

WALKING THE TIGHTROPE: BALANCING THE PRACTICES OF  
INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING WITH THE ROLE OF ADMINISTRATIVE  
LEADERSHIP

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

As school improvement efforts have increased over the past two decades, a focused attention has been placed on improving both teacher practices and student learning outcomes to meet increased accountability measures. School districts across the United States are turning to the use of an instructional coach in conjunction with more rigorous criteria for teacher evaluation implemented by building administrators. This study sought to explore how school administrators with backgrounds in instructional coaching were able to balance implementing evaluation frameworks while simultaneously implementing best practices and strategies from instructional coaching to lead instructional improvement in their buildings.

Following Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing method, I conducted a qualitative study with two participants who serve as building administrators who have a background in instructional coaching. Each participant completed two ninety-minute interviews that explored each participants' relationship to the phenomenon through their background, current experiences, and how they used their experiences to define and describe the background. The literature review began by exploring Ericsson and Pool's (2017) framework of expertise theory through purposeful practice while seeking to uncover how teacher evaluation frameworks, focused feedback, and instructional coaching helped to create what I termed the Highly Effective Instructional Leader. The data did support that administrators who have a background with instructional coaching do have the opportunity to engage teachers in purposeful practice, however, contextual factors did arise that produced mixed results for each participant.

This research was conducted during the Fall semester of the 2021-2022 school year which has also coincided with the continuation of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. This pandemic has not only impacted the school environment for students but has also proven challenging for teachers and administrators as the general operations of the school have shifted to balance instructional improvement, student learning outcomes, and additional responsibilities incurred by the pandemic. This research study still provides evidence and lessons for administrators who are looking to embed a culture of continuous improvement within their schools.

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**CHAPTER I:**  
**INTRODUCTION**

There was a man who lived in town

And he was wondrous and wise

He jumped into a bramble bush

And scratched out both his eyes.

And when he saw what he had done

With all his might and main

He jumped back in the bramble-bush

And scratched them in again.

Dr. Clyde E. Willis, Political Science professor at Middle Tennessee State University, would begin his law and legal system classes each semester by utilizing the old English nursery rhyme used to begin this introduction. Originally used by Karl Llewellyn in *The Bramble Bush* (1930), Willis emphasized in his essay, *The rules thirteen: an essay for students* (2006), that the educational experience of students and how they had been taught to learn did not always follow the clean, linear pattern they had been exposed to. Willis (2006) would encourage students to “jump headlong into a different realm of learning [than they were accustomed to] and though we may at times become baffled, we jump right back in and everything makes sense” (p. 4). While this

study does not come remotely close to discussing law and the legal system or the political sciences (outside of educational legislation that has helped to create the landscape of schooling today), the Bramble Bush nursery rhyme represents the idea of growing, learning, and improving. When a person has the confidence, supports, and passion for continuous learning and improvement, they can begin to look at all of their experiences, successes, and even failures as learning opportunities. For the context of this research study, the Bramble Bush nursery rhyme is significant because we have the ability, resources, tools, and knowledge to begin improving the quality of instruction and student learning outcomes in our nation's public schools. To collectively improve equity for all students and for this work to have a sustainable, long-term impact, there must be strong relationships and partnerships between instructional leaders and educators.

It can be said that there are three careers (or callings) that require a formal education combined with field placements (jumping into the bramble bush, *per se*). The formal education provides the working "theories" of the relevant domains for each of those careers; however, the real learning comes from the experience gained in residencies, internships, and other on the job training when the student jumps "back into the bramble bush." The medical, legal, and educational fields all require students to learn about best practices and theories around their fields, but the true learning comes from practicing the medicine, law, or teaching that occurs in the field. While all three of these disciplines require a steep learning curve when the practitioners move from theory to practice, they also require adaptations and are constantly undergoing reforms in their field. However, the medical and legal fields far outpace their educational counterpart when it comes to large-scale studies of improvements in practice and growth for its

practitioners. In fact, when compared to the requirements for professional updating, certifications, and improvement in both medicine and law, educators have minimal to no real requirements to provide evidence of professional growth outside of the required hours of professional development each year. These comparatively minimal professional growth expectations can be traced through the legislative history of public schools.

### **School Improvement Via Legislation**

The history of compulsory education in the United States began in Massachusetts in 1852 when the first state law was created requiring school attendance for students. As early as the turn of the twentieth century, thirty-two more states had enacted similar legislation, with Mississippi being the last in 1918 to adopt legislation around mandatory school attendance (Katz, 1976). Although the institution of schooling has been around far longer than even the history of the United States, public education would not gain national attention until the mid-nineteen-sixties. Public education reform began in 1965 with the first passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) where the federal government broke the nation's long precedent of education being only a state matter. With the enactment of ESEA 1965, the federal government sought to improve schooling for all, with a specific emphasis on disadvantaged populations (Tucker, 2014). ESEA 1965, while aimed at improving academic outcomes for students, was characterized by its true purpose of providing funds so “teachers could cope with students’ cultural disadvantages” (Tucker, 2014, p. 8). This would in turn allow teachers to properly educate their disadvantaged students. As Tucker (2014) summarized, “if the students were not learning, the fault lay in the background of the students, not in any lack

of competence or commitment of the teachers...” (p. 8). As studies have shown since the passage and adoption of ESEA 1965 (Tucker, 2014), the first federal foray into education reform sought to cure one symptom of the failure of the education system, not to provide the cure for the system as a whole.

The second legislative push came at the start of the twenty-first century through the landmark, and controversial, reauthorization of the 1965 ESEA bill which became known as No Child Left Behind (Tucker 2014; Muhammed 2018). While the original ESEA 1965 sought to improve opportunities for disadvantaged subgroups, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) moved toward sweeping accountability for individual schools based solely on the learning outcomes of their students. For the first time in U.S. history, states were pushed to increase student proficiency on state testing, with schools being required to have one-hundred percent of their students perform on grade-level for reading and math by 2014 (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002; Tucker, 2014; Muhammed, 2018). Per NCLB, the federal government’s role in education expanded with legislation around testing student performance, improving teacher performance, and seeking to identify schools who were underperforming (Hiebert et al., 2002, Tucker, 2014). While the goals of NCLB were grounded in ensuring that all students we given the opportunity for academic success, the perceived over-night shift of blame to schools rippled through the education community. Opposition from both labor unions and teachers (specifically in urban settings) arose around the highly ambitious, yet unrealistic, expectation that one-hundred percent of students in every state, every district, and every school would be on grade-level by 2014 (Tucker, 2014; Muhammed, 2018). Anthony Muhammed (2018) articulated: “The goals of NCLB [were] admirable and morally correct, but we must

acknowledge that breaking a system of normally distributed achievement is not going to end with a legislative pen” (p. 10). With such lofty aspirations and with no real changes in practices for leadership or educators (except to increase proficiency ratings for all students), NCLB legislation lacked substantial policy changes that would be ushered in less than a decade later.

During the 2008 recession, the Obama administration sought to continue moving toward education improvement for students by way of improving schools through teacher performance. Many policy makers acknowledged that while the morality of NCLB was in the correct place, several flaws existed within the legislation. States lowered grade-level proficiency percentages to ensure that they would progress toward the goal of one-hundred percent of students demonstrating proficiency (Tucker, 2014). States also had the autonomy to lower their expectations for specific standards that would further perpetuate the achievement gaps for the most at-risk students in American society. In President Obama’s 2009 legislation Race to the Top (RTTT), states were able to opt out of the harsh measures (being penalized if all students were not proficient on state testing) that accompanied NCLB if certain stipulations were followed by the states. Chiefly among these stipulations was that states were to reform their current teacher evaluation systems as well as begin holding teachers accountable for student results on state assessments through a value-added model (Tucker, 2014). With the passage of RTTT, the standard for accountability had shifted from the schools, principals, and school boards (NCLB) to teachers in each classroom (Tucker, 2014). This shift signaled a massive change in the landscape of how teacher performance was determined, and it sought to measure true teacher impact on student learning.

The most current education reform came in December 2015 with the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is the most recent reauthorization of ESEA 1965. While ESSA 2015 is another legislative arm of the federal government, it also has been viewed as providing more autonomy to states and local education associations (LEAs). As Tooley (2017) summarized, “Under the previous iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind, states could mostly ‘paint by number,’ but ESSA has given states more of a blank canvas” (p. 2). The major buckets of work that ESSA sought to improve were: 1) educator preparation; 2) educator recruitment and retention; 3) educator evaluation and support systems; and 4) comprehensive professional learning systems (Tooley, 2017). Citing the 2015 *State of the States* report published by the National Council for Teacher Quality, Connally and Tooley (2016) reported that “31 states have a policy in place, either through statute, regulation, or other guidance, requiring that teachers’ professional development be based on their evaluation results” (p. 10).

### **Improving Teaching at Scale**

Recent research has concluded that the impact that educators have on student learning has been in a period of stagnation. While Stigler and Miller (2018) championed education as one of the most beneficial creations of modern society, little has changed in the approaches used in modern education to reduce learning gaps, opportunity gaps, and income gaps in rural, urban, and suburban settings. The New Teacher Project (TNTP) published their report *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009) to study the current reality of teacher evaluation and teacher development in twelve

school districts across four states. Citing a *New York Times* (1936) story around teacher quality:

There are at least 'several hundred' incompetents now in the school system [says the superintendent]. Other observers think there are several thousands, while still others insist that 'several' would be nearer the mark. Whether these incompetents were unfit to teach at any time, or have been rendered unfit by the passing years, is a matter of opinion. The question is, why are they allowed to remain? (p. 2)

While the TNTP report (2009) begins with a sobering account of the questions that still exist approximately 85 years later, the *Widget Effect* (Weisberg et al., 2009) sought to shine light on the fact that America, and the world, are now "in a knowledge-based economy that makes education more important than ever, teachers matter more than ever" (p. 2). The call to action from TNTP was to begin looking at the needs and growth for educators and those who supervise their growth. In discussing the need for continuing to grow educators, Dylan Wiliam (2018) advocated: "The reason teachers need professional development has nothing to do with professional updating. Teachers need professional development because the job of teaching is so difficult, so complex, that one lifetime is not enough to master it" (p. 25).

While there are advocates who espouse the view that the most ineffective teachers should simply be replaced, Wiliam (2018) advocates that "Specifically, there are two things that can improve educational achievement substantially, with little additional cost. The first is to ensure that the curriculum in each school is content-rich and is focused on developing knowledge. The second is creating an expectation that all teachers in the district, even if they are already the best, continue to improve their classroom

performance" (p. 6). Furthermore, Wiliam (2018) later reminds us that simply "firing bad teachers" is easier in theory than in practice. This is not due to tenure laws or due process considerations, but because teacher performance is variable. Also, as many researchers (Danielson, 2001, 2010, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2014, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Goldberg, 2001; Darling-Hammond & Amreign-Beardsley, 2012; Marzano, 2007; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011; Reeves, 2016; Wiliam, 2018; Lezotte and Snyder, 2011) have concluded, there is hardly a definition of what "good instruction" is within the most rural districts in America, let alone throughout the United States. It is Wiliam's (2018) second assertion, that all teachers should continually seek improvement, that will be examined through this study. With the increase of research, tools, practices, and resources, district and school leadership should do everything within their sphere of influence to increase the expectation that every teacher can improve their individual performance.

### **A Transient Workforce**

The current standards for determining teacher expertise are based on three criteria (either solely or as a combination): career longevity, third party certification (National Board Certification), or student achievement results through value-added models (Stigler and Miller, 2018). Although these three criteria are universally used as a determining factor in placing students with teachers, there are inherent flaws in each measure that can hinder individual and collective improvement efforts in schools. As Stigler and Miller (2018) articulated through research, a teacher's total years' experience has a small correlation with student learning outcomes. In fact, Stigler and Miller (2018) cite research

that showed that a teacher's impact is greatest during the early years of the teacher's career and eventually plateaus as the teacher continues their career. Certifications, such as National Board Certification using the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) to define expertise, have also shown mixed results in determining the expertise of teachers and the outcomes of those who become certified have on student learning. Finally, using student achievement results (value-added measures) to determine teacher expertise produces wide ranges of variance between teachers using multiple years of data. Teachers who were identified as the highest performing one year might be identified as the lowest-performing the next year due to factors that may or may not be within the scope of the teacher's control (Darling-Hammond, 2015).

Although the three criteria generally used to determine 'expertise' in teaching have inherent flaws, a deeper problem is starting to loom for the education profession moving forward. This problem is signified by the diminishing workforce of "expert teachers," by whichever measure they are defined, through either attrition (people leaving the teaching profession), migration (teachers making lateral transfers to other schools), or retirement. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) estimated that the national attrition rate for teachers totaled 8% from year to year (up from 5.4% in the 1990s) and also accounted for 90% of teacher demand. While natural turnover is expected in any profession, Carter-Thomas et al. (2017) shared that only one in five teachers who left the profession did so due to retirement. Carver-Thomas continued that "less than a third of national teacher attrition is retirement. In other words, each year schools nationwide must hire tens of thousands of teachers as a result of beginning and mid-career teachers leaving the profession" (p. 1). Speaking to teacher turnover in schools, Muhammed (2018)

argued that “a school cannot gain momentum if it lacks organizational memory [due to losing knowledge and experience through a revolving door] ... organizations with no memory simply survive; they never reach a point where they can thrive” (p. 51).

As expected, urban and hard to staff schools experience the brunt of this attrition, “which means that students in schools with high turnover and few experienced teachers are at a decided educational disadvantage” (Carver-Thomas et al., 2017, p. 1). When schools are constantly replacing teachers in their building (through transfer or resignation), the impact of this carousel not only hurts the students but also creates an unstable climate and culture. Worse, when teachers decide to leave a school for another in the same district, this indicates dissatisfaction with the conditions of employment rather than the occupation. As Thornton, Perrault, and Jennings (2008) argued, “while individuals who transfer, rather than leave teaching, may not represent a loss to a district as a whole, each teacher must be replaced at the school he or she left and the subsequent burden upon school leaders is much the same” (p. 354). Boe, Cook, & Sunderland (2008) continued that, “Attrition only accounted for 30% of total turnover; the substantial majority of turnover lies within the ranks of employed teachers” (p. 23). If we have learned anything from the research thus far, it is that much of the time spent on teacher turnover is focused on the wrong aspect (attrition) while an important factor (migration) goes largely ignored in research studies.

Muhammed (2018) tells us that “unless the school achieves positive stability through a large coalition of its members, it is incapable of sustaining growth over time. If membership constantly turns over, training and professional initiatives have no long-term

effectiveness” (p. 45). In the results from an IRB approved qualitative pilot study in 2019 conducted on teacher migration by the researcher, two major factors emerged that led to teachers moving to a new school from one year to the next: building leadership and school climate/culture. Of the 23 participants in the study, there were 15 general educators, 4 special education teachers, 2 instructional coaches, and 1 administrator. Of the participants surveyed, the mean experience was 14 years, with an average of 3.5 schools taught and an average of 2 transfers per person. While teachers were not clear about what they hoped to gain in terms of leadership from their lateral transfer, all teachers were able to articulate the aspects of a climate/culture they hoped they would receive in terms of school culture and leadership supports (George, 2019). As Wiliam (2018) notes, “The key to improving American schools is not knowing what to do—the research is now reasonably clear on that issue—but in creating situations where what we know needs to happen can happen” (p. 6). School districts and school administrators need to further study and address the impact that teacher migration plays in their districts and schools. As Casas (2017) tells us, “it is what we don’t say that creates a culture of mistrust or, worse, leads to a negative school/work experience for those who we are entrusted to teach and serve” (p.103).

### **Problem Statement**

National legislation has provided more scrutiny and higher stakes for schools and school leaders in the past two decades than at any other point in United States history. With increased accountability for student learning outcomes, teacher retention rates (both in the profession as well as schools with at-risk populations) have continued to decline

amidst those pressures placed on school leaders and schools. At a time where accountability has become the norm, it will be hard to roll back policies that identify schools on both ends of the performance spectrum. Therefore, if the gap experienced in learning outcomes by schools is to be closed, the work has to come from within the school and the scope of instructional leadership within that school. This work will begin with hiring school administrators who have the capacity and desire to improve teaching and learning through providing coaching and purposeful (or deliberate) practice opportunities that allow for teachers to experience growth. When school districts prioritize placing building administrators in leadership positions that harness the power of coaching for instructional improvement through setting of specific improvement goals, grounded in focused and timely feedback, that push teachers outside of the current ability level (Ericsson and Pool, 2017), schools will then move toward the instructional improvement of student learning outcomes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in expertise theory, which is grounded in not only being able to identify experts but also in helping to create the next generation of experts in education. Using the framework from Ericsson and Pool (2017), this study seeks to outline the methods that administrators use to harness the power of purposeful practice to improve teacher performance through the supervision and evaluation frameworks utilized in their schools. Ericsson and Pool (2017) delineate four characteristics that define purposeful practice: 1) Purposeful practice has well-defined, specific goals, 2) Purposeful practice is focused, 3) purposeful practice involves

feedback, and 4) purposeful practice requires getting out of one's comfort zone. The administrators interviewed in this study all have similar backgrounds grounded in roles of coaching teachers for instructional improvement.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research study is to collect qualitative data from participants who have previously served in the role of instructional coach who are currently in the position of principal or assistant principal. This research seeks to study how administrators and evaluators are able to maintain their backgrounds and practices in instructional coaching to lead improvement in schools while also balancing the roles and responsibilities of the principalship. It is with these goals in mind that the researcher seeks to investigate and answer the following questions:

RQ 1: In what ways do administrators describe and experience using their background as an instructional coach to personalize the supports of teachers in their school?

RQ 2: In what ways do administrators describe and experience using their background as an instructional coach to engage their teachers in purposeful practice?

### **Summary**

It is important that the path to our current reality in K-12 education is explored and contextualized in light of the goals of this research. Research is clear that the single most important factor in student learning outcomes is the classroom teacher (Hattie,

2012; Darling-Hammond and Goldberg, 2001). However, it is the responsibility of an instructional leader to guide that teacher in the work of providing equity and improving learning outcomes. As cited in the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) Administrator Evaluation Rubric (2016), Murphy states, “Good leadership is not about you. It is about what you leave behind... In the process of improvement, it is almost inevitable that significant barriers will arise. Great leaders learn to build trenches under barriers and find ladders to use to climb over them” (p. 4). Tying Murphy’s quote on leadership to this research, instructional leaders must be able to balance both the coaching and development of their teachers with their administrative responsibilities. Some may think it is impossible to be the coach and the evaluator—to successfully walk that tightrope. But it can be done. But it takes a new type of leader: the highly effective instructional leader. Once the paradigm has shifted from just being the evaluator to also being the coach, from just being the supervisor to also being the support, teachers will not only feel more supported in their work but will also begin to see results from their personal and professional growth.

## **CHAPTER II:**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

John Hattie (2012) contends that “Feedback is among the most common features of successful teaching and learning. But there is an enigma: while feedback is among the most powerful moderators of learning, its effects are among the most variable” (p. 115). As Hattie (2012) said, the use of feedback can have one of the greatest, if not the greatest, impacts on teaching and learning. However, feedback may also be the least understood and hardest practice to implement for teachers as well as for students. While the research surrounding instructional feedback from students has gained traction in the past decade with movements like Hattie’s Visible Learning Framework and an increase of cognitive science and the implications of feedback for student learning, less work has been done to truly develop a comprehensive understanding of the role feedback from instructional leaders plays for educators. Moreover, the diminishing supply of veteran teachers and the attrition of new teachers entering the field has created a largely ignored and muted sense of urgency to use feedback to create expertise in the next generation of educators (Carver-Thomas et al., 2017; Thornton et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Boe et al., 2008; Muhammed, 2018).

The following review of literature will examine an array of topics which examine current research around creating systems of sustainable feedback for teachers that lead to

improvement in teaching practices and student outcomes. Beginning with the relevant research on building educators as experts of their craft, this review will analyze current and relevant research on expertise theory in principle, expertise in education, feedback, teacher evaluation, and the relationship between highly effective educators and administrators who provide evidence of strong student academic achievement and growth results. Furthermore, this review of literature seeks to provide context into not only the origins of the research questions, but also provide context in determining what conditions are necessary inside a school to create educator improvement through a system of feedback. The goal of this review of literature is to create the knowledge base that will allow for the creation of a new type of leader, the highly effective instructional leader.

### **Expertise Theory**

As research and literature has become widely available, a surge of information has emerged on the culture, structures, and processes for creating experts across various domains. Research around expertise theory has long debated the role of genetic versus environmental factors that explain variance in performance. As research has progressed, the movement from the role of chance (genetics) has been replaced by the external impacts of environment and experience (coaching and practice) for building expertise. Since this shift, researchers (Ericsson, Krampe, & Romer, 1993; Ericsson & Pool, 2017; Gladwell 2008; Stigler & Miller, 2018; Pink, 2011) have sought to uncover the conditions necessary to foster expertise across a variety of domains. Once thought to be the gold standard for building expertise, Gladwell's (2008) ten-thousand-hour rule was the target measure for a person wanting to reach expert status. Through deeper

exploration of the conditions necessary to build expertise, it has become increasingly clear that the most important factors in a person attaining expert status are intentional practice facilitated through feedback from a coach and are less dependent on the number of hours spent on the pursuit (Ericsson and Pool, 2013; Marzano, 2011; Pink, 2011).

Although substantial research has been conducted around creating experts in many diverse fields, the literature around fostering expertise in educators is lacking to say the least. Educational researchers (Marzano, 2011; Wiliam, 2018; Stigler & Miller, 2018; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Reeves, 2016) have explored the implications and impacts of how strong instructional leadership correlates to creating expert educators, but no specific research has resolved to answer the question of how providing specific and targeted feedback to educators grows them in their expertise. While much of the literature and research around expertise exists outside of the realm of education, there are connections to specific actions and practices that exist in the domains of business and other fields who utilize an improvement science framework that can be applied to educational settings.

Research regarding the creation of expertise in education is partly lacking due to the pseudo expertise that exists in every educated society. When teacher candidates embark on the beginning of their professional careers, they are bringing with them learned systems, routines, and practices they experience for twelve or more years of pre-k through high school education, as well as their experiences in higher education programs. Similarly, being part of an educated society means that even individuals who do not pursue a career in education are also bringing their assumptions and backgrounds of how education practices and programs should and should not be implemented. As Stigler and Miller (2018) articulated, teaching (and all of education) has fallen in the realm of a

“cultural activity” where behaviors and beliefs are learned through implicit experience whether the society acknowledges it or not. Stigler and Miller (2018), citing Lortie (1975) assert that:

As a cultural activity, teaching is more like dinner-time conversation than it is like flying an airplane. The routines of dinner-time conversation are learned from growing up in a family and observing how others behave at meal times. People do not take a course or read a manual to learn this. They learn to participate in cultural activities by observing and imitating others. There is evidence that people learn to teach in just this way- by observing their teachers during their 13 years of schooling before entering college and by imitating what they remember. (p. 435)

As Stigler and Miller (2018) have described, the phenomenon of modern education that began over a century ago and the practices, methods, and beliefs associated with modern education have remained in a state of stagnation due to the cultural familiarity and the lack of research to truly create expert educators for the future.

### ***Theoretical Complications with Expertise Theory***

While Ericsson and Pool (2017) have delineated a difference between purposeful and deliberate practice, their research has shown that education and teaching do not fall into the scope of deliberate practice. Their explanation for this, much like other professions (business, electrician, consultant), centers around variables that extend outside of an individual’s control and because there is no direct competition within the field of education. In discussing the professions that do not qualify for deliberate practice, Ericsson and Pool (2017) share that they “are not areas where you are not likely to find accumulated knowledge about deliberate practice, simply because there are no objective criteria for superior performance” (p. 98). Therefore, while there may be instances where instructional leaders can engage teachers in aspects of deliberate practice, the research

has not acknowledged the use of deliberate practice the domain of education due to the collaborative and non-competitive aspects of environment. Instructional leaders who wish to move teachers to expert level performance should do so by engaging in purposeful practice around goal setting, feedback, and measurement of those goals (Stigler and Miller, 2018).

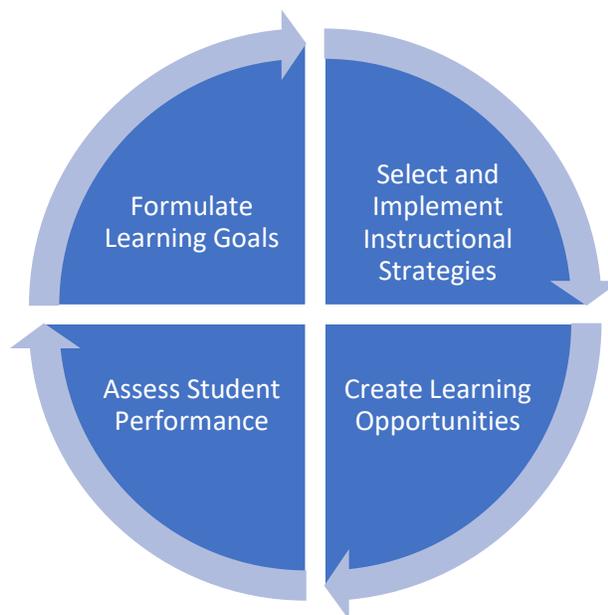
### **Creating Opportunities for Expertise**

In an effort to scientifically identify the factors that outline expert performance, Ericsson, Krampe, and Romer (1993) articulated that a “truly scientific account of exceptional performance must completely describe both the development leading to the exceptional performance [environment] and the genetic and acquired [through experience and coaching] characteristics that mediate it” (p. 363). As the science of expertise has evolved, the literature has moved away from the genetic factors that lead to expertise and more to the environmental conditions that must exist to foster expertise (Ericsson et al., 1993). Through what Ericsson and Pool (2017) term deliberate practice, there is clear alignment between the role that feedback and practice play in creating an expert in any field, including education. Ericsson and Pool (2017) share that two conditions must be present to make deliberate practice different from other types of practice (mainly purposeful): (1) there must be a field where there are performers who are seen as having skills that set them apart from others in the field, and (2) there must be a teacher or coach who can provide opportunities for the person they are coaching to get better. In sum, Ericsson and Pool (2017) outline the relationship as “deliberate practice involves feedback and modification of efforts in response to that feedback. Early in the training process much of the feedback will come from the teacher or coach, who will monitor

progress, point out problems, and offer ways to address those problems” (p. 99). Ericsson and Pool (2017) continue that “With time and experience students [or teachers] must learn to monitor themselves, spot mistakes, and adjust accordingly” (p. 99).

Stigler and Miller (2018) assert that “the biggest challenge to understanding expertise in teaching is that teaching is not an individual endeavor in which the teacher himself or herself is the only actor. Teaching is a complex system of interaction elements, and effective teaching requires that all of these elements work to produce the desired outcomes” (p. 431). Outlining that system, Stigler and Miller (2018) identified in their review of research three common criteria were used to evaluate or label expertise in the domain of teaching: 1) experience through the practice of teaching, 2) replicating the work of “experts” (i.e. certifications), and 3) using student achievement results to determine expertise (value added metrics). As research has shown, inherent flaws exist in using any of these three measures (individually or collectively) to define expertise in teaching. Through continued research, Stigler and Miller (2018) assert that teacher expertise will never be able to be distilled down to “best practices” because teaching across different cultures produces different outcomes that we use to determine expertise, however, they continue that “Expert teaching is not just performing the acts of teaching. It is a highly contextualized endeavor in which teachers must create the precise learning opportunities that will move students to the next level of learning and development” (p. 440). Stigler and Miller (2018) advocate that true expertise for teachers is realized when they can construct learning opportunities that involve 1) productive struggle, 2) explicit connections to concepts and content, and 3) deliberate practice.

In their attempt to create a model of building experts in teaching, Stigler and Miller (2018) created the model found in Figure 2.1 in which four domains help to build educator expertise. Stigler and Miller (2018) determined that expert teachers: 1) formulate learning goals for their students, 2) select and implement the appropriate instructional strategies to meet those learning goals, 3) create learning opportunities, and 4) assess student performance. This cycle, and the feedback gleaned from the process, allows for expert teachers to monitor the learning of the class as well as individual students and adjust any of the measures as needed.



**Figure 2.1: Stigler & Miller’s (2018) Model to Build Teacher Expertise**

### ***Building Expertise Through Supervision***

One hallmark of effective supervision and evaluation in education is its ability to create and sustain improvement in teaching and learning outcomes. Marzano (2011) advocates working to create the expert teacher by telling us that “Clearly, the more skilled the teacher, the greater predicted increase in student achievement. Equally clear is

the implication for supervision. Its primary purposes should be the enhancement of teacher expertise” (p. 2). When the goals of evaluation move from compliance to providing teachers with opportunities for growth, increased learning outcomes for all students become the norm, not the exception. However, Ericsson and Pool (2013) advocate that we must be able to define what enhancement of teacher expertise is. They pose the question, “if there is no agreement on what good performance is and no way to tell what changes would improve performance, then it is very difficult- often impossible- to develop effective training methods. If you don’t know for sure what constitutes improvement, how can you develop methods to improve performance?” (p. 85). As Stigler and Miller (2018) spoke of deliberate practice for pre-service teachers, “The goal is to develop adaptive knowledge- the ability to implement them effectively to achieve instructional goals in a range of contexts” (p. 442).

