LEARNING TRANSFER: ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACT OF IMPLEMENTING JOB-EMBEDDED COACHING SKILLS ON THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

By

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(Under the Direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

The evolving role of the assistant principal as an instructional leader has increased the urgency and need for them to be equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and dispositions to support instruction. The purpose of this study was to examine the transfer of job-embedded coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a district-wide coaching program. The study also sought to examine whether the transfer of coaching skills and practices impacted assistant principals' perspectives about their expanding role as instructional leaders supporting instruction. The theoretical frameworks of situated learning theory and integrative learning transfer guided the purpose of this study. An action research approach was taken supported by the Plan-Do-Study-Act logic model. Assistant principals learned coaching skills and practices, implemented and transferred skills and practices in a job-embedded manner, engaged in active monitoring and self-reflection, and adjusted their

actions based on receiving feedback about their learning transfer. Data collected during the study included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observational notes, and documents/artifacts. The thematic findings that emerged about assistant principals and the transfer of coaching skills and practices within their local school context included: 1) Context and conditions matter; 2) Improved self-awareness supports a coaching mindset; 3) integrate coaching through intentional actions; 4) clarity and duration of coaching practices drives leader capacity.

INDEX WORDS: Assistant principal development, Coaching, Coaching skills, Instructional leadership, Job-embedded professional learning, Learning transfer, Professional learning, Staff development

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my tribe of close loved ones that have supported me in this journey. Firstly, my husband and children have been my biggest cheerleaders of support and sacrifice. Rohan, thank you for your loving support, unwavering motivation, and encouragement as I went through the waves of this dissertation. I know this was indeed a sacrifice for you as it was equally for me. My love for you continues to deepen and grow every step we take together.

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Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation my parents. Dad, your wisdom and value you place on knowledge and education continues to fuel my passion for continuous learning. Thank you for always being there to support me without judgement as I make decisions in life. Mom, although you are not here to see the fruits of your labor in your children and grandchildren, you have imparted a life lesson of "never give up, there is always a way" that has served me well during this journey and life. I feel your presence now and always will!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Researchers have made a connection between the increasing need for assistant principals and their expanding role in schools (Calabrese, 1991; Craft et al., 2016; Glanz, 1994; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). The percentage of public schools nationally with an assistant principal has steadily increased at all levels. According to the Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey (SASS/NTPS), between 1987-2016, all U.S. public schools had at least one assistant principal (Goldring et al., 2021). An increase in demand for accountability and teacher effectiveness due to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 has resulted in a shift in the leadership role of assistant principals from management to instructional leadership (Searby et al., 2017; Sun & Shoho, 2017; VanTuyle, 2018). As such, assistant principals play a pivotal part in responding to their school's context and accountability measures.

Traditionally, the role of the assistant principal has been managerial under the direction of the principal in maintaining the order and operations of the school (Glanz, 1994; Glanz, 2006; Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). Many view the role of the assistant principal as a common stepping stone to advanced leadership opportunities to fulfill the leadership pipeline (Fuller et al., 2018; Hitt & Player, 2018; Mertz, 2006, Protheroe, 2008). Myung et al. (2011) noted that targeted training and leader succession plans are needed to ensure continuity of leadership. Weller and Weller (2002) suggested that as assistant principals become acclimated to their school sites, they

should become proactive in shaping their own ideas and attitudes while creating high expectations for teachers and the instructional program.

The call for assistant principals to move beyond the scope of management and operations is critical to meet the changing dynamics of schools to improve teacher practice and student achievement. Assistant principals should seek opportunities to explore perceived and ideal instructional responsibility by becoming involved with curriculum and instruction and a willingness to learn and act as instructional leaders (Glanz, 2006; Kaplan & Owings 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006, Militello et al., 2015). Oliver (2005) encouraged assistant principals to "step outside the box and experience being instructional leaders as well as managers" (p. 96) as they reexamine and advocate for the appropriate professional development opportunities to meet their needs.

Hallinger's (2003) instructional leadership model for assistant principals emphasized a balance of leadership with a central focus on learning to support instruction. An increase in support for assistant principals to aid them in conducting constructive conversations with teachers, building relationships, and handling conflict management can support their success in their evolving leadership role (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Petrides et al., 2014).

Assistant principals are rarely afforded the quality and breadth of professional learning and educational leadership curriculum to meet the needs of their evolving role toward supporting instruction (James, 2017; Oleszewski et al., 2012). Leadership training programs, training curriculum, job descriptions, and professional development are ambiguous, and they do not prioritize assistant principal's practices toward instructional leadership to support and improve teacher instruction (Barnett et al., 2012; Goldring et al., 2021; James, 2017). As assistant

principals continue to experience a shift in their roles in supporting instruction, appropriate professional learning is imperative to facilitate these efforts.

The attributes of high-quality professional development that supports teacher instruction and student achievement are well-documented in the research (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Garet et al., 2001; Porter et al., 2000). Some essential indicators of effective professional development include content-focused learning, embedding active learning, using models of effective practice, incorporating coaching support, and providing multiple opportunities for feedback and reflection (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Like the needs of teachers, assistant principals need professional learning that extends over time, includes follow-up, is job-embedded, connects to the work of teaching, and promotes inquiry and reflection (Desimone, 2009; Desimone & Garet, 2015).

When these attributes of high-quality professional learning are implemented with fidelity and with appropriate support, teachers can thoughtfully improve their practices. These same attributes of professional learning hold true for principals and assistant principals (Zepeda et al., 2015; Zepeda & Lanoue, 2017). As their role continues to evolve, assistant principals are uniquely positioned to create the conditions and environment to shape and impact teacher instruction by engaging them in job-embedded professional learning experiences (Podolsky et al., 2016).

Coaching can be an effective way to improve instruction, leading to better outcomes for student achievement (Kraft et al., 2018). Coaching is a job-embedded professional learning model where teachers are guided on transferring new learning into instructional practice with increased fidelity of transfer (Killion et al., 2020; Zepeda, 2019; Zepeda et al., 2022). Coaching supports instructional practice through a developmental process where teachers can more deeply

understand the content, instructional strategies, and connect research to classroom practice through an action-oriented change strategy that promotes growth (Zepeda, 2019). Furthermore, a coach's role is to partner with teachers to improve their practice so that students are more successful (Campbell & Nieuwerburgh, 2017). As the work and role of assistant principals becomes more aligned to support effective instruction through observing and providing feedback, they may be better prepared to fulfill some of a coach's role to support the growth and development of teacher instruction (Quintero, 2019).

Research has concluded that aspects of the assistant principal role, such as coaching teachers or being visible in the classroom, could positively improve student outcomes and school climate (Master et al., 2020). Although this research holds promise, with a growing need for assistant principals to become stronger instructional leaders, little is known about their preparation to coach teachers toward improving their instruction.

Specifically, this study examined the assistant principals who were enrolled in a district-wide coaching program. The research centered on assistant principals who were implementing at their school sites job-embedded coaching practices. Of interest was examining the learning transfer of coaching skills as assistant principals worked to improve their development as instructional leaders to support instruction.

Statement of the Problem

Assistant principals seek a strong desire for professional learning that connects to their role, content knowledge, skills, and learning necessary throughout their careers as educational leaders (Allan & Weaver, 2014). Unfortunately, most school districts do not provide assistant principals with targeted professional development to meet their growing needs to assume instructional leadership (Petrides et al., 2014). Many district-level leaders are beginning to

understand the value and worth of investing in the untapped leadership potential of assistant principals to meet their needs in their expanding instructional role to prepare them for future principal opportunities (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Reyes-Guerra & Barnett, 2017).

Overview of the Research Site Context

Lincoln County Public Schools (LCPS, a pseudonym) is a suburban school district located northeast of the state's capital city. The system includes 142 schools including 81 elementary, 29 middle, 24 high schools, 7 specialty schools, and 1 charter school. During the 2022-2023 school year, it served 182,865 students. In 2022-2023, the Lincoln County Public School District reported that there were 552 assistant principals supporting the school system.

LCPS has invested in the growth of assistant principals by instituting an Assistant Principal (AP) Coach Endorsement program that is offered by the district's office of staff development. The AP Coach Endorsement program is a state-approved endorsement that has been in existence in LCPS since 2020. The program focuses on providing professional learning about coaching practices to assistant principals to integrate into their conversations of with teachers and teams at their schools. In 2018-2019, upper-level district leaders recognized a growing need for assistant principals to provide teachers with effective feedback that promoted reflection, growth, and fostered change in teaching practices after classroom observations.

Based on anecdotal and survey data from current assistant principals that completed the school-based program as teacher leaders, many attested to the knowledge and skills gained from the program as playing a pivotal role in how they approached their work as instructional leaders when supporting teachers. Moreover, the program's intent to support leader professional growth through job-embedded professional development aligned with the district's 2022-2027 strategic plan. Therefore, improved efforts to grow the knowledge and skills of assistant principals

became evident as a need to be addressed. This study used the action research process to examine the transfer of coaching by assistant principals into their practices to support teacher instruction.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the transfer into practice job-embedded coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a district-wide program. The study also sought to examine whether the transfer of coaching practices and skills impacted assistant principals' perspectives about their expanding role as instructional leaders supporting instruction.

The perspectives collected in this study came in two ways. First, views from the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) were compiled as they shared their perspectives on the transfer of coaching skills and practices (see Appendix A). Furthermore, the ARDT developed interventions that supported the transfer of job-embedded learning to the participating assistant principals within their respective contexts. Secondly, perspectives were captured from six assistant principals that comprised the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants) that enrolled in the 2022-2023 coaching program (see Appendix B). Members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants) identified the extent to which learning transfer impacted their leadership roles and perspectives about being instructional leaders.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching skills into their leadership role of supporting instruction?
2. How does the transfer of coaching practices impact assistant principals' perspective as instructional leaders?
3. What does the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction?

The following section discusses the definition of key terms specifically related to the action research study. While these terms are used in a large body of research, this section discussed the terms specifically related to this study in the Lincoln County Public School District.

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, the following key terms are defined.

- "Assistant Principal" in the context of the Lincoln County Public School District is a school-based leader that supports and executes the duties directed by the principal to support the school.
- "Coaching" in the context of the Lincoln County Public School District is a job-embedded professional learning model facilitated by an assistant principal where teachers are guided on transferring new learning into instructional practice with increased fidelity (Killion et al., 2020; Zepeda, 2019).
- "Coaching Skills" in the context of the Lincoln County Public School District are a set of coaching tools embedded in a framework. The coaching practices include for example,

feedback conversations, development of partnership and trust, and engaging in reflective dialogue with active listening. These practices and skills are meant to be implemented by assistant principals as they work in their building to support their development of feedback conversations with teachers and teams they support.

- "Instructional leadership" in the context of Lincoln County Public School District are leadership practices within a local school context that focus on the coordination and control of instruction and curriculum that incorporates supervising and evaluating instruction and monitoring student academic growth (Hallinger, 2003, Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021).
- "Professional Learning" in the context of the Lincoln County Public School District is a complex array of interrelated learning opportunities that require cognitive and emotional involvement where individuals examine the capacity and willingness to enact appropriate alternatives for improvement or change (Avalos, 2011; Desimone, 2011).
- "Job-Embedded Learning" in the context of the Lincoln County Public School District is learning that occurs as teachers and administrators engage in daily work activities that require active engagement, promote learning by doing, and facilitates the application and adaptation of new skills into practice (Coggshall et al., 2012; Croft et al., 2010; Wood & Killian, 1998).
- "Learning transfer" in the context of Lincoln County Public School District is the effective and continual application of knowledge and skills gained in learning activities and meaningful scaffolded social interactions by learners that impact their development and performance of their jobs or other individuals, organizational, or community responsibilities (Broad, 1997; Roumell, 2018)

- “Situated Learning” in the context of Lincoln County Public School District is the learning that assistant principals engaged, collaborated, and built aligned to coaching models and practices (Brion, 2020; Lave et al., 1991).
- “Transfer” in the context of Lincoln County Public School District are the observed behaviors of assistant principals as they practice and integrate their learning about coaching into their feedback and support for teachers (Joyce & Showers, 1981; Showers, 1987, Taylor, 2017).
- “Low Road Transfer” in the context of the Lincoln County Public School District is the transfer of coaching practices that resemble similar practices that assistant principals engage in when providing teachers with feedback (Perkins & Salomon, 1992).
- “High Road Transfer” in the context of Lincoln County Public School District is the transfer of coaching practices by assistant principals that require a higher level of connection and abstraction to transfer learning into practice effectively (Perkins & Salomon, 1992).

Situating the study further is the theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

This action research study focused on transfer of coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a program. The study sought to examine whether the transfer of coaching practices and skills impacted assistant principals' perspectives as instructional leaders. The primary theoretical frameworks of situated learning and integrative theory of low and high road transfer anchored the action research cycle for this study (Hajian, 2019; Lave, 1988; Perkins & Salomon, 1988, 1989, 1992).

Situated learning theory was founded on the principle that knowledge is constructed if the learner becomes an active participant within a highly connected community in which knowledge

and culture are integrated (Lave et al., 1991). Situated learning places the learner in the center of content, context, and a community of practice (Brion, 2020; Brown et al., 1989). Situated learning and cognition are developed through purposeful and authentic activities in specific social contexts.

The level of a learner's cognition is developed through practice, where novices gain expertise as they transfer skills (Chaiklin & Lave, 1996; Lave, 1988). Stein (1998) underscored that adults bring a wealth of novel learning experiences that can change the processes that surround their workplace lives. Moreover, transfer occurs when learners can practice in situ and finely adapt skills to their contexts (Brown et al., 1989, Lave, 1988). The assistant principals enrolled in the Lincoln County Public School District coaching program engaged in learning, and as aspiration, they would be able to transfer skills learned in their work with teachers at their local schools.

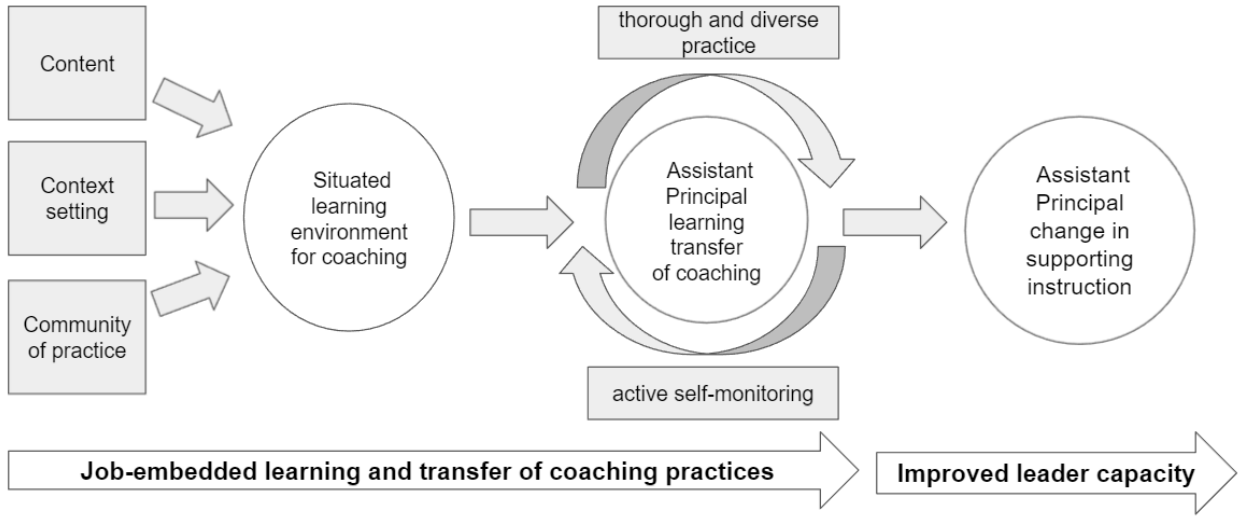
Perkins and Salomon (1989) added knowledge around the transfer of learning to include the underlying mechanisms of transfer, namely, low road and high road transfer. Low road transfer occurs when the target and the original activity share many of the same features, which results in reflexive behaviors or automatic responses in similar activities. Conversely, high road transfer occurs due to thoughtful abstraction of general principles among several different events and contexts. The search for shared connections among the structures supports the flexible application and transfer of learning in different situations (Perkins & Salomon, 1988, 1989, 1992).

Perkins and Salomon (1992) concluded that the conditions that encompass the transfer of learning include the thorough and diverse practice of learning, explicit abstraction, active self-monitoring, arousing mindfulness, and using a metaphor or analogy that facilitates the transfer

process when new material is studied. When these conditions are present, transfer of learning is more likely to occur. For transfer to occur, the learning needs of adult learners; trust in the process, in colleagues, and the learner; time within the regular school day; and sufficient resources must be available to support learning (Zepeda, 2019). Figure 1.1 illustrates this idea.

Figure 1.1.

Theoretical Framework for Situated Learning Transfer



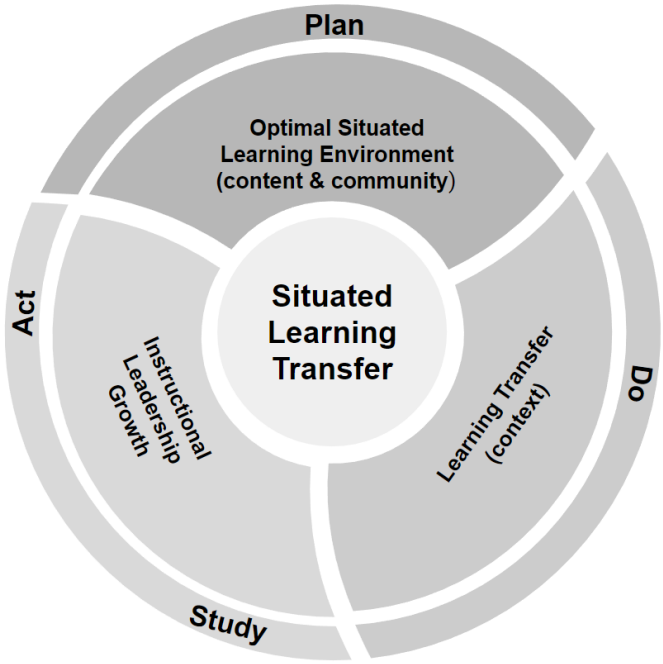
Note. Adapted from Brion (2020); Lave (1988); Perkins and Salmon (1992).

The present study used the tenets of situated learning and learning transfer to build a theoretical framework, as depicted in Figure 1.1. The job-embedded learning for assistant principals occurs within the contexts of their schools. Assistant principals used the knowledge, skills, and community of practice collaborative opportunities to prepare for implementing individual and team coaching cycles. Assistant principals transferred their learning through practice, active self-monitoring, and obtaining feedback on their coaching practices to determine their perceptional shifts as an instructional leader as they supported teachers during feedback conversations about instruction.

Logic Model

Given the foundations of situated learning transfer for this research study, the logic model had to be rooted in the needs of the assistant principals and the actions of support needed for them to flourish as instructional leaders. The logic model depicted in Figure 1.2 guided the study to examine the transfer of job-embedded coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a program and to examine whether the transfer of coaching practices and skills impacted assistant principals' perspectives about being instructional leaders.

Figure 1.2: *Logic Model of Study*



Note. Adapted from Brion (2020); Bryk et al. (2015); Lave, (1988).

The logic model Plan-Do-Study-Act served as the construct under which the Action Research Design Team situated the scope of the study. Additionally, the logic model was an organized way to view the change process as interventions were developed and implemented throughout the study. The theory of change which undergirds this logic model is presented.

Theory of Change

The foundation of the study was predicated on the idea that assistant principals could transfer the coaching skills in their instructional leadership practices as they implemented the knowledge and skills learned in the coaching program. The theory of change was situated on the premise of high and low road learning transfer that facilitated the ability of the assistant principals to be flexible and responsive in their coaching practices with teachers. When assistant principals engaged in coaching practices with teachers in providing feedback, it is anticipated that both low and high road transfer learning opportunities support changes that can be observed in assistant principal practices. It is also anticipated that assistant principals will experience high and low road learning transfer throughout the implementation of the job-embedded coaching practices as they applied them in their school contexts to support teacher instruction.

The cycle of support started with assistant principals engaging in situated professional learning opportunities about best coaching practices and a framework to support teacher instruction. Assistant principals then implemented and transferred coaching practices through job-embedded coaching cycles with teachers at their respective schools. As assistant principals engaged in job-embedded implementation, opportunities to self-reflect by watching themselves coach, engage in the community of practice collaborative conversations, and obtain feedback from their supporting coach was part of their learning experiences.

Overview of Methodology

The nature of the design and methodology of action research has provided benefits for the professional development of educational leaders (Glanz, 2014). Therefore, use of action research appropriately fit the nature and context of this study. The purpose of action research in an educational context is to address a specific problem by using principles and methodologies of

research. Collaborative action research allows for a group or team of individuals that can focus on one or several classrooms or a district-wide investigation (Oja & Smulyan, 1989). Although the distinction between collaborative and school-wide research may be subtle and even arbitrary, they are both essential for school renewal (Glickman, 1988). This study used the collaborative action research methodology to examine a district-based assistant principal coaching program.

In the context of this study, the primary researcher and the Action Research Design Team (see Appendix A) used the literature surrounding coaching and effective professional development to design professional learning and a course of study that emphasized job-embedded implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices for the Action Research Implementation Team (see Appendix B). The Action Research Design Team sought to support the action research implementation team by providing them with opportunities to transfer learning, to provide feedback on the transfer of learning, and to make professional learning modifications to meet the needs of the members of the implementation team.

Action Research

Action research was an appropriate methodology for this study because it allowed for collaboration and responsiveness to make changes. Bryk et al. (2015) described this process as using a "learning-to-improve problem" approach (p. 115). The end goal is to improve outcomes across classrooms, schools, and the district. Action research recognizes complex systems of effective change as researched by Lewin and embraces an experimental logic. Additionally, action research is structured so participants can learn what it will take to implement new practices reliably with quality at scale (Bryk et al., 2015).

