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## Principal Perceptions of Effective Performance Coaching: A Case Study

Kimberly A. Starr  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

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Principal Perceptions of Effective Performance Coaching: A Case Study

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Adult and Lifelong Learning

by

Kimberly A. Starr  
University of Mary Hardin Baylor  
Bachelor of Arts in Education, 1992  
University of Central Arkansas  
Master of Science in Leadership, Management, and Administration, 2006  
University of Central Arkansas  
Educational Specialist in School Administration, 2009

May 2021  
University of Arkansas

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Kit Kacirek, Ed.D.  
Dissertation Director

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Kenda Grover, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

---

Teresa Ray, Ph.D.  
Ex-Officio Member

---

Michael Miller, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

## **Abstract**

This qualitative case study focused on the effectiveness of leadership coaching and its impact on school principals' professional growth. Through an in-depth interview process with eight principals, perceptions regarding their leadership or performance coach's effectiveness were explored using the CLEAR Coaching Model as a conceptual framework. Participants shared experiences through participation in the School Support Program hosted by the Arkansas Leadership Academy. Five significant themes emerged from this study: 1) the coaching relationship impacts effectiveness, 2) a working alliance is needed to ensure desired outcomes, 3) understanding school culture and current reality are necessary before coaching can begin, 4) the coach's ability to ask questions influences the perception of success in the coaching experience, and 5) professional learning experiences with the addition of a coach are more successful.

## **Acknowledgements**

There are several people I would like to recognize and thank for their assistance through this dissertation journey! But first, I give all glory and honor to my savior, Jesus Christ. My husband, Edwin, has been my rock and support system. He was patient and kind when I spent nine hours or more glued to a computer to complete this dissertation. There is no way I could thank him enough for his love and care! My children, Zachary and Bethany, continually encouraged me, and Bethany was monumental with the data analysis through a code she wrote just for me. I also want to recognize my grandparents' and parents' contributions and thank them all for giving me their best.

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**Many, many thanks to all!**

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Jack Klotz, who was a leader among leaders in his field. Dr. Klotz was a UCA professor who saw something in me that I sure did not see in myself. He decided early on that I needed to get a doctorate, and after graduating with my Master's and then Specialist, he said, "One more to go." Sadly, he passed away shortly after and will not share this graduation with me, but I think he may be grinning from above!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

School principals are central to the national discussion on high-stakes testing and student achievement in public schools. Studies show that school success is correlated with the principal's or instructional leader's performance and belief system about leadership and student achievement (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Costello, 2015; Dhuey & Smith, 2018; Sebastian et al., 2016). Since principals are responsible for the entire educational program in their schools, they must possess the knowledge and skill to implement educational reform while improving student achievement (Veelen et al., 2017). However, learning how to be an instructional leader may not be adequately taught in preparation programs or professional development opportunities (Bossi, 2008; Gray, 2018; Vogel, 2018; Wise & Cavazos, 2017). Many times, principals indicate that they could benefit from professional development, resources, and support for their role as instructional leaders (Koonce et al., 2019; Rogers et al., 2016).

In this chapter, the background and context of this study examining the relationship between performance coaching and the professional development of principals are discussed. Also, this chapter presents the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and its' significance. The research questions that guide this study, the research approach, and my role as a researcher are discussed. The chapter concludes with the definitions of key terminology and a summary.

### **Background and Context of the Study**

The Arkansas Leadership Academy, housed at the University of Arkansas, was established in 1991 to provide training services in leadership development for certified school personnel in the state of Arkansas (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). In response to low achievement scores and the need for high-quality instructional leaders, the Arkansas Leadership Academy was tasked to design a program for low-performing schools that supplied professional

learning experiences and onsite coaching to improve practice. The Arkansas Leadership Academy's Intensive School Support for Low-Performing Schools Program debuted in 2001. It was among the recommended school improvement programs for districts and schools designated by the Arkansas Department of Education as being in school improvement. Schools were identified as a result of low student achievement in their overall population, and the various subgroups served. As a result of two reauthorizations in 2005 and again in 2009, the program was renamed the School Support Program. Currently, the School Support Program is part of Act 222, titled An Act To Strengthen Arkansas Educational Leadership Development (2009).

A hallmark of this program was the combined professional learning experiences and weekly onsite coaching that provided the school leader with tools intended to facilitate system-wide improvement. When the program began, selected schools received funding from the Arkansas Department of Education to use toward the cost of supporting their improvement efforts. Schools that chose to work with the School Support Program entered into a Professional Assistance Agreement using funding from the state. Since the program's inception, the requirement for inclusion has changed, and schools no longer must be low-performing to take advantage of it. This change allowed schools that performed at or above state achievement standards to participate in the Arkansas Leadership Academy's professional development initiatives. Consequently, all schools in Arkansas had an opportunity to participate in a Professional Assistance Agreement with the School Support Program.

There are a various reasons a school principal may have chosen to participate in the School Support Program. Principals who were struggling professionally or had low-performing schools may have desired assistance or were encouraged to participate by their superintendent. Some principals had participated in other Arkansas Leadership Academy programs and

initiatives and wanted to continue to improve their leadership capacity and enhance the leadership development of their teachers. The School Support Program offered a principal both professional learning and onsite performance coaching to guide their work. Because of the variation in reasons to join the School Support Program, there tended to be a full range from beginning to experienced principals represented.

When a principal began their journey with the School Support Program, they were assigned a performance coach. The Arkansas Leadership Academy employed performance coaches who demonstrated success as principals, meaning they were able to lead their school well and improved student achievement effectively. Most potential coaches participated in programs or institutes hosted by the Arkansas Leadership Academy and were already familiar with the Leadership Development System, the rubric for professional learning experiences. Once hired, performance coaches were assigned a mentor and had job-embedded training throughout their first year. Performance Coaches were placed in schools using factors such as the region of the state, expertise of the coach, and disposition of the client. Principals had an opportunity to evaluate the School Support Program and their coach at the end of each year through satisfaction surveys. When the contract was renewed, principals and superintendents could request continued services or a change in programming or coach.

The principal and leadership team of each newly contracted school participated in a “Kick-Off” event where they met their coach and learned the foundational models, tools, and processes on which the Leadership Development System was founded. The coach led the team through a comprehensive needs assessment and the construction of a strategic action plan in the areas identified for school improvement. The strategic action plan encompassed school vision, culture for learning, managing change, teaching and learning, and accountability systems. During

the school year, the principal participated in learning experiences such as Master Principal and Leadership Team Institute provided through the Arkansas Leadership Academy, and the professional development required by the state and district. The performance coach provided onsite support for the principal as they planned and implemented new learning. The School Support Program offered services using proven methods for empowering educators to improve student outcomes. These methods included collective decision-making tools, problem-solving through root cause analysis, actionable feedback for improving teacher instruction, and progress monitoring systems. Working with the principal, the performance coach supported building leadership capacity that embraced the principal, teachers, students, and the community in positive change aimed at enhanced student outcomes. Through the professional learning experiences, guidance in leadership development, encouragement of shared decision-making, and problem-solving methods, supported by the coach, the School Support Program provided school leaders with the strategies they needed to create system-wide improvement for student achievement (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020).

### **Client Expectations and Role**

Contracting between a client and coach is the beginning stage of developing a coaching relationship. During this time, the coach played a significant role in developing a working alliance, personal rapport, and agreement on goals (Gettman et al., 2019). To begin the contracting stage with the School Support Program, clients participated in an opening session that explained the program's services and the role of the performance coach. There were multiple definitions for coaching found in the literature; however, James-Ward's (2013) definition that described coaching as an ongoing process between a principal and outside coach who assists in reaching goals and increasing leadership capacity aligned closely with the current role of a

performance coach. Performance coaching is focused on facilitating learning, development, and the performance of the person being coached (Lennard, 2010; 2013). Specifically, “Coaching is about helping people learn, rather than teaching them” (Cook, 2009, p. 12).

Typically, principals who chose to enter a Professional Assistance Agreement with the School Support Program participated in other Arkansas Leadership Academy programs and were familiar with the work. Primarily, principals who attended the Master Principal Program were those who sought to obtain services. The Master Principal Program is a three-year professional learning experience for school leadership development (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). Therefore, clients were familiar with the Arkansas Leadership Academy’s School Support Program and had expectations that aligned with the program’s purpose.

The Performance Coach was responsible for assisting the principal in developing a personal learning plan according to assessed school needs and professional growth goals (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). Creating this plan required trust; therefore, the coach must build a collaborative relationship where clear, honest feedback was provided for improved performance (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). The literature lists common expectations for coaches: relationship building, problem defining and solving, goal setting, supporting, questioning, and reflecting practices (Carey et al., 2011; Cook, 2009; Hawkins & Smith, 2013; Wise & Cavazos, 2017). “Coaching was found to provide principals with a safe person to talk with and a supportive thought partner when making difficult work decisions” (Celoria & Roberson, 2015, p. 91).

The learning plan was revisited at each coaching session, and progress was noted. As areas of growth and challenges were identified, the performance coach planned their visits to address those needs. A performance coach would often conduct classroom observations with the

principal to assess instruction and student learning and would also support the school's leadership team as they provided direction through the school's core beliefs, vision, and mission (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). The premise of the work with a performance coach was that learning occurs naturally through the context of the work (Lennard, 2010; 2013).

### **Research Problem Statement**

The School Support Program consisted of professional development experiences and onsite performance coaching for the leadership development of principals. Paramount to the program's success was the implementation of new learning when the principal returned to the school; therefore, the performance coach visited the school weekly to follow-up and support plans for implementation (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). Data from satisfaction surveys that the Arkansas Leadership Academy used to assess the coaching engagement's success indicated that the principals' perceptions of the coaches' effectiveness varied. The principal position is multifaceted when allowing for the whole school system's management, including personnel, budgets, and day-to-day operations. Additionally, a principal is the school's instructional leader, ensuring all students are provided with an opportunity to achieve at high levels. The responsibility to teachers, staff, students, and families can be overwhelming. Performance coaches needed to know best practices to engage them. "Today good coaches are keenly aware that the sustainability of this emerging coaching field is contingent on the positive results created in the work of coaching with individuals, teams, and organizations" (McLean, 2012, pp. 6-7).

Literature in the field of workplace and specifically principal coaching discussed outcomes for the leader and explained the positive effects coaching has on professional growth and leadership practice (Goff et al., 2014; James-Ward, 2013; Jones et al., 2015). Surprisingly,



there was little research that explored attributes, specific qualities, and behaviors of the coach that contributed to these outcomes. This study was conducted to understand and describe the effective performance coach through the perceptions of principals who participated in the School Support Program.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this single-case study was to explore how principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching. Specifically, this study examined coaching behaviors, attributes, and activities that principals perceived as beneficial to their professional development. This study included principals from across the state of Arkansas who took part in the three-year School Support Program hosted by the Arkansas Leadership Academy. Understanding how principals interpreted and responded to a coaching intervention could provide insight into the user experience; an experience that is critical to meeting the School Support Program goals. Additionally, this research could inform the performance coach training providers about the behaviors and skills necessary to provide effective coaching and professional development in the School Support Program.

### **Research Questions**

This research study explored how principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching. For this research, effective performance coaching was defined as qualities, attributes, or factors that contribute to a school principal's leadership development. The primary research question that guided the study was: How do principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching? The five sub-questions:

- How do principals explain the purpose of performance coaching?
- How do principals explain the role of the performance coach?

- What behaviors/qualities of the coach do principals believe contribute to an effective coaching relationship?
- How do principals describe the evolution of the coaching relationship?
- How do principals describe their experience with performance coaching?

### **Research Approach**

This case study focused on principals who were a bounded system through participation in a completed School Support Program (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A single-case study design with embedded units of analysis was appropriate as an in-depth investigation of more than one principal's perceptions of effective performance coaching in the School Support Program was conducted (Yin, 2018).

The social constructivist interpretive framework explains reality as socially constructed; that is to say, there are different interpretations of the same event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Social constructivism posits that individuals develop meaning and understanding from their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In Adams' (2006) exploration of social constructivism, the construction of learning is a product of social interaction. Moreover, since social constructivists posit that learning originates in a social context and is best when there is a social aspect, I connected the principals' perceptions of what was gained or experienced through the process of interaction between the principal and performance coach (Bryceson, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Conceptual tools or models are useful in learning about the ongoing effectiveness of coaching (Lennard, 2010; 2013). This study explored how principals perceive effectiveness in performance coaching. To categorize the data collected, the CLEAR Coaching Model was

utilized. The CLEAR Coaching Model emphasizes the coaching relationship and is goal-oriented in design using five stages: *Contract*, *Listen*, *Explore*, *Action*, and *Review* (Cook, 2009; Hawkins & Smith, 2013). Through the model's stages, clarity on the coach's role and an avenue for assistance were provided (Cook, 2009). Hawkins and Smith (2013) based this coaching model on Mezirow's work around psychological processes for adult learning and changed behavior. They believed that following the CLEAR process provided the needed sequence to achieve the coachee's desired goals through transformational coaching sessions (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). In his book on Coaching Models, Lennard (2010; 2013) related the CLEAR Coaching Model to situated learning theory as it considers learning naturally from participation in daily life and in solving real problems.

Study participants were interviewed using a three-phase approach that included preconceived notions of coaching, experience during coaching, and the lasting impact of coaching. The five stages of the CLEAR Coaching Model organized obtained data according to the stages. In the *Contract stage*, foundations of the coaching relationship are built, and through the *Listen stage*, the coach clarifies needs and determines the appropriate coaching process. While in the *Explore stage*, current behaviors and options for change are considered, and during the *Action stage*, a realistic plan for change is developed. Finally, the *Review stage* is an opportunity for reflection on actions taken and the coaching relationship (Cook, 2009). The CLEAR Coaching Model fit this research well. It was an operational structure for individual coaching sessions and provided a process framework to organize descriptions of coaching effectiveness through participant responses (McLean, 2012).

## **Case Study Research**

This research was a single-case study exploring the School Support Program's coaching element in order to understand how principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching. Therefore, case study research was applicable because this study's focus was to understand a complex social phenomenon through the exploration of the research questions (Yin, 2018). "A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). The participants in this study embodied a bounded system by their completion of the School Support Program, which typically lasted three years. In summary, a case study was chosen due to the nature of the research questions, the bounded system of principals, and the fact that the researcher had little or no control over the participants (Yin, 2018).

## **Participants**

The study's targeted population was those principals who took part in a completed School Support Program. School Support Professional Assistance Agreements were typically a three-year commitment, although schools have participated longer. After sending and receiving responses from those who qualified for the study, eight participants agreed to interview. A three-phase approach was used to gather data about their coaching expectations before the engagement, their impressions during the coaching cycle, and their reflections following the process. This three-phase inquiry allowed the participants to describe their entire experience and enabled patterns of meaning and categories to be determined by collecting data (Creswell, 2013).

Data were obtained through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted through an internet application or by phone. As an employee of the Arkansas Leadership Academy, I had

access to the Arkansas Leadership Academy database of past participants, and a journal was used to maintain interview notes and observations.

### **The Researcher**

I have served in education for the past 27 years as a teacher, preschool director, assistant principal, and principal in Texas and Arkansas. More recently, I had the opportunity to be both a principal and a performance coach. I have been affiliated with the Arkansas Leadership Academy since participating in the Master Principal Program during my tenure as an elementary principal. I witnessed firsthand the Leadership Development System and implemented the tools and processes presented to develop leadership capacity and increase student achievement. Understanding that the School Support Program's professional experiences can produce a positive outcome, I wanted to explore principals' perceptions of effective performance coaching as an essential element of programming.

