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The Impact of Embedded Coaching on Educational Leader Professional Practice

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The Impact of Embedded Coaching on Educational Leader Professional Practice

By

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Dedication

There are many who supported me through this process, however, I dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my three sons Austin, Alek, and Adam: Being your mother is the greatest gift of my life. All I've ever wanted to be is better for you. It's my greatest hope that you each will each achieve your wildest dreams and find outrageous joy in your lives. To my husband César: Thank you for your never-ending patience and support with all my late nights, early mornings, family vacations and weekends working toward this lifelong goal. Lastly, to my grandmother, Mary Stancil Moore: You had a larger impact on me than you'll ever know. You modeled what it means to be a strong female leader for me at an early age. Thank you for all you gave me. I miss you, but know you are proud of me.

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Abstract

School and district leadership is complex work. Educational leaders today are charged with a myriad of responsibilities, ranging from everyday operational duties to strategic development of school improvement plans. Leaders are expected to be experts at everything ranging from transportation to transforming teaching and learning. Gone are the days when a leader was expected to manage the school or district. Today leaders are expected to meet the robust needs of staff, students, and families inclusive of social-emotional needs, academic needs, and physical needs. Today's leaders are expected to be transformative, to have skills sets that enable them to effectively partner with all stakeholders, support teachers and staff, have a deep knowledge of instructional best practices and a sophisticated ability to develop and monitor continuous improvement systems. At the same time, as we have moved from pandemic to endemic, the pre-existing inequities within our education system are laid bare and students and families have more need of support than any time in recent history. It is an incredibly complicated time to serve as an educational leader. It is also an incredibly important time to have strong leaders serving in our schools and school systems.

Given the multi-faceted demands of educational leadership today, this research explores how embedded leadership coaching impacts leaders' professional practice. As embedded capacity building model, this research explores the ways in which individual leader coaching has impact on leaders, as well as what the implications may be for both research and practitioners in the field.

Key Words: job-embedded, coaching, leader professional practice

Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Study

The effectiveness of leadership has a profound impact on educational communities. As our society shifts from pandemic to endemic, educational institutions work diligently to address significant learning loss, budgetary limitations, staffing shortages and educator burnout. It is a very challenging time to work in education. Now more than ever before, we need school and district leaders that are highly effective, competent and can positively influence outcomes for all students and especially students the farthest from educational justice. However, the impact of leadership on student outcomes varies widely, as do embedded support mechanisms for leaders.

Serving as an effective leader in a school setting is a complicated endeavor. Educational leadership is a high-stakes balancing act between instruction and operation with an incessant pull toward the operational side of leadership, which focuses on technical aspects of school management such as transportation, staffing, budgeting, and scheduling. While it is necessary for school leaders to function as competent operational managers, it is insufficient to enable the conditions for improved student outcomes. To positively shift student experiences and outcomes, school leaders must be able to also function as effective instructional leaders, which includes the ability to exercise shared collective leadership within their school communities (Louis et al., 2010). Developing leaders to serve as effective instructional leaders requires deep professional development and coaching.

Highly effective leadership is necessary to create positive impact for students. In Hattie's (2009) widely referenced meta-analysis study related to student achievement, he

found that that while the overall effect size of all the variables examined are quite large (> .40), the total effect size for school leadership was smaller (< .36). However, Hattie (2015) clarified in follow up research that while the combined effect size of leadership on student outcomes was low (< .36), leaders who believe their role is to lead for ***impact*** and who embed evaluation as a core professional responsibility have a much higher effect size (.91) on student achievement outcomes. Robinson et. al. (2008) expanded the concept of leading for impact. In their meta-analysis study, they found that leaders who consider themselves instructional leaders are more focused on the impact of leaders and teachers have on student learning, while leaders who consider themselves *transformational* tend to focus more on the teachers and the larger school environment.

Much of Hattie's work was completed before the global COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore may not fully capture the current challenges facing school leaders. The pandemic has inevitably pulled much of the leadership focus to the operational sphere of schools for an extended period. While globally we are still working to fully understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student well-being and learning, preliminary research indicates that there are significant increases in learning and access gaps to be addressed. For example, Kuhlfeld et. al. (2022) found that nationally both reading and math scores fell significantly from 2019-2022, with more significant drops in the area of mathematics. They also found that achievement gaps between low-poverty and high-poverty schools grew (*SD* = .10-.20). School and district leaders cannot lead for equity and impact if they are not deeply steeped in the instruction happening at their school.

Stosich (2020) highlighted that traditionally direct involvement in instruction is one of the tasks principals have spent the least amount of time on in schools due to other

competing interests and obligations. If principals are to be expected to make a shift to a higher prioritization on instructional leadership, they must be provided ample support to do so. Providing a framework to support educational leaders in maintaining a laser-like focus on student well-being and achievement requires a deep commitment to supporting the professional growth and competency of school and district leaders. As we transition as a society from pandemic to endemic, there has never been a more important time to support school systems and school leaders so that they are in turn able to provide a rich, rigorous, and well-rounded learning experience for every student. Historically, school district support and professional development for leaders has been inconsistent, and tends to be more focused on a hierarchical management and resource deployment model that is lacking in ongoing and embedded coaching opportunities for leaders.

To this end, this research study sought to examine the impact embedded professional leadership coaching has on leader professional practice. Embedded coaching consists of individualized professional development between a specially trained coach and a leader in which ongoing support is provided. Compared to other more sporadic forms of professional development for leaders such as occasional workshops or monthly training sessions, professional learning that is embedded and contextualized to the leaders' specific problem of practice has been found to be more effective (Knight, 2019). More traditional methods of professional development, such as workshop models are less effective than instructional coaching models because they often lack context or direct applicability, while instructional coaching as a method of professional development model is integrated into the day-to-day experience of the coachee (Garet et. al., 2001). Prior research has examined the importance and characteristics of highly effective

leaders, which will be further discussed in Chapter 2. Currently little research exists to deeply understand the internalized experience of the leader while engaging in embedded professional leadership coaching, and the impact of this coaching on leaders' professional experience and leadership. This study addresses this gap in literature.

Support for School Leaders

Support for leaders has traditionally focused on the operational components of the leadership role. It is uncommon for school districts to provide systemic and embedded professional development in the form of coaching for school and district leaders. Puerach and colleagues (2016) provided insights on the historical role of the school district central office. Given that the public schooling system was developed like a mass production model, the structures of central offices were similarly aligned. This hierarchical system was established to manage and deploy resources on an economy of scale. This model was arranged by school, feeder pattern and district. This system was primarily focused on "sorting, resourcing and delegating" and was not deeply concerned with capacity building or instructional leadership. Honig (2008) discussed ways in which the central office has historically failed to serve as a capacity building mechanism. This shift is far more than a technical change and impacts all components of central office goals and operations. Honig (2008) specifically stated:

> School district central office administrators currently face unprecedented demands to play key leadership roles in efforts to strengthen teaching and learning districtwide. As many have noted, district central offices traditionally have served mainly as fiscal or administrative pass-throughs for federal and state

> initiatives or have managed certain local operations, such as school buses, facilities, purchasing, and the processing of schoolteachers and administrators through local civil services systems. However, in recent decades, various policy initiatives have called on district central offices to shift the work practices of their own central staff from the limited or managerial functions of the past to the support of teaching and learning for all students (pp. 627-628).

Singer (2017) elaborated on both the historical role of the central office as well as its influence on the many school reform efforts we have experienced over time. While the central office traditionally has served as the flow through for resources related to reform efforts, the implementation of those efforts has typically been on a school-by-school basis with limited to no "on the ground" (Singer, 2017) involvement from central office. This disconnect has led to inconsistent implementation of and sporadic outcomes for reform efforts.

Honig (2014) conducted extensive qualitative case studies showing that the establishment and implementation of embedded professional development structures such as Instructional Leadership Directors (ILDs) had a reported positive impact on leader ability to serve as a high impact instructional leader. Similarly, Sun and Leithwood (2012), in their quantitative meta-analysis study, found that 11 specific leadership practices are significantly correlated with improved student achievement outcomes, with building collaborative structures and providing individualized supporting being the most influential leadership practices.

Significance of Study

While there is clear evidence to illustrate the urgency of providing embedded professional support for school and district leaders, there exists extremely limited research to better understand the subjective perception and experience a leader has while engaging in individualized coaching and support. Better understanding how leaders perceive and experience embedded support as impacting their leadership practice will enable those who develop and implement embedded support to improve its effectiveness. Having research on both the structures of embedded support for leaders alongside the specific experience of leaders within those structures will hold phenomenal potential for improving leadership practice and ultimately student outcomes. Furthermore, qualitative data from this study has the potential to inform specific recommendations for both policy and practice related to how school districts and systems should prioritize, systematize, and implement embedded coaching supports for leaders, as well as serve as foundational work for future research – both quantitative and qualitative studies – on this similar topic.

Purpose of Study

Given the significant impact school and district leaders have on the educational experience of students as well as the current lack of research exploring the impact of embedded coaching for these leaders, the purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of individualized, embedded leadership coaching on school leaders' professional practice. Insights gleaned from this research can be utilized to guide policy and practice regarding professional support for leaders and serve as a launching point for future research on similar topics.

In order to explore individual leaders' experiences with coaching, a grounded theory constructivist approach was utilized. Grounded Theory is a qualitative research

approach in which copious information from each participant is gathered, categorized, and coded, ultimately leading to the development of theory regarding the topic. This research design approach is most appropriate for the purposes of this study given the highly individualized nature of the embedded coaching experience for each participant alongside the open and inductive nature of the research design. For this study, there are no specific hypotheses, but rather broad research questions to deeply understand the subjective experience of each participant who has received embedded coaching, and how they perceive this experience has impacted their professional practice.

Research Questions for the study are as follows:

Research Question #1: What impact has your leadership coaching had on your professional practice as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

Research Question #2: Following your experience with leadership coaching, what do you believe are your next professional steps as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

Question #3: Is there anything else you think I should know to better understand your experience with leadership coaching?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used consistently throughout this study:

- Job-Embedded: As previously highlighted by Leithwood and Azah (2017), job embedded professional development is a key characteristic of high performing districts. Embedded means ongoing and directly related to the current job role.
- Coaching: Coaching is a term often used loosely and to describe a variety of personal and professional relationships which are oriented to in some way to improve capacity and performance for the coachee. There are as many different

types and approaches to coaching as there are stakeholders to participate. The Minnesota Department of Education (2016) described school principal coaching as part of the evaluation framework as:

Principal coaching, part of the broader category of leadership coaching, is a type of human resource development aimed at improving professional effectiveness and maximizing performance as it relates to a defined set of professional tasks or specific professional goals. When district leaders can establish relationships with school principals based on trust and a shared commitment to professional growth, the evaluation process will have the greatest positive impact on principal practice, school systems and structures, school-based programs, and student supports. (p. 6)

- Leader Professional Practice: The combined actions a leader takes to focus continuous improvement efforts for their school or district constitute the overall professional practice of the leader. Effective leaders serve as both operational leaders and strong instructional leaders (Louis et al., 2010).

Positionality

To maintain the integrity of the research process, the researcher worked diligently to bracket perspectives or theoretical ideas that may influence the research process (Creswell, 2013). The researcher does work within the school district where the research was conducted and does work directly with some of school and district level leaders who are participating in the embedded coaching process. Some participants remain employed by the district where the researcher conducted the research, and some work in other districts or in other capacities outside the district. While some participants may work directly with the researcher in a supervisory capacity, the embedded coaching pilot

program that has been in place since 2020 is voluntary, and the contents of the individual coaching sessions as well as the process itself are held in strict confidence between the coach and the participants. No part of the embedded coaching pilot is linked with the evaluation process for leaders. As such, the researcher sought to understand the participant's lived experience of the coaching process but had no direct access to the actual content of the coaching sessions.

Potential Limitations

There are some potential limitations associated with this study. The sample, although representing diverse leadership roles and districts of employment, is a sample of convenience. Another potential limitation is that only the perspectives of those who have chosen to participate in embedded coaching over the last few years were included in this study, thereby potentially limiting our understanding in certain domains. Taken together, potential limitations of this study primarily associated with the question of external validity – to what extent the study findings can be generalized to a broader context. Nonetheless, any emerging theories discovered as a part of this study may establish a foundation for follow-up studies which may contribute to the broader population of interest.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature about educational leader professional practice, embedded coaching and professional capacity building, and the role that embedded coaching can play as part of larger continuous improvement efforts for schools and districts. The chapter will begin with a purpose for the research being conducted, followed by a synthesis of a literature review of leadership characteristics and embedded coaching, and will conclude with an outline of the existing research gaps this study aims to address and the research questions that were utilized as part of the study to address these gaps.