Having the ability to identify expertise is not the same as creating expertise through what Ericsson and Pool (2017) term deliberate practice. Ericsson and Pool (2017) share that two conditions must be present to make deliberate practice different from other types of practice (mainly purposeful): (1) there must be a field where there are performers who are seen as having skills that set them apart from others in the field, and (2) there must be a teacher or coach who can provide opportunities for the person they are coaching to get better. “Deliberate practice involves feedback and modification of efforts in response to that feedback. Early in the training process much of the feedback will come from the teacher or coach, who will monitor progress, point out problems, and offer ways to address those problems” (p. 99). Ericsson and Pool (2017) continue that “With

time and experience students [or teachers] must learn to monitor themselves, spot mistakes, and adjust accordingly” (p. 99).

Marzano (2011) outlines five conditions districts and school leaders must meet to develop teacher expertise: 1) creating a well-articulated knowledge base for teaching, 2) providing focused feedback and practice, 3) opportunities to observe and discuss expertise, 4) determine clear criteria and a plan for success, and 5) provide recognition of expertise. Marzano (2011) attempted to capture the educational aspect of creating experts by capitalizing on research from the non-educational realm of research. Beginning with a well-articulated knowledge base for teaching, Marzano (2011) aligns with other researchers (Danielson, 2001, 2010, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2014, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Goldberg, 2001; Darling-Hammond & Amreign-Beardsley, 2012; Marzano, 2007; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011; Reeves, 2016; Wiliam, 2018; Lezotte and Snyder, 2011; Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018) in that we must be able to answer the question of what specifically good teaching is in practice. When there is no clear agreement on what good teaching is, let alone expert teaching, it is nearly impossible to create a system that fosters the creation of expertise.

### **Teacher Evaluation**

Teacher evaluation systems, like much in the realm of education, have undertaken a dramatic overhaul with increased accountability toward equity in learning opportunities for all students. Since the early 2000’s, more pressure has been placed on state and local governments to ensure that teachers are, with fidelity, preparing their students for the demands of post-secondary education and employment opportunities. These reform efforts beginning with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and progressing through Race to

the Top (RTTT), Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), as well as research studies funded by The Gates Foundation, The New Teacher Project (TNTP), and other educational research have sought to bring the best practices, teaching, and opportunities to all students in every school district in the U.S. However, the push for increased accountability has not always led to marked improvement in teaching practices or learning outcomes for students (Davis, Lampley, Foley, 2016; Connally & Tooley, 2016; Toch, 2016).

The simple act of implementing an evaluation framework or mandating an evaluation system alone does not provoke change. In a study conducted by Connally and Tooley (2016), 31 states had some form of legislation that required teacher evaluation be tied to teacher improvement through professional development. Although more than 60 percent of states required evaluation of teaching, there was still variance in the results from 31 different evaluations and frameworks. Also, when there is little consensus on what constitutes effective teaching and what effective teaching looks like in practice, it is impossible to separate sometimes “good people who teach” from “good teachers who have students that learn” (Marshall, 2013; Danielson, 2012, Marzano, 2011). The push for increased teacher accountability has led to a surge of literature and research to articulate what effective teaching looks like and how to multiply it. Danielson (2012) emphasizes that “Unless there is a clear and accepted definition of good teaching, teachers won’t know how their performance will be evaluated, and observers won’t know what to look for” (p. 34). Ericsson and Pool (2017) continue to elaborate on the need for criteria by arguing “if there is no agreement on what good performance is and no way to tell what changes would improve performance, then it is very difficult- often impossible-

to develop effective training methods. If you don't know for sure what constitutes improvement, how can you develop methods to improve performance?" (p. 85).

Therefore, is the lack of the ability to discern good teaching as well as the variance that exists throughout districts in being able to define good teaching.

In the midst of the push for increased educator accountability, a new movement led by renowned education reformers (Danielson, Marzano, the Gates Foundation, The New Teacher Project, and many others) has emerged in the form of creating a system of teacher evaluation frameworks that seeks to create a systematic approach to improving teacher expertise and student learning outcomes. While this approach is varied greatly in research, the work of evaluation reformers has been to create evaluation systems that both rewards educator growth as well as increases student outcomes through classroom observations and state-mandated assessments. In recent years, the use of Value-Added Measures (VAMs) has become practice in some states to use high-stakes testing results to give teachers a numerical "level of effectiveness" that either comprises a percentage or all of a teacher's evaluation for the school-year.

### ***Perceived Flaws with Teacher Evaluation***

A 2009 report released by The New Teacher Project (TNTP) titled *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009) outlined the role (or lack thereof) that evaluation systems play in providing insight and improvement into educational programs, decisions, and student learning results across the United States. In the report that was a precursor to major legislative reform around school and educator performance throughout the United States, the flaws of the teacher evaluations of the time were placed

front and center at the discussion that was around the inequality of educational access for students throughout the country. In their findings, TNTP (2009) revealed that the great majority of teachers from the twelve districts across four states in the study received above average to exemplary ratings on their teacher evaluations (Weisberg et al., 2009). In fact, TNTP (2009) discovered that 99 percent of teachers were rated “satisfactory” in districts that used binary ratings of “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory” to measure teacher performance. In districts where the evaluation range extends beyond a binary rating, “94 percent of teachers receive one of the top two ratings and less than 1 percent are rated unsatisfactory” (Weisberg et al., 2009, p. 6). This finding, along with several economic impacts from the recession of 2008, helped launch new initiatives around improving instruction for students and teacher quality in schools.

Despite TNTP’s (Weisberg et al., 2009) findings around the exceptionally high teacher evaluation ratings, there was still a great disparity among student learning outcomes and teacher effectiveness ratings. The crux of the problem, as TNTP (Weisberg et al., 2009) argued, was the idea that teachers were viewed as a collective of interchangeable parts rather than individual professionals with different needs and effectiveness levels. Hence, the title of the phenomenon they termed the *Widget Effect* (Weisberg et al., 2009). However, the work of TNTP (Weisberg et al., 2009) was not the first discussion around the potential impact of a flawed evaluation system and the low level of impact it has on student learning. As early as the 1980s, researcher Linda Darling-Hammond (2014) concluded that teacher evaluation systems lacked a true foundation of evidence to show an impact of increased instructional effectiveness for teachers and learning outcomes for students. Therefore, knowing that teacher evaluations

have existed in the dual nature of providing quality control as well as (on the surface) providing improvement for teachers, the question now becomes one of intent.

### ***The Purpose of Teacher Evaluation***

Renowned teacher evaluation and feedback researcher and practitioner Charlotte Danielson (2001) outlined two very basic functions that teacher evaluation serves: 1) to provide quality assurance to meet the requirements of legislators and 2) to recognize, cultivate, and develop good teaching. Danielson (2001) advocates that “All educators-practitioners and policymakers- recognize what discerning parents have always known: The quality of individual teachers matters” (p. 13). Danielson (2001) continued to discuss the new wave of teacher evaluation at the turn of the century by stating “Traditionally, evaluation was an activity that was done to teachers. The new systems place teachers in more active and professional roles” (p. 15). However, from the time of Danielson’s (2001) proclamations were made to the publishing of TNTP’s *The Widget Effect* (2009), little was accomplished in those eight years to view teachers and their growth through an individualized and professionalized lens (Weisberg et al., 2009). Little has changed in the court of public opinion through recent research around the idea that the only purpose of teacher evaluation is “its use for high-stakes personnel decisions such as pay, promotion, and dismissal. Given this, some might be puzzled, or even bristle, at the suggestion that data from evaluation systems could be used to drive instructional improvement” (Connally & Tooley, 2016, p. 2).

Expanding on the work from other researchers (Danielson, 1996, 2001, 2007, 2008, 2009; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond,

Cook, Jaquith, and Hamilton, 2012) former educator and administrator Kim Marshall (2013), when discussing the views and practices with which administrators and teachers approach the evaluation process, warned that “a broken teacher supervision and evaluation process widens America’s achievement gaps” (p. 22). In his appraisal of the core functions of the evaluation process, Marshall expanded from the previous conceived purposes of teacher evaluation to include five realms that the supervision and evaluation process serves. These realms, listed in Table 2.1, outline much of the research previously discussed around using supervision and evaluation of teachers to drive improvement through feedback, growing expert teachers, and improvement of the instructional program that exists in the school.

**Table 2.1**

*Marshall’s (2013) Supervision and Evaluation Purposes*

Purpose	Description
Appraisal	“getting an accurate sense of the quality of instruction in all classrooms and placing each teacher on a scale of proficiency- for example, highly effective, effective, mediocre, and ineffective” (p. 21).
Affirmation	“retaining and further developing teachers in the top two categories [highly effective and effective] and giving them the opportunity to take on leadership roles” (p. 21).
Improvement	“coaching and supporting the development of teachings in the bottom two categories [mediocre and ineffective] - and also effective teachers who want to do even better” (p. 21).

**Table 2.1** (continued).

Purpose	Description
Housecleaning	“dismissing teachers who are still not effective after a reasonable chance to improve” (p. 21).
Quality Assurance	“being able to honestly tell parents and other stakeholders that every child will have good teaching in every classroom every year” (p.22).

While Marshall (2013) has outlined the five realms teacher evaluation serves, he also warns of the variance in how effectiveness of teaching and the impact on learning differs from state to state, district to district, and even school to school. Marshall continues by outlining seven flaws in the design of current teacher evaluation systems that produce the noted variance:

1. There isn't a good definition of good teaching.
2. The principal sees only a tiny fraction of the teacher's work.
3. The principal's presence changes what's going on in the classroom- what the teacher does (the dog and pony show) and how students behave.
4. Full-lesson write-ups rarely change anything.
5. The process is extremely time-consuming, which keeps principals out of classrooms.
6. Teachers are passive recipients of evaluations and are evaluated in isolation from their colleagues.
7. Student learning is not part of the process.

Through Marshall's (2013) appraisal of the purposes of teacher evaluation as well as the variance in performance that can skew results, the education world stands at a crossroads of how to reconcile the risks versus benefits that teacher evaluation can bring.

The push for increased accountability around student learning outcomes has led to a reimagining of the teacher evaluation systems used in states and districts across the U.S. Also, this push has created human capital strains on a profession where its members (teachers) frequently feel overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated. With teacher retention rates continuing to drop, it is imperative that we take a stance of coaching and growing our teachers instead of the perpetual wheel of hiring and firing bad teachers.

Although there are multiple frameworks which promise to deliver increased outcomes for students, the research is quite clear that the most effective evaluation frameworks seek to build expertise through feedback and purposeful (or deliberate) practice from the feedback. Teachers also show more growth in student outcomes when they can receive feedback multiple times a year and have a dedicated administrator (or coach) who invests in building the teacher's efficacy and practice. If we are truly to improve equity in learning outcomes for all students, we must take the stance of improving the efficacy and skills of our teachers of those students. As will be discussed in the next section, the State of Tennessee, which utilizes the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) has been identified as a state who has potentially shifted the narrative around the impact that the teacher evaluation process can have on improved instruction and student learning outcomes.

### *Teacher Evaluation in Tennessee*

As the United States began to transition from the 2008 recession and as federal money became available to states and local governments through stimulus packages, reformers took the opportunity to attach new policies and procedures around improving America's public education system. Congress passed the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) in 2009 with aims to improve the economy, create new jobs, and accelerate educational reform. The Obama administration encouraged states to create new standards and assessment systems, monitor growth of students, improve teacher quality (specifically in low performing schools) through more rigorous evaluation processes (Davis et al., 2016). This legislation, combined with scathing research on the quality of teachers and the weaknesses in evaluation systems in the *Widget Effect* (Weisberg et al., 2009), created the perfect storm for the United States Department of Education to intervene on the national stage and circumvent the enumerated powers clause of the Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (Davis et al., 2016). Through the federally funded grant of Race to the Top (RTTT), states could apply for their share of 4.35 billion dollars to help accelerate the reforms in instruction, assessment, and teacher evaluation (Davis et al., 2016). The state of Tennessee became one of the states to win access to the funds from the competitive grant. The stipulations were that Tennessee create a program, First to the Top (FTTT). that would provide an overhaul to the evaluation process and improve teacher quality. This awarded grant began the current evaluation framework that has been used for more than a decade, the Tennessee Educator Assessment Model (TEAM).

For the first time in Tennessee educator history, teachers would begin receiving required feedback annually around their instruction and impact on student performance. Prior to the adoption of First to the Top (FTTT) and the TEAM evaluation model, teachers were only required to be observed twice every ten years (Toch, 2016). The TEAM evaluation now required for all teacher to be observed annually, with teachers with more than three years' experience being visited by an evaluator on average four times per year, and teachers with less experience on average of six times per year (Toch 2016). Toch (2016) reported that “This resulted in nearly 300,000 structured classroom observations of the state’s 66,000 teachers in 2011-12, the first year of the states’ reforms, compared to some 20,000 more informal visits the year before” (p. 4). As previously mentioned around feedback, all teachers in Tennessee began receiving more feedback around their instructional practices and students results than they ever had in the past.

In addition to using the new teacher evaluation system to provide feedback around instruction, RTTT legislation, pushed by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, required states to embed student achievement results as another measure to gauge teacher performance (Toch, 2016; Davis et al., 2016; Connally and Tooley, 2016). Using the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVASS), teachers were now going to be given growth scores for their students’ academic growth through the given year. While legislation has changed and the TEAM model has evolved, Tennessee teachers still have a multi-measured evaluation system that provides teachers with a composite from one to five known as a “level of effectiveness” (LOE). Table 2.2 provides the weighting of

teacher evaluation scores factoring in observation scores, school achievement measures, and individual TVASS growth scores for the current school year.

**Table 2.2**

*TEAM Evaluation Weighting*

Employee	Observation Score	TVAAS Growth	Achievement Growth Measure
Tested Subject	50%	35%	15%
Non-Tested Subject	70%	15% <sup>1</sup>	15%
Administrator	50%	35% <sup>2</sup>	15%
Portfolio Assessment	50%	35%	15%

Since 2011-2012, Tennessee has been recognized as a state at the forefront of improving teacher evaluation frameworks by measuring a teacher's practice through classroom observations as well as student growth on end of year, summative assessments (Connally & Tooley, 2016; Toch, 2016; Davis et al., 2016). In relation to the 31 states that as of 2016 had legislation around teacher evaluation and professional development, Tennessee is 1 of 9 states that required multiple annual observations for all teachers, 1 of

<sup>1</sup> According to the TEAM 2020-21 Teacher Evaluation Guidance document around growth and achievement scores, teachers from non-tested subjects will use the TVAAS data from the school-wide growth composite to calculate their growth.

<sup>2</sup> According to the TEAM 2020-21 Teacher Evaluation Guidance document around growth and achievement scores, Administrators will use the TVAAS data from the school-wide growth composite to calculate their growth.

13 states to require evaluator certification, 1 of 18 states to require a post-observation conference, and 1 of 14 states to require an annual growth plan for every educator (Connally & Tooley, 2016). These measures, along with being one of the first states to adopt a new evaluation system, has allowed Tennessee to lead the way with building educator trust in the system as well as be provided with “accurate and meaningful observation feedback” from their lessons (Connally & Tooley, 2016, p.24). Due to the proactive approach and availability of perception data from teachers along with student results, Tennessee was 1 of 4 states highlighted by Connally and Tooley (2016) around what successful implementation of a new teacher can mean for instructional practices and student learning.

The proactive approach to training and resources used in Tennessee has shown promise in regard to teacher perceptions around the impact of the evaluation process. Connally and Tooley (2016) reported “From 2012-13 to 2014-15, the proportion of Tennessee teachers who thought the evaluation system improved their teaching rose from 38 to 68 percent. Likewise, the proportion of teachers who agreed that the system improved student learning increased from 28 to 63 percent” (p. 8). Table 2.3 further illustrates the data collected by the Tennessee Educational Research Alliance (TERA) around the impact of the TEAM evaluation system on improvement in teaching and student learning:

**Table 2.3***Perception of TEAM Framework with Teachers*

<i>Year</i>	<i>In general, the teacher evaluation process used in my school has led to improvements in my teaching</i>	<i>In general, the teacher evaluation process used in my school has led to improvements in student learning</i>
<i>2016</i>	<i>72%</i>	<i>66%</i>
<i>2017</i>	<i>74%</i>	<i>70%</i>
<i>2018</i>	<i>72%</i>	<i>69%</i>
<i>2019</i>	<i>76%</i>	<i>71%</i>

**Feedback**

As administrative practices have shifted to more of a role of instructional leader and as school districts have created and implemented the roles of instructional coaches, teachers are receiving more feedback around the instruction they provide students in their classes. This increased feedback is directly in line with research emphasizing coaching and feedback rather than achieving a targeted number of hours in a domain. Grenny et al. (2013) assert that “The number of hours one spends practicing a skill is far less important than receiving clear and frequent feedback against a known standard” (p. 128). This provides direct correlation for the role that feedback plays in building expertise in educators. However, as previously discussed by Hattie (2012), the amount of feedback and the implication of how it truly impacts practice is variable at best. If the feedback we

provide our students has the power to leverage successful learning, then what impact could actionable feedback to teachers do for students, schools, and communities? While these paradigm shifts seem to be good in theory, teachers are now receiving greater amounts of feedback (some good, some bad; some actionable, some not) which makes improving instructional ability more than just simply providing “*feedback*”.

While more feedback can be seen from the outside as a step in the right direction, we must acknowledge the potential pitfalls for the variety of sources providing feedback. This concern about the abundance of feedback coming from a variety of sources from inside and outside of the immediate school building can create confusing and contradictory situations for teachers (Bryk et al., 2016). Educators are now forced to wade through a sea of feedback to determine their next course of action. Not only is this inexhaustible supply of feedback numbing, but educators can also be placed in tricky situations when feedback from one source contradicts the feedback of another. If the feedback is not coordinated within the system, the feedback itself becomes detrimental and undermines the improvement process. The danger then becomes that the overabundance of feedback cancels out the high-leverage opportunity to build self-efficacy and pedagogical skill, which in turn creates a perpetual cycle of a misalignment of intended versus action results.

While the feedback and sources have increased, the amount of research surrounding the teacher’s perceptions and a clear, definitive agreement on the meaning of feedback become murkier. For the purpose of administrative evaluation in Tennessee, the

Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) <sup>3</sup>, feedback is mentioned sixteen times at the level three (at expectations) and level five (significantly above expectations) across the four essential domains/standards of school leadership defined by the state of Tennessee. Even in the glossary of terms for an administrative evaluation, there is no specific definition for what differentiates level five feedback from level three feedback. In analyzing the Tennessee teacher evaluation framework (TEAM) rubric for teachers, feedback for students is one of the twelve domains listed in the instruction rubric. Both evaluation frameworks for administrators (TILS) and teachers (TEAM) are appropriate in this context because they are the tools in which both groups receive feedback and coaching for improved practice.

### ***Types of Feedback***

The framework for feedback came from Stone & Heen's work, *Thanks for the Feedback* (2014). From the work of Stone & Heen (2014), we do learn that "when people list their most difficult conversations, feedback always comes up...They describe just how tough it is to give honest feedback, even when it is sorely needed" (p. 3). Likewise, we also learn that when we are on the receiving end of feedback, most often "we are left feeling unappreciated, demotivated, and a little more indignant [toward the idea of feedback]" (p. 3). In their handbook targeted for people to become better consumers of feedback, Stone & Heen (2014) took a deep dive into the three types of feedback that we receive in our personal and professional lives. These types of feedback, outlined in Table 2.4 provide insight into not only what appreciation, evaluation, and coaching feedback is

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<sup>3</sup> <https://team-tn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/TEAM-Administrator-Rubric.pdf>

grounded in, but also how the receiver of the feedback hears or interprets each type of feedback.

**Table 2.4**

*Stone and Heen's (2014) Types of Feedback*

Type of Feedback	Description	What it means to the receiver
Appreciation	Fundamentally about relationship and human connection.	“I see you,” “I know how hard you have been working,” and “You matter to me” (p. 31)
Coaching	Being provided more direction	“I am with you and want to improve your knowledge or skills” (p. 32)
Evaluation	Tells you where you stand.	“How you are being assessed, ranked, or rated” (p. 33)

While there is no universal definition of feedback, the following impacts of feedback have been pulled from respected researchers and practitioners in Table 2.5:

**Table 2.5***A Comparison of Literature on Feedback*

Author	Impact of Feedback, No Feedback, or Incorrect Feedback
Brown, Roediger, & McDaniel (2014)	“People seldom receive negative feedback about their skills and abilities from others in everyday life, because people don’t like to deliver bad news...[therefore] when it comes to learning, we what we choose to do is guided by our judgements of what works and what doesn’t, and we are easily misled” (p. 122-123).
Douglas Stone & Sheila Heen (2014)	“Feedback includes an information you get about yourself. In the broadest sense, it is how we learn about ourselves from our experiences and how we learn from other people—how we learn from life” (p. 4).
Reeves (2016)	Effective feedback is explicit and constructive, providing the same map for teachers that great scoring rubrics provide for students. Feedback is not, in these contexts, merely an evaluation but an essential guide to improved performance” (p. 70)
John Hattie (2017)	Referencing Sadler (1989), “feedback aims to reduce the gap between where a [person] is and where he or she is meant to be- that is prior or current achievement and the success criteria” (p. 115)
Dylan Wiliam (2018)	In his chapter on providing feedback, Wiliam provides this synthesis: “If we are to harness the power of feedback to increase student [or teacher] learning, then we need to ensure that feedback causes a cognitive rather than emotional reaction—in other words, feedback should cause thinking by creating desirable difficulties” (p 153).

In discussing the nebulous relationship that exists between the giver and receiver of feedback, Stone and Heen (2014) set out to uncover the hidden and not so hidden aspects surrounding feedback. "When we give feedback, we notice that the receiver isn't good at receiving it. When we receive feedback, we notice that the giver isn't good at giving it... We wondered: What is it that makes feedback such a conundrum for both givers and receivers?" (p. 3). One reason that people dislike receiving and giving feedback is because it is just as uncomfortable to provide bad news as it is to receive it. In fact, in their discussion of feedback, Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel (2014) tell us that one of the reasons "that people seldom receive negative feedback about their skills and abilities from others in everyday life, [is] because people don't like to deliver bad news" (p. 122). When an inflated teacher evaluation process is coupled with an inattention to student learning outcomes, administrators and teachers lose sight of true purpose and benefit of the teacher evaluation process. The ability to provide prescriptive feedback is replaced by superficial scores and comments, and any instructional improvement and improvement of student learning outcomes happens by chance, not design (Weisberg et al., 2009).

If it is true that people hate giving feedback just as much as getting feedback, how can leaders create an environment where two (or more) people can be on the same page during the feedback process? One thing we know for certain is that most feedback given from administrators comes in the form of evaluation, which includes being rated or ranked against a set of standards, being aligned to expectations, or being used to inform long-term decisions about standing (Stone & Heen, 2014). As Reeves (2016) advocates, "We must depart from the notion that feedback is uncomfortable and evaluative" (p. 78)

if we are to ensure that feedback will be used to improve both teaching and learning in the classroom. It is through the lens of coaching that feedback should not only be given but evaluated and measured to ensure that the coaching for each specific teacher addresses the growth opportunities and needs for students.

### ***The Impact of Formative Feedback***

In what has become a standard in the education world for feedback, Reeves' (2016) formula of providing FAST (Fair, Accurate, Specific, and Timely) feedback to students may also be a strategy that can be used to leverage improved performance for educators. Reeves (2016) reminds us that "Effective feedback is explicit and constructive, providing the same map for teachers that great scoring rubrics provide for students. Feedback is not, in these contexts, merely an evaluation but an essential guide to improved performance" (p. 70). One of the mismatches that occurs in the feedback loop is that the feedback giver (evaluator) provides feedback that does not measure, let alone improve, the teacher's impact on student learning. In discussing providing accurate feedback to teachers, Reeves (2016) tells us, "many teacher evaluations focus on classroom displays, lesson plan formats, meeting participation, and other factors that are far afield from the central question: Did students learn as a result of the teacher's instruction?" (p. 69). This highlights a stark difference between the intended and actual outcomes of the evaluation and feedback process. As TNTP (2009) uncovered, the teacher evaluation process is often devoid of using student learning outcomes to monitor, measure, and improve instructional and pedagogical skills. As Grenny et al. (2013) advocated for measurement of improvement through feedback, "You can talk about results all you want, but they remain nothing more than ideas until you decide exactly

how you are going to measure them” (p. 21). When administrators or supervisors provide feedback that is based around procedures and not instruction, it should not come as surprise to see an increased efficiency in procedures and little to no movement in student progression toward learning targets and goals.

Listed as the second condition for building teacher expertise by Marzano (2011), an evaluation system based on providing effective and actionable feedback is an essential component for growing and developing teachers. Marzano (2007) tells us that feedback is most effective when “Clear goals establish and initial target. Feedback provides students with information regarding their progress toward that target. Goal setting and feedback used in tandem are probably more powerful than either one in isolation. In fact, without clear goals it might be difficult to provide effective feedback”<sup>13/</sup> (p.12). One solution may be to create the conditions for the “Goldilocks Zone” for an experience that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi terms *flow*. As Pink noted about Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow in *Drive* (2009), "One source of frustration in the workplace is the frequent mismatch between what people must do and what people can do. When what they must do exceeds their capabilities, the result is anxiety. When what people must do falls short of their capabilities, the result is boredom. But when the match is just right, the results can be glorious. This is the essence of flow" (p. 117). This follows the framework that providing feedback through Stone and Heen’s (2014) lens of coaching can have on teachers. By allowing teachers the opportunity to embrace feedback in a non-threatening and non-punitive way, teachers then have the chance to execute the feedback through purposeful (or deliberate) practice and receive targeted coaching around the area for improvement. This in turn allows the teacher to embed the feedback into pedagogical

practice as the teacher develops the necessary expertise to deploy the strategies and learning when needed. Stigler and Miller (2018) advocated for building expertise, “As with the case of teaching practices, the key point may not be whether or not you know something, but whether you are able to access and apply the knowledge when you need it to improve students’ learning outcomes” (p. 441). When administrators create these conditions for feedback that lie within the "Goldilocks zone" that Pink (2009) describes, it is possible to create the conditions that are *just right* to create *glorious* results from the giving and receiving of feedback.

Continuing with Reeves’ (2016) FAST framework to provide feedback, it is important to examine the “timeliness” of providing feedback and acting on feedback. As Reeves (2016) advocates in his model, teachers, like students, should be exposed to feedback as immediately as it is available. Research from Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) also affirms the work of Reeves that feedback should be provided as immediately as possible to provide teachers with “real-time opportunities” for improvement. Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) shares that “When delivered effectively, real-time feedback does what any feedback does; it gives teaches what they need to grow, and by extension, it gives students what they need to learn. It just accelerates that process so that teachers and students both get what they need faster” (p.164). Therefore, the goal of teacher evaluation and providing feedback should be to provide teachers with actionable feedback that allows for opportunities to embrace, execute, and embed feedback through the lens of coaching.

As Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) advocates, “The purpose of observation and feedback is not to evaluate teachers but to develop them” (p. 129). He continues by

stating that “By receiving [at minimum] bi-weekly observations and feedback, a teacher gets as much development in one year as most receive in twenty” (p. 131). If administrators want to teachers to foster a formative mindset with their students in their classrooms, administrators should model the formative mindset with their teachers around evaluation, feedback, and improvement. This change of mindset around the purpose of observation and feedback from the instructional leader

### ***Observation and Feedback as Improvement Levers***

In his widely recognized tool kit for leaders, Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) provides four “levers” that school leaders can use to improve the realms of instruction and school culture. In the instruction realm, Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) outlines the following instructional levers: 1) Data-Driven Instruction, 2) Instructional Planning, 3) Observation and Feedback, and 4) Professional Development. Throughout the section of Observation and Feedback, Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) takes an extensive look at how teachers can leverage the feedback they get from administrators and pitfalls that administrators call fall in to that render feedback ineffective and useless. Table 2.6 outlines the errors and truths of providing actionable, growth inspiring feedback for teachers.

**Table 2.6**

*Bambrick-Santoyo's (2018) Errors and Truths Around Observations and Feedback*

<b>Error</b>	<b>Truth</b>
Error 1: More is better	Truth 1: Less is more
Error 2: Lengthy written evaluations drove change as effectively as anything.	Truth 2: Face-to-face makes the difference.
Error 3: Just tell them; they'll get it.	Truth 3: If they don't do the thinking, they won't internalize it.
Error 4: State the concrete action step. Then the teacher will act.	Truth 4: Practice makes perfect.
Error 5: Teachers can implement feedback at any time.	Truth 5: Nail down the timing.

### ***Feedback in Context of the Receiver***

In a study led by Jarrod Bolte (cited in Bryk et al., 2016) in Baltimore Public Schools surrounding the amount and quality of feedback that new teachers were receiving, Bolte and his team learned there was a stark disproportionality with the amount of feedback teachers were receiving and the sources of the feedback. In the study conducted by Bolte, a new teacher could receive feedback directly from eight or more sources, and the feedback from those eight sources could or could not be informed by discussions between the different groups. While some teachers were receiving an abundance of feedback, there were some groups of teachers who were receiving no feedback at all (Bryk et al., 2016).