I begin my coaching sessions with school leaders by asking the question, "What's on your mind?" Known by Stanier (2016) as the "Kickstart Question," it sets the stage for discussing what is exciting, pressing, or a source of anxiety. It is useful because it is an open question that elicits a range of responses allowing for a starting place for the coaching visit (Stanier, 2016). I have the opportunity to work with these leaders since I am employed as a performance coach for the Arkansas Leadership Academy's School Support Program. I work onsite with principals to deliver point-in-time coaching and negotiate professional development implementation through various learning experiences. The question I keep asking myself is, "Am I effective?" To confirm positive results from a coaching experience, the principal has to believe that the coach's abilities or characteristics contributed to their leadership development. That is why I have chosen this topic around perceptions of effective coaching. First and foremost, it is

essential to the field of school leadership coaching, and it is also important to me as a professional.

### **Researcher Assumptions**

The primary qualifications for working as a performance coach in the School Support Program were as follows: proven successful leadership as a building level principal, a master's degree, and certification in building-level leadership (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). Successful leadership was further defined as proof of raising student achievement and developing a positive school culture. These qualities were gathered in the interview process through documentation of state achievement scores and personal and professional references.

These assumptions reflect what I held to be true as I began this study. These were not a source of bias; however, they were part of the inquiry as the study unfolded and reflection at the end of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Based on my experience as a principal and my background as a performance coach, I brought four assumptions to this study:

1. The School Support Program was a combination of professional development and onsite coaching. This assumption recognized that this adult learning creates an opportunity for improved leadership. Through the coaching process, action plans were constructed for positive change in leadership skills and the school's systems. It is unrealistic for student achievement scores alone to serve as an evaluation of improved principal performance or effective coaching.
2. A principal has to be willing to change for the coaching process to be successful. This assumption was based on the premise that people control their willingness to be coached. Clients can avoid visits, choose not to follow through, or even distort information into something that already fits with what they are doing.

3. Being a successful principal does not ensure effectiveness as a coach. Experience from our team illustrated this assumption. A highly successful principal was hired as a performance coach yet was unable to transition from being in charge to guiding, questioning, and listening to principals. The shift from supervisor to coach is not natural for all who have been leaders, and as a result, principals reported a lack of effectiveness.
4. Principal development and change depend on leadership support in the superintendent or district office. This assumption acknowledged that principal growth was predicated on district structure and building-level autonomy. Principals are not independent entities; therefore, they cannot effectively implement change processes or structures that are counter to the leadership above them. Lasting change cannot occur despite district leadership; it must be in conjunction with that leadership.

### **Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The position of principal has become one of the most complex in the school business. As instructional leaders, principals are responsible for their school's educational program, which is in addition to their role as building managers (Veelen et al., 2017). With this amount of responsibility, principals are not always adequately prepared to perform their duties and need additional support (Gray, 2018). One opportunity for that needed support, discussed in the literature, is the addition of a building-level leadership coach (Bossi, 2008; Lytle, 2009). This study explored how principals construct their perception of effective leadership or performance coaching and how that coaching impacted their overall growth as principals. Through these

findings, attributes or factors that contributed to the leadership development of a school principal surfaced, providing a deeper understanding of effective performance coaching.

Performance coaches in the School Support Program currently do not receive specific training on coaching models, behaviors, or techniques. Training consisted of managerial aspects of the position, such as frequency of visits, required documents, and monthly reporting. Increased understanding of behaviors, qualities, and techniques perceived by principals as effective in the coaching relationship will contribute needed insight into the ongoing development of performance coaches in the School Support Program. Findings will be used to improve coaching practices and services through the School Support Program and expand recruitment efforts for performance coaches and prospective schools. Moreover, this study's results could provide data to strengthen principal practice and supply evidence for districts to determine whether a coaching model is warranted for improved leadership development and performance.

### **Definitions of Key Terminology Used in This Study**

The following terms and definitions are central to the context of this case study:

1. *Principal*: A full-time, state-licensed school leader who participated in a three-year contract with the School Support Program (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). An official who is responsible for an educational program (Veelen, et al., 2017).
2. *Performance Coach*: An experienced leader who visits the school weekly to facilitate leadership development and follow-up with professional development implementation (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). Ongoing process between



a principal and outside coach who assists in reaching goals and increasing leadership capacity (James-Ward, 2013).

3. *Arkansas Leadership Academy*: A statewide partnership that was established in 1991 to support and provide learning experiences for different leadership roles through a Leadership Development System (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020).
4. *School Support Program*: A building (school) level initiative that works to provide support with proven methods for empowering educators in their efforts to improve student outcomes and to build leadership capacity that embraces positive change (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020).
5. *Professional Development*: A comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach aligned to state standards and local initiatives conducted by well-prepared professionals that support ongoing engagement in a continuous cycle of improvement (Learning Forward, 2010).
6. *Instructional Leadership*: What a principal does to impact classroom practice and promote student learning (Vogel, 2018). The methods or strategies principals use to increase student achievement by developing shared responsibility, leadership capacity, and strong teachers (Costello, 2015).

### **Summary of Chapter One**

In this chapter, the study's background was outlined, and the School Support Program was described as a combination of professional learning experiences and onsite coaching. Client expectations for coaching were discussed, and information on how coaches are trained and placed was presented. The problem statement revealed how the study would examine the

behaviors and attributes principals perceive are integral to a sustainable coaching relationship, and the purpose of the study discussed the need for additional data into how principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching. A primary research question was given with five sub-questions explored in this study. The research approach discussed the need for a single-case study design and a three-phase inquiry that allowed participants to describe their experience through interviews fully. The CLEAR Coaching Model was introduced as the conceptual framework used to categorize and analyze data.

I discussed my background as a researcher and revealed and explained four assumptions as the study began. The study's rationale and significance provided insight into potential contributions to coaching school leaders and training performance coaches. Definitions for principal, performance coach, Arkansas Leadership Academy, School Support Program, professional development, and instructional leadership were provided, as noted in the literature and as they were used specifically for this study.

## Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

### **An Opportunity for Principals**

The purpose of this study was to explore how principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching. This study aimed to examine coaching behaviors, attributes, and activities that principals perceived as beneficial to their professional development. A feature of the School Support Program was the combination of professional learning experiences and onsite coaching. Principals who participated in the School Support Program have indicated varying effectiveness levels in performance coaches, with some identified as more effective than others. This case study explored how these perceptions were constructed to inform the Arkansas Leadership Academy's School Support Program how principals perceive this experience so training, hiring processes, and recruitment efforts can be improved. Executive or leadership coaching has been utilized and studied in the business world since around 1990 (Gettman et al., 2019; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008; Losch et al., 2016). Studies on coaching principals were more recent and were inclined to describe the benefits of having a coach as opposed to financial gain (Houchens et al., 2016; James-Ward, 2013). The research focused on principal coaching structures, and coaching results will be outlined later in this chapter.

The review of literature began with competencies related to instructional leadership. The competencies that were discussed include: the ability to create a vision for student learning, the ability to create a positive setting for learning, the ability to develop teachers, and the ability to supervise school curriculum and instruction. The role of professional development in supporting instructional leaders was reviewed as well as current research on best practices associated with performance coaching, the coaching relationship, and how coaching principals are unique. The

chapter ends with a discussion of a conceptual tool for data analysis and a summary of major themes and conclusions.

### **Search Strategy**

Sources were retrieved based on the scholarly nature, empirical value, and relevance to the topic. Six databases were utilized: Emerald Insight, JSTOR, ERIC/EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and databases offered through the University of Arkansas Libraries. Search terms included: *instructional leadership, principal leadership, executive coaching and leadership, coaching principals, coaching for principals and administrators, coaching, coaches, coaching leadership, coaching for leadership development, coaching relationship, coaching models, CLEAR Coaching Model, professional development, continuing education, training, professional learning, participation in professional development, principal professional development, professional development for principals or school leaders, principal effectiveness, social constructivism theory, empathy in leadership, Arkansas Leadership Academy, and School Support Program*. Additional resources were retrieved by examining reference lists in related articles.

### **Principal as School Leader**

In today's school environment, a principal's workload and accountability measures are multifaceted, demanding, and, many times, overwhelming (Wise & Jacobo, 2010). Literature divided a principal's responsibilities between management and instructional leadership tasks; meanwhile, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) defined ten standards that encompassed them both. Put simply; principals are responsible for the overall functioning of their school. Typical duties include improving the students' education, supervising and evaluating teachers, assigning classrooms, scheduling, monitoring student conduct, providing

student services, recommending hires and dismissals, implementing policy, budgeting, and working with parents (Costello, 2015; Dhuey & Smith, 2018). In *The Boss of the Whole School* (2006), Hebert explains, “A principal’s day is characterized by interacting with hundreds of constituents and coping with events of all magnitudes that necessitate immediate decisions, crisis management, and constant watchfulness” (p. 16).

School systems across the United States recognize the importance of leadership in their schools and work to build a pool of qualified principals and processes to fully support them throughout their tenure (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). Many principals have to navigate their position with little or no experience leading adults. As Bossi (2008) articulates, “An enormous issue forgotten by many, however, is that leading adults in an educational setting is a whole different deal than teaching children in a classroom” (p. 31). The principal supervises all school operations; however, district personnel is increasingly taking a more hands-on approach to support principals (Baker & Bloom, 2017). Still, a principal is accountable to district personnel, the school board, and community partnerships (Hoppey & McKleskey, 2013).

The importance of instructional leadership is often addressed when considering the qualities of an effective school leader (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Instructional leadership has been defined in various ways since the 1980s, when it became apparent that principals can positively influence student outcomes through their leadership (Bush, 2015). A working definition of instructional leadership is anything a leader does to improve instruction and student learning (Costello, 2015). Results from qualitative and quantitative studies have found that the competencies needed for successful instructional leadership include: the ability to create a vision for student learning, the ability to create a positive learning environment, the ability to develop the capacity of teachers, and the ability to supervise curriculum and instruction within their

schools (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Hoppey & McKleskey, 2013; Marzano et al., 2018; Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015).

### **Vision for Student Learning**

Creating a vision for student learning is more than just a statement; principals must genuinely believe in what is possible and share their conviction with the school community (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). When that shared conviction is present, the vision provides energy, direction, and purpose (Drysdale et al., 2016). Wise and Jacobo (2010) stated that the principal's vision for students and adults is an essential element of success and Küger et al. (2007) noted that the vision has a substantial impact on behavior and strategy. Successful principals understand that school leadership matters and pride themselves in being ethically and morally responsible for their students and teachers (Garza et al., 2014). Quality principals embrace a vision of educational ideals (Hsin-Hsiang & Mao-neng, 2015).

In the article, "How High-Poverty Schools Are Getting It Done," Chenoweth and Theokas (2013) discussed findings from their study of school principals serving in poverty schools. They found that principals who were successful in high-poverty, diverse schools shared the belief that all students could achieve and that the school is responsible for making it happen. Their study included 33 principals whose schools were approximately 75% low socio-economic status and 73% children of color. Nevertheless, achievement levels were comparable to middle-class schools, and some were among the top in their state. These principals believed their students could achieve, demanded rigorous performance standards, and emphasized excellence over mediocrity.

Ross and Cozzens (2016) found similar results in their quantitative study of teacher perceptions of principal leadership. Participating teachers reported that strong leaders should be

consistent and have a clear and compelling plan. They determined the principal could then build trust and support to organize people to accomplish the goals of the plan. Successful principals are unwavering in their vision for high student achievement and monitor what leads to success and what can be learned from failure (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013).

### **Learning Environment**

The principal's ability to create a robust learning environment is essential to student learning. Principals build a positive learning culture through their personality traits, attitudes, and behaviors around teaching and learning (Hsin-Hsiang & Mao-neng, 2015). Principals who are instructional leaders develop a setting that supports learning and builds relationships between them and their teachers (Hoppey & McKleskey, 2013). They create schedules and procedures that maximize instruction and collaboration time for teachers and build positive relationships and trust (Bush, 2015; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). Those relationships develop through exemplified professionalism and knowledge of the importance of cultural diversity (Ross & Cozzens, 2016; Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015).

In Taylor-Backor and Gordon's (2015) study, they identified the importance of a principal's cultural awareness knowledge. Teachers, according to their study, emphasized that principals should start with a better understanding of their own culture and then pursue learning about and increasing their understanding of other cultures. In Hsin-Hsiang and Mao-neng's (2015) qualitative study on the link between principal leadership and teacher culture development, it was apparent that principals must have excellent communication skills and be culture builders with genuine care and concern for teachers. Their study found that teaching excellence could only be achieved through a school culture of praise, openness, collaboration, and consideration for teachers.

Ross and Cozzens' (2016) conducted a quantitative study of teacher perceptions of principal leadership using a behavior inventory. Their premise was that instructional leaders influence student achievement through their connection to teachers and the ability to address quality classroom instruction. They found that effective school leaders shared responsibility with teacher teams through improved organizational structures and shared concern around student data. Overall they concluded, "When teachers positively perceived their principals' leadership, they were also more likely to have positive perceptions of their school's climate" (Ross & Cozzens, 2016, p. 171). Hoppey and McKleskey (2013) and Bush (2015) concluded that the principal's role is to improve teachers' and students' lives by supporting, listening, trusting, and caring for people through a nurturing community.

### **Teacher Development**

The ability to develop teachers is more than the act of supervising and evaluating. Principals have to be learners of best instructional practices and provide actionable feedback from classroom observations to support teachers adequately (Vogel, 2018). Principal leadership must be effective for successfully implementing change (Chang et al., 2017). In their quantitative study to consider the relationship between a principal's change style and teacher professional development, Chang et al. (2017) determined that a principal's skill in making meaningful change affects teacher willingness to participate in and implement new learning from professional development.

Teachers' successful development is often the determining factor in a successful school as they are the next largest group, after students. Principals, therefore, should have a long-term commitment to teacher growth (Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015). Principals cannot do the work in isolation; they must support their teams and share responsibility (Ross & Cozzens, 2016).



Through a long-term commitment to teacher growth, effective principals can guide teachers in developing personal instructional improvement plans (Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015). When principals take the time to build teacher capacity, teachers excel and contribute to and lead professional development while the principal creates a school where excellent teachers want to continue teaching (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013).

Instructional leaders visit classrooms and provide feedback; they share resources and ideas at meetings and nurture an environment for peer sharing and observation (Costello, 2015). They promote a common language for use during classroom observations and ask questions about what was seen, what it meant, and what they as leaders need to learn more about (Moss & Brookhart, 2013). According to Garza et al. (2014), the strategic principal has a strategic focus on developing teacher leadership capacity over a sustained period. As an instructional leader, the principal should enhance teacher growth through high-quality professional development and opportunities for teacher leadership (Hoppey & McKleskey, 2013).

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

Principals must understand and support what and how students should learn. This is known as curriculum and instruction. Supervising the instructional program requires a principal to be skilled in curriculum development and knowledgeable about effective instruction. Marzano et al. (2018) define curriculum as being both guaranteed and viable. A guaranteed curriculum is the specific course and content presented that students are expected to learn regardless of the teacher. In other words, each student should have the opportunity to learn the same content in grade levels and across subject areas. Viable is defined as adequate time and resources to teach the curriculum (Marzano et al., 2018). Therefore, principals need to assess and improve

curriculum and focus on the school's instructional program as a whole, not just individual teachers (Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015).

The importance of assessing and improving curriculum was confirmed through two quantitative studies that examined a principal's influence on achievement scores and student learning. Sebastian et al. (2016) found that principals directly influenced instruction and achievement by supporting teacher leadership through a safe climate, enabling teachers to do their work. Dhuey & Smith (2018) examined the principal's effect on reading and math achievement from a different lens by examining the principal's effectiveness and how well matched the principal was to the school. They concluded, "Thus, even modest changes in the quality of the principal, all else equal, can produce appreciable gains in student quality" (p. 876).