Leader Professional Practice

Leadership development is a core responsibility of school and district systems. As educators, we all aim to improve the service of students, and targeted effective capacity building opportunities are a key component of our growth. Leaders engage in a wide variety of combined daily actions that constitute their professional practice. As research in this chapter will indicate, much of a leader’s time is dedicated to operational leadership, or actions taken to ensure overall functioning of the school or district. This focus limits the leader's ability to focus explicitly on improving student outcomes, or instructional leadership. While operational management is necessary, this will not improve outcomes for students and exploring models to better support leadership ability to focus on and support instructional leadership is necessary. Current research indicates both positive capacity building structures as well as some structures limiting the professional growth of leaders. Examining these structures more closely helps to refine

the need for clearer research on embedded coaching for school and district leaders as part of a larger system improvement framework.

Common Characteristics of Effective Educational Leaders

Research indicates there are some common characteristics identified for effective educational leaders. Having a deeper understanding of what these characteristics are can enable those designing and providing embedded coaching and support to tailor and assess progress. Over the last 25 years, Hallinger (1996) has conducted extensive literature review regarding the characteristics of "instructional leadership," a term that is used widely but also loosely to describe what every educational leader should aspire to be. It is less often defined with specificity and few, if any, school districts have a common definition of the phrase that leaders can refer to. Given this, it makes sense that interpretations of the phrase would differ significantly. In the 1990s, literature gave rise to the instructional leader as one who was strong, directive, a culture builder, goal-oriented and focused on both leading and managing (Hallinger et. al., 1996). Between 1983 and 2005, 116 studies have been conducted specifically on the instructional leadership model, with the Hallinger and Murphy model (1985) being the most referenced model. Specifically, this model consists of three dimensions: 1) *Defining the School's Mission 2) Managing the Instructional Program and 3) Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate.*

This line of research is significant because it highlights the shift from operational leadership to instructional leadership as identified characteristics of effective leaders; it also identifies the embedded support that is required to support the leaders due to the complexity of the work and the extensive skills expected of the leaders, such the ability to

define and lead a school mission as well as the knowledge and strategy to promote positive school learning climate. Leaders who previously focused on the managerial aspects of leadership would necessarily benefit from these contextualized capacity building opportunities.

Teacher's Perspective on Effective Leader Practice

An important perspective to explore is that of classroom teachers because they are the ones whose practices have the largest impact on students (Hattie, 2009). What characteristics or qualities do teachers identify as part of effective leadership? Blase and Blase (1999) surveyed over 800 teachers across different geographical regions of the United States utilizing an open-ended questionnaire based on the Blumer (1969) and Mead (1934) approach to examine teacher perspectives regarding their principals' leadership practices. The survey data was then coded utilizing the Glaser and Strauss' (1967) methods of comparative analysis.

. Two major instructional leadership themes emerged from the teacher survey data. The first theme was talking to teachers to promote professional reflection, and the second was promoting professional growth. More specifically, teachers' response indicated that effective instructional leaders could promote reflection by a) making suggestions, b) giving feedback, c) modeling, d) using inquiry and soliciting advice and opinions, and e) giving praise. Regarding the second theme on professional growth, teachers reported that effective instructional leaders should a) emphasize the study of teaching & learning, b) support collaboration efforts among educators, c) develop coaching relationships among educators, d) encourage and support redesign of programs, e) apply principles of adult

learning, growth, and development to all phases of staff development, and f) implementation research to inform instructional decision making.

The findings of this research are profound because they are centered on teachers' feedback, whereas many empirical research studies of instructional leadership have focused on student outcomes or leader actions. Additionally, both themes of effective instructional leadership highlight the important role of school leaders in developing the capacity of the teachers to thrive and succeed. The ability of the leader to implement the previously indicated themes hinges on the leader having the skill set to do so. While the Blase and Blase (1999) study does not address capacity building of the leaders, without a robust method to provide embedded coaching for leaders there will be inconsistent at best ability of leaders to effectively serve as instructional leaders for teachers. Kars and Inandi (2018) found that teacher ratings of principal trust increased when teachers perceived the principal leadership style to be democratic as opposed to autocratic or laissez-faire. This democratic approach would be congruent with an approach that supports collaboration and shared decision-making, skill sets that lie outside an operational management focus and that could be supported via embedded coaching. Arbabi and Mehdinezhad (2015) also found that teacher ratings of self-efficacy improved alongside their perception of their principal's ability to take a collaborative approach to school improvement. Taken together, teacher perceptions of their leaders' ability to serve as effective leaders have an important impact on educator practice. Therefore, providing effective capacity building for leaders supports educators and the entire learning community.

Capacity Building and Connection to Coaching

Just as important to understand the characteristics of effective leaders is to examine the structure that will support and sustain the development of effective leaders. Understanding these two components together will lead to both individual and systemic improvement efforts.

It is common for leaders to have multiple competing interests for their time that may pull them away for high leverage work that will positively impact student outcomes. As Carraway and Young (2015) stated, "Despite a growing emphasis on instructional leadership, principals spend little of their time on instructional tasks. Instead, the vast majority of their time is spent managing the school building" (p. 231). Carraway and Young went on to state:

> In addition, districts do not provide principals and teachers with the support needed to promote instructional leadership (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). Generally, instructional leaders are provided little assistance and presented with vague expectations and unclear methods from the district (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). In summary, principals need structured staff development and district support to be effective instructional leaders because most principals do not possess the knowledge and skills needed to be instructional leaders (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). (p. 232)

Carraway and Young (2015) expanded on this line of research by examining leader perceptions of participation in embedded capacity building. They conducted a qualitative case study of an embedded professional development program that was aimed at improving school principals' instructional leadership skills. The three-year embedded professional learning program, referred to as Skillful Observation and Coaching

Laboratory (SOCL) focused on developing leader instructional leadership in three primary areas including: a) recognizing instructional patterns in the classroom, b) identifying & retrieving teacher talents from memory, and c) utilizing coaching to improve teacher skills (Carraway & Young 2015). The SOCL is rooted in supporting leaders' authentic sensemaking. While the SOCL strategy was utilized district wide with leaders as a lever to increase instructional leadership skill set, three principals (two elementary and one middle) were included in the case study process based on the criteria-based sampling approach, which required the leader having served in their current role for five years. The results of the study indicate that while the three participants found the embedded and sense-making focused nature of the program supportive of their own learning, competing interests and inconsistent implementation stemming from a lack of consistent participation and follow through resulted in negative impact on their learning, such as struggles in implementing the skills and strategies gained from the professional learning opportunity.

This research underscores the necessity of providing ongoing embedded systemic professional learning time for leaders as part of a specific capacity building strategy, but it also reveals the challenges associated with consistent implementation. Ultimately it begs the question: Do systemic efforts on embedded capacity building for leaders make a positive difference for students? Leithwood and Azah (2017) found nine characteristics in common for school districts that were positively impacting K-12 student achievement (Table 1). It should be noted that achievement improvements in their study were measured based on outcomes on literacy and math standardized assessments and do not include non-cognitive indicators (e.g., study habits) nor measures of social-emotional

learning (e.g., growth mindset.) The nine common characteristics most reported by high performing school districts include the following:

Table 1 (Leithwood, 2017, p. 29).

Characteristics of High-Performing Districts

Characteristic
Broadly shared mission, vision, and goals
Coherent instructional guidance systems
Deliberate and consistent use of multiple forms of evidence to inform decisions
Learning oriented organizational improvement process
Job-embedded professional development for all members
Budgets, structures, personnel policies and procedures, and uses of time aligned with the district's mission, vision, and goals
Professional leadership: A comprehensive approach to professional leadership development
Elected leadership: A policy-oriented board of trustees, and productive working relationships with staff and other stakeholders
Productive working relationships with staff and other stakeholder groups

Within these nine characteristics we see several domains where embedded coaching and capacity building are in direct alignment, such as "include learning oriented organizational improvement processes," "job-embedded professional development for all members" and "a comprehensive approach to professional leadership development." (Leithwood & Azah, 2017). This research emphasizes that high-performing districts do place a high priority on building the capacity of their leaders as a system-wide effort.

Honig (2008) research expanded on the topic of a system wide strategy for capacity building to explore the role that district leaders play as part of this process. Honig stated that an assistance focused relationship is a key component for district support of leaders. This highly contextualized professional partnership between school

and district leaders focuses on modeling, valuing, and legitimizing, creating, and sustaining social engagement, developing tools, brokering and boundary spanning and supporting engagement in joint work. This model is rooted in a coaching type of model without being called as such and calls on central office leaders to shift thinking regarding how schools are being supported. As Honig stated:

> Sociocultural learning theory elaborates forms of assistance that foster participants' increasingly deep engagement in various activities—or, as some theorists put it, novice-expert relationships that aim to bring novices into fuller participation in a given activity. These forms of assistance are a far cry from general calls for central office administrators to coach schools or for central office administrators to think of assistance mainly as a set of information or as materials that they can deliver to schools (pp. 633, 634).

The model Honig outlined in her research simply cannot be achieved within the traditional managerial focus of central office. It additionally requires close consideration of Leithwood's (2017) nine characteristics relative to prioritizing embedded learning. In doing so, districts would likely need to consider the overall organizational structure for pressing operational needs in order to create space and opportunity for a learning focused relationship between central office and building leaders. Zepeda et al. (2021) stated that central office transformation, "shifts to transformation for what, why and where central office attention must be focused…responsible central office leadership aims to build capacity and resilience while empowering leaders across the system to make decisions on behalf of students and their best interests" (p. 94).

The complexity of effective school leadership necessitates that principals serve as instructional leaders, and similarly, it is no longer sufficient for school and district leaders to be managerially focused. While still expected to be skilled at the operational components of school or district leadership, this alone will not enable us to close access and opportunity gaps for students. As previously highlighted by Leithwood and Azah (2017), job embedded professional development is a key characteristic of high performing districts. Embedded means ongoing and directly related to the current job role. Districts rightfully place a high priority on the professional learning needs of teachers and licensed educators and often place far less on professional learning for building leaders and even less on the professional learning of central office leaders. How can one expect continuous improvement from an organization that does not engage in continuous learning?

Embedded Coaching

Embedded coaching is a form of professional capacity building that is rooted in socio-cultural and cognitive learning theories. Sociocultural learning theory emphasizes the belief that meaning making is a contextualized process in which the individual makes sense through language and culture rich social interactions. An approach rooted in constructivism, sociocultural learning theory indicates that knowledge is a cumulative process in which new experiences and interactions integrate with previous experiences to make new meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). Stosch (2020) summarized the role of learning theory as part of leadership development as follows:

> The fundamental premise of sociocultural learning theory is that learning is a social process (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998). This is

> both a historical and a dynamic process, one that is informed by existing beliefs and structures, past experiences, and ongoing exchanges (Wenger, 1998). Similarly, a cognitive lens draws attention to how individuals come to understand or "make sense" of stimuli and how this process is influenced by individuals' knowledge, beliefs, experiences, and the social context in which this meaning-making process unfolds (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995). These two conceptual lenses can help to examine the process of learning to lead as part of everyday activity (p. 3).

The experiences of participants while engaging in a coaching session are highly individualized. Each leader participating will bring with them their own lived experiences, which will affect every part of their interaction with the coach as well as the meaning they make from the sessions. The nature of the coaching relationship is entirely aligned with a sociocultural approach to learning theory.

Effect of Embedded Coaching on Professional Practice

Examining the use of embedded coaching as a strategic capacity tool to connect the theory to implementation of continuous improvement strategies holds great promise. Reeves (2009) found that leadership coaching as a part of the school improvement process produces positive outcomes. Knight (2019) stated that "school leaders implement up to 95 percent of what they learn if there is an opportunity to practice with feedback and follow-up coaching" (p.101) Exploring the connection between embedded coaching and larger structures of capacity building holds great promise.

Honig (2012) examined the effect that providing embedded support for principals had on school leaders' professional practice. For this qualitative case study research

design, Honig examined the role and function of district office executive leaders, referred to collectively at Instructional Leadership Directors, or ILD in providing embedded support for school leaders in support of growing instructional leadership skill sets. Research findings from over 200 interviews, observations, and document reviews across three urban school districts indicate that 100% of executive leaders serving in an ILD role believe their main focus to be supporting principals in the development of their instructional leadership skill set. However, there did not exist a common definition of instructional leadership in any district studied and the implementation of the learning assistance practices was inconsistent from district to district, and ILD to ILD. Some mitigating factors noted included competing demands for ILD time and focus, limited background of some ILD in supporting instructional leadership over operational leadership and lack of systemic district structures to support the ILD and principal in partnering in a learning-centmered relationship. Honig's research highlights the value and necessity in supporting school leaders via embedded coaching and professional development, and, at the same time, illustrates some of the significant challenges in consistently doing so. Further, while the research does outline the importance of providing job-embedded supports for leaders, it does not address the specific experience of a leader as they engage in these assistance-centered working relationships, leaving an opportunity to better understand from the perspective of the leader what specifically about job-embedded support most impacts their professional practice.