Within the Baltimore County school district, it was learned that “For some teachers, the problem was too much feedback from too many people—feedback that was uncoordinated, often incoherent, and sometimes in outright conflict with one another. Elsewhere, the problem was not enough feedback; the challenge was how to assure that all new teachers received regular advice that might help them improve their learning” (Bryk et al., 2016, p. 29). As is found within districts, schools, and even classroom to classroom in the same building, building systems that work at scale and produce lasting results is a large task that often falls to implementation of initiative after initiative without understanding the root causes of the problem in the first place. As Bolte and his team in Baltimore City Schools found, “Many times, we think the answer is to do more [feedback]... when actually, if you do less, in a focused way, you get better results” (Bryk et al., 2016, p. 28). Figure 2.2 from Bryk et. al (p. 29) provides a simple illustration of the sources that a first-year teacher could receive feedback from. In the adaptation of the visual from Bryk et al. (2016) this simple illustration does not show the web of communication between each of the sources of feedback that may or may not be communicated to the teacher.



**Figure 2.2 Summary of Feedback Sources from Bryk et al. (2016)**

### **Instructional Coaching**

As teacher evaluation models have become more stringent in the past two decades and as the amount of feedback and sources of feedback have increased for teachers, the role of an instructional coach has become a welcomed position in schools for teachers to gain support in carrying out specific improvement feedback and efforts. Instructional coaching, as described by Aguilar (2013), is:

a form of professional development that brings out the best in people, uncovers strengths and skills, builds effective teams, cultivates compassion, and builds

emotionally resilient educators. Coaching at its essence is the way that human beings, and individuals, have always learned best (p. 6).

As Aguilar (2013) articulated, coaching, in essence, is professional development that builds not only the teacher's pedagogical skills but also helps to develop the emotional capacity to work with other professionals and students.

When tracing the utilization of instructional coaches in schools, Knight (2006) pointed to the popularization of placing instructional coaches in buildings because researchers and educational leaders have come to realize that the act of providing an in-service session for teachers under the guise of professional development does not impact student learning or growth. Knight (2006) states that the preliminary research around coaching programs grounded in support, feedback, and intensive, individualized professional learning is promising and shows positive impact on student learning outcomes. The following review of literature around instructional coaching will trace the background of instructional coaching, how instructional coaching provides equitable opportunities for students, and research on implementing an effective instructional program that meets the needs of all stakeholders and improves educational outcomes for students.

### ***The Evolution of Instructional Coaching***

The background of implementing instructional coaching is grounded in the fusion of the classic role of an apprenticeship, backgrounds in athletic coaching, and research on cognitive psychology around leaning (Aguilar, 2013; Nuefeld & Roper, 2003). Nuefeld and Roper (2003) described how the "goal [of coaching] is to engage educators in

collaborative work designed to contribute to the development of intellectual capacity in schools” (p. 1). As research on learning has improved, it has become evident that the traditional approaches used to improve teacher performance (in-services, workshops, outside consultants) no longer meet the needs of the changing landscape of teaching and learning (Nuefeld & Roper, 2003; Knight, 2006; Aguilar, 2013). With the need for improved professional development that has the potential to increase school, teacher, and student outcomes, the role of an instructional coach has been widely adopted by school districts.

### ***Instructional Coaching and Equity***

In addition to the real-time professional development that instructional coaches can provide teachers, another possible benefit of instructional coaching is providing equity for all students and their learning outcomes. Aguilar’s (2013) description of equity in relation to instructional coaching is defined as:

In its most simplistic definition, *equity* means that every child gets what he or she needs in our schools—*every child*, regardless of where she comes from, what she looks like, who her parents are, what her temperament is, or what she shows up knowing or not knowing. Every child gets what she needs every day in order to have all the skills and tools that she needs to pursue whatever she wants after leaving our schools, and to lead a fulfilling life. Equity is about outcomes and experiences—for every child, every day (p. viii)

Aguilar (2013) tells us that the surest way to meet the needs of students is by improving the experiences of and addressing the needs of both teachers and school administrators. When both teachers and administrators come together with a foundation of healthy relationships with each other, “[research] can explore solutions to current challenges and improvement outcomes and experiences for kids” (pg. xiv). This partnership and the

professional growth for teachers and administrators is where instructional coaching can have the most impact. Aguilar (2013) provides that “This is where coaching comes in. It is a holistic approach to working with people that incorporates an understanding of how institutions and systems impact learning that fosters transformation at multiple levels” (p. xiv). When schools have common goals around instructional improvement and increased impact on student outcomes, the result is that each student receives more intentional instructional strategies, instructional materials, and instructional assessments which decrease the variability from classroom to classroom. This decrease in variability is the key factor that improves equity for every student, in every classroom, in every school.

### ***Building and Supporting Effective Coaching Programs***

Once instructional coaching supports have been implemented within a school or a district, careful consideration and action must occur to ensure that the instructional coaching programs have the ability to yield promising results. King, Neuman, Pelchat, Potochnik, Rao, & Thompson (2004) of the Annenberg Institute provided four strategies to support effective coaching in schools. Beginning with embedding instructional coaching in professional development, districts can build systems that support instructional coach growth and improvement by sharpening their perspectives and practices through professional learning communities (King et al., 2004). This shift helps to create the mindset that all members of the organization are learners and involved in continuous improvement efforts. A second recommendation from King et al. (2004) suggests that coaching programs should derive their knowledge and expertise from

various sources and partnerships (with universities, neighboring school districts, etc.) to ensure knowledge of instructional coaching and content is continually improved.

The final two suggestions from King et al. (2004) begin with providing opportunities to document evidence of improvement within schools and districts. Failure to document instances of improvement (or no improvement) will not provide districts with real-time, context-based data to inform modifications to the program when needed. As stated by King et al. (2004), “When given low priority, documentation can easily become a mass of disconnected reports, student work, and test scores that emphasizes quantity over quality” (p. 9). The final recommendation centers on the idea of grounding evidence of impact of the instructional coaching system from improved student learning outcomes (King et al., 2004). While one of the goals is to improve teacher practice, evidence of increased student performance should just the overarching criteria for determining the success and next steps around instructional feedback and coaching.

Knight (2006) outlined eight factors that, if implemented correctly, can help coaching become a strong tool for school improvement. These factors identify the steps and considerations that school principals and district leaders can utilize to ensure strong development and sustainability around the building of a strong instructional coach program. A summary of Knight’s (2006) eight factors for ensuring instructional coaching success is provided in Table 2.7.

**Table 2.7***Knight's (2006) Eight Factors for Ensuring Instructional Coach Success*

Factor	Summary of Impact
Sufficient Time to Work with Teachers	Coaches must spend the majority of their times working with teachers in the context of improving their instruction. Programmatically speaking, principals and district leaders should strategically deploy their coaches to ensure the bulk of their duties center around teacher improvement.
Proven Research-Based Interventions	Instructional coaches must be adept in providing the teacher's they are coaching with tools and strategies that address the teacher's most pressing needs.
Professional Development of Instructional Coaches	Instructional coaches must also invest in their professional development if they hope to grow the teachers they work with. Knight (2006) suggests that coaches should receive professional development around the coaching they are implementing with their teachers and also the teaching practices they are sharing with their teachers.
Protecting the Coaching Relationship	Citing that most teachers view their profession as part of their self-identity, coaches must create relationships that are based on the premise of partnership. This is characterized by the following aspects: teachers and instructional coaches being partners, providing teachers with autonomy about what and how they learn, having the ability to practice learning within context, engaging in dialogue after professional development, and respecting the voices and professionalism of the teachers.

**Table 2.7** (continued).

Factor	Summary of Impact
Ensuring Principals and Coaches Work Together	As Knight (2006) shares, the principal and instructional coach must work in tandem, but it should never be a question that the principal is the instructional leader of the school building.
Providing Principals with the Right Training	This training can ensure the principal knows the work and impact of the coach and teacher relationship when deploying coaches and defining their responsibilities.
Hiring the Right Instructional Coaches	Borrowing from Collins (2001) idea of first who, then what, the most important factor in the success of an instructional coaching program is hiring the right person. Knight (2006) that instructional coaches should be strong teachers who have the ability to build and sustain strong relationships.
Evaluating Coaches	If principals and district leaders want to foster an environment of continuous improvement, they must develop the mechanisms and systems for feedback and evaluation that help move the instructional coach's practice forward.

The consistent theme of both King et al. (2004) and Knight's (2006) works hinges on the improvement in student learning outcomes. When district and school leaders carefully structure the roles, responsibilities, and training experiences for instructional coaches to improve their efficacy, instructional coaches spend the majority of their time working with teachers and building strong relationships that improve student outcomes. Intentionality of structuring those roles and responsibilities, respecting the teacher/coach relationship, and ensuring the instructional coach serves as a model for professional growth and improvement all serve to lay the foundation for building-wide improvement. In context of this study, the research aims to find how school administrators use their coaching backgrounds and practices to provide substantive and actionable feedback as they balance their background with the managerial role. Those administrators who are able to walk the tightrope of coach and administrator potentially can aid in the creation and understanding of the Highly Effective Instructional Leader.

### **The Highly Effective Instructional Leader**

The ideas and research around principals as “instructional leaders” began in the 1980s as researchers were examining the implications of various school improvement initiatives. Citing several studies around instructional leadership (Hall & Hord, 1987; Edmonds, 1979; Rutter et al., 1979; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982), Hallinger (2010) writes that the lens in which we view instructional leadership today was derived from studies around change implementation (Hall & Ford, 1987), school effectiveness (Edmonds, 1979; Rutter et al., 1979) and program improvement (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Throughout analysis of all the available research, Hallinger (2010)

contends that the common factor around improvement in schools concerning change implementation, school effectiveness, and program improvement was the “skillful leadership of school principals” (p. 331). These findings from Hallinger (2010) are in alignment with the research of Lezotte and Snyder (2011) in that consistently the most “effective schools have strong and effective leadership” (p. 51). Although the research is clear that a strong instructional leader has the potential to impact the quality of teaching and learning in a school, the challenge of striking a balance between the traditional roles and responsibilities of a building principal and the dynamism needed to be a transformational leader is the greatest hurdle for schools to get past.

When examining the shift that occurs from pure “traditional school leadership” to “instructional leadership,” research has shown that it is a much more difficult transition to make in practice than in theory. In a study conducted by Blase and Blase (1999), the two researchers set out to find the characteristics that both positively and negatively impacted classroom instruction. Using their Reflection-Growth (RG) model to outline effective instructional leadership, Blase and Blase (1999) unveiled two prevalent themes for effective instructional leadership: 1) principals talk with teachers to promote reflection and 2) promoting professional growth. Summarizing their results around talking strategies to promote reflection, Blase and Blase (1999) outlined five strategies used by principals to facilitate growth in their teachers presented in Table 2.8:

**Table 2.8***Blase and Blase (1999) Strategies for Facilitating Growth*

Strategy	Rationale
Making Suggestions	“Proactively giving advice for the improvement of instruction...during post observation conferences and informally in day-to-day interactions” (p. 360).
Giving Feedback	“by visiting classrooms and giving post observation feedback to teachers, effective instructional leaders ‘hold up a mirror’, serve as ‘another set of eyes’, and are ‘critical friends’ who engage in thoughtful discourse with the teacher about what was observed for instructional improvement” (p. 360).
Modeling	“principals, on occasion, actually demonstrated teaching techniques during classroom visits to model good instruction...Such modeling and subsequent discussions were not considered offensive because principals had cultivated respectful and trusting relationships with teachers” (p. 361).
Using Inquiry & Soliciting Advice and Opinions	Providing and teachers with opportunities to provide their professional insight into their improved practice. This also may be seen as providing autonomy and helping teachers think through their improvement process.
Giving Praise	“Praise focusing on specific and concrete teaching behaviors significantly affected teacher motivation, self-esteem, and efficacy. It also fostered teacher reflective behavior, including reinforcement of effective teaching strategies, risk taking, and innovation/creativity” (p. 363).

### *The Highly Effective Instructional Leader and Change*

Lezotte and Snyder (2011) define leadership as: “(whether from an individual or a team) ... the ability to take a ‘followership’ to a place they have never been and are not sure they want to go to” (p. 53). One of the key facets of Lezotte and Snyder’s (2011) definition on leadership is their implied emphasis on being able to manage and create individual and organizational change. This is the clear delineation between a leader and a manager (Lezotte and Snyder, 2011; Grenny et al., 2013). In fact, in their research around the correlates of effective schools, Lezotte and Snyder (2011) have never found an effective school that lacked strong instructional leadership. Therefore, the question that must be answered is this: What are the conditions necessary for schools and districts to grow strong instructional leaders who lead through a transformative lens and not a directive (or transactional) leadership lens? (Lezotte and Snyder 2011). The priority for the highly effective instructional leaders is to create the conditions necessary for growth and change.

The priority to develop as a “highly effective instructional leader” is to combat the fear of change and personal growth within the organization and among individuals. Lezotte and Snyder (2011) state that “Leaders will not be effective if they simply try to command change. They must develop and maintain a followership. One cannot claim leader status if no one is willing to join the journey” (p. 53). Lezotte and Snyder (2011) continue to discuss change by arguing that “Change represents risk to most people. Even if the followers are convinced that the vision is compelling, they won’t be comfortable committing to the change unless they can count on the leader to support them in the

necessary processes” (p. 53). This ‘followership’ and their ability to embrace the risk associated with change is created through first building credibility as a leader and the ability to lead by example (Grenny et al., 2013; Lezotte and Snyder, 2011). Grenny et al. (2013) confirm the need to manage change because “When you ask people to step into a place of uncertainty and change, they look to you to take their cues. They look at your behavior. Unfortunately, they have a bias for interpreting your behavior in ways that confirm rather than disconfirm their existing concerns or mistrust. So, in order to encourage them the change, you have to generate clear, unambiguous evidence that they can believe in you” (p 157). Regardless if the change is structural (building schedules, physical classroom changes) or cultural (moving to a coaching model of feedback, increased presence and feedback from administrators around teaching), the first role of the leader is to manage the uncertainty around the changes.

Change management for individuals and organizations begins and ends with changing ingrained behaviors and habits. Any time leaders ask their people to step outside of their current comfort zones (the status quo), people tend to resist. As Grenny et al. (2013) articulated, “When we ask people to change their actions, many of the new behaviors are far more physically or emotionally challenging than the actions required to maintain the status quo. You’re asking people to step away from a familiar, comfortable action into a world of uncertainty or difficulty” (p. 155). New behaviors, or new habits, involve a process of unlearning the old in favor of the new. This proves to be the first challenge that leaders encounter when implementing changes for individuals or the organization: resistance. Grenny et al. (2013) described the source of the resistance in that “First, people tend to resist new behaviors because they’re crystal clear about what

they'll be losing. Like it or not, when it comes to change, humans tend to overvalue what they're losing while undervaluing what they gain" (p. 94).

## **Conclusion**

The role of instructional feedback can have infinite impact on the progress of instruction and learning within schools and districts. When teams, schools, educators, and administrators can work together in concert, schools have the possibility to grow in unimaginable ways. As we have examined, we must get clearer on what effective, actionable feedback looks like for both educators and evaluators. We must create systems for feedback that remove the punitive, evaluative nature and in its place create safe spaces for individuals to develop a true growth mindset toward feedback. When we begin to look at the systems, conditions, and quality of feedback, we can truly move one step closer to understanding the enigma that feedback creates. The recipe for success is embracing a system of feedback that seeks to create qualities of expert performance among teachers through coaching and purposeful (sometimes deliberate) practice. This coaching must take place inside and outside of the formal evaluation process, where teachers are given prescriptive feedback that can be embraced, executed, and embedded in practice. The research is clear: Coaching (in any domain) through feedback leading to purposeful practice that leads to deliberate actions is the key to group and individual improvement. This coaching is even possible in domains where the coaching and feedback comes in the form of evaluation or appraisal. Feedback has the power to transform learning for students and adults alike. However, feedback works best when it happens in a carefully curated culture of feedback. But, the carefully curated culture of

feedback can only be created and sustained by the type of leader all schools need: The Highly Effective Instructional Leader.

### **CHAPTER III:**

## **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter will address the research methods for this study which utilized Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing method to describe the experiences of school administrators who previously served as instructional coaches in the K-12 setting prior to becoming an administrator. The qualitative (QUAL) design of the research was paramount in assessing the research questions by providing the lived experiences of the administrators and how their background in instructional coaching has continued to lead instructional improvement in their respective schools. In choosing the methodology, the researcher examined both the strengths and weaknesses for using a qualitative research approach where the qualitative data collection will inform the phenomenology of the study. Ultimately, Seidman (2013) advocates for the use of qualitative interviews in education as research because:

So much research is done on schooling in the United States; yet so little of it is based on studies involving the perspective of the students, teachers, administrators, counselors, special subject teachers, nurses, psychologists, cafeteria workers, secretaries, school crossing guards, bus drivers, parents, and school committee members, whose individual and collective experience constitutes schooling. (p. 9)

As Seidman (2013) advocates qualitative research allows for a true interpretation of a real-world phenomenon through the thoughts and experiences of the human subjects. Due to the qualitative nature of this educational research, I have chosen to provide a subjectivity statement to begin this chapter to provide context of my professional

background and also provide details as to how the interest in this topic grew organically throughout my career.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

To ensure that my prior knowledge and relationships to the phenomena did not impact the story of the participants, I will provide a subjectivity statement prior to the data collection and analysis to ensure the experiences of the participants in relation to the phenomena are not influenced by my potential biases (Bednall, 2016). As Bednall (2016) summarized:

The challenge [in a phenomenological inquiry] for a researcher is to allow the voices of subjectivity to emerge authentically in coming to an understanding of what essentially the research respondents mean in their personal accounts expressed through the data collection devices... (p. 124).

As a former school administrator and teacher, I am fully aware of the expectations and constraints among school administrators as being an instructional leader, building manager, and being the ultimate linchpin of the school, as well as teachers to provide quality, differentiated instruction while also providing a safe and orderly environment. I am also aware of the tremendous amount of coaching and feedback that teachers receive today as well as how exponentially it has grown over the past decade. As Lezotte and Snyder (2011) have found in their research on effective schools, the most important factor in making a school successful is having a strong instructional leader in the role of principal. One of the justifications for the phenomenological interview design was to ensure that the research and/or results were not influenced by the author's previous background or biases and truly captured the lived experiences of the participants. Serving as a coach and evaluator for instructional coaches within my buildings, I can

unequivocally speak to the roles and impacts instructional coaches have made within the school and district I worked in. Also, the coach to administrator pipeline that has continued to grow in surrounding districts has been paved by multiple instances of school success in all K-12 settings.

As with almost any role in the K-12 setting, especially in the case of administrator, is characterized by time that is often stretched too thin and increasing expectations daily. Likewise, the roles and responsibilities of a teacher often go much wider than just measuring the impact of teaching and learning through assignments and assessments. Knowing that feedback tends to be more subject specific for higher grades where teachers tend to have specific content knowledge, I have narrowed the scope of the research to include administrators who are in a K-6 grade band who are not generally specifically trained to teach one subject. Also, the district that will be used in the study is a district outside of the researcher's previous work experience where subjectivity around schools, teachers, and administrators will not be a working issue.

During my doctoral candidacy, I conducted two pilot studies that have helped to refine the purpose and research questions for this qualitative interview study. The first study centered around teacher migration, where teachers identified that the most important reason they chose to leave schools was because they were in search of strong instructional leadership within a strong organizational culture. The second pilot study leading to this research, teachers were asked to rate their experience with their building principal around instructional leadership, their feedback preferences, and the feedback they receive from their administrators. As a result of that second pilot study, this study

also endeavors to expand upon participant responses in which participants felt that they received and implemented instructional feedback that was from either coaches or administrators and that they felt provided a coaching framework for instructional improvement.

### **Purpose Statement**

The intent of this study was to explore the extent to which K-6 administrators, who have a coaching background, perceive that they maintain the role of a coach while balancing the roles and responsibilities of the principalship. The qualitative phenomenological interview design aligned with the epistemological philosophical assumption and the paradigm of pragmatism. The paradigm of pragmatism seeks to explain the nature of what works within the context of the research (Creswell, 2018). The goal of this research aligns with Crotty's (2010) framework that the researcher sought to explore the world and reality in relation to the phenomenon to make the most of the meaning. The purpose of this study was not to study all instructional coaches or school administrators; it was to provide context around the successes and barriers to success that participants who served as successful instructional coaches have encountered during their principalship.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) outline the importance of creating a theoretical (or conceptual) framework because it provides the researcher with ways of combatting “ambiguity, complexity, and change” when defending their rationale for choices and framework for the study. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) continue by emphasizing that “a

conceptual framework is an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous” (p. 5). Therefore, the theoretical framework for this study capitalized on the research of Ericsson and Pool’s (2017) exploration of expertise theory through elements of purposeful practice, which are outlined by using the following criteria: 1) purposeful practice has well-defined, specific goals, 2) purposeful practice is focused, 3) purposeful practice involves feedback, and 4) purposeful practice requires getting out of one’s comfort zone.

### **Research Design**

This study identified two building principals within a school district in the middle Tennessee region who serve as k-6 administrators with a previous background in instructional coaching. The researcher conducted individual interviews with each administrator to begin exploring the conditions created and the leadership qualities that help to improve teaching and learning in their buildings. Utilizing a modification of Seidman’s (2013) three-interview procedure, the research conducted two interviews with each principal each lasting approximately ninety minutes. While Seidman (2013) advocates that a three-interview approach allows for the participant to share their focused life history, the details of their experience, and reflect on the meaning of their experience, I combined the participants’ professional history as a coach and administrators and captured the details of their experience within the first interview. I chose to modify Seidman’s (2013) interview process due to the timing of the study coming in the first month of school opening (August) and to lessen the implications of time for the participant in the study. The researcher also modified Seidman’s (2013) process due to

the continued changing landscape of roles and responsibilities of the school administrator due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Seidman (2013) allows for such modifications to the interview process due to constraints placed upon the participants for agreeing to participate in the phenomenological interview process.

### **Participants**

Participant selection for this study involved two administrators who had similar backgrounds and experiences in their transition from teacher, to instructional coach, to administrator. Both participants served as instructional coaches in the same school district [Alpha Special Schools] prior to becoming administrators in the same district [Beta Special Schools]. These administrators have been identified as administrators who previously served in the capacity as instructional coaches prior to their placement as building principals. The participants have also been selected because they lead schools that have been identified as reward schools by the Tennessee Accountability Framework for growth, achievement, or both. Upon IRB approval to conduct this study, the researcher sought permission from district personnel and contacted the administrators to ask them for their voluntary participation in the research study.

Participant A is currently serving in their third year as building principal at a school within a K-6 district in Middle Tennessee. Coming from a non-traditional path into education, Participant A is currently in their eleventh year in public education having previously served as a middle grades science teacher for five years in three different school districts. Participant A became a school-level instructional coach in her sixth year of education in a Middle School in [Alpha Special Schools] and served in that role for

three years. At the conclusion of her time as an instructional coach, Participant A began seeking assistant principal positions in both Alpha Special Schools and Beta Special Schools. Upon participating in interviews, the director of schools for Beta Special Schools wanted to place Participant A in the role of principal. Participant A's non-traditional path into education as well as their non-traditional path into the principalship (not having any experience as an AP) made them an attractive candidate to study the tightrope that administrators walk as support and superior.

Participant B is currently serving in the role of assistant principal at a school within a K-6 district in Middle Tennessee. Participant B is in their twenty-third year of public education, with the first ten of those years serving as a middle grades math teacher. Upon leaving the classroom, Participant B took on the role of a math instructional coach at a Title I elementary school in her district for eight years. From there, Participant B transitioned into an Assistant Principal role within the same district where their time was split between one of the district's magnet schools and an open-zoned choice school within the district for three years. The participant then took another assistant principal position at a K-12 school within the district for a year until the COVID-19 pandemic ended the 2020 school year. Participant B then moved to a new district and is currently serving her second year as an administrator.

### **Research Site**

The research was conducted at a site selected by the participants on the basis of their comfortability and availability throughout the study. It was preferred that the researcher conduct interviews with the principals in their own buildings to have access to

the physical environment and conditions in which the teachers work and that the administrator has created. Both participants served as instructional coaches within the same previous district before coming to their current district to serve in the administrative capacity. Both participants have shared experience of expectations within the same school district. Also, both participants currently serve in the role of administrator in the same school district. This alignment of both similar expectations during their time as an instructional coach and now as an administrator provides richer context for comparative analysis.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Qualitative data has been captured using Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing method for two school administrators. Using a modified version of Seidman's (2013) method, this study employed a two-interview system that were approximately 90 minutes per interview. As previously stated, the modification to Seidman's three-interview method is to combine the participant's background and current experiences in the role of administrator. Each interview was audio recorded using the OtterAI program and all conversation was transcribed and coded while also being verified for accuracy and reliability.

The interview protocol used was a formal semi-structured interview process. As outlined through research, formal semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to use a standard protocol while also allowing for the flexibility that allowed for the discussion to evolve for elements relevant to the study (Bhattacharya, 2017). To ensure that all data continues to provide clarity toward answering the research questions, the

researcher chose to not utilize open-ended or natural conversation interviews so that conclusions can be drawn, where appropriate, that make certain the phenomenon is explained within the context of school improvement through strong instructional leadership.

The first interview combined the life history and experiences of the participant in regard to the phenomenon of maintaining the role of a trained instructional coach while also in the role of a building principal. The opening question for the first interview was: “What experiences as a teacher and instructional coach led you to pursue the principalship?” This question allowed the participant to provide relevant background information to inform the phenomenon. At the conclusion of the answer for question one, the participant was asked the following question: “What training or aspects of successful instructional coaching have you been able to implement in your role of principal? How would you qualify your experience in balancing the duality of supervisor and instructional leader?” Appendix B contains the interview framework and questions from Interview I that was utilized for both participants.

In a post-interview analysis of data, I used the transcripts from both participants to begin identifying salient excerpts that related to the phenomenon. These excerpts identified from Interview I created the categories for both participants that provided the framework, topics, and questions for Interview II. Data analysis revealed five categories for each participant that outlined their lived experiences in the roles of instructional coach and administrator in personalizing supports for teachers. The categories identified for each participant can be found in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1***Identified categories from Interview I- Both Participants*

Participant A	Participant B
Feedback	Resistance
Autonomy	Support
Relationships	Coaching
Self-Reflection	Relationships
Coaching	Hard Conversations

The second, and final, interview consisted of the participants discussing the limitations, challenges, and plans for continuous improvement in growing as an instructional leader. The overarching question for the second interview was “What are aspects of the instructional coaching model that you have not been able to implement that you would like to as an administrator? What are the limitations or barriers that keep you from implementing these practices? What advice, if any, would you provide for future administrators who come to the principalship with training in instructional coaching?”

The final interview served the purpose for the participant to reflect on the meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 2013). Seidman (2013) speaks to the purpose of making meaning: “The combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, and describing the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives” (p. 22). Appendix C (Participant A) and Appendix D (Participant B) contain the

interview framework, categories, and questions from Interview II that was for each participant.

At the conclusion of Interview II, I used the transcripts from both participants to begin identifying salient excerpts that related to the phenomenon. I sought to find data that answered the following questions:

1. How do administrators describe and experience using their background as an instructional coach to personalize supports of teachers in the school in the administrative role?
2. How do administrators describe and experience using their background as an instructional coach to personalize supports of teachers in the school that engages in purposeful practice?

As I read across the data from both participants, I began to develop categories that addressed the questions noted above. Once these categories were identified, I developed themes that cut across both participants and noted instances where their experiences were both similar and distinct. From these similarities and differences, I answered the research questions and developed implications for future practice and research.

All data will remain confidential to the researcher and will remain anonymous for the purpose of this study. All participants will be informed of data collection and security protocols when completing their informed consent prior to participation in the study. Once building administrators have been identified, the researcher will keep interview questions and responses in a secured location with the coding index. All interviews and coding methods will be provided in the appendices at the conclusion of the study.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

The qualitative component of the data analysis used an inductive analysis because the researcher is not working from any presumed framework with the data (Bhattacharya, 2017). The interviews sought to investigate systems and conditions that are created in each identified school in an effort to explore commonalities in approach, structures, and leadership styles that have a direct improvement on teaching and learning within their respective buildings. This coding strategy allowed the researcher to capture the constructs and systems created by the participants in the interviews to provide an accurate portrayal of the conditions for strong instructional leadership. As Seidman (2013) has said of interviews, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). Data and categories will be obtained from interviews transcripts with administrators and field notes of the researcher that will serve to help the researcher in identifying categories that will characterize the findings and provide insight to the research questions (Bhattacharya, 2017). Once data has been collected and analyzed, findings from the data will be presented along with implications for practice and future studies that can be completed to continue creating a robust interpretation of the phenomena.

## ***Trustworthiness and Rigor***

In establishing the necessary constructs to ensure that the data and conclusions drawn from the study are both trustworthy and rigorous, the researcher will outline Guba’s four constructs that ensure the study has credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. (Shenton, 2004). To establish and further provide credibility, the

epistemological philosophical assumption and the paradigm of pragmatism provides the constructs to explain the nature of "what works" within this specific context of grade band and location (Creswell, 2018).