School leaders are responsible for monitoring the curriculum by examining lesson plans and conducting classroom observations (Marzano et al., 2018). Taylor-Backor and Gordon (2015) concluded that principals should be able to identify effective instruction through observation and possess conferencing skills, and establish positive interpersonal relationships with their teachers. Working with teachers to develop curriculum and participating in data analysis is among the many identified instructional leadership skills (Vogel, 2018). To summarize, "Although leadership for the improvement of instruction should include teachers, it begins with the school principal as the leader of leaders" (Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015, p. 123).

### **Professional Development for Principals**

Principals are gatekeepers of professional development for teachers in their schools and are often not equipped to choose appropriate options for their teacher's needs due to a deficiency in their own professional development (Brown & Militello, 2016). As a result, principals

sometimes lack confidence as well as competence and have indicated a need for professional development, resources, and support to enhance their skills of leadership (Koonce et al., 2019). Principals taking part in programs designed to enhance leadership practices and affect student achievement have had mixed results.

Professional development for school leaders can take many forms. Veelen et al. (2017) identified four platforms for principals' professional development: workplace development, informal development, personal reflection, and external feedback. Their research revealed that onsite professional development embedded within the school environment rather than another location and principals who were driven by personal motivation contributed to the effective implementation of educational change (Veelen et al., 2017). In other words, principals who are motivated to keep learning themselves tend to create quality learning environments for others. Another noteworthy finding was the need for best practice or skill-based professional learning experiences directly related to a current working situation and, subsequently, research into the impact of those experiences (Veelen et al., 2017).

In contrast, a study administered by the University of Washington included 100 principals from lower-performing elementary schools who participated for two years in 188 hours of professional development primarily focused on instructional leadership (Herrmann et al., 2019). The research team based this study on the theory that improving instructional leadership practices would, in turn, improve teacher and student outcomes. Although results were disappointing regarding a direct effect on student achievement or teacher outcomes, conclusions showed the difficulty inherent in successfully changing principal leadership practices. Additionally, there was limited evidence supporting the notion that professional development on

instructional leadership components could improve principal practice, teacher performance, and student achievement (Herrmann et al., 2019).

In a convenience sample from the Midwest, principals took part in a cohort-style professional development initiative through the National Institute for School Leadership's Executive Development Program (Corcoran, 2017). The success of the year-long program and principal effectiveness was measured by student yearly test data in reading and math for both participating and non-participating principals (known as the control group). Corcoran (2017) found an incremental increase in reading and significant math increases in the control group. Limitations of the study, such as student demographics, attendance, and the fact that it was a convenience sample of principals, were noted. In closing thoughts, Corcoran (2017) concluded that student test scores should not be the only measure of principal effectiveness or be used exclusively to make decisions on programs, especially within such a short period.

Research on professional development for principals is sparse except for studies such as these that examined specific programs aimed at improving instructional leadership and measuring the impact on student achievement. Principals require high-quality professional development that meets the obligations of their position. "School leaders are at the forefront of successfully implementing educational reform and improving the quality of teacher and student learning" (Veelen et al., 2017, p. 398). Ratiu et al. (2017) found positive effects of coaching in their quantitative study and concluded that coaching had great potential for professional development. Resources and support for these critical tasks are needed, promoting the desire for additional studies on how coaching might fit in a principal's overall professional development (Bossi, 2008; Gray, 2018; Hayashi, 2016).

## **Principles of Performance Coaching**

Coaching has become the fastest-growing field inside consulting with a one billion dollar a year industry (Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008). There is evidence of coaching as early as the 1940s; still, consulting firms' widespread use of executive coaching began around 1990 (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). Coaching has become a strategy for learning and development in several organizations with many titles such as manager-as-coach, managerial coaching, executive coaching, business coaching, life coaching, career counseling, and mentoring (Joo et al., 2012). In a quantitative study using a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, the positive effects of coaching within a working environment were clear, leading researchers to conclude that coaching has great potential for use as a professional development method (Ratiu et al., 2017). Joo et al. (2012) also found that since jobs are more complex and constantly changing, coaching was endorsed for organizational learning, positive social relationships, and employee development.

It is important to recognize that coaching is different from counseling, where past events are examined, and mentoring, where a more experienced person in the organization assists with onboarding or provides advice (Cook, 2009). Coaching is more issue-focused than therapy as it occurs in the workplace and is intended to improve interpersonal skills and performance (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). Coaching facilitates learning, development, and improved performance of the coached person (Lennard, 2010; 2013). "A great coach needs to be grounded in the broader context of the human being in today's world" (McLean, 2012). Effective coaches build trust and rapport, communicate effectively, listen well, and use questioning to assist the coachee in finding their way (Cook, 2009). Once considered a method to assist poorly performing managers, coaching has transformed to include successful employees who want to

become better (Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008). Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) found that three-fourths of executives used coaching for developmental purposes while one-fourth used coaching for remedial needs.

Coaching is rooted in adult learning theory and lifelong learning as it is goal-oriented, self-directed, and connects new learning with life experience (Griffiths, 2015). Transformational learning theory, experiential learning theory, and mentoring learning theory were also mentioned in the literature. Situated learning theory related more closely to performance coaching in this study, as it recognized the importance of social interaction, context, and collaboration in the adult learning process (Lennard, 2010; 2013). Situated learning theory focuses on learning from participation in daily life and how learners engage with the world to construct meaning from it (Lennard, 2010; 2013).

Qualifications for coaching beyond the attributes of listening, questioning, and communication are vague at best. Certification in coaching is unnecessary but does exist, and some degree programs have a coaching component (Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008). A simple Google search of coaching organizations yielded results such as the American Coaching Association, Center for Credentialing and Education, and Association of Coach Training Organizations, among other lesser-known organizations. The International Coaching Federation (2020) is the largest organization of professionally trained coaches that works to advance the coaching profession. They offer credentialing, core values, and a code of ethics (International Coaching Federation, 2020). The ethical standards include the responsibility to clients, the responsibility to practice and performance, the responsibility to professionalism, and the responsibility to society (International Coaching Federation, 2020).

## **The Coaching Relationship**

Once it is determined that a coach will be employed, it is critical to identify the purpose of the coaching and the coach's professional background to ensure a positive coaching relationship (Joo et al., 2012). Crosse's (2019) qualitative study that examined how coaches made sense of the coaching relationship concept concluded that the critical ingredient to a successful outcome is the coaching relationship. To build a positive relationship, a coach must understand psychological dynamics, adult development, and leadership and management issues (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001).

Through what is termed a working alliance, coaches co-create a coaching relationship with clients that requires personal rapport, agreement on goals, respect, trust, and expertise in the field (Gettman et al., 2019). Behaviors most beneficial to building the coaching relationship were a non-judgmental approach, focus on learning and development, support, encouragement, empathy, and a belief in the client's potential. In this person-centered approach, clients must know that they are in a safe space and that their coach is authentic (Crosse, 2019).

Gettman et al. (2019) presented findings from coaches and executives using the International Coaching Federation's Core Competencies and Contracting Inventory Scale. In this research, they were interested in the coach's contribution since they knew coach behavior played a significant role in creating a coaching relationship. Contracting includes perceptions of the coach's expertise, agreement about goals and methods, and the personal attachment between a coach and client. Although there was a disconnect on the importance of contracting between the coaches and executives, those practices in the contracting stage were positively related to client beliefs about their coaches. Crosse (2019) identified the relationship styles of coaches that illustrate the ability to foster the coaching relationship, including empathic and consultive (being

helpful), pragmatic and professional (facilitating an outcome), supportively connecting (providing acceptance), and equality and exploration (increasing awareness).

### **Coaching Principals**

School leadership coaching has been described as an ongoing process between a principal and coach who assists and supports in reaching goals and increasing leadership capacity (James-Ward, 2013). Lytle (2009) defined a coach as a personal counselor, someone trusted outside of the school who is committed to learning and provides candid feedback to the principal regarding the position's challenges and organizational change.

Through this literature review, principal responsibilities have been highlighted for just one facet of their position, instructional leadership. There are far more requirements when it comes to successfully leading schools. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) provides foundational principles called Standards to guide an effective leader's work. Of the recommended ten, this review has explored three of the standards in preceding sections; Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values, Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, and Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel. The other seven standards include essentials for promoting student success through ethics, equity, student support, professional communities, family engagement, operations and management, and school improvement. As Gray (2018) suggests in her exploration of university preparation programs, principals need more support in preparation programs and as novice principals when considering the enormity of the position.

Individual coaching can be an essential part of a principal's professional development and continuous improvement (Losch et al., 2016). In a 2017 national study that randomly surveyed 10,424 public school principals, 48.9% of principals indicated that they received



coaching (Wise & Cavazos, 2017). A coach is defined as "... a highly skilled professional who help leaders to be aware of the problem or situation and help leaders to set goals to resolve the problem" (Goff et al., 2014, p. 5). Coaches must be highly trained, knowledgeable, available, and have the ability to establish a close relationship with the principal (Hayashi, 2016).

Executive coaching has been found to have a positive effect on performance and a positive return on investment in business (Jones et al., 2015). Acknowledging the same could apply to school leaders, Houchens et al. (2016) conducted a multi-case study using a coaching protocol that led principals to conclude that the coaching process enhanced instructional confidence through deepening levels of self-awareness, reflective practices, and feedback. Coaching has increased as an industry in education serving superintendents and principals and, as Lytle (2009) writes, should not be considered a sign of weakness but a commitment to ongoing personal learning and growth. In Lytle's (2009) article, "When New Get a Coach," he posits that school leaders should even negotiate to have a coach as part of their contract.

While reviewing the literature, a myriad of coaching structures was described, and evidence continued to indicate that workplace coaching has a more positive effect on performance than other forms of professional development (Bossi, 2008; James-Ward, 2013; Jones et al., 2016; Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013, Wise & Cavazos, 2017; Wise & Hammack, 2011). Coaching today focuses on leadership development and is more than a skill. It is knowledge, experience, and an understanding of how systems thinking relates to the work (McLean, 2012). To adequately comprehend the coaching process, case studies that examined coaching visits and the format of those visits were searched. One such quantitative study of urban principals who received feedback and coaching to improve their skill determined the following phases for performance-based coaching: groundwork, which is building a relationship of trust, assessment,

and feedback or understanding what the feedback means, goal-setting, and support to keep the principal on track (Goff et al., 2014). Prior to those findings, Goldring and The Principal Leadership Project (2010) had an added step, action planning, between goal setting and support and also expanded the meaning of support to include ongoing assessment to measure progress over time. In the Wise and Cavazos (2017) study, principals reported that coaches provided support in a confidential, safe environment for discussions. Goff et al. (2014) noted that there was a significant positive effect of coaching on leadership development, but one year of coaching may not have been enough to change leadership practices. Additionally, Losch et al. (2016) discovered that individual coaching is the most effective form of professional development through their quantitative study on coaching models.

A meta-analysis of 17 studies into research on workplace coaching found that coaching is conducted chiefly through face-to-face meetings but can also utilize videophone, telephone, and internet applications (Jones et al., 2015). Cosner et al. (2018) also concluded that the primary structure for high-value coaching was face-to-face every week or two instead of non-face-to-face, such as telephone, email, and text messaging.

### **Coaching in Educational Institutions**

Traditional principal preparation programs are useful in supplying a foundation for the position; nevertheless, they do not prepare educational leaders of today and tomorrow, according to Bossi (2007). Preparation programs struggle to provide authentic fieldwork and experiences that take theory into practice (Gray, 2018). When examining the coaching progression for school leaders, James-Ward (2013) found that novice principals from Southern California reported benefits such as an opportunity to learn, becoming acclimated in the position, learning how to provide meaningful feedback, increasing leadership skills and managing the politics of the

position. In this case study conducted over a three-year period, principals also remarked that the most beneficial aspect of the coaching experience was acquiring practical skills from an experienced, neutral coach (James-Ward, 2013). Crosse (2019) calls this type of experience a work alliance where the coach builds a relationship through the exploration of goal, task, and bond. Using active listening, asking questions, and empathy, coaches co-create the coaching relationship with clients (Crosse, 2019). The importance of communication, personal rapport, trust, respect, and expertise in the field cannot be overstated (Gettman et al., 2019).

Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) summarized their analysis of existing research evidence about coaching by examining self-efficacy levels in school leaders, and the effect coaching could have to support growth in leadership development. School leaders with higher self-efficacy levels were found to be more prepared to advance to senior leadership as well as cope with the stresses of the position. Celoria and Roberson (2015) conducted a similar qualitative study to understand the relationship between principal coaching and work-related stress and emotional development. “Coaching was found to provide principals with a safe person to talk with and a supportive thought partner when making difficult workplace decisions” (Celoria & Roberson, 2015, p. 91).

In the national study mentioned above, Wise and Cavazos (2017) reported that over 85% of respondents declared they are better principals because of leadership coaching. Bossi (2008) discovered, through research on a two-year program in California, that coaching not only increased scores but improved retention among participating principals. In the article “Coaching Principals is a Calling and a Commitment,” Psencik (2019) noted the importance of trust, listening, questioning, focus, and connection when coaching principals successfully. Ray’s (2017) qualitative study reflected the same conclusions regarding the critical role of trust,

relationships, sincerity, and authenticity. Additional research articles about coaching principals suggest that the most significant effect is on individual-level outcomes through guidance, support, and reflective growth (Bossi, 2007; Jones et al., 2015).

### **CLEAR Coaching Model**

The literature on school-based leadership coaching focused on the results of the experience by using quantitative measures such as student achievement scores or teacher retention rates and qualitative data such as principal outcomes. Although some studies mentioned the importance of trust, support, sincerity, and connection to describe the relationship with the coach, this study sought to expand on that knowledge to explore how principals construct their perception of effective performance coaching (Bossi, 2007; Psencik, 2019; Ray, 2017). However, this section is just about research, not perceptions. A conceptual model was chosen to focus the research process and provide insight into this study's methodological design and data collection (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

The CLEAR Coaching Model was among other methods developed to produce optimum results from the coaching process, such as the Systems Approach to Executive Coaching, GROW Model, and CIGAR Model, to name a few (Cook, 2009; Lennard, 2010; 2013; McLean, 2012). The CLEAR Coaching Model was constructed as a result of Mezirow's work on adult learning and transformation and the interpersonal context of situated learning theory (Cook, 2009; Hawkins & Smith 2013; Lennard, 2010; 2013).

A coaching model is an intellectual device that provides elements of the process and interrelationships to understand an approach to coaching and assists in learning about the ongoing effectiveness of coaching (Lennard, 2010; 2013). The CLEAR Coaching Model was developed in the early 1980s by Peter Hawkins and provided a process framework that clarifies

what is needed by the coachee and a structured approach to arrive at needed actions (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). The stages of the CLEAR Coaching Model allow a coach and coachee to form a relationship and review or reflect on their experience in each coaching session (McLean, 2012).



**Figure 2.1: *CLEAR Model***

Source: *BusinessBalls.com* (2020): <https://www.businessballs.com/coaching-and-mentoring/clear-model/#outline>

The CLEAR Coaching Model is a client-centered model that emphasizes the coaching relationship through each of the five stages:

C – Contract: Client’s desired outcomes, how the coach can be useful, and ground rules

L – Listen: Active listening, understand the situation, empathy, and making connections

E – Explore: Questioning, reflection, and brainstorming, generate insights and awareness

A – Action: Client chooses a way forward and agrees to initial steps, practices

R – Review: Review the actions and process, reflect on coaching process, feedback

(Hawkins & Smith, 2013)

The CLEAR Coaching Model focuses on what the client wants and can encompass their whole life. It establishes an equal relationship between coach and client and is oriented to move toward goals and results (Lennard, 2010; 2013). This conceptual coaching model was the graphic organizer for data collection and provided the basis for a case study database. Consequently, this

model influenced the interview protocol, provided a structure for data analysis, and aided in reporting findings.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In this chapter, I mapped the journey of today's principals as they lead their schools. The position of principal has many demands that are not necessarily covered in traditional preparation programs or even school policy. The role of instructional leader has many aspects that are difficult to navigate since no one person can know every content area and instructional strategy. Successful instructional leaders were found to have a strong belief in their students, create a supportive environment for teachers and students, are focused on developing the leadership capacity of their teachers, and monitor curriculum and instruction through lesson plans and classroom observations (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Hoppey & McKleskey, 2013; Marzano et al., 2018; Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015).