Although leadership self-efficacy is not a specific construct that the study focused on, there is value in understanding the role of leader's self-efficacy in their professional practice, both as part of the larger construct of examining capacity building for leaders

and as a point of interest. For example, the Hoyt et. al. (2003) study on the relationship between undergraduate student leaders' self-efficacy, and individual and group efficacy and performance show that while leadership efficacy did not directly affect group performance, leaders' self-efficacy was associated with collective task efficacy. Additionally, leaders with high self-efficacy reported lower levels of anxiety than low-efficacy leaders, which subsequently predicted their task performance. While the research was not conducted with school leaders, Hoyt et al.'s (2003) research outlines the important role of leaders' self-efficacy in shaping their sense of anxiety and task efficacy. Effective leaders believe they have the skill and confidence to lead, which then impacts their decision-making.

Bloom and Bloom (2009) found that school leaders who participate in a blended coaching model improve their own self-efficacy as well as staff coherence and trust. Over time, participation in an effective coaching model is correlated with improvements in student outcomes as indicated by math and literacy academic achievement measures. Smither et al., (2003), found that principals who worked with coaches set more specific goals compared to peers who did not receive coaching. Also, they were more likely to share their feedback and solicit ideas from their supervisors, but not peers or subordinates and have improved performance ratings (p. 73). While it is difficult to prove causality between coaching and direct improvements in student outcomes, there is evidence to show a correlation between effective coaching and improved professional practice among leaders. This correlation holds great potential as a tool across levels of a school district organization.

Gaps in Literature

School and district leadership is challenging, complex work. While much research exists broadly on the topic of school and district continuous improvement efforts, there is scant research that illustrates the specific experience of a leader who participates in embedded coaching, and what impact this experience has on leader professional practice. Existing research on characteristics of effective leadership and existing embedded professional supports and strategies provide insights into the potential that deeper exploration of embedded coaching as a capacity building tool for leaders may hold. The research conducted in this study both adds to an extremely limited body of research on the topic as well as provides insight for future research and improved district and school practices. The grounded theory approach enables an open-ended approach to more deeply understanding a complex learning process without predicting or pre-supposing any specific outcome. This authentic and organic approach to the topic is designed to yield rich new research.

Given that this is a grounded theory research design, no hypothesis is established in favor of an inductive open-ended approach. As coding occurred themes emerged. It was quite interesting to see, in light of the review of the literature regarding characteristics of effective leaders, what the participants themselves shared as their lived experiences relative to embedded coaching.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

Research Question #1: What impact has leadership coaching had on your professional practice as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

Research Question #2: Following your experience with leadership coaching, what do you believe are your next professional steps as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

Research Question #3: Is there anything else you think I should know to better understand your experience with leadership coaching?

Chapter 3: Research Methods

This chapter outlines the research methods employed to address the research questions aimed at examining the impact of embedded leadership coaching on school leaders' professional practice. This chapter describes how participants were selected for this study, and what the research measures, data collection processes, and methods for analysis were.

Research Purpose and Questions

The aim of this study was to better understand the impact of individualized, embedded leadership coaching on school leaders' professional practice. Given the significant impact school leaders have on the overall functioning and effectiveness of the school environment and student learning, having a clearer understanding of the coaching experience and its impact on leaders is an informative as part of a systems approach to building leader supports.

The first research question aimed to better understand the specific experience of leaders who have participated in embedded coaching. The second research question aimed to better understand how leaders view their professional future after participating in leadership coaching.

Research Question #1: What impact has your leadership coaching had on your professional practice as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

Research Question #2: Following your experience with leadership coaching, what do you believe are your next professional steps as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

Research Question #3: Is there anything else you think I should know to better understand your experience with leadership coaching?

Research Design

To explore individual leaders' experiences with coaching, a grounded theory constructivist approach was utilized. Grounded Theory is a qualitative research approach designed to gather, code, and categorize large amounts of qualitative data to form potential theories about the phenomenon being researched. This research design approach was selected over other qualitative methods due to the inductive nature of the research design. As a researcher, I was most interested in better understanding the individualized experience of embedded coaching for leaders so that I could determine, in an organic, authentic, and inductive manner, what key learnings can be gathered regarding embedded leadership coaching. The grounded theory approach enabled the development of potential emergent theories organically via a deep interview of multiple participants. While there are many qualitative approaches of value to research, grounded theory is best suited for the purposes of this researcher's interests. This information enabled me to construct a ground theory, which can increase the body of knowledge related to embedded leadership coaching as well as provide guidance for future real-world application and research.

As Kenny (2015) explains, the origins of grounded theory methodology (1967) included a very specific approach that focuses on constant comparison in which every line of data is coded. Codes are then categorized as higher-level concepts. New codes and emerging categories of concepts are constantly compared with one another, eventually resulting in a group of coherent and crystalized categories and the development of a grounded theory. Within the GT approach to research, there exist three primary approaches which contain some similarities as well as some significant distinctions. Classic, Straussian, and Constructivist grounded theory all retain the core components of

the general approach to include the use of memo writing, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and substantive vs. formal theory. Beyond these essential components, however, there exist critical distinctions among the three approaches. Each approach utilizes differing principles related to underlying philosophy, coding frameworks, and the use of literature (Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

The most significant difference among the three primary approaches lies within the philosophical underpinnings. A Classic GT approach subscribes to the belief that a coding framework (CF) is designed to discover at grounded theory (GT.) The Straussian GT approach purports that a rigorous coding framework (CF) is designed to *create* a grounded theory (GT.) The Constructivist GT approach emphasizes the need for an open-ended coding framework (CF) to *construct* a grounded theory (GT.) In plain terms, both Classic and Straussian Grounded Theory approaches utilize a specifically laid out coding approach to discover a theory within the qualitative data that has been processed through the coding framework. This is a more deductive approach with the coding framework itself serving as a clear point of reference throughout the process. This approach is closer to a positivist approach, which emphasizes a set reality in which the researcher aims to determine a theory in which the researcher herself is neutral (Kenny, 2015.) It is worth noting that however, while Classic GT leans more toward positivism, the Straussian approach is closer to a post-positivist approach which contends that reality can never be fully apprehensible or uncovered by scientific inquiry (Kenny, 2015).

Alternatively, the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach proposed by Charmaz

(2000) comprises a much less structured coding protocol based on the philosophical assumption that knowledge is co-created by the participant and researcher. Charmaz's Constructivist GT (2000) is unambiguously underlined by a relativist ontology, which presupposes the existence of multiple social realities. She also emphasized an epistemological position that is unequivocally endorsed by both the researcher and the participants, who participate in the co-construction of knowledge and mutual interpretation of meaning. This approach is a sharp departure from both the Classic and Straussian deductive approaches to Grounded Theory research. In short, Charmaz (2000) refashioned the methodology of GT by reclaiming the potent tools of GT from their positivist origins to forge a more flexible, intuitive, and open-ended methodology which dovetails with a constructivist paradigm.

Given the fluid, multi-faceted and highly individualized nature of school leaders' professional practice and school leadership, it is important to allow the themes and categories to form based on the emerging data that capture the multiple realities experienced by the participants rather that imposing a pre-existing theoretical framework. Thus, the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach is best suited for this study to understand in much greater detail the specific leadership coaching experiences that contributed to leader professional practice. The approach of fluid initial coding and refocused coding enabled the researcher to gain a deeper level of understanding of the phenomenon. Charmaz's coding procedure is patently more interpretative, intuitive, and impressionistic than the Classic or Straussian GT (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz places a particularly strong emphasis on in-depth, intensive interviewing to purposely yield an intimate exploration or the meanings that participants attribute to their experiences

(Charmaz, 2006; Hallberg, 2006). Although these interviews are analyzed through the Constructivist coding procedure, the analysis rarely culminates into a prognostic or predicative theory presented at the conclusion of the research (Hallberg, 2006). Instead, a CGT study typically concludes with the researcher's interpretive understanding, rather than explanation, of the studies social process which is presented in the form of a "story" (Hallberg, 2006).

Population, Sampling, and Participants

Participants included current and former school or district leaders in an urban school district in western Washington State. Participants represented all levels—elementary, secondary, central office—who have engaged in embedded coaching sessions with an Executive Coach certified through the Seattle Coach© program between January 2020 and February 2023. Details are presented in Appendix A. The leadership coach was a former employee of the school district and not an employee at the time of the research study. Some of the participants previously knew the coach, some did not. There were no exclusion criteria pertaining to participants' demographics, such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientations, cultural or linguistic backgrounds. The researcher recruited participants via individualized email and follow-up phone calls prior to the start of the study. A total of 21 interview requests were emailed to participants. Fifteen positive responses were initially received. A follow up message yielded three additional respondents with a total of 18 intensive one-on-one interviews completed. Three respondents did not reply.

While Creswell (2013) suggests 20-30 interviewees to permit the researcher to

achieve a detailed theory, Guest et al. (2006) suggested that 12 interviews suffice for most researchers to discern themes. Charmaz expanded on both perspectives and posits that the standard is not a specific number of interviews, but rather the point at which the researcher has saturated the data, or the point at which no new concepts are emerging. "How many interviews do I need? First, the question presupposes that the number of interviews answers a researcher's concern about performance, whether this concern is about meeting barely adequate, credible, or exemplary standards. Second, the question presupposes that experts can specify a concrete number of interviews. Third, it presupposes that they would agree on the same concrete number. All three presuppositions are problematic (Charmaz 2006). Charmaz (2006) emphasizes the importance and value of utilizing an effective *theoretical purposive sampling* approach as part of a constructivist grounded theory research design. As Creswell (2013) indicates, theoretical sampling is emergent, and participants are selected based on their contribution to the development of the theory. As initial coding occurs, gaps may become evident, necessitating further data collection and then more coding and categorization, resulting in the evolving process of *theoretical sampling* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As participants were asked the interview questions for this research study and as coding and memo writing ensued, some themes arose that required deeper examination and/or follow up interviews. For example, the theme "confidence" emerged, necessitating a need to conduct follow up conversations and questions to better understand in what context the participant is referring to "confidence."

Participant data for this study was coded utilizing Charmaz's approach for Constructivist Grounded Theory in which data was collected and analyzed

simultaneously in an iterative process to the point of saturation. This inductive process uses data to construct analytic categories and differs from sorting topics, which is a common approach to qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014). Given the CGT approach utilized for this study, eighteen intensive one-one-one interviews was sufficient to saturate the data.

Table 2 provides the self-identified characteristics for each participant, as well as the percentage of overall participants who held affiliated characteristics.

Table 2 *Summary of Participants' Demographics*		
Self-identification	*n*	%
Gender		
Female	11	61%
Male	7	38%
BIPOC Leader		
Yes	6	33%
No	12	66%
Position		
Assistant Principal	2	11%
Principal	12	66%
Central Office	4	22%
Years of leadership experience		
0-3	2	11%
4-7	4	22%
8+	12	67%

Interview Questions

In congruence with a CGT approach, the interview questions were intentionally open-ended. As Charmaz (2006) indicates, asking open-ended, non-judgmental questions permits the interviewees to reflect on questions that they may not regularly think of in everyday life. Charmaz further specifies that "The combination of how you construct the questions and conduct the interview shapes how well you achieve balance between making the interview open-ended and focusing on significant statements" (p. 162). For this study, each participant was asked the following three questions by the researcher:

Research Question #1: What impact has your leadership coaching had on your professional practice as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

Research Question #2: Following your experience with leadership coaching, what do you believe are your next professional steps as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

Research Question #3: Is there anything else you think I should know to better understand your experience with leadership coaching?

Study Procedures

Data Collection

In-depth, one-on-one interviews served as the primary data source. Each interview was conducted for approximately 30 minutes via Microsoft Teams with recording and transcription activated. This format facilitated effective coding and data analysis processes. Intensive interviewing has long been a useful data-gathering method in various types of qualitative research. Most essentially, an interview is a directed conversation; intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experiences beyond the surface level and, thus,

is a useful method for interpretative inquiry (Charmaz, 2006, p. 28).

