questions before we begin?

(Begin audio recorder.)

Thank you for meeting with me today. Our focus today will be on your professional development experiences.

Interview Questions

1. How did you become involved with coaching?
2. How did you become involved with the current university coaching program?
3. Who designed the current leadership coaching program? Is it theory based? If so, whose theory?
4. When you became the university's program director, what was your vision for the PD program for leadership coaches? What changes did you implement, and why did you choose to make those program changes? What kind of response did you receive from the leadership coaches?
5. Turning to Coaching 101, who designed Coaching 101? Theory based?
6. Tell me about developing PD for adult learners, particularly practicing coaches. How do you design PD to help practicing coaches continue to grow and improve their practices?
7. What activities do you think are most effective to transfer knowledge or strategies to daily situations and school context?
8. How do you provide follow-up to the coaches?

The following questions are logistical.

9. Coaching 101 has expanded. Who are involved as participants now? Who are required to attend? Are there exceptions?
10. What are the costs involved? (Total cost, cost per diem, cost per participant)
11. What kind of grant accountability is expected from you? Who evaluates effectiveness of program?

12. Program design-differentiated levels. Tell me about your Beyond Foundations program? Who is attending? How many participants? Leadership coaches or more? What do you do in your Beyond Foundations program? What guided you in developing the program? What key elements do you think need to be addressed in the program?
13. How do you encourage a professional community among coaches? Using the program's website did not appear to work well initially for communicating according to coaches' survey responses. Are there different methods to promote communication among coaches?
14. How does technology impact coach relations (Skype, networking, instructional videos)?
15. What is the future for coaching?

APPENDIX H

Table 3.2 Observation Guide—Leadership Coaching Programs

	Coach at MPF/MCI-Field notes	School evidence
Contextual knowledge	• Active participation in discussions • Sharing of experiential knowledge	• Job-embedded learning • Focus on student learning and achievement • Instructional core • Instructional coherence
Reflective	• Exhibit of learning style preference • Active listening (attending, observing others, affirming, reflecting, paraphrasing, summarizing) • Interaction with peers • Sharing of experiential knowledge	• Active listening • Interactions w/principal and staff • Sharing of experiential knowledge • Logs
Collaboration	• Participation in videotaping • Participation at table activities and role playing • Participation in team discussions • Number of interferences (cell phone usage) • Use of computer for non-workshop use • Number of times leaving the room	• Participation w/ILT • Participation w/PLC • Team learning • Implementation of PL materials (i.e., protocols, learning walk guides)

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CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall Conclusions

Findings from three different perspectives on leadership coaching—transformative learning, building capacity, and professional development—combine suggesting adult transformative learning is a key to creating change in underperforming schools. The first chapter on transformative learning in adults implies that coaches follow a process to build school teams by encouraging adults to relinquish teacher autonomy, and develop a collective responsibility for student success. Working collaboratively, the team shares common goals based on the instructional core and program coherence, and provides mutual support to improve instructional practices.

The second chapter on building the capacity of the principal to lead underperforming schools indicates coaches facilitated and supported principals' thinking as the principals changed their perspective on leadership from being a building manager to being a leader of instruction. This transformation suggests principals became more involved with instructional practices, and teachers became more involved in decision-making processes. Leading through collaboration appeared to empower the principal and teacher leaders to focus on student performance and school improvement. On the other hand, further evidence from this study implies administrative turnover could negatively impact changes made in underperforming schools, if the new administrative philosophy does not concur with current building practices.

The third chapter on professional development for experienced coach implies coaches experience transformative learning when the focus of the coaching program changes and causes coaches to rethink their beliefs about coaching. The study provides evidence that leadership

coaching practices changed from expert to facilitator to mediator of thinking as the coaches devised ways to make sense of their new learning in order to better serve their clients.

Key Implications

Findings confirm leadership coaching, as provided by the Midwest University training site, is effective for underperforming schools, and suggests it is the leadership coach who mediates the process of changing underperforming, dysfunctional schools to functional entities by developing a culture of collaboration that promotes transformative adult learning. According to evidence provided by coaches' voice, coaching is necessary at the building level because that is where the changes must occur. It is the student who is the focus of school improvement. It is the student who must achieve. It is the responsibility of the principals and teachers, as a team, to help students achieve academic success. State standards and mandates can and will change, but my research suggests it is the presence of a leadership coach who guides underperforming school teams to bridge or buffer external requirements, and enables teams to learn how to resolve student performance issues collaboratively through the establishment of a professional learning community. It is the professional learning community that enhances the chance to sustain changes within the context of the school. This leads to a second implication.

The second implication addresses leadership stability, and the need to revise administrative training for aspiring principals. Leadership stability, particularly that of the building principal, strengthens the sustainability of positive changes and supports the school as a unit focused on student improvement. My study suggests constant turnovers in building principals shatter the possibility of sustained change in underperforming because new leaders often retain traditional beliefs about principals as building managers, not instructional leaders. While it is not realistic to retrain all veteran principals to become instructional leaders, this study

points to the need for colleges and universities preparing aspiring principals to address the instructional core, program coherence, professional community, and environmental influences as a leadership framework necessary to sustain school improvement changes. Using the concept of shared leadership and shared decision-making as the norm for a functional school philosophy, I suggest aspiring school principals be trained as collaborative team members rather than institutional, authority figures. Understanding the concept of team empowerment and sharing common goals focused on student achievement maximizes the potential of the principal to be an instructional leader.

The final implication from this study, given that leadership coaches appears to be an effective method to improve underperforming schools and student performance, suggests professional development for leadership coaches must continue to be an on-going process. Coaching strategies evolve as the school leaders' needs change. The study indicates that, while coaches are professionally supported through a community of practice, evolving technology is enhancing access to professional development. Online training modules, online training videos, interactive websites, and social networks are now available to support coaches' learning. At present, though, the effectiveness of online training for leadership coaches is unclear, and suggests that further research be conducted on its impact.

On a concluding note, it should be recognized the implementation of leadership coaches in school districts requires significant financial investment. The question becomes whether districts are willing and able to allocate adequate resources for the program. The process to make cost vs. value decisions indicates the need for additional research on the enactment of a leadership program, the impact of program on improving instructional quality, and ultimately, the impact on the learning and performance of the student.