Action research according to Zepeda (2019) can be viewed as a form of job-embedded professional learning that provides a rich learning experience so that educators can reflect and

consider their actions on impacting student learning while simultaneously improving their practices in the company of others. Reason and Bradbury (2008) proposed that action research combined action and reflection and theory and practice in participation with others to address concerns within a stakeholder group. The power of action research is it allows people to take a critical look at their practice and to have the courage to open oneself to the possibility of change while engaging in a "reflective spiral" that occurs throughout the action research process (Fairbanks & LaGrone, 2006; Hughes, 2016).

The approach of using action research helped the assistant principals as they learned new skills, see what skills were transferred, and which were not—all to support the growth of assistant principals as they learned to coach teachers. Throughout the study, the Action Research Design Team (see Appendix A) worked together to support assistant principals in a district coaching program in a diverse suburban school district. Data from the implementation team were collected and analyzed to provide direction and to create interventions based initially on the appropriate literature and then later from data collected through the cycles of action research.

The action research cycles provided time for implementation and reflection for both the action research design and implementation teams based on the findings from the interventions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with assistant principals at the beginning, middle, and end of the action research cycles (see Appendix D). The interviews elicited perspectives on how implementing coaching processes and skills influenced their role as instructional leaders when providing feedback to teachers about their instruction.

Additionally, assistant principal check-in with their lead coach throughout the coaching program's course of study, and they were offered continuous feedback that guided the Action Research Design Team direction for future professional learning (see Appendix A). Interviews

supported gaining insights about the perspectives the assistant principals held about coaching and the skills needed to work with teachers.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study incorporated numerous qualitative methods. These methods included:

1. Individual semi-structured interviews with the assistant principal participants of the study at the beginning, middle, and end of the research process (see Appendix D).
2. Focus group interviews with the action design research team members that served as coaches to support the assistant principals at the middle and end of the study for purposes of gaining perspective on the progress of assistant principal learning transfer of coaching skills and practices (see Appendix E).
3. Observation of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) Lead Coach providing reflective feedback to assistant principals using a checklist on the level of implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices after viewing a self-reflected recorded coaching conversation (see Appendix F).
4. Document review of assistant principal reflections and analysis of video clips conducted by the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) and researcher throughout the study helped determine implementation and learning transfer by assistant principals. The data collected was discussed during focus group interviews and informed future implementation cycles.
5. Reflexivity journaling of thoughts, questions, assumptions, and ideas throughout the research process to recognize the multiple identities, key issues, and developing perspectives and viewpoints in the research setting.

The researcher analyzed the qualitative data generated from the interviews and focus groups using a coding scheme, looked for overall patterns, and then developed themes. Additionally, the researcher and Action Research Design Team (ARDT) analyzed the artifacts, coaching plans, and video evidence to look for gaps in professional learning and program support to inform future research cycles.

Interventions

The primary interventions of this action research study were in the form of job-embedded professional learning opportunities offered to assistant principals enrolled in a district coaching program. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) focused on providing assistant principals with professional learning aligned to research-based coaching skills and practices, supporting job-embedded implementation and transfer of skills within their context, and providing feedback and coaching throughout implementation to promote reflection.

The assistant principals received feedback and coaching from a member of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) throughout the implementation process. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) created and implemented the interventions. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) included the program's coordinator, one additional office coordinator, one external coaching consultant, and an assistant principal that completed the coaching program.

The interventions were created after monthly focus group interviews with Action Research Design Team (ARDT). The focus group interviews included opportunities to assess where assistant principals were in implementing coaching cycles as outlined in the program's course of study. The data gathered and discussed during the interviews determined the needs that were most significant. The data led to, adjustments and pinpointed the additional supports that needed to be provided to the assistant principals to facilitate the implementation of practices and

to examine the transfer of coaching practices. Once the interventions were identified, they were then implemented by the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) over the next month.

The interventions included a variety of supports that were developed to meet the group's needs as they surfaced. The activities included small groups just-in-time professional learning opportunities, periodic scheduled check-in conversations, customized course of study plans, and debrief coaching conversations after assistant principal's implemented coaching practices at their local schools with teachers. The interventions were implemented after the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) assessed where assistant principals were in the implementation of their coaching cycle in addition to an examination of coaching plans, coaching artifacts, and review of a self-reflective coaching video. These interventions were designed to meet the needs of assistant principals as they sought to integrate coaching practices into their expanding role as instructional leaders at their school.

Significance of the Study

The expanding role of assistant principals has been written about extensively (Oleszewski et al., 2012; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). Based on current local and national data trends, the urgency for assistant principals to align their role toward instructional leadership will help to sustain a pipeline for future principals that are equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills to lead instruction in schools (Fuller et al., 2018; Grissom et al., 2021).

As the need for assistant principals to be instructional leaders grows, the exigency for adequate, relevant, and appropriate professional learning opportunities can potentially impact teacher classroom instructional growth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Therefore, this study examined how a district coaching program in a large and diverse suburban school district can

support the professional learning needs of assistant principals to improve their instructional leadership abilities to coach teachers toward improving their instructional practices. Additionally, the study examined how coaching, the primary focus of the program, transferred into assistant principals' practices and influenced their perspectives as instructional leaders. The study adds to the gap in the literature related to how assistant principals can play an active role as instructional leaders in supporting the instruction in schools.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the study of the dissertation, and lays out an overview of the research questions, the problem of practice, and methods for the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the related literature for the study, and discusses the assistant principal role, instructional leadership, coaching, coaching practices, job-embedded professional learning, and learning transfer. Chapter 3 describes the methodology involved in action research and the qualitative methods related to this study and emphasizes the context in which the study was conducted. Chapter 4 examines the findings from the action research study.

Chapter 5 details the analysis of findings from the action research case based on the action research cycles related to the research questions that guided this study. This chapter also describes and analyzes the interventions implemented by the researcher and the Action Research Design Team (ARDT). Chapter 6 summarizes the study, provides a discussion about the findings from the research questions, offers implications for school leaders, and proffers implications for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the transfer into practice job-embedded coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a district-wide program. The study also sought to examine whether the transfer of coaching practices and skills impacted assistant principals' perspectives about their expanding role as instructional leaders supporting instruction. To address the purpose of this action research, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching skills into their leadership role of supporting instruction?
2. How does the transfer of coaching practices impact assistant principals' perspective as instructional leaders?
3. What does the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction?

This chapter explored the literature that influenced the objectives of the present study.

The topical areas included in this chapter are a review of the related literature in five major sections. The first section provided a historical overview of the traditional role of the assistant principal and how the role has expanded. The section also included discussion about the benefits of preparing assistant principals for instructional leadership to support future principal opportunities.

The second section explored how instructional leadership models can support the evolving role of assistant principals toward improving instruction in varying school contexts. The third section examined the components of effective job-embedded professional learning and the often-limited opportunities for assistant principals to engage in high-quality job-embedded professional learning to enhance their skills as instructional leaders. The fourth section explored how one job-embedded professional learning model, coaching, can be leveraged by systems to support assistant principals to meet their learning needs and growth as instructional leaders. The fifth section focused on frameworks and conditions needed to enhance the learning transfer of job-embedded professional learning by building the capacity for growth in the role of assistant principals.

Historical Overview of Assistant Principal Roles

The growing demand for assistant principal leadership has developed over the last 25 years. Nationally, schools with an assistant principal have increased by 18 percentage points (Goldring et al., 2021). The emergence of educational policies emanating from federal legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, which called for an increase in educator accountability, has resulted in the need for assistant principals to make shifts in their leadership role from a focus on management, discipline, and logistics to that of instruction (Searby et al., 2017; Sun & Shoho, 2017; VanTuyle, 2018). It is critically important that as the role of the assistant principal continues to evolve, and an investment made to develop their knowledge and skills to fulfill their current and future instructional leadership roles (Fuller et al., 2018; Goldring et al., 2021; Grissom et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002).

Traditional Role of the Assistant Principal

The role of assistant principal was introduced in U.S. schools during the 1930s. Traditionally, the role of the assistant principal has been an entry-level administrative position managed under the direction of the principal in maintaining the order and operations within a school (Glanz, 1994, 2006; Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). Many assistant principals have claimed they "do what principals don't want to" do (Marshall, 1993, p. 16). In the beginning of the role configuration, assistant principals had limited responsibilities, no formal training, and little authority (Glanz, 2005).

Since the assistant principal position originated to alleviate some of the principal's administrative duties, their primary responsibilities included "routine administrative tasks, custodial duties, and discipline" (Glanz, 2005, p. 7). Marshall and Davidson (2016) concluded that principals often controlled the opportunities that assistant principals had for leadership opportunities (e.g., district level activities, chairing certain committees, or leading curricular and instructional efforts). This control limited opportunities for visibility and career mobility for assistant principals.

A seminal study by Austin and Brown (1970) concluded that assistant principals were tasked with school management by executing day-to-day tasks related to running the school and providing physical necessities of the educational program. Further studies asserted that the work lacked clear conceptualization as assistant principals learned to navigate the survival rules, socialization, and micropolitical assumptive worlds as fledging administrators (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Sun & Shoho, 2017). Subsequent studies concluded that little had changed about the assistant principal role since its inception (Barnett et al., 2012; Calabrese, 1991; Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002).

Marshall and Hooley (2006) grouped the responsibilities of assistant principals into four major categories, which included conferencing with students and parents; handling behavior problems; developing the master schedule, registration, and attendance; and counseling students. The most common roles of assistant principals that emerged aligned with discipline, attendance, student activities, staff support, athletics, and master scheduling (Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). Hausman et al. (2002) observed that most assistant principal duties centered around the management of students. Moreover, assistant principals expressed concerns that their roles provided little opportunity for influential leadership roles with teachers (Glanz, 1994; Harvey, 1994; Sun, 2011). Goldring et al. (2009) proposed that alongside the accountability to improve student outcomes, there was a need for increased expectations for assistant principals to be well versed in pedagogy and instructional content.

Scholars have indicated that the role of assistant principals has remained undefined and ambiguous, resulting in the need for clarity and specificity to meet the growing needs of supporting instruction in schools (Armstrong, 2010; Craft et al., 2016; Oleszewski et al.,, 2012; Petrides et al., 2014). The lack of clarity is compounded by the absence of specific professional standards aligned to the role of assistant principals (Craft et al., 2016; Turnbull et al., 2015). Hartzell et al. (1995) and Peters et al. (2016) concluded that assistant principals would feel a greater sense of support if their roles and responsibilities contained accurate information about the expectations and opportunities to navigate their new role as they acclimate to their context and establish relationships with others. Therefore, to meet the increasing demands of schools, intentional clarity, and expansion of the assistant principal role to reflect the evolving needs of schools is necessary (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021).

Expanding Role of the Assistant Principal

The dynamic contexts that come with each school setting must be matched with leaders who are responsive in supporting the school's needs (Gurr & Drysdale, 2018; Hallinger, 2018; Murakami et al., 2019). Kaplan and Owings (1999) made a case for shared instructional leadership in schools by redefining the role of the assistant principal. They asserted that assistant principals must be involved in the school's vision, coaching, evaluating teachers, scheduling, developing, and managing instruction. Moreover, Kaplan and Owings (1999) asserted that "many assistant principals have the interest and the capacity to promote positive student achievement in their schools. Assistant principals can become key instructional leaders able to substantially help principals increase student achievement" (p. 92).

Despite the crucial role that the assistant principal can play in improving student achievement, the role has historically not aligned with the instructional leadership skills needed in the 21st century (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). Elmore (2007) emphasized the importance of school administrators as instructional leaders. Given the vast responsibility of principals, researchers believed that reform in the assistant principal role must include goal setting, implementation of curriculum design, and increasing their capacity as instructional leaders (Drago-Severson & Aravena, 2011; Glanz, 2005). Correspondingly, the expansion of the assistant principal role may require them to develop additional skill sets to meet the needs of today's schools.

The research has also cited the struggle that assistant principals have as their role includes an instructional focus, while still managing administrative duties. A study by Searby et al. (2017) in Alabama stated that 61% of assistant principals reported that their current role required 50% or more of their time on instructional leadership; yet, 39% of the assistant principals spent less

than 50% of their time on instructional leadership activities. Although there was importance and the need for expanding the role toward supporting instruction, assistant principals were overwhelmed with balancing their managerial duties with expanded instructional responsibilities.

VanTuyle's (2018) study corroborated the struggle between instructional leadership and managerial work for assistant principals. The study concluded that elevated engagement in supervision and evaluation of instruction supported assistant principals growing as instructional leaders compared to those that handled discipline exclusively. Moreover, assistant principals who acted with high instructional leadership levels ensured that teachers accommodated student needs. As assistant principals continued to expand their role as instructional leaders, it supported a school-wide focus on quality instruction in addition to a larger goal of maintaining a leadership succession pipeline (Bengtson et al., 2013; Grissom et al., 2021; Militello et al., 2015; Sun & Shoho, 2017; Zepeda et al., 2012).

Assistant principals must also be prepared to tackle today's diverse school challenges, complexities, and contextual factors (Dodman, 2014; Gurr & Drysdale, 2018; Murakami et al., 2019). The foundational factors of leading in diverse school environments include shaping a vision of academic success for all students based on high standards, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction, and objectively managing people, data, and processes (Mendels, 2012). Furthermore, Dodman (2014) asserted that understanding a school's internal and external context and needs, leveraging the knowledge and resources available to leaders, and creating relationships with established instructional accountability can support the advancement of diverse schools. Murakami et al. (2019) proposed that factors such as families below the poverty line, high teacher turnover, increased numbers of underserved and marginalized populations, and students with varying learning disabilities were

just a few of the challenges that school leaders must navigate as part of their role in today's schools.

Assistant principals must adapt as their role evolves to support low achieving schools. Bukoski et al.'s (2015) study on assistant principals in low achieving schools proposed that expanding community-based social justice leadership by building effective partnerships supports an expansive view to their leadership role. Activities such as visiting churches and homes, fighting for marginalized students' rights, and helping to achieve community-based goals would foster trust, create an overlap between the school and community, and facilitate efforts to close student achievement gaps (Bukoski et al., 2015; Khalifa, 2012). Therefore, a paradigmatic shift on caring for the most vulnerable may permit assistant principals to affect change through establishing connections within their school context and the broader educational community (Boske & Diem, 2012; Bukowski et al., 2015; Milner, 2018).

Although the role of the assistant principal remains undefined between instructional and managerial duties, the expansion continues to be shaped by a stronger instructional focus and responsiveness to current school environmental needs (Murakami, 2019; Peters et al., 2016; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). The need to expand the role may also support building assistant principals' capacity to be influential instructional leaders who can lead in varying contexts, shape teacher practice, and ensure readiness for future leadership opportunities (Grissom et al.,2021; Militello et al., 2015; Sun & Shoho, 2017).

Need for the Expanding Role of the Assistant Principal

The need for assistant principals to expand their role toward improving instruction involves assessing teaching, providing concrete and timely feedback about performance, and facilitating reflective conversations about teacher practice and the improvement of student

achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Khachatryan, 2015). Loeb et al. (2005) concluded that when teachers did not receive high-quality feedback, it left many feeling a sense of frustration and lack of professional respect that often-generated low morale, stagnation, or pushed teachers out of the field. Also, the need for teachers to receive effective feedback that promotes their growth may lead to improved morale and efficacy toward their practice.

The research cited several studies connected to the impact of feedback on instructional practice. Shute's (2008) study concluded from several meta-analyses that "feedback generally improves learning, ranging from .40 SD to .80 SD and higher" (p. 176). Furthermore, feedback from administrators during pre and post evaluation conversations that focused on classroom instructional moves, which included strengths and weaknesses, steps in instructional activities, and the components of practice that needed refining and improvement, prompted learning processes that enhanced teacher morale (Khachatryan, 2015; Mireles-Rios & Becchio, 2018).

As the expansion of the assistant principal role moves toward supporting instruction, there may be a need to build their capacity to effectively observe teaching and to develop the skills to provide meaningful feedback. Rigby et al. (2017) concluded that administrators' lack of pedagogical and content knowledge hindered observation and feedback in ways that could substantially improve instruction and improve teacher instructional practices. Hence, feedback was ineffective due to the nature, delivery, and lack of skill in feedback delivery. Thus, leader preparation, mentoring, and professional development for assistant principals may support these efforts (Khachatryan, 2015; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016). When assistant principals learn to build their capacity to facilitate reflective conversations that focus on specific teacher actions, it may strengthen relationships and improve teacher practices.

The expanding role of assistant principals toward instructional leadership practices also included conducting classroom observations and providing feedback. Blase and Blase (1999) argued that informal, ongoing feedback following observations to promote reflection and communicate goals for classroom instruction encouraged teachers to improve teaching. Ball and Cohen (1999) showed that learning opportunities were amplified when new insights were actionable and related directly to their classroom practices. Hall (2019) extended this thinking and proposed that the way a leader responds to performance concerns after classroom observations varies widely and may not always be practical. Yet, attending to performance concerns directly and attentively may prove beneficial.

The Rigby et al. (2017) study of administrator feedback asserted that although observation and feedback were widely implemented, little evidence demonstrated that administrator observation and feedback were a mechanism for instructional improvement. Furthermore, Horng et al. (2010) found no relationship between school outcomes (including student achievement) and time devoted to instructional tasks, such as classroom observations. A follow-up study found that time spent on informal classroom observations, or walkthroughs, was negatively associated with learning and school improvement (Grissom et al., 2013). The literature cited tensions that emerged between administrators and teachers when school leaders conducted ineffective observations and feedback conversations, which resulted in heightened professional tension. As a result, this tension may prevent teachers from viewing feedback as a supportive means toward instructional change, even if the feedback was delivered effectively (Glanz, 2005; Ovando & Ramirez, 2007).

While these studies suggested that there was little reason to believe that school leader observation and feedback might improve long-term student outcomes, the research indicated that

teachers were more likely to change their practices if they received specific feedback after classroom observations (Ball & Cohen 1999; Grissom et al., 2013; Rigby et al., 2017). As assistant principals continue to expand their role by refining their instructional leadership skills through observation and feedback practices, it may also support building a skill set that can be transferred to future leadership opportunities to maintain a succession pipeline.

Many district-level administrators have started to understand the need for the next generation of leadership potential in assistant principals by providing them with professional development to be effective in their current role and to prepare them for future principalships (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Reyes-Guerra & Barnett, 2017). There has been mounting concern based on administrator shortage and rising attrition rates that assistant principals who have limited exposure to instructional leadership skills may not be prepared for the future principalship; hence, a targeted approach to develop assistant principal capacity and career paths is necessary (Barnett et al., 2012; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014).

Instructional leadership is a crucial responsibility of effective principals (Fuller et al., 2018; Grissom et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002). Hence, the acquisition of instructional leadership skills during tenure as an assistant principalship may contribute to the readiness for future principalship and career advancement, ensuring a pipeline of leadership succession (Gates et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2019; Parylo et al., 2013). The Gates et al. (2019) report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation concluded that a principal pipeline instills emerging school leaders with the confidence and expertise needed to improve student achievement and school performance. Earlier, Leithwood et al. (2004) argued that “efforts to improve [school leader] recruitment, training, evaluation, and ongoing development should be considered highly cost-effective approaches to successful school improvement” (p. 14).

Districts and schools that began to build their leadership capacity at the teacher level and expanded these efforts to better preparing assistant principals found that those in leadership roles outperformed peers that did not engage in such activities or programs (Gates et al., 2019; Myung et al., 2011). Hence, having an active leadership succession conduit that invests in effective preparation may prove beneficial in maintaining the human resources needed for a sustained leadership pipeline.

Moreover, Parylo et al.'s (2013) study concluded that the themes of passion for teaching and education, external motivation, and the experience acquired as an assistant principal influenced an educational leader's career path to the principalship. Bastian and Henry's (2015) analysis of homegrown assistant principals in North Carolina's public schools found a positive correlation between serving as an assistant principal and long-term leader effectiveness. This effectiveness was attributed to the familiarity with the environment they served as assistant principals.

Systems that build leadership place a value on "growing their own," and advancement to the principalship rests on prior leadership experiences. Buckman et al.'s (2018) study reported that potential advancement within a school or district was attributed to the knowledge and experience of working in the same or similar environment. When internal expertise was homegrown, it allowed for the acclimation to district and school culture, vision, and goals (Buckman et al., 2018; Grissom et al., 2019). Ultimately, these factors positively impacted employability, chances for promotion, personal growth through building internal human capital (Buckman et al., 2018; Wood et al., 2013). As a result, promotion into leadership positions was more difficult for external than internal candidates, which has increased internal hiring (Buckman et al., 2018; Parylo & Zepeda, 2015).

Subsequent research studies on the leadership pathway concluded that superintendents felt that growing their administrators was the most effective and preferred means of recruiting assistant principals that were better positioned for employment, career advancement opportunities that could positively impact student achievement (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Buckman et al., 2018; Goldring et al., 2021). The benefits gained from instilling a homegrown leadership pipeline proved beneficial as assistant principals acquired the knowledge and skills from their experiences in their current contexts and used the background as they moved up in their careers and expanded their leadership opportunities.

The current need for the expanding role of the assistant principal requires a comprehensive view that encompasses the knowledge and skills to navigate logistics, instructional focus, and direction of the school to impact student outcomes (Searby et al., 2017; Sun & Shoho, 2017; VanTuyle, 2018). Therefore, assistant principals should be well versed in understanding and applying the components of instructional frameworks and models that support teacher instruction and student achievement in the context they serve.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is one of the most enduring leadership models that emerged in the United States in the 1980s from accumulated evidence that indicated that leadership could positively affect student achievement (Bush 2015; Bush & Glover, 2014). The literature on instructional leadership remains overwhelmingly centered on principal leadership, even though a focus on the assistant principal role has been recommended for several decades (Calabrese, 1991; Greenfield, 1985; Searby et al., 2017).

The limited research on assistant principal's readiness for instructional leadership has resulted in an increased focus on standards-based reforms. Moreover, equity-minded

instructional leaders such as assistant principals serve as critical members in advancing a school's success as a learning organization for students and educators (Petrides et al., 2014; Pont et al., 2008; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021; Spillane et al., 2001).

Defining Instructional Leadership

The concept of instructional leadership has been widely studied with numerous definitions, models, and frameworks evolving over time (Zepeda et al., 2017). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) defined instructional leadership as leadership behaviors aimed at promoting and improving the process of teaching and learning involving teachers, students, parents, school planning, school management, school facilities, and resources (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Muda et al., 2017).