This review exposed that the principal's position is not always adequately supported through learning experiences and professional development. Although there were studies about particular programs for principal leadership development, there was a lack of job-embedded, practical learning for the day-to-day operation of the school. This deficiency can lead to feelings of inadequacy when choosing professional development to enhance teaching and learning and provide better schools (Brown & Militello, 2016; Koonce et al., 2019).

Through an exploration of coaching processes and theories as well as coaching in an educational setting, an answer surfaced to improve instructional leadership and address the professional development needs of principals. Research specific to coaching principals revealed a process for effective coaching visits that included building a relationship, identifying problems, setting goals, creating action plans, and supporting principals to meet them (Goff et al., 2014;

Goldring & The Principal Leadership Project, 2010). Principals reported positive results from the coaching experience, including a better understanding of the position, increasing leadership skills, and reflective growth (Bossi, 2007; James-Ward, 2013; Jones et al., 2015).

There was a significant gap noted in the initial literature review that this case study explored. In the research, authors discovered protocols for coaching sessions and determined results from the coaching experience but did not adequately describe the coach or what attributes of the coach created a positive experience. Although minimal qualifications were mentioned, such as coaches were past administrators, considered highly qualified, and credentialed or trained in a specific program, the perception of participating principals or what they considered effective performance coaching was not cited.

Finally, the CLEAR Coaching Model was presented as a conceptual framework to focus the study and provide a structure for data collection (Hawkins & Smith, 2012). This model contributed to the interview protocol, provided an organized method for data collection, and aided in creating a case study database.

## Chapter 3: Research Methods

### Chapter Outline

The purpose of this study was to explore how principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching. Instructional leadership, the term most often used to describe those actions, has been studied, not only to determine just effectiveness but for use as a roadmap toward successful leadership (Vogel, 2018). Instructional leadership is defined as anything a principal does to assist or impact instruction and student learning (Costello, 2015; Vogel, 2018). Through the Arkansas Leadership Academy, the School Support Program provided professional learning experiences and onsite coaching to assist principals with this enormous responsibility (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). Participating principals had indicated varying levels of effectiveness of coaches. Therefore, results from this study could inform the Arkansas Leadership Academy about the coaching approach and client perceptions of the approach established by the School Support Program.

This chapter is organized with a discussion of the research design and overview of the study, including information on the research sample, recruitment and participation in the study, and data collection method. The role of the researcher is addressed, as well as the data analysis plan, trustworthiness, ethical procedures, scope and delimitations, limitations, and a summary. Each section provides details and information that would enable another researcher to repeat the study in the School Support Program or with other similarly structured programs.

### Research Design and Overview

In order to conduct this inquiry, I applied the social constructivist interpretation to examine each principal's preconceived notions about working with a coach before their experience, their impressions during the coaching cycle, and reflections of impact as a result of



coaching (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). This three-phase inquiry allowed participants to describe their experience fully and provided data to determine codes, categories, and themes. The following primary research question and five sub-questions were explored:

- **RQ:** How do principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching?
- **SQ1:** How do principals explain the purpose of performance coaching?
- **SQ2:** How do principals explain the role of the performance coach?
- **SQ3:** What behaviors/qualities of the coach do principals believe contribute to an effective coaching relationship?
- **SQ4:** How do principals describe the evolution of the coaching relationship?
- **SQ5:** How do principals describe their experience with performance coaching?

## **Case Study**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that, “Case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37). Therefore, a case study was appropriate for this research as it was focused on a bounded system of principals who participated in the School Support Program. They all worked with performance coaches supplied by the School Support Program for at least three years. Performance coaches, who were past principals or otherwise qualified, visited the schools weekly to support the implementation of professional learning experiences through the Leadership Development System.

Specifically, this research explored the phenomenon of being coached using a single-case study with multiple embedded units of analysis, the principals from the program (Yin, 2018). Being the primary instrument of data collection, I used a combination of a deductive and inductive investigating strategy with the CLEAR Coaching Model conceptual proposition to

shape the data collection plan (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2012; Yin, 2018). Following Braun & Clarke's (2012) method of Thematic Analysis, I searched for details that described an effective performance coach's behaviors and how principals described their experience throughout data collection. Questions were added and revised as a result of experiences and participant responses.

### **Research Sample**

For this case study, the population was principals who lead or have led schools in the Kindergarten through twelfth-grade public school system and participated in the School Support Program for a minimum of three consecutive years. This program worked with a small group of schools each year to provide weekly onsite coaching support and professional learning experiences (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). Principals who took part for three consecutive years were invited to participate in the study through an email or phone call (see Appendix A). According to records obtained from the Arkansas Leadership Academy, 29 principals participated in School Support for three years or more since 2010. The challenge in obtaining this purposeful sample was locating those who have moved from the principal position and obtaining an agreement to participate in the study.

After further investigation, it was discovered that one person was deceased, and then two others were eliminated from the pool since I worked with one and served the other as a performance coach. Borrowing from Grounded Theory, I wanted to have enough participants to meet saturation or redundancy where no new information provided additional categories or themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the pool of qualifying principals was 26, the desired number of participants was eight to ten. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) further explained that a sample size is dependent on how many participants are needed to answer the research questions.

An audit trail was kept for sources of data and to provide anonymity. Audit trail notations were assigned to each participant in the form of a pseudonym (i.e., Whitney). These names were used when referencing specific participants in the study. The demographic makeup and years of service in the School Support Program are depicted in the table below.

**Table 3.1: Participant Demographics**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Region of Arkansas</b>	<b>Years of Participation</b>
Whitney	Female	Caucasian	Northeast	2016-2020
Allen	Male	African American	Central	2010-2013
Faith	Female	African American	Southwest	2012-2015
Brian	Male	African American	Central	2013-2016
Peggy	Female	African American	Northeast	2008-2011
Heather	Female	Caucasian	Southwest	2010-2013
Anthony	Male	Caucasian	Southeast	2014-2017
Patricia	Female	African American	Central	2011-2014

There were four regions of Arkansas represented in the sample. According to the United States Census Bureau (2019), in the Northeast region of Arkansas, where the school districts were located, approximately 23% of the population lived in poverty. The Central and Southwest regions were close in percentages, with Central at 14.6% and Southwest at 14.1% in the school districts' counties. The school districts in the Southeast region of Arkansas had 15.8% of the population living in poverty. As a comparison, Arkansas had an overall percentage of 16.2% of individuals living below the poverty level. Though not represented in the sample, the Northwest region had counties with as little as 8.9% (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

The CLEAR Coaching Model provided a descriptive framework to organize the case study analysis (Yin, 2018). After the sample was determined, each participant was personally interviewed at their choice of location, online application, or by telephone. Since I had access to the School Support Program records, I could document general demographics prior to our meeting.

## **Data Collection Method**

A guided conversation format through semi-structured, in-depth interviews was used that satisfied the need for desired information while remaining friendly and asking relevant, open-ended questions (Yin, 2018). I chose to conduct single session interviews so the focus could be on the inquiry and only take an hour of the participants' time. Yin (2018) advised that interviews are desirable and even essential because most case studies are about human matters or actions. However, the fact that we are working with humans also can be a potential weakness. "As such, even in reporting about such events or explaining how they occurred, the interviewees' responses are subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation" (Yin, 2018, p. 121).

This study began by vetting the interview questions through a colleague and pilot interviews with two coached principals using an interview protocol (see Appendix C) that led them through the three-phase inquiry (Yin, 2018). While data from these principals were not included in the findings, the experience provided an opportunity to test recording procedures and refine interview questions with those principals in the School Support Program who agreed to offer feedback. Notes from the pilot interview were used to inform research design and interview procedures as the case study advanced (Yin, 2018). Interviews for this case study were recorded and transcribed word-for-word. Data analysis commenced with Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase approach to Thematic Analysis:

1. Phase 1: Familiarize Yourself With the Data
2. Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes
3. Phase 3: Searching for Themes
4. Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes

5. Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

6. Phase 6: Producing the Report

Categories were pre-determined using the CLEAR Coaching Model, and results were aggregated and displayed in tables (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Additionally, a journal was kept to note observations of qualities and behaviors during the interview that cannot be ascertained through a voice recording or interview transcript. Since case study often depends on multiple data sources, the interview transcripts and notes from the research journal were used to triangulate data and corroborate findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

**Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

To initiate the process of recruiting participants for the study, I searched archival records from the School Support Program. Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, all principals who had participated three years or more were listed. After creating a spreadsheet and eliminating those not eligible to participate, 26 principals had at least three consecutive years of School Support participation, which included onsite coaching as part of the program. Since there were varying amounts of time since participation, many of those listed were no longer in the same position; however, the Arkansas Leadership Academy made an effort to update job titles and positions in the database as much as possible.

School Support participants, who were located, received an email or phone call asking for permission to contact them to discuss participation in the case study (see Appendix A). The total number found and contacted was eighteen, and nine responses were received. Each person was contacted three times, and those who responded positively were emailed or called to discuss details about the study and received the Informed Consent document (see Appendix B). All who responded in the affirmative were chosen to participate which was a total of eight participants

who were served from 2010 to 2019 in the School Support Program. Fortunately, there was representation from the different regional areas of Arkansas, with the exception of Northwest Arkansas.

Each participant interview was conducted using an interview protocol (Appendix C) that was piloted before data collection (Yin, 2018). The participant could choose the location and mode of meeting, either in-person or through telecommunication, due to the COVID-19 crisis. Health precautions recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were in place for those who agreed to in-person interviews (Appendix E). Nevertheless, all participants chose to interview either through Zoom or a phone call due to the health risk. Participants were asked to give permission to record the interview, and in return, they were assured that the information collected would be kept confidential to the extent allowed by laws and University policy. Participants were offered member-checking to supply feedback on initial analysis as well as an opportunity to review the transcript of their interview (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Each participant was interviewed once and completed the interview in approximately an hour. Participants exited the study after reviewing their interview transcript and initial data analysis if they chose to do so. They also had an opportunity to clarify, correct, or elaborate on their responses.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, I had a personal interest in this study's results as I aspired to improve my practice as a Performance or Leadership Coach. Additionally, I planned to offer the study results to improve the overall coaching model for the Arkansas Leadership Academy's School Support Program. Since I conducted the interviews, there were principals in the study whom I knew personally or professionally, even though I did not allow those whom I coached to

participate. I desired to use any existing relationship as a means of trust in order to receive honest, candid responses. I realized that this possible familiarity could also be considered a form of bias; therefore, I used member-checking and bracketing to not agree or disagree with responses losing valuable perspective (Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The primary research question explored how principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching. With an interview protocol, participants were asked about their experience, growth, and relationship with their onsite coach during the three or more years of participation. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and studied through complete immersion into the data. Themes and patterns were established and analyzed through coding using Microsoft Word and then transferred to an Excel spreadsheet (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2012; Yin, 2018). To organize the data analysis, the CLEAR Coaching Model was used to develop the case description. Categories were listed and aggregated, and results were displayed in a spreadsheet (Yin, 2018). Through this thematic analysis, there was an opportunity to analyze what the data was saying and interpret what it meant to present a compelling story of principals' perceptions of effective coaching (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2012).

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness, a member-check or respondent validation was conducted after interviews and preliminary analysis, allowing each principal to evaluate the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These transcripts and initial findings were emailed to seven of the interviewed participants who volunteered to provide feedback on emerging findings. Follow-up discussion and revisions were offered if there were identified inaccuracies in findings or the transcript. Interview transcripts and notes from the

research journal were used as sources of data to triangulate results (Yin, 2018). Patterns and themes were established with the goal of reaching saturation, meaning the same responses were heard repetitively from participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An audit trail was created to achieve dependability that included detailed explanations of how the data was collected, journal notes from the interviews, and a database of findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Yin 2018).

Participants were chosen from a purposeful sample of principals who participated in the School Support program for a minimum of three years. Every respondent willing to participate in the study was chosen and interviewed either by phone or Zoom. Specifically, there were five females comprised of three African Americans and two Caucasians, and three males including one Caucasian and two African Americans. Represented regions of the state were: Northeast, Central, Southwest, and Southeast.

The CLEAR Coaching Model was used as a conceptual proposition to capture participants' perceptions and experiences, making them detailed enough to present a complete picture of their experience (Yin, 2018). Through these measures, the knowledge base of attributes and qualities of effective performance coaching was expanded.

### **Ethical Procedures**

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before starting any part of this case study (see Appendix D). Full disclosure was provided detailing my role in the School Support Program and as the researcher. Participants were asked to sign or provide verbal confirmation of an informed consent that discussed the study and its' purpose prior to the interview (see Appendix C). After transcription, the subsequent data-analysis document used an assigned pseudonym for each participant. The potential for breach of confidential information was possible, but all data collected was stored on a password-protected laptop computer, flash



drive, and file. Those who agreed to participate were assured that all information would be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy throughout the study, and no identifying information would be used in any reports or publications resulting from this research. Participants had access to and final approval of their interview transcript and were given the opportunity to receive a draft data analysis and provide feedback.

### **Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

To understand and improve performance coaching effectiveness, I studied principals in Arkansas who participated in the School Support Program for at least three years as that is considered a completed program. Although there were coaching models offered to principals through other organizations, the model offered through the Arkansas Leadership Academy provided a specific time period, coaching qualifications, and structure through the Leadership Development System.

As an employee of the Academy, I obtained the names of those who qualified, and as a performance coach, I understood the context of the coaching model through the Leadership Development System's professional learning experiences. Using the CLEAR Coaching Model, findings were reported according to the five stages, and research questions were answered in a thematic presentation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research had a limitation in that the sample was not an equal representation of participating Arkansas principals in the School Support Program. Additionally, I relied on accurate record-keeping in the Arkansas Leadership Academy and the consideration of principals to participate. Subsequently, this study included principals from 2010 to the present. Vivid memories and descriptions of distinct characteristics might have been compromised due to the

passage of time. While this dissertation was written, the country experienced a crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic, which made contact and participation problematic for some participants. Since participation was limited to those who were willing, there may be a decrease in the ability to apply findings beyond the School Support Program. However, conclusions from this study may be generalizable to coaches serving in similar organizations.

### **Summary of Chapter Three**

In this chapter, the research design and overview of this case study were detailed, and the sample of principals who participated in the School Support Program was discussed. The research questions were listed, and the data collection method was provided. My role as the researcher was explained, followed by the data analysis plan, which included the use of Thematic Analysis and the CLEAR Coaching Model to organize the data analysis. The chapter concluded with methods of ensuring trustworthiness, such as member-checking and triangulation, followed by ethical procedures that included obtaining an IRB. The scope and delimitations considered the small group of participants, limitations regarding participation, and the effect of the COVID-19 crisis.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This qualitative research study was conducted to explore how principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching. This single case study included principals from across the state of Arkansas who took part in a three-year School Support Program hosted by the Arkansas Leadership Academy. My purpose for researching this program was that I believed that a better understanding of the qualities, attributes, or activities of the coach would improve the professional development and coaching services for participating principals. The findings also provided data on the value of a coaching experience for principals. The following primary research question and five sub questions were explored:

RQ: How do principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching?

Sub questions:

SQ1: How do principals explain the purpose of the performance coach?

SQ2: How do principals explain the role of the performance coach?

SQ3: What behaviors/qualities of the coach do principals believe contribute to an effective coaching relationship?