The researcher sought approval from Seattle Pacific University's Institutional Review Board to begin data collection. Prior to each interview, the researcher shared the purpose of the study, the informed consent form, and the established in-depth interview questions with potential participants. If participants granted consent, interviews were held and recorded. During the interview, the researcher acted primarily as a listener and only asked follow-up open-ended questions as necessary to encourage participants to provide additional details regarding their experience (Charmaz, 2006). Individual intensive interviews strive to reach well beyond surface level responses to deeply understand a participant's experience (Charmaz, 2006). As such, in addition to the three interview questions, depending on the response of the interviewee, the researcher asked neutral follow-up probing questions such as "tell me more about that," "tell me more about how you feel about that," or re-stating a participant comment for accuracy. This approach is congruent with the co-created CGT approach. Furthermore, five follow-up interviews were conducted based on the emergent codes, categories and themes that emerged from initial data collection.

Data Analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed for the purpose of coding and theming. CGT analysis consists of a more flexible, two-step approach which includes initial or open coding followed by refocused coding, which results in the GT. The approach includes essential GT techniques such as memo writing, constant comparisons, theoretical sampling, and saturation, but within a coding framework that is significantly more flexible (Charmaz, 2008).

Consistent with other GT approaches, the method of constant comparison was utilized throughout the analysis process. This process includes consistently comparing codes, categories, and themes with one another in an iterative manner (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As codes and categories begin to emerge in the analysis process, the process of memo writing requires the researcher to synthesize data and make connections early in the process. Memos served to inform ongoing analysis in grounded theory research and drive guidance for theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006). As theories emerge from initial coding, focused coding and synthesis memos, the researcher can identify if there is a need to return to participants with more focused questions as part of the theoretical sampling process. This process repeats until we reach the point of data saturation, in which no new categories emerge. Memos are then integrated in the development of descriptive theories or models (Creswell, 2018).

It is common for the researcher to serve as coder for GT research. For a CGT approach, the researcher and participant co-construct knowledge together based on multiple perceived realities and, as such, it is impossible to fully eliminate any possibility of subjective bias. However, there are clear actions researchers can take to minimize subjective bias throughout the research process. To minimize bias and preconceptions, it is essential that the research achieve intimate familiarity with the studied phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006) to reduce researcher likelihood of making assumptions based on a lack of knowledge. A quality GT approach must include robust and thorough coding practices. The use of full interview transcripts for coding rather than interview notes, alongside robust coding, memo writing, and theoretical

sampling procedures support the integrity of the CGT approach.

Additionally, to increase credibility and reduce the possibility for researcher bias, a peer debriefer was utilized for this research project. The peer debriefer is a recent doctoral graduate in the same department as the researcher with specialized training in qualitative research but limited familiarity with the research topic. The peer debriefer had access to the data and was able to review and analyze codes and the coding process as well as provide written memos for consideration of the researcher.

The first step of the data analysis process is called *initial* or *open coding* stage in which the researcher codes for actions and potential theoretical cues rather than for themes. Charmaz (2008) suggests that coding with gerunds, that is, noun forms of verbs, such as revealing, defining, feeling, or wanting helps to define what is happening. The goal of this first stage of the process is to make connections between codes and keep the analytic process active, engaging, and emergent (Charmaz, 2008, p. 164).

The second step of the coding process of CGT is called *refocused coding*. During this stage, the researcher identifies the codes that are recurring or significant. Charmaz describes these codes as those carrying "analytic momentum." These codes then undergo GT techniques of theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and memo writing (Charmaz, 2008). The memo writing component of the processes is especially important as memos may document gaps in the data and assist with the development of conceptual "conjectures," which ultimately captures the unfolding process of interpreting the phenomenon and constructing a theory (Charmaz, 2008).

In sum, the CGT approach represents a radical departure from the Classic and Straussian GT approaches, which tend to be more concrete, prescriptive, and rule bound.

Instead, Charmaz advocates for highly adaptable coding guidelines which endorses an imaginative engagement with data (Charmaz, 2008, p. 168).

Chapter Four: Results of Study

This chapter reviews the results of the study, which is focused on better understanding the impact that embedded leadership coaching had on the professional practice of educational leaders. The chapter includes the qualitative data analysis and begins with an overview of data saturation processes, followed by open coding, axial & selective coding, the establishment of dimensions, and the use of peer debriefing and member checking as validation methods.

Qualitative Data Analysis and Results

Data Saturation

Achieving data saturation is a critical part of the grounded theory approach to research. Reaching data saturation ensures a deep analysis of the existing data. Categories are saturated when "gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, not reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories" (Charmaz 2008). As part of the grounded theory process, the researcher goes back to the data, reviewing initial codes to determine if any new codes emerge or codes need to be adjusted to work toward saturation, the point at which no new categories are emerging across participants.

This process of saturation is why sample size for Grounded Theory research can vary widely based on the design of the study and data gathered. As Mason (2010) indicates, "sample size and saturation need to take into account the research objectives and the quality of data…a skilled interviewer who conducts 10 interviews may produce a more significant analysis than a novice who conducts 50" (p. 214).

As part of this research project, the primary researcher conducted coding after every three participants. Each participant transcript was reviewed and coded

individually, with all codes initially labeled as “unassigned.” The primary researcher would next, one transcript at a time, engage in the open coding process. After every three data sets, the researcher wrote memos to summarize initial thoughts prior to the next three interviews. As codes began to emerge across participants, the researcher was able to refine memos and coding processes, identifying new codes as they emerged from the data. In some instances, this necessitated going back to previous transcripts and re-evaluating the codes and memos. As interviews were conducted, the primary researcher did not modify the interview questions, but rather, as codes began to emerge, would ensure to ask participants to “tell me more about that” in order to provide prompting for additional participant elaboration of previously made statement in a way that was both neutral and open-ended. In some cases, the researcher went back to speak with previously interviewed participants to ask them to expand on previously made statements. As an example, if a participant had previously spoken about an impact on their confidence as a result of working with the coach, the researcher would then talk again with the participant, simply asking the participant to talk some more about this.

A total of five participants were interviewed for a second time in order to gather additional information. This process of iteratively coding and memo writing for every three participants going back into the data and both refining codes and conductive follow-up interviews resulting in the achievement of saturation in codes.

Open Coding

Each interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams. Each interview was recorded and transcribed with this tool. Following each interview, the transcript was downloaded from Microsoft Teams as a verbatim Word document. After the interview

was completed and transcribed, the next step was the open coding process. GT coding is the process of defining what the data are about and consists of categorizing line by line or chunk by chunk data with a name that both summarizes and accounts for each section of data (Charmaz, 2014). Data transcripts were coded by the researcher after every three in-depth interviews in order to avoid researcher bias, determine if follow up questions for interviewees, and to accomplish saturation. Data were reviewed both line-by-line and by section during open coding using the qualitative software tool *Delve.* After every transcript, the researcher made note of and assigned codes or what are referred to as "snippets" within the *Delve* software tool. Snippets were then assigned to the researcher to create codes representing analytical contents of groups of snippets, or codes. Ongoing memo-writing occurred after each transcript was coded as well as after the establishment of axial and selective core codes. As Charmaz (2014) indicates, "Memo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers. Memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process" (p. 165). Table 2 below outlines the researcher selected codes that emerged during the initial, or open coding process.

Table 3

Researcher Selected Codes

Accountability	Competing Interests	Non-evaluative	Trust
Action Planning	Confidence	Problem of Practice	Validation
BIPOC Affinity	Desire to Improve	Reflection	

Climate & Culture Listening Tools & Strategies

The following paragraphs provide a conceptual description for each code (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Select quotes from participants have been included to encapsulate the key ideas for each code.

Accountability. Participants indicated that working with a coach encouraged a level of accountability for them in terms of following through on personal and professional commitments made when working with the coach. As described in more detail in a later code, this accountability was not tied to any evaluative indicator, but rather a mutual commitment to the coaching relationship.

> Where at the end you would be like. OK, so like here's what we talked about today. And here's what you're what you were kind of hoping to do by the next time that we meet. And then I always felt like I had to do it for the next time we met. That was this, like, internal accountability that was helpful to me that I was like, OK, I'm meeting with XXX again in a week or whatever. Two weeks. I better make sure I have that uncomfortable conversation or address that, because I told her that I would. And I know that it's important. And she'll ask me about it next time we meet. (Participant J, 2023)

Participants' sense of need to follow through was motivated by internal, rather than external accountability in many cases. Leaders articulated that going through the process of telling their coach that they would engage in an (often challenging) task was enough to ensure that they did what they said they would do. While non-evaluative,

simply knowing they would be asked about their follow through by their coach was a sufficient motivator.

> There was a piece of accountability that was really important. Leaders were vulnerable enough in this process and, and I think that's true of me in the process as well. But leaders were vulnerable enough in saying what they needed to be held accountable to and their fears of leading. (Participant H, 2023)

Participant H speaks of both accountability and vulnerability, as well as the need to ask for assistance in being held accountable. Again, there is no evaluation tied to this need or desire for accountability.

Action Planning. Many participants spoke about the coaching relationship enabling them to develop a plan, or "practice" how they were going to approach something. This code in some ways overlaps with the competing interests code in that many of the comments around action planning discuss the need for technical shifts. Action planning is very much tied to the problem of practice code, but much more granular, in some cases with step-by-step plans being developed between leader and coach**.**

> Kind of map out like what that would look like and maybe what those interactions, what I would say, and we would do some role-playing, and so that kind of helped me be able to practice in a safe space before taking it out into the real world of leadership. (Participant G, 2023)

Some participants spoke to the value of planning for an interaction with staff, and some spoke to the value of planning for events or learning experiences.

> And I was like, yes, there's one really pivotal August PD (professional development) moment that I remember with that staff that was, you know, really powerful. So trying to take what was powerful about those moments and being able to plan for some future PD here. (Participant I, 2023)

Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Affinity. Some leaders of color interviewed indicated that they would have benefitted from working with a coach who was also a leader of color. At the same time, they also indicated that the work with a white coach was very valuable and overall supportive of their professional growth goals. Several spoke of the need to potentially have more than one coach, one who also identifies as an individual of the BIPOC community, and one who does not. It is worth noting that none of the leaders of color in this research study indicated a need to work with a coach of a specific racial or ethnic background, but rather another person who is also a leader of color.

> It really got me thinking into doing some coaching with a leader of color because being a leader of color, you know, here in the United States, it has this added layer of complexity to the role. So, I think if I were to do something similar again, I would try to find somebody who's a person of color who can provide me with that perspective. (Participant E, 2023)

Some of the leaders of color spoke to the role and presence of white privilege within educational leadership. This consideration influences how some leaders of color think about their leadership coaching moves.

> Because I don't hold that power sometimes. And so I think just like being mindful during my coaching sessions that XXX is a white woman and has an experience as a white woman, whereas my experience might be slightly different than hers. And so I think taking all of the grounding work in terms of research was really great for me to be able to add that to my knowledge. (Participant G, 2023)

Climate and Culture. Climate and Culture crosses paths with action planning, growth mindset, and trust codes. This code area strongly referred to how the coach supported the leader in being able to impact the climate and culture within a school. Some comments discussed the coach supporting the leader in being able to deeply understand a climate and culture so that they can be successful within it.

> I got this position when I was, you know, in the transition when I was working with her. So she was helping me a lot to understand how the different cultures of the school and central office will look, and also identify one area for me that was specific, which was communication, and how that will look differently in, you know, the different settings. So it just helped me become more intentional. (Participant E, 2023)

Several leaders spoke about the role of school building climate and culture as a strategic tool to move forward some of the key leadership teams within the school community.

> I did the climate survey results with my Building Leadership Team (BLT) and Racial Equity & Inclusion (RE&I) Teams together all at once, just to

> get their get their reaction. What did they feel was their next step as a leadership team? I'm trying to get that collaboration piece, so I think that's where coaching has to come in for me. (Participant B, 2023)

Balancing Competing Interests. Several participants spoke about the role of educational leadership being “a lot” and some reported “feeling overwhelmed.” Some leaders spoke of competing interests for their time associated with overwhelm, and some spoke to the challenges related to the prioritization of work.

Participants N and M both spoke about the tension between the technical and the adaptive aspects of the leader’s role, leaving them with limited space to maneuver and act as an adaptive leader.

> I feel like at times I feel like all I'm doing is managing. And I need to step back and I need to have that conversation, and for me it's helpful to kind of separate out, OK, what's the management, what's the leadership? (Participant N, 2023)

> Making sure you're not dealing with the urgency of the moment all the time, because that happens in this job all the time. You have to prioritize your urgencies and make sure you're getting the most important things done first. Instruction, coaching teachers, observation, students and all the other urgent things can come after that. (Participant M, 2023)

Participant L also shared the myriad of roles that a building leader must balance as well as the emotions associated with each of these roles: “Not only managing people,

leading people, but caring for people and supporting people. And with that comes the gamut of emotions" (Participant L).