Transferability will be available due to not only the sharing of both the interview questions and responses, but also through the creation of a framework from the results that can be replicated and tested throughout different educational and leadership settings. In discussing the dependability of the study, researcher will ask the same set of initial questions to each participant for each interview that allow for each participant to establish their professional background, provide details of experience, and reflect on the meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 2013). The researcher will also publish follow up questions and transcripts of conversations in the appendices. Finally, the researcher will establish confirmability through the study through the constructivists approach which seeks to work with the participants to construct meaning through experience. The resulting framework created can be tested and improved upon through subsequent research around principal leadership and improving teaching and learning.

## **Conclusion**

Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing method provided approximately six hours of data that explored the phenomenon of transitioning from instructional coach to administrator. Within this phenomenon, several categories were noted for each participant that provided data for analyzing and answering the research questions of providing opportunities for personalized support and purposeful practice. Inductive analysis and coding from Interview I provided the categories, context, and

questions for Interview II. The following chapters will provide a presentation and analysis of data obtained through the interviews (Chapter IV) as well as a discussion of findings in light of the research questions and the implications for future research and practice.

## CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

### **Introduction**

This chapter contains an analysis of data collected from Participant A and Participant B during the phenomenological interviewing process where each participant completed two interviews. Data was collected through sequential interviews for Participant A (August 24, 2021 and August 27, 2021) and for Participant B (August 28, 2021 and September 2, 2021) where evidence was collected and analyzed to determine each participant's relationship to and how they define the phenomenon. Seidman (2013) explained through his experience that the optimal spacing between interviews that provided the most promising results was somewhere from "3 days to a week apart" (p. 24). Seidman continued that "This [spacing] allows time for the participant to mull over the preceding interview, but not enough time to lose connection between the [previous interview]" (p. 24).

The researcher analyzed data from Interview I to determine categories and questions for Interview II. While the questions for Interview I (Appendix B) were the same for each participant, the questions for Interview II (Appendix C & Appendix D) changed due to the nature of categories and key terms each participant used to describe the phenomenon. The first section will begin by exploring Interview I for both participants, followed by a reporting of similarities and differences in relation to the

phenomenon of the transition from coach to administrator. The researcher will then present an analysis of data for Interview II for each participant as well as the similarities and differences in their meaning making of the phenomenon. This chapter will conclude with an examination of how the perspectives, experiences, and relationship to the phenomenon have shaped each participants' transition into administration while still honoring the best practices learned through their experience as instructional coaches.

Interview I for both participants centered on each participant discussing the history and relationship to the phenomenon of moving from student, to educator, to coach, and to administrator. Each participant provided a brief history of their educational and professional background followed by their transition from instructional coach to administrator. The phenomenon of embedding coaching into the learning opportunities and feedback they provide their fellow administrators and instructional coaches was also explored in Interview I. A summary of the interview for each participant including an exploration of high frequency terms related to the transition from instructional coach to administrator will be explored in the following section.

### **Summary of Interview I- Participant A**

#### ***Background with the Phenomenon***

Participant A did not come to the profession of education through a traditional pathway with a four-year university that required the typical residency and student teaching experiences. Originally a business major, Participant A moved from the accounting profession into a job-embedded teaching program with TNTP (The New Teacher Project) through the Nashville Teaching Fellows. Participant A attributes much

of their learning about education and leadership to this time with TNTP. This was due to the cohort-based nature and the learning experiences that the non-traditional teachers group participated in around learning pedagogical strategies and embedding feedback from program coaches and other job-embedded participants in the program. Participant A regularly provides examples of how their non-traditional program impacted her views on teaching, teacher leadership, and instructional leadership through the lens of instruction coaching as an administrator through embedding learned philosophical teachings of education in conjunction with job-embedded opportunities to apply those philosophies. Participant A spent the first third of the interview describing how her background in relationship to the phenomenon influenced how she perceives the roles of instructional coaching and instructional leadership today. We will begin by presenting the data from Participant A and her direct experience with coaching and how it has influenced her professional practice. Table 4.1 provides a brief overview of Participant A's background as a teacher, instructional coach and as a building principal.

**Table 4.1**

*Summary of Experience- Participant A*

Role	District/Years
Middle Grades Science Teacher	District A, School 1: 1 year
Middle Grades Science Teacher	District B, School 1: 1 year
Middle Grades Science Teacher	District C, School 1: 3 years
Middle Grades Instructional Coach	District C, School 2: 3 years
Elementary School Principal	District D, School 1: 3 years

### *Experiences with Receiving Coaching*

When asked about the role that feedback and coaching played in her professional practice, Participant A attributed the structured feedback from various sources early in her career with impacting not only her practices as a teacher but also her values and perceptions of the impact that coaching can have. She acknowledged that while she did not have an instructional coach in the sense of the role that she filled before becoming an administrator, the bulk of her experience with coaching and learning about coaching came through her pre-service work and her graduate studies programs. She also cites throughout Interview I that while she craved coaching and feedback, she did not receive feedback around her professional improvement in her time as a coach. Table 4.2 provides questions and responses around the feedback Participant A received and how it shaped her values in coaching.

**Table 4.2**

#### *Summary of Coaching- Participant A*

Question	Response
Do you feel that looking back now, you would have liked to have had a coach as you transitioned into various roles?	Absolutely, yeah. I love getting feedback. And when I worked for the Nashville Teaching Fellows, and that time in between District A and District B, I got a lot of coaching from them as well. And I think that I really enjoyed that feedback. I think I would have benefited from that for sure.

**Table 4.2** (continued).

Question	Response
What supports or growth opportunities do you wish you would have had as an instructional coach?	Ongoing coaching cycles for myself as a coach. I think evaluating a coach, or being evaluated as a coach, when someone doesn't see your day to day work, it's really difficult. And I think I seek feedback, and I'm hungry for feedback, but it doesn't feel authentic. It didn't feel authentic, when it wasn't something that they saw on a regular basis.
Did you feel like the feedback that you received from your in house evaluator there, the school was a little more useful?	No. I thought it was very, very kind, very generous, but it wasn't constructive. And I think that was because they maybe struggled to identify a way to give constructive feedback.

While Participant A did not have specific experiences with instructional coaching like she provided and now oversees, there were instances where she reported a gap of coaching that could have been filled during her teaching and coaching careers. Evidence from the data suggests that this has shaped her perspective on the impact that instructional coaching as a coach and as an administrator can have on building climate and culture as well as improved student learning outcomes.

**Expectations of the Coaching Role.** When asked about the expectations of becoming an instructional coach, Participant A cited that what she expected in her role of instructional coach did not translate directly into what the reality of the position was. Participant A frequently shared that the autonomy, while not expected when taking the position, was something that allowed her the professional judgement to build a coaching and mentorship program within the school she was working. She also cited that she “thought [her job] would be heavily focused on new teachers and professional development” but often times was exposed to unexpected roles such as implementing of the state’s mandated Response to Intervention (RTI) program, which took time away from working with the teachers in her building. Table 4.3 provides specific questions and excerpts from the interview around the expectations Participant A had coming into the position.

**Table 4.3**

*Participant A’s Expectations of the Coaching Role*

Question	Response
What were your expectations when you came into becoming an instructional coach?	“So I thought that it would be a lot more structured than it was, first of all, that it would be a pretty cut and dry like "this is your daily schedule." These are the PDs that you're going to offer and when you're going to offer them. I thought it would be really heavily focused on new teachers and professional development for the faculty.”

**Table 4.3** (continued).

Question	Response
<p>How much in alignment were those expectations you've already talked about?</p>	<p>“Right so I think the structure is definitely not completely inaccurate. I think that working with new teachers became a huge part of my job because of a number of zero to three year teachers and new to the building teachers that we had at [School in District 3]. You know, we went through a lot of change. And so that just went way off of you know what I expected. And then I did not really understand the role that I would play in RTI before I accepted the position. And so that was new information and a learning curve for me.”</p>
<p>What were you most excited about in becoming and instructional coach?</p>	<p>“Working with teachers.”</p>
<p>Do you feel like you were able to work with teachers as much as you had hoped?</p>	<p>“I think the first year there was definitely an imbalance. And that came from, you know, like I said, I had that program that I had to learn and figure out how to do like the fidelity monitoring piece and things like that, that were that were a huge part of the job. The second year, I felt like I really got to spend that time in each teacher's classroom. And that was great. But by the third year, I had assumed some administrative duties and that took away some time from teachers.”</p>

While the expectations did not match Participant A's move into coaching, interview transcripts reveal a trend that she was able to transition to the position and learn to balance both the lack of structure (otherwise termed as autonomy) as well as the vague expectations from building administrators and also balancing the RTI<sup>2</sup> expectations from District C. Participant A was clear in her responses that the imbalance of working with teachers, especially in her first year, was directly impacted by the additional responsibilities of implementing a building-wide intervention program while also being expected to support a large number of new teachers. The next section of evidence focuses on the learnings Participant A had during her time as a coach that influenced her views and practices as an administrator around leadership.

**Learnings of Leadership from Coaching.** When asked what she learned about leadership in her transition to coaching, Participant A cited that “the most valuable lesson I have learned about leadership” came from her experience as a coach. When asked to clarify her response, Participant A shared that school climate and culture were the two major leadership lessons she learned in her time as an instructional coach. Citing potential fears of going into the coaching role, Participant A shared that she “quickly learned that the impact of building climates and the need to spend time investing in relationships before I came in, trying to put PD and initiatives into place that I should have been more considerate of those things.” Table 4.4 shares questions and answers around specific practices she hoped to either emulate or avoid in her leadership positions.

**Table 4.4***Learnings of Leadership from Instructional Coaching*

Question	Response
<p>What did you learn about being an administrator during your role as a coach?</p>	<p>“I think that, first of all, that the administration, when done correctly, is coaching in so many ways, and just that there is so much carryover, in that, like you said, continuous improvement cycle, that when you're looking to move everyone forward, and they have that rationale about why that, you know, they buy into wanting to improve together. So that would be relationships, school culture, and climate was a big one, just that you cannot do accomplish anything without those being in place. And building relationships with teachers and students, you know, kind of outside of the classroom and how that looks differently. And then also, you know, just, I guess, it led me to be more open minded about what other classrooms can look like, and what's best, you know, that you said that definition of success like that can look more than one way, and that there's different ways to achieve that.”</p>

**Table 4.4** (continued).

Question	Response
Were there any best practices in your time when you were a coach that you wanted to make sure that you held on to or that you were able to emulate as you made that transition?	“I think building relationships, recognizing and celebrating successes is definitely one of the main ones...when things are going well whether that is in a classroom where you know, they've been a part of the coaching cycle or whether that's on a larger scales overtime, you know, data that looks really strong. Something as simple as you know, writing a thank you note or writing it I see you doing this you know, I think that you know, it sounds corny, but seeing it in action. You see the power in that.”
Were there any practices or behaviors that you experienced that did not want to exhibit?	“Yeah, embarrassing people in front of their peers, or in front of colleagues is a huge one. Not taking time to figure out others perspective, my failure to take others perspective and over emphasis on scores rather than improvement.

While coaching in her teaching and instructional coaching career did not have a profound impact on Participant A, evidence from Interview I shows that the perspectives she gained around instructional and building leadership had a profound impact on who she wanted to become as a leader. One area of note is Participant A’s realization that it is nearly impossible to implement improvements or changes of practice without first investing in relationships and seeking to understand the individual behaviors and

organizational culture. Participant A shared several times in this portion of the interview the interrelation between the roles of administration and coaching, both sharing common principles grounded in relationships, collegiality, trust, and recognition of individual and collective growth. As Participant A stated, “administration, when done correctly, is coaching in so many ways... that when you are looking to move everyone forward... they buy into wanting to improve together.” The next section of the interview focuses on how the learned leadership attributes impacted teacher perceptions of Participant A’s coaching and feedback cycles to improve instruction.

**Teacher Perceptions of Coaching.** In Participant A’s three years serving as an instructional coach, she acknowledged the evolution of her role and how teachers perceived her role throughout her time as a coach. One attributing factor for this evolution was the tremendous amount of teacher turnover the school experienced in her time as a coach. Participant A estimated that she worked directly with fifteen new teachers in her first year in the position, twenty in year two, and approximately twenty-eight “new teachers and teachers who were new to the building” in year three. Therefore, by year three, almost all teachers on staff had been through at least one coaching cycle and understood the purpose and role she played for her school. Evidence shows that Participant A’s ability to self-reflect from early in her coaching tenure as well as the prioritization of strong relationships with teachers allowed for her to maintain the role of a coach while also balancing additional administrative duties she gained in her final year of coaching.

As previously mentioned, the roles and responsibilities of Participant A evolved over her three years and culminated in her assuming administrative duties. When asked how those administrative duties impacted how teachers perceived her role, Participant A cited that taking the time to foster relationships built on the foundation of trust during the first two years as well as engaging in coaching cycles with a large majority of the staff allowed for her to remain seen as an instructional coach while adding those administrative responsibilities. This is an aspect of coaching that has played a large role in her transition to an administrator as she has continued to provide individual support to teachers, instructional coaches, and her assistant principals.

**Transitioning from Coach to Administrator.** A central theme of this study has been how the instructional coach has been able to transition into the role of an administrator. When looking at this specific shift, Participant A shared several times that the main factor in pursuing administrative positions was due to the lack of being able to see suggestions for individual and organizational improvement implemented. The idea of having the authority to make suggestions for improvement did not balance with Participant A's ability to see the suggestion turn to action. The inability to see improvement through coaching led Participant A to begin applying for administrative positions. When asked specifically about what led for her to begin applying, Participant A stated that it began with "having a vision for what improvement can look like in a classroom. And seeing that in action. I think feeling the outcome of building those relationships, and the impact that that can make on instruction and student learning." Table 4.5 provides a detailed description of excerpts from the interview that describe the transition from coach to administrator.

**Table 4.5***Transitioning from Instructional Coach to Administrator*

Question	Response
<p>What experiences as a coach made you feel prepared to say, I'm ready to start applying for administrative jobs?</p>	<p>“I think first, like having a vision for what improvement can look like in a classroom. And seeing that in action. I think feeling the outcome of building those relationships, and the impact that that can make on instruction and student learning. Having hard conversations was a big one, and being willing to initiate hard conversations, or to come back after our first conversation and ensure that the conflict has been addressed, and that, you know, kids are getting what they need. Yeah, the process of giving feedback, the process of, you know, working on the school improvement plan, and then following up to revise it, make sure it's not just a document, right, was huge. Delivering professional development.”</p>

When discussing the experiences that made Participant A feel confident to begin applying for administrative positions, she cited that her experience (and subsequent learning from failed experiences) with having “hard conversations” and learning the value of effective communication skills as a coach helped to prepare for the roles and responsibilities of an administrator. When asked to what she attributed the growth in this area, she repeatedly stated that a practice she continued to hone was “self-reflection” and

that was also a practice she wanted to continue to model with her teachers and staff in her role as a building administrator. Participant A also was clear to articulate that all decisions, especially the need to have hard conversations with adult staff members, was always done in service of making sure that students were getting what they needed. The priority of student needs first was the foundational norm for all relationships that Participant A worked to build. Table 4.6 provides the questions and interviews from Interview I (Appendix B) that outlines the impact of hard conversations and self-reflection that Participant A used for professional growth.

**Table 4.6**

*Experiences with Hard Conversations*

Question	Response
<p>So let's talk about having hard conversations. Was that skill, something that was intrinsic? Or is that something that was learned?</p>	<p>“I think having hard conversations, like the ones you have as a coach or administrator role, was definitely learned. I mean, approaching them in a way that doesn't destroy your relationship. Because I think that that is the process that I went through as a coach. Because I did have difficult conversations in the beginning and I went about them the wrong way. And so I think learning how to have a hard, productive, hard conversation, I think, was the learning part.</p>

**Table 4.6** (continued).

Question	Response
<p>How did you determine that you might have gone about hard conversations the wrong way?</p>	<p>“My second week of coaching, when two people said ‘either you fire her or I quit to my principal’. That follow up, sit down, you know, opened my eyes to again, perspective taking and seeing all sides of situation. And, you know, not that we all agree when we left, but I’m learning, you know, how they perceived my, what I had come in to say. And that happened several times. I mean, there were PLCs that I worked with that were really struggling and I really disagreed with the way they were doing things. But I didn’t communicate that in a way that they could hear me and make a change. And even though I could have said it that way to someone else, they were not able you know, to receive it because of the way that I had delivered it.”</p>
<p>How did you get to the point where you a) realize that and then b) you wanted to improve on it? I guess how did you engage in your own cycle of continuous improvement?</p>	<p>“I think self-reflection definitely was a huge part of it. And, you know, that was a mistake that I made over the course of three years. So even though I did it more often the first year it’s still a mistake I made. I still go about hard conversations the wrong way sometimes. I think we all do. But I think I get better at it each time because I do take that time to reflect and trying to think through it.”</p>

### Key Themes from Interview I- Participant A

In an analysis of Interview I, several themes, or practices, were repeatedly referenced in relation to the phenomenon during all phases of Participant A's experiences as an educator. The purpose of this section is to provide insight into how Participant A's description of the themes provides evidence to support the posed research questions. Key themes listed in this section will be compared with the key themes from Participant B to analyze the experiences of each participant. The themes in this section also formed the structure for Interview II for Participant A where she was asked to go more in-depth with each theme and describe how each theme impacted her outlook in the instructional coach to administrator transition. Table 4.7 is a summary and brief description of how each key theme impacted Participant A.

**Table 4.7**

Summary and Description of Key Themes- Participant A

Key Themes	Impact
Feedback	Participant A referenced the importance of feedback throughout Interview I. On a personal level, Participant A described how she not only valued high-quality feedback, but she also openly sought out feedback. Her personal experience directly impacted the processes and culture around feedback she wanted to provide teachers in both her role of instructional coach and now as building administrator.

**Table 4.7** (continued).

Key Themes	Impact
Autonomy	<p>Autonomy has played a large part in how participant A approached her role as instructional coach and building administrator. Having autonomy in her role of instructional coach allowed for her to individualize supports for teachers and improve her individual practice. While she enjoyed the autonomy, she did describe the one frustration with autonomy was not having the authority to ensure improvement efforts were seen through. Participant A has worked to embed autonomy with teacher improvement as a way of building teacher ownership around their learning and improvement goals. And so she has worked to find a balance in walking a fine line between providing teachers with that sense of ownership and autonomy in their own professional learning while also providing them the just in time feedback that they need.</p>
Relationships	<p>Participant A shared that some of her greatest learnings around instructional coaching and leadership centered around the building of relationships. She stated several times the impact that spending time building professional relationships had in her journey toward administration. She frequently discussed the role that the foundation of relationships had on school climate and culture and how that was the first practice she wanted to implement as an administrator.</p>

**Table 4.7** (continued).

Key Themes	Impact
Self-Reflection	Participant A also shared how the practice of self-reflection has impacted her growth as a teacher, instructional coach, and as an administrator. One key component in her use of self-reflection has been her focus on modeling the self-reflection process for teachers during her time as an instructional coach and administrator. This is a practice that she has also implemented for her instructional coach and assistant principal she currently works with.
Coaching	The theme of coaching was at the heart of responses for Participant A in Interview I. She consistently identified how her experiences with coaching early in her career as well as coaching she provided teachers in the instructional coach role impacted how she views it today. Also, of all the practices that have been able to transfer from the role of instructional coach to administrator, providing individualized coaching for improvement was the practice most frequently cited.

Interview I for Participant A centered around the personal history and experiences involved in the transition from instructional coach to building administrator. The interview sought to provide data that would identify key themes that could be further explored in Interview II. The preponderance of evidence from interview transcripts provided the themes in Table 4.7 that generated the substance for Interview II. The next

section of this chapter will analyze Interview I for Participant B following the same format and analysis of themes.

### **Summary of Interview I- Participant B**

#### ***Background with the Phenomenon***

Participant B came to the education profession through a traditional four-year university path with experiences in residencies and student teaching. When asked for her reason for entering the education profession, Participant B cited that her mother was an educator for nearly three decades. Seeing her mother work to “help students learn and grow” positively impacted Participant B’s outlook and relationship with being an educator. Upon entering the university, Participant B consistently referenced the support systems in place that helped to provide coaching and feedback from the university as well as the impacts of strong cooperating teachers in residencies and student teaching. While Participant B did not have an instructional coach like the role she would later fulfil, the [DISTRICT A] central office provided a district facilitator who worked with all new teachers. Table 4.8 provides the professional experiences leading up to the transition into the role of an administrator.

**Table 4.8***Summary of Experience- Participant B*

Role	District/Years
Middle Grades Classroom Teacher	District A, School 1- 5 Years
Middle Grades Classroom Teacher	District A, School 2- 5 Years
Math Instructional Coach	District A, School 3- 8 Years
Split Assistant Principal	District A, Schools 4 & 5- 3 Years
Assistant Principal K-12 Setting	District A, School 6- 1 Year
Assistant Principal K-6 Setting	District B, School 7- 2 Years

*Experiences with Receiving Coaching*

Participant B frequently stated that she did not receive coaching in the same framework that she provided; however, she did cite several times that it was something she would have liked early in her teaching career, as well as coaching support when entering the instructional coach position. Participant B did provide evidence of district initiatives around providing a “facilitator” from the district. After working with Participant B, this district-level facilitator used Participant B’s classroom frequently to bring other teachers from the district in for instruction and behavior support. Participant B’s facilitator also provided opportunities to attend conferences and expos for math instruction and classroom management. One expectation from [District A] was that if a teacher attended a professional development conference, then they were asked to come back and present to the school (or district) on their new learning. Participant B attributed much of her learning to work with adults during these “share outs” as recaps of

professional developments. She frequently stated that she honed her skills on providing small group instruction in presenting content rather than whole group PDs. Participant B finally shared that it was those experiences with her facilitator, combined with her passion for athletic coaching and her support systems at the university level that shaped her core values around coaching.

Participant B did speak to coaching and learning opportunities embedded in professional development in her work as an instructional coach. Being trained in several programs gave her the opportunity to expand her learning into classrooms with teachers in her role as a coach. Participant B also cited that she received extensive support from [DISTRICT A's] Title I office and other Title I schools. When asked about coaching that she received from a mentor or district supervisor while in her role of coaching, Participant B frequently mentioned the impact of district Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). It was in these PLCs that all of the instructional coaches in [DISTRICT A] were able to hone their specific skills in working with teachers and leading improvement in their schools. Toward the end of her coaching tenure, Participant B discussed how they began training on how to implement effective coaching cycles and how [DISTRICT A] leadership modeled those cycles with their own coaches. The next section of the study will analyze the expectations that Participant B had of the coaching role and study the alignment of those expectations to their reality.

**Expectations of the Coaching Role.** Participant B became the first math instructional coach in [District A] at the elementary school level. Upon taking the position, she felt very unsure as to what the expectations were for the position. She often

shared that she felt confident that she would be working with teachers and delivering professional development, but she was not prepared for the work around the intervention planning and programming as well as the work around maintaining the school's Title I budget. Participant B shared how the dual nature of the overseeing the Title I program and implementing interventions school-wide were not roles she was prepared. She noted that it took intentional planning to ensure she could still provide the instructional supports her teachers needed while also balancing the additional responsibilities.

Participant B also stated that she battled what Adam Grant (2021) termed as “imposter syndrome” in his book *Think Again*. Participant B shared that she had never spent time in an elementary school besides her eight-week student teaching experience with kindergarten (which she expressed a great displeasure for). Participant B shared that she encountered a “battle within [her] own head at times because she felt ‘I can’t go model a lesson in kindergarten, because, I don’t know how to tell you to do this any better than what you can do now’”. Therefore, Participant B shared that she felt a combination of unsure and overwhelmed with the role of instructional coaching coming into the position. The following sections will provide evidence from Interview I that discusses how her position and mindset changed over the course of her eight years as a coach and how those experiences prepared her for the administrative roles she would eventually assume.

**Learnings of Leadership from Coaching.** When asked about what specific behaviors, practices, and principles she learned around leadership, Participant B frequently highlighted examples from all administrators that she had worked with in her

role of a teacher, coach, and school administrator. A consistent theme from Interview I is Participant B’s self-reported ability to create “her own systems” and practices based off of a combination of attributes from her different principals she has worked with. Participant B also shared specific examples and behaviors she had seen from administrators that she knew she did not want to be known for. Table 4.9 provides questions and answers around specific learnings of leadership and how it has impacted her leadership today.

**Table 4.9**

*Summary of Learnings of Leadership from Coaching*

Question	Response
What did you learn about being an administrator while in the role of a coach?	“I think watching because I only had [school principal at SCHOOL 3] for eight years, I watched him and I watched how he served his community, and the importance of building relationships and 100% supporting teachers and just being in the thick of it all the time. So I think I think the organization, the managing the structure and the procedures and the policies and all that but to then how to be the instructional leader. I think that's and then trying to find a balance. I think that's something I'm still working on is balancing the management of the building versus getting into the classrooms and in offering instructional support. So that's something that I'm still working on, but from my coaching experience is just invaluable.”

**Table 4.9** (continued).

Question	Response
<p>Any specific “best practices” that you saw and said “When I become an administrator, I want to do this...”</p>	<p>“Being present, being visible, I think it's the biggest thing, because you can, you can share your expectations, and you can have policies and procedures. But if you don't inspect what you expect, and you're not visible, those things are not going to happen, you know, and what gets scheduled gets done. So, mapping out, mapping out a plan for the year. And then being visible to see it through. I think that's probably the biggest thing. And one of one of my big takeaways from being at SCHOOL 5 was consistency in visibility, you know, every day, [principal at SCHOOL 5] goes into all the classrooms, and it's "What Can I Do you need anything? How are you? Do you need anything?" And anything from box of tissues to pencils, or I need help with teaching this lesson... I think some of those are my biggest takeaways.”</p>

**Table 4.9** (continued).

Question	Response
Was there anything you saw an said “that’s not what I want to do, that’s not who I am”?	<p>“Well, I think the thing that I guess my reason for leaving the SCHOOL4 and SCHOOL 5, I'll try not to be too specific, was constant change is not good. In constant change in things that don't need to change, change for change’s sake is not necessary.”</p> <p>“Also, not addressing or having hard conversations in a timely manner, because I saw some things that needed to have been addressed that were not addressed, because one of my dad's famous quotes is familiarity breeds contempt. And so when you cross that line of personal versus professional, and then you have to go and address that person on a professional level, it makes it more difficult and you've become very comfortable with that person.... And that's not best if those things are happening, and they're not best for kids like consistency in policies and procedures and structure and addressing things head on in a timely manner.”</p>

As Participant B reflected on their experience as a coach and as a leader, perhaps her greatest realization was the growth of her perspective in how to work with individuals and groups in an educational setting. Referencing her basketball coaching background, Participant B stated that “I learned how to kind of soften myself from that coach with a

whistle to the coach with a soft heart and kind demeanor and becoming understanding of other people.” It is with this empathy and understanding that Participant B approached her role as a coach and which she now uses in her work as a school administrator.

Participant B attributes much of who she grew to be as a leader from her experiences as an instructional coach and assistant principal. The following section provides insight on how Participant B leveraged those learnings of leadership and how teachers under her instructional coach umbrella perceived her role and supports in the classroom.

**Teacher Perceptions of Coaching.** When asked about teacher perceptions of her role as a coach, Participant B stated that she felt animosity and resistance from a few teachers within the building because they had applied for the same job, and it was given to “an outsider without elementary experience.” She continued by stating that the rest of the faculty outside of the small minority received her role positively. When asked what factors provided for the positive perception of her role, Participant B attributed it to her intentionality of seeking to build strong relationships grounded in teacher support. When asked how she balanced the line of being a coach who fostered relationships with teachers and the expectations of her administration, Participant B responded that it was a delicate balance because there were times where she would see instruction that was not moving students as well as teacher actions or behaviors that were not best practice or at times not even kind to kids. Participant B shared that her ability to have frank and hard conversations with teachers and provide an intervention before going to administration helped to build relational trust between her and the staff. Table 4.10 provides questions and responses from Participant B around the perception and relationships between her as a coach with teachers.

**Table 4.10***Teacher Perceptions of Participant B's Role of Instructional Coach*

Question	Response
How would you describe the perception that your teachers had of your role as a coach?	“I think I figured out that the ones that were most resistant we're the ones that maybe had wanted that job, but outside of that they were they were always very, very positive. I think ability to build relationships and know that I wasn't coming in to judge and that I was coming in to support. I think that was the biggest thing is that it was a no judgment zone.”
How did you balance or walk that thin line of building relationships with teachers while also working directly with a principal?	“It was tricky sometimes, because you go into a classroom and you'd see some things that were going on that you knew that you knew were not best practice that you knew were not safe for kids or best for kids, or even kind to kids, you know, so you didn't want to be the tattletale, but you also knew that your sole reason for being there was to grow students and help them learn and grow and help teachers help students learn and grow. And if you're not willing to have hard conversations, and I think that was something that I was also afraid of is having those hard conversations, because I'm a people pleaser. And so by telling you, Hey, I noticed that you did this or that. And there was a, so I tried to go in and intervene first before going to administration. But I knew there were some things that I had to go to administration about.”