Bush and Glover's (2014) definition focused on the leader's direction and impact of influence on the behaviors of teachers working with students. The definition of instructional leadership has since shifted with the emergence of transformational and distributed leadership models, emphasizing a leadership for learning approach (Hallinger, 2009). This approach stresses the need for a distributed leadership approach with a balance and central focus on learning rather than instruction that can positively impact the quality of teaching and excellence in schools (Bush, 2015; Hallinger 2009; Muda et al., 2017).

Leaders that integrate instructional leadership work alongside teachers to provide support and guidance on best practices in teaching (Brolund, 2016; Bush, 2015). Additionally, creating a healthy school culture, linking actions between curriculum and instruction, encouraging conversations about teaching, and supporting a collective prophetic moral vision further defined instructional leadership in the 21st century (Reitzug et al., 2008; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). A study by Celikten (2001) concluded that when principals assigned instructional

leadership activities to assistant principals, it contributed to their overall success as leaders. Hence, assistant principals can support the distributed function of instructional leadership by supporting principals in setting a positive tone for school improvement and academic growth (Craft et al., 2016; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021).

New thinking about instructional leadership has emerged due to increased demands on accountability, effectiveness, and organizational management (Bush, 2015; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016). Horng and Loeb (2010) proposed that although day-to-day teaching and learning are at the heart of good classroom instruction, leaders can affect student learning through the teachers they hire and retain. Moreover, the research cautioned around a narrow focus of instructional leadership and proposed a more comprehensive view where leaders influence classroom teaching and student learning by supporting instruction with effective teaching and learning environments (Horng & Loeb, 2010; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Louis et al., 2010). Therefore, examining both historical and recent leadership models and frameworks that influence instruction may inform the urgency and importance of assistant principalship leadership development.

Leadership Models

Since its emergence in the 1980s, instructional leadership models have shifted based on apparent limitations, which included a lack of process to instructional leadership development and the leadership capacity needed for school improvement, especially at the secondary school level (Bush, 2011; Hallinger, 2003). Calabrese (1991) identified that indicators such as visibility, problem-solving, staff support, communicating a vision, and promoting a positive school environment aligned with the evolving role of the assistant principal as an instructional leader.

A comprehensive model of instructional leadership was first developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) with three essential dimensions of the instructional leadership construct: school mission and goals, management of instruction, and the promotion of a positive school learning climate. The 3 dimensions were further delineated into 10 instructional leadership functions. The first dimension, school mission, and goals focused on a leader's role in working with staff to ensure clear, measurable, and time-based goals focused on the academic progress of student achievement that is incorporated into daily practice. Leaders play a critical role in collaborating and communicating these goals with their staff and community (Hallinger, 2009; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

The second dimension, managing the instructional program, focused on coordinating instructional and curriculum through supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress (Hallinger, 2011). Within this dimension of the instructional leadership model, leaders are deeply engaged in facilitating, supervising, and monitoring teaching and learning within the school. Additionally, this dimension requires leaders to be immersed in the school's instructional program.

Hallinger (2011) cited an example where when the leader was aware of the reading levels of the 650+ students at their school, it reflected the level of investment the leader had in monitoring the progress and managing the school's instructional program. As a result, leaders require specialized expertise and training to carry the responsibility within this dimension of instructional leadership efforts (Khachatryan, 2015; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Marshall & Davidson, 2016).

The third dimension, promoting a positive school learning climate, included protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing

incentives, and developing high expectations and standards. Promoting a positive school learning climate emphasizes a culture of continuous improvement where the students and staff are aligned in their purpose and practices. Craft et al. (2016) cited Hausman et al. (2002) and reported, "one of the most commonly cited traits of successful assistant principals was the ability to build and maintain positive relationships which were linked to fostering a positive school climate" (p.10). Additionally, leaders modeled and valued these practices by creating a climate and culture that supported the continuous improvement of teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

Instructional leadership has further emphasized a learning model that values curriculum and instruction as instrumental in changing schools (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger, 2018; Murakami et al., 2019). The updated model prioritized a need for a distributed approach that balances a focus on learning rather than instruction (Bush, 2015). Gordon et al.'s (2006) study on school administrator instructional leadership revealed that a collegial model of supervision and an approach focused on teachers' developmental growth were the new paradigms in instructional leadership. Gordon et al. (2006) asserted that the paradigm hinged on "understanding how teachers grow optimally in a supportive and challenging environment" (p. 11).

The collegial supervision model focused on administrators having certain prerequisite traits to facilitate collective instructional improvement—not just curriculum and instructional knowledge, but interpersonal and technical skills. The model called for administrators to perform various tasks to improve student learning, including providing direct assistance to teachers, guiding professional development, and championing curriculum revision (Croft et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2006; Dodman, 2014). When leaders have the adequate prerequisite skills to approach their work with a learner mindset, it may result in instructional improvement.

Hallinger (2018) updated the traditional instructional framework to include indicators that today's leaders must consider. The model was built from Bossert et al. (1982), which incorporated contextual factors into an instructional leadership model. The context and cultural framework integrated instructional framework ideas but accounts for the influence of multiple contexts. The model focuses on improving student learning through influencing school climate and the teaching and learning program (Gurr & Drysdale, 2018). The context and cultural framework demonstrated that multi-level contextual factors influence leadership in schools. The multi-level factors include institutional, community, socio-cultural, economic, political, and school improvement contexts (Gurr, 2014; Gurr & Drysdale, 2018; Hallinger, 2018).

Institutional context encompasses a school's location within a system and how the system influences practice through decentralization, school autonomy, policy mandates, and work role expectations. Furthermore, community context considers the challenges within a school's community and how effective leadership is critical in influencing the outcomes. Socio-cultural context is value-driven as leaders adapt their leadership style to existing societal values and norms. The economic context is a macro-level feature of consideration about the economic development and features such as time at work in the local and broader society. Political context considers the extent to which the political contexts shape school leaders' beliefs, attitudes, and practices.

Lastly, the school improvement context introduces the historical context and the school's improvement trajectory. The contextual factors encompassed in this framework is essential for leaders of diverse schools to keep on their radar as they make informed decisions to support staff and students (Hallinger, 2018). As assistant principals become more actively engaged in the evolving definition of instructional leadership through a comprehensive view, how they interact

with the system and people involved may have positive effects (Hallinger, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021).

The view of instructional leadership has widened to include additional frameworks of thinking that assistant principals can consider expanding their scope of influence as instructional leaders. Murakami et al. (2019) cited that when the language of instructional leadership was paired with the constructs of transformational leadership—collaboration and participatory decision-making—assistant principals were able to work more closely with teachers to foster the types of innovation needed for school improvement. Moreover, DeWitt (2020) urged for a more holistic approach to instructional leadership, encouraging leaders to positively incorporate social-emotional learning practices to positively impact student learning and behavior.

The expanded vision of assistant principals would include focused and supportive professional development in the areas of social-emotional learning as well as culturally responsive school leadership (CSRL) to fit today's educational environment and needs (Khalifa et al., 2016; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021).

A redefined role of assistant principals as culturally competent leaders with a social justice identity may also align with the instructional leadership needed in the 21st Century to ensure equal access and opportunity for all students (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). Carpenter et al. (2017) indicated that assistant principal motivation and stance toward social justice work might affect practices from interactions with students, teachers, and parents to professional development opportunities and instructional and disciplinary strategies.

Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive framework emphasized the need for school leaders, such as assistant principals to support teachers and students by actions such as promoting an inclusive school environment and fostering the development of culturally

responsive teachers with the appropriate professional learning and support to attend to diverse school needs. Therefore, the time is ripe to revisit the role of the assistant principal as an equitable instructional leader providing them with the prerequisite skills to meet the challenges of today's schools (Brown & Williams, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; Senge, 2012).

As the role of the assistant principal continues to expand, a supportive bridge is needed to grow them into successful instructional leaders that can tackle today's challenges. (Goldring et al., 2021; Sun & Shoho, 2017; VanTuyle, 2018). Therefore, the expanded perspective on instructional leadership must be supported with effective leadership development and job-embedded professional learning that meets the need of today's school contexts for all educators (Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021).

Job-embedded Professional Learning

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 advocated for an intentional focus on job-embedded professional development. The legislative act emphasized professional development and learning as integral components in schools and educational agencies as a strategy for providing educators (including teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized support personnel, paraprofessionals, and as applicable early childhood educators) with the knowledge and skills to be successful (Zepeda, 2019). The legislation makes the argument that professional learning should be job-embedded to support the needs of educators and leaders by being sustained, ongoing, and content-focused (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). An adequate understanding of the criteria and components of job-embedded professional learning for teachers and leaders, such as assistant principals, may support their growth as educational professionals.

Defining professional job-embedded learning

The complexities of today's schools require teachers and leaders to obtain professional development and ongoing job-embedded learning to meet their contextual needs (Peters et al.,

2016; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021; Zepeda, 2018). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) defined effective professional development as structured professional learning that results in a change in educator practice and improvements to student learning outcomes. A seminal research study by Wood and Killion (1998) defined job-embedded learning as "learning that occurs as teachers and administrators engage in their daily work activities" (p. 52). Additionally, Islas (2010) reported that learning that is job-embedded connects to and transfers to professional practice.

Job-embedded learning opportunities for adults can be formal or informal (Hager, 2012). These learning opportunities allow adults to work to solve real problems of practice, interact and collaborate with peers, encourage the application of learning through engagement and reflection, and provides agency in making decisions about what type of learning will support their needs for growth (Brookfield, 2013; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Parise & Spillane, 2010; Zepeda, 2018).

Joyce and Showers (2002) emphasized that in learning a new skill, pushing oneself through the awkward first trials and exhibiting persistence was essential in moving from an unsuccessful learner to a successful learner. Hence, the active learning and agency that job-embedded professional learning opportunities provide may support personalized growth to meet the needs of adults (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hager, 2012).

Environmental conditions may also define how adults learn and are supported in effective job-embedded professional learning (Coggshall et al., 2012). Coggshall et al. (2012) proposed that an environment centered around learning, knowledge, community, and assessment are paramount to support an effective professional learning environment.

Learning-centered environments that build on individual strengths needs to be

personalized and differentiated. Knowledge-centered environments focus on discipline-specific content knowledge for teaching so that there is a deeper understanding and greater flexibility. Community-centered environments incorporate norms such as collaboration, learning, and inquiry to support the capacity of learners. Assessment-centered environments provide opportunities for learners to test their understanding by trying out new approaches and receiving feedback to enhance their growth (Bransford et al., 2000; Coggshall et al., 2012).

The environment needed to support effective job-embedded professional learning encompasses many components that keep the adult learner at the center of the process. As the assistant principal role evolves, they can support such environmental conditions for others and seek these same conditions for themselves as adult learners (Coggshall et al., 2012; Croft et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Assistant principals may play a role in developing job-embedded professional learning environments for teachers by being an active partner in administering feedback to support the learning environment triggered by accountability systems (Coggshall et al., 2012, Searby et al., 2017). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) proposed that effective professional learning provides opportunities for coaching and expert support that involves sharing expertise about content and evidence-based practices focused on individual needs. Therefore, feedback and reflection through built-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice can help them thoughtfully move toward expert visions of practice.

School leaders such as assistant principals may work toward shifts in their practice by capitalizing on job-embedded professional learning opportunities to support teacher growth (Zepeda, 2019). Although much of the research surrounding job-embedded professional learning was focused on teacher development, similar thinking may be applied to the needs of assistant

principals to foster their knowledge, skills, and to close the gap as instructional leaders in supporting instruction.

Components of Effective Professional Job-embedded Learning

The components of effective job-embedded professional learning and development that support teacher instruction and student achievement are well-documented in the research (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Garet et al., 2001, Porter et al., 2000). Although the research is well-documented, significant questions exist about how educators can learn skills and impact practice (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Fullan (2007) asserted that external approaches to instructional improvement are rarely powerful, specific, or sustained enough to alter the classroom and school culture; hence, there is a need for specific components to be integrated within job-embedded professional learning opportunities.

Although research on the components of effective job-embedded professional learning has been mixed, positive findings have reached consensus about the typical components of high-quality professional learning (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Desimone, 2009, Desimone & Garet, 2015). Table 2.1 highlights the essential components of effective teacher professional development.

Table 2.1

Essential Components of Effective Teacher Professional Development

Professional Development Component	**Description**
Content focused	Engagement in discipline specific curriculum relevant to context.
Active learning	Use of authentic artifacts and interactive activities to provide a contextualized professional experience.
Collaboration	Collective interactions of inquiry, support, and reflection to support instruction and professional growth.

Table 2.1

Essential Components of Effective Teacher Professional Development

Professional Development Component	Description
Modeling of effective practice	Integration of scaffolded learning such as video observation, demonstration lessons, exemplar lesson plans, and peer observation (co-learning).
Coaching support	Coaches and teachers working together to choose a focus that best supports the needs of the teacher.
Feedback and reflection	Opportunities to obtain embedded feedback and reflection from learned experiences to inform practice.

Note. Adapted from Darling-Hammond et al. (2017).

Learning opportunities that are content-focused, embed active learning, use models of effective practice, incorporate coaching support, and provide multiple opportunities for feedback and reflection to foster educator development and the transfer of skills into practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Desimone and Garet (2015) considered additional features such as coherence, duration, and collective participation components for effective professional development. Assistant principals may also benefit from such professional development learning components that are structured to promote their leadership growth.

Content-focused: Content-specific learning engages the teacher in discipline-specific curricula where they can implement and situate the learning into the classroom environment instead of generic professional development delivered externally or disconnected to their practice. In one study, Desimone and Garet (2015) made a critically important point that professional development content could be misdirected if it is not focused on actual knowledge and skills needed to support student learning.

In a meta-analysis review of 35 studies that examined content specificity, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) found that 31 featured a specific content focus as part of the professional learning model. Roth et al. (2011) examined the impact of content-focused and job-embedded professional learning on student achievement of elementary school science teachers. The study concluded that when teachers engaged in both content-focused learning with collaboration and analysis of their teaching, it resulted in greater student learning gains using pre and post assessments.

Conversely, Desimone and Garet (2015) proposed that discrete teacher behaviors were more accessible to change than either teacher content knowledge or complex instructional approaches. When learning was designed to foster the use of straightforward and specific tasks, the learning was regarded as successful, yet required a modest number of hours (Piasta et al., 2010; Sailors & Price, 2010). Desimone and Garet (2015) concluded that changing teachers' subject-matter knowledge in meaningful ways was complex and coupled with changing behaviors and beliefs.

Active Learning: Active learning addresses the what and how about effective adult learning. Trotter (2006) proposed that actions such as leveraging and using adult learning experiences, providing choices based on interest and their own needs and experiences, and incorporating reflection and inquiry enhance adult learning experiences. Active learning encourages engaging in practice by using authentic artifacts and interactive activities to provide a deeply embedded highly contextualized professional experience (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

When designing professional learning experiences, considerations such as integration of the practice of new knowledge and skills can be further supported through the elements of

collaboration, coaching, feedback, and reflection (Desimone et al., 2015; Garet et al., 2011; Garet, 2008). Greenleaf et al. (2011) described an active teacher professional learning model that improved student learning. The professional learning was inquiry-based, subject-focused, and collaborative. Teachers engaged in activities to simulate their discipline, and they identified potential challenges. Moreover, the analysis of student work, videotaped classroom lessons, and active metacognitive reflection enhanced the active learning experience.

Similarly, in a study by Heller et al. (2012), teachers implemented the same scientific investigations they analyzed in written teaching cases. Additional studies focused on pedagogical and content experts that would teach model lessons as teachers engaged as learners and an opportunity to role-play with their peers as part of the practice (Landry et al., 2006; Saxe et al., 2001). Moreover, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) concluded that the opportunity for teachers to engage in the same learning activities they are designing for their students could be used as a form of active learning. Overall, it was determined that 34 out of 35 studies incorporated the element of active learning in professional learning designs.

Collaboration: The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2016) proposed that schools have increasingly shifted to structuring teaching as a collaborative community effort comprised of many joint configurations (e.g., one-on-one, small group, school-wide). The Commission concluded that collaborative approaches learning positively promoted school change that extends beyond the classroom. Hence, when teachers rallied collectively around instruction and served as a support system for each other, it resulted in a trusting learning environment where teachers felt safe to engage in inquiry and reflection, take risks, and work together to attend to and solve the dilemmas in their practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Several studies highlighted the benefits of embedding collaboration within professional

learning designs. Kutaka et al.'s (2017) study on elementary school mathematics teachers concluded that coursework, collaborative assignments, self and group reflection of video evidence, and unit planning resulted in significant changes in student scores. Additionally, Meissel et al. (2016) explored a flexible whole-school professional model which emphasized modeling instruction, coaching and feedback, and facilitating discussion with participants. The results from both studies emphasized the importance of embedding collaborative tasks that positively supports the learning environment for participants.

Taylor et al. (2017) examined collaboration using video to enhance teacher professional learning. Science teachers that collaborated by viewing and discussing experienced teachers modeling science concepts and analyzing each other's teaching and student work resulted in positive student achievement for teachers that participated in this type of professional learning. Technology-enhanced collaboration through web-based coaching and online courses was also cited in the literature as an effective means of supporting teacher learning and collaboration (Allen et al., 2015; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Landry et al., 2009). Ultimately, when professional learning is thoughtfully designed to include collaboration as a learning component, teacher growth can be positively impacted.

Modeling effective practice: Modeling practices during professional learning supports adult learning and growth (Coggshall et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). When adult learners engaged in professional development that integrated modeling into the learning design such as using video observation, demonstration lessons, exemplar lesson plans, and peer observation (co-learning) it provided a clear vision of best practice (Avalos, 2011; Coggshall et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Moreover, Kleickmann et al. (2016) concluded that the use of modeling as a scaffolding technique along with active learning supported adult

learning which transferred to positive student achievement. Therefore, the effective use of modeling is of utmost importance for professional development designers to integrate into learning opportunities to support adults learning (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Doppelt, et al., 2009; Heller et al., 2012).

Incorporating coaching support, feedback, and reflection: Incorporating coaching within a professional learning design may also support and extend effective scaffolding of learning and implementation of new approaches to practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Zepeda, 2019). Coaching allows for the necessary follow up after professional learning to obtain constructive feedback to support implementing new practices (Powell et al., 2010; Roth et al., 2011).

When coaching is leveraged as part of the professional learning design, coaches and teachers work together to choose a to focus for the learning that best supports the needs of the teacher (Knight & Nieuwerburgh, 2012). Studies have suggested that coaching can support educators' effective implementation of new curricula, tools, and approaches (Gallagher et al., 2017; Penuel et al., 2011). The research was consistent with earlier studies from Joyce and Showers (2002) and Neufeld and Roper (2003), which provided evidence that teachers who received coaching were more likely to enact desired teaching practices and to apply them more appropriately than those that did not receive coaching supports.

As part of the coaching process, feedback and reflection are also critical to the growth and development of adults (Coggshall et al., 2012; Croft et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Early research from Schön (1983) noted that teachers learned more from reflecting on their experiences than from their engagement in the experiences. Studies by Gallagher et al. (2017) and Meyers et al. (2016) concluded that embedding feedback and reflection into learning designs yielded positive effects and promoted student-centered instruction. Moreover, an

intentionally embedded process of feedback and reflection to support teachers in science instruction and reading recovery, resulting in positive results. (Sirinides et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017).

The vast body of literature surrounding the value of job-embedded professional learning continues to grow. The research reminds us that a combination of elements and effective mechanisms along with the enduring attributes of coherence, duration, and collective participation creates a collaborative culture that results in collective professional capital that leads to widespread productive improvement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone et al., 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Sims et al., 2021; Zepeda, 2019; Zepeda et al., 2022). Effective job-embedded professional learning components may also be integrated into assistant principals' professional learning as their role continues to evolve to fill expertise gaps and to support their growth as instructional leaders in schools.

Job-embedded Learning for Assistant Principals

Assistant principals handle a wide range of responsibilities that require specialized learning opportunities; yet few learning opportunities are available to them (Barnett et al. 2017; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Weller & Weller, 2002). Early studies from Marshall (1993) noted that assistant principals needed training and support to manage multiple tasks and responsibilities faced in the position. Marshall (1993) proposed that “actively identifying, recruiting, and supporting individuals as they enter administrative positions, affected the way administrators defined their roles and leadership styles” (p. 91). Barnett et al. (2012) concluded that assistant principals’ challenges and learning needs “pertained to workload and task management, conflicts with adults and students, and curriculum and instruction issues” (p. 92).

Moreover, novice and experienced assistant principals "did not feel ready to work with people (particularly when conflicts arose), understand certain job expectations, and did not possess the organizational and managerial skills needed to accomplish tasks" (p. 109). Assistant principals desired training for the problems they encounter daily, especially budget, discipline, and facilities management (Hausman et al., 2002; Owen-Fitzgerald, 2010, Petrides et al., 2014). Novice assistant principals described their early experience of administration as a cultural shift that was characterized by a sense of dislocation and feelings of ambiguity. These experiences were primarily attributed to inappropriate preparation for their frontline location between teachers and upper-level administrators, differences between teaching and administration roles, workloads, and lack of ongoing support and scaffolding (Armstrong, 2015). Many assistant principals relied on their administrative internship experiences from their preparation programs to learn about the role (Reyes-Guerra & Barnett, 2017). Hence, the research points to an evident gap that supports addressing the learning need for assistant principals.

Assistant principals often seek support to deepen their content knowledge and skill development necessary throughout their careers. Barnett et al. (2017) concluded that assistant principals "need skill development in working with teachers, decision making, and communication should not be left to informal or happenstance occurrences'' (p. 28). Moreover, assistant principals appreciated gaining insights about honing their decision-making and networking skills, developing their people and communication skills, and contemplating their personal development.

Specific content suggestions for skill development included areas such as change management, team building, management of technology and time, and teacher performance evaluation (Cranston et al., 2004; Gurley et al., 2015; Kwan & Walker, 2008). Hence,

professional learning afforded assistant principals a greater understanding of their leadership preferences and personal dispositions to be emotionally intelligent, flexible, and fair as they work with stakeholders (Barnett et al., 2012).