Confidence. Many participants spoke directly about how the coach helped them feel more confident as a leader. This confidence in turn helped the leaders feel stronger about their ability to make good decisions for their school community.

> I think it gave me confidence to go in, and she always tells me, just be yourself, lead from who you are, don't try to lead by like, what you see in other leaders. Lead from who you are because that's what got you noticed to be a leader. So I think for me the biggest impact it had was being true to who I am as a leader, but also that I did have the skill set, even though I might not have the experiences. So that's the first thing. (Participant M, 2023)

Participant D also spoke to confidence associated with the ability to rest and process through thoughts, resulting in an improved ability to be fully present in their professional life:

> All of those things, but a sense of rest, of like I needed to be able to process through whatever was there, and let it go so that I could really be present in my leadership opportunities now, and not second guess myself and have a level of confidence and what I was doing. (Participant D, 2023)

Desire to Improve. Many participants spoke to a foundational desire to improve as leaders. This underlying mindset affected how they entered the coaching relationship.

> But working with her really got me thinking into what I need to do to constantly become a better leader. So, it's like you constantly need to have like this. It was super helpful. You have to have some growth plan for you as a leader. So that's actually one of the outcomes and reasons why I'm currently in the program that I'm in now. (Participant E, 2023)

"The next step for me that I can emotionally remember, rather than like specifically remember, is just to continue to push myself to do some of the harder things that maybe I need to do" (Participant J).

Participant L discusses how entering into a coaching relationship requires work and dedication if the goal is to improve. This participant also discussed the need to be open and vulnerable as part of the growth process.

> Again, you can enter into these opportunities, but if you don't come ready to lean in, and do some back-end work as well as do some ongoing personal work, whether it be one-on-one or with a partner, or with a team, you really need to be ready to be vulnerable and transparent because you really dig deeply. A lot of it is about well, the struggles. (Participant L, 2023)

Participant P discusses the ways in which, overall, coaching assisted with the growth process. As some other participants also did, this participant links vulnerability directly to the growth process as well.

> You have to be vulnerable and check your ego at the door. Check perfection at the door. You really have to allow the coach to come into

> your life, and just lay it out and help them help you become better…And she challenged me through sessions. And so for that, I mean it's a lifetime impact. I feel indebted to her for her executive coaching on not just helping me in the immediate, but really, long term and in my career trajectory. (Participant P, 2023)

Listening. When participants discussed listening, they shared how the coach listened deeply to them, which set the stage for the identification of needs and co-construction of growth strategies.

> Listen and address some of the emotional concerns around the current situation, but I think because professional growth and moving forward in a hopeful way is so important to me, it also allowed us to keep our focus on students and student learning in the process of all of that and so, within my building and things that I was leading through to really… she provided a listening ear and then asked very thoughtful questions that made me be reflective and set goals for how I wanted to move forward in those issues. (Participant H, 2023)

Participant B discussed initial impressions, at first not being clear on the purpose of coaching and then realizing that the coach was starting from a place of listening.

> "I was like, I don't even know what the purpose of this coaching is, because I'm the one just doing the talking right? And then I think after like the fifth session, it hit me! OK, she's listening" (Participant B).

Non-evaluative. Several leaders spoke about the benefits of having a coach that is non-evaluative, particularly with regard to being able to speak freely without any underlying concern about consequences for doing so. This is true even when the leaders have high regard and trust for their evaluators, who also have responsibilities to act as coaches. This ability to interact with a coach in a confidential manner without any risk or repercussions enabled leaders to be more open about their struggles.

> I think it would be so valuable if we had something like that in house here in XXXX where we did have a principal or an AP or like a building admin coach. I don't think it has to be like an AP Coach, a principal coach who was non- evaluative, who had the time and space devoted to that and wasn't pulled in 75 other directions because that's the other thing--is we've tried that before. In fact, XXX started as that as you probably remember, XXX and XXX, when they were hired were non-evaluative, non-supervisors. And then I think it was one year that they coached principals and then they were turned into principal evaluators. (Participant J, 2023)

Participant I discussed their own experience shifting their role from mentor to principal and the impact this shift had had on relationships with staff.

> And I noticed this when I went from a mentor, you know, to principal right? Like there is something that you'll never get away from. Right. Like I don't with teachers that I evaluate, I've never had that same kind of conversation that I did when I was a mentor, right? You know, there is something about that evaluation piece that kind of creates a little bit of nervousness you know, but when you know that it's somebody who has

> nothing to do with your evaluation, you are more open. (Participant I, 2023)

Participant J spoke specifically about the emotional healing that was part of having a confidential and non-evaluative space to engage in embedded coaching.

> Yeah, it was kind of therapeutic. There was, there was an element of therapy and ability to talk about things that you can't talk about with anyone else. I can't talk about with my teachers, a whole bunch of stuff that goes on right? Because it's not appropriate. But having this non-evaluative nonsupervisory person to coach me and… Just be with me…was helpful for my professional health and my mental health. (Participant J, 2023)

Problem of Practice. The problem of practice code was the most frequently occurring code for participants. This code was less about the specific problems facing the leaders, but the process through they were able to identify a problem of practice with their coach and then identify next steps to address. Participants varied widely regarding their identified problem of practice, which was identified alongside the coach and tailored to the needs of that participant.

> So in in a sense, it really helped develop stronger professional learning communities (PLCs). I mean, if we really want to name kind of how that has come and evolved, we actually met again. The team was larger the second summer that we met for that that coaching with the leadership team, a new AP came on and was a part of that process. So again, it was

> just helping us clarify and get down to more specific things to prioritize (Participant H).

Participant O discussed how the coach partnered with them to refine their plan for facilitation of a BLT:

> So that was a problem of practice that we were working on and XXXX helped me do a backwards map, and say what do I want it to look like? What would the ideal look like? We did some vision exercises and then we kind of worked backwards knowing that, hey, in two weeks we have such and such a BLT (building leadership team) meeting. What needs to happen before that? (Participant O, 2023)

Reflection. Many participants spoke about ways in which their coaching experience enabled them to reflect more deeply on their leadership practice. These reflections were not always tied to action planning or problem of practice identification. This code often included broader metacognitive reflection opportunities to consider the big picture of one's practice prior to shifting to problem of practice identification or action planning.

"It just helps me kind of really pull back and reflect, and think about, you know? What I'm doing. What I'm trying to do as a leader" (Participant N, 2023).

"A lot of what we did was to examine our feelings, our perspectives, our reactions, how we could have avoided some of the demons that play around in our heads a lot" (Participant L, 2023).

Tools and Strategies. Participants spoke frequently about ways in which coaching supported both short and long-term planning. This code is in some cases connected to the action planning code, but in some cases, participants discussed the use of tools and protocols as part of their coaching experience. These didn't necessarily apply with their own staff. In essence, participants discussed how specific approaches either enhanced their coaching experience and/or enabled them to more effectively lead with their own staff.

"It helps you formulate or have some kind of ready-made tools that you can experience to kind of draw out more of your thinking and put it into an actionable format. I think that's what I found" (Participant A, 2023).

While participant A shared tools used with the coach enabled a more focused conversation, participant I spoke of the need for some very specific suggestions and technical solutions to connect to core leadership beliefs.

"That was really helpful because I just, I just needed some technical solutions, you know, like, what do I believe? And so then, how?" (Participant I, 2023).

Trust. Participants discussed trust in a few different ways. Several comments centered on the feeling that the coach had a certain level of familiarity with them as leaders and with the school system, which created a sense of emotional safety. Several comments related to trust also centered around leaders feeling comfortable to be vulnerable with the coach.

“A trustful relationship that's authentic in the feedback they give me, because I know it's gonna help me grow as a leader” (Participant M, 2023).

“Really expose vulnerable transparent feelings and experiences” (Participant L, 2023).

“Yeah, you know, I think the trust element of the coach and the receiver of the coaching is critical, and it kind of comes from a couple of different places. One is it's relational, right? Trust. And so you connect with the person” (Participant A, 2023).

Validation. While trust and validation often came up together in conversation with participants, validation came up in a different way, often related to comments of feeling heard, seen, and supported as part of the embedded coaching experience.

“Just reminding me to hold true to what I feel is really best for kids and staff, and to go with it. And what's the worst that could happen as long as I'm being kind, as long as I'm being courageous and as long as I'm being honest? I've got nothing to lose” (Participant F, 2023).

> A situation that was a little bit bigger than maybe just me, and just doing it alone was not sufficient and so getting some assistance and knowing that it was OK to ask for that, and that kind of developing that vulnerability, you know, through the coaching experience. It just helped me take the next steps to be able to do that and ask for that. And so again it was that validation piece. (Participant A, 2023)

Participants L and D both spoke to the feeling of loneliness that can be part of building leadership and ways in which the coaching relationship helped validate the leader and to reduce this sense of loneliness.

> Or we don't think we have time for something more, you know? But what I learned was it wasn't additional work. It was the work. It was what I was already doing, and it was helping me gain a depth of perspective that I wouldn't have otherwise. Many times I felt heard when I was, I didn't feel heard in others, in any other setting. It can be lonely. (Participant L, 2023)

> Even if you do have a team around you, right, it makes you feel like, OK, there's someone that will help me think through this that really wants the best for me. They're not looking for, like, what angle they can work to get what they want. They're not looking for their own interest to be served in whatever decision they make. They really just want to support me. And so it for me, it gave me a space that helped it feel a little less lonely at times. (Participant D, 2023)

Axial and Selective Coding

As open coding is completed and categories emerge, the researcher next begins to consider axial codes. While comparative analysis is used throughout the entire coding process in an iterative manner, at this stage of the process codes are examined in order to determine connections between codes into larger axial codes. As Charmaz indicates, “Axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give

coherence to the emergent analysis" (p. 147). The axial coding process must be thoughtfully applied as part of a grounded theory process, however. In GT axial coding is the second step that consists of drawing connections between the concepts selected during the open coding process. While Corbin and Strauss (2105) indicate a fairly rigid axial coding process in which comparative analysis is used to create properties and dimensions in the data, some qualitative researchers express concern the using an overly technical model can diminish the researcher interpretation of the data. "At best, axial coding helps to clarify and to extend the analytical power of your emergent ideas. At worst, it casts a technological overlay on the data—and perhaps on your final analysis" (Robrecht, 1995). Being mindful of this balance of benefits with axial coding, it is important that the researcher become intimately familiar with the data and reconsider the categories and analysis in an ongoing manner as part of the process to maximize the authenticity of the GT process.

Once axial codes emerge from the data, the researcher then considers whether there is a core code, or dimension, to the data to which the other categories are connected. It is worth noting that this may not, and need not, always be the case within GT research (Charmaz, 2014.) The researcher closely analyzes the data to determine what key dimensions may emerge and then, congruent to a Constructivist GT approach, determines what theory may emerge from the data. This theory is typically expressed in this approach to grounded theory more as a story that expresses the *how*, and sometimes the *why* participants construct meaning from their experiences (Charmaz, 2014). As part of this approach, the researcher does not stand outside of the process. "A constructivist approach theorizes the interpretive work that research participants do, but also

acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation. The theory depends on the researcher's view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it" (p. 239). Chapter five provides a final explanation and interpretation of the relationships between the categories developed during axial coding.

There were three main themes that emerged with this study. These themes are *Leaders' Growth Mindset*, *Leaders' Emotional Well-Being,* and *Leading for Continuous Improvement*. While unique and distinct in some ways, the *Leaders' Growth Mindset* category is an underlying theme that shows up in both other two themes and is therefore considered the core dimension.

The Constructivist GT methodology provided an opportunity to deeply understand the experience of school and district leaders as they engage in embedded coaching and to develop, through the data and interactions with the participants, emerging themes.

Once core themes (or dimensions) emerge from the data, the researcher next analyzes conditions, strategies, and consequences for each theme (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As Creswell (2013) indicates, this process enables the researchers to further explain the phenomenon as well as consider specific strategies. Table 3 provides an overview of the properties for each dimension.