**Table 4.10** (continued).

Question	Response
<p>How did you maintain relationship and trust while have to have difficult or hard conversations?</p>	<p>“I think that they knew that I had their best interest at heart, for example, one teacher, she was brand new, she was older, but got into the job embedded type thing. And it was a complete disaster. And I knew that if I didn't intervene, there were 24th graders that were going to suffer for 180 days. And so I went in and just told her, I want to I'm going to support you in this. And then there were those times where I had to have those hard conversations. But she knew I had her best interest.”</p>
<p>How did you learn how to have hard conversations?</p>	<p>“There's that fine line between building those relationships and getting to know people on a personal level, but not crossing those lines of personal versus professional, because then it makes it more difficult. But just through experience, and just observing, you know, sitting in with [principal at SCHOOL 5] and listening to how he approached the conversations and listening to [principal at SCHOOL 4] and how she approached those conversations, and then listening to [school principal at SCHOOL 6], you know, three different perspectives on addressing teachers and handling, having those hard conversations. And then I have had three administrators here and watching, so I kind of, I kind of built my own my own system.”</p>

Participant B was very clear in her responses that maintaining trust and partnership between instructional coach and teacher was built on the foundation of strong relationships. Participant B cited that the ability to build strong relationships allowed her to overcome initial resistance to her role in improving teacher practices as well as her ability to have hard conversations. The final section of the summary of Participant B, Interview I will examine the transition from coach to administrator and the transfer of practices in assuming a new role.

**Transitioning from Coach to Administrator.** After spending ten years as a classroom teacher in the middle grades and eight years as an instructional coach in the elementary grades, Participant B felt confident to assume the role of building administrator. She attributed her confidence in her being able to make the transition due to her extensive background in supporting teachers and implementing and sustaining the PLC process. Also, Participant B previously cited that her training and experience with the TEAM evaluation process and conducting evaluations with TEAM rubric language gave her confidence in the evaluation role.

One factor that Participant B referenced was that the two schools she was split between for her first three years of being an administrator did not have an instructional coach. Also, the schools had never had an assistant principal due to the nature of [SCHOOL 5] being a magnet school for the district and [SCHOOL 6] being a choice school within the district. Because both schools did not have large scale behavior issues, Participant B described the transition from coach to administrator as being one where she

was able to provide high-levels of instructional support. Table 4.1 provides questions and responses around the phenomenon of transitioning from coach to administrator.

**Table 4.11**

*Transitioning from Instructional Coach to Administrator – Participant B*

Question	Response
<p>What made you decide it was time to move from a coach to an administrator?</p>	<p>“Well, I saw the role of the administrator in a high poverty school, in a large school. And I think I had gained a lot of confidence in my ability. I saw all the things that I was doing compared to what the assistant principal was doing. And I thought I can do that. So I think that was, that was the thing, just having all of those experiences and seeing the role of the AP versus the role of the coach. And I felt it was it was time and I guess my level of confidence and the opportunity at the schools that I applied for, with, you know, getting to go to a magnet school getting to go to a choice school with that had an affiliation with the university that had student teachers in the building all the time, you know, that was a different opportunity to, to use my strengths from coaching and move into administration.”</p>

**Table 4.11** (continued).

Question	Response
<p>How have your views of an instructional coach changed since you have come an administrator?</p>	<p>“Well, I think my first three years, I felt like the role of the coach was invaluable in an educational setting, because there was not a coach there was not an assistant principal. So seeing how, how I can how I supported administration and took responsibilities off of their plate, and, and was able to implement lots of things. So it's a very different unique setting, moving from my coaching role into my first three years of administration, because I really did a lot of the coaching. But I think that that's part of what an administrator does. So I was involved in some of the implementing best practices to observations to student discipline and planning and organizing. When I got out to SCHOOL 6, I got to see from an administrative and assistant principal perspective how, what that looked like what coaching look like from that, that different viewpoint. And how it was different because it wasn't a Title I school, but the role of the coach and teacher support in running PLCs.”</p>

**Table 4.11** (continued).

Question	Response
<p>How have your perceptions of the roles of a coach changed since you've become an administrator?</p>	<p>"I knew my job was important. But you know, when you get into that administrative role, and you see, because when I was making that decision to transition, I saw what the assistant principals doing versus what the coach was doing. And then when I got to SCHOOL 5 in SCHOOL 4, I was doing both of those roles. When I got to SCHOOL 6, I saw how that coach took some of the burden off of administration, and it's a team effort."</p>
<p>What specific practices in supporting teachers were able to transfer in your move from coach to administrator?</p>	<p>"Just being an instructional support. Just knowing how to work the system, how to get in there and get buy in, and how to organize support for them. You know, after eight years of doing that, what primarily are teachers looking for? What do they need? What do they not need? What do they not want? And how can I help support students in the classroom with the teachers, and I think that just understanding that relationship between the coach and the teachers and, and seeing, because you know, as an administrator, you still have to build trust, and you have to build those relationships. I think that it is always embedded within you, but you're the administrator. And sometimes it was hard to remember that I was the administrator, as opposed to that coaching support."</p>

**Table 4.11** (continued).

Question	Response
<p>What practices have not been able to transfer?</p>	<p>“I don't really know if there's anything that can't transfer over into that role. I mean, I think you have to remember that you are the administrator. And there are things like those conversations that I wasn't really at liberty to have, I can have them. But as far as, as far as the support with the teachers, I don't know if there's anything that can't transition from a coaching role to administration.”</p>
<p>In what ways have you used your experiences and background as an instructional leader to personalize supports for teachers?</p>	<p>“I think having a better understanding of professional development, and how to identify needs for teachers. Just having gone through all kinds of PD, and how to organize that and how to encourage, when you see when you see an area of weakness, and how to encourage that and how to help set goals, that's something that I would also like to get better at is setting those goals for teachers, for PD and follow through. But I think that that's one of those things that you can observe a teacher, and you can give them their reinforcement and refinement, but I also learned, setting an action goal, this is what I saw. So the next time I come in, this is what I'm going to look for. But having that experience of organizing PD and having lots of training that I can bring to the table, to a teacher that struggling this, hey, I've done this before. I've done that before; this is a great PD for you. And let's look at this and moving forward with that.”</p>

In describing the transition from instructional coach to administrator, Participant B shared that “I think that [coaching] is always embedded within you, but you're the administrator. And sometimes it was hard to remember that I was the administrator, as opposed to that coaching support.” Evidence from Interview I shows that Participant B was able to utilize her supports and trainings she received as a pre-service teacher, classroom teacher, and as a coach when making the transition to administrator. The following section will provide an analysis of key themes, or practices, that were identified throughout several responses in Interview I.

### **Key Themes from Interview I- Participant B**

In an analysis of Interview I, several themes, or practices, were repeatedly referenced in relation to the phenomenon during all phases of Participant B’s experiences as an educator. The purpose of this section is to provide insight into how Participant B’s description of the themes provides evidence to support the posed research questions. Key themes listed in this section will be compared with the key themes from Participant A to analyze the experiences of each participant. The themes in this section also formed the structure for Interview II for Participant B where she was asked to go more in-depth with each theme and describe how each theme impacted her outlook in the instructional coach to administrator transition. Table 4.12 is a summary and brief description of how each key theme impacted Participant B.

**Table 4.12***Summary and Description of Key Themes- Participant B*

Key Word/Practice	Impact
Resistance	<p>Participant B referred to resistance through several different aspects. The first layer of resistance came as a classroom teacher when a teammate did not want to share lesson plans. The second instance came when some teachers were resistant to her coaching when she first took on the position. She continued to speak on resistance in coaching and how she would work to break through the resistance. The final example of resistance has been experienced in Participant B's role as an administrator. This has centered around the seeking and implementation of strategies for instructional improvement by teachers.</p>
Support	<p>Participant B stated throughout the interview that the supports that she was given as a pre-service teacher, teacher, and coach had a profound impact on how she seeks to support her teachers as an administrator. She has chiefly seen her role as both instructional coach and as administrator as being a support for teachers both instructionally as well as emotionally and professionally.</p>

**Table 4.12** (continued).

Key Word/Practice	Impact
Coaching	Participant B referenced repeatedly how her athletic playing and coaching impacted her ideas of how to support students and teachers. The most evident phrase was her quote on softening from being that “coach with a whistle” to becoming a coach who sought to understand the people she was working with. This has impact the practices she has implemented as an instructional coach and building administrator. As previously referenced, so much of administration is coaching.
Relationships	Participant B referenced the impact of relationships throughout Interview I. The common finding in all the mentions of the importance of relationships was the level of support that co-existed in those relationships. Participant B even attributes the value of building relationships as one of the single most important practices that she wanted to emulate from the administrators she worked for as a teacher, instructional coach, and as an assistant principal.

**Table 4.12** (continued).

Key Word/Practice	Impact
Hard Conversations	Participant B spoke of hard conversations as an area of improvement that she has been working toward. She repeatedly referenced the importance of addressing issues head on and not leaving them resolved. She also elaborated on how the ability and willingness to have hard conversations improved relationships and trust among the teachers she served as an instructional coach and the teachers she currently serves as an administrator.

### **Similarities to the Phenomenon**

In the analyzation of data from Interview I for both participants, several instances emerged where each participant's background with the phenomenon overlapped with the others. The researcher utilized In Vivo coding methods as well as the OtterAI interview transcription service to identify key themes that were consistently present in both participant's interviews. This section seeks to identify and present the similarities of experiences for both participants in order to further explore and explain the phenomenon of the transition from instructional coach to school administrator. Table 4.13 provides an overview of key themes present in Interview I for each participant.

**Table 4.13**

*Summary of Themes: Participant A and Participant B*

Participant A	Participant B
Feedback	Resistance
Autonomy	Support
Relationships	Coaching
Self-Reflection	Relationships
Coaching	Hard Conversations

As presented at the summary of each interview, key themes were present in each participants' interview. Similarities in the relationship to the phenomenon centered around two themes: Coaching and Relationships. Both participants cited ample evidence around the impact that coaching had on their professional practices as they transitioned from teacher, to instructional coach, to administrator. Both participants outlined both their positive and negative experiences with coaching often were impacted by the quality of relationships that each participant built with those they coached.

Upon further analysis of differences in the themes from Participant A and Participant B in Interview I, Participant A provided many responses that were more interpersonal characteristics and learnings around how Feedback, Autonomy, and Self-Reflection impacted her professional practice and how she embedded those qualities in her coaching of teachers in both the instructional coach and administrator role.

Participant B cited evidence of how the themes of Resistance, Support, and Hard

Conversations over the course of eight years of instructional coaching and six years in the role of administration has shaped her outlook and current practices today.

### **Conclusion- Interview I**

At the conclusion of Interview I, the researcher coded each participants' interview and began analyzing themes to develop questions for Interview II that would allow for deeper exploration of how those themes impacted their relationship to the phenomenon. While each participant shared the same set of questions for Interview I (Appendix B), the variate of themes required different sets of questions for Participant A (Appendix C) and Participant B (Appendix D). The final interview in the data collection process served the purpose for the participant to reflect on the meaning of their experiences and the relationship that each theme from Interview I had on their transition from instructional coach to administrator (Seidman, 2013). Seidman (2013) speaks to the purpose of making meaning: "The combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, and describing the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives" (p. 22).

### **Summary of Interview II- Participant A**

Interview II for Participant A began with follow-up questions the researcher had after coding and analysis of Interview I. The follow-up questions centered around the themes of Participant A's background of becoming an educator through a non-traditional path, and how experiences from her non-traditional path impacted her as a teacher, instructional coach, and as an administrator. The final follow-up question explored how

her frustrations of not being able to mandate change in the instructional coach role pushed her to begin seeking administration positions. At the conclusion of the follow-up questions, Interview II began with a structured set of questions that explored the key themes from Interview I. The interview data for each theme will be presented in the following paragraphs.

### ***Feedback***

Participant A began Interview II by providing responses to questions centered around the theme of feedback. In discussing her passion for seeking feedback, Participant A shared that she felt like the feedback she would receive in her coaching role would ultimately be around how to improve her practices as an instructional coach. However, Participant A shared that she rarely felt that she got feedback that moved her practice forward from the school or the district (especially in years two and three). When pressed to elaborate on her response, Participant A shared that the lack of feedback and coaching was mostly due the idea that feedback and coaching was only reserved to those who were “struggling or needed it the most.”

Participant A was then asked to explain how her experience with not receiving coaching and feedback has impacted how she seeks to provide those to her teachers, coaches, and assistant principal. Participant A shared that she has worked to create a base layer of support (i.e. Tier I supports) that all staff members in her building benefit from. She stated, “I think that the newer teachers do participate more in coaching cycles with the academic coach, but I think we look for opportunities to push the teachers who are at that expert level.” When asked to explain how her views of the importance of coaching

and feedback have changed in her time as an administrator, Participant A shared that she was just now in a position to begin thinking through how to improve her personal practices of still embedding the coaching and continuous improvement cycle as an administrator.

Participant A was asked how the experiences of providing feedback as an administrator was similar to providing feedback as an instructional coach. Participant A shared that she approached coaching conversations as an administrator in the same manner she approached them as an instructional coach. Citing the same planning process while trying to embed ownership and autonomy for the teacher, Participant A did report that she now has the ability to follow-through that she did not have as an instructional coach. This response embeds other components of themes around coaching and autonomy. However, evidence does show that practices from the realm of instructional coaching have transferred, but with more of the “administrative teeth” that Participant A mentioned in Interview I.

When presented with the question of how her feedback aligns with Stone and Heen’s (2014) framework for feedback in the realms of evaluation, coaching, or appreciation, Participant A shared that she perceived the majority of her feedback as coming from the coaching lens. She did provide that instances that involved the TEAM evaluation model did straddle the line of evaluative and coaching; she had evidence from climate and culture surveys that indicated the majority of teachers felt that the evaluation process was aimed at improving instructional practices through the lens of coaching. Participant A did share the one practice she implemented that she wanted to implement as

coaching that has been received as evaluative has been the summative evaluations that she conducted for the first time [(due to her first year as principal being cut short due to COVID-19)]. Part of Participant A's practice of self-reflection has been to approach these conversations through coaching and to ease assumptions and perceptions the bring on the added anxiety of evaluation.

For the final question around the theme of feedback, Participant A was asked to provide a definition or describe the importance of what feedback meant to her in relation to her history and current experiences with the phenomenon. She shared that "feedback is a different perspective outside of yourself, that is given with the intention of promoting growth. And that that can be a statement or it can be a question. But it gives space for someone else's perspective. And then you synthesize that with your own perspective to take it and move forward." When asked how she conveys that message to her faculty and staff within her building, she shared:

I think saying and anchoring it and going back to the rationale and why over and over and over is the number one way. And I think that's also something that you live out in feedback conversations when you show that's the intention. And when you earn the trust that comes with that there's not a 'gotcha' waiting around the corner. It's really to promote growth for teachers so that you can improve student learning. And when they see that you live it and say it, they believe it.

Participant A strives to lead by example in terms of creating opportunities for her staff to provide feedback as well as engage in feedback conversations that are improvement centered. From the responses above, evidence shows the perception of Participant A is to provide coaching, support, and feedback to all her staff members on a base-level.

Throughout Interview II, it was evident in responses that the history and experiences with feedback (or sometimes lack thereof) directly impacted Participant A's

outlook on how she structures and provides feedback and coaching for all staff members in her building. Next, we will explore the theme of autonomy and discuss her experiences with autonomy impacted her outlook as a building administrator.

### *Autonomy*

Participant A discussed the impact of autonomy in her role of instructional coach and how it has framed her administrative practices in Interview I. When asked about the role that autonomy played in her overall instructional coaching experience, Participant A shared that the autonomy allowed for her to make instructional leadership decisions in her building around programming and implementation. However, Participant A frequently shared that the autonomy to make those decisions did not correlate to seeing or ensuring improvement due to her lack of administrative authority.

When asked how she provided autonomy for teachers in her role of instructional coach, Participant A shared that she worked to create and sustain relationships with the teachers with whom she worked and to co-create next steps and have teachers have ownership in writing and monitoring their improvement goals. When asked what prompted her decision to embed professional autonomy into her practice with teachers, Participant A shared that much of her learning around coaching has come with studying research about what works best with adult learners. Citing that research as the basis for the need for professional autonomy, Participant A stated: “If you don't have autonomy in your goals, you're not going to buy into them and anything you do in pursuit of them will be compliant based and that doesn't create long term change. And I think that was the main one.” Participant A also shared how she valued providing autonomy for veteran teachers who were new to her staff. Citing her personal experience, Participant A became

frustrated when she arrived as a teacher to a new school and was placed in the same new teacher induction program although having multiple years of experience. Her personal experience has framed how she recruits and retains teachers through the use of autonomy. Teachers are encouraged to pursue improvement goals based on their self-reflection and needs through data analysis.

When asked how teachers in her building perceived her attempts to provide autonomy in their professional decision making and their professional development, Participant A stated that she felt that her teachers would say they had high autonomy in their learning and growth plans. While Participant A has yet to see evidence of the implementation of the learning and growth plans under what would be considered normal circumstances (a non-pandemic year) and knows that she does not have complete buy-in from all staff, she feels there is strong evidence through her use of growth plans and summative conferences to extend autonomy to teachers in their individual growth opportunities.

For the final question around the theme of feedback, Participant A was asked to provide a definition or describe the importance of what autonomy meant to her in relation to her history and current experiences with the phenomenon. She began with expressing how her own experiences in “seeing autonomy improve working relationships and receptiveness to feedback as coach has made me buy into it on an ongoing basis as an administrator.” She then provided the following statement to outline the importance of professional autonomy in her school:

I think autonomy is important because it creates ownership and buy in to the strategies that are going to actually impact long term change. And lacking autonomy leads to dissatisfaction in your role and in the feedback that you receive

and in frustration, and I think that ultimately, like I said, before if you do something without autonomy, you are just in place of compliance.

In this response, Participant A embeds other key themes throughout both interviews around ownership, change, feedback, and compliance. The role of autonomy in her school plays a large factor in determining organizational health and improvement of instruction for students.

As discussed above, Participant A has worked to embed autonomy in individual growth and improvement plans throughout her experiences as an instructional coach as well as her time as an administrator. It is this autonomy that Participant A also feels is a cornerstone for building strong professional relationships as both an instructional coach as well as an administrator. Without providing professional autonomy, actions and behaviors become compliance which becomes a breeding ground for dissatisfaction and contempt. Next, we will examine the interview responses around the theme of specifically building relationships and how it has transferred from the instructional coaching role to the administrative role.

### ***Relationships***

One theme that was consistently present in Interview I was the theme of relationships. Participant A shared various stories of how she learned the importance that relationships played in leading improvement within an organization. She also shared examples of how her failure to adequately build relationships with certain teachers in her instructional coaching role impacted her ability to improve outcomes for students as well as building climate and culture. This section explores the questions and responses for

Participant A around the impact that the practice has had around her relationship during the instructional coach to administrative transition.

The first question around relationships in Interview II centered around the overall experience of building relationships as an instructional coach. When asked to provide an overview of the process of building relationships as an instructional coach, Participant A shared that she began by first listening, watching, and observing the norms of the school culture. She also stated that it was learning to value the professional experiences and expertise of teachers on the staff while also showing she was willing to learn alongside them as their instructional coach. Participant A shared

I'm not here to implement all this change before I even know who I'm trying to change or what you're doing. Listening, learning, showing up over and over, even when they threaten to quit over you, and then I think recognizing their strengths and their values. That is what I look back and think about the importance of building those relationships.

Participant A shared the example from Interview I where she had teachers she had failed to establish a relationship with demand to her principal that she be fired. Upon re-sharing this particular instance, Participant A emphasized the need to express professional humility as well as the willingness to learn with the teachers with whom she was working.

When asked to describe how she has worked with her instructional coach and assistant principal to ensure relationships are at the cornerstone of their professional practice, Participant A shared that she has had to work extensively with her coach on building relationships through coaching questions as well as having her coach self-reflect on particular practices and interactions with teachers.

The next focus of the interview shifted to the important factors needed to build strong and sustainable relationships with teachers in the roles of instructional coach and as an administrator. Participant A re-emphasized the need for listening and observing but also added the need for practicing empathy, perspective taking, and patience as well. Sharing that she had not always been “the most empathetic person, it became important for her to begin seeking to understand why some practices did not meet her expectations. As Participant A shared, “I think when you’re not empathic, you rush to judgement.” This key learning, while admittedly not being a strength of Participant A, gave her the permission to begin “understanding how people go to where they are in their classrooms” and helping to build perspectives of how the school and individual teachers work. This seeking to understand coupled with learning to be patient because she came to understand “that change takes time”

When asked what the important factors were for building relationships as an administrator, Participant A shared: assuming positive intentions, being a good listener, being a good communicator, transparency, honesty, “but firstly, again, that empathy piece.” A major factor in Participant A’s push for empathy, perspective taking, and patience is grounded in her personal experiences and personality traits as an instructional coach and administrator.

The subsequent focus on building relationships extended into asking how Participant A’s experience as a coach impacted her ability to not only create, but also sustain relationships with her teachers in the administrative role. Participant A stated that creating relationships was easy because she learned “things I did and did not want to do based on my coaching experience.” She continued that early on, she was able to practice

watching and listening and in her first year “made changes that were damaging to children and teachers.” Participant A did however express the difficulty in maintain those relationships with teachers by stating:

The sustain was the hard part. Because eventually the honeymoon ends. And you do have to challenge people with hard conversations, and ask things of them that are uncomfortable that they you know, ask them to venture outside of what they've tried before and things like that. So I think that's where I've had to drop back on my experience as a teacher more than I did my experiences as a coach in that sustaining relationships. What did I want from my administrators? And what do I wish I'd had when I was a teacher in the classroom? But again, the coaching piece really played into building relationships initially.

As previously stated in other responses, Participant A worked with intentionality to ensure that she applied learnings from her experiences as an instructional coach to ensure that she took the correct steps to build strong relationships. As she transitions into year three of her administrative career, she continues to self-reflect on her actions as well as the needs she had as a teacher and instructional coach to ensure she can further meet the needs of her staff and students.

Participant A was later asked to discuss how her staff perceived her efforts to not only build but also sustain relationships that are strong, empathetic, listening, and observing relationships. While acknowledging that she has made, and will continue to make, mistakes in her role as principal, “the majority of teachers perceive about that [my focus on relationships] has a positive impact on everything we do here at the school.” Participant A continued by sharing that instances where those efforts have been difficult was around “things that oftentimes are uncomfortable, and some people don't like that challenge, and they don't want to have to do something differently.” In her response, Participant A was able to articulate not only the steps she has taken to build relationships,

but also expressed vulnerability that she models with her teachers in not being a “perfect person.” She was also able to ground her explanation in evidence from both internal and external survey data around the climate and culture of the school she leads.

The final discussion around the importance of building relationships explored how Participant A strives to foster the importance of relationships with her instructional coach and assistant principals. She pointed out that the majority of her work in this area has been with her instructional coach because she has trouble building relationships with certain groups of people or understanding their perspectives around instructional strategies. When asked how she was embedded the coaching around relationships for her instructional coach, Participant A shared that much of the work has come through the use of self-reflection questions and activities, which is one of the strategies and practices from other themes that emerged through Interview I.

Like the sections on feedback and autonomy, the final question in the section on relationships asked Participant A to make meaning of her overall experience with building relationships and how it has impacted who she has become as an instructional leader. She stated that “relationships are everything. You can have all of the goals in the world but if you don't have the relationships, you will never make an impact and certainly not one that will outlast you. So I mean that that's it, relationships are everything.” Participant A was clear in expressing the clear priority that she places on building relationships with her staff. She also has expressed the effort in ensuring her assistant principal and instructional coach also implement practices and strategies to foster relationships. Participant A has been repeatedly clear that the quality of relationships

among the administrative staff (including the instructional coach) has a direct impact on the school's climate and culture.

Participant A has worked to improve the relationships with her staff since moving into the principal position three years ago. Citing a negative school culture at the school when she took over, and also relying on the past experiences in her instructional coaching experience, she was determined to ensuring that she built a foundation of relationships that would define the implicit and explicit culture of her school. The next section will present the data from Participant A's experience with self-reflection and how she has used her background to make it practice in her school as a principal.

### *Self-Reflection*

Throughout both interviews, Participant A shared her practices and perceived value of self-reflection in improving her individual practice as well as the teachers she worked with in the role of instructional coach and currently works with in the role of building principal. Beginning with interview II around the theme of providing feedback, Participant A shared that one of her goals was to "provide specific, actionable feedback that also "reinforced that self-reflection piece that would allow teachers to arrive at conclusions on their own." Participant A also shared that in the instances where providing autonomy backfired, it was mostly attributed to the inability (or willingness) to self-reflect. Referencing a specific failure of providing autonomy, Participant A stated that oftentimes was attributed to some educators not being able to correctly identify what specifically needed to be improved or setting wrong improvement goals altogether. It was in those few instances where Participant A felt the need to reel in the autonomy with certain people as the administrator with that authority. The following sections will

explore and describe how the theme of self-reflection evolved from a personal improvement characteristic into a building-wide expectation Participant A is working to embed in the school she leads.

The first question around self-reflection asked Participant A to reflect on what experiences as a teacher and a coach. She replied that it has always been “a big part of who I am... [but] I think it did not come up as something that I was self-aware of until I became a coach.” As Participant A reflected on her time as a coach, she cited that she “realized that the reason that we weren't speaking the same language sometimes is because of their lack experience in self-reflection or how that reflection and action process was carried out.” Participant A concluded by contributing her values around the practice of self-reflection back to her time in conducting video analysis as a teacher as well as her drive for mastery as really the factors that grew her appreciation for the practice of self-reflection.

Participant A was then asked how she worked to broaden her teachers’ perspectives on creating self-reflection as an intrinsic value. She stated:

I think, you know, we did start out by talking about what is the value of self-awareness or self-reflection. But I think the most powerful piece for them was engaging in cycles of it, and seeing the impact of those cycles on their performance and their students’ performance. So giving them questions that they could use, like a framework for questions, stems that they could use when they watch videos of themselves, giving them specific journal prompts.

One outcome from embedding self-reflection for teachers was that Participant A began to realize that reflection journals turned into “a dear diary entry of all the things that [the teachers] perceived happened [in their lessons] and didn't really become [grounded] in the

connection of evidence between teacher actions and student actions.” To ensure the goal of self-reflection netted the targeted outcomes, Participant A stated that she began providing “specific, targeted questions to guide their reflection, and just promoting that guidance, and then then them seeing the outcome of that in future cycles of watching themselves and, and reviewing scripted notes. Participant A shared not only how she personally values the process of self-reflection, but also discusses how she works to create opportunities for both the willing and resistant teachers to embed the practice.

When asked why it is important for both administrators and instructional coaches to self-reflect, Participant A closed on the section by adding that "It important for everyone to help them self-reflect. I think self-awareness and knowing your own strengths and areas of growth is how we all improve and become better and better serve our school.” She then added on her own self-reflection practices:

Again, that is something I do on a daily basis. I just told you know earlier what feedback means to me has changed this month, like, you know, that's something that I'm working on, you know constantly exposing myself to other ideas, collaborative conversations with other leaders, reading, digging into podcasts, research, and material, and then going back every single time and trying to synthesize that with where does it stand with what I previously understood and how do I apply this and we're working and where do I have areas of growth in this.

Participant A provided response that not only clarified the importance of the practice of self-reflection but also how she seeks to lead by example and make her learning and desire to get better a personal and professional priority.

The final question surrounding the practice of self-reflection asked Participant A to define what self-reflection meant to her throughout her time as an educator. She stated:

I would say self-reflection is an awareness of your own actions and thinking at a metacognitive level, understanding why you did those actions and why you thought the way they did or why you thought the way you did. And also, I think implicit within that is that piece of like acting on self-reflection that you don't just end once you've reflected on what you've already done but you also consider how that might impact your thoughts and actions moving forward. I think that's why it is so critical for everyone. But for educators because that's how we're going to grow as professionals.

Participant A was then asked to describe how the theme of self-reflection related to the other themes of feedback, autonomy, relationships and coaching discussed in Interview

II. She replied:

Self-reflection is what drives the choices you make when you have autonomy, for better for worse... the connection between self-reflection and feedback can lead when you're the recipient of the feedback can lead you to either accept or reject the feedback if it is in line with your self-reflection. On the other hand, if you're the giver of feedback, I think self-reflection comes then where you know your biases and you know what it is that you're naturally seeking or that you're more inclined to provide feedback on or the way even that you're more inclined to provide feedback and awareness of that and acting to mitigate you know the effects of that. And then for self-reflection and relationships, you have to have to have a strong relationship with someone in order to allow them to guide you through this self-reflection process. It is hard to become better and self-reflecting if you don't have that relationship prior to coaching them through that self-reflection process. That leads to people becoming very closed off, which hinders the ability to self-reflect, with or without their support.

Much like the other themes discussed, there is evidence of overlap with the role that self-reflection plays in Participant A's personal and professional practice. This statement above on the relationship of self-reflection to the other themes describes a purposeful intentionality within a system of improvement in Participant A's leadership style and actions. The final theme that will be discussed in the ability to balance administrative leadership with the backgrounds and practices of instructional coaching will center around the theme of coaching. Like the other themes explored, coaching will embed

many of the practices and intentionality of climate, culture, and actions that have provided a framework for both individual and collective improvements.