SQ4: How do principals describe the evolution of the coaching relationship?

SQ5: How do principals describe their experience with performance coaching?

This chapter is organized into three sections that present the key findings of this study obtained through eight in-depth interviews with current or past principals who participated in the School Support Program. The chapter begins with a discussion of the setting, which includes conditions at the time of the study and the participants' background. The data collection and analysis process, research findings, and a summary of the chapter follow.

## Setting

This research was conducted during a national pandemic of the COVID-19 virus. The impact of the pandemic was confirmed in the mode of interview and willingness to participate. A face-to-face interview would have allowed a more personal interview with the ability to monitor participant emotion and comfort. Instead, many did not respond, and those that did opted for a teleconference format of Zoom or phone call. These interviews were shorter than anticipated, and journal notes could not be as specific as desired concerning facial expression and body language.

## Background of the Participants

There were eight participants in this research study. Five participants were female, three were male, and all regions of Arkansas, with the exception of the northwest, were represented. These participants qualified for the study because they took part in the School Support Program for at least three years and had a coach provided to them during that time. Although only three participants are currently school principals, four have remained in administrative positions, and one retired from a principal position in June of 2019. Table 4.1 provides information, according to their pseudonym, regarding the date, mode, and duration of the interview and each participant's current role.

**Table 4.1: Participant Interviews**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>	<b>Mode of Interview</b>	<b>Duration of Interview</b>	<b>Current Role</b>
Whitney	11/4/2020	Zoom	41:40	Principal
Allen	11/20/2020	Zoom	28:20	Superintendent
Faith	11/16/2020	Zoom	1:08:32	Principal
Brian	10/30/2020	Zoom	27:31	Director/District
Peggy	11/5/2020	Phone Call	33:01	Retired Principal
Heather	11/18/2020	Zoom	1:03:02	Assist. Sup.
Anthony	11/12/2020	Phone Call	37:42	Principal
Patricia	11/20/2020	Zoom	35:42	Deputy Sup.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected from the eight participants using semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted through either a phone call or Zoom teleconference session. As the sole researcher, I transcribed each interview word-for-word and kept a journal of nuances that would not appear in the written transcript, such as body language and facial expressions. The interviews lasted an average of 42 minutes, were friendly, and each participant willingly discussed their experience, even those that they considered not as positive. Each participant was asked questions in a three-phase inquiry beginning with their preconceived notions of the coaching engagement, their experience during coaching, and the lasting impact of the coaching engagement. Member-checking was offered to each participant to ensure the transcript was accurate and allow them an opportunity to review initial findings. All but one participant was interested in the results of this study. The following questions were used to begin the conversation; however, questions were revised and expanded according to the participant's responses.

### **Preconceived Notions:**

- What was your experience with coaching before this engagement?
- What did you expect from the coaching experience?
- How did this experience differ from other professional development that you have engaged in?

### **Experience during Coaching:**

- Tell me about how the coaching process evolved: what did the coach do, what did the coach ask you to do, how was the process structured?
- Tell me about how the coaching relationship evolved: what did the coach do, what did the coach ask you to do, at first, how did you feel about the relationship?

- During the coaching engagement, what coach behaviors would you say supported your learning and development?

#### Lasting Impact of Coaching:

- How have you applied what you learned during the coaching engagement?
- What words would you use to describe the coaching engagement?
- What words would you use to describe a competent performance coach?
- How did your experience differ from your expectations of the experience?

(see Appendix C)

A case description with categories and themes was developed using Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase approach to Thematic Analysis and the CLEAR Coaching Model. In the first phase of analysis, Familiarizing Yourself with the Data, I immersed myself in the data by transcribing each interview and reading the transcript while listening to the recorded interview. During the second phase, Generating Initial Codes, each transcript was coded according to the CLEAR Coaching Model and other features of the data relevant to the research questions. Phase three, Searching for Themes, was spent examining the data for themes inside the coaching model categories to collapse the data into meaningful patterns. During phase four, Reviewing Potential Themes, those identified themes and patterns were reviewed against the entire data set. Finally, in phases five and six, Defining and Naming Themes and Producing the Report, themes were defined and named, and findings were composed (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The following table presents the categories from the CLEAR Coaching Model and recurring themes from the data.

**Table 4.2: CLEAR Coaching Model Categories and Themes**

<b>Contract</b>	<b>Listen</b>	<b>Explore</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Review</b>
<i>Built Relationships</i>	<i>Understood the School Situation</i>	<i>Questioning</i>	<i>Strategic Planning</i>	<i>Focused</i>
		<i>Reflection</i>		<i>Solution</i>
<i>Outcomes of Coaching</i>	<i>Offered Perspective</i>	<i>Data Analysis</i>	<i>Goal Setting</i>	<i>Oriented</i>
<i>Working Alliance</i>	<i>Debrief Time</i>	<i>Understood the Community</i>	<i>Shared Leadership and Collaboration</i>	<i>Team Building</i>
			<i>Ongoing and Onsite</i>	<i>Coaching Others</i>
<i>Personal and Specific to the School</i>				<i>Application</i>

In Lennard's (2010; 2013) book on coaching model development, he explained that a coaching model could be used as a guide and conceptual tool to understand an approach to coaching and learn about coaching effectiveness. The CLEAR Coaching Model, developed by Peter Hawkins, provided a framework that clarified what was needed by the client and supplied a structured approach to arrive at the agreed outcomes of the coaching engagement (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). Consequently, this study's data analysis was filtered through each stage of the CLEAR Coaching Model to develop a thorough description of each participant's experience and address each sub question in order to answer the primary research question.

**Research Question: How do principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching?**

### **Contract**

The first stage of the CLEAR Coaching Model is to Contract with the client. This process allows the coach to understand the client's desired outcomes, the purpose of the coaching engagement, and to create a working alliance that includes the development of the coaching relationship and basic ground rules for their work together (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). Recurring

themes from the participants accented the importance of fostering a working alliance that included developing a trusting and honest relationship with the coach, ensuring the coach understood desired outcomes, and the necessity of the coach to become part of the school family. These factors that defined the coaching engagement's Contract stage were even more pronounced when the coach reportedly did not have them in place. One such incident was described by Heather,

And then the coach was, well it seemed like supportive of that resistance, it just really hurt the culture and the trust that existed, I would say that the trust was, I don't know if violated is too strong a word, but it was definitely questionable.

The table below represents statements in the interviews that addressed the first two sub questions and supported the Contract stage. The left column is the statement or statements from the participant while the second column refers to the participant who made the statement during the interview (Anthony, Brian, Peggy, etc.). The audit trail refers to the line(s) of the transcribed interview where the statement was made (L 231-232 refers to lines 231 and 232 in the transcription of that participants interview).

**Sub Question 1: How do principals explain the purpose of performance coaching?**

**Sub Question 2: How do principals explain the role of the performance coach?**

**Table 4.3: Interview Supporting Data – Contract**

<b>Contract</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
He was able to give me some insight to improve teaching.	Anthony	L 231-232
I didn't really want someone to pull up to our school once every two weeks and think they knew about everything that was going on.	Anthony	L 334-336



**Table 4.3 (Cont.)**

<b>Contract</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
It was just more conversational, trying to build, establish a relationship.	Brian	L 187-188
Where do I see this school in a few years and how are we going to get it to that point?	Brian	L 206-207
He really invested, you know in me.	Peggy	L 141-142
I mean, we just had, I felt, a really awesome relationship.	Peggy	L 144
She spoke at one of the faculty meetings, "I'm really here to be an asset."	Allen	L 287-289
It would always start with a conversation with me so we can kind of catch up.	Whitney	L 237
And you know the words he used, but really it was body language, a tone that really set that relationship up.	Whitney	L 229-230
He built a relationship first and then we worked on the things we needed to do coaching wise.	Whitney	L 258-259
She just became a part of our family.	Heather	L 361
She had instant credibility with us because she was so bought into the core beliefs and the vision of our school. We just felt that she believed with every fiber of her being that we could be successful.	Heather	L 358-361

**Table 4.3 (Cont.)**

<b>Contract</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
She helped us spread that belief among the teachers.	Heather	L 361
She knows my school. She already knew what the obstacles were. But then at the same time, she knew what we had done right. I was blown away.	Faith	L 349-350
But when she came, she knew my school, she had done her homework and I felt like anybody who knows that much about my school, whatever this lady tells me to do, I'm gonna do it with very few questions, because she did her homework.	Faith	L 355-357
I mean, she was just one of us.	Faith	L 451-452
I think it was and I think you know, she may have emailed me and said or maybe she did a phone call, I can't really remember you know, and set up a time, hey, do you mind if I come by or whatever and we started just kind of eased into it.	Patricia	L 191-194
That's again, a benefit of a coach who says, yeah, but here are the pieces that we said that we were going to hold ourselves accountable to in these next two weeks.	Patricia	L 214-216

## Listen

The Listen stage of the CLEAR Coaching Model is described simply as active listening. Through this active listening, the coach fully understands the situation and makes connections. Techniques such as mirroring and reframing allow the coach to experience what it is like in their client's position (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). The study participants unanimously agreed that this stage was evidenced by their coach understanding the school's situation through culture and various forms of data. Although only two participants asked for their coaches to be replaced, the lack of this stage proved monumental as Whitney described,

The first coach we got, it did not go well. It wasn't good. We didn't get anything from it and we were at the point where either we get a new coach, or we stop working with ALA. So that's, you know, because the difference was, is he would come in, and he would just tell us things, and he wouldn't listen to where we were and what we were trying to do and what we really needed.

Another participant, Faith, compared the coaching process with the School Support Program to another company contracted by her district. She explained,

They never asked you for the short list of things that worked before they tried to help you troubleshoot. It was this is our program, y 'all are gonna do it our way. You guys don't know anything because you're in school improvement. So you just do everything I tell you and it was a case closed thing. We had no, there was no site decision-making. There was no shared ownership, there was no collaboration. You were a robot, you did what you were told to do.

Table 4.4 represents statements in the interviews and responses for sub question three that supported the Listen stage. The left column is the statement or statements from the participant while the second column refers to the participant who made the statement during the interview. The audit trail refers to the line(s) of the transcript where the statement was made.

**Sub Question 3: What behaviors/qualities of the coach do principals believe contribute to an effective coaching relationship?**

**Table 4.4: Interview Supporting Data – Listen**

<b>Listen</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
He would go check-in rooms and talk to teachers and talk to students and just kind of get a feeling, what's going on.	Anthony	L 311-312
It was always a pleasant conversation, and it was always, what do you want? Where do you want to go with this? You know, it wasn't, this is what you're gonna do. It was, what are you thinking? And how can I help you get there?	Anthony	L 351-353
It was just more of like trying to understand demographics because the school had just gone through audit, a scholastic audit and it was terrible. So we were just trying to get all the data and different things and like I said, he asking me, what did I see? Where do I see this school in a few years? And how we gonna go about getting it to that point?	Brian	L 204-207
I think early on we actually looked at data, and he also visited classrooms with me, so that he could get familiar with the teachers and see students.	Peggy	L 175-176
She and I had some real conversations, one about the current reality, two about what the school's needs were, and three, where were my	Allen	L 217-219

**Table 4.4 (Cont.)**

<b>Listen</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
deficiencies that I needed to work on to make sure that the work took place.		
So he stopped and he learned before he even tried to ask any questions or move us forward or talk about goals or anything, he learned who my team was, who we were as a school at that time, before he started coaching us. And that was very helpful that just that stop and who are you? What do you really need, you know, like a needs assessment kind of thing to know where we're at?	Whitney	L 198-202
But I think one thing she helped me with as a leader was to be able to put things in perspective.	Heather	L 413-414
She acknowledges the situation. She acknowledges the emotions associated with the situation.	Heather	L 495-496
I think that was the thing that just made me instantly know, she's here to help us. She's not here to beat us up. She is here to help us, she is going to build on the things that we're doing right and she's going to tweak the things that could be made better.	Faith	L 359-362
It was always a look at data, and it was always your hard data first, because that was going to be the data that's	Faith	L 459-461

**Table 4.4 (Cont.)**

<b>Listen</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
going to make you sink or swim at the end of the year, soft data, you get into teacher biases.		
We're going to do these particular pieces, I may visit these classrooms, we had our standard time to debrief, and then we would set the goals for the next time that they were going to be on the campus.	Patricia	L 265-268

## **Explore**

The Explore stage of the CLEAR Coaching Model is a time specifically for the coach to generate new insights as they become aware of issues that need to be considered (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). The coach accomplishes this through questioning, reflection, and brainstorming using questions that ask about what is happening, the effect of the events, what has been tried, and what alternatives are available (Cook, 2009). One participant, Allen, reviewed the tools his coach used to gather those insights in order to tackle their needs,

She did All on the Wall, the Five, the Gap Analysis. We did the Root Cause Analysis, Fishbone. We did the Four Corners, when we met with the public, when we met with teachers when we met with this and when we met with community at large, what were the Four Corners and so and it worked. She did consensus building and then she really helped me understand the piece about taking things to scale.

Table 4.5 represents statements in the interviews that supported the Explore stage. The same sub question from the Listen stage is used here to further expand on behaviors and qualities of the coach. The left column is the statement or statements from the participant while the second

column refers to the participant who made the statement during the interview. The audit trail refers to the line(s) of the transcript where the statement was made.

**Sub Question 3: What behaviors/qualities of the coach do principals believe contribute to an effective coaching relationship?**

**Table 4.5: Interview Supporting Data - Explore**

<b>Explore</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
Of course, he never told me. But he asked me, we would do things and he would say, Okay, so that's what you want to do.	Anthony	L 274-276
He would go check in rooms and talk to teachers and talk to students and just kind of get a feeling, of what's going on.	Anthony	L 311-312
We did a lot of walkthroughs together, and we would talk about mostly, we would try to collect data, and make sure that we were working on our weaknesses.	Anthony	L 318-320
Because it required me to do a lot of self-reflection and look at myself.	Brian	L 140-141
So him coming in, with me being a global thinker, helping me to see the minor details or the details, put on paper to get to where I needed to be and how to do certain things.	Brian	L 222-224
Talk samples, and like I said a lot of the ALA frameworks	Brian	L 236-238

**Table 4.5 (Cont.)**

<b>Explore</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
and strategies that, he's he utilized with other schools, and different things and examples from other schools and things like that.		
I think early on we actually looked at data, and he also visited classrooms with me, so that he could get familiar with the teachers and see students.	Peggy	L 175-176
So PLC time became really important. We got to digging into data, digging into test results. What are some things that we can accomplish, this, this, or that, it was really good.	Allen	L 301-302
Questions, and you're just like, no, no, I need you to give me the answer, and he's like, no, no, here's a question. I need you to think about.	Whitney	L 157-158
He came in asking the right questions, he dug into what we really wanted, what goals we really wanted to achieve, and kept digging until we got past the surface level of what we wanted to do.	Whitney	L 187-189
He was visiting classrooms and then coming back and talking to me about what he'd seen culture wise, instructional wise, like that, and so that we can make a plan for what we can do next.	Whitney	L 244-246



**Table 4.5 (Cont.)**

<b>Explore</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
I really valued that outside opinion, because sometimes you can't see what's really there, because you live it every day, and so you can't see it, the good and the bad, and so he could tell me, the good and the bad that sometimes I was just oblivious that it was there.	Whitney	L 247-249
Well, she typically came in and met with our facilitators and members of our administrative team, to just go over our progress with our strategic plan and to find out, any areas that we might need support in. And, we also spent a lot of time I would say, just dreaming maybe, brainstorming maybe, a more technical term for it, but just what if we could do this? What if we could go here?	Heather	L 397-401
She would do classroom walkthroughs with us. We were very much into the classroom walkthroughs at that time.	Heather	L 429-430
Yeah, and then she helps you and guides you toward solutions, what really matters here? What do we really want the outcome to be at the end of all this? How can we use this to make our school better?	Heather	L 502-510
She didn't give us the	Faith	L 289-290

**Table 4.5 (Cont.)**

<b>Explore</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
answers. She played enough critical friend and deep thought provoking questions where you discovered the answer on your own.		
Then she said, if you had a dream, where do you want your school to be, and she took me on a vision walk, I never will forget it.	Faith	L 372-373
We walked all around the school and she said, what's your vision for your school?	Faith	L 374-375
We had our standard time to debrief, and then we would set the goals for the next time that they were going to be on the campus	Patricia	L 267-268

**Action**

In the Action stage of the CLEAR Coaching Model, the client chooses how they want to move forward to create the desired outcome (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). In the School Support model, this was exemplified in developing a strategic action plan for improvement. The plan provided details on what action steps will be taken, by whom, the timeline, and how the outcome would be measured (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2020). Cook (2009) described it as helping the coachee develop a realistic plan of action for change. All participants mentioned the strategic plan, goal setting, and the accountability it provided. Brian described this as one of the lasting impacts of the experience,

That was an aha moment for me and I say that because it allowed me to, in that goal, process, you know, you have specific goals you want to have measured, you have checkpoints, and if they're working if they're if they're not working. And so I think the

goal planning process was an aha moment for me, because it allowed me to actually zoom in on what was working and what was not working, when to adjust and how to adjust and if time needed to adjust. And that went on from year to year, because that helped me a lot.