Table 4

Properties of the Dimensions Related to the Central Phenomenon

Dimensions		Properties	
	Conditions	Strategies	Consequences

Growth Mindset **(Core Dimension)**	Leaders desire to improve leadership practice, grow professionally, and ultimately become a more effective school or district leader. Leader belief that growth is necessary and possible.	Enter coaching relationship from a place of reflection, willingness to be honest and vulnerable, and desire to implement specific changes to professional practice with accountability	School and district leaders feel a sense of professional growth and improvement alongside a sense of emotional balance and specific measurable improved outcomes
Leader Emotional Well-Being	Leaders need to feel listened to and heard, experience emotional safety, trust, and validation in a non-evaluative setting	Coaching relationship centers on deep listening, confidentiality, encouragement, and tailored support	Improved leader confidence, emotional resiliency, and sense of workplace satisfaction
Leading for Continuous Improvement	Leaders need to improve an aspect of leadership	Leaders identify one or more specific problems of practice	Leaders effectively addresses problem of practice, improving

	professional practice in order to improve educational process	with coach and together develops an action plan, tools & strategies to address with accountable follow up	the educational process

As illustrated in Table 3, “Leaders’ Growth Mindset” serves as the core dimension and the foundational premise for the other two dimensions. Leaders engaging in the embedded coaching process with a growth mindset expressed both the desire to grow and the belief that growth is necessary and possible. This underlying core belief set is foundational to the other two dimensions of “Leaders’ Emotional Well-Being” and “Leading for Continuous Improvement.” Stated another way, the underlying leadership belief that one can and should improve creates the conditions for the coaching relationship. The data revealed that leaders indicated that embedded coaching impacted their own emotional well-being as well as their ability to lead for continuous improvement, or to address specific leadership challenges.

Growth mindset arose as the core dimension due to the number of codes in the open coding and axial coding process that spoke to reflection, desire to improve, taking action for improvement, and desire to be held accountable for improvement actions.

> And I think in particular, and I'm thinking of teachers, and I think that coaching is viewed in some layers of our system as a negative like, ohh I need coaching because I'm weak, or there's something wrong with me, you

> know or that. But I don't. I view coaching…it's kind of like private lessons. It's like I'm a practitioner. I'm deeply immersed in this work. I'm only gonna be better. (Participant N, 2023)

> But working with her really got me thinking into what I need to do to constantly to become a better leader. So it's like you constantly need to have this. It was super helpful. You have to have some growth plan for you as a leader. So that's actually the one of the outcomes from that—it is why I'm currently in the program I'm in. (Participant E, 2023)

Both participant N and E discuss to value and importance of engaging in an ongoing embedded coaching relationship as part of a growth plan. Both speak to the need to have this structure as part of an iterative process for leadership improvement.

Participant R discussed the desire to be able to improve in the service of the community.

"It's about my performance. What could I be doing differently? I really value that because you know, my goal is really to and for those that I'm leading. My goal is to be able to guide them" (Participant R, 2023).

An additional dimension presented in Table 3 is "Leaders' Emotional Well-Being". This dimension speaks strongly to leader need for emotional balance, safety, trust, and validation. Many participants spoke about the coaching relationship meeting this emotional need for them as part of their leadership growth experience.

> But that's just how I'm wired. I'm a words of affirmation guy. I don't care if you get me gifts or accolades in front of people, but those moments of hey, I've noticed you've done this, or hey, I want to tell you I've seen

> growth in this area, that feeds me to be like, ohh, they do see the effort I'm putting in, because I did value and internalize the feedback. I got to try to do things differently…She developed in me a belief that I had the ability to do what I was gonna do. I think I had that head knowledge, and maybe I knew it could do it, but not the heart knowledge that I'm going to be good enough at it. And she was really good at building that part of, you know, believing yourself. She would say, I believe in you. Others believe in you. We see potential there. (Participant M, 2023)

Several leaders connected their embedded coaching experience with an emotionally therapeutic component that addressed their need for a professionally safe space to share their thoughts.

> And forward momentum in somebody professional practice. But also, there's a therapeutic aspect to it that…I think leaders carry so much, and can't talk about so much, that offering them space. It's almost a little bit like therapy-like professional coaching and some therapy. And I think honestly leaders need that space and we don't really have it. (Participant J, 2023)

"And...and then there's definitely a healthy dose of encouragement, right? You know, and because I think, I think we often doubt ourselves" (Participant I, 2023).

Each of these participants speak to the emotional safety and affirmation they received as part of their embedded coaching experience. This provides perhaps an insider view of the emotional toll and challenges that school and district leaders experience on a

regular basis.

The third dimension presented in Table 3 is “Leading for Continuous Improvement”, which is focused on leader identification of a problem of practice, or a particular set of issues to address, and the coach’s partnership in developing a plan to address these identified challenges. Multiple participants spoke to their appreciation of the individualized approach to leader identified problems of practice.

> And she helped us with a template that we used. It's it was almost like having a third party that you could rely on to remove some of the vulnerability of two people who are struggling and trying to accomplish a job together. It aided us in that… really take ownership of each session and what you wanted out of it. If you just showed up hoping that somebody was gonna provide you answers and you were gonna be disappointed. (Participant, L, 2023)

Several participants discussed ways in which the embedded coaching process enabled them to think more strategically about their school-based leadership teams. This problem of practice is rooted solidly in continuous improvement and the role that the leader plays in guiding this process.

> Whether it's leadership moves, and what kind of conversations do I need to have this week, and what kind of messaging and what is really the role of my current role of my BLT, and where am I trying to get that BLT and what kind of role do I play? What's my vision for them? What kind of role do I play as they develop into a team? You know, those kind of things, those kind of leadership moves and that leadership work. (Participant N,

2023)

This intensive one-to-one GT interview processes permitted the emergence of some clear perspectives regarding school and district leader experiences with embedded coaching. The primary necessary condition central to the embedded coaching relationship is the presence of growth mindset in the leader. Additionally, leaders have a strong need for emotional safety and validation, something that many feel is lacking in their typical day-to-day work. Lastly, leaders highly value coaching support that is tailored to supporting continuous improvement efforts and problems of practice they have themselves identified. Combined, an embedded coaching model provides for differentiated and timely embedded professional support for leaders and meets multiple distinct needs that coalesce in supporting improvement in leadership professional practice.

Peer Debriefing

While the researcher plays an integral role as part of a GT research model, a peer debriefer was utilized in order to enhance research credibility and reduce possibility of researcher bias. As Lincoln and Gruba (1985) indicated, a peer debriefing is “the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind” (p. 308). Lincoln and Gruba discussed the benefits of a peer debriefing process, which include deepening the researcher ability to consider bias and to gain rich feedback from a trained peer regarding the research process. Spall (1998) also emphasize the value and importance and utilizing a peer debriefer as part of a robust qualitative research design.

For this research project, a peer debriefer was invited to join the project. The primary investigator (PI) provided the peer debriefer with an overview of the research project as well as access to anonymized participant data such as the interview transcripts, coding processes, memos, and emergent theory. The peer debriefer for this research project is a cis-gender white female and a recent graduate of the same doctoral departments as the principal researcher. While the peer debriefer has training in conducting qualitative and GT research, she did not have expert knowledge about leadership or coaching theories, nor did she have prior knowledge about the project. Thus, the peer debriefer engaged in a memo-based process of proving feedback to the researcher as a peer who is not deeply enmeshed in the research and is not the researcher. As part of this peer debriefing process, the peer debriefer reviewed codes and associated memos with the perspective of a reader with expertise in qualitative research but no background in the topic. This provided a valuable approach to improve validity of data and coding processes. The peer debriefer reviewed memos made by the principal researchers and added additional memos for consideration.

The principal researcher reviewed all embedded feedback from the peer debriefer, going back to the data in some cases to re-code, expand context for code selection, or add additional codes. If there was any discrepancy or disagreement noted regarding codes of memos between the principal researcher and the peer debriefer the two engaged in follow-up communication to refine understanding and calibration. Given the fact that the principal researcher is an intimate and integrated part of the GT process and is expected to not only become an expert on the data but to also be a key part of the data gathering and coding process, the addition of an unconnected and trained peer debriefer provided

essential perspective to ensure a robust Grounded Theory research process.

The primary researcher took peer debriefer feedback into consideration at all stages of the Grounded Theory research analysis process. For example, in multiple instances, the peer debriefer would leave memos inquiring as to why an individual code was not coded to more than one category. The fact that the peer debriefer lacked the context of the interview that the PI had spurred an inquisitive objectivity that was helpful in prompting the investigator to go back yet again to re-read and consider categories for codes. This supported an overall deeper process of coding to the point of saturation as well as improved validity.

Member Checking

Member checking is a method to emphasize validity as part of the grounded theory research process. As part of member checking, the researcher returns to some participants after axial codes and core dimensions have emerged and, "explains major categories to certain participants they have studied and then inquire whether and to what extent these categories fit each participant's experience" (Charmaz, p. 210).

For this research project, the primary researcher selected five participants at random and returned to them, sharing the emergent codes, categories, and key dimensions. Participants were asked to share input regarding the degree to which the emergent theory represented their personal experiences. This process, alongside the peer debriefing process, provided the researcher with valuable insight as to the accuracy and clarity of the emergent theory.

> Wow. I feel like this is spot on. To be honest, I hadn't really thought about how much of an emotional support coaching with XXX was. I really was

> just thinking about how I could get help with some problems of practice. But then when we started talking, I found myself talking all about my feelings you know? I guess it wasn't just me. I guess we all really need both to grow. (Participant N, 2023)

Another participant spoke about a slightly different perspective focusing first on their emotional well-being but then finding support with self-identified problems of practice.

> I'll be honest and say that initially I started coaching because I think I just really needed a safe space to kind of let it all hang out without judgment. But then I realized I really did want to get better at how I handled conflict, and that this was causing so much stress for me. I was avoiding it. So yeah. Even though I started with my feelings, what I needed to feel better and more competent was to figure out how to get better at an aspect of my job. So what you learned totally makes sense. (Participant B, 2023)

The process of member checking enabled the researcher to understand that while participants entered their coaching relationship for different reasons, they each wanted to improve their practice and were heavily influenced by their own emotions and self-identified problems of practice. The two categories are not the same but connected to one another with the foundation being the desire to become a better and more professionally satisfied educational leader.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This section provides an in-depth understanding and analysis of the three core themes that emerged within the research as well as a discussion regarding the relationship between these three themes and implications for potential further research. The following questions drove the overall research design and construction of the theoretical model later discussed in this section.

Research Question #1: What impact has your leadership coaching had on your professional practice as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

Research Question #2: Following your experience with leadership coaching, what do you believe are your next professional steps as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

Question #3: Is there anything else you think I should know to better understand your experience with leadership coaching?

While there is a significant body of research regarding coaching models, especially for teachers, research that examines the internal experience of a school or district leader as they engage in an embedded leadership coaching experience, and in particular, how this experience impacts the leader's professional practice, is extremely limited. A better understanding of this process will hold much promise as part of the larger efforts to support school and district leaders. The GT research process yielded some rich understandings regarding the experience of individual school and district leaders as they engaged in an embedded coaching relationship.

The core dimension that emerged was that of *leaders' growth mindset*. Data related to this theme appeared across all participants. Growth mindset appears to be both

a precondition of the coaching relationship and a result of it. As such, a leader's growth mindset is an integral component to the other two dimensions of leaders' emotional well-being and leading for continuous improvement.

An emergent grounded theory for this research is that **embedded coaching has an impact on leaders' cognitive process (i.e., growth mindset), emotional capacity (i.e., well-being) and behavior (e.g., actions or behavioral approaches) to lead for continuous improvement).** Figure 1 presents a model that illustrates the ways in which these three themes are intertwined to shape the leader's experience with embedded coaching.

Figure 1

Impact of Embedded Leadership Coaching on Leader Professional Practice

The following sections detail each theme of the model presented in Figure 1 as well as discussion of each theme. The table below (Figure 2) outlines the relationships between the emergent theory, each theme, associated categories, and open codes.

Table 5

Embedded coaching has an impact on leaders' cognitive process (i.e., growth mindset), emotional capacity (i.e., well-being) and behavior (e.g., actions or behavioral approaches) to lead for continuous improvement).

Dimension	Leaders' Growth Mindset 	Leaders' Emotional Well-Being 	Leadership for Continuous Improvement 
Categories	Desire to Improve	Confidence Competing Interests Trust Validation Listening BIPOC Affinity Non-evaluative	Accountability Action Planning Problem-of-Practice Climate & Culture Tools & Strategies Reflection

Open Codes*	Desire for coaching Feedback Internal motivation Commitment to the field Intention setting Self-awareness	Vulnerability Emotional safety Familiarity Honesty Encouraging Affinity Gentleness	Identifying a specific problem-of-practice Frequent reflection Specific follow-up Differentiated Collaborative problem-solving

*This table includes frequent open codes but does not represent every code gathered as part of the line-by-line coding open coding process.