The research on assistant principal professional learning has proposed that training and development should prepare them to be not only effective managers but also to increase their capacity to assume greater responsibilities as instructional leaders (Drago-Severson & Aravena, 2011; Goldring et al. 2021; Sun & Shoho, 2017; VanTuyle, 2018). Petrides et al. (2014) and Sciarappa and Mason (2014) cited the lack of knowledge and skills by assistant principals to improve student learning. Moreover, instructional leadership was one of the top five knowledge areas of need for professional development for assistant principals due to its alignment with the responsibility of monitoring teacher supervision, curriculum, instruction, and student learning (Oliver, 2005; Owen-Fitzgerald, 2010; Petrides et al., 2014; Searby et al., 2017).

Assistant principals' perspective on school leadership differed from principals in their desire for more involvement in instructional leadership to obtain a skill set and to gain confidence in school improvement strategies (Allan & Weaver, 2014; Houchens et al, 2018; Munoz & Barber, 2011). Therefore, providing customized ongoing quality professional development for assistant principals is imperative.

The design and implementation of effective job-embedded professional learning for assistant principals can support their growth as educational leaders (Searby et al., 2017). Designers of professional development programs need to ensure that learning incorporates appropriate content, structures, and meaningful learning activities (Barnett et al., 2017). Oliver's (2005) study of over 900 assistant principals in Southern California found that they preferred professional development sessions on their school campuses or at the central office. Furthermore,

when the professional learning was delivered in short seminars or embedded within online courses, it allowed adequate time for reflection toward application into practice.

Additionally, assistant principals indicated they desired intellectual stimulation and emotional support from external sources, including observing other principals and joining support groups (Kwan & Li, 2016). Monthly professional development opportunities on school finance, time management, school culture, instructional leadership, and using various modes of learning (face to face and virtual) also proved to be beneficial (Allan & Weaver, 2014).

Mentoring was also prevalent throughout the literature to support assistant principal professional learning opportunities. Marshall and Davidson (2016) proposed that effective mentoring, coaching, and administrative collaboration were needed to support the growth of assistant principals. Mentors guided assistant principals by modeling coaching and providing feedback to resolve dilemmas. As a result, assistant principals experienced a boost in confidence and a broadening of leadership skills (Marshall, 1993; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Searby et al., 2017).

Daresh (2004) stated that having a mentor was "the single most powerful thing an assistant principal... can do to enhance personal survival and effectiveness" (p. 97). Many "grow your own" programs offered assistant principals with a variety of learning experiences with embedded design mentoring programs for assistant principals, especially those who are newly appointed (Armstrong, 2015; Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Reyes-Guerra & Barnett, 2017). When assistant principals worked with their principal mentors on tasks aligned to the principal's job like teacher observation, they gained confidence and competence; and hence, they improved their upward mobility toward the principalship (Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Retelle, 2010, Sun,

2018). The urgency and need for assistant principals to be supported with effective professional learning and mentoring support was evident throughout the literature.

One of the more current practices to support the needs of assistant principal professional learning is coaching (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Leadership coaching involves an experienced coach collaborating with a willing participant to set achievable professional goals with actionable steps to improve leadership practice that is time-bound, context-specific, has a narrow focus, and is personalized (Bloom et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2015).

Hayes and Burkett (2021) explored the perceptions of 26 mid-career assistant principals in Texas enrolled in a coaching academy to improve their professional growth and needs. The academy offered professional learning, small group networking, and job-embedded coaching for the assistant principals. The study concluded that developing leadership skills in addressing leader strengths and constraints, enhancing communication skills, and managing specific professional learning needs increased their confidence as leaders.

Hayes and Burkett (2021) also described a transformation in the understanding of instructional leadership by leading teachers using words such as ‘‘grow, support, and collaborate” (p. 12). The job-embedded professional learning model encompassed components of effective job-embedded professional learning (e.g., content-focused, coaching, reflection, collaboration) that supported assistant principals in their growth as instructional leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Searby, et al., 2017).

Coaching practices may also be leveraged by instructionally focused assistant principals to support teacher instruction toward improving student achievement. A deeper understanding of best coaching practices is necessary to assess which ones are most applicable for assistant principal application and transfer into their leadership practices.

Coaching

Coaching is a model of job-embedded professional learning where teachers are guided to transfer new learning into instructional practice with increased fidelity (Killion et al., 2020; Zepeda, 2019). Coaching may support instructional practices by engaging teachers in a developmental process where they learn to understand the content better, apply instructional strategies, and connect research to classroom practice that promotes professional growth to impact student achievement (Kraft et al., 2018; Zepeda, 2019).

Effective coaching programs are an expensive intervention that can consume approximately 80% of school budgets, which many schools may not have the human or financial means to invest in (Killion et al., 2020). Therefore, as the role of assistant principals continues to evolve and align to instructional leadership practices (e.g., increased visibility in classrooms, conducting classroom observations, and administering feedback to teachers) integrating coaching practices into their work with teachers to support instruction may prove beneficial (Knight, 2018; Master et al., 2020; Quintero, 2019).

Definitions of Coaching

The coach's role is to partner with teachers to improve their practice by building their will, skill, knowledge, and capacity so that students are more successful (Aguilar, 2013; Campbell & Nieuwerburgh, 2017; Knight, 2018). There are several schools of thought around the definition of coaching and its impact on educators and school improvement. Coaching, according to Skiffington and Zeus (2003) is described as a holistic, multifaceted approach to learning and change that impacts educator professional development and learning culture through the learning experienced by creating “learning that endures” (p. 81). Nieuwerburgh (2012) comprehensively defined coaching as:

A one-to-one conversation focused on enhancing learning and development through

> increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate. (p. 17)

Coaching conversations can serve as a vehicle for the self-directive learning and development of teacher practice through the supported actions and behaviors that are facilitated by the coach. Goldring et al.'s (2021) synthesis of empirical research on assistant principals suggested that although limited evidence exists on how assistant principals contribute toward student outcomes, assistant principal coaching of teachers can increase their instructional leadership role that may lead to student achievement.

Furthermore, Aguilar (2013) asserted that "coaching offers a new set of tools that have the potential to radically transform our schools" (p. 5). Devine et al. (2013) stated that coaching was a powerful approach for personal change and learning by facilitating inquiry by using active listening and providing appropriate challenges and supports to develop students, teachers, school leaders, and educational institutions. Moreover, Lofthouse (2019) added that coaching "helps individuals deal with authentic challenges, professional interests and dilemmas experienced in complex educational settings, while also acting as a counterweight to some of the consequences of performativity" (p. 33).

Regardless of its form, coaching involves supporting the development of a deeper understanding of content, extending thought processes to see varying points of view, developing critical thinking skills, examining instruction related to student success, translating research into classroom practice, and giving feedback on performance to help educators boost their performance (Zepeda, 2019). As teachers encounter instructional challenges and move through their developmental process as a learner, school leaders such as assistant principals may leverage

coaching practices and approaches to support teachers and their professional growth as instructional leaders.

Purpose and Approaches to Coaching

Coaching is considered an essential component embedded within professional development that allows educators to develop their capacity by examining their behaviors, practices, beliefs, values, and feelings (Aguilar, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Zepeda 2019). Coaching fosters partnerships and an environment where educators feel cared for and can engage in deep reflection, take risks, and have robust conversations about celebrations and growth in their practice as they move toward their desired goal in a fulfilling manner (Campbell & Nieuwerburgh, 2017).

The early research of Joyce and Showers (2002) found that less than 5% of teachers implement new knowledge and skills on completing professional learning. When teachers were provided with professional learning with the follow-up that specifically included coaching and valuable feedback, the implementation levels, fidelity, and efficacy moved to 95%.

For purposes of this study, the coaching approaches that best aligned with the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals to enhance their instructional leadership skills were obtained from Knight's (2018) impact cycle and Bloom et al. (2005) blended coaching. Knight's (2018) impact cycle uses an instructional coaching approach to support teachers. Bloom et al. (2005) blended coaching approach emphasized a way of doing and being that can be integrated by leaders through an instructive to facilitative manner. The work of Knight (2018) and Bloom et al. (2005) is what the system in which that action research is being conducted subscribes. These approaches model and allow the assistant principals to implement new processes and skills aligned to instructional leadership. Table 2.2 highlights the three coaching approaches.

Table 2.2

Description of Coaching Approaches

Coaching Approach	Description
Directive (consultative)	Coaching focuses on sharing expertise. Most of the thinking is done by the coach based on a strategy focused goal.
Dialogical (collaborative)	Coach shares expertise when appropriate. Coach works in collaboration with teacher on a student focused goal.
Facilitative (transformative)	Coach does not share expertise and serves as a sounding board. The individual that is coached (coachee) does most of the thinking based on a teacher focused goal.

Note. Adapted from Knight (2018) and Bloom et al. (2005).

The three approaches to coaching practices documented in the literature that most aligned with the purposes of this study were directive (consultative), dialogical (collaborative), and facilitative (transformative) (Aguilar, 2013; Bloom et al., 2005; Knight, 2018). Directive coaching focuses on shifting behaviors based on the coach's expertise in a content area or strategy and sharing expertise (Bloom et al., 2005; Knight, 2018). The coach provides resources, makes suggestions, and models lessons to support educator practice. Directive coaching is less likely to result in long-term changes of practice or internalization of learning (Aguilar, 2013; Knight, 2018; Zugelder, 2019).

Dialogical (collaborative) coaching balances advocacy with inquiry using coaching skills such as asking questions to empower the collaborator to identify goals and strategies that will make an impact on student achievement and educator success (Bloom et al., 2005; Knight,

2018). Facilitative coaching supports learning new ways of thinking and being through reflection, analysis, observation, and experimentation, this awareness influences behaviors. The origins of facilitative coaching are grounded in cognitive and ontological coaching. These coaching practices addressed ways of thinking to build metacognition.

In facilitative (transformational) coaching, the coach works to build on the existing skills and knowledge to construct new skills and knowledge, and ultimately shape the beliefs that will inform future actions (Aguilar, 2013; Bloom et al., 2005; Knight, 2018; Zugelder, 2019). The integration and transfer of these coaching approaches into assistant principal practice may deepen their skill set in supporting teacher instructional growth and school improvement efforts.

Coaching Models that Support Instruction

Instructional coaching is one model that may be implemented by assistant principals to support instruction. Knight (2015) proposed that understanding the complexities of working with adults, leveraging a useful coaching model, gathering data, using effective teaching practices, employing effective communication, and being an effective leader are hallmarks that allow coaching to thrive. Instructional coaching frameworks reflect the five features of effective professional development: content-focused, active learning, duration, coherence, and collective participation (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

Knight's (2018) approached coaching through an instructional framework called the impact cycle. Knight's (2018) coaching process emphasized a partnership philosophy embedded within a three-step approach of identifying, learning, and improving instruction to support teacher growth. This three-step framework is focused on obtaining a clear picture of the reality of teaching (through observation or recording a lesson), debriefing to identify an area to create a goal, engaging in inquiry where the coach and teacher learn together, and monitoring shifts in

teacher practice and student achievement (Knight, 2018; Knight 2022). The partnership mindset anchors the work between the coach and coachee through a mutually humanizing mindset encompassing the principles of equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2015, 2018, 2022).

The cognitive coaching model developed by Costa and Garmston (2002) can also support instruction. The cognitive coaching framework engages teachers in conversations about planning, reflecting, and problem-solving through a cyclical model that includes a pre-observation conference, classroom observation, and a post-observation conference. Non-verbal skills such as rapport (body matching), use of silence, and non-verbal accepting supports the structure time and space for reflection. Verbal skills such as reflective questioning (positive presuppositions), paraphrasing (summary), clarifying (probing, values, meaning), and providing data and resources can support the teacher to explore their thinking behind their practices (Costa & Garmston, 2015; Zepeda, 2019).

The cognitive coaching approach honors autonomy encourages interdependence which aligns to a dialogical approach that may result in higher achievement. Assistant principals may find value in integrating coaching skills as part of their leadership practices as when providing feedback to teachers on classroom instruction and impact on instruction.

Impact of Coaching on Instruction

The impact of coaching on instruction has emerged with some promise and potential in supporting the growth of teachers to positively impact learning (Kraft et al., 2018; University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, 2016). The early studies on coaching conducted by Joyce and Showers (1982, 2002) concluded that teachers who received coaching were more likely to incorporate new teaching practices than teachers who were not coached. Moreover, Joyce and

Showers (2002) proposed that the likelihood of transferring new learning into practice increased nearly 80% when coaching is added to the theory, demonstration, and low-risk practices offered in most professional learning endeavors. Furthermore, the benefits of coaching had positive effects including investing more time by frequently meeting with their coach to discuss how student data affected their instructional practices (Marsh et al., 2010; Van Ostrand et al., 2020).

The broadest application for coaching has traditionally been in literacy and math. However, coaching has expanded to assist and develop a wider range pedagogical practice, classroom practices and team development (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018). Several experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of coaching aligned to literacy documented improvements in teachers' literacy instruction and student performance on reading assessments (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Marsh et al., 2010; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Powell et al., 2010; Sailors & Price, 2010). Furthermore, Campbell and Malkus (2011) concluded from a two-year study of on-site coaching on mathematical content knowledge, pedagogy, and curriculum that student achievement increased on standardized mathematics exams.

Conversely, a second middle school mathematics study found no impact on teacher knowledge or student achievement (Garet et al., 2011). Kraft et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis concluded significant, positive coaching effects on instructional practices (0.49 standard deviations) with a more limited impact on student achievement (0.18 standard deviation). The data suggested a weaker relationship between instructional inputs and achievement outputs related to coaching. Further analyses indicated that the coaching effects were about half as large in large-scale coaching trials in comparison to smaller trials. Hence, a suggested shift from content focus to a broader scope that emphasized instructional processes that meet the changing student needs, a decrease of one-on-one coaching time, and an increase to team coaching may

prove beneficial to mitigate achievement plateaus and build collective capacity toward improving instruction (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Mitchell, 2014).

The body of research on the impact of assistant principals serving as coaches remains limited. Master et al.'s (2020) study on the assistant principals enrolled in the Pathways to Leadership in Urban Schools (PLUS) program, which provided professional development aligned to instructional leadership and coaching practices to support teachers, concluded that students of teachers that a PLUS assistant principal coached had somewhat more significant ELA achievement gains than students whose teachers did not receive coaching support from a PLUS assistant principal.

Grissom et al. (2021) advocated for improved efforts to develop assistant principal by including instructional leadership practices such as integrating coaching with the requisite skills to provide feedback to teachers. Therefore, there is urgency for assistant principals to acquire and transfer the skills of coaching, including knowledge of what constitutes coaching as well as the necessary requisite skills needed to provide feedback to others may positively impact teacher growth as well as create a pathway student achievement.

Adult Learning Transfer

Transferring learning into practice is considered the missing link in professional learning that can be best supported by understanding the most effective ways to optimize acquisition and transfer (Brion, 2020, Hajian, 2019; Thomas, 2007). Learning transfer is a multi-dimensional process that occurs at any stage that could be enhanced through coaching and reflecting in situated learning environments (Hajian, 2019). Moreover, support at the individual and organizational levels through meaningful social interactions and the development of skills into real-world contexts that are successfully applied and maintained over time is essential (Burke &

Hutchins, 2007; Hajian, 2019; Roumell, 2018).

The need to be intentional when designing professional learning for adults with the appropriate support can potentially increase the transfer of learning into professional practice. An awareness of the types of learning transfer can support the design and implementation of the appropriate job-embedded professional learning to meet the needs of the adult learner.

Types of Adult Learning Transfer

Learning transfer is defined as the effective and continual application of knowledge and skills gained in learning activities that impact job performance or another individual, organizational, or community responsibility (Broad, 1997). The mechanisms embedded in integrative and situated learning theory may support the conditions that cultivate the skills to be transferred into legitimate participation and practice (Lave et al., 1991; Perkins & Salomon, 1989; Perkins & Salomon, 1992).

Situated learning supports adult learning transfer through active participation in a highly connected community in which knowledge and culture are integrated through opportunities to study the rationale of new practice, the opportunities to see it in action, and the opportunities involved in planning for practice (Joyce & Calhoun, 2016; Lave et al., 1991). Researchers have proposed that the learning environment must be situated in the varying overlap between the original and transfer context (near or far transfer). Table 2.3 highlights the different types of adult learning transfer.

Table 2.3

Types of Learning Transfer

Types of Learning Transfer	Description
Low road transfer (Perkins & Salmon, 1992)	Learned activity and context share many of the same features, which results in reflexive behaviors or automatic responses when transferred into practice.
High road transfer (Perkins & Salmon, 1992)	Learned activity contains thoughtful abstraction of general principles among several different events and contexts. Flexible application and transfer of learning in different situations is needed.
Multi-dimensional transfer (Brion, 2020; Weber, 2014)	A model of learning transfer that considers context, environment, and the six dimensions of learning transfer (pretraining, learner, facilitator, materials and content, context, environment, and follow up).
Mindful transfer (Roumell, 2018; Taylor, 2017)	The inclusion of knowledge application, perspectives, and skills across contexts by examining commitments and experiences through creating applicable cases and contextualizing through repetition.

The underlying premises behind transfer are important to understand given that this study aimed to examine how a situated learning environment for a group of assistant principals enrolled in professional learning community supported the conditions for the transfer of coaching skills into their practices as instructional leaders.

Low road transfer supports conditions when the context is sufficiently similar to learning to trigger semi-automatic responses. In contrast, high road transfer depends on mindful abstractions and applications that require a deliberate search for connections and patterns within the working (Detterman, 1993; Perkins & Salomon, 1992). Learning transfer is encouraged by bridging between low and high road transfer to prepare learners to actively engage in “far

transfer," which helps learners apply the knowledge and skills within a broader real-world context (Billing 2007; Weber, 2014). Therefore, when adults are situated in a supportive yet cognitively rigorous environment, they can create connections and make meaning of their learning to transfer it into their context and practice.

Adults operationalize learning transfer as they integrate newly acquired skills within their working context, when behaviors are successfully applied after the learning, and if maintained over time (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Weber, 2014). The seminal work of Joyce et al. (1987) proposed that a series of moves such as extensive practice with new behaviors and models in addition to the integration of new strategies into practice are crucial to transfer. Additionally, further support and training may be necessary to ensure learning transfer as unanswered questions begin to accumulate. Hence, as adults learn a new skill, pushing oneself through the awkward first trials and exhibiting persistence was essential in moving from an unsuccessful learner to a successful learner (Joyce & Showers 2002).

Weber (2014) asserted that systems often fail to address the learning transfer process and are more often focused on the design and implementation of the learning. An intentional effort toward embedding application objectives and transfer processes within learning supports the learning transfer process. Brion's (2020) multidimensional model of learning transfer considered how culture, which was comprised of context and environment, affected six dimensions of learning transfer (pretraining, learner, facilitator, materials and content, context, and environment, and follow up). When cultural conditions in schools and organizations are ignored, it may result in withdrawal from learners and facilitators. Hence, the withdrawal from both facilitator and learner will mitigate the transfer of learning into practice. Therefore, when learning transfer design and decisions are considered on multiple levels, successful transfer

outcomes can increase.

Researchers have further explored the field of adult transformative learning and mindful transfer as frameworks that may improve the actions taken toward application and transfer of knowledge (Roumell, 2018; Taylor, 2017). Taylor (2017) proposed that constructing and appropriating new and revised interpretations from experience required deliberate development of higher cognitive thinking and application of understanding to everyday experience, which brings fundamental change that sticks to the learner's perspective and way of doing things.

Additionally, complete learning transfer needs to include knowledge application, perspectives, and skills across contexts. Roumell's (2018) notion of mindful transfer further extended Weber's (2014) thinking. Roumell (2018) asserted that through examining one's commitments and experiences, creating applicable cases, and contextualizing through repetition of ideas support for learning transfer was evident. Subsequently, actions that support mindful transfer and higher-order cognitive processing that can be systematically incorporated into the learning environment to reinforce thinking patterns and learning events further develop active competencies. The conditions to support optimal learning transfer are critical for assistant principals as they engage in professional learning opportunities.

Conditions for Learning Transfer

Effective adult learning conditions can support the transfer of learning into practice. Researchers have concluded that influences such as personal motivation, the relevance of the knowledge to the learner, and future goal orientation are essential contributing factors at the individual level (Bhatti & Kaur, 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007). Additionally, the degree to which a person feels comfortable to take positive interpersonal risks, known as psychological safety, can support the exercise of agency to engage in experiences and interactions which lead

to positive human development (Edmonson & Lei, 2014; Wanless, 2016). When humans feel that taking an interpersonal risk will not result in embarrassment, ridicule, or shame, it results in engagement, connections, change, and ultimately learning (Edmonson & Lei, 2014).

Moreover, opportunities for application, perceptions of support, and accountability were also critical processes on the learner and facilitator at the instructional and organizational level that extend past content delivery (Dirani, 2012; Ford et al., 2006; Nafukho et al., 2017). Roumell (2018) asserted that:

> Learning transfer and application are not so much about the content or how it is presented in a learning event. Learning transfer is about helping learners relate to the content and visualize how they might effectively apply the new strategies in meaningful ways. The strategies can readily be incorporated into the learning environment to reinforce mindful transfer thinking patterns and supporting them in gaining comfort and agency to support adult learners. (p. 18)

Therefore, the learning environment must be thoughtfully designed to integrate ample opportunities for learning application and transfer opportunities to support the needs of adult learners.

Chapter Summary

The growing demand for assistant principal leadership has resulted in shifts to their role from a focus on management, discipline, and logistics to that of instruction (Searby et al., 2017; Sun & Shoho, 2017; VanTuyle, 2018). The need to expand their role supports building their capacity to be influential instructional leaders who can lead in varying contexts, shape teacher practice, and ensure readiness for future leadership opportunities (Grissom, 2021; Militello et al., 2015; Sun & Shoho, 2017). When educators and leaders, such as assistant principals, engage in

effective job-embedded professional learning, it can support transfer into their practice as thriving instructional leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

One model of job-embedded professional learning that assistant principals can learn more about their work as instructional leaders is coaching. Coaching may support assistant principal instructional leadership growth by teaching them how to engage with teachers in a developmental process where they better understand how to facilitate conversations with teachers on the enhancement of self-awareness, personal responsibility through questioning, active listening, and challenging the teacher in a supportive, encouraging climate that emphasizes partnership and minimizes evaluation (Campbell & Nieuwerburgh, 2017; Knight, 2022; Lofthouse, 2019). The action-oriented change strategy of coaching can promote professional growth to impact student achievement (Kraft et al., 2018; Zepeda, 2019).