Patricia also mentioned the value of the coach in the strategic planning process when she said,

So, I think having someone there and, you know, sitting down talking about and developing plans, because we, I know, that was one thing, you know, was like, okay, so what are we going to do? And, you know, he did have me at different times to talk about, you know, okay, this is the plan. And then we're going to look at, revisit the data at this particular time, and see if we've made any gains and any improvement. That's good.

The table below represents statements in the interviews that supported sub question four and the Action stage. The left column is the statement or statements from the participant while the second column refers to the participant who made the statement during the interview. The audit trail refers to the line(s) of the transcript where the statement was made.

#### **Sub Question 4: How do principals describe the evolution of the coaching relationship?**

**Table 4.6: Interview Supporting Data – Action**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
Oh, yeah, we would sit down, and talk about our next steps and what I needed to do.	Anthony	L 274-275
Let's get all on the same page and once we got on the same page, it was extremely helpful because it allowed me to plan and prioritize set goals and organize and actually measure things that I was doing.	Brian	L 164-167
So we could meet those challenges and meet those goals by implementing some of the interventions and strategies from ALA.	Brian	L 192-194

**Table 4.6 (Cont.)**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
When I went in as an administrator, yes, I've gone through school, but nothing is like the real world when you get in there and so learning how to divide the time and really focus on what's important.	Peggy	L 257-260
When we got that we were, let me tell you, through her coaching and us working hand in hand, the school moved from being one of the lowest in the state to the most improved high school in the state in two years.	Allen	L 243-245
There you go, you got to make a plan and then work the plan.	Allen	L 366
Being able to ask those really good questions that help us think through what we're trying to solve or issues that we're having.	Whitney	L 303-304
I felt like she was feeling it with me but she didn't let me stay there too long before we were talking about moving forward and fixing it.	Heather	L 478-479
Then she helps you and guide you toward solutions and is excellent at helping keep things in perspective.	Heather	L 502-503
We needed a coach that was going to streamline us and	Faith	L 280-281

**Table 4.6 (Cont.)**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
make us all go in one direction.		
The real work began again and I think that was probably just her natural gift of just point in time remediation, what you need and what you need to build capacity in to make it be sustainable.	Faith	L 318-320
Question you to the point you had an action plan when you left.	Faith	L 550-551
I'd go back and reiterate the measurable outcomes and being specific about what the goals are and not allowing ambiguity, to kind of a language there. So how do you really say, here's what we're working on? And then how do we hold ourselves accountable?	Patricia	L 299-301

## **Review**

The final stage of the CLEAR Coaching Model is Review. When this stage is conducted, the coachee's actions and the effectiveness of the coaching relationship are appraised. In addition to considering the actions and the success of those actions, this is also the time for determining what worked well in the relationship or partnership between the coach and coachee (Cook, 2009). Hawkins and Smith (2013) add that during Review, specifics on what was helpful or

challenging and what the client would like to be different in future coaching sessions are discussed.

Participants in the study reported that the experience exceeded their expectations. However, it should be noted that the two participants who were not pleased with their first coach had positive experiences with the replacement. One piece of nonconforming data was offered by Anthony, who mentioned that he believed coaches should be rotated more often,

That would be one thing. If you are looking for new ideas, I would say I would rotate around a little more with your advisors. You got a new perspective with that person, and then that person's there for two or three years, and it kind of blends into everything else. So I think it's good to get somebody else to come in and kind of put their touch in there too to see what else needs to be done.

Patricia elaborated on the effect the coaching engagement had on her career,

I think when you know that there are some things that changed your trajectory, and they have beneficial to you in your next roles. And that you really seem to be the kind of coach that you've had the experience to engage with, right? So when you talk about lasting impact, I would not probably be the kind of coach or the kind of supportive administrator if I had not had those experiences with them.

The table below represents statements in the interviews that supported the Review stage and addressed sub question five. The left column is the statement or statements from the participant while the second column refers to the participant who made the statement during the interview. The audit trail refers to the line(s) of the transcript where the statement was made.

#### **Sub Question 5: How do principals describe their experience with performance coaching?**

**Table 4.7: Interview Supporting Data - Review**

<b>Review</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
Yeah, it's been a few years since I was involved with that program, and I normally don't do surveys and don't participate in in these types of things, but they were really good to us at this school.	Anthony	L 95-96

**Table 4.7 (Cont.)**

<b>Review</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
So that in just learning that with her, it was more conversational and just pulling things out of me so when I use those things with people I work with now just to pull things out of people.	Brian	L 258-261
So grouping has always, stayed a very big part of me, watching the data, discussing with the teachers where we are in making those plans of how we're going to reach our goal. So that was a heavy focus.	Peggy	L 338-341
For someone to come in take a critical look, being a critical friend, I guess that was a term, but a critical friend and that's one who's open and honest I mean like, okay, this is our current reality where we're gonna go and helping me look at things in a different way, and helping and supporting plan development if I needed.	Peggy	L 409-413
Everything had a reason because it was a waste of time, resources and energy to not do that. But that made a difference for me and I pretty much operate like that, now.	Allen	L 311-313
I cried, I'll be honest, I cried on the phone when my Superintendent called me and told me that we couldn't do it this year. He said, we just we don't have the money. I just	Whitney	L 292-295

**Table 4.7 (Cont.)**

<b>Review</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Audit Trail</b>
cried and was like, you can't do this, take that away. That was the roughest phone call, we probably had.		
When you have a really great experience like that, it changes you forever. It transforms your leadership.	Heather	L519-520
So that that was one of the things we did just there was no idea we came up with that she didn't see the value of no matter how strange it was. That was the beauty of it.	Faith	L 516-517
So I really think, I really believe that, what they taught me about hearing the voice of other stakeholders, about involving teachers, empowering teachers, the work with the school leadership team, not me having to carry the load by myself.	Patricia	L 279-281
I think all those things I gained from them, and that I've quite honestly taken into my into my career as an administrator, as I've continued in my work.	Patricia	L 284-285
I still use a lot of strategies, even when I'm not constantly thinking about it, I realized that I'm still using a lot of those strategies.	Brian	L 341-343



## Research Findings

From the categories of the CLEAR Model of Coaching, five major themes emerged. They are presented with supporting details attained during the interviews. Direct quotations from participants, using their pseudonyms, were used where appropriate. The themes are:

1. The coach's ability to create a trusting, open, and honest relationship with the principal they are coaching impacts the effectiveness of the coaching engagement.
2. A co-created working alliance between the coach and principal is needed to ensure desired outcomes from the coaching experience.
3. Coaches need to learn about the school and understand the school's situation before coaching can begin.
4. The coach's ability to ask questions influences the perception of success in the coaching experience.
5. Professional learning experiences with the addition of a coach are more successful.

**Theme One:** *The coach's ability to create a trusting, open, and honest relationship with the principal they are coaching impacts the effectiveness of the coaching engagement.*

Analysis of the interviews revealed an emphasis on the relationship between the coach and principal when discussing coaching engagement effectiveness. All participants mentioned some aspect of the relationship when they described their experience. The responses were divided into three areas: communication, credibility, and empathy.

## **Communication**

An integral part of the coaching engagement is the continuous communication between the principal and coach. When participants shared their stories, they discussed what coaches said as well as tone and body language. As Whitney explained,

Building a relationship so that we could have those conversations and it was a lot of his body language and tone. And you know, the words he used but really it was body language, a tone that really set that relationship up.

Allen provided a detailed example of how his coach had to learn to communicate with him,

She started off being a little guarded, and very, very vague until we got to the conflict and said, look, cut all the crap just tell it to me straight. I like my conversations like I like my drinks, straight, no chaser and so it became that way and that's how she would always preface it. It's straight. No Chaser here. Here it is, bam! And I appreciated her and valued her more for that.

Brian reviewed the process his coach used to build a relationship through conversation,

It was conversational at first, because I think it was, at first, we were really trying to get to know each other, get to know one another. And if we can actually trust one another, it was just more conversational, just trying to build, establish a relationship.

Participants also mentioned communication as a way to start or end a coaching visit as Anthony stated,

It was always a pleasant conversation, and it was always, what do you want? Where do you want to go with this? It wasn't, this is what you're gonna do. It was, what are you thinking? And how can I help you get there?

## **Credibility**

Credibility was a recurring theme through all eight interviews. Participants described their coach as knowledgeable about the principal position, school business, change processes, and building positive school culture. These characteristics gave the coach credibility as Heather described, "Well, it begins with the personality to win people over, those skills that make people feel comfortable because you can't do this work if you're not willing to bare your soul. That

person needs to have credibility.” In another example, Faith articulated that more than just the principal needed to believe in the coach’s credibility,

I needed a coach, because deep down, I knew what was wrong. But I knew that teachers had to hear it from somebody other than me. I knew that they had to hear from a credible source. At that time, ALA was like the king and queen of school improvement, teacher capacity, school culture and climate. I mean, visionary, the mission, the core beliefs, the goals. I knew I needed those structures from a coach who could come in and say, yes, all of those things are important. But first of all, you need to know what you believe. You need to have a vision, you need to have a mission, nothing else matters until we have those three things set in stone.

Whitney and Peggy both talked about the value of having a credible opinion from a coach, but Peggy clearly demonstrated that belief through the following comment,

I was very receptive to whatever he said, I mean, like I said, because it's another set of eyes, sometimes when you're right there you miss, you tend to miss things or something that's vital. So, having him right there with us and looking at the data and helping us, it was just key, and it was a very good experience.

Credibility took many forms throughout the interview process as noted above, but Patricia provided specifics about a credible coach’s value when she described her expectations, “Well, I expected a co-thinking partner, I expected someone that I could bounce ideas off of, I expected someone who had a level of expertise. Someone who has some background in building relationships.”

## **Empathy**

“They’re not on the sidelines; they’re in the game,” Heather explained when she answered questions about the coaching relationship and a competent coach. All participants discussed the need for a coach who could empathize as they worked to solve different problems in their schools. Patricia responded, “I want someone who I want to say is empathetic, someone who understands that the work is challenging work and that people really do need support.”

Although the word empathy was not always used, the context of the coach’s understanding the

principal position was repeated. When discussing her coach's ability to understand a situation, Faith stated, "Open enough to accept ideas, but honest enough to tell you move on." Peggy also mentioned how her coach was not dictating from the outside when she said, "But he always pushed, what is our plan going to be? I didn't feel like it's just our plan; he was a part of it."

**Theme Two:** *A co-created working alliance between the coach and principal is needed to ensure desired outcomes from the coaching experience.*

A working alliance includes the purpose of the coaching engagement and ground rules for the work that are decided collectively between the coach and principal. All participants discussed their purpose or reason they got a coach and some ground rules that were identified as they worked with their coach. Although the components were there, participants did not call these agreements a working alliance; the term was used as it was found in the literature on the CLEAR Coaching Model (Hawkins & Smith, 2013).

### **Purpose of Coaching**

Anthony, Brian, Allen, and Patricia reported that they did not choose to get a coach. Anthony was hired with a coach in place who served the previous principal, yet he stated, "I wanted to learn all I could because I needed it." Allen knew that there would be a coach due to the level of school improvement, but he responded, "I was excited, I was very excited!" Even though Brian had no choice, he was open to having a coach because of a positive experience with coaching in another district, and Patricia explained, "I mean, some people may have seen it as a mandate, but I saw it as an opportunity to have another set of eyes that were somewhat objective."

Peggy, Whitney, Heather, and Faith requested a contract with the School Support Program. Peggy described her feelings about the program, saying, "So I was just eager for any

more assistance, I wasn't fearful of somebody coming in, I was actually very open to someone coming in, another set of eyes. So it was something that I really looked forward to.” Whitney determined that she needed a coach from her experience at another district, “I knew I couldn't turn that around by myself, I was gonna need help and coaching to make that happen.” Heather noted that the School Support program was successful at another school, “We were able to turn that middle school around, which I think is one reason why I ended up at the high school hoping to kind of replicate that process.” Faith wanted a coach as a result of working with the Arkansas Leadership Academy’s Master Principal Program and because she knew the reputation of school improvement success.

### **Ground Rules**

Participants discussed the ground rules of working with their coach when they explained how the coaching relationship evolved. Anthony remarked on how he felt about the need for frequent coaching visits,

I didn't really want someone who pulled up to our school once every two weeks to think that they knew about everything that was going on at the school. I did take, I did appreciate his input. But you can't drive in and you can't go to a school once every two weeks and say, this is what you need to do and get in your car and leave.

In the following statement from Whitney, she too discussed the need for frequent visits as a necessity for the work,

Having him here so often was very helpful. Like, you can't just come once every two months and expect to see progress. I know a lot of people like well, that's a lot of days. But you know what? Those lot of days made a huge impact, because it helped build a relationship between him and the school and he wasn't just someone that popped in and out randomly. We knew we were going to have this many days.

Brian described the importance he placed on having meetings with his coach and district supervisors when he commented,

Look, everybody's saying different things and pulling me different ways. Let's get all get on the same page. And once we got on the same page it was extremely helpful because it allowed me to plan and prioritize set goals and organize and actually measure things that I was doing.

Other ground rules were created to care for the principal and keep the work moving forward as Heather described,

She seems to know exactly, when it's okay to say it, and when it's okay to just be quiet and listen, and when it's okay to grab that box of Kleenex and cry with you, hit the wall with you, whatever needs to happen. I felt like she was feeling it with me, but she didn't let me stay there too long before we were talking about moving forward and fixing it.

**Theme Three:** *Coaches need to learn about the school and understand the school's situation before coaching can begin.*

Participants unanimously agreed that it was vital that the coach learned about the school and the school's current situation prior to the beginning of any coaching. To fully cover this theme, participants discussed two main areas: School Culture and Data Analysis.

### **School Culture**

Participants shared that their coach learned about their school culture by meeting and visiting with staff and students. This step provided an opportunity for the coach to observe what was happening in the school while building relationships beyond the principal. Anthony explained, "He would go check in rooms and talk to teachers and talk to students and just kind of get a feeling, what's going on." Peggy mentioned, "He also visited classrooms with me so that he could get familiar with the teachers and see students." The time the coach spent in the classrooms and working with teachers was a positive for Allen, who said,

Then as they became more accustomed to her, it was wonderful because they'd be like, hey, I need you to see what's going on in PLC. So PLC time became really important. We got to digging into data, digging into test results. What are some things that we can accomplish this, this, this or that? It was really good.