Leaders' Growth Mindset

Given that the core theme of growth mindset appears across dimensions, it is important to discuss how the concept is considered. The term growth mindset, popularized by Carol Dweck, is simply defined as the belief in the malleability of intelligence. As Dweck (2015) states, "In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment" (p. 28). While an individual with a growth mindset is often resilient when dealing with setbacks, a resilient person does not always possess a growth mindset. Thus, the two concepts are not synonymous. For the purposes of this research, the term growth mindset is explored relative to a school or district leaders' mindset toward professional growth improvement. In essence, the leader is the learner in this study.

The concept of growth mindset has been researched and discussed many times over the course of the last several years in education, and not always without controversy. Some criticism of Dweck's work has been raised regarding whether her research is culturally responsive, as it generally focuses on the internal processes of the learner and may not focus as much on the external cultural and societal factors that may also impact a learner. Zaretta-Hammond (2014) discussed the relationship between growth mindset and culturally responsive teaching in her widely read and utilized *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* text. She stated, "students must believe they can have success at learning tasks and have motivation to persevere through challenging work" (p. 178). Both researchers focus on the underlying internal beliefs of the learners playing a critical role in their perception of growth and success. This is not to say that external factors play no role in the mindset of the learner, but rather that there are critical internal processes related to belief in ability to grow and persist that are necessary alongside external factors that may be at play. For example, findings from the present study suggest that BIPOC participants may benefit from engagement with a coach of color, which can provide them with a sense of affinity and emotional safety, and further their openness and orientation towards growth.

Participant data indicated several ways in which leaders articulated a desire and expectation to professionally grow and improve. This theme emerged across codes and categories. Many participants talked about the ways in which their embedded coaching experiences centered on their desire to continually grow as a leader, alongside acknowledging areas of growth. While for each participant, the specific problems-of-practice they wished to attend to or the specific ways then benefitted from the emotional

support of the coaching relationship, each discussed the desire to become a better leader in their field. As such, the desire to improve was certainly connected to, and at the same time, foundational to, the other two core categories. Participants were focused on being their best leadership selves while grappling with the emotional and professional challenges of leading a school or district department.

The clear presence of a growth mindset, or desire and believe in the ability to improve, is significant to this research. Without the presence of this mindset, the impact on both the emotional well-being and continuous improvement efforts would undoubtedly be affected. Participant desire for growth also suggests that the participants in this study opted to participate in embedded leadership coaching firstly because they wanted to improve, and then through the coaching relationship experienced additional and related impacts to their emotional well-being as well as behavioral actions for continuous improvement. This is a subtle but important distinction. While there is significant research on growth mindset (and the role of growth mindset regarding culturally responsive teaching), there exists little to no research on the role that growth mindset plays in the professional growth of educational leaders as part of an embedded coaching process.

For emphasis and to re-state, Participant P beautifully articulated the desire to get better (growth) and the role that embedded coaching played in this process.

"You have to be vulnerable and check your ego at the door. Check perfection at the door. You've really have to allow the coach to come into your life, and just lay it out and help them help you become better…And she challenged me through sessions. And so for that, I mean it's a lifetime impact. I

feel indebted to her for her executive coaching on not just helping me in the immediate, but really, long term and in my career trajectory." (Participant P, 2023)

Growth mindset has been shown to be associated with resilience. For instance, Dweck (2006) and McKay (2017) found that growth mindset had enabled leaders to approach problems with resiliency, whereas Baumard and Starbuck (2005) reported that leaders with a growth mindset are better able to manage setback and stereotype threats. The present study found that growth mindset can be nurtured through an embedded coaching relationship, which in turn impacts the leader's sense of emotional well-being as well as approach to school and district continuous improvement. These findings are further discussed in the following paragraphs.

Leaders' Emotional Well-Being

As participant research was analyzed, it became clear that embedded leadership coaching had a significant impact on leader emotional well-being. Many participants spoke of the emotional toll and challenges that came with educational leadership and the limited opportunities to reflect on these challenges in order to maintain emotional well-being. Several spoke of the role of school leaders as often feeling lonely, isolated, and stressful due to the presence of many competing interests. School and district leadership has always been a multi-faceted and complex role. In addition to the many complexities associated with leadership throughout a global pandemic, the face and role of educational leaders has shifted over time. As Kelley (2023) noted:

> In recent decades, other factors such as increased globalisation, changing demographic patterns, growing immigration, evolving labour markets, and rapidly developing technologies have also brought an urgency to adapt education systems to meet the needs of contemporary society…schools have been redefined not only as educational establishments, but as multi-service providers, offering pre-school, childcare, recreational services, meal provision, family support, and health care (p. 14).

The many demands of the leader role, coupled with the fact that there are usually only a few formally identified leaders in a school building or central office department, can lead to a sense of isolation and lack of feeling like there is someone to just talk to. As Riley (2012) indicated, principals often receive less social support than other employees within an educational organization. The participants indicated that the role of the coaching relationship benefitted them because they could have a person with whom they could connect confidentially to discuss their successes, challenges, and overall feelings regarding their role. This benefit is in no small part due to the non-evaluative nature of the coaching relationship. Many participants discussed the feeling of emotional safety that developed from both the confidential and non-evaluative nature of the embedding coaching process. Confidential non-evaluative spaces are typically few and far between within the day-to-day experience of school and district leaders.

Many leaders participating in this research study spoke about feeling seen, validated, heard, and encouraged as part of the coaching experience. This space

for deep reflection and emotional vulnerability is rarely part of leader capacity building mechanisms, which typically focus on large or medium size groups of leaders together engaging in structured professional learning. With the many demands of educational leadership, perhaps it is no surprise that leaders both crave and value dedicated time to process their emotions.

While a GT approach does not include the establishment of any hypothesis, to a certain extent the researcher speculated that many leaders might talk extensively about the positive impact that embedded leadership coaching has on their professional practices. While this was the case and will be discussed further in in the next section, the participants spoke as much about the benefits to their own personal emotional well-being as they did the impacts to their professional practice. Depending on the participant, some first spoke more about the impact of coaching on their emotional well-being, and some more about the impact of embedded coaching on their professional practice, but all participants spoke about both. This was somewhat surprising to the researcher in that there was no preponderance of the evidence strongly in one category or another, but rather both professional and personal well-being and continuous improvement were held in high priority as part of the growth process.

To re-state from Chapter 4, Participant J provided a strong example of the impact that embedded coaching had on emotional well-being.

> Yeah, it was kind of therapeutic. There was, there was an element of therapy and ability to talk about things that you can't talk about with anyone else. I can't talk about with my teachers, a whole bunch of stuff

> that goes on right? Because it's not appropriate. But having this non-evaluative nonsupervisory person to coach me and… Just be with me…was helpful for my professional health and my mental health. (Participant J, 2023)

Leading for Continuous Improvement

The third theme that emerged from the research was leading for continuous improvement. Participant data indicated that continuous improvement efforts could be addressing any number of current problems of practice. The key is that the leader identified the areas to address with their coach. Some participants indicated working with the coach on some very specific items, while others worked with the coach on broad re-visioning work and a wide variety of topics between. The key concepts that came across in this dimension include differentiation, accountability, and support.

Participants spoke of the ways in which the embedded coaching partnership enabled them to identify, reflect on, and take specific action to address a school or district continuous improvement need. It is important to note that rather that yielding specific topical problems-of-practice to address, the research instead highlights the value participants placed on having a coach to support them in processing and action planning for a leader identified problem of practice. Participants spoke about the process of identifying a struggle and action planning for it much more than the specific issue that needed to be resolved. Alongside this, participants discussed the value of having a coach hold them accountable in a non-evaluative way, which in turn further developed their own sense of internal accountability. The combination of identifying the issue,

developing action steps, and then knowing there would be clear follow up from the coach was something participants spoke of with high value.

Espuny and colleagues (2020) outlined in their research the many areas of accountability school principals typically must address to include competing demands for leadership of learning, pressures related to accountability and pressures from staff, families, and society in general. With such a wide range of ongoing areas of need, coupled with the unpredictability of any day in the field as practitioners, participants in this study discussed the benefits of being able to work in a coaching partnership to prioritize and develop a plan of action that is specific to the needs of their learning community at that time. This differentiated "just in time" approach was something participants spoke at length about.

This research project yields the emergent theory that ***embedded coaching has an impact on leaders' cognitive process (i.e., growth mindset), emotional capacity (i.e., well-being) and behavior (e.g., actions or behavioral approaches) to lead for continuous improvement).*** The three dimensions of this theory constitute a unique conceptual model within the research canon. While there exists research on growth mindset, research on psychological safety and emotional well-being, and research on leader problem of practice, the blending of these three together as part of an embedded coaching experience represents an approach not previously explored in the research. Additionally, examining this phenomenon through a GT approach represents a unique methodological approach to the research topic. Taken together, this unique approach to the topic yielded rich qualitative data representing a novel conceptual framework regarding embedded coaching models for school and district leaders. This research

contributes to the field of research on embedded coaching models for leaders that supports the refinement of capacity building models for leaders as well as implications for numerous additional research opportunities.

Strengths of Study

First, utilizing a qualitative GT approach for this research design enabled the researcher to gain a deep and intimate understanding of the embedded leadership coaching experience for building and district level leader participants. Currently there is scant research exploring the internal experience for a leader as they engage in embedded coaching. Research that does exist on this specific topic addresses external leader experiences in primarily mixed-methods methodological approaches. The GT approach to the topic represents a not previously before studied approach to the research design. The purpose of this study was to shed some light on the internal leader experience as they engaged in a coaching relationship.

Second, having the opportunity to have an in-depth interview with a diverse group of 18 leaders provided robust data. Participants came from elementary, middle, and high school levels as well as central office, and represented varied gender identifications, race/ethnicity, professional roles, and years of professional experience.

Third, utilizing a robust coding process alongside the use of a peer debriefer strengthened the accountability process and ultimately led to a stronger data analysis and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. It is the researcher's belief that the depth of understanding of the embedded coaching process for each leader could not have been accomplished as effectively with a different research design. This research project

represents an addition to the field of educational leadership research that can ultimately lead to a better understanding of leadership development and capacity building.

Limitations of Study

This GT study has certain limitations. In terms of sampling, while the participants yielded an adequate sample size (N = 18) for the purposes of the research and in-depth one-on-one interviews, it is also accurate that the participants were those who had previously voluntarily agreed to participate in embedded leadership coaching. As such, the perspective of those leaders who elected not to participate in coaching is not represented within this study.

Also, this study examined leaders' internalized experiences and perceptions as the outcome of the study and did not examine the impact of embedded coaching on student outcomes, which may be a promising topic for future research.

Additionally, the participants in this study participated in embedded leadership coaching with one coach contracted with the district who utilizes a specific coaching model. While in some ways this brings some consistency to the study, it also indicates some limitations. This study does not purport to evaluate the effectiveness of various coaches or coaching models that may exist. As an example, some leaders of color who participated in this study indicated that, while they found their coaching relationship with the coach involved in the study valuable, they would also like to engage in coaching with a coach of color. While this is not a focus of the present study, future research could explore the benefits of working alongside coaches of similar or different demographics and professional backgrounds.

Implications for Future Research

There are multiple possibilities for future research based on the themes that emerged from this GT study. One thought provoking study would be to conduct a comparative study on leaders' problem-solving strategies as a function of their participation in an embedded coaching opportunity. This research project could include the ways in which specific leaders addresses their identified problems of practice as well as the effectiveness of the outcomes.

Additionally, a longitudinal study could be conducted to determine what impacts to student outcomes may exist for leaders who participate in embedded leadership coaching. For this mixed-methods design, leaders' participating in coaching could be studied over an established period to explore the presence of high-yield leadership behaviors as well as the exploring the relationship between engagement in a coaching experience and student academic outcomes. This methodological approach would provide powerful additional insight into the impact that embedded coaching has on both externalizing leadership behaviors as well as student academic outcomes.

For additional GT research, it would be extremely worthwhile to explore the experiences of leaders who engage in affinity-based coaching (based on gender, race, etc.) and the impacts this coaching has on their professional practice. Also, the majority the participants for this study have more than eight years of experience. It would be valuable to study the impact of embedded coaching for more novice leaders with three years or less of experience. To better understand the internal process for leaders' as they engage in the embedded coaching process, additional GT research could explore more deeply one of the dimensions in the conceptual model, such as leaders' emotional well-

being, to better understand what factors within this dimension impact leader actions and decision-making.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study were insightful and multi-layered. The emergent themes provide some insight into the extreme complexity of educational leadership and also into the hearts and minds of the dedicated leaders who participated in this study. The results of this research project hold promise for additional research as well as practical implications for the field of educational leadership. While the previous section outlines some of the potential future research possibilities, this section discusses the practical implications of this research.