### *Coaching*

The final theme discussed with Participant A was her relationship to the phenomenon through the lens of coaching. Throughout all of the themes discussed in Interview II, coaching was embedded in the themes of feedback, autonomy, relationships, and self-reflection, which all helped to explore the phenomenon of embedding the practices of instructional improvement while balancing the roles and responsibilities of administrative leadership. In beginning the discussion with the theme of coaching, Participant A was asked to describe the role that ongoing coaching cycles for her personal and professional development would have meant for her practice both as a teacher and as an instructional coach. She shared that she would have appreciated someone in her room providing “feedback on goals along a progression” that would have allowed her to “move from one level to the next within a certain domain, or at the very least, make connections each time to prior goals.” It was this feedback and improvement cycle that Participant A cited that she did not experience as a teacher or instructional coach.

Participant A was then asked how her experiences have impacted how she works with teachers in the administrative role around providing targeted and timely feedback. She replied that providing routine and consistent feedback is “definitely what I am trying to do, rather than providing feedback that feels isolated and only applies to the lesson I observed.” In her feedback practices, Participant A shared that she is trying to link feedback to improvement efforts outlined in professional learning plans that contain both

goals and action steps for teachers. She concluded that this streamlined approach to feedback keeps the “teachers [from] playing whack a mole and trying to appease [me as the observer].”

The final question around how her experience with coaching cycles for teachers and administrators asked her to describe how she models the behaviors she wants to see her instructional coach and assistant principal, she replied:

I think it's the most important work the instructional leader can do. And do I think do we always get it perfect? No, but I think when it's when it's the priority, you schedule it like a priority. And that that is what will lead to instructional improvement and improvement in teacher practices and teacher quality. I think it's just a priority. It's something that I model and I set up system for with the coach and the AP and we do it. We just make it very systematic.

What became clear from the questions asked around how participant A would have appreciated coaching cycles, how her prior experiences impacted how she views coaching cycles today, and how she works to provide those cycles for her administrative team, Participant A was quite clear that the work involved intentionality and prioritization. If the instructional leader was not willing to self-reflect and make every move intentional and then was not willing to follow through and make time to prioritize individual and collective improvement, the improvement (if any) would happen purely by chance and not design.

In the theme of coaching, the idea of physiological safety emerged as a requisite for beginning, leading, and sustaining improvement. When asked how she has worked to create a sense of psychological safety in balancing the practices of instructional coaching with her administrative duties, Participant A shared that it is “showing teachers that I am a learner and that I am here to support them... and that my intentions really come from a

place of wanting to see them succeed.” Participant A also shared that part of creating an environment of psychological safety comes from recognition and celebration of “seeing great things in [teachers] and in their classrooms and looking for looking for the good in every single classroom, even the ones that are maybe having a more difficult time.” The final aspect that Participant A shared around psychological safety was striving to treat everyone fairly.

When asked how she creates an environment of psychological safety while also ensuring her instructional coach does not have the same frustrations and constraints that she experienced as a coach, Participant A shared that it has been “difficult to keep the line of instructional coach and administrator very clear” to protect the need for teachers to feel safe with the instructional coach. Participant A continued by stating:

But I think things that we can do are establish a tremendous amount of clarity with our coach on what our expectations are. So that as she gets questions there, as she re-delivers information, we're all on the same team. And I think we also brainstorm and you know, come together every single week, and usually more often than that to talk about what we're looking for. So that the things that she's coaching on are the things that they're getting feedback and accountability on from us. And then she was part of all of our learning walks and things like that. So she may not know what they scored on TEAM, but she knows what's going on in those classrooms and what our team's perspectives on those things are.

In the discussion of creating psychological safety, Participant A again relied on the themes of intentionality as well as leading by example. Participant A was very clear in establishing a culture where everyone feels like they are wanted to succeed. She also

was able to clearly articulate how the line between coach and administrator needs to clearly be defined so teacher feel safe working with the instructional coach. It is with purpose driven clarity and attention to ensuring all teachers grow that Participant A attributes a culture built on psychological safety.

Another aspect of coaching that was prominent in Interview I was around embedding goals and practice opportunities for teachers both as a coach and now as an administrator. When asked to speak specifically on the goal setting and practice in the role of a coach, Participant A stated:

Goals, I think was really evident, because that was something that you know, for a while, we co-created together and moved into that combination of co-creating and writing their professional learning plans. So that was something that was a part of all of the work that we did together. And like I said before, even if I provided feedback outside of their goals, I always would come back to either one, how it would impact or relate to their goals, or two give them something that would help them feel like they're moving forward with their goals as well. I did that through questions. Practice is not something that I think I did a great job of as a coach. In certain domains, I think I did it in the domains where it felt safe. So for example, practice writing success criteria together, things like that. And that's where I think as educators, we do spend most of our time practicing things like that. But where a lot of my teachers, or a lot of novice teachers struggle, of course, is classroom management. And that's not something that we do a great job of providing practice for. That's not something I did a great job of providing practice opportunities for.

When asked to elaborate on what it meant to work “in the domains where it felt safe,”

Participant A continued by sharing that it was improvement efforts that were safe for the teachers. She shared that most of the practice opportunities she gave as a coach came in low-stakes, low-level activities such as improving lesson plans, writing success criteria, and things that did not require teachers to get outside their comfort zone. In conclusion,

Participant A share that “it’s the things where you have to put yourself out there that feel hard and challenging and don’t feel as safe for teachers.”

When asked how she has worked to embed goal setting and practice opportunities around those goals as an administrator, Participant A shared that she has gone about goal setting the same way she did as a coach. She continued with, “I think the added pieces because I do have more of a hand in all of the school-wide PD, I am always looking for a bridge the practice at the end of every PD so that we never leave feeling like we didn't have the time or support to implement it the next day in the classroom or implement something next.”

Participant A was asked a follow up question of how she helped teachers move past those “safe goals” and to move outside of their comfort zone. She shared that it began with highlighting teachers who “are willing to take risks and finding a small group of teacher leaders who want to step out of the box and take those risks within the building.” Even if these teachers made mistakes or did not reach their goals, Participant A stated that “we saw that [the mistakes, failure, and learning] was a beautiful thing as well.” Seeing that moving outside the box allowed other teachers in Participant A’s school to begin moving outside of their comfort zones. Although Participant A acknowledge that she still has teachers who are on the fence of trying new practices, she hopes soon “the majority will buy in and we can move together.”

One key practice that emerged from the conversation around goal setting and practice opportunities was the school-wide culture of excepting and learning from failures and mistakes. Participant A shared throughout that her experience as a coach did not allow for goal setting and practices that extended teachers into the growth zone. By

creating a culture of taking on challenging goals, teachers in her building know that a failure to reach those goals will not be in vain. Instructional leadership, from an instructional coach or as a building administrator, is about pushing teachers to take calculated risks.

The final set of questions asked to Participant A was around how she has worked to create ownership of goals as an instructional coach and as an administrator. Discussing her time as an instructional coach first, Participant A shared that it was about “providing autonomy with enough guidance and support that they weren't left to their own devices.” When asked about how she has created ownership around goals as an administrator, she continued by saying:

A lot of the same. But I think even more intentional focus on connection to students now, and student learning and student outcomes. And going back to what we said earlier about learning each individual teacher, and what's going to drive them to feel like they own their goals. So for some, like it's going to be about student data, whereas others it's going to be something completely different. But knowing whatever it is, it's going to drive them and presenting them with that as the thing that they are working towards.

One dynamic shift in thinking and practice for Participant A was the transition from measuring goals around teacher actions as an instructional coach to now writing and measuring goals around impact of those actions on student learning. The use of autonomy around the goal setting process, collaborative discussion around action steps and progress toward those goals, as well as creating a culture of calculated risks has been what has moved the culture of Participant A's school towards one centered around continuous improvement.

The final question around the theme of coaching asked Participant A to define and describe why the process of coaching around goals and giving opportunities to practice is important to her school's culture. She replied:

I think one piece of it is coaching drives self-reflection when done well. Which then creates that sense of ownership for whoever is being coached. And I think having that goal, of course, gives people something to work towards, and knowing that you're supported in that goal, and that there's someone else, like coach who is there to help guide you, but that you can take your own path to getting there is as important for that ownership piece as well. And then the opportunities to practice because when you practice, well, you, you perform well, I mean, you, you practice it, like you, you want to perform. And I think, you know, giving and giving the chance for people to experience success, who may not have experienced the level of success they want in any particular given area can be really powerful. And it can be powerful for anyone, at any level. And then once people experience success, they want more and more of it.

As with other prominent themes throughout the interview process, Participant A intertwined each theme within the theme of coaching. It is clear from her relationship to the theme of coaching that Participant A wants to create a culture of continuous improvement that is owned by all. As she has transitioned from her role of instructional coach to building administrator, Participant A has worked to extend autonomy towards goals that directly impact students' learning outcomes. As Participant A shared, "I think it goes back to my whole coaching philosophy of trying to find the next level for everyone, no matter their current level of expertise."

### **Summary of Interview II- Participant B**

Interview II for Participant B also began with follow-up questions the researcher had after coding and analysis of Interview I. The follow-up questions centered around the themes of Participant B's background of being able to gain administrative experiences

around teacher evaluation and improvement during her time as an instructional coach, how her experiences with working with resistant teachers and having hard conversations impacted her leadership capacity, and how she sought to convey to teachers that she always had their best interests at heart. The final follow-up question explored how her dual role of instructional coach and assistant principal in her first administrative position impacted her current outlook as an administrator today. At the conclusion of the follow-up questions, Interview II began with a structured set of questions that explored the key themes from Interview I. The interview data for each theme will be presented in the following sections.

### ***Resistance***

The first theme from Interview I to be explored in Interview II was the theme of resistance. Throughout the Interview I and follow-up questions at the beginning of Interview II, the theme of resistance appeared in clearer detail around Participant B's experiences. The first question around the theme of resistance centered around how it impacted who she became as a coach. She stated that her coaching role was the first time she had ever experienced resistance in the education setting. Those uncomfortable experiences, however, allowed for Participant B to "grow as a person in a leadership role... and understand why there's resistance... each person that's resistant is not resistant for the same reason." When pressed to elaborate on the root cause of most resistance she encountered as an instructional coach, Participant B likened it to a mixture of pride and lack of growth mindset. Participant B also shared that there was an inherent stigma among some teachers because they would say "I've taught longer than you and I should

know more than you and you don't know what you're talking about.” In reflection, Participant B cited that more often than not the resistance was more of a “skill” deficit. She stated that most resistance she encountered was from teachers who did not want to admit that “I don't know how [to do what you are asking me to do] and so I'm not going to let you know that I don't know how. I'm just going to act like I don't care.” Part of Participant B's experience in both instructional coaching and as an administrator have been around breaking down barriers that existed between resistant teachers.

Participant B discussed that the types of resistance she encountered as an instructional coach seemed to fall into two types of resistance: will or skill. With “will” resistant teachers, Participant A spoke to pride being a major factor, as well as the experience gap that may have existed between a younger instructional coach and a veteran teacher. Participant B describes the “skill” level of resistance as teachers not having the capacity or the tools to implement the desired changes. Participant B stated that much of those resistant teachers did not want to admit that they could not implement improvements through the coaching cycle, so it was better for them to resist as if they were refusing rather than admitting that they could not carry out the coaching.

When asked what advice she would give her younger self or a new instructional coach coming into the position around dealing with resistance, Participant B shared:

Well I think it goes back to what I learned is what I didn't know about people. I didn't understand that there really are no bad kids. There are just kids that come from a bad situation, or have bad experiences and it's the same for teachers that they're really no bad teachers but there's always a reason behind behavior, you know, and so that's the part of relationships, it's so important in getting to know people past that surface level and understanding where they come from and where they've been. And so that you can understand why they act the way they do or why they do the things they do or why they speak the way they do. And I think

that that's just a life lesson on learning to interact with, you know, learning, empathy and tolerance and understanding of others.

Participant B's response about learning to work with people provides insight into the importance of building strong relationships that extend beyond the surface level. It also hinges on understanding the root causes for actions and behaviors for adults as well as students.

Participant B was asked to describe how her encounters with resistant teachers have impacted who she became as an administrator and how she continues to work with teachers who are at times resistant. She stated that working with resistant teachers helped her learn about herself "because at first [she] would take it personally and I would get mad when they weren't doing what I said to do." Continuing to explain the role that resistance played in how she approaches leadership today, Participant B stated:

And so it just forced me to find other ways to share the knowledge and to encourage and just go into it knowing that there is going to be resistance... And so I think that that that was probably my biggest takeaway from, from dealing with resistance, there's always going to be resistance, and so you just have to you have to, you know it's coming and you just got to be prepared for it.

Learning how to not take resistance personally and also balancing her former background of coaching students in basketball were two areas of growth for Participant B. Much like in Interview I, Participant B shared how working with adults who are licensed professionals was much different from being the adult coach of student athletes. This change in paradigm and outlook shaped how she learned to work with and support teachers. This theme is also present in the final question of the section on resistance, where Participant B was asked to look back on the whole phenomenon of resistance and

define how has that shaped who she is are today as an instructional leader. She responded:

Well it's given me a new perspective of leadership because I think I go back to coaching basketball, where I had complete control with the whistle, and what you were going to do what I said or you would sit the bench. Well, I can't really make the teachers sit the bench, like right so, so, it's a different type of leadership, it's, it's not a top down having your thumb on everything like you have to you have to trust the process and when, when people resist you got to give them an opportunity to show you a different way. And you have to be open to that, and you have to be open to conversations. You have to be willing to have hard conversations and in support the people in your building. And so I think, from dealing with adversity, you find things that work and things that don't work and, and you realize that you don't want to spend, spin your wheels trying to change somebody that's not going to change. And so you try to limit the exposure they have to the rest of the group, and, and move forward with your initiatives or expectations.

One learning from Participant B's encounters with resistance was her realization that change, nor improvement, cannot be willfully enforced for adult learners or educators.

When discussing the outcomes and learnings around resistance, Participant B spoke to being willing to engage in hard conversations and confront resistance, but engaging in each with a goal to understand how backgrounds and past histories impact adult to adult conversations. As she frequently stated, resistance (whether passive or aggressive) exists in all organizations. The instructional leader of the school must be there to lead the change though building relationships with those who are most resistant.

### ***Support***

The next prevalent theme from Interview I centered around the theme of providing support for educators in the role of an instructional coach and as a building administrator. She was first asked to describe how all the levels of support through teaching, instructional coaching, and administrative careers have impacted how she seeks

to provide support to teachers she serves. Participant B explained how the various levels of support she had received in her professional journey was something that she always strove to “give back” because so many people had supported her in her journey.

Participant B shared the following learnings around support:

And so I learned a way to address behaviors that needed to be changed. I learned a way to celebrate the teachers for the things that they were doing, and then I learned a way that I didn't want to communicate with people from certain experiences at [SCHOOL 2] and I learned about collaboration along the way. So I think that all of those experiences have helped me have a better understanding for all the people that I lead, and take the time to. I think relationships are important because then you find the way that each person needs support because everybody's needs are different.

When asked how the role of support as an instructional coach and as an administrator were similar, Participant B shared:

Well I think that the most common thing is everybody wants to feel a level of respect, and they want to feel appreciated. They want to feel supported, they want to have clarity of expectations, and they want to have consistency in management and follow through. And so I think all of those things kind of define support.

Both responses above outline the role that support played not only in Participant B's professional career, but also her outlook on how she provides support to the teachers she leads through her administrative role. By sharing her learning around the need to feel supported, clear expectations, and follow through, these are practices that have informed her need to provide support on a school-wide level.

The final question around the theme of support asked for Participant B to describe how not only her experiences with getting support but also providing support to teachers and staff have impacted her relationship with the theme. Her response was that she has always had the attitude of never giving up or quitting. Participant B felt fortunate to have had administrators and mentors who had supported her both personally and professionally by providing “in positive criticism, encouragement, encouraging me to step out of my comfort zone and try new things.” In the conversation, Participant B shared two stories of teachers who came to see her the day of Interview II who had just endured traumatic events. She shared that in that moment, her job was to be the emotional support for those teachers in their time of need and also noted that it was part of her identity “because something [she had] done made them [the teachers] feel supported and they feel safe.” When asked to elaborate on how she has created that “safe environment”, Participant B stated:

I've said it probably now 500 times but it all goes back to relationships, and making sure your people see that I'm a real human and in bringing feelings into it and being vulnerable. And I don't think that that's every administrator, I think because a lot of administrators feel like you can't let them see that you don't know or you can't let them see that you're weak or you can't let them see that this is a weakness of yours, but I think just bringing all of that being emotional and letting them see that you've kind of been through similar experiences. I think it all builds on itself, and bringing all of those aspects and experiences to the table.

Participant B's relationship and definition of the theme of support has directly impacted her professional practices as well as the outlook of how she implements her instructional coaching background into the work she does as a building administrator. Evidence is clear that Participant B has valued the levels of support she has received and strives to “give back” both personal and professional supports to the staff she serves. The

upcoming section will look into the idea of how her experiences with resistance and support have impacted Participant B's outlook and ability to provide one to one coaching support as both an instructional coach and as an administrator.

### ***1:1 Coaching***

Following a conversation on the themes of resistance and support, Participant B was asked to explore her history and experiences with receiving and providing coaching. While coaching crossed into the ideas of support as well as the next section, relationships, the researcher attempted to clarify questions to get a true understanding of the theme of coaching and Participant B's experience with using her background of instructional support. Looking back to Interview I, Participant B stated that she learned that her coaching style was to "don't let me show you how to do it, but let me teach you. Don't let me show you how to do it but let me teach you a strategy that you can use." When asked how teachers received this type of coaching, Participant B shared that she didn't "think we did it right [at first], because we were giving them [teachers] the tools and saying this is what we're going to use and this is how we're going to use it and then not following up with training or additional assistance." She continued that most of the success she experienced as a coach was taking the time to provide the rationale around tools or initiatives and provide ongoing support and training to ensure successful implementation.

Another common theme in the response around coaching was Participant B realizing she needed to provide differentiation in support. She found in her instructional coaching experience that there were various teachers who were "experts" in different teaching strategies, programs, and with specific tools. Participant B was able to enrich

and extend the learning for those “expert” level teachers or also provide them opportunities to expand into support roles. As Participant B said, coaching became about “understanding different entry points that were most effective” for individuals and groups of teachers. In closing, Participant B discussed how she worked to provide teachers with new tools for their “instructional toolbox.” Participant B shared a key learning experience in supporting teachers was providing the necessary level of training and clarity around new tools used in the classroom, as well as the need for differentiated support around training and implementation of new tools and strategies.

Continuing with the theme of coaching, Participant B was asked how she worked to embed goals and practice opportunities for teachers at the various schools she has served at as an administrator. She shared that there were instances in her instructional coaching and administrative experiences where she worked with grade-level groups and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to set specific goals for student learning outcomes. Citing one example as an administrator, Participant B shared that setting goals for students and restructuring instructional time around those goals lead to great success for a group of teachers who were initially resistant but “by Christmas, they had seen such a huge growth in student reading levels they were just ready to dig in the next semester.” When asked if there were specific examples of success where she had seen implementation of specific professional or pedagogical goals with teachers, Participant B shared, “I don’t know if I have enough experience with that yet.” While Participant B had seen goals for grade levels and specific teams, she did not feel that she has had the opportunity to provide 1:1 coaching support to teachers in her administrative role as of yet.

The final set of questions around the theme of coaching asked Participant B to outline how reflecting on her experiences with them have impacted her outlook on coaching today in the role of a building administrator. When asked specifically how her perception of coaching has changed from a basketball coach, to instructional coach, to now being an administrator with an instructional coaching background, Participant B stated:

Well I think when you look back, when you look back at all the administrators that you have, growing up. And I think about the administrators that I had growing up all of them came from a coaching from a coaching role, like [Principal A] coached, [Principal B] coached, you have a [Current Director of Schools] who coached, and so I think that coaching in an essence is, is the ability to bring a group of people together to work toward a common goal and achieve success or be successful, you know, win games, have high achievement. And so I think that that having all of those experiences has helped me understand what it means to lead a group of educators in a building and how to motivate them. I think that that's what it means.

Participant B shared that she has been highly influenced by her former principals as both a student and as a teacher. Citing several building principals who lead schools who are deemed as some of the most successful in Participant B's home school district, she shares that coaching is "the ability to bring a group of people together to achieve success or be successful," no matter what the target it. The final two sections will begin by looking at the importance of Participant B's experiences in building relationships and providing feedback through hard conversations both as an instructional coach and building administrator.

## *Relationships*

Of the last two themes discussed in Interview II, the theme of relationships was chiefly important to providing insight of lessons learned and practices implemented in the transfer from instructional coach to administrator. Prior to the questions pertaining to the importance of building strong relationships, Participant B shared in examples of working with specific teachers the importance of relationships. For example, when citing the importance around understanding that “there really aren’t bad teachers” or teachers who have malicious intent with students, having a relationship with those individuals to gain understanding and perspective into how their past experiences have impacted their current outlook. She also stated in the section surrounding the theme of support that relationships are the drivers of differentiated support because “you find the way each person needs support because everybody’s different.” The final crossover from relationships came when allowing teachers to see the administrator as a “real human” by “bringing feelings [into conversations] and being vulnerable.”

The first discussion around the theme of relationships centered around Participant B describing the factors needed to build and sustain relationships as an instructional coach. Participant B stated:

Being able to connect personally, trust, transparency. I think vulnerability... I guess, understanding... I think all of those together, you know, I think about the mean lady that wanted my job that was really ugly, but, you know, once she realized what my intentions were, you know, she softened up and so I think you have to have all of those components to build relationships.

Of the characteristics mentioned, personal connections, vulnerability, and understanding were all underlying sub-themes embedded within the major themes already discussed.

Evidence from this answer in conjunction with previous responses shows a clear intentionality on the part of an instructional coach to establish those norms and provide opportunities for the teacher to see them as a fellow educator who wants to ensure their success. When asked if there were differences in the factors needed to build and sustain relationships as an administrator, Participant B added that “I don’t think there’s really much difference.”

When asked to pause and think how her experience of building relationships as a coach impacted her ability to create and sustain relationships as an administrator, Participant B articulated that it “goes back to perspective” because perceptions of the needs of the school look different at each level of teacher, instructional coach, and administrator. As the instructional coach, “you see the impact of all of those pieces [in a school], and then moving into the administrative role you now see impact of those moving pieces so it’s easier to understand all the different needs of your stakeholders.” Citing how her perspectives have changed from her time as a teacher, instructional coach, and now as an administrator, Participant B discussed the level of additional involvement that you bring into the roles and responsibilities on each level. Also, one of the key behaviors of the administrator is to understand the needs not just of the building but each individual staff member in the building. She concluded with stating that it is realizing that everyone is involved and everyone “plays a part” in ensuring the success of a school.

Another theme that was present in Interview I was Participant B’s learned lessons in how to balance professional and personal relationships in the role of instructional coach and as building administrator. When asked how she balanced the shift of paradigm

from personal to professional relationships, Participant B described how she had several instances where it was difficult to separate those friendships within the work that she was engaging in as an administrator. For example, early in her administrative career, Participant B was tasked with evaluating a teacher she had a personal relationship with. She shared how it “was challenging” to build the foundational trust that “I wasn't out to get her and I wasn't going to leave her like I was going to support her through it, and offer ideas and support.”

Citing another recent example in the difficulty of balancing personal and professional relationships, Participant B described how she has had to learn to balance the personal relationship with her current instructional coach. She shared that in her first year at her current school, she and the instructional coach “worked very closely together and [we] got really close with [each other] on a personal level because like we were the outcasts... so we just stuck together.” However, as new administrative expectations were implemented in her school where it has been “made very clear that you have to have that fine line between those personal relationships and a professional relationship because you are their boss.” With the changing of leadership, expectations of not only professional practices balanced with personal relationships change, but also the dynamics of staff interactions. Participant B’s relationship with her instructional coach had dissolved and working together has become uncomfortable. When asked to elaborate, Participant B shared that it has been imperative to build “thick skin” because in the coaching role, you could technically choose to “not water the rocks” [work with teachers who do not want assistance] but as an administrator your job is to work to improve everyone, even the resistant. Asked about what she has learned through this process, Participant B shared “I

think that's one thing if I could go back and change would be that keeping that professional line drawn [with my coach]. You know it's lonely at the top.”

The final question around the theme of relationships follows the same pattern as resistance, support, and coaching where Participant B was asked to provide meaning around her experiences with building relationships as an instructional coach as well as in an administrative role. When asked specifically how she valued the relationships in her different roles, Participant B shared that she felt that idea of relationships was part of her living out her purpose of “helping others be their best.” When speaking of how she has worked to build those relationships grounded in personal growth in a school setting, Participant B shared that “you want to help others [teachers] be their best because that impacts children and student learning.” She continued that it is about “helping them [teachers] understand that I believe in them and that I trust the experience as well as what the data says.” Speaking to the investment she makes in relationships, Participant B shared that taking opportunities to support and be there for teachers provides the backbone for relational trust needed among staff and the administration.

From the meaning-making response within the theme of relationships, evidence shows that one of Participant B’s core values is to build strong relationships with everyone she works with. Tying to her physical and spiritual purpose, Interview I and II provide ample evidence to support this assertion. The final theme for data presentation and analysis will examine the theme of hard conversations and how Participant B balances the necessity to have hard conversations while still ensuring she builds strong relationships that are supporting and coaching in nature.

### *Hard Conversations*

In what has already been discussed in part with the theme of resistance, the theme of hard conversations was the last to be discussed in Interview II. In specifically discussing the individualized supports for teachers, Participant B shared several accounts of needing to be open to conversations and being “willing to have the hard conversations and support the people in your building.” In reviewing data from Interview I, Participant B shared that she was “afraid of having hard conversations because she was a people pleaser.” When asked how she learned to combat that fear of having those hard conversations and not feel like a people pleaser, Participant B discussed how the “number one role as an administrator is to protect everyone in this building. And you have to have students’ best interest at heart in, in all of your decisions, and so you either have a hard conversation or students suffer in some way.” Describing a lesson in leadership that she has learned from her Director of Schools, Participant B shared the imperativeness of hard conversations as “10 minutes of an uncomfortable conversation saves you 180 days of misery.”

Participant B then provided a recent example of a hard conversation with one of her teachers. When the teacher failed to handle a student behavior per the school’s expectations, Participant B had to discuss the behavior with the teacher. When asked how she knew that she would need to have this conversation, Participant B shared that “I have to have this conversation with her [the teacher] because that is not how we handle those situations. And if I let it go, I’m setting a precedent for what happens next. And I’m

saying that it's okay.” Describing the process and the impact of this particular conversation, Participant B shared:

It's always a coaching, it's always teaching. And so we talked about different ways that she could have handled that. And she didn't leave beat down. She knew she was wrong. But I think learning how to have those conversations, having gone through that coaching experience, and then really understanding that everything you do impacts children and their future. And so I think just having had all those experiences like it's, that's what leads you to be able to do these things.

In both the response around the importance of having hard conversations as well as the example provided by Participant B, one central commonality is being willing to meet the moment head on while also looking at the conversation through the lens of coaching and continuous improvement. By Participant B having the relationship with the teacher and using modes of support and coaching to bring about a change of practice, the teacher in the situation was able to leave not feeling down about themselves but with a set of specific actions and strategies to implement in the future.

When asked what advice she would give an educator coming into the role of instructional coach around the theme of hard conversations, Participant B shared that the “greatest advice is to address a behavior or address a situation in a timely manner, because the more time that passes, the harder it is to [long pause] get your point across... the longer you wait, the more you make it seem like [the action] was okay.” When asked if there would be different or additional advice that she would give an instructional coach moving into the administrative role, Participant B stated “Just to hit it head on.” When asked to elaborate on her statement, Participant B continued with:

I would say you don't want to have that hard conversation when you're angry. You want to make sure that you give it some thought. And maybe even collaborate with the peer. Never, never, never be afraid to call and ask for support or advice or toss the idea out and get multiple perspectives. Always give due process, you know, never assume guilt. But, you know, make sure that you know the whole story and not let too much time pass before addressing.

It is clear that Participant B's roadmap to successfully navigating hard conversations begins with addressing the behavior head on and in a timely manner. However, she does caution to go into the conversation having as many of the facts as possible and seeking to understand rather than cast blame or guilt. Finally, Participant B was very clear that if the administrator is unwilling to have the hard conversations around actions or behaviors, then he or she is saying that those behaviors are acceptable and part of the school's culture.

The final discussion around the theme of hard conversations asked Participant B to reflect on how her experiences with having those hard conversations impacted who she has become as a school administrator. Participant B discussed how having hard conversations has "established a level of respect throughout the building." Discussing a recent hard conversation around the behavior of group of teachers, she stated that "once [the behavior] was addressed, there was a level of respect that was gained throughout the building. And I think it set a different precedent throughout building." Asked to further elaborate on the impact of the conversation, Participant B shared that "it was instant culture changer because... by addressing some of those behaviors you gain a level of respect throughout the building." When asked how addressing that group of teachers impacted the perceived level of support for teachers in the building, Participant B shared,

“things that I was willing to investigate or get involved in. They never had that support, you know, they'd never had those conversations before.”

In discussing the final theme of hard conversations, Participant B shared that what once was an act of fear and uncertainty has become a practice of ensuring that the behaviors that are best for students and their learning environment are implemented building-wide. Having the confidence to have hard conversations as a leader ultimately seeks to challenge the status quo as well as behaviors that undermine the school culture and purpose of learning. However, as Participant B shares, having hard conversations is a combination of the other themes (resistance, coaching, support, relationships) explored in Interview II.