Assistant principals that invest in expanding their repertoire of skills through engaging in job-embedded professional learning require ample adult learning transfer anchored in cultural and contextual mechanisms, structures, and processes (Brion, 2020; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Roumell, 2018). As job-embedded professional learning opportunities emerge for assistant principals, intentionality to their working context, shifts in perspectives and behaviors, and development of higher cognitive thinking through a supportive community are essential. The urgency to create such conditions for assistant principal learning is evident given the movement toward instructional leadership as a necessary and vital component of their work (Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Petrides et al., 2014; Searby et al., 2017).

Chapter 3 describes the action research methodology, explores data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. Chapter 3 also includes a detailed examination of the context of the research site.

CHAPTER 3

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An increase in demand for accountability and teacher effectiveness has resulted in a shift in the role of assistant principals (Searby et al., 2017; Sun & Shoho, 2017; VanTuyle, 2018). As the need grows, assistant principals seek professional learning that connects to their 21st-century role as instructional leaders (Allan & Weaver, 2014, Goldring et al., 2021; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). The call for assistant principals to support instruction by learning and transferring coaching practices and skills into their feedback conversations can support teacher and instructional leadership growth (Grissom, 2021; Grissom et al., 2017 Khachatryan, 2015; Knight, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the transfer into practice job-embedded coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a district-wide program. The study also sought to examine whether the transfer of coaching practices and skills impacted assistant principals' perspectives about their expanding role as instructional leaders supporting instruction.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching skills into their leadership role of supporting instruction?

2. How does the transfer of coaching practices impact assistant principals' perspective as instructional leaders?
3. What does the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction?

Chapter 3 explores the logic model that guided the study, describes the research design, data collection methods, data analysis, and discusses the validity and trustworthiness of the study.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

A recent four-year quantitative study by Master et al. (2020) focused on the impact of assistant principals implementing coaching with teachers through the Pathways to Leadership in Urban Schools (PLUS) program. The study concluded that teachers coached by assistant principals experienced improved student achievement gains in English Language Arts (ELA) in comparison to teachers who did not. Moreover, the assistant principals from the study stated that "the job-embedded coaching they received from the PLUS staff as the most valuable component of the program and described their cohort as a key source of support" (p. 4).

The findings from the quantitative study suggested that when designing professional learning opportunities, the integration of job-embedded coaching and professional development with a peer cohort supported the transfer of learning into leadership practices (Master et al., 2020). The present action research study attempts to extend the thinking of Master's (2020) findings by examining how assistant principals' situated learning environment and job embedded coaching support influence learning transfer of the desired coaching skills into their practices as instructional leaders. A thorough understanding of the nature of qualitative research was needed to understand better the value of using this method for conducting this study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) proposed the definition of qualitative research as a field of inquiry that crosscuts disciplines and subject matter. Qualitative research aims to examine the power of the how and why by enriching the understanding of a given phenomenon in naturalistic settings within a specific context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glanz, 2014). Creswell and Poth (2018) described qualitative research as a process where "the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15).

Moreover, qualitative research strives to make sense of or interpret phenomena and experiences in terms of the meaning that individuals make from them (Bloomberg &Volpe, 2019). The use of thick descriptions allows for a depth of contextual detail that can be gathered through multiple data sources and triangulated to enhance the quality of the research (Ravich & Carl, 2016). Hence, thick descriptions were compiled and analyzed by collecting data from interviews, focus groups, and document review.

This study aimed to examine the perspectives of assistant principals as they transferred coaching skills into their role of supporting teachers during feedback conversations. Furthermore, the study examined how the perspectives of the assistant principals impacted their instructional leadership capacity to support teachers. A qualitative research approach was selected because of the study's focus on participants' perspective about their instructional leadership work.

Using action research methods that included assistant principal semi-structured interviews, focus group meetings with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT), document/artifact review, and observation of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) administering feedback to assistant principals about learning transfer best supported the focus of

the study. Action research methodology was used to situate the research within the context of the study.

Overview of Action Research Methods

Action research is a systematic and collaborative orientation toward inquiry that works toward solving complex problems confronted by communities and organizations (McNiff, 2018; Mertler, 2020; Stringer, 2014). Bryk et al. (2015) described the action research process within a system setting as using a "learning-to-improve problem" approach with an end goal to improve outcomes and to implement new practices reliably (p. 115). Zepeda (2019) defined action research as a form of job-embedded professional learning that provides a rich learning experience so that educators can reflect and consider their actions on impacting student learning while simultaneously improving their practices in the company of others.

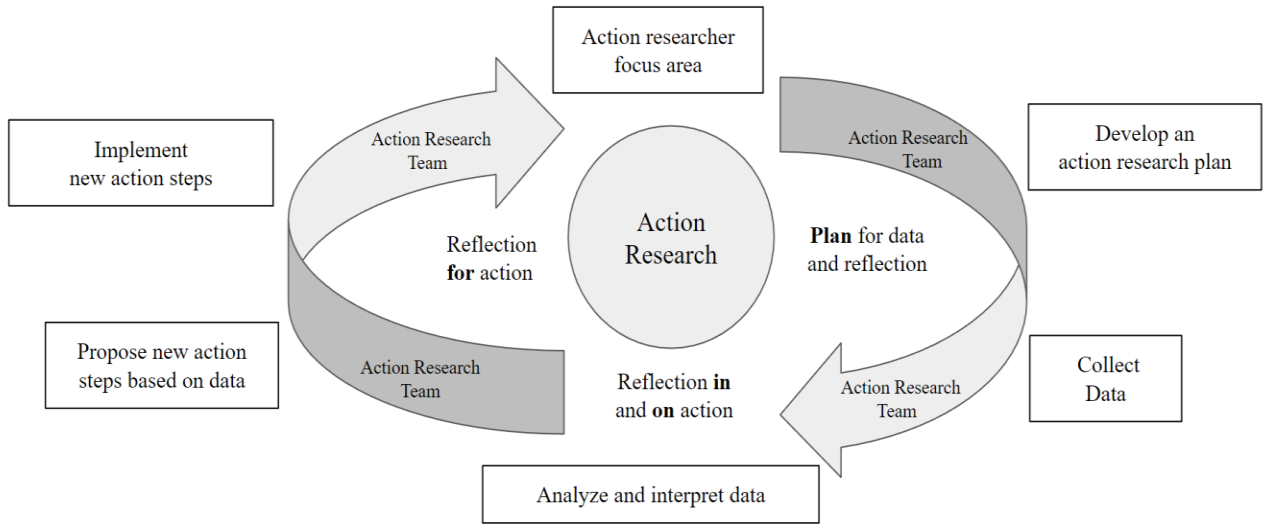
The power of action research is that it allows people to take a critical look at their practice and to have the courage to open oneself to the possibility of change while engaging in a reflective spiral (Fairbanks & LaGrone, 2006; Hughes, 2016). Action research allows organizations to address problems unique to their settings and contexts using an in-action rather than about action, which aligns with this study's objectives (Coghlan, 2019). Coghlan (2019) asserted that action research garners "important learning from outcomes both intended and unintended, and [contribute] to actionable knowledge," and as such, drives the process of continuous improvement (p. 6).

The use of data collection and analysis is critical in action research. The integration of data collection and analysis in the action research produces understanding to inform future action and to increase the amount of conscious learning that emerges from the experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Zepeda, 2015). Therefore, intentional efforts of collecting, analyzing, reflecting,

and engaging in conversation to modify practice are critical features of action research (Glanz, 2014). Additionally, according to Schön (1983, 1987), *reflection in action* and *on action* helps reshape what we are doing while we are doing it. Moreover, Zepeda's (2019) adapted model highlights that *reflection for action* leads to forward-thinking and action steps. Hence, the action research process relates to advocating for change using a multidimensional approach. Figure 3.1 depicts the cycles that the researcher and Action Research Design Team (ARDT) take toward the reflective actions in this research process.

Figure 3.1

Action Research Model



Note. Adapted from Glanz (2014); Zepeda (2019).

Action research was chosen because it uses inquiry to improve practice (Stringer & Aragón, 2020). According to Zepeda (2019), the job-embedded nature of action research rests on the foundations of:

1. examining real-life practices and experiences in the context, they occur
2. using a systematic approach for the ongoing action research

3. develop deeper meaning about practice with the assistance of others
4. experiment with practice based on reflection and analysis of data

All these characteristics make action research the appropriate research method to investigate the perspectives of assistant principals as they learn and transfer coaching practices and skills into their instructional leadership role of supporting teachers.

Action Research Design

The design of action research allows for the improvement process to occur through collaboration and reflection that result in responsive changes to practice. Bryk et al. (2015) described this process as an improvement cycle approach guided by rapid learning that galvanizes shifts in actions that will be implemented in subsequent improvement cycles. As new learning and reflection occur, a better understanding of the problem and possible solutions emerges. Bryk et al. (2015) proposed that the faster the learning can occur that the changes can occur from small to large scale.

The *Plan-Do-Study-Act* cycle articulates a hypothesis based on a working theory of improvement. The *Plan-Do-Study-Act* cycle approach allows the researcher to actively gather data to determine gaps in understanding when examining the data in the *study* component of the cycle. Bryk et al. (2015) suggested that each cycle builds on previous learning to "effect improvements reliably under different conditions" (p. 121). Furthermore, the learning and reflection needed to develop change often requires multiple cycles to establish a change idea that works.

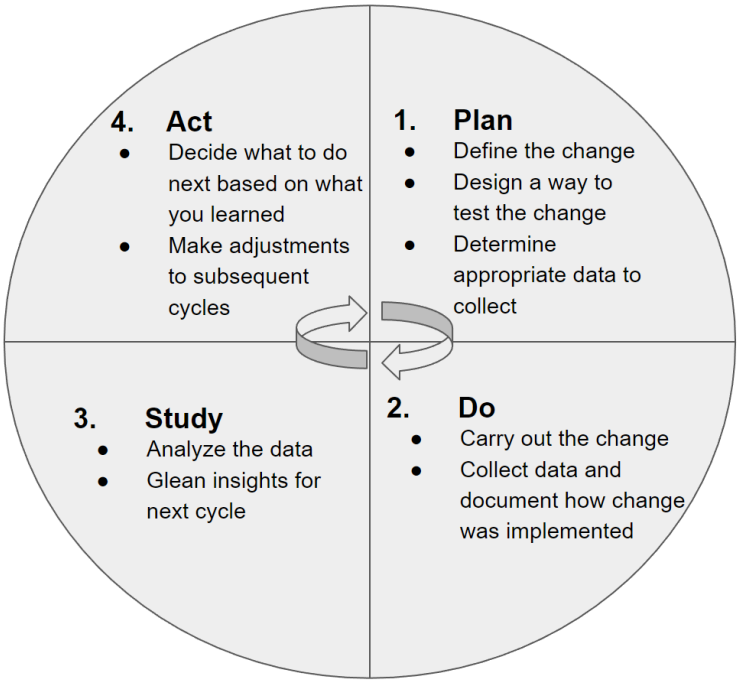
The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Action Research

Action research encompasses a systematic, collaborative, and democratic movement toward using inquiry to seek solutions to complex problems (McNiff, 2018; Mertler, 2020;

Stringer, 2014). The spiraling and iterative nature of rapid learning and reflection during the study component of the cycle, as proposed by Bryk et al. (2015), is depicted in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2

The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Action Research



Note. Adapted from Bryk et al. (2015).

The iterations of the Plan, Do, Study, and Act phases of the action research cycles encouraged the researcher and participants to reflect in and on their actions to better understand how to design job-embedded professional learning opportunities and intervention strategies to support the growth of assistant principals as instructional leaders. The cycles of this study were defined by the logic model and provided a framework for the researcher and participants.

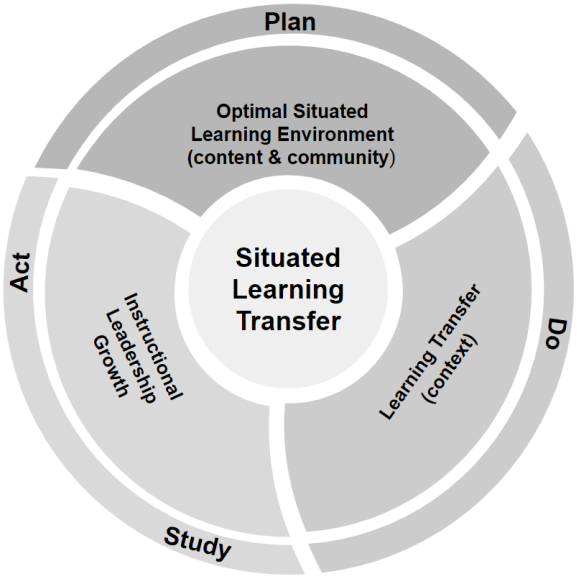
Logic Model

The logic model for this study examined the work of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) as they engaged in the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle of improvement (Bryk et al., 2015).

The logic model served as a structure through which the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) examined the inputs and activities the assistant principals engaged in during the study to design intervention strategies in an iterative manner. The Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle depicted in Figure 3.3 provided a structure for the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) to plan for an optimal learning environment, encourage professional capacity by supporting learning transfer, and implement interventions based on reflections from the data gathered from the action research design and implementation teams (Bryk et al. 2015; Hill et al., 2022).

Figure 3.3

Logic Model of Study



Note. Adapted from Brion, (2020); Bryk et al., (2015); Lave, (1988).

The logic model Plan-Do-Study-Act served situated the scope of the study. Additionally, the logic model was an organized way to view the change process as an iterative cycle of improvement that was implemented throughout the study. The theory of change which undergirds this logic model is presented.

Theory of Change

Undergirding the logic model is the theory of change premised on the tenets of learning transfer. Learning transfer is best supported through an individual's active participation within a situated learning environment that includes the study of new practice and opportunities to see and practice them in context (Brion, 2020; Roumell, 2018; Taylor, 2017). Therefore, the learning environment must be situated in the varying overlap between the original and transfer context (near or far transfer). When adults are situated in a supportive yet cognitively rigorous environment, they can create connections and make meaning of their learning—increasing the transfer into their context and practice. Hence, this study aimed to examine how a situated learning environment for a group of assistant principals enrolled in a professional learning community supported the conditions for the transfer of coaching skills into their practices as instructional leaders.

The Case

The context for this study was a single suburban district. The study sought to examine the perspectives of assistant principals enrolled in a district coach endorsement program as they learned, implemented, and transferred coaching skills and practices during feedback conversations with teachers within their school contexts. The examination and analysis on the perspectives of assistant principals allowed for a deeper understanding of their learning needs as instructional leaders as they integrated and transferred coaching skills and practices during feedback conversation with teachers.

Furthermore, the analysis of the assistant principals' perspectives throughout the study informed the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) and district program on the most applicable coaching skills and practices aligned to their evolving role as instructional leaders. Action

research provides a rich learning experience in the form of job-embedded professional learning that allows individuals to take a critical look at their practice and engage reflective processes that can result in sustained shifts in thinking and action (Hughes, 2016; Zepeda, 2019). A variety of data sources were used to provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon and the interventions experienced throughout the context of the study.

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT)

Action research is a systematic and collaborative orientation toward inquiry (McNiff, 2018; Mertler, 2020; Stringer, 2014) that strives to increase understanding of the participants' work (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) was comprised of district, school, and external personnel that included the primary researcher that serves as the program coordinator, an additional district coordinator, an external consultant, and a local school assistant principal that completed the coaching program in the 2020-2021 school year.

The primary researcher served as the program coordinator for the district's coaching program. The primary researcher had a genuine interest in designing effective professional learning experiences for assistant principals and examining the transfer of learning into practice. The additional district coordinator, Ms. Yothers, was most recently a local school assistant principal and served as a thought partner to the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) in developing professional learning and interventions to meet the needs of the assistant principals.

The consultant, Mr. Williams, provided the team with 10 years of coaching experience and an external perspective on coaching, which supported the development of intervention strategies. Mr. Williams supported the transfer of coaching skills as a Lead Coach by providing feedback to assistant principal participants. Additionally, Mr. Williams worked closely with the primary researcher to design and implement professional learning in the coaching program.

Mrs. Lasso, an assistant principal, has 7.5 years of leadership experience. Mrs. Lasso was a recent completer of the coaching program. Her active use of coaching in her leadership provided contextual perspective that informed the action research design team's interventions. Mrs. Lasso supported the transfer of coaching skills as a Lead Coach by providing feedback to assistant principal participants. Table 3.1 lists the members of the action research design team and describes their role in the research.

Table 3.1

Action Research Design Team

Team Member	Primary Role	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	District Program Coaching Coordinator, LCPS	Lead and conduct all research with the action research team, for purposes of data analysis. Develops and facilitates content to program enrolled assistant principals. Brings 2 years of leadership experience and 7 years of coaching experience to the team.
Ms. Evelyn Yothers	District Coordinator, LCPS	Thought partner in the development of professional learning content and interventions to support assistant principal participants. Support the action research team in reducing bias through fact and member checking processes.

Table 3.1

Action Research Design Team

Team Member	Primary Role	Action Research Role
Mr. James Williams	External Consultant Facilitator and Lead Coach	Experienced coach with 10 years of coaching individuals and teams. Provides external coaching expertise view. Plans and facilitates professional learning for assistant principals enrolled in the program. Serves as a Lead Coach that provides feedback and support on the transfer of coaching skills and practices to assistant principals.
Mrs. Abby Lasso	Assistant Principal and Lead Coach	Experienced active assistant principal with 7.5 years of experience. Serves as a Lead Coach that provides feedback and support on the transfer of coaching skills and practices to assistant principals.

The participants of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) each bring a unique perspective that will inform the outcomes of the study. They were each selected based on their current and previous experiences coaching others in their context.

Action Research Participants

A group of six assistant principals were asked via email communication in July 2022 to participate in this study as part of their enrollment in the district assistant principal coaching program. The goals and objectives of the study were outlined in addition to the potential benefits to future professional learning opportunities to meet learning needs of assistant principal as evolving instructional leaders. The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant

Principal Participants) was comprised of six assistant principals that serve at different school levels in LCPS.

Due to the complexities of schools, professional development and ongoing job-embedded learning should meet current assistant principal learning needs (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021; Zepeda, 2018). As such, the primary researcher had an interest in examining the perspectives of assistant principals at varying school levels to determine if contextual factors may have an influence on the implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices to inform interventions determined by the action research design team. Table 3.2 lists the members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants), the areas the participants support, and their years of leadership experience.

Table 3.2

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants)

Assistant Principal Participants	School Level	Areas of Teacher Support	Assistant Principal Experience
Mr. James Blake	ES	2nd and 4th grade	Provides 3 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Destiny Carruthers	MS	6th grade Language Arts	Provides 7 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Jason Dunn	HS	Math and Career Technical Education	Provides 3 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Sherry Jenkins	MS	Social Studies	Provides 5 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Kathy Perkins	ES	Kindergarten and 3rd grade	Provides 4 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.

Table 3.2

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants)

Assistant Principal Participants	School Level	Areas of Teacher Support	Assistant Principal Experience
Mr. Roy Washington	HS	Math	Provides 13 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.

The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants) worked within their respective context to implement coaching skills and practices with fidelity. The research plan and timeline are presented.

Research Plan and Timeline

The timeline for the research followed what Bryk (2015) and Glanz (2014) described as a rapid cycle of iterative reflection on action. The timeline in Table 3.3 outlines the cycle of iterative reflection and action to support the needs of the action research participants.

Table 3.3

Action Research Timeline

Date	Action Research Activity	
	Action Research Design Team (ARDT)	**Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants)**
July 2022	• Secured consent to participate in study • Initial Action Research Design Team meeting	• Secured consent to participate in study
August 2022	• Members of the ARDT facilitate a three-day professional learning opportunity providing and overview about foundational coaching skills and practices to enrolled assistant principals	• Assistant principals attend introductory professional learning about coaching skills and practices.

Table 3.3

Action Research Timeline

Date	Action Research Activity	
September 2022	• Members of the ARDT facilitate a targeted four-hour professional learning opportunity to enrolled assistant principals on coaching skills and practices to implement when supporting individual teachers. • Collected Artifact • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections	• ARIT individual semi-structured interview (#1) • Assistant principals attend a targeted professional learning opportunity on coaching individuals. • ARIT begins the job-embedded phase of implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices with a teacher at their local school. • Artifact collection • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections
October 2022	• Observation (#1) of feedback conversation • Action Research Design Team (ARDT) focus group interview (#1) using collected artifacts. • ARDT reflects and develops intervention strategies • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections	• ARIT continues implementation and transfer of job-embedded coaching skills and practices with a teacher at their local school. • Artifact collection
November 2022	• Observation (#2) of feedback conversation • Action Research Design Team (ARDT) focus group interview (#2) using collected artifacts. • ARDT reflects and develops intervention strategies • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections	• Mid-point ARIT individual semi-structured interview (#2) • Assistant principals attend a virtual field experience professional learning • Artifact collection • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections

Table 3.3

Action Research Timeline

Date	Action Research Activity	
December 2022	• Action Research Design Team (ARDT) focus group interview (#3) using collected artifacts. • Action Research Design Team (ARDT) reflects and determines additional intervention strategies.	• ARIT concludes implementation and transfer of job-embedded coaching skills and practices with a teacher at their local school. • Final research ARIT individual semi-structured interview (#3)
January 2023	• Appropriate follow up activities	• Appropriate follow up activities

The action research timeline provided a structure that organized the timing of the data collection in this study. An awareness of the timing of data collection supported the action research process to promote continuous cycles of reflection within the context of the study. A deeper understanding of the context of the study is provided.

Context of the Study

An examination of the context in which the research will unfold is necessary to have a greater understanding of the nature and purpose of the study.

District Context

Lincoln County Public Schools (LCPS) is a suburban school district located northeast of the state's capital city. The system includes 142 schools including 81 elementary, 29 middle, 24 high schools, 7 specialty schools, and 1 charter school. During the 2022-2023 school year, it served 182,865 students. The diverse and rich backgrounds include students from 191 countries and speak 98 different languages.