Whitney discussed the importance of getting to know her school and team before coaching could begin,

He came in and he stopped and he learned about us and where we were. Because he knew me, but he didn't know my team. He didn't know my new school and so he stopped and he learned before he even tried to ask any questions or move us forward or talk about goals or anything, he learned who my team was, who we were as a school at that time, before he started coaching us.

Faith's coach truly became a part of the school and quite popular with staff and students,

The kids were so crazy about her they got to the point that oh, she's here somebody get her purse, somebody get her book bag, somebody hold that door. I mean, the kids loved to see her come and that's when you know you have a good coach when everybody looks forward to the day that they're going to be on your campus. She was just one of us.

### **Data Analysis**

Understanding student data and using it to make improvement plans was necessary as the coaches began to work with the principals. Each visit included a time to debrief and create the next steps or goals for the upcoming visit. Patricia enjoyed knowing they would, "Visit this many classrooms, we had our standard time to debrief, and then we would set the goals for the next time that they were going to be on the campus." Peggy reiterated the importance of data review, "Overall, it was looking at data and talking about where we were along the way." Anthony also talked about the importance of data collection, "We did a lot of walkthroughs together, we would try to collect data." Brian's school had just gone through an audit, so he stated, "We were just trying to get all the data and utilize the data and look at the demographics."

**Theme Four:** *The coach's ability to ask questions influences the perception of success in the coaching experience.*

It became clear through the interview process that the participants did not want to be told what they should do to address their school's challenges. All of them emphasized that the coach

would ask questions to lead them to their own conclusions. Questions were sorted into two areas: probing questions and reflective questions.

### **Probing Questions**

The coaches used questions about data and school structures to learn about the school. These probing questions were needed for both the coach and principal to ensure that the plans that followed were specific to the school's needs. Whitney had a negative experience when her first assigned coach did not ask questions, "The difference was, he would come in, and he would just tell us things, and he wouldn't listen to where we were and what we were trying to do and what we really needed." Conversely, Peggy benefited from the constant questions her coach asked about data, "That narrow focus on students, being able to group students and following the data." Allen's coach also maintained focus by, "Being deliberate and intentional looking for two or three things to do well. You can't do 1000 things well, but do two or three things well, and take it to scale." Questions about data and a continuous focus on data were how Faith's coach monitored progress, "Look into your data set enough, she looked at hard data, she looked at soft data, she looked at formative, she looked at summative."

### **Reflective Questions**

The majority of positive comments from participants centered on the reflective questioning their coaches utilized. Whitney, who expressed what she missed most about her coach responded,

I guess just the reflective questions, because that's still something that we're trying to work on with each other being able to ask those really good questions that help us think through what we're trying to solve or issues that we're having.



Anthony remarked, “Of course, he never told me. But he asked me, we would do things, and he would say, Okay, so that's what you want to do.” Reflective questions were ongoing, even when outcomes were met as evidenced by Faith’s comment,

After that first year when we met growth and we were getting ready to get off of the list she celebrated. But the next day she cracked the whip and she came in with a whole different set of thought provoking questions.

Brian described the experience of working with a coach who was able to provide reflection in action, “It required me to do a lot of self-reflection, it was personal, it gave me a lot of chances to self-reflect and to look at myself in that process.”

**Theme Five:** *Professional learning experiences with the addition of a coach are more successful.*

All participants commented on the professional learning aspect of the School Support Program. After analyzing interview responses, the concern regarding professional growth was evident since their time with the program. The manner in which each participant described professional learning divided into three categories: A Different Experience, Specific to the School, and Lasting Impact.

### **A Different Experience**

The simple question, “How did this experience differ from other professional development that you have engaged in?” created a quick and robust response. Comments from all participants addressed the personalization and how it was ongoing and conducted onsite.

Specifically, Heather stated,

Just that it was, it was made for our campus we started with the things that we needed to as far as the core beliefs and the mission and vision. So this made it easy to plan our professional development, because we constantly referred back to that mission, and wanted to make sure that whatever we were doing, it was supported by our mission. Our core beliefs were sort of a touchstone for moving forward with any kind of professional development or plans.

Allen emphasized personalization when he responded,

It was more personal, she and I had some real conversations, one about the current reality, two about what the school's needs were, and three, where were my deficiencies that I needed to work on to make sure that the work took place.

Whitney addressed the ongoing nature of the learning experiences through the School Support Program when she said,

It was ongoing, it wasn't just this one and done thing where you go off somewhere, and they talk at you, and then you come back, and you never talk about it again, even though you try to do it, or if you do try to do it, it's just not successful, because you don't have anyone to talk through it. He was able to coach us through the assignments and the things that we were talking about there and that made a much more lasting impact.

Peggy reiterated the importance of professional learning onsite with a coach who knew the school, “Onsite, you know, with him being there, and learning our school, our data, our students and our staff.” Patricia compared the professional learning experiences with her coach to other professional development when she explained,

Well, you know, a lot of times you go to professional development, and you don't have the follow up. I mean, you attend and then you're off, left to your own devices to try to implement. So in the coaching model, I think it gives you someone to say, well, here's what we learned, how do we apply?

### **Specific to the School**

Participants in the study often mentioned the strategic action plan and the process of creating that plan. All professional learning experiences were filtered through the strategic action plan that was collaboratively created with the principal, faculty, and the coach. Strategic action plans resulted from a needs assessment, meaning the plan was individualized to each school, and the coach checked on the progress of the plan at each visit. Patricia said, “She especially was really good when we were doing the plan, working on measurable goals and those kinds of things.” Brian stated, “It allowed me to, in that goal process, have specific goals you want to have measured, you have checkpoints, if they're working, if they're not working.” Peggy

commented, “Let's see what we can do about this, making a plan, developing a plan to overcome any deficits that we were looking at or any data that we were looking at, and the outcome, what it looked like.” In the creation of the strategic action plan, Allen was asked, “What are the three things that we're going to do and do well? You got to make a plan and then work the plan.”

## **Lasting Impact**

The final analysis of interview transcripts concentrated on the lasting impact of professional learning through the coaching engagement. Each participant discussed what they still use, what has influenced their leadership, and their overall experience. Anthony explained,

A lot of things come through education that, you're like, oh no, what's coming this year, and we'll do it for a year and then something else comes, so this was constant. It's not something that you wanted to just get rid of, and look for something else to do. This was something that you can use your whole career.

Brian talked about the impact of the work and what he has transferred to his current position in the district office,

Setting goals, measuring those things, we're still using those strategies and paying attention to and surrounding myself with people that can kind of like put the brakes on and say this is what we need to do. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Just learning that with my coach, was more conversational and just pulling things out of me so when I use those things with people I work with now I am just pulling things out of people, their gifts.

Peggy has since retired from the profession, but she remembers the coaching experience as,

Supportive, and I know this is a hard strange word for it, but I would say stretching always. I mean, pushing or urging you to go further to dig deeper into data. Drilling down to each skill, not just overall, because you can have 40% what does that 40% really mean? So I think drilling, stretching and also being warm and friendly.

When Allen reflected on the overall impact of the coaching experience, he described it as,

Priceless, career changing, and a sheer blessing because it takes a strong person to help you to see you. The 360 leadership engagement thing and getting the report back and my coach was like, no, here's the deal, the beauty of her teaching me how to own it. You may not agree with it, but you got to own it. Because whatever they manifested on paper is a direct result of your actions.

Whitney reminisced about her experience and provided this reflection,

Highly impactful on our culture and achievement. Capacity, I don't even know how to say our ability to build capacity is higher because of that, we are better. Our culture is actually a healthy school culture versus a toxic school culture because of it.

Heather described the impact from the coaching model provided by the School Support Program by comparing it to one less effective,

When you're able to have that opportunity to reflect on something that is a very canned program, and scripted that has very little buy in, compared to one that is collaborative and that builds leadership capacity and spread in your building. You just don't ever want to go back, it just frames the work from that moment on.

Faith emphasized, with great enthusiasm, the quality of her coach,

She's the best coach I've ever seen, priceless, timeless things she taught you, it will stand the test of time, versatile, and character building. I think we all became not just better teachers, but better people because we never lost sight of what the end goal was and I would even go so far as to say it was transforming.

Finally, Patricia described her experience with the following descriptors and statements,

Coaching was consistent, authentic, and supportive. I'm gonna use this word, and then I'm gonna quantify it, challenging. Like I'm gonna push you to think, a little further than where you're thinking. I think that's important for a coach, to challenge you to help the organization to stretch, to move beyond where we currently are.

## **Researcher Observations**

Through the use of a research journal, I captured observations during and immediately following each interview. There were no in-person interviews since all participants chose a telecommunication method due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This circumstance inhibited me from clearly reading facial expressions and body language, but tone and inflection were noted during the conversations.

Two of the participants were interviewed by phone, so only tone and inflection were available. Peggy was the first phone interview, and she seemed happy to tell her story. She sounded sure of herself and as if she was smiling throughout the entire interview. There were

only a few questions specific to the coaching process that she admitted to not remembering clearly. Anthony was also a phone interview. He was amiable and willing to talk about his experience, but his voice tone was flat throughout the interview.

Brian, Whitney, Faith, Heather, Patricia, and Allen had interviews through Zoom. All of them displayed a pleasant affect and were willing to discuss their experience. Whitney and Heather had what they perceived as a negative experience with the coach initially sent to them. Each was able to replace them early in the coaching engagement, but both were somewhat hesitant to talk about that experience. In the end, I was able to get more information out of Whitney because we knew each other from meetings and other Arkansas Leadership Academy events. Still, Heather needed to be assured that the story would be held in the strictest confidence allowed by University policy. I also had previous professional relationships with Brian and Allen, so they were eager to help with this research. I did not know Faith and Patricia before interviewing them. They were both friendly and answered questions easily with no evidence of hesitation. All participants had a very positive, even excited tone of voice when they described the School Support Program's lasting impact and specifically the coaching aspect of the experience.

### **Summary of Chapter Four**

This chapter reviewed the setting for the research and how it influenced the study and interpretation of findings. The background of participants was described, and a table provided each participant's pseudonym, mode of interview, time to complete the interview, and the participant's current role. The data analysis was conducted using the six phases of Thematic Analysis with the research questions filtered through the CLEAR Coaching Model stages. I met triangulation with the in-depth interviews, transcripts, and an observational research journal. The

primary research question was how do principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching? Five findings resulted from the analysis of the data and evidence from the interview transcripts were used to support them. Each finding answered the primary research question, and sub questions were answered throughout the data analysis displayed in tables.

The first finding was that the coach's ability to create a trusting, open, and honest relationship with the principal they are coaching impacts the effectiveness of the coaching engagement. This theme was expanded through the categories of communication, credibility, and empathy. Participants explained the importance of open and honest communication, the coach's experience in schools and the principal position, and the coach's ability to understand their current situation. The second finding was the need for a co-created working alliance between the coach and principal to ensure desired outcomes from the coaching experience. A working alliance was defined as the purpose or reason for the coaching program and the ground rules necessary for a positive experience. Third, it was found that coaches need to learn about the school and understand the school's situation before coaching can begin. The participants discussed this need in the areas of familiarity with the school culture through staff and students and data analysis of hard and soft data.

The fourth finding was the coach's ability to ask questions and how that influenced the perception of success in the coaching experience. Probing and reflective questions were explained, with participants stating that they did not want to be told what to do but led through effective questioning. Finally, participants perceived that professional learning experiences with the addition of a coach are more successful. Participants described this theme through the experience the School Support Program provided, how learning needs to be specific to the school's needs, and the lasting impact. Each participant provided evidence of those key learning

experiences and how they continued even after the coaching engagement. The chapter concludes with researcher observations that were obtained during and after the interviews in a research journal.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this case study was to explore how principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching and how coaching impacted their professional growth. The participants in this study were principals who participated in the School Support Program, implemented by the Arkansas Leadership Academy, for a minimum of three years and were provided a coach for the entire engagement. Eight participants were interviewed for this qualitative case study to identify the behaviors, qualities, and attributes needed for an effective coaching engagement. This study will allow those who coach principals and programs with a coaching component to understand some of the necessary factors for a successful experience. The conclusions and recommendations in this chapter address five areas: (1) coaching relationship; (2) working alliance; (3) understanding culture and current reality; (4) questioning; and (5) professional development.

### **Conclusion 1: A positive coaching relationship is foundational.**

The first significant finding from this study supports the literature that articulated the importance of a positive coaching relationship. Numerous times during the interviews, participants remarked about the relationship that was developed with their coach. A conclusion drawn from this finding is that principals will perceive coaching as effective when establishing a positive relationship with their coach. Celoria and Roberson's (2015) study emphasized the importance of relationship and psychosocial functioning when coaching principals. Coaches provided a sense of security as principals learned the job. Crosse's (2019) research supported the finding that the key ingredient to a successful outcome is the coaching relationship.

Coaching has become a strategy for learning and growth in many organizations. School leaders benefit from a coach because of the position's enormity and need for additional support



(Gray, 2018). The established relationship is critical to the coaching engagement's effectiveness, and the coach's behavior plays a significant role in creating the coaching relationship. The coach must have the ability to establish a close and trusting relationship with open communication (Hayashi, 2016). Coaches achieve this relationship by believing in the client's potential, being supportive and nonjudgmental, and creating a safe space to encourage and support (Crosse, 2019).

### **Conclusion 2: A working alliance is essential.**

The findings revealed that a co-created working alliance was needed to make sure the coach and principal agreed on the desired outcomes from the coaching experience. Although the term working alliance was not always used in literature or by the participants, this aspect of the coaching engagement was a prerequisite for a productive engagement. The working alliance was formed during the Contracting stage of the CLEAR Coaching Model through the participant's purpose for participating in the process and the ground rules they established for the coaching engagement (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). The working alliance encompassed personal rapport between the coach and principal and established an agreement on goals and processes (Gettman et al., 2019). Hayashi (2016) found that, according to principals, coaching was effective because of the individualized aspect. Coaches who used a process-oriented approach helped principals become more reflective and confident practitioners through preset agendas (Celoria & Hemphill, 2014).

The frequency of visits, part of ground rules in the working alliance, was also related to how principals rated a coach's effectiveness. The more visits and time spent by the coach, the higher they were rated (Wise & Cavazos, 2017). Additionally, Goff et al. (2014) found that more coaching sessions yielded more growth in leadership development skills. The working alliance

ensures that the coach and principal co-create the goals, methods, bond, and trust for the coaching engagement (Crosse, 2019, Gettman et al., 2019).

### **Conclusion 3: Understanding school culture and current reality are crucial.**

This conclusion surfaced through participant descriptions of the evolution of the coaching process. The Listening stage of the CLEAR Coaching Model best describes this need as coaches actively listen and learn about the school's situation (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). Interestingly, the literature did not explicitly mention the need for this familiarity with school culture and the current school situation. However, research in principal coaching does reveal a coach's requirement to assist in developing an improvement plan. Improvement planning is evidenced in Wise and Hammack's (2011) study focused on coaching competencies. They found that a common expectation is that the coach assists with developing a plan and is knowledgeable of effective practice. Rogers et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study that discovered most coaching conversations were about issues with instructional leadership, including student learning and progress. Principals desired a coach that addressed leadership through critical reflection and feedback (Cosner et al., 2018). Finally, James-Ward's (2013) study on leadership coaching identified that a valuable aspect of coaching was the experience gained from classroom observations. A conclusion drawn from these expectations is that a coach must be knowledgeable and have a clear understanding of the school culture and data to determine needs and effective practices.