This research yields significant implications for those responsible for the capacity development of school building and district level leaders. Participants in this study showed evidence of a growth mindset, or predisposition for growth that was enhance via the embedded coaching process. There can be no assumption that this is strongly in place for leaders, and needs to be a part of a well thought out professional growth framework for leaders.

Building on growth mindset work, capacity building efforts should be designed to allow for differentiated and targeted support with specific leader identified problems of practice as well as opportunities for leaders to reflect on their feelings in safe spaces. Typical capacity building structures that focus on supporting groups of leaders may address some of these needs, but typically not all. A more robust model of leader capacity development that is aligned with this research would include specific space to nurture the

development of growth mindset in leaders as well as small group or individual spaces of emotional safety for leaders to process their emotions. Identifying and providing support in the processing of specifically identified problems of practice can then be addressed alongside the other two dimensions.

Typical professional development methods for school and district leaders emphasize continuous improvement efforts to include addressing problems of practice, but are almost entirely silent on addressing the emotional well-being needs and the enhancement of a growth mindset in leaders. It is the belief of this researcher that while there is an acknowledgment of a need for emotional well-being of leaders, in practice the day-to-day time and scheduling constraints typically push these efforts to the very end, if not entirely off, the capacity building agenda. The importance of this work cannot be overstated. This research indicates there is a significant need to better address the emotional and psychological safety of educational leaders as an essential part of systemic capacity building strategies.

As a continuous improvement strategy, school systems should consider the utilization of embedded leadership coaching as a part of a comprehensive capacity building framework for leaders. The “just in time” and highly tailored nature of embedded coaching simply cannot be delivered in a workshop model. While there certainly is a place for group professional capacity building, this strategy alone is unlikely to fully address the needs that emerged from this research process. Rather, utilizing a combination of group and individualized capacity building for leaders holds great promise. The participants in this research project had previously agreed and had shown interest in engaging in coaching. More systematically utilizing this model requires the

inclusion of both whole/small group professional development alongside embedded coaching experienced for all leaders. In a time of limited resources and competing priorities, the value of supporting those who lead our school buildings and systems so that they can in turn support our educators, students, and families must be a priority.

Conclusion

While three key domains emerged from this grounded research study, it is worth noting that there was significant overlap between the domains. Participants discussed how they valued reflection as part of their growth, next describing how a particular problem of practice emerged as part of this reflection, and the ensuing plan that was developed to address the issues, leading to the development of the emergent theory that ***Embedded coaching has an impact on leaders' cognitive process (i.e. growth mindset), emotional capacity (i.e., well-being) and behavior (e.g., actions or behavioral approaches) to lead for continuous improvement).*** This emergent theory speaks to the iterative and fluid nature of the embedded coaching relationship. It also speaks to the individualized and contextualized nature of the embedded coaching model. While growth mindset was a consistent theme across participants, leaders did have distinctive, although related, needs for emotional support as well as professional planning and support.

This type of embedded coaching support model is rarely provided in any systematic way for leaders in school districts, and more standardized workshop style professional development models are unlikely to fully address the needs and impacts that the participants in this study experienced. This researcher is optimistic that the learning gleaned from this research project will benefit the field of educational leadership practitioners as well as provide context for additional important research.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions and Script

Project Title: *The Impact of Embedded Coaching on Educational Leader Professional Practice*

Principal Investigator: Heather Sánchez, Seattle Pacific University EdD Candidate

Interview Questions & Process

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! As shared within the call for participants, the purpose of this study is to better understand the impact that embedded coaching has on the professional practice of school and district educational leaders. Better understanding this impact will provide important information to plan for meaningful professional supports for school and district leaders.

Below are the questions that will be explored during your interview. I may ask follow-up questions to better understand your responses to the original question.

As shared on the consent form that you completed, this interview will be recorded. You are more than welcome to turn off your camera at any time. I will also not start recording the interview until after the second question since the first two questions relate to your identity, position, discipline, and other background details. The information gathered during the first two questions will be kept separately from the interview transcripts.

Do you have any questions for me before we proceed with exploring the shared interview questions?

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1. First off, before proceeding could you share your pronouns with me so I can refer to you accurately when needed?

2. In regards to this next section, please feel free to skip any of the following demographic-related questions, or any of the future questions during the interview. With that said, could you please specify…
    - …your gender (e.g. male/female/non-binary)
    - …your race/ethnicity
    - …your position title (Assistant Principal, Principal, Director, Other)
    - …your discipline/department (e.g. Elementary, Secondary, K-12, etc.)

- …the type of institution you are affiliated with (e.g. Public schools, private school, non-affiliated)

3. What impact has your leadership coaching had on your professional practice as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

4. Following your experience with leadership coaching, what will be, or were, your next professional steps as a leader? Please be as specific as possible.

5. Is there anything else you think I should know to better understand your experience with leadership coaching?

Appendix B: Background on Executive Coaching Framework

ICF Core Competencies
(International Coaching Federation)

The ICF Core Competencies were developed to support greater understanding about the skills and approaches used within today's coaching profession as defined by ICF. These competencies and the ICF definition of coaching serve as the foundation of the Credential process, including the ICF Credentialing Exam. ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

The ICF Core Competencies are organized into four domains based on commonalities and interdependencies between competencies within each domain. There are no domains nor individual competencies that are weighted—they do not represent any kind of hierarchy. Rather, each competency is considered core and critical for any competent coach to demonstrate.

The ICF Core Competencies were originally created in 1998, consisting of 11 Core Competencies. In November 2019, ICF released an updated version of the competencies. The updated Core Competencies were integrated in ICF-Accredited Coach Education Programs curricula beginning in January 2021. As of August 1, 2022, the updated Core Competencies were integrated into the Credentialing Performance Evaluation and written exam requirements.

A. Setting the Foundation

1. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards—Understanding of coaching ethics and standards and ability to apply them appropriately in all coaching situations.

1. Understands and exhibits in own behaviors the ICF Code of Ethics (see Code, Part III of ICF Code of Ethics).
2. Understands and follows all ICF Ethical Guidelines.
3. Clearly communicates the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions.
4. Refers client to another support professional as needed, knowing when this is needed and the available resources.

2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement—Ability to understand what is required in the specific coaching interaction and to come to agreement with the prospective and new client about the coaching process and relationship.

1. Understands and effectively discusses with the client the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship (e.g., logistics, fees, scheduling, inclusion of others if appropriate).

2. Reaches agreement about what is appropriate in the relationship and what is not, what is and is not being offered, and about the client's and coach's responsibilities.

3. Determines whether there is an effective match between his/her coaching method and the needs of the prospective client.

B. Co-Creating the Relationship

3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client—Ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust.

1. Shows genuine concern for the client's welfare and future.

2. Continuously demonstrates personal integrity, honesty and sincerity.

3. Establishes clear agreements and keeps promises.

4. Demonstrates respect for client's perceptions, learning style, personal being.

5. Provides ongoing support for and champions new behaviors and actions, including those involving risk-taking and fear of failure.

6. Asks permission to coach client in sensitive, new areas.

4. Coaching Presence—Ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident.

1. Is present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment.

2. Accesses own intuition and trusts one's inner knowing—"goes with the gut."

3. Is open to not knowing and takes risks.

4. Sees many ways to work with the client and chooses in the moment what is most effective.

5. Uses humor effectively to create lightness and energy.

6. Confidently shifts perspectives and experiments with new possibilities for own action.

7. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions and can self-manage and not be overpowered or enmeshed by client's emotions.

C. Communicating Effectively

5. Active Listening—Ability to focus completely on what the client is saying and is not saying, to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the client's desires, and to support client self-expression.

1. Attends to the client and the client's agenda and not to the coach's agenda for the client.

2. Hears the client's concerns, goals, values and beliefs about what is and is not possible.

3. Distinguishes between the words, the tone of voice, and the body language.

4. Summarizes, paraphrases, reiterates, and mirrors back what client has said to ensure clarity and understanding.

5. Encourages, accepts, explores and reinforces the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, suggestions, etc.

6. Integrates and builds on client's ideas and suggestions.

7. "Bottom-lines" or understands the essence of the client's communication and helps the client get there rather than engaging in long, descriptive stories.

8. Allows the client to vent or "clear" the situation without judgment or attachment in order to move on to next steps.

6. Powerful Questioning—Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client.

1. Asks questions that reflect active listening and an understanding of the client's perspective.

2. Asks questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action (e.g., those that challenge the client's assumptions).

3. Asks open-ended questions that create greater clarity, possibility or new learning.

4. Asks questions that move the client toward what they desire, not questions that ask for the client to justify or look backward.

7. Direct Communication—Ability to communicate effectively during coaching sessions, and to use language that has the greatest positive impact on the client.

1. Is clear, articulate and direct in sharing and providing feedback.

2. Reframes and articulates to help the client understand from another perspective what he/she wants or is uncertain about.

3. Clearly states coaching objectives, meeting agenda, and purpose of techniques or exercises.

4. Uses language appropriate and respectful to the client (e.g., non-sexist, non-racist, non-technical, non-jargon).

5. Uses metaphor and analogy to help to illustrate a point or paint a verbal picture.

D. Facilitating Learning and Results

8. Creating Awareness—Ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of information and to make interpretations that help the client to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results.

1. Goes beyond what is said in assessing client's concerns, not getting hooked by the client's description.

2. Invokes inquiry for greater understanding, awareness, and clarity.

3. Identifies for the client his/her underlying concerns; typical and fixed ways of perceiving himself/herself and the world; differences between the facts and the interpretation; and disparities between thoughts, feelings, and action.

4. Helps clients to discover for themselves the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc. that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what is important to them.

5. Communicates broader perspectives to clients and inspires commitment to shift their viewpoints and find new possibilities for action.

6. Helps clients to see the different, interrelated factors that affect them and their behaviors (e.g., thoughts, emotions, body, and background).

7. Expresses insights to clients in ways that are useful and meaningful for the client.

8. Identifies major strengths vs. major areas for learning and growth, and what is most important to address during coaching.

9. Asks the client to distinguish between trivial and significant issues, situational vs. recurring behaviors, when detecting a separation between what is being stated and what is being done.

9. Designing Actions—Ability to create with the client opportunities for ongoing learning, during coaching and in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed-upon coaching results.

1. Brainstorms and assists the client to define actions that will enable the client to demonstrate, practice, and deepen new learning.

2. Helps the client to focus on and systematically explore specific concerns and opportunities that are central to agreed-upon coaching goals.

3. Engages the client to explore alternative ideas and solutions, to evaluate options, and to make related decisions.

4. Promotes active experimentation and self-discovery, where the client applies what has been discussed and learned during sessions immediately afterward in his/her work or life setting.

5. Celebrates client successes and capabilities for future growth.

6. Challenges client's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action.

7. Advocates or brings forward points of view that are aligned with client goals and, without attachment, engages the client to consider them.

8. Helps the client "Do It Now" during the coaching session, providing immediate support.

9. Encourages stretches and challenges but also a comfortable pace of learning.

10. Planning and Goal Setting—Ability to develop and maintain an effective coaching plan with the client.

1. Consolidates collected information and establishes a coaching plan and development goals with the client that address concerns and major areas for learning and development.

2. Creates a plan with results that are attainable, measurable, specific, and have target dates.

3. Makes plan adjustments as warranted by the coaching process and by changes in the situation.

4. Helps the client identify and access different resources for learning (e.g., books, other professionals).

5. Identifies and targets early successes that are important to the client.

11. Managing Progress and Accountability—Ability to hold attention on what is important for the client, and to leave responsibility with the client to take action.

1. Clearly requests of the client actions that will move the client toward his/her stated goals.

2. Demonstrates follow-through by asking the client about those actions that the client committed to during the previous session(s).

3. Acknowledges the client for what they have done, not done, learned or become aware of since the previous coaching session(s).

4. Effectively prepares, organizes, and reviews with client information obtained during sessions.

5. Keeps the client on track between sessions by holding attention on the coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon courses of action, and topics for future session(s).

6. Focuses on the coaching plan but is also open to adjusting behaviors and actions based on the coaching process and shifts in direction during sessions.

7. Is able to move back and forth between the big picture of where the client is heading, setting a context for what is being discussed and where the client wishes to go.

8. Promotes client's self-discipline and holds the client accountable for what they say they are going to do, for the results of an intended action, or for a specific plan with related time frames.

9. Develops the client's ability to make decisions, address key concerns, and develop himself/herself (to get feedback, to determine priorities and set the pace of learning, to reflect on and learn from experiences).

10. Positively confronts the client with the fact that he/she did not take agreed-upon actions.