The racial and ethnic distribution is as follows: 33% African American, 11% Asian/Pacific Islander, 18% Caucasian, 33% Latino, 34%, 4% Multi-racial, 2% American

Indian. Within these student groups, 25% are Limited English Proficient (LEP) learners, 14% have documented disabilities that receive special education services, and 16% receive gifted services. The district employs a staff of nearly 23,000, 11,300 are classroom teachers and 927 professionally certified administrators to support the diverse student population.

Assistant Principal Demographics

For purposes of this study, in 2021-2022 the district's Leadership Development Department reported having 565 assistant principals, of which 420 have served for more than 3 years. Moreover, assistant principals serve at the following school levels within the district: 159 at the elementary level, 93 at the middle level, and 168 at the high school level. The ethnic description of the assistant principals that have served for more than 2 years include: 244 Caucasian, 146 Black/African American, 19 Hispanic, 6 Multi-racial, and 5 Asian.

District Coaching Endorsement Program

The Coach Endorsement program is a state approved program that prepares individuals to obtain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions aligned to instructional coaching best practices. The program was approved by the state and began in 2011 to support the district in building teacher leader capacity and the learning needs of aspiring teacher leaders. In 2020, the program expanded to serve assistant principals to support their professional learning needs in developing transferable coaching skills that could be integrated their role as school leaders as they support teachers.

The yearlong job-embedded program provides participants with the opportunity to learn about coaching skills, best practices, and processes through professional learning opportunities throughout the year. Once the learning sessions are completed, participants engage in the job-

embedded implementation phase where they apply the coaching skills, practices, and processes within their local school context in coaching cycles.

Participants are supported and monitored by an experienced lead coach that provides feedback on the application of coaching as observed through the submission of artifacts and narrative reflections using two online platforms. Furthermore, the feedback provided is aligned with the program's state approved coaching rubric aligned to the state coaching standards (see Appendix C).

Successful completion of the program is attained by obtaining a proficiency rating on each of the coaching standards. For the purposes of this study, an emphasis was placed on the areas of feedback, communication, and establishing a relationship of trust. These areas were selected based on a review of literature on instructional leadership and coaching practices as critical for leaders. Table 3.4 summarizes the coaching standards and observable indicators for feedback, communication, and establishing a relationship of trust.

Table 3.4

Coaching Standard with Observable Indicators

Performance Standard	Observable Indicators
Providing Feedback	The coach has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to provide feedback to individuals and teams to build capacity and improve performance in student achievement. The coach will be able to: • provide feedback that reflects best practice based on current research • utilize a process to provide feedback • develop specific and purposeful feedback • formulate and use effective questioning techniques

Table 3.4

Coaching Standard with Observable Indicators

Performance Standard	Observable Indicators
Providing Feedback	• provide resources that align with identified needs • prioritize and develop a timeline • develop and utilize strategies to build a support network • develop coachee/team(s) recognition of incremental improvement and growth • recognize the fluid nature of the coachee/team(s) plan for continuous improvement
Communication	The coach has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to communicate effectively with coachee/team(s). The coach will be able to: • utilize effective questioning skills • utilize effective clarifying skills • utilize positive phrasing • write for varied audiences and situations • write clear statements for improved performance • understand the legal implications of written word • demonstrate proper grammar, usage, and mechanics • use active listening skills • recognize body language and adjust coaching approach as needed • recognize the non-verbal implications of the coaching environment and adjust coaching as needed

Table 3.4

Coaching Standard with Observable Indicators

Performance Standard	Observable Indicators
Establishing Relationships of Trust	The coach has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively establish the relationship of trust with all stakeholders in the coaching process. The coach will be able to: • understand the importance of confidentiality and trust • protect and maintain confidentiality and trust • communicate to others the importance of confidentiality in the coach/coachee and team relationship • foster a positive relationship for high performance • demonstrate respect for coachee's/team(s) perception, learning style, and individuality • recognize and address cross-generational/cultural/other differences • demonstrate effective listening and reflection • demonstrate professional conduct at all times • recognize and address personal issues that may impair, conflict, or interfere with coaching performance or professional relationship • show genuine concern for the coachee's welfare and future • participate effectively in partnerships and networks of support to include all stakeholders • provide ongoing support and advocacy • apply appropriate strategies to resolve conflict and resistance with coachee/teams(s)

Note. Adapted State Professional Standards Commission Coaching Requirements (2021).

The coaching endorsement program strives to provide a high-quality learning experience. The state coaching standards provided guidance and served as a pathway that observable data could be collected from the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) throughout the study. Additional sources of data collected for the study are provided.

Data Sources

Data were collected from primary (participants in the study) and secondary sources (documents, artifacts, and video-clips) to obtain a comprehensive view of assistant principals learning and the transfer of skills into practice with the teachers they support (Stringer & Aragón, 2020).

Participants

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) was comprised of the district's coaching program coordinator, an additional district coordinator, an external consultant, and a recent assistant principal graduate of the program (see Appendix A). The members of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) worked to develop interventions to inform the research study questions.

The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants) (see Appendix B) shared their perspectives about engaging in a shared community that supported the learning and transfer of job-embedded coaching skills and practices which fostered their development and capacity as evolving instructional leaders working with teachers. The research cycle provided time for active self-monitoring and reflection for the Action Research Implementation Team and reflection for the Action Research Design Team based on the results of the implemented interventions. Table 3.5 describes the members of the Action Research Implementation Team (Assistant Principal Participants)

Table 3.5

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants)

Assistant Principal Participants	School Level	Areas of Teacher Support	Assistant Principal Experience
Mr. James Blake	ES	2nd and 4th grade	Provides 3 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Destiny Carruthers	MS	6th grade Language Arts	Provides 7 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Jason Dunn	HS	Math and Career Technical Education	Provides 5 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Sherry Jenkins	MS	Social Studies	Provides 5 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Kathy Perkins	ES	Kindergarten and 3rd grade	Provides 4 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Mr. Roy Washington	HS	Math	Provides 13 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.

The Action Research Implementation Team (Assistant Principal Participants) were selected using defined criteria aligned to the purpose of the study. The selection criteria are provided.

Selection Criteria

To ensure information-rich data that would yield objective insights and understanding, a purposeful sampling method was employed to select the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Patton, 2015). Since each research setting contains its own contextual factors, purposeful

sampling choices frame who and what matters most as data and ultimately become the stories that are told (Merriam, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

The study sought to examine the perspectives of assistant principals as they engaged in professional learning about coaching skills and practices and transferred the learning in a job-embedded manner. As such, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) and the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants) were purposefully selected as they each bring unique perspectives and experiences that supported the scope of this action research study. The ARIT selection was purposeful to obtain a broad perspective on the implementation and learning transfer of coaching skills and practices across various contexts. The broad perspective of examining a system level phenomenon of implementation within various local school levels and contexts helped to inform the differentiated needs of the action research implementation team and examine implications for the system's program needs.

During the 2022-2023 district's application window for the coaching program, 20 assistant principals were recommended by their local school principals. An invitation was sent via email to the recommended assistant principals to which 13 accepted the opportunity to enroll in the district program. For purposes of the ARIT, the researcher invited 6 assistant principals to participate in the study while enrolled in the coaching program. The members of the ARIT each had a minimum of 2 years of assistant principal leadership experience and served at the elementary, middle, or high school levels. The next section of this chapter describes the data collection methods included in this action research study.

Data Collection Methods

A qualitative approach was employed to collect and analyze data in this study. Qualitative data strives to describe the meaning of findings from the perspective of the research

participants nested in a real-world context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Data collection should be guided by the purpose, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and research questions. Data collection methods extend and magnify our view, thus broadening and deepening what we learn and know about it through the world of the research participants (Charmaz, 2015).

Data collection for this study incorporated several qualitative methods. These methods included:

1. Individual semi-structured interviews with the assistant principal participants of the study at the beginning, middle, and end of the research process.
2. Focus group interviews with the action research design team members who served as coaches to support the assistant principals during the beginning, middle, and end of the study for purposes of gaining perspective on the progress of assistant principal learning transfer of coaching skills and practices.
3. Observation of the action research design team Lead Coach using a rubric to guide and provide reflective feedback to assistant principals on the level of implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices after viewing a self-reflected recorded coaching conversation between the assistant principal and teacher.
4. Document review of assistant principal narrative reflections and review of video clips conducted by the action research design and discussed at the focused group interview during the middle and end of the study helped determine implementation and learning transfer by assistant principals. The data collected informed future implementation cycles.

5. Researcher reflexive journaling of thoughts, questions, assumptions, and ideas throughout the research process to recognize the multiple identities, key issues, and developing perspectives and viewpoints in the research setting.

The researcher analyzed the qualitative data generated from the interviews and observations using a coding scheme, looked for overall patterns, and then developed themes. Additionally, the researcher and Action Research design team (ARDT) analyzed the documents and artifacts to look for evidence of learning transfer and gaps in professional learning and program support to inform future research cycles.

Assistant Principal Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews are conversations between the researcher and participants in the study (Mertler, 2020). Collecting data through semi-structured individual interviews can capture perspectives, experiences, and feelings through a focused exploration (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Semi-structured interviews ask several base questions with the option of follow-up with additional questions through prompts and probes. Prompts enables the interviewer to clarify questions or topics, rephrase, repeat, or provide an example. Probes enables the interviewer to extend participant thinking by asking to extend, elaborate, or provide detail to a response. The use of prompts and probes can adjust the lines of inquiry during the interview (Denscombe, 2014).

Individual, semi-structured interviews with assistant principals were the appropriate method used to determine how the transfer of coaching practices and skills impacted their perspective as instructional leaders. The structure of this type of interview allowed for the researcher begin with an interview structure format and have the flexibility to integrate prompts

and probes to clarify and deepen thinking from the participants as needed (Denscombe, 2014). Table 3.6 illustrates a sample of the interview question.

Table 3.6

Semi-structured Interview Question Sample

Research Question	Interview Questions
Q2: How does the transfer of coaching practices impact assistant principals' perspective as instructional leaders?	How do you define instructional leadership? What coaching practices have transferred into your role as an instructional leader? What impact does the transfer of coaching practices have on your leadership approach? How does implementing coaching practices influence how teachers view instructional support? How does implementing coaching practices impact your perspective as an instructional leader?

The perspectives that were offered through the semi-structured interviews highlighted the learned experiences of transfer. The participants views shared during the interview shaped the interventions and development of future professional learning for assistant principals. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) focus group also provided perspective to support the efforts of the action research study.

Action Research Design Team Focus Group

Focus groups are facilitated group discussions where participants are selected because of a shared experience related to a study's focus on a single theme (Kreuger & Casey, 2015; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). Focus groups are planned and structured yet flexible to explore

unanticipated issues as they arise in the discussion (Barbour, 2018; Liamputtong, 2011). The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) participated in focus group opportunities after they reviewed documents and artifact evidence from the implementation team. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) was comprised of the program coordinator, lead coach supervisors, and a school assistant principal that recently completed the coaching program.

The purpose of the focus group was to create a candid conversation to discuss the evidence submitted by the implementation team to determine to what extent coaching skills were being transferred into the practices of the coaches. Additionally, the team discussion led to the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learning about the most applicable and transferable coaching skills as well as barriers the implementation team may have experienced during the study. The findings from the discussions informed future professional learning opportunities and interventions that were needed to support learning transfer for the ARIT. Furthermore, the focus group interviews served as a point of data triangulation with the semi-structured interviews from this study. Table 3.7 illustrates a sample of focus group questions.

Table 3.7

Focus Group Interview Question Sample

Research Question	Focus Group Questions
Q1: To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching practices into their leadership role of supporting instruction?	What job-embedded coaching practices were transferred by assistant principals that support instruction? What was the evidence of coaching practice learning transfer?

Table 3.7

Focus Group Interview Question Sample

Research Question	Focus Group Questions
Q3: What does the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction?	How extensive as assistant principals' transfer of job-embedded coaching practices? What coaching practices are most applicable for assistant principals to implement that support instruction? What coaching practices are most transferable for assistant principals? What barriers, if any, influence the implementation and transfer of coaching practices? How should the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) develop professional learning opportunities about coaching to meet the needs of assistant principals to support instruction?

The focus group interviews offered an opportunity for the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) to offer their perspective and share findings to inform the study's intended purpose. A description of additional data collected in the study such as observation notes, researcher's reflexive journal, documents, and artifact review are provided.

Observation Notes

Observation was used as a form of data collection to examine behaviors of individuals by directly watching them and reporting emerging patterns and trends (Glanz, 2014). Observations of the assistant principals implementing coaching skills and practices through video capture were viewed by members of the ARDT two times during the study. The findings from the observations were discussed with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) during the focus group meetings to inform subsequent interventions and implementation of action research cycles.

After a review of artifacts and video clips of the assistant principals implementing coaching skills and practices, an Action Research Design Team (ARDT) member facilitated a feedback conversation using protocol along with a rubric with specific indicators to provide feedback to the assistant principals. The researcher observed the conversations between the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) members. Notes were taken to record these observations.

Researcher's Journal

The researcher's reflections and notes were kept in a reflexive journal. The journal allowed the researcher to capture thoughts and ideas related to data collection efforts through the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) and the assistant principals. Reflections were used to help the researcher preserve reasoning and thinking and to make sense of the data that emerged through this action research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Stringer & Aragón, 2020). Additionally, the researcher's journaling process helped to clarify the role, context, and involvement in the action research (Bradbury et al., 2019). Furthermore, reflexive journaling provided an "audit trail," leading to improved trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Document and Artifact Review

Document and artifact review provided a significant source of data for the study. Documents can provide rich data points corroborating data collected through interviews and observations (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011; Boreus & Bergstrom, 2017; Charmaz, 2015; Prior, 2017). The researcher must situate documents in the context and connect these items to the broader narrative (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

The documents and artifacts were reviewed and analyzed and included participant reflections and the video clips submitted by the assistant principals through an online platform. The documents and artifacts were reviewed and analyzed by the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) using a state-approved rubric with specific indicators to guide this review. The evidence gathered from the review of the documents and artifacts were brought to the focus group interviews and used by the team members to support responses to focus group questions about assistant principal learning transfer of coaching skills and practices.

Interventions

Interventions, as defined by Glanz (2014), are practices, programs, or procedures that are implemented to "investigate [the] effect on the behavior or achievement of an individual or group" (p. 64). Action research employs an iterative spiraling process of inquiry and reflection that leads to the development of potential interventions that may produce evidence that solves practical problems (Glanz, 2014; Stringer & Aragón, 2020). Moreover, active inquiry and reflection leads to the movement of the action research of toward a new plan of action. Figure 3.2 depicts this process.

The purpose of this study was to examine the transfer into practice job-embedded coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a district-wide

program. The study also sought to examine whether the transfer of coaching practices and skills impacted assistant principals' perspectives about their expanding role as instructional leaders supporting instruction. Resultingly, specific interventions were developed to improve the implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices to foster instructional leadership growth.

The interventions included a variety of supports that were developed to meet the ARIT needs as they surfaced. Once the interventions were identified, they were implemented by the ARDT over the next month. The activities included small group just-in-time professional learning opportunities, periodic scheduled check-in conversations with ARIT participants, customized implementation plans, and frequent debriefing coaching conversations with an ARDT Lead Coach. The interventions offered provided ARIT participants the opportunity obtain constructive growth feedback and learn in an environment that met their needs which informed subsequent implementation and the transfer of skills and practices. The interventions will be developed on an ongoing basis beginning in September and concluding in December 2022. The activities that will support the development of interventions for the study are summarized in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8

Interventions for the Study

Intervention Activities	Target Group	Intervention Time Frame
Coaching program professional learning	ARIT- Assistant Principal Participants	August September November
Feedback conversation with ARDT Lead Coach	ARIT- Assistant Principal Participants	October- December (as the review of documents and artifacts demonstrating implementation and transfer are submitted to Lead Coach)

Table 3.8

Interventions for the Study

Intervention Activities	Target Group	Intervention Time Frame
Small group just in time professional learning	ARIT- Assistant Principal Participants	October-November
Customized implementation plans, schedules, and frequent support touchpoint conversations	ARIT- Assistant Principal Participants based on focus group interview analysis and discussions	October-December

The intervention activities guided subsequent cycles of implementation for the Action Research Design Team as they continued to monitor and provide feedback on the implementation and transfer or coaching skills and practices. The data were gathered and analyzed using qualitative methods. The data analysis led to the emergence of consistent patterns and emerging themes which resulted in opportunities to analyze the data using the appropriate data analysis methods.

Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative data strives to describe the meaning of findings from the perspective of the research participants nested in a real-world context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Data collection analysis deepens what we learn and know through the world of the research participants (Charmaz, 2015). Creswell and Creswell (2018) proposed that qualitative data analysis requires a level of comfort with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts. Therefore, the study followed three phases of data analysis as the data was organized, analyzed for patterns, and interpreted (Glanz, 2014).

The use of thick descriptions in the study allowed for a depth of contextual detail that was gathered through multiple data sources and triangulated to enhance the quality and credibility of

the research efforts (Ravich & Carl, 2015). Hence, thick descriptions were compiled and analyzed from the data from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations, video-clips, and document review. The thick descriptions improved the trustworthiness and provided an audit trail which allowed for a comprehensive and objective perspective to the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Coding

Data collection begins with a plan to manage the large volume of data and reduce it in a meaningful way to identify patterns that can address the proposed research questions. Saldana (2009) elaborated "a code in qualitative research as a word or short phrase that is summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or an evocative attribute for a portion or language-based or visual data" (p. 4). The coding process is comprised of collecting data to be assembled, categorizing the data, and thematically sorting the data in an organized manner for the construction of meaning (Williams & Moser, 2019).

Coding also fostered inductive analysis as patterns and themes emerged from the analysis of the data. As inductive coding emerged, the importance of examining discrepancies helped to refine the findings, subsequent analysis, and recommendations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A sample of codes, the meaning, and data examples are offered in Table 3.9.

Table 3.9

Code Sampling for Data

Code	Meaning	Data Sample
C	Conversation structure	"Using the identify questions as a process allowed them to speak and be self-reflective of their lesson and made the biggest impact on my role as an AP coach."- Mr. Blake reflecting on the transfer of coaching into instructional leadership in semi-structured interview
SP	Structured process	"It seems easy for them to do the identify and improve questions in their conversations. It has freed them up to be authentic listeners."- Mr. James Williams reflecting on applicable coaching practices in the focus group interview
Q	Questioning	"Some questions led to a deeper understanding of what my coachee was trying to explain. Some questions such as Can you tell me more about…?"- Ms. Perkins reflecting on transferable coaching skills in documents and artifacts
CR	Contextual responsibilities	"Lag time in documentation due to AP multiple responsibilities along with managing change at the local school"- Primary researcher field notes from observations, and focus group interview with ARDT

Thematic Analysis

Coding allows the researcher to move to a higher level of data analysis leading to the development of thematic analysis. In this study, the researcher followed the phases of thematic analysis and procedures to establish validity and reliability in the findings, as illustrated in Table 3.10 (Nowell et al., 2017).

Table 3.10

Phases of Thematic Analysis and Establishing Trustworthiness

Phase of Thematic Analysis	Means of Establishing Trustworthiness
Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with the data	• Prolong engagement with data • Triangulate different data and collection modes • Document theoretical and reflective thoughts • Document thoughts about potential codes/themes • Store raw data in well-organized archives • Keep records of all data field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals
Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes	• Peer debriefing • Researcher triangulation • Reflexive journaling • Use of an inductive coding framework • Audit trail of code generation • Documentation of all team meeting and peer debriefing
Phase 3: Searching for Themes	• Researcher triangulation • Diagramming to make sense of deductively emerging themes • Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes
Phase 4: Reviewing Themes	• Researcher triangulation • Themes and subthemes vetted by team members • Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data

Table 3.10

Phases of Thematic Analysis and Establishing Trustworthiness

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes	• Researcher triangulation • Peer debriefing • Team consensus on themes • Documentation of team meetings regarding themes • Documentation of theme naming
Phase 6: Producing the Report	• Member checking • Peer debriefing • Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details • Thick descriptions of context • Description of the audit trail Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study.

Note. Adapted from Nowell et al. (2017).

The researcher is an instrument of analysis in qualitative research methods; therefore, it is important to use a system for coding and finding themes to reduce researcher bias and to improve the trustworthiness of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). The process of coding and identifying themes presented in Table 3.10 aids in the triangulation of data which will strengthen the reliability and validity of the study.

Reliability, Validity, Generalizability, and Trustworthiness

This study was designed with thoughtful attention to reliability, validity, generalizability, and trustworthiness by applying the research methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted the importance of trustworthiness in reassuring the reader that the study has significance and contains value. Moreover, validity and reliability reflect the world being described when the same phenomenon results in compatible observations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Generalizability supports a development of context-relevant findings that may be applied to a broader context, while still maintaining content richness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Hence, the intentionality toward these attributes enhanced the overall trustworthiness of the research through triangulation.

Methodological triangulation was accomplished using multiple data sources and types to capture various perspectives and examine data at varying times. The researcher also engaged in persistent prolonged exposure, member checks, peer debriefing, and reflexive journaling to enhance transparency, reduce bias, and improve the overall trustworthiness of the study. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) engaged in member checks and peer debriefing with the researcher by analyzing field notes and data to offer alternative perspectives to help abate the researcher's bias and assumptions. Furthermore, this study was context-specific; hence, a thick description was provided so that others could determine the transferability. Table 3.11 illustrates triangulation efforts based on data collection and analysis methods.

Table 3.11

Connecting Data Collection to the Research Questions

Research Question	Method of Data Collection	Method of Analysis	Timeline
Q1: To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching practices into their leadership role of supporting instruction?	Semi-structured interviews protocol	Coding/Analysis of Themes	September 2022 November 2022 December 2023
	Focus Group Interviews	Coding/Analysis of Themes	October 2022 December 2023
	Observations/Document Review	Coding/Analysis of Themes	October 2022 November 2022
	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	Ongoing through January 2023

Table 3.11

Connecting Data Collection to the Research Questions

Research Question	Method of Data Collection	Method of Analysis	Timeline
Q3: What does the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction?	Focus Group Interviews	Coding/Analysis of Themes	October 2022 December 2022
	Observations/Document Review	Coding/Analysis of Themes	September 2022 November 2022
	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	Ongoing through January 2023

Triangulation of data played a critical role to improve the trustworthiness and reliability that sustained the research findings. Although efforts to maintain trustworthiness was evident, the researcher positionality with the context of the study could potentially impact the research process. The researcher's subjectivity statement is provided.