### **Conclusion 4: Questioning is a requisite skill for coaches.**

Asking questions and not giving advice was a theme throughout the interviews. Participants were clear that both probing and reflective questions were necessary to allow for growth during the coaching engagement. This finding supported the literature in that the ability

to ask questions distinguished a coach from other assistance provided in the workplace. In the CLEAR Coaching Model, the Explore stage is built around questioning and reflecting (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that a coach must have the ability to ask a variety of questions that lead the principal to their own decisions. Research conducted in principal coaching indicates the importance of questions to establish focus, discover solutions, expand thinking, and move toward goals (Celoria & Hemphill, 2014). The act of questioning was regarded as an essential skill as the answers are within the principal (Crosse, 2019; Psencik, 2019). “Coaching is the process used to help people reflect, find power and courage within themselves, and think and act in new ways in order to bring about permanent and positive change” (Wise & Jacobo, 2010, pp. 162-163).

#### **Conclusion 5: Professional development is more functional with coaching support.**

This finding from the data analysis supports and extends the literature even though it was specific to the professional development offered through the School Support Program and those experiences during the coaching engagement. Illustrated in the CLEAR Coaching Model’s Action and Review stages, participants discussed the difference in learning experiences, how the learning was built around and for the school, and the lasting impact. A conclusion drawn from this finding is that professional development is more likely to be applied and sustained with ongoing support from a coach. Veelen et al. (2017) studied school leaders and professional development. They concluded that learning activities embedded within the school environment and driven by personal motivation had the most significant impact on educational innovation and change. Principals also reported benefitting from learning things quickly and acquiring practical skills from having a coach (James-Ward, 2013). In a literature review of 31 papers between 2012 and 2018 conducted by Eastman (2019), coaching was described as the life-blood of professional

development that leads to transformational change. This conclusion regarding professional development with a coach serves as an extension of knowledge in the literature on coaching principals. It addressed the importance of job-embedded professional development but added the principals' need for ongoing coaching support to implement change initiatives in their buildings. Participants in this study reflected that professional development during the coaching engagement was more sustainable than other learning opportunities where they received training and attempted to implement what they learned in isolation.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the research questions, findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are offered for (1) performance (leadership) coaches, (2) principals or school leaders, and (3) School Support Program or other educational programs.

#### **Recommendations for performance (leadership) coaches**

1. Take time at the beginning of the coaching engagement to establish a positive relationship with the school leader through conversation, encouragement, and support.
2. Co-create a working alliance that includes desired outcomes, ground rules, and details about coaching visits, so there are no misunderstandings.
3. Utilize a coaching model to ensure that all stages of a visit are thoroughly completed.

Consider the CLEAR model; contract, listen, explore, action, and review for each visit and as a tool for reflection on the entire coaching engagement.

4. Learn everything possible about the school culture and current reality. Talk with administrators, teachers, students, and family or community members to understand where the school is functioning now and where and how it can be improved.

5. Assist the principal and their team in creating a strategic action plan that determines actions, timeline, the person responsible, assessment, and next steps to improve continuously.
6. Never give advice; ask questions that lead the principal to conclusions or decisions. Study questioning and be ready to ask the necessary type of question according to the situation.
7. Attend professional development sessions with the principal as much as possible and use coaching visits to reflect on the new learning, application, and implementation for a sustainable outcome. Tailor provided professional learning experiences to the school's mission and needs according to the strategic action plan.

### **Recommendations to principals or school leaders**

1. Ensure that a coaching engagement is genuinely needed and desired. Have an open mind when considering whether a coach is essential in the current situation and whether another opinion and set of eyes is welcome.
2. Take time to build a relationship with the coach, set aside time for conversation and questions.
3. Prepare school faculty, staff, and stakeholders for the addition of a coach. Discuss the coaching engagement and allow time for questions and concerns.
4. Prepare for a coaching engagement by considering personal and professional needs through a self-assessment or professional growth plan. Decide on desired outcomes, ground rules, mode of visits, and duration of coaching visits.
5. Provide all forms of hard and soft data and opportunities for the coach to learn about the school's culture and current reality.

6. Invite the coach to professional development when possible. Reflect on the new learning and create a plan for application and implementation.

### **Recommendations for the School Support Program or other educational programs**

1. Provide professional development for coaches on tools, strategies, and techniques to build a positive coaching relationship.
2. Consider the use of a coaching model to ensure quality stages of each visit and the overall engagement.
3. Create contracts that include a working alliance co-created with coach and client to ensure desired outcomes are met, and ground rules or norms are established.
4. Provide book studies, professional learning, and collaborative opportunities to improve the questioning ability of coaches.
5. Allow coaches to attend professional development with clients when feasible. Stay current with research and trends to ensure relevance.
6. Recruit coaches with experience in school leadership and with demonstrated ability to pivot to a supporting role for the principal.
7. Recruit schools and principals that understand the processes and want to improve through the engagement of a coach.

### **Recommendations for further research**

Further studies in leadership or performance coaching for principals are recommended to develop a more extensive database of information and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and the overall impact of coaching. In light of this, the following should be considered:

1. Due to this study's limitations, a much larger study should be conducted to gather national and state data on performance or leadership coaches' effectiveness for school principals.
2. Similar case studies should be conducted that focus on the perception of district leaders and performance or leadership coaches.
3. Studies on the lasting impact of coaching on principal retention and school performance should be conducted.

### **A Natural Fit**

This case study explored the phenomenon of school principals who have participated in coaching and how those principals perceived the coach's effectiveness. It was grounded in the social constructivist interpretive framework that postulates learning is a product of social interaction (Bryceson, 2007). Therefore, a parallel could readily be drawn between adult and lifelong learning and coaching.

The concepts of effective coaching and adult learning share similarities in theory and practice since the client, like the adult learner, must be willing and motivated to learn. Coaching models and strategies often rely on situated learning theory, which focuses on learning from social interaction, solving problems, and participating in daily life (Lennard, 2010; 2013). Mezirow's theory of transformative learning has strong connections to the coaching experience. In the workplace, those who desire a coach typically want to improve some aspect of their skillset. Mezirow's transformation process reflects coaching as the client is being led through an assessment of current beliefs and reality. Then a plan is constructed and carried out to implement the desired change (Griffiths, 2006). Methods of adult learning, like self-directed learning, where the learner decides what to learn, and experiential learning, where the reciprocal relationship

between learning and experience is considered, are observed in the coaching engagement since the approach to learning is controlled by the client. Simultaneously, the coach guides them through those learning processes (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Coaching is grounded in adult education principles, and understanding the fit between coaching and adult learning is extremely important for success in the field of leadership coaching. As evidenced in this study's conclusions, a coach must understand adult learning theories and use aligned practices to ensure an effective coaching engagement.

### **Researcher Reflections**

Coaching has become the fastest-growing field inside consulting and has changed from assisting the low performing to increasing the performance of successful employees (Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008). If this study provided a glimpse into today's coaching needs for principals, it was well worth the effort. Principals have an enormous responsibility for their schools, such as managerial aspects like budget, food service, transportation, and the all-important instructional aspects, including curriculum, instruction, and student achievement. Like leaders in the business world, principals benefit from a thought partner who can help identify problems and support goals and plans (Goff et al., 2014). The School Support Program was one program that provided coaching services to principals in Arkansas. I hope this study and the recommendations continue to expand and improve those services.

As this study comes to a close, my reflection is bittersweet. This study allowed me the opportunity to speak with school leaders who participated in the School Support Program from 2010 to 2020. It was a privilege to hear stories of growth and challenge and how this program and the Arkansas Leadership Academy impacted their professional lives. I learned about my coaching practice and have grown as a professional. The behaviors and strategies that were



deemed effective will forever be in my repertoire of coaching skills. In the end, I found that I strongly agreed with Lytle (2009), who explained that when negotiating a contract, a coach should be included and viewed as an indication of a commitment to personal learning.

Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, once said, “The only constant is change.” Well, change is on the horizon for the Arkansas Leadership Academy and the School Support Program. Through new leadership, new programs, and a new vision for content delivery, many of the pieces mentioned in this study may not continue. Still, it is hoped that the information gained from this study will serve principals and leadership coaches in Arkansas and beyond for years to come.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Introductory Email/Letter**

Date

Dear (name of individual)

My name is Kimberly Starr and I am a Performance Coach and Co-Facilitator for the Arkansas Leadership Academy. I am currently writing my doctoral dissertation in Adult and Lifelong Learning at the University of Arkansas. I am conducting a qualitative case study to explore principal perceptions of effective performance coaching in the School Support Program.

I would be honored to have you participate in this research. Participation will only require one interview either face-to-face at a location of your choice or through video conferencing. Health and safety measures recommended by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will be followed if the face-to-face option is chosen. Social distancing of six feet will be maintained throughout the interview and cloth masks will be worn at all times. If there is any chance of exposure to COVID-19 I will cancel the interview and would ask that if you have reason to believe you were exposed, you would cancel the interview as well. Please join me in monitoring our personal health by reporting symptoms of COVID-19 such as a temperature, cough, and/or shortness of breath prior to the interview. I will also supply disinfectant wipes at the interview to clean surfaces prior to use.

The interview will be comprised of questions and a conversation about your experience of being coached through the School Support Program. I would like to record these interviews and may take notes as we talk. Prior to the interview, you will receive a consent form.

Please be assured that should you agree to participate, you will receive a typed written transcript of your interview where you will have the opportunity to clarify, correct, or elaborate on information shared in the interview process. All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact me or my professor at the University of Arkansas College of Education and Health Professions. The contact information is as follows:

Kimberly Starr: kastarr@uark.edu

Dr. Kit Kacirek: kitk@uark.edu

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form

To:

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You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled: Principal Perceptions of Effective Performance Coaching: A Case Study. Below is a description of the study for your review.

**Project Title:** Principal Perceptions of Effective Performance Coaching: A Case Study

**Principal Researcher:** Kimberly Starr  
Doctoral Student  
[kastarr@uark.edu](mailto:kastarr@uark.edu)

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Kit Kacirek  
ADLL Ed.D. Program Coordinator  
[kitk@uark.edu](mailto:kitk@uark.edu)

**What the study is about:**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore how principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching. This study is based on experiences with a performance coach provided through the School Support Program at the Arkansas Leadership Academy.

**What participants will be asked to do:**

The research consists of a face-to-face or video conferencing interview that will last 1-2 hours. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted at a location of the participant's choice. The interview will be recorded with your permission. After the interview is transcribed, it will be sent back to you via email for your review and to ensure accuracy of the interview. All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

**Risks:**

Risk in this study is minimal. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym and no identifying information will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this research. All data collected will be stored on a password protected laptop computer, flash drive, and/or file. Due to current health restrictions in place, recommended health and safety measures from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will be followed. Social distancing of six feet will be maintained throughout the interview and cloth masks will be worn at all times. If there is any chance of exposure to COVID-19 by the participant or researcher, the interview will be cancelled. The participant and researcher will monitor their health and report symptoms such as temperature, cough,

and/or shortness of breath. Disinfectant wipes will be provided by the researcher to clean surfaces prior to use.

**Benefits:**

By participating in the study, the participant may contribute to new insight into building coaching relationships and improve services provided through the School Support Program. This study may also contribute to the field of education by providing guidance for coaching and professional development practices for principals. Through this study, information will be shared that can be used to strengthen principal practice and implement best practices within schools.

**Payment for participation:**

There will be no payment for taking part in the study.

**Privacy/Confidentiality:**

All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy and no identifying information will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this research. Interviews will be maintained by using a pseudonym for the participant and the researcher will use a password protected laptop and flash drive, and any hard copies will be in a file in the researcher's home.

**Taking part is voluntary:**

Participant involvement is voluntary. The participant may refuse to participate before the study begins, discontinue at any time, or skip any questions/procedures that may make him/her feel uncomfortable with no penalty to him/her.

**If you have questions:**

The main researcher conducting this study is Kimberly Starr, Doctoral Candidate, at the University of Arkansas. If you have questions, please contact me at [kastarr@uark.edu](mailto:kastarr@uark.edu).

I have been given an opportunity to read and keep a copy of this agreement and to ask questions concerning the study. Questions have been answered to my full and complete satisfaction.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, having full capacity to consent, do hereby volunteer to participate in this research study.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Research Participant

This research has received approval of the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board, which functions to insure the protection of the rights of human participants. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Compliance Coordinator at (479) 575-2208 or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu)

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

**Topic:** Case Study on Principal Perceptions of Effective Performance Coaching

#### I. Basic Information

1. Place of interview \_\_\_\_\_
2. Date of interview \_\_\_\_\_
3. Time of interview: Started at \_\_\_\_\_ Ended at \_\_\_\_\_
4. Interviewee's:  
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Organization \_\_\_\_\_
5. Coach \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. Instruction for Interviewer

##### Introduction:

1. *Thank you for your time and willingness to speak to me today. The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours and will be audio recorded. The audio data will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. After transcription, the subsequent data-analysis document will use a pseudonym for identification. Before we proceed, please review these documents with me, then sign if you understand and agree. Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time with no ramifications to you, and please know that no identifying information collected will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this research.*
2. *The purpose of this case study to explore principal perceptions of effective performance coaching in the School Support Program. This will be a three-phase inquiry beginning with your preconceived notions prior to coaching, your experience while coaching, and the lasting impact of your experience with coaching.*

#### III. Research questions and Interview Questions:

- **RQ:** How do principals construct their perceptions of effective performance coaching?
- **SQ1:** How do principals explain the purpose of performance coaching?
- **SQ2:** How do principals explain the role of the performance coach?
- **SQ3:** What behaviors/qualities of the coach do principals believe contribute to an effective coaching relationship?
- **SQ4:** How do principals describe the evolution of the coaching relationship?
- **SQ5:** How do principals describe their experience with performance coaching?

**Preconceived Notions:**

What was your experience with coaching before this engagement?

What did you expect from the coaching experience?

How did this experience differ from other professional development that you have engaged in?

**Experience during coaching:**

Tell me about how the coaching process evolved:

What did the coach do?

What did the coach ask you to do?

How was the process structured?

Tell me about how the coaching relationship evolved:

What did the coach do?

What did the coach ask you to do?

At first, how did you feel about the relationship?

During the coaching engagement, what coach behaviors would you say supported your learning and development?

**Lasting Impact of Coaching:**

How have you applied what you learned during the coaching engagement?

What words would you use to describe the coaching engagement?

What words would you use to describe a competent performance coach?

How did your experience differ from your expectations of the experience?

**Closing**

*I have concluded my questions, thank you for your time again. When I complete the draft data analysis, I plan to share it with my research participants so they can check how their views are presented before the transcript is finalized. Will you be interested in receiving the draft data analysis and providing feedback accordingly?*

Final Comments:

Researcher Initials \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D



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**To:** Kimberly A Starr  
BELL 4188

**From:** Douglas J Adams, Chair  
IRB Expedited Review

**Date:** 10/27/2020

**Action:** **Expedited Approval**

**Action Date:** 10/27/2020

**Protocol #:** 2009286322

**Study Title:** Principal Perceptions of Effective Performance Coaching: A Case Study

**Expiration Date:** 10/01/2021

**Last Approval Date:**

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

**Adverse Events:** Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Kit Kacirek, Key Personnel

## Appendix E

### Health and Safety Information

1. All participants will have the option of video conferencing or a face-to-face interview.
2. If face-to-face is chosen, the participant will be assured that the following safety measures will be employed according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Guidelines found on the website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>
  - a. A location will be chosen that has ample room for social distancing of at least 6 feet.
  - b. Cloth masks will be worn at all times during the interview.
  - c. The researcher will cancel if there is any chance of exposure to COVID-19.
  - d. The researcher will monitor her health by ensuring she has not had a temperature, cough, and/or shortness of breath prior to the interview.
  - e. The participant will be asked about exposure to COVID-19 prior to the interview.
  - f. The participant will be asked if they have experienced a temperature, cough, and/or shortness of breath prior to the interview.
  - g. Surfaces will be cleaned prior to use during the interview.