### *Discussion of Two Quotes*

Interview II concluded with the researcher asking Participant B to provide further explanation and context around two quotes from Interview I. When asked to further explain the meaning behind the quote of "I learned how to soften muscle from that coach with the whistle to the coach with a soft heart and kind demeanor and understanding of other people," Participant B discussed how her transition from middle grades teaching and athletic coaching to an elementary setting with younger students and seeing how teachers worked and interacted with younger students had a profound impact on her. When asked how that perspective shift impacted her transition into the coaching role over her ten years, Participant B stated:

A transition from the idea of I am just coming into school and doing a job to, [but] this [job] is kind of who I am. I've had somebody tell me that teaching shouldn't define you, but it really does like you have a passion for these kids you want the best for them and it wasn't until I realized what they didn't have, and what I could

give them through coaching and supporting teachers that supported the kids and then moving into administration, you know what you give the teachers what they give the students. And you know what they get each day.

In discussing how she learned to see the alignment of her instructional support and coaching to teachers and their impacts on kids, Participant B expressed that in her role as a coach there was the idea of knowing you have got to love on them [the teachers] so they're willing to love on the kids.

The final discussion of Interview II asked Participant B to provide further explanation on another statement from Interview I. When talking about coaching and walking that tightrope of a coach and administrator in Interview I, Participant B (speaking on coaching) stated, "I think that it's always embedded within you, but you're the administrator, and sometimes it's hard to remember that I am the administrator, as opposed to coaching support." When asked how she continues to embed the instincts of coaching and supports while balancing her administrative responsibilities, Participant B said:

Well, I think, like I said, you know, I think relationships are a strength and a weakness because I always like to get to the heart of people. But that requires you to cross some of those professional and personal lines, and I think. I think it's just going to take more experience to see what works best. You know because I, in my role like I'm, I'm going to meet the expectations of my administrator, if my administrator has that fine line drawn between professional and personal relationships and I've got to, I've got to see if that works better, you know.

When asked how she would define what teacher growth looks like in her role as an administrator who has a coaching background, Participant B shared:

I think teacher growth would be defined in identifying areas of strength and areas of need. And over the course of time, being able to quantify or qualify a difference in that, in those outcomes, you know, whether it's management of the classroom, or any of the aspects of instruction. Growth in sports, growth in. Our [Interim Principal] talked a lot about last year, collecting data points, and not just academic data points, but how many kids actually came to school today with their homework or how many kids participated in your lesson as opposed compared to yesterday and what was it that I did differently. And I think just constantly tracking data, whether it's academic or social or emotional or, you know, how many kids got to class on time or earlier than they did yesterday because of something that I did differently in the classroom. So, I think, teacher growth constantly looking for ways to improve any kind of data collected.

When asked to describe her role in teacher growth, Participant B concluded the interview by stating that “Helping make them aware of what that [teacher growth] actually is because I've never thought about calculating growth and improvement and the way that you know it's solely been from data, academic data, or achievement growth.”

### **Similarities to the Phenomenon (Interview II)**

In analyzing the similarities for both participants from Interview II, both participants expressed high levels of ownership in how their individual practices and improvement efforts drove building-wide initiatives as well as personalized supports for individual teachers. One aspect that was chiefly prominent in both participants' interviews was the value and importance placed on building and sustaining relationships built on trust, empathy, perspective, and professional autonomy. While not all themes made a direct cross-over between Participant A and Participant B, there were instances where a theme from Participant A [i.e. Autonomy] was present in responses from Participant B, such as allowing teachers to make their own professional learning decisions.

Another similarity of themes for both participants stems from the impact that their experience as an instructional coach has had on their administrative practices. Learning through lived experience of how to work with professional adults to lead improvement while also engaging in activities that forced both the participants and the teachers outside of their comfort zones improved their ability and self-efficacy to engage in those practices as administrators.

Data analysis also confirmed that while both participants did not use Ericsson and Pool's (2017) exact terms of "purposeful practice" or "deliberate practice," both participants engaged in instructional coaching moves and strategies that involved working to set well-defined, specific goals that were focused on improvement through the use of feedback that extended outside of the teacher's current comfort zone. Chapter V will provide specific findings that address Research Question II and the impact that creating these opportunities had on both participants and the teachers they worked with.

The data collected and analyzed provides a clear view of the impact that serving in the capacity of an instructional coach had on both participants' professional outlook and practices as an administrator. While some of these themes represented behaviors tied to specific actions for improvement, evidence suggests that the most important factors to ensuring an effective transition from the instructional coaching role to the administrative role are chiefly in being able to understand and interpret individual and collective behavior while also working to utilize and implement research around andragogy.

## Chapter Summary

Data gathered utilizing Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing method from both participants was used to explain their relationship to the phenomenon of using their background in instructional coaching as they transitioned into the role of administrator. Interview I provided each participant's background and experiences in relation from the transfer from coach to administrator. Subsequently, questions for Interview II were generated by coding and analysis of Interview I that produced themes for each participant's transition. These themes from Interview II provided data for how the participants defined their experiences in relation to the phenomenon of transitioning from instructional coach to building administrator.

The data collected and presented throughout this chapter sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: In what ways do administrators describe and experience using their background as an instructional coach to personalize the supports of teachers in their school?

RQ 2: In what ways do administrators describe and experience using their background as an instructional coach to engage their teachers in purposeful practice?

The data collected will be discussed in Chapter V centers around the characteristics and practices that were specific to both instructional coaching and administrative roles. The

following chapter will present the findings from the study in light of the research questions, implications for future practice, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER V:**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This study sought to explore how administrators who have previous backgrounds with instructional coaching aimed to personalize supports for individuals and groups of teachers through their leadership. The intent was to explore the phenomenon using Ericsson and Pool's (2017) expertise theory to uncover how administrators with instructional coaching backgrounds worked to grow their teachers to expert levels. Using the strategy of purposeful practice, the researcher interviewed Participant A and Participant B using Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing method to determine how their backgrounds and experiences, along with their current perceptions of their leadership, allowed for teacher growth using purposeful practice. In instances where purposeful practice extended into Ericsson and Pool's (2017) "gold standard" of deliberate practice, the researcher highlighted that data and used it to inform next steps with research. Table 5.1 provides a brief summary of both purposeful and deliberate practice.

**Table 5.1***Purposeful vs Deliberate Practice Comparison*

Purposeful Practice	Deliberate Practice
Well-defined, specific goals	Practice that not only knows where it is going but how it is going to get there
Focused	Practice within a field that already has a developed knowledge base that can define expertise
Involves feedback	Practice that involves a teacher coach to provide feedback
Forces one out of their comfort zone	

Seidman's (2013) model for interviewing was condensed from three interviews to two interviews to allow for maximum participation from Participant A and Participant B while also respecting the increased administrative responsibilities due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic. While Seidman (2013) ultimately endorses a three-interview method that allows for each individual interview to explore a focused life history (Interview I), details of the participants' present lived experience (Interview II), and the opportunity to reflect on meaning from the previous interviews (Interview III), Seidman (2013) allows for the modification of the structure of the phenomenological interviewing method "As long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experiences within the context of their lives..." (p. 25). Although the structure was modified, the researcher still maintained the suggested three days to a week window between interviews to maintain the continuity of the research design.

The following sections describe the findings from the interviews which explored both participants' history and experience with the shift from instructional coach to

administrator while also examining how those experiences have impacted their current perceptions of instructional leadership and working to grow the teachers under their leadership.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This section of the study will present findings in relation to both research questions asked during the study. Findings for each research question will be presented as a synthesis of data for both Participant A and Participant B within the same section. The researcher will then present connections and contradictions between both participants' experiences at the conclusion of the analysis of each research question. The goal of this section is to present data with the goal of informing conclusions, implications for future practice, and to inform further research into the transition from instructional coach to building administrator.

### ***Limitations***

There are instances where minor limitations impacted the quality of data for specific participants in the study. Although both participants met the requirements for research by serving as an administrator in the K-6 setting and also having previous experience as an instructional coach, some data, themes, and experiences differ from Participant A and Participant B due to their current roles. While Participant A serves in the capacity of building principal and has both the organizational culture and power within her scope of leadership, Participant B is still serving in the role of assistant principal. Although Participant B has been encouraged to assume the role of principal in her current district, she has continued to maintain her role of assistant principal for

reasons related to her family. Therefore, there are instances in the data where Participant A is able to speak directly to actions and practices while Participant B is able to speak more to behavioral relationships to the data. However, data from Participant B still provides insight into how instructional coaching has impacted her role as an assistant principal and how it will impact her role when she assumes a principal position in the future.

Another limitation that bears mention is the sample size for the study. While both Participant A and Participant B provided a combined six hours of interview transcripts, the original intention of the study was to include three participants. The third recruited participant (who also shared the similar background in instructional coaching and administration and serves in the same school district as Participant A and Participant B) declined to participate in the study.

### ***Research Question 1***

Research question 1 sought to explore in what ways administrators describe and experience using their background as an instructional coach to personalize the supports of teachers in their school. Participant A and Participant B both provided interview responses around their background with instructional coaching and how it currently impacts their administrative roles. The findings will be reported through themes beginning first with the importance of building balanced, sustainable relationships with staff members.

**Balancing Expectations and Reality of Instructional Coaching.** Participant A and Participant B shared throughout both sets of interviews that the roles and responsibilities they encountered as an instructional coach did not meet their expectations when entering the role of instructional coach. Citing additional responsibilities (Participant A: RTI<sup>2</sup> implementation, fidelity monitoring of interventions, administrative expectations; Participant B: RTI<sup>2</sup> implementation, fidelity monitoring of interventions, overseeing the school's Title I budget) that were added to the role of instructional coach, both participants shared how those responsibilities took away valuable time to work with teachers and be in classrooms. Both participants shared that they anticipated the bulk of their responsibilities would center around working with teachers and delivering professional development. While both participants eventually learned to balance their additional roles, they discussed how much of their early years of instructional coaching were spent learning how to balance the expectations of working with teachers while also implementing and overseeing state and federal mandated programs. As Participant B articulated about the additional roles in entering a new position, she felt a combination of unsure (of entering a new position) and overwhelmed (balancing additional responsibilities outside of coaching). These experiences align with the major challenges of implementing instructional coaching programs in school districts and schools. As has been discussed through instructional coaching research (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2006; Nuefeld & Roper, 2003; King et al., 2004), it is important that the role of instructional coaching is grounded in support of educators and improving student outcomes, not adding additional tasks that do not impact teaching or learning. This idea of balancing the

expectations of instructional coaches will be further discussed in the final sections of implications for practice and possible future studies.

**Building Balanced, Sustainable Relationships.** In relation to the research question of how Participant A and Participant B have used their backgrounds with instructional coaching to personalize supports for teachers in their schools, evidence suggests the prioritization of relationship development for instructional leaders prior to becoming engaged in specific improvements in teacher practice from the role of an instructional coach or administrator. The first, and most cited, example of personalizing supports from both was in building relationships with individual teachers and professional learning communities (PLCs). Evidence illustrates that both participants not only valued the building of strong relationships with their staffs, but that relationships were also the cornerstone for any improvement and growth efforts within their schools. This finding related to the importance of building strong relationships prior to beginning group or individual improvement efforts is supported not only by research around instructional improvement through instructional coaching (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2006) but also the literature around effective instructional leadership (Blase & Blase, 1999; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Grenny et al., 2013; Marzano, 2011; Reeves, 2016; Wiliam, 2018). When asked how to build strong relationships with teachers in the coaching role, both participants shared that it was having the ability to watch and listen as well as show their abilities to be learners with their teachers.

Both participants shared lived experiences both as coaches and as administrators that relationships were the linchpin of creating a climate and culture based on continuous

improvement in schools. Table 5.2 and Table 5.3 illustrate evidence from interview responses to provide context surrounding the role that relationships play in ensuring improvement efforts can be implemented and sustained.

**Table 5.2**

*Relationships as the Linchpin of Change- Participant A*

Evidence
<p>When asked what was learned about being an administrator as a coach, Participant A replied "...relationships, school culture, and climate was a big one, just that you cannot do accomplish anything without those being in place. And building relationships with teachers and students, you know, kind of outside of the classroom and how that looks differently. And then also, you know, just, I guess, it led me to be more open minded about what other classrooms can look like, and what's best, you know, that you said that definition of success like that can look more than one way, and that there's different ways to achieve that. "</p>
<p>When asked about best practices learned as a coach, Participant A replied, "I think building relationships, recognizing and celebrating successes is definitely one of the main ones."</p>
<p>When asked on why she decided to begin applying for principal positions, Participant A replied, "I think first, like having a vision for what improvement can look like in a classroom. And seeing that in action. I think feeling the outcome of building those relationships, and the impact that that can make on instruction and student learning. Having hard conversations was a big one, and being willing to initiate hard conversations, or to come back after our first conversation and ensure that the conflict has been addressed, and that, you know, kids are getting what they need."</p>

**Table 5.3***Relationships as the Linchpin of Change- Participant B*

Evidence
<p>When asked what was learned about being an administrator as a coach, Participant B replied, “I think watching because I only had [school principal at SCHOOL 3] for eight years, I watched him and I watched how he served his community, and the importance of building relationships and 100% supporting teachers and just being in the thick of it all the time.”</p>
<p>When asked why teachers perceived her role positively, Participant B answered, “I think ability to build relationships and know that I wasn't coming in to judge that was coming into support. I think that was the biggest thing is that it was a no judgment zone.”</p>
<p>When asked how to build relationships while also working closely with the principal, Participant B shared, “It was tricky sometimes, because you go into a classroom and you'd see some things that were going on that you knew that you knew were not best practice that you knew were not safe for kids or best for kids, or even kind to kids, you know, so you didn't want to be the tattletale, but you also knew that your sole reason for being there was to grow students and help them learn and grow and help teachers help students learn and grow.”</p>

Evidence also suggested that the practice of building strong relationships depended on the explicit focus of building collegiality and trust while also recognizing individual and collective growth efforts as a building administrator. One paramount finding from the value of relationships, trust, collegiality, and recognizing growth is that the transition from instructional coach to administrator focused on the transfer of how to work with educators in a collaborative sense rather than a strictly managerial sense. Both

participants shared that they both had missteps when trying to implement change initiatives when they sought to lead improvement efforts without building the relational capital needed to sustain the changes sought. While the managerial responsibilities of the administrator are still present, evidence from both participants provides a framework for embedding practices for building relationships learned through the instructional coaching experience to implement managerial practices that are based around individual and collective improvement.

A secondary theme that was present in the data analysis was the ability to balance the need to develop just enough of a personal relationship with teachers as both coach and administrator while not violating the boundaries and norms of professional relationships. Participant B cited evidence from both her time as an instructional coach and as an administrator which discussed the delicate balance of having relationships that were personal but did not violate professional norms or expectations. In Participant B's experience, when relationships tipped more toward the side of personal, lines of coaching and feedback became harder to maintain. Participant A shared examples where she has worked with her present instructional coach to build relationships with all teachers. Both participants alluded to the idea that the instructional coach could pick and choose which relationships to nurture and improve whereas the administrator has the responsibility to create positive relationships with all teachers. Also, both participants shared the need to express vulnerability and allow your teachers to see you as a person, not just as a supervisor.

Evidence suggests that prior to engaging in any improvement cycle or practices with other professionals, both instructional coaches and administrators must have taken the time to build strong relationships built on trust and empathy with their fellow professional colleagues (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2006; Blase & Blase, 1999; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Grenny et al., 2013; Marzano, 2011; Reeves, 2016; Wiliam, 2018). True success in both the role of instructional coach and administrator roles first and foremost depends on the prioritization and ability to cultivate strong interpersonal relationships that are able to straddle the line of being personal enough without crossing professional boundaries. It is empathy and the ability to share vulnerability with teachers that allow for strong relationships to be built. One final thought on the transition from instructional coaching to the role of administrator is that there will be instances of failure, but it is important to prioritize self-reflection as part of the self-improvement process.

**The Importance of Practicing Self-Reflection.** Another finding from the analysis of data was the role of self-reflection for both personal and teacher improvements for both participants. While self-reflection was a prominent and identified theme throughout Participant A's interviews, both participants shared their experiences with self-reflection specifically around hard conversations as well as learning how to have empathetic and authentic conversations in the role of instructional coach. The ability to self-reflect has also impacted how both participants have sought to lead their schools. Interview summaries provide evidence that Participant A not only works to improve these skills with her teachers but also with her current instructional coach and assistant principal. The ability to self-reflect on practices and actions as an instructional coach shows direct correlation to practices of self-reflection as a school administrator.

Participant B's exploration of self-reflection was centered around her specific actions regarding coaching, conversations, and relationships. While there was not a dedicated theme of self-reflection that was similar to Participant A, analysis of data provided evidence of implicit use of self-reflection for improvement of practice. When reflecting on her time as a coach, Participant B articulated that it was important to lean on the experience she learned from the administrators she worked with in her roles as teacher and instructional coach to learn how to deal with specific scenarios. She also referenced the idea of self-reflection in the example of implementing new programs or initiatives as a coach and how she learned that through her mistakes that she needed to support teachers in their implementation of those new programs. Participant B also shared that her purpose in having hard conversations with teachers was getting teachers to self-reflect on their actions and outcomes of those actions to determine a new course of action. The final theme of resistance was evident in Participant B's reflections with each of the key themes outlined in Interview II. Participant B consistently discussed how each experience as an instructional coach and also as an administrator has broadened her perspectives on resistance, support, relationships, coaching, and having hard conversations.

**Leadership Lessons Learned in Instructional Coaching.** Another theme prevalent in the sets of interviews for both participants was the learned leadership lessons they both experienced during their time as instructional coaches. Both Participant A and Participant B shared that they learned the value and the impact of leadership within a school building that directly influenced their decisions to enter the role of administration. Beginning with Participant A, she frequently stated that she learned more about the

practices she did not want to implement as a school leader during her time as an instructional coach. Citing the importance of relationships, school climate, and school culture in her time as an instructional coach, Participant A learned quickly that inattention to those key cultural pieces as an administrator directly worked against any improvement efforts for individual and collective growth. Participant A also shared that “administration, when done correctly, is coaching in so many ways... that when you're looking to move everyone forward, and they have that rationale about why...they buy into wanting to improve together.”

While Participant A cited lessons of leadership that she did not want to implement, Participant B shared several examples of how the different building principals she worked for as an instructional coach and administrator impacted her outlook on leadership. Participant B shared that she learned firsthand the value of creating a sense of community and building relationships from her principal she worked with as an instructional coach. She also shared the importance of being present and visible in schools and attending to both physical and social and emotional needs of staff.

**Transfer of Specific Coaching Practices.** When analyzing evidence of specific practices that transferred from the instructional coach role to the administrator role, several practices were learned and sharpened during both participants' times as instructional coaches that impacted practices they have implemented as building administrators. In her time as an instructional coach, Participant A stated that she engaged in a coaching cycle with almost every teacher in her school due to high teacher turnover. Participant A defined three themes (building strong relationships, self-

reflection, and coaching) and how they related to providing personalized supports for teachers that she used as an instructional coach and currently as an administrator.

Analyzing the findings around the theme of feedback, Participant A shared how her experience with not receiving coaching and feedback both as an educator and as an instructional coach impacted how she worked to provide personalized supports for her teachers. Participant A reported that every teacher, regardless of years of experience or mastery level, receives a base-layer of support from building administrators and the building instructional coach. Participant A also shared the need to provide feedback that is closely aligned to goals and needs of teachers and not simply feedback in isolation. This purposeful construction and alignment of feedback to existing goals provides both instructional leaders and teachers the opportunity to measure true progress toward those specific improvement efforts (Pink, 2011; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Marzano, 2013; Stigler & Miller, 2018; Grenny et al., 2013; Reeves, 2016; Stone & Heen, 2014; Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018). It is this alignment and measurement that generates improved practices and learning outcomes for students and teachers alike.

Another theme evident in the findings was that Participant A found the “follow-through” piece that she had felt that she was missing in the role of instructional coach. Citing that all the build-up to improvement she experienced in coaching was the same, Participant A now felt in a position as an administrator to actually see the improvement through. Participant A is able to embed the goal setting with follow-up and follow-through with the use of professional learning plans that every educator in her building engages in.

In analyzing the specific practices that transferred from instructional coach to administrator for Participant B, evidence suggests the majority of the transfer was with learning how to work with adults and build relationships. While Participant B engaged in providing goals for teachers in her role of instructional coach and administrator, evidence from both interviews centered around working with grade level PLCs to create goals and monitor progress toward achieving those goals. When asked for specific examples where she had success with implementing specific professional or pedagogical goals with teachers, she stated that, “I don’t know if I have enough experience with that yet.” As Participant B reflected, she shared one area of improvement is “that I would also like to get better at is setting those goals for teachers.”

One possible reason for this lack of transfer from instructional coach to administrator could be due to Participant B working for school principals who do not have an instructional coaching background. Also, the split nature of Participant B’s first administrative assignment, the shortened year at the K-12 school (due to COVID-19 closures), and being in her second year of schooling during a pandemic as well as losing a building principal in the middle of her first year at her current school have all impacted the use of specific coaching strategies and goals settings with teachers.

One direct connection that both participants shared was their confidence and their ability to plan professional development and also follow through on the implementation of the professional development. Both participants referenced the need to help teachers improve practice because that would have the greatest impact on students and student learning. Both participants also shared that they have been able to use their previous

experience in coaching to identify professional development needs for individual teachers and emphasized the need for providing differentiated opportunities that would target both novice and expert teachers in their professional growth. Another similarity that both participants shared was their confidence in being able to see implementation and changes through involving professional development. Both Participant A and Participant B shared instances as coaches where they had the authority to coach people to change but did not have authority to ensure the change was implemented. Both participants shared that they had much more confidence in their abilities to see improvement efforts through in their role as administrators.

**Research Question 1 Conclusion.** Research Question 1 sought to explore in what ways administrators describe and experience using their background as an instructional coach to personalize the supports of teachers in their school. In conclusion, findings show that prior to initiating improvements for individual teachers or the school collective, it is imperative to create opportunities to build and sustain strong relationships as a building administrator. Both participants cited that the most important practice and leadership lesson learned during instructional coaching and in the transition to administration was the ability to create relationships built on empathy, trust, and the general well-being of staff members. These findings align with Lezotte and Snyder's (2011) effective school research around the correlates of high expectations for success as well as the research on the importance strong instructional leadership (Marzano, 2011; Wiliam, 2018; Stigler & Miller, 2018; Reeves, 2016). Once these relationships begin to form, the transfer of specific instructional coaching practices and lessons of leadership learned through instructional coaching can begin to take root. All administrators (regardless of

background) must prioritize building a strong climate a culture focused on relationships first before any change is initiated.

### ***Research Question 2***

RQ 2: In what ways do administrators describe and experience using their background as an instructional coach to engage their teachers in purposeful practice?

Research Question 2 utilized the same data from both interviews with the explicit purpose of identifying how both participants describe how their background as an instructional coach enabled them to engage their teachers in purposeful practice. While both participants embedded practices related to the facilitation of opportunities for creating well-defined specific goals that centered around feedback and pushing individuals outside of their comfort zones (Pink, 2011; Ericsson & Pool, 2017; Stigler & Miller, 2018; Grenny et al., 2013; Marzano, 2007; Marzano, 2013), data analysis revealed Participant A was able to create more opportunities for purposeful practice due to her role of being the building principal. Although Participant B reported that she was not able to deliberately create opportunities for purposeful practice in her assistant principal role, several key practices and actions tipped toward the use of specific components of purposeful practice. The first discussion will analyze each participant's ability to create well-defined, specific goals for individuals and groups.

**Well-Defined, Specific Goals.** Utilizing Ericsson and Pool's (2017) expertise theory and model of purposeful practice to build expertise, evidence was analyzed to determine the trait of purposeful practice around setting specific goals for improvement.

Throughout questions from Interview I and the analysis of themes from Interview II, both participants shared instances where they utilized their background to help teachers identify specific improvements and write goals around improvement efforts. Beginning with Participant A, she outlined the importance of not only having well defined, specific goals, but also the importance of providing autonomy to build ownership of those goals. Teachers are consistently urged to pursue improvement goals based on their own self-reflection and data analysis process. Participant A also shared how she worked with teachers individually through improvement plans and summative conferences to ensure that goals were explicitly written and tied to student improvement. She also shared how she always wanted to ensure that feedback her teachers received was centered around their improvement goals through both formal and informal observations.

Participant B described how her ability to diagnose and provide feedback through the coaching and evaluation process enabled her to help teachers set appropriate improvement goals. Participant B stated that she could provide a reinforcement and refinement area through the evaluation process, but she learned that the key to seeing improvement at scale was through the use of setting action goals that she would continue to monitor as she continued to work with that teacher. As previously reported, Participant B shared that she wanted to improve in helping teachers to set individual goals and the successes she has experienced around goal setting has been seen mostly with grade-level PLCs. Although there were no specific examples where goal setting with individuals has proven successful, Participant B's acknowledgement of setting her own improvement goal in this area exhibits her ability to self-reflect for personal improvement.

In analysis of the data, it is evident that Participant A has had more experience and impact in setting goals for her staff. While Participant B has worked around setting goals, one explanation for the difference of experiences for both participants is the role that each fulfils. While differences in practice and experiences differed for both participants, each participant did show research based alignment in the goal-setting process that improved individual and group performance (Ericsson & Pool, 2017; Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2006; Grenny et al., 2013; Hattie, 2012; Stone & Heen, 2014; Reeves, 2016; Marzano, 2011; Marzano, 2007; Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018; Stigler & Miller, 2018). Participant A transitioned from the realm of instructional coaching in the same building for three years into the principal position. Participant A has been able to establish the culture of goals, practice, and feedback because she is the key driver of the school's culture. While Participant B has had more coaching and administrative experience, she has been subject to the cultures established by her principals in her role as an assistant principal. While the practice of goal setting is important, Participant B must work within the confines of her principal's expectations for interactions with teachers.

**Focused Feedback.** While experiences around setting goals differed for both Participant A and Participant B, there were several common instances where each participant was able to engage in providing focused feedback around specific goals for individual teachers (Ericsson & Pool, 2017). Both participants expressed how their desire for feedback as teachers and instructional coaches shaped how they strive to provide feedback for their teachers around specific practices.

Participant A shared that many of the practices and processes for providing feedback to teachers are the same that she engaged in as a coach. The difference was her ability to follow-up and follow-through with the feedback that has changed as a principal. Participant A also shared that she, her assistant principal, and instructional coach all seek to provide feedback that is in alignment to individual teachers' improvement goals. This practice aligns notably with research around goal setting and coaching for improvement (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2006; Ericsson & Pool, 2017; Grenny et al., 2013; Hattie, 2012; Stone & Heen, 2014; Reeves, 2016; Marzano, 2011; Marzano, 2007; Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018). What is probably the most defining aspect of the feedback process for Participant A is ensuring "even if I provided feedback outside of their goals, I always would come back to either one, how it would impact or relate to their goals, or two give them something that would help them feel like they're moving forward with their goals as well." Participant A also reported that her feedback is grounded in the framework of coaching and that the use of these coaching conversations around targeted feedback take place during coaching conversations, professional learning plans, summative conferences, and the TEAM evaluation process. This use of feedback is supported not only by research on providing feedback (Stone & Heen, 2014; Reeves, 2016; Hattie, 2012) but also extends into the fields of teacher evaluation (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018; Marzano, 2011; Marzano, 2007; Marshall, 2013; Danielson, 2012; Weisberg et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Danielson, 2001; Toch, 2016) and coaching for instructional improvement. Also, the theme of providing feedback to her teachers was present in the other themes of autonomy, relationships, self-reflection, and coaching analyzed in Interview II.

Participant B's experience with providing feedback to teachers began in her experience of using the TEAM evaluation model in her coaching conversations with teachers as an instructional coach. Through the use of coaching cycles, Participant B shared how the ability to engage in the TEAM training as an instructional coach impacted how she viewed the evaluation and feedback process as one that is more about improving student learning outcomes rather than teacher practices in isolation. Other examples of providing feedback have been centered around her specific time as a split assistant principal where she stated that she felt like she was an instructional coach as well as assistant principal. However, due to the nature of the themes for Interview II, there is not sufficient evidence to describe Participant B's use of feedback to build expertise in her teachers in relation to goals. While she does engage in the feedback process through evaluations, there was no evidence of practice to demonstrate impact of feedback on building expertise for Participant B.

Data for experiences in providing feedback, like creating well-defined, specific goals was more evident for Participant A and her specific experiences than for Participant B. One reason for this finding is due to feedback being a theme that was identified in Interview I for Participant A that was also analyzed in-depth for Interview II. While Participant B did provide instances where the practice of providing feedback around specific goals was mentioned, the evidence from Participant B failed to provide explicit connections and examples of the role of feedback. As with the theme of goals, it is possible that an explanation for the lack of specificity being tied to Participant B being in the assistant principal role. The researcher also failed to embed questions around feedback for Interview II for Participant B so the phenomenon could be explored and

reported. However, evidence does show that Participant A's desire to receive feedback, her practices in providing feedback as a coach, and working with teachers around setting goals have improved her ability to transfer the practice of providing feedback to teachers.