Subjectivity Statement

Researcher positionality and subjectivity are unique attributes that impact the totality of the research process (Holmes, 2020). At the time of the study, the researcher was a district administrator positioned as a coordinator that primarily supported the district's coaching program. The researcher's background includes being a middle and high school science teacher for 12 years, a school and district-based instructional coach for 4 years, and a district coordinator for 3 years. As an educator, the researcher has always valued being a reflective practitioner. The researcher began to explore how the concepts introduced by Schön (1983) related to reflection in and on action could be beneficial to the development of all educators. Therefore, the researcher

examined the professional learning model of coaching with both an outsider and insider perspective within the context of this study (Mercer, 2007; Merton, 1972).

As a researcher and facilitator to the study, the researcher understood that subjectivity, bias, and position influenced the study. The role of the researcher as the district coordinator for coaching introduced insider bias toward the processes employed and investigated within the study. The researcher's insider position and the familiarity of the coaching process and a personal bias on its potential impact introduced a bias into the study's context. The way participants viewed the researcher in her role at the district may have influenced how participants expressed their perspectives. To limit bias and subjectivity, the researcher documented and reflected on notes in a reflexive journal, leveraged the same protocols, and engaged in multiple opportunities for member checking during Action Research Design Team (ARDT) focus group meetings.

As an observer insider, the researcher also served as an active participant on the Action Research Design Team (ARDT). The researcher engaged in course content development, providing coaching support for a small group of participants enrolled in the program, and co-facilitating design team meetings. During the meetings, implementation team progress and new actions steps were discussed and developed for subsequent cycle implementation. To mitigate subjectivity and bias, the researcher's small group of assistant principal participants were not included on the implementation team. This allowed for a more objective view on leadership perspectives for the study to surface.

As an outsider, the researcher has never professionally served as an assistant principal. The outsider role allowed the researcher to bring an external yet curious perspective to address the research questions.

Limitations

Limitations are characteristics of design or methodology within a study that influence and expose conditions that may weaken the interpretation of the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Due to the nature of the qualitative research, limitations to this study were evident. First, the researcher served as an observer-insider during the study. As an observer-insider and primary researcher of the study, the researcher's role as the district's program coordinator held a position of power which may have influenced the degree to which participants felt psychologically safe to share perspectives (Edmonson & Lei, 2014; Wanless, 2016). The researcher worked to establish a safe environment and emphasized the value of the participant's perspectives in the development of future professional learning opportunities for assistant principals. Moreover, it was critical that the researcher engaged in processes such as member checking and peer debriefing with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) members to mitigate bias and increase trustworthiness throughout the study.

District and study contextual factors also presented limitation to the study. Firstly, the assistant principal participants in the study were from various school levels with unique contexts and local school conditions that may have influenced the findings. Although this presents a broad perspective aligned to the study's intent, it did not central the focus on a particular target group. Another limitation due to the specific context of LCPS was the small sample size that was analyzed within this study in comparison to the large number of assistant principals that serve within the district. The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT- Assistant Principal Participants) included six participants, all enrolled in the district's assistant principal coaching program (two male and four female).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 described the methodology of data collection and analysis for this action research study. Coghlan (2019) asserted that action research garners "important learning from outcomes both intended and unintended, and [contribute] to actionable knowledge," and as such, drives the process of continuous improvement (p. 6). An adapted Plan-Do- Study-Act (Bryk, 2015) logic model supported the learning and continuous improvement process of this action research study.

In this study, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations, document review, and researcher reflections were used as data sources. All data were coded and analyzed for themes and patterns as they related to the study's research questions. The codes were further analyzed by the use of thick descriptions which provided depth based on the context and perspectives from the research participants. The collection of multiple data points also played a critical role to improve the trustworthiness and reliability that sustained the research findings. The limitations and subjectivity of the study further articulated the study's reliability. The next chapter presents the findings of the study in the Lincoln County Public Schools District (LCPS) coaching program.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

The evolving role and need for assistant principals over the last 25 years has increased the urgency for them to be equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively support teachers toward instructional growth (Fuller et al., 2018; Goldring et al., 2021; Grissom et al., 2021). Coaching is one job-embedded professional learning design that supports teacher instructional growth (Killion et al., 2020). Hence, the need for assistant principals to engage in customized high-quality professional learning and learning transfer opportunities to practice coaching skills within their context may support their instructional leadership growth (Brion, 2020; Hayes & Burkett, 2021),

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the transfer into practice job-embedded coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a district-wide program. The study also sought to examine whether the transfer of coaching practices and skills impacted assistant principals' perspectives about their expanding role as instructional leaders supporting instruction.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching skills into their leadership role of supporting instruction?

2. How does the transfer of coaching practices impact assistant principals' perspective as instructional leaders?
3. What does the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction?

Chapter 4 explores the context of the study and the findings from this action research inquiry. The context includes a narrative of each research site where the assistant principals engaged in a coaching cycle and implemented the coaching skills and practices with a teacher. Moreover, a brief description of each teacher that partnered with the assistant principal while they implemented their coaching skills and practices are described. The findings from the case are presented in terms of the action research cycles from the perspectives of both the action research design team and the action research implementation team. The findings from both perspectives help to articulate a complete picture of the findings from this study.

Context of the Study

The coaching program for assistant principals is situated within the Lincoln County Public School (LCPS) District. The LCPS district is the 15th largest across the state that is supported by 552 assistant principals across the school system. The district has been recognized for its strategic leadership development of assistant principals and principals through the Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA). The QPLA is a locally created initiative that serves the district's succession leadership pipeline by training and developing aspiring educators to become assistant principals in the Aspiring Leadership Program (ALP). Active assistant principals are afforded the opportunity to continue toward principalship through the Aspiring Principal Program (APP).

In 2018-2019, upper-level district leaders recognized that assistant principals conducted a majority of teacher formative and summative observations and debrief conversations; yet they were not provided with pre-service professional learning to equip them with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and practices to facilitate reflective conversations with the teachers to foster growth of teacher instructional practices. Additionally, anecdotal evidence from current assistant principals that completed the district's current coaching endorsement program as a teacher leader attested to the value of learning and implementing coaching skills and practices in their current leadership role when facilitating debrief conversations with teachers upon completing classroom observation. Hence, grew a partnership with the district's staff development office in 2020-2021 to customize a coaching endorsement program for assistant principals modeled after the district's current coaching program as a strategy to deepen the talent and capacity of current assistant principals.

Further adding to this study's context, the end of the 2020-2021 school year welcomed a new superintendent, deputy superintendent, and several new Board of Education members. New leadership casted a vision that focused on empathy, equity, effectiveness, and excellence. In the area of effectiveness, one strategic priority highlighted was talent management, specifically pipeline development. As such, this study's focus on developing the skills of assistant principals through the acquisition of coaching skills and practices aligns with and supports the district's efforts to develop and to retain leadership talent.

The context in which this action research study was situated included six schools with representation from each school level (two elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools). The research study was intentionally set up to examine a cross sectional view of implementation and transfer to inform district program needs for current and future assistant

principals enrolled in the coaching program. Each school within the study has its own unique context and conditions under which the assistant principals engaged in their implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices.

Table 4.1 and 4.2 provides a summary of the contextual research site and teacher demographics of each location in which the assistant principals implement and transfer their coaching skills and practices through individual coaching cycles. The data presented was obtained from the state's Governor's Office of Student Achievement data dashboard and the Georgia Department of Education.

Table 4.1

Contextual Research Site Demographics

Research Site	Student Enrollment	Student Demographics	Research Site Context
Harrington ES	718	19% Asian 25% Black 39% Hispanic 3% Multiracial 15% White	Title I 20.3% Free and Reduced Lunch 16.7% Special Education 33.6% English Language Learners
Gravestown ES	1111	2% Asian 19% Black 74% Hispanic 2% Multiracial 2% White	Title I 40.2% Free and Reduced Lunch 7.7% Special Education 59.5% English Language Learners
Jules MS	1466	16% Asian 28% Black 38% Hispanic 5% Multiracial 13% White	Title I 24.2% Free and Reduced Lunch 10.7% Special Education 25.7% English Language Learners

Table 4.1

Contextual Research Site Demographics

Research Site	Student Enrollment	Student Demographics	Research Site Context
Sterling MS	1071	10% Asian 48% Black 16% Hispanic 6% Multiracial 20% White	Non-Title I 18.3% Free and Reduced Lunch 12.6% Special Education 11% English Language Learners
Duncan Creek HS	2690	14% Asian 28% Black 41% Hispanic 3% Multiracial 13% White	Title I 17.1% Free and Reduced Lunch 13.8% Special Education 7.6% English Language Learners
Academy HS	2780	10% Asian 33% Black 50% Hispanic 2% Multiracial 5% White	Title I 21.2% Free and Reduced Lunch 15.6% Special Education 9.2% English Language Learners

Table 4.2

Contextual Research Site Teacher Demographics

Research Site	Total Number of Teachers	Teacher Demographics (%)	Location Average Teacher Years of Experience	Description of Teacher in Coaching Cycle
Harrington ES	58	93% Female 7% Male	14.78	1st Grade 22 years of teaching
Gravestown ES	81	73% Female 27% Male	10.49	2nd Grade 1 year of teaching
Jules MS	96	98% Female 2% Male	12.8	6th Grade 7 years of teaching

Table 4.2

Contextual Research Site Teacher Demographics

Research Site	Total Number of Teachers	Teacher Demographics (%)	Location Average Teacher Years of Experience	Description of Teacher in Coaching Cycle
Sterling MS	69	96% Female 4% Male	14.1	6th Grade 2 years of teaching
Duncan Creek HS	157	67% Female 33% Male	12.75	SPED Math 1 year of teaching
Academy HS	160	63% Female 37% Male	10.82	10th Grade 3 years of teaching

This study was designed to examine the perspectives of assistant principals as they implemented and transferred coaching skills and practices when facilitating debrief conversations after conducting classroom observations. The assistant principal participants were invited to join the study as a part of being enrolled in the district coaching program. The action research was implemented throughout three cycles of interventions. The interventions were developed based on the action research design team focus group discussions where implementation and transfer challenges were discussed as the assistant principals were engaged in active practice and self-monitoring of their practices.

Participants

The assistant principal participants of the study were invited (two from each school level) as part of their enrollment in the assistant principal coaching program. Participants included a cross sectional representation of professional experiences which provided a multifaceted approach to the perspectives on how implementation and transfer of coaching skills can be approached in various school levels and contexts outlined in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Assistant Principal Professional Experience and School Context Summary

Assistant Principal	Years of Experience	School Level	School Context
Mr. James Blake	3 years	Elementary	1111 Students 81 Teachers Title I 40.2% Free and Reduced Lunch 7.7% Special Education 59.5% English Language Learners
Ms. Destiny Carruthers	7 years	Middle	1466 Students 96 Teachers Title I 24.2% Free and Reduced Lunch 10.7% Special Education 25.7% English Language Learners
Ms. Jason Dunn	3 years	High	2690 Students 157 Teachers Title I 17.1% Free and Reduced Lunch 13.8% Special Education 7.6% English Language Learners
Ms. Sherry Jenkins	5 years	Middle	1071 Students 69 Teachers Non-Title I 18.3% Free and Reduced Lunch 12.6% Special Education 11% English Language Learners
Ms. Kathy Perkins	4 years	Elementary	718 Students 58 Teachers Title I School 20.3% Free and Reduced Lunch 16.7% Special Education 33.6% English Language Learners

Table 4.3

Assistant Principal Professional Experience and School Context Summary

Assistant Principal	Years of Experience	School Level	School Context
Mr. Roy Washington	13 years	High	2780 Students 160 Teachers Title I 21.2% Free and Reduced Lunch 15.6% Special Education 9.2% English Language Learners

The cross-sectional participant representation helped to support the researcher's goal to better understand coaching skills and practices for assistant principals across grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school). The six assistant principal participants engaged in professional learning opportunities with their larger cohort group and met with their Lead Coach to support their implementation and transfer efforts throughout course of the study.

Action Research Design Team

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) helped to guide the study by offering and implementing interventions based on interactions with assistant principal participants, progress review of documents, artifacts, and video clips submitted by the assistant principal participants. Furthermore, members of the ARDT met with assistant principal participants at designated points during the research study to provide feedback on their progress on the implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices within their respective contexts. The composition of the team is outlines in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Action Research Design Team Members

Team Member	Primary Role	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	District Program Coaching Coordinator, LCPS	Lead and conduct all research with the action research team, for purposes of data analysis. Develops and facilitates content to program enrolled assistant principals. Brings 2 years of leadership experience and 7 years of coaching experience to the team.
Ms. Evelyn Yothers	District Coordinator, LCPS	Thought partner in the development of professional learning content and interventions to support assistant principal participants. Support the action research team in reducing bias through fact and member checking processes.
Mr. James Williams	External Consultant Facilitator and Lead Coach	Experienced coach with 10 years of coaching individuals and teams. Provides external coaching expertise view. Plans and facilitates professional learning for assistant principals enrolled in the program. Serves as a Lead Coach that provides feedback and support on the transfer of coaching skills and practices to assistant principals.

Table 4.4

Action Research Design Team Members

Team Member	Primary Role	Action Research Role
Mrs. Abby Lasso	Assistant Principal and Lead Coach	Experienced active assistant principal with 7.5 years of experience. Serves as a Lead Coach that provides feedback and support on the transfer of coaching skills and practices to assistant principals.

The primary researcher and external consultant served as the core of the ARDT. They met virtually on a biweekly basis to discuss progress of program implementation and designed professional learning opportunities throughout the research study to support the learning needs of the assistant principal participants. Furthermore, the expanded ARDT met two times during the study for focus group interviews to discuss and design just in time interventions to support the assistant principals as the implemented and transferred coaching skills and practices within their respective contexts.

Findings from the Case

This action research study examined how assistant principals enrolled in a district coaching program implemented and transferred coaching skills and practices to support instruction. Additionally, the study examined the perspectives of the assistant principals as they transferred coaching skills and practices and its impact on their instructional leadership approaches. A small group of assistant principals that enrolled in the Lincoln County Public School District's coaching program were invited to the study and became the Action Research

Implementation Team (ARIT). Upon enrollment into the district's coaching program, initial perspective interviews were conducted.

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) developed the course of the study to design appropriate professional learning opportunities aligned to coaching best practices, planned for just in time support sessions, and reviewed documents and artifacts to determine the most appropriate interventions to meet the ARIT learning needs. Furthermore, the ARIT met with members of the ARDT regularly to debrief progress on the implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices, obtained feedback on their practices, and shared emerging implementation challenges within their context. Moreover, the primary researcher individually interviewed members of the ARIT at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. The ARDT participated in a focus group interview at the midpoint and end of the study. Observational and researcher field notes were also collected throughout the course of the study.

The data reveals the story of the ARIT as they worked to implement and transfer coaching skills and practices with teachers in school context environment while navigating the district and local school shifts which began in the 2022-2023 school year. Initial semi-structured interview data revealed that several members of the ARIT navigated challenges such as increased work responsibilities due to the reallocation of assistant principals, a school principal out on medical leave, and assistant principal split responsibilities between two schools. As the study unfolded, several new initiatives aligned to the district's strategic priorities and goals were enacted. Members of the ARIT team referenced these initiatives as contributing factors leading to increased time and responsibility needed to learn and support the initiatives.

The study uncovered many findings. The ARIT reflected on the importance of intentional integration of coaching skills and practices as a method to support instruction. The intentional

learning of specific skills such as active listening, conversation structures, questioning, trust, psychological safety, and partnership were concepts that surfaced as important to the ARIT as instructional leaders. Mid-career assistant principal Ms. Carruthers reflected about these key skills:

> My idea of listening was simply listening more and listening to gain an understanding. Never did I imagine that there were different levels of listening. And so now, I think, I've learned to be more aware of my level of listening to understand what the person's trying to share with me. From that listening, the next strategy of questioning, so actually how to ask these questions is what I'm still in the process of learning and practicing. One of the biggest things takeaways so far from this course is that of fostering psychological safety that really touched me and a sense of being an instructional leader.

As the ARIT members moved their learning from content to context, a deeper development of understanding supported the subsequent action research cycles of implementation. The findings of each action research cycle are detailed and expanded on in the next section.

Action Research Cycle 1

Action Research Cycle 1 started a few weeks into the school year in early August of 2022. Cycle 1 lasted approximately four weeks and concluded by the beginning of September. As part of this cycle, the assistant principal cohort (which included the ARIT members) met with the core two members of the ARDT to engage in two days of professional learning aligned to coaching skills and practices. The key aspects of the learning centered on the importance of establishing relationship and trust with teachers, the partnership principles of coaching, a coaching mindset, and coaching conversational structures that promote reflective feedback.

During the two-day professional learning sessions, members of the ARIT expressed skepticism on how the role of the assistant principal and coach can co-exist. Reflexive journaling noted that the assistant principals had concerns about how teachers would perceive them in the role of a coach versus an evaluator and the potential confusion connected to teacher evaluation. Mr. Washington explained, "I'm not seeing how I can switch my role as an evaluator off then turn into a coach for my teachers." Mr. Dunn expressed similar sentiments and expanded, "At the high school level with all the teachers we are over, if they are lucky, we get to meet with them at least once a year." The polarity of being a coach and evaluator appeared to challenge the group's thinking and current "evaluator only" mindset.

Observational field notes indicated that after examining the seven partnership principles of equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity (Knight, 2022), the ARIT gained some clarity about how these principles helped to foster trust by providing the time and space while facilitating a coaching conversation to exercise these principles with teachers. The ARIT also began to make connections to their current role as they collaborated with their peers on how they already leverage the principles of voice, dialogue, and choice in their leadership actions with teachers.

Initial semi-structured interviews and reflexive journaling notes indicate that the members of the ARIT slowly began to process the potential integration opportunities for coaching into their role. Two needs emerged for the ARIT. The first need centered on engaging in clear conversation structures that would support them having partnership driven conversation, and the second need was developing a mental model process they could follow as they launched the job-embedded phase of implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices.

The learning the ARIT members attended in cycle one emphasized active collaboration and discussion. ARDT member Ms. Evelyn Yothers observed that ARIT members engaged in active collaboration and discussion when grappling with balancing the role of coach and evaluator. A reflexive journaling notes concluded that Ms. Yothers believed that , "time and space to have conversations about role balance were critical." The discussion allowed the ARIT members to make connections to how coaching skills and practices could be embedded within their current practices such as in the formative observation phase with teachers. Ms. Yothers, most recently being a local school assistant principal, empathized with the group's sentiments and advocated for clarity and customized program support as the study moved forward. Conversely, the elevated voice from the ARIT on the need for clear conversation structures and mental models to support the coaching work became a dilemma that ARDT explored and designed interventions for this action research study.

Interventions for Action Research Cycle 1

The active discussion on balancing the role of coach and evaluator that surfaced during the professional learning session led to the just-in-time dilemma that needed to be discussed and supported by the ARDT. Since full implementation of coaching did not begin until September, the ARDT met to discuss initial learning transfer and surfacing challenges which led to the first iteration of interventions.

Focus group and field notes confirmed that the ARIT members valued and agreed that trust, partnership, listening, and psychological safety were essential to begin the coaching work. ARDT member Ms. Lasso affirmed, "teachers want to know that what they're doing with their assistant principal coach is kept confidential, because they are having to be very vulnerable throughout the entire process and we honor and respect that they're working on that journey."

Mr. Williams added, “by creating a culture and environment of coaching and learning where mistakes are okay it shows we’re getting better. Assistant principals are best positioned more than anyone else to do this work.” Laying strong and transparent foundational conditions for coaching between an assistant principal and teacher were essential given the evaluative role they have within a school.

Conversely, the ARIT members needed individualized support to understand contextually how implementing coaching could look for them. It was necessary for the local school principal to clearly understand the optimal conditions needed to build the capacity of assistant principals as coaches. As such, the ARDT decided on two interventions during the group discussion. First, ARDT members Mr. Williams, Ms. Lasso, and the primary researcher were assigned as Lead Coaches to support the ARIT members. The ARDT members each supported a small group of ARIT members as they implemented and transferred coaching skills and practices within their context and navigated the polarity of the coach and evaluator roles. The intended outcome for this intervention would provide targeted support for the specific needs of the ARIT members as they integrated their learning transfer and implementation of coaching skills and practices as assistant principals.

Secondly, each Lead Coach ARDT member facilitated a virtual beginning of year support team meeting for each ARIT member. The meeting was attended by the ARIT member, ARDT (Lead Coach) member, and local school principal. An agenda was designed by the ARDT during the initial focus group discussion to maintain consistency among the ARDT team. Agenda items included the ARIT member strengths and opportunities for building their leadership capacity through learning about coaching, developing common understanding of coaching, and

advocating for the optimal local school conditions necessary to support the implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices (see Appendix G).

The primary researcher observed and took notes on the ARDT facilitation of the meet and greet and beginning of year meetings. Reflexive journaling notes and focus group debrief (Appendix E) with the ARDT noted that the ARIT felt well supported at both the district and local school level at this point in their learning. ARDT member Ms. Lasso expressed that partnership agreements "seemed to be an area that they have implemented with fidelity with both the principal and teacher they are partnering with to establish the relationship." Mr. Williams spoke to the "all in support" disposition principals displayed as he reflected on the support team meetings he facilitated. The primary researcher engaged ARDT member Ms. Yothers in fact checking by examining partnership agreements and corroborated similar findings.

Initial Interviews

Initial interviews were conducted with the ARIT members during the first cycle in the months of August and early September. The interview process provided an opportunity for the ARIT to share individual baseline perspectives on the professional learning, instructional leadership, and any preliminary implementation and learning transfer of coaching skills prior to the job-embedded phase of the study. Additionally, the one-on-one interview provided the time and space for each ARIT member to share how implementing coaching skills and practices could look in their school context and to address questions and concerns about the support needed during the next phase of the study.