**Extending Outside One's Comfort Zone.** The final analysis of determining if participants were able to engage their teachers in purposeful practice examines their ability to move teachers outside of their comfort zone. In discussing the maintaining of strong relationships, Participant A shared that a difficulty in maintaining relationships occurs when "you have to challenge people with hard conversations, and ask things of them that are uncomfortable...ask them to venture outside of what they've tried before." Participant A also shared how her experience as an instructional coach taught her that teachers sometimes attacked "easy" goals related to planning or posting objectives on the board. As she has moved into the role of principal, she has tried to create an environment where teachers realize it's safe to try new things. Participant A stated, "it's the things where you have to put yourself out there that feel hard and challenging and don't feel as safe for teachers." As research around improvement of practices in both groups and individuals has shown (Pink, 2011; Ericsson & Pool, 2017; Stigler & Miller, 2018; Ericsson, Krampe, & Romer, 1993; Gladwell 2008), it is imperative that instructional coaches and administrators have a keen sense of the current ability levels of those they are coaching to ensure that appropriate actions and practices meet desired results. Participant A has worked to not only encourage teachers to move outside of their comfort zone, but also works to highlight teachers who are willing to take risks and celebrate both successes and failures.

While Participant B also discussed the idea of moving outside of one's comfort zone, most of the discussion surrounded around her personal and professional growth as well as the working through relationships with teachers and her current instructional coach. This again can be linked to the factors of serving four schools in her six years of being an assistant principal, serving in the role of assistant principal and not being the building principal, and finally flaws in research design and interview questions by the researcher.

**Research Question 2 Conclusion.** Data analysis provides mixed results for the implementation of Ericsson and Pool's (2017) strategy of purposeful practice to increase expertise. Although there were instances where the themes of goal setting, focused attention, feedback, and extending outside of comfort zones were present, responses for Participant A tipped more toward providing specific opportunities for purposeful practice while Participant B's results yielded limited to no findings. Several factors could have impacted the discrepancy of data between both participants and will be discussed. However, evidence was clear that Participant A has been able to structure a school culture built on continuous improvement through the use of goal setting, feedback, and moving outside of one's comfort zone.

One factor that could have influenced the data for Participant B is that she currently serves in the capacity of an assistant principal and not a building principal. Being in the role of assistant principal and working for principals who have not had the similar background in instructional coaching could have adversely impacted Participant B's ability to implement best instructional coaching practices. Another factor for the

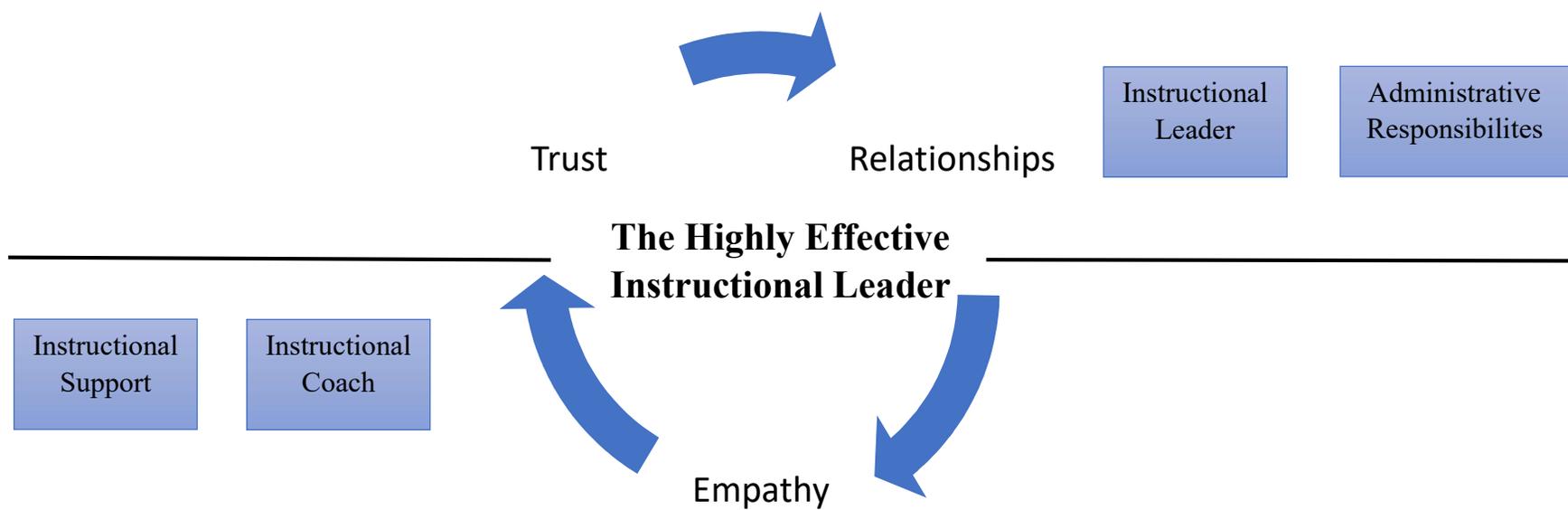
discrepancy in results could also be attributed to the themes from Interview I that were used to create the topics and questions for Interview II. While Participant A spoke to the idea of relationships and coaching as Participant B did, much of Participant A's data centered around specific practices of providing feedback, autonomy, opportunities for self-reflection, and coaching. The majority of Participant B's themes centered around balancing the interpersonal themes of resistance, support, and hard conversations. Therefore, data from Participant B focused more on how those themes have impacted her and her practices, while Participant A was able to provide specific, concrete examples of embedding purposeful practices. Recommendations and suggestions for future research will be made at the conclusion of Chapter V to identify remedies to these discrepancies.

### ***Implications for Practice in Context***

In analysis of interview data, it was evident that there is an imbalance of the coaching and support teachers get from their administrators and their instructional coaches. Just as we seek to provide equity among classrooms in buildings, schools in districts, and districts throughout the state, we should also seek to provide similar experiences to improve individual and collective practices for teachers. Although instructional coaching is a newer phenomenon to be implemented within districts, seeking to provide the base layer of support for all coaches regardless of their school and background should be a priority for all school districts. School districts can begin creating these opportunities for instructional improvement by implementing structured coaching cycles for instructional coaches within their district. Both participants in the study described the desire to engage in purposeful conversations with feedback to improve their

practices as instructional coaches. If one path to administration is through instructional coaching, districts can begin seeing their efforts to improve the practice and efficacy of instructional coaches having a direct impact as these instructional coaches become building principals.

Although there are several paths to an administrative role and other leadership positions within the K-12 educational setting, this study has been able to provide a framework that all leaders (with a coaching background or not) can follow around ensuring that specific practices and priorities are in place to help guide new administrators and leaders to success. The framework referenced in Figure 5.1 emphasizes the need for the Highly Effective Instructional Leader to be able to maintain the delicate balance of walking the line of instructional support through coaching and administrative responsibilities. In both roles, it is imperative that the highly effective instructional leader is the model of continuous improvement and learning in their building. When the highly effective instructional leader is willing to move outside of their comfort zone, they set the climate necessary for sustained improvement. As research on instructional coaching (Knight, 2006; Aguilar, 2013; King et al., 2004; Nuefeld & Roper, 2003) and this study outlined, there is a necessary balance that highly effective instructional leaders must maintain between the roles of instructional coach providing instructional support and of the administrator serving as the true instructional leader.



**Figure 5.1: Framework for the Highly Effective Instructional Leader**

This framework is built on the foundation of building strong relationships of trust and empathy while seeking to help every individual reach their maximum potential. As Lezotte and Snyder (2011) shared, “professionals continue to learn and grow within the profession [education] itself. To do so, they must have a process that is based on both new learning and ongoing support” (p. 53). The role of the Highly Effective Instructional Leader is to balance both the personal and professional needs of both individuals and the organization to continue to seek improvement. Beginning with the focus on people, not programs, and relationships, not specific outcomes, Highly Effective Instructional Leaders seek to grow with their people and coach continuous improvement that becomes the *modus operandi* for the organization.

Relationships emerged as the fulcrum for the study for how the Highly Effective Instructional Leader balances their administrative responsibilities with their backgrounds of leading instructional improvements in schools and classrooms. Research from Lezotte and Snyder (2011) confirms that the principal’s primary responsibility is to be the school’s instructional leader. It is through intentional moves that involve both best practices instructional coaching (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2006, King et al., 2004; Nuefeld & Roper, 2003) as well as building expertise through purposeful practice and pushing individuals and groups to engage in learning and growth outside of the comfort zone (Ericsson & Pool, 2017; Pink, 2011; Grenny et al., 2013; Stigler & Miller 2018; Blase & Blase, 1999). Whether in the form of instructional coaching or administrative practices, the research supports the findings from this study that relationships are a foundational element for instructional coaching and instructional leadership. However, in this study, relationships and the intentional devotion of time to not only developing relationships but

also to also build them organically with intentionality became paramount. Thus, iterative training for leaders who want to successfully walk the tightrope of instructional coaching and administrative leadership should be prioritized around cultivating and sustaining relationships that can withstand the productive struggle that systematic improvement will produce.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

As already discussed, limitations existed in this study due to several factors. While both participants met the initial criteria of serving as administrators with a background in instructional coaching, the difference in Participant A being a principal and Participant B being an assistant principal might have provided for less comparative data. Also, the difference in Participant A's themes being grounded in specific actions while Participant B's themes centered around interpersonal aspects might have also skewed potential data for comparative purposes. Future research would benefit by seeking participants with not only similar backgrounds but also similar positions. Also, future studies should include more participants that incorporate varied backgrounds in order to further clarify themes and patterns of experiences as they relate to balancing the background of instructional coaching with administrative responsibilities.

Another recommendation for future research would be to not solely rely on self-reported data through the interview process from the administrators. One way to mitigate the reliance on self-reported data would be to conduct surveys with teachers from various schools to identify principals who embed the characteristics and practices of purposeful practice. This process could also take in to account the perspectives of teachers who work

with these administrators to cross reference the perceptions of the administrators with the lived experiences and perspectives of the teachers they lead.

One final set of recommendations centers around research for strictly instructional coaches. Analyzing experiences with coaches building credibility and the impact it has on teacher perception and school culture would provide insight into the experiences of instructional coaches who come into a grade band in which they have no teaching experience (like both participants did in this study). This study could also analyze how instructional coaches balance their new grade bands while also learning how to coach teachers without having specific experience in that grade band. Finally, a study in analyzing the specific impact the relationships between instructional coaches and teachers would provide specific insight into the reported data from this study on how building relationships is the most important lever to beginning instructional improvement.

## **Conclusion**

Data obtained using Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interview method allowed for an exploration of the path of two administrators who have worked to embed their instructional coaching backgrounds into their administrative roles. While the outcomes have differed due to circumstances (pandemic, job title, building cultures, etc.), evidence is clear that the background of instructional coaching has had a positive impact on both Participant A and Participant B's values and practices for leadership. Beginning with the prioritization of relationships, both participants expressed the need for personal improvement and collective improvement to be grounded in strong relationships. While having relationships does not always lead to one-hundred percent buy in, they set the path

for the organization and provide the backdrop for system level improvement. In relation to purposeful practice, relationships must exist to help teachers self-reflect and set specific improvement goals. Relationships must also be able to endure authentic feedback and coaching around those goals while finally having the teachers feel supported in moving outside of their comfort zones.

When these relationships have taken root and the culture of the building becomes one centered on personal and collective improvement, the self-efficacy of all staff members improves. Evidence from both participants showed how their drive and improvement has sparked their own improvement in self-efficacy. In a culture where every individual knows they have someone pushing them to the next level, the underlying culture is one built on psychological safety where individuals feel confident in trying new techniques and have permission to learn from potential failures. As both participants shared, there are not any aspects of instructional coaching that do not translate into the role of a building administrator. However, having a background in instructional coaching and working with professional educators helps to build the social capital and professional credibility to not only suggest change, but also to support individuals and groups through the change process. One conclusion is clear: walking the tightrope of instructional coaching and administrative practice begins with focused intentionality on relationships prior to implementing improvement efforts at the school or teacher level.

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**APPENDIX A:**  
**IRB APPROVAL LETTER**

**IRB**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
Office of Research Compliance,  
010A Sam Ingram Building,  
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd  
Murfreesboro, TN 37129  
FWA: 00005331/IRB Regn. 0003571



**IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE**

Wednesday, August 11, 2021

*Protocol Title*                    **Reflective Administrative Instructional Coaching: A Qualitative Study**  
*Protocol ID*                      **22-2009 71**

*Principal Investigator*       **Ronald C. George, Jr (Student)**       *Faculty Advisor:* John L. Carter  
*Co-Investigators*                NONE  
*Investigator Email(s)*        *rcg2m@mtmail.mtsu.edu; lando.carter@mtsu.edu*  
*Department*                      ALSI  
*Funding*                            NONE

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU IRB through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category (7) *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action is tabulated below:

<i>IRB Action</i>	<b>APPROVED for ONE YEAR</b>		
<i>Date of Expiration</i>	<b>8/31/2022</b>	<i>Date of Approval:</i> 8/11/21	<i>Recent Amendment:</i> NONE
<i>Sample Size</i>	TEN (10)		
<i>Participant Pool</i>	<i>Target Population:</i> Primary Classification: <b>Healthy Adults (18 or older)</b> Specific Classification: <b>K-12 Administrators</b>		
<i>Type of Interaction</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-interventional or Data Analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Virtual/Remote/Online interaction <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>In person or physical interaction – Mandatory COVID-19 Management</b>		
<i>Exceptions</i>	1. Audio recording permitted. 2. Approved for in person data collection.		
<i>Restrictions</i>	<b>1. Mandatory SIGNED Informed Consent.</b> <b>2. Other than the exceptions above, identifiable data/artifacts, such as, audio/video data, photographs, handwriting samples, personal address, driving records, social security number, and etc., MUST NOT be collected. Recorded identifiable information must be deidentified as described in the protocol.</b> <b>3. Mandatory Final report (refer last page).</b> <b>4. The protocol details must not be included in the compensation receipt.</b> <b>5. CDC guidelines and MTSU safe practice must be followed</b>		
<i>Approved Templates</i>	<i>IRB Templates:</i> Signature Informed Consent <i>Non-MTSU Templates:</i> Recruitment Script		
<i>Research Inducement</i>	NONE		
<i>Comments</i>	NONE		

**APPENDIX B:**  
**RECRUITMENT PROTOCOL**

***Study Title*** Walking the Tightrope: Becoming a Highly Effective Instructional Leader, A Qualitative Study

***Primary Investigator(s)*** Chris George ***Faculty Advisor:*** Dr. John Lando Carter

***Contact information*** rcg2m@mtmail.mtsu.edu; 615-498-7642

***Department & Institution*** College of Education, MTSU

***Protocol ID*** 22-2009 7i ***Approval:*** 08/11/2021 ***Expiration:*** 08/31/2022

Approved Recruitment Script

Dear [insert name],

I am currently working on a research study as a student in the Assessment, Learning, and School Improvement Ed.D. program at Middle Tennessee State University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the experiences of transitioning from an instructional coach to a building administrator.

You are eligible to be in this study because you are an administrator that serves as an administrator in a K-6 setting who also served as an instructional coach prior to becoming an administrator. You were intentionally selected to participate in this qualitative study because of your qualifications and current job role. If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in an interview process that will consist of 2 (maximum of 3) 60-90 minute interviews. The interview is scheduled to take place in person and it will be

audio recorded. You will have the chance to read the entire informed consent before you make a final decision.

Although every effort will be made to avoid the spread of COVID-19, there still exists a chance for an outbreak. Therefore, your information will be collected to use for contact tracing in the event an outbreak should emerge. Your information will be destroyed in accordance with CDC guidelines.

This study will be conducted during August-September of 2021. Please remember that participation in this study is completely voluntary; you can choose to be in the study or not. If you would like to participate or

have any questions about the study, please email me at [rcg2m@mtmail.mtsu.edu](mailto:rcg2m@mtmail.mtsu.edu).

Sincerely,

Chris George

## **APPENDIX C:**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANT A & B**

#### **Interview Questions: Interview I**

#### **Pre-Interview Conversation (explain the expertise theory and purposeful practice) I**

**want to know how you're using your background as an instructional coach as an administrator.**

#### **Background/History**

1. Can you provide a brief summary of your educational background and what experiences led you in the direction of education?
2. Did you have an instructional coach as a teacher? How did you view their roles and responsibilities when you were a classroom teacher?
3. What experiences as a teacher led you to become an instructional coach?
4. What supports did you have as a classroom teacher that made you feel confident in assuming the role of instructional coach?
5. Being that instructional coaches are a relatively new phenomenon in education, what were your expectations when becoming an instructional coach?
  - a. Follow up: what excited you about becoming an instructional coach?
  - b. Follow up: what were your fears about becoming an instructional coach?
    - i. Follow up: How did you mitigate those fears?
6. What formal training did you receive when becoming an instructional coach?

7. What supports (or growth opportunities) did you receive as an instructional coach?
8. What supports (or growth opportunities) do you wish you had as an instructional coach?
9. How would you describe how your teachers perceived your role as a coach?
  - a. Follow up question (why?)
10. How did you balance being the support for the teacher while also working with the building principal?
11. What did you learn about being an administrator during your role as a coach?
  - a. Follow up: What were “best practices” you wanted to emulate in the coach to administration transition?
  - b. Follow up: Without mentioning specific events or names, what were practices or behaviors you did not want to emulate that you experienced with administrators in your coaching tenure?

**Relation to the Phenomena (Moving from Coach to Admin)**

12. What experiences as a coach made you feel prepared to enter the role of administration?
13. How did your views of the roles and responsibilities of an instructional coach change from when you were a classroom teacher?
14. What are your views of the roles and responsibilities?
15. Do you recall any of the experiences/knowledge you wish you had before making the shift to your administrative role?
16. How would you describe your transition from coach to administrator?

17. What do you wish you would have known (or been prepared for) when making the initial shift? (THIS MAY HAVE ALREADY BEEN ADDRESSED)
18. What practices have been able to transfer from your move to administrator?
  - a. Follow Up: Why?
19. What high-leverage practices have not been able to transfer from your move to administrator?
  - a. Follow Up: Why?
20. Do you feel that you have been able to maintain the learning and training from being an instructional coach in your transfer to administration?
  - a. Follow Up: What has allowed that learning and training to transfer?
  - b. Follow Up: What have been the barriers to transfer?
21. In what ways have you used your experience and background as an instructional coach to personalize the supports of teachers in your school?
22. How would you describe how your experiences and background as an instructional coach allows you to engage your teachers in purposeful practice?
  - a. Do you have specific examples of successes?
  - b. Do you have specific examples of barriers?

**Supporting Current APs and Coaches:**

24. How have you worked to build the capacity of your current assistant principal(s) and instructional coaches to prepare them for future administrative work?
25. What practices have you implemented as an administrator to ensure you are developing the capacity of your assistant principals and/or coaches?

26. What would you describe as the benefits of the coach to administrator  
“pipeline”?
27. What would you describe as barriers that exist in the coach to administrator  
“pipeline”?

### **Interview Questions: Interview II**

The last interview asks the participants to make meaning of their responses in the first (or first two interviews). Seidman’s (2013) phenomenological interview method requires that the final interview occur as a meaning making exercise from the first two interviews. Therefore, the second interview will have a semi-structured format that will have questions and further inquiry around answers from the first (or first two) interviews. These questions allow the participants and the investigator to explore the phenomena in terms of the participants reflecting on their own experiences to chart their path for personal growth.

**APPENDIX D:****INTERVIEW II QUESTIONS- PARTICIPANT A****Interview II:**

The purpose of interview II is for me to ask you some follow up questions, I am going to ask you to share examples and stories about what some of the big ideas that you shared with me mean, then I am going to ask you to go back and tell me what some of these big ideas mean.

**Follow-Up Questions from Interview I:**

1. You came from a not-traditional background; can you tell me a little bit about how that background has shaped who you are as an educator? As a coach? As an administrator?
2. You had mentioned previously that you had coaching experience with TNTP (Nashville Teaching Fellows)- how did that experience impact your view on coaching and feedback?
3. You mentioned being ready to enter administration because you got to the point where you felt like you had no authority to make sure things were “in place”. Can you expand upon that?
4. Are there any follow-up questions you thought about that I should have asked or anything you would like to clarify from interview I?

### High Frequency Summary Keyword

- Feedback
- Autonomy
- Relationships
- Self-Reflection
- Coaching (with Practice & Goals)

Are there any themes/terms you feel like need to be added to this list?

Interview II questions:

#### Feedback

- 1) You stated that you “enjoy feedback”, that you “seek feedback” and that you are “hungry for feedback”.
  - a) What does this mean to you as a coach?
- 2) You stated that you “enjoy feedback”, that you “seek feedback” and that you are “hungry for feedback”.
  - a) What does this mean to you as an administrator?
- 3) You talked a lot about the role of feedback as a coach. Can you tell me about your overall experience as a coach in giving feedback?
- 4) Can you tell me about time where you engaged in really good feedback as a coach?
- 5) Can you tell me about a time where you possibly gave feedback that wasn’t well-received or didn’t produce results you had hoped?
- 6) So now that you are an administrator, can you tell me about time where you engaged in really good feedback? How would you describe your overall experience as an administrator in giving feedback?

- 7) What similarities were there in the experiences as a coach and administrator in providing feedback?
  - a) What are some differences?
- 8) So if you reflect back on what you just told me, what do you feel like is the most important thing that you brought to your work as an administrator around feedback?
- 9) Tell me what feedback means to you now after having the chance to reflect on your experiences?

### **Autonomy**

- 1) You talked a lot about the role autonomy played in your coaching experience? How did you allow for teachers to experience autonomy in their growth efforts as a coach?
- 2) Can you tell me a time where autonomy worked well in the realm of coaching?
- 3) Can you think of a time where it did not work well in the realm of coaching?
- 4) How has the idea of autonomy changed as you have become an administrator?
- 5) How have your experiences with autonomy shaped your beliefs about autonomy regarding your teachers?
- 6) How have your teachers viewed their professional autonomy in their learning/growth plans?
- 7) Tell me what the value of autonomy means to you after having the chance to reflect on your experiences.

### **Relationships**

- 1) You spoke a lot about the role that relationships play in coaching your teachers toward improvement. Can you describe your experiences in building relationships as a coach?

- 2) What were the important factors needed to build relationships as a coach?
- 3) Can you tell me about a particular success that you experienced in building relationships?
  - a) What allowed for that success?
- 4) Can you tell me about a particular time where building a relationship as a coach did not go as expected?
  - a) What possibly lead to that outcome?
- 5) How has your experience as a coach impacted your ability to create relationships as an administrator with your teachers?
- 6) What are the important factors needed to build relationships as an administrator?
- 7) How do you feel your teachers perceive your efforts to create strong relationships?
- 8) Tell me what the value of relationships means to you after having the chance to reflect on your experiences.

**Self-Reflection:**

- 1) You outlined how you studied self-reflection for your dissertation. What experiences as a teacher led you to the desire to explore that topic?
- 2) What experiences as a coach led you to the desire to explore that topic?
- 3) You outlined how you studied self-reflection for your dissertation. How has that impacted your school climate as a principal?
- 4) How has your work and knowledge impacted your expectations for teachers to self-reflect?
- 5) What does it look like for your teachers to self-reflect?

- 6) You outlined that you provide self-reflection questions for your administrators and coaches. Can you tell me more about this process?
- 7) Why is it important for your administrators and coaches to self-reflect?
- 8) Tell me what self-reflection means to you now after having the chance to reflect on your experiences.

**Coaching:**

- 1) You mentioned you would have liked on-going coaching cycles as a coach? What would you have liked for that to look like and how has that impacted your implementation of coaching for your coaches?
- 2) You mentioned the idea was of creating a sense of psychological safety while also providing coaching and feedback. How have you grown in that aspect of the work in your transition to administrator?
- 3) How were you able to embed goals and practice for teachers as a coach?
- 4) How were you able to create ownership of goals as a coach?
- 5) How have you been able to embed goals and practice for teachers as an administrator?
- 6) How have you been able to create ownership of goals as an administrator?
- 7) Tell me what the process of coaching around goals and practices means to you now after having the chance to reflect on your experiences.

**APPENDIX E:****INTERVIEW II QUESTIONS- PARTICIPANT B****Follow-Up Questions from Interview I:**

- 1) How did the TEAM Evaluation Experience as a coach impact how you provide feedback through the TEAM evaluation process as an administrator?
- 2) You mentioned with coaching that you wanted teachers to know you “had their best interest at heart”. Can you provide more insight on what you mean by that?
  - a) How has this transferred to your role as an administrator?
- 3) You mentioned several times that you had to learn to deal with things head on... can you provide specific examples?
  - a) How did those instances impact who were as a coach?
  - b) How have those instances impacted who you are as an administrator?
  - c) You mentioned that was one of your improvement goals- how are you addressing and monitoring your growth in this area?
- 4) You mentioned you played a dual role at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. How would you describe that experience in the following ways:
  - a) From a coach with administrative perspective?
  - b) From an administrator with a coaching perspective?
- 5) You mention that at [REDACTED], you had “Master level teachers” ... What were your experiences in providing feedback to teachers who had been labeled with that distinction?

### High Frequency Summary Keyword

- Support
- Coaching
- Relationships (personal vs professional also)
- Hard Conversations, Resistance (link heath brothers quote)
- Professional Development

Are there any themes/terms you feel like need to be added to this list?

Interview II questions:

### Resistance

- 1) You mentioned several times that you encountered resistance with “reluctant” teachers in your time as a coach. How did that impact who you became as a coach?
  - a) How did that impact your view of instructional leadership?
- 2) You mentioned several times that you have encountered resistance with “reluctant” teachers in your time as an administrator?
  - a) How has that impacted your identity as an administrator who has a coaching background?
- 3) How have your experiences impacted your ability to combat the status quo response of “this is how it has always been done”?
- 4) How did dealing with resistance impact who you became as a coach?
- 5) Using your experiences, how would you plan to address challenging the status quo in a future principal placement?

- 6) In their book *Switch* (2017), Chip and Dan Heath said that “what looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity” (p. 15).
  - a) Can you tell me what comes to mind when you hear this quote?
- 7) How would you describe how resistance has impacted who you are as an instructional leader today?

**Support:**

- 1) Support was a major keyword from interview I, being mentioned over 40 times. How did the support you received throughout your career impact who you are today?
- 2) How has support impacted who you are as an administrator today?
- 3) Is there any difference between the role of support as a coach and as an administrator?
- 4) How would you describe how the various trainings and PD opportunities have impacted your view of teacher support?
- 5) How would you define what support means to you and how you work to increase your support of teachers?

**1:1 Coaching**

- 1) One theme that really influenced who you became as an educator was having the 1:1 coaching relationship throughout your path. How has the idea of 1:1 support impacted how you view coaching today?
- 2) You said when coaching “don’t let me show you how to do it, but let me teach you a strategy to use”. How was this method received by teachers?
- 3) How did you ensure that teaching of strategies would lead to implementation of strategies?

- a) Do you have examples of successes?
- 4) You mentioned setting action goals with teachers. What did that look like?
  - a) How did you follow-up and ensure that teachers would follow through as a coach?
  - b) How do you follow-up and ensure that teachers would follow through as a coach?
- 5) How have you been able to embed goals and practice for teachers as an administrator?
- 6) How have you been able to embed goals and practice for yourself?
- 7) Tell me what coaching means to you now after having the chance to reflect on your experiences.

### **Relationships**

- 1) You spoke a lot about the role that relationships play in coaching your teachers toward improvement. Can you describe your experiences in building relationships as a coach?
- 2) What were the important factors needed to build relationships as a coach?
- 3) Can you tell me about a particular success that you experienced in building relationships?
  - a) What allowed for that success?
- 4) Can you tell me about a particular time where building a relationship as a coach did not go as expected?
  - a) What possibly lead to that outcome?
- 5) How has your experience as a coach impacted your ability to create relationships as an administrator with your teachers?

- 6) What are the important factors needed to build relationships as an administrator?
- 7) You mentioned the need to balance the personal vs professional relationships. How did you come to value this balance?
  - a) Was there a time that you had a previous personal relationship with someone that had to become a professional relationship?
- 8) How do you feel your teachers perceive your efforts to create strong relationships?
- 9) Tell me what the value of relationships means to you after having the chance to reflect on your experiences.

**Hard Conversations:**

- 1) You mentioned as a coach that “if you’re not willing to have hard conversations, and I think that was something I was afraid of having those hard conversations, because I’m a people pleaser.”
  - a) How did you learn to combat that fear?
- 2) How did your experiences as a coach impact your perspective on having hard conversations with teachers/staff in the role of an administrator?
- 3) You mentioned having an experience of having a hard conversation with a staff member that went well. Can you think of an experience with a hard conversation that did not go well?
  - a) What led to that outcome?
- 4) What advice would you give someone who is new coming into the role of coaching around having hard conversations?
- 5) What advice would you give someone who is coming into the administrative role from coaching around hard conversations?

- 6) Tell me the value of hard conversations now that you have had the chance to reflect on your experiences.

**Final:**

- You had two statements I would like to dig deeper into:
  - “I learned how to soften myself from that coach with a whistle to the coach with the soft heart and kind demeanor and understanding of other people.”
  - “I think that it is always embedded within you, but you’re the administrator. And sometimes it was hard to remember that I was the administrator, as opposed to that coaching support.”