The initial snapshots captured through the interviews served as an anchor to set up the conditions and mindset needed for the ARIT's subsequent job-embedded implementation phase within their school context. Ms. Carruthers was the most reflective during the interview. She

spoke about the value and ideal timing for her to engage in this type of professional learning as a seventh-year middle school assistant principal. Ms. Carruthers reflected on the importance of setting the conditions of psychological safety and trust in working toward partnership with teachers by "becoming more aware of making sure others feel safe and included by letting them know that their voice matters."

Ms. Jenkins shared in her interview about how "a coaching approach is truly a reframing of how observations are done. The supportive, not punitive approach, lands on people differently." Similarly, Mr. Washington reflected "with a shift in approach comes an investment of additional time to be intentional as an instructional leader." Mr. Washington appreciated having a group of fellow assistant principals and being assigned a program Lead Coach as thought partners throughout this learning.

The view of what instructional support looks like through the lens of coaching was also prominent during the initial interviews. Mr. Dunn and Mr. Blake specifically spoke to the increase in self-awareness of their approaches to feedback conversations. Mr. Blake shared, "the 30-second feedback strategy that was introduced and practiced during the initial professional session is now part of the conversational framework in my mind." The strategy emphasizes a strengths-based approach that supports relationship building with teachers. Mr. Dunn's perspective of "getting into the trenches with the teacher in this coaching work" helps to shift the view of how teachers see instructional support.

Overall, the initial interviews highlighted the importance of establishing the ideal conditions and foundational considerations for assistant principals as they began the implementation and learning transfer of coaching skills and practices within their context. These initial leader actions set the stage for a reframed view of administrators and how they

instructionally support teachers by integrating coaching practices within the next phase of the study.

Action Research Cycle 2

The ARIT began full implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices during Cycle 2 of the study. This portion of the study lasted approximately six weeks and was completed by the end of October. During this phase of the study, the ARIT actively engaged in job-embedded implementation and learning transfer of coaching skills and practices embedded within a coaching cycle process at their school. The ARIT members articulated that the foundational professional learning sessions and initial program support were beneficial; however, additional concrete resources and processes were needed as they began this active phase of coaching an individual while managing their role as an assistant principal. The ARDT was called to determine the best course of action to support the ARIT members in their implementation and transfer journey.

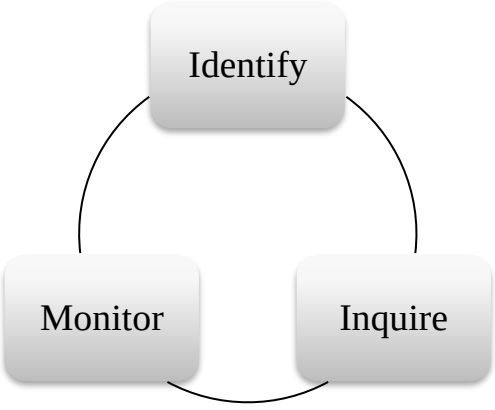
Interventions for Action Research Cycle 2

The members of the ARDT met to further assess and explore the most appropriate professional learning opportunities that could address the identified needs of the ARIT members. Reflexive journaling and team planning notes indicate that professional learning opportunities needed to be relevant to what the ARIT members would be implementing during this phase. Further logistical needs included receiving a clear course of study denoting when the ARIT would receive feedback to support their implementation and transfer, appropriate resources that support implementation of coaching practices, and how their work would be documented for the study and the coaching endorsement.

This cycle of interventions created by the ARDT was grounded in designing effective professional learning sessions that were content specific on the processes, strategies, and resources needed to coach an individual teacher. The ARDT determined that the most applicable coaching process and resources to share with at the professional learning session with the ARIT was Knight's *Impact Cycle* (2018). A close examination of the Impact Cycle instructional coaching processes was audited and adapted to meet the needs of ARIT members. The adapted coaching process included opportunities for the ARIT members to implement and transfer their coaching skills and practices with their cooperating teacher to identify a goal and teaching strategy, engage in inquiry through peer observation, watch exemplar videos or explore district resources, and monitor improvement as the teacher implemented new practices and received feedback. Figure 4.1 depicts the adapted model that the ARIT used during the study.

Figure 4.1

Action Research Implementation Team Coaching Process



Note. Adapted from Knight (2018).

The focus of the professional learning was specifically on having the assistant principals watch each phase of the Impact Cycle through video, provide coaching protocols and resources that

align with each phase, and provide time for assistant principals to discuss how to integrate the shared protocols and resources within an implementation period.

The primary researcher co-facilitated the content specific professional learning opportunity and observed the small group just-in-time learning sessions to take notes. Observational notes indicate that the content specific professional learning on coaching an individual teacher was well received by the assistant principals. Ms. Carruthers spoke about the increase in the "amount of time the teacher was talking versus the coach" which helped to guide reflective conversations. After reviewing a goal setting protocol shared, Mr. Dunn expressed interest in "weaving this into his debrief pre-conference" conversation with all his teachers. The professional learning session was designed with the adult learner in mind to ensure the session was relevant, provided several opportunities for the ARIT members to view Jim Knight's coaching process by watching him model coaching conversations with a teacher, and shared several resources for the ARIT members to collaborate on as they considered their next actions.

Ms. Perkins appreciated the clear and specific learning structures that were put in place and shared, "As a type A person overall, I now have a frame of reference and see what these conversations can look like." Similarly, Mr. Blake, an assistant principal working part time between two schools, showed some ease in reporting concerns, "instead of me having to tell her, my role is really to facilitate the conversation, [and] ask the right questions." The researcher's reflexive journal noted the groups' active collaboration supporting assistant principals becoming "the right fit" and increasing the "level of readiness" to engage their teachers more in the processes of being coached. The level of readiness and "learner spirit" was further highlighted and captured in observation notes from ARDT beginning of year meetings with ARIT members.

The elevation of teacher voice and autonomy through leveraging the power of video to support teacher growth was also important for the ARIT. The concept of having teachers record their practice resonated with second year middle school ARIT member Ms. Jenkins during her mid-perspective interview. She felt that "by having the teacher agree on a portion of instruction to record and viewing it as learning partners (separately or together)" it would provide an objective platform for her to t engage in a coaching conversation that would lead teachers toward self-reflection. Ms. Jenkins acknowledged the investment of time that it would take to follow through on such actions, but she was committed to the learning process.

Ms. Perkins respectfully pushed back by candidly reflecting that the "slow shift of her school's culture of administrators visiting classrooms as common practice would be pushed further if a teacher was asked to record, watch, and debrief with her" as modeled in the professional learning session. Alternate methods such as having a pre-observation conference with the teacher prior to conducting a live observation in lieu of video was discussed with the assistant principals to capture current reality and honor the voice of teachers while supporting this phase of the study.

Additionally, program support and active monitoring of the implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices by the ARDT members was a vital intervention during this cycle. To facilitate this process, the ARDT members watched and provided feedback to ARIT members from coaching video clips using an online platform (Sibme), reviewed submitted documents and artifacts aligned to their coaching work with teachers, and conducted feedback conversations with ARIT members using the program state-approved coaching rubric (Appendix C). The data collected by each ARDT member was brought to and discussed during ARDT focus group

meetings to explore this study's research questions related to the extent of learning transfer that occurred while implementing coaching skills and practices.

Moreover, the ARDT agreed that facilitating a small group just-in-time learning session midway through implementation would support the ARIT efforts during this phase of the study. The small group just-in-time intervention facilitated by the ARDT Lead Coach team provided an intentional implementation check-in opportunity and learning and modeling of coaching best practices with the use of practical tools. Observational notes during the team planning meeting noted Mr. William's advocating for "real and practical tools that can easily be integrated into what they already do." Ms. Yothers added that the "small wins to the process" would be vital first steps to "close the gap between evaluator and coach." Ms. Lasso concurred; however, she expressed an empathetic concern to embed "real talk discussion" in the design of the learning to discuss what contextual implementation would look like and potential barriers to navigate as they continued the implementation and transfer phase of the study. Resultingly, the team designed a session that included protocols and tools to support coaching conversations for goal setting, resources to guide coach-teacher inquiry ensuring voice equity, small group practice opportunities on reflective questioning and paraphrasing, and time to discuss contextual implementation challenges with their group.

Mid-Study Interviews

The second round of interviews came as the ARIT assistant principals were actively implementing and transferring their learning in context while managing their local school assistant principal responsibilities. A common thread of leading teachers by approaching conversations with a curious and empathetic mindset was a common thread that emerged from the mid-study interviews. Ms. Carruthers reflected, "I think I'm able to see it from the level of

being in the trenches and working through it with them." Ms. Jenkins shared that "having a better perspective through using a structure, actively listening and responding with open-ended questions" helped her view her approach and perspective to leadership differently than she typically would when conducting a teacher evaluation.

A shift in leadership perspective and instructional leadership view was also noted. Mr. Blake confessed, "the way I ask questions now has changed. It's more of listening to learn; then I follow up with tell me more; how do you think this will impact you?; how can I support you?" Ms. Perkins added, the approach of "going into fix things" in the classroom shifted for her. The impact of implementing coaching practices strengthened her ability to use "time on task" data with her teacher to provide reflective feedback so that together, they made instructional decisions. Collectively, the ARIT mid-study interviews referenced the use of protocol questions aligned with supporting a teacher to identify a goal, then monitoring the goal by asking questions about improvement toward the goal supported through reflective feedback conversations. Moreover, intentional efforts in learning alongside their teachers through co-planning, co-observing a teacher's classroom, or exploring a resource aligned to supporting the teacher's goal were highlighted.

This phase of the study also surfaced a growing concern mentioned by each ARIT member—the lack of time to consistently implement and transfer coaching skills and practices with fidelity. Mr. Washington and Mr. Dunn spoke about the struggles at the high school level. Both ARIT members spoke about placing intentional time on their calendars to facilitate a reflective coaching feedback conversation, self-reflect on their coaching video clip, or upload documents/artifacts, but they reported being called on several occasions to handle student discipline issues. Mr. Dunn expressed "I want to shut off my 'walkie' and just focus. I think the

coaching work is super important, [and] it's hard." Ms. Carruthers and Ms. Perkins shared from the middle and elementary school perspectives that scheduling the time and sticking to it worked for them; yet, they still felt challenged to "stay consistent with meeting with their teachers," reflecting on their coaching, and documenting their work to obtain feedback for their self-growth.

Reflexive journal notes during the mid-study interviews revealed that although the ARIT saw great value in integrating coaching to support teachers and themselves, many lost momentum in consistently implementing and transferring their learning into practice. Mr. Blake shared during his interview "being a school only half the time certainly is influencing my implementation and transfer, but I am going to make it work." For each ARIT member, their contextual circumstances affected the level of implementation and transfer they were able to achieve. Focus group responses from the ARDT also confirmed that managerial administrative duties took precedence during this cycle. An entry in the researcher's journal noted this:

> There is a desire within the assistant principals in this study to grow others and stretch themselves as leaders by trying out these coaching skills they have invested in learning and practicing with their peers. It seems that when rubber hits the road with implementation, they are being hindered by contextual daily stressors or added responsibility due to district shifts and changes that is impeding their progress.

The ARDT needed to examine the dilemma and to create interventions to meet the needs of the ARIT members to ensure a greater implementation and learning transfer of coaching skills and practices.

Focus Group

A focus group session was conducted toward the end of this cycle with the ARDT to examine how the planned interventions supported the ARIT. The purpose of the focus group was twofold. First, each ARDT team member that served as a Lead Coach reported on the implementation progress of their designated ARIT. Additionally, the ARDT shared progress about the evidence of learning transfer they observed through the analysis of coaching video clips, uploaded documents/ artifacts, and notes they shared with ARIT members in their feedback conversations. Second, the focus group interview served as a platform for the ARDT to discuss the research study's questions aligned to the extent, transfer, and most transferable coaching skills and practices for assistant principals.

ARDT members shared that the ARIT represented a strong group of "growth mindset leaders." The ARIT saw the value of integrating the coaching skills and practices gained from the program as an effective way to build capacity in themselves as instructional leaders and supporting those they lead. The ARDT collectively agreed that the ARIT successfully worked to set up effective partnerships by developing and documenting partnership agreements with their teachers. These agreements helped to set the tone in supporting a safe and supporting coaching environment. Ms. Lasso shared that the assistant principals were "helping teachers have autonomy and feel empowered to identify goals and strategies so that they continue to get better" in her reflection on the documents and artifacts she reviewed. Table 4.5 summarizes key points documented by the ARIT in their submitted partnership agreements.

Table 4.5

Partnership Agreement Document Evidence

Partnership Agreement Topic	Documented Evidence in Partnership Agreement
Hopes and Fears	"Grow as a teacher and improve practice. As a coach, grow in providing actionable and useful feedback. Fear is not enough time to do it well." Mr. Dunn's partnership agreement document response with teacher about hope and fears about coaching
Goals	"Provide support and coach the team in researched strategies to meet the needs of all students."- Ms. Carruthers documented the goals of her work in her principal/coach partnership agreement
Honoring Confidentiality	"In my initial meeting with the coachee, I assured her that this process was non evaluative, but rather an opportunity for myself and her to grow professionally. This is important as there is some vulnerability that one has to have to get the most out of the coaching cycle."- Mr. Blake partnership agreement document on honoring confidentiality
Partnership Logistics	"We will set aside time to meet at 7:50 on Tuesdays. We will work together on this cycle at least through the first semester. If additional time is needed, we can continue."- Ms. Jenkins documented in her partnership agreement the agreed upon time for coaching conversations

Furthermore, Ms. Lasso noted that evidence of "having the ability to effectively question to prompt reflection, to listen carefully to know what question to ask next, and to provide feedback that is reflective, as opposed to directive" as emerging competencies that require practice and self-reflection. Observational notes from feedback conversations and reflexive journals noted similar competencies from the ARIT. Mr. Williams shared based on submitted

coaching clips that "assistant principals are heavily relying on the coaching protocols and resources to facilitate their coaching conversations in a mechanical way."

Although ARIT members leveraged coaching skills in communication and feedback, Mr. Williams spoke to a lack of the "organic nature of a coaching conversation." Mr. Williams hypothesized that more practice was needed by the ARIT. Observational notes from feedback conversations noted that Mr. Williams pushed the thinking of his ARIT members to consider how they could be more self-reflective on their coaching practices by asking "what do you want to be more intentional about in your coaching?" The importance of taking the time to not only implement, but also to reflect on practice was apparent. Collectively, the ARDT agreed the ARIT were exhibiting coaching skills and practices that were at the beginning to developing levels (see Appendix C) at this point of their implementation and learning transfer.

Table 4.6 highlights a sampling of observable coaching skills and practices aligned to the program rubric the ARDT noted as emerging coaching competencies.

Table 4.6

Coaching Standard with Observable Indicators and Documented/Artifact Evidence

Performance Standard	Observable Indicators	Document/Artifact Evidence Sample
Providing Feedback	The coach has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to provide feedback to individuals and teams to build capacity and improve performance in student achievement. The coach will be able to: • utilize a process to provide feedback • formulate and use effective questioning techniques • provide resources that align with identified needs	"I share a more collaborative style allowing my coachee to think so he can reflect on his best practices, I conducted the identify questions to allow my coachee to discover his own goals. Feedback is critical to implementing a coaching cycle. I will continuously allow for feedback and reflection for self-discovery and next steps."- ARIT member Ms. Carruthers narrative reflection through document artifact on her perspective on delivering feedback

Table 4.6

Coaching Standard with Observable Indicators and Documented/Artifact Evidence

Performance Standard	Observable Indicators	Document/Artifact Evidence Sample
Communication	The coach has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to communicate effectively with coachee/team(s). The coach will be able to: • utilize effective questioning skills • utilize positive phrasing • demonstrate proper grammar, usage, and mechanics • use active listening skills • recognize body language and adjust coaching approach as needed	"If I notice a change in body language, I will pause and think to myself what I have said or not said to cause hesitation."- ARIT member Ms. Perkins narrative reflection through document artifact on her self-awareness in body language recognition "Utilize questioning to help lead people to the problem of practice, and to help lead people into what strategies they're thinking of they could use and what learning needs to be done."- ARDT member Ms. Lasso reporting on evidence of implementation and transfer through viewed video clips
Establishing Relationships of Trust	The coach has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively establish the relationship of trust with all stakeholders in the coaching process. The coach will be able to: • understand the importance of confidentiality and trust • protect and maintain confidentiality and trust • communicate to others the importance of confidentiality in the coach/coachee and team relationship • foster a positive relationship for high performance • demonstrate effective listening and reflection • demonstrate professional conduct at all times	"Removed myself from evaluation schedule and assured her the process was non-evaluative."- ARIT member Ms. Jenkins document artifact reflecting on conditions she set up to ensure relationship and trust was intentional "Partnership agreements have been uploaded by all ARIT members between their school and their cooperating teacher. The ARDT feels like they ready for implementation"- primary researcher reflexive journal entry after ARDT focus group discussion

During this focus group, a concern surfaced about the wide variance that existed in following the program's course of study in consistently implementing coaching skills and practices with fidelity. The ARDT became nervous that transfer of learning would not stick if implementation was not happening consistently. Similar sentiments were expressed at the mid-cycle interview with ARIT members. Some challenges and barriers that surfaced during the interviews included:

- a lack of time due to additional administrative responsibilities;
- a shift in attention needed toward new district initiatives;
- supporting teachers experiencing high levels of anxiety due new district initiatives; and,
- becoming familiar with new district policies on student discipline as impeding the implementation and transfer process of their learning.

The focus group concurred the causes such as the lack of intentional time devoted to coaching, added multiple responsibilities for assistant principals and teachers, namely contextual logistics including the need for assistant principals to support teachers emotionally more than professionally with the onset of several new district-wide initiatives rolled out in fall 2022. Ms. Lasso shared from her assistant principal lens:

> Having to take care of people's social emotional well-being is a huge charge that must come first before getting to the work. Stress is at incredible high in buildings and things keep getting piled on and schools are overall understaffed.

With assistant principals and teachers feeling overwhelmed, the time to implement "one more thing" felt like a heavy lift.

The ARDT noted the evident commitment from this group but empathized with the struggles they were experiencing associated with the fidelity needed to implement the coaching work. As such, the ARDT decided that to support implementation and transfer during the next

phase, each ARDT Lead Coach needed to carefully consider their ARIT members' contextual circumstances. The team decided to meet with each ARIT member that fell behind during this phase and to develop a customized implementation plan that met the needs of the ARIT member. There was a total of four customized plans created for ARIT members (2 high school, 1 middle school, 1 elementary school). Added supports included scheduled weekly check ins and optional 45 minutes office hour sessions were implemented by the ARDT to enhance communication and support for all the ARIT members.

The goal of the interventions were aimed at meeting the specialized needs of the ARIT based on contextual differences. Furthermore, the interventions provided a layer of supportive accountability through the weekly check-ins to promote a more consistent level of implementation to support the transfer of coaching skills and practices with fidelity. The interventions were employed and supported by the ARDT as the ARIT moved into the next phase of this action research study.

Action Research Cycle 3

November 2022 brought action research Cycle 3 and movement toward the end of the job-embedded implementation and transfer phase of the study. This portion of the study lasted five weeks and was completed in December. With specialized implementation plans and enhanced program support and communication in place, time was of the essence to extend the knowledge of the ARIT to support deeper learning transfer.

The ARDT met to discuss the mid-study focus group and interview findings. The team realized a common practice noted in the data was that the ARIT were heavily relying on using structured protocols for facilitating all their coaching conversations. Observation notes and the researcher's reflexive journal documented Mr. Williams reminding the group of "the mechanical

implementation," and he posed the question how can they "see coaching more than just Jim Knight?" The ARDT also recognized that understanding and honoring the ARIT's context was key in supporting the learning needs of this group. Resultingly, the ARDT was called to determine the best next course of action to support the ARIT in their continued learning transfer of coaching skills and practices.

Interventions for Action Research Cycle 3

The ARDT determined the next intervention to support learning transfer was to design and implement a contextual school-based virtual field experience as professional learning opportunities. Observational notes during the team planning captured Ms. Yothers suggesting "can we reach out to graduates and capture some videos of them coaching?" Mr. Williams stepped up to reach out to a few former graduates of the program that he still coached on an informal basis to initiate the partnership. A total of three coaching video were collected from the elementary and secondary levels. Videos captured assistant principal engaging in coaching conversations at various points of support to model and to expand the view of what coaching skills and practices could look like for the ARIT.

The design of the professional learning pushed the ARDT to embed opportunities for the ARIT to be self-reflective, set goals as they learned more about coaching, view Lincoln County Public School assistant principals coaching in action, and collaborate with their peers. The goal was for the ARIT to think deeply about their practices in context and to consider integration opportunities to stretch them outside their comfort zone. Upon completion of this field experience learning opportunities, the ARIT continued with the implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices with their cooperating teacher. The ARIT continued to receive coaching feedback support from their assigned ARDT Lead Coach as this phase of the research

study ended. Final individual semi-structure perspective interviews were conducted with the ARIT members. Additionally, the ARDT participated in a final focus group interview. Observational and reflexive journal notes from the primary researcher were also collected during this phase of the research study.

Final Interviews

The final individual semi-structured interviews for the ARIT were conducted over the first two weeks of December. Each ARIT member expressed a sense of accomplishment for making it to the end of semester amidst all district changes and challenges endured. Some ARIT members were still wrapping up their coaching cycles with their teachers and were relieved to hear that some additional grace was provided on the monitoring component of the program.

All the ARIT members were able to discuss the impact and shifts in their leadership perspectives. Ms. Jenkins spoke to her increase in the level of confidence and efficacy as an instructional leader. She reflected on a heightened level of self-awareness of her "coaching moves such as paraphrasing, reflective questioning, and wait time" that was not evident prior to being in the program. Ms. Jenkins noted that her cooperating teacher and others "are more willing to try new things and they trust that I will support their ideas" in a way that best meets their intended goals.

Ms. Perkins spoke on her disposition when approaching teachers to have a conversation about instruction is more about "informed self-discovery" based on the current reality of what instruction looks like. Ms. Carruthers spoke about her coaching binder and how she "has her reflective question prompts out" as she plans for her debrief conversations with her teachers. She further advocated that every leader, including principals needs to "go through coaching training" to support the growth of others in their building.

The improved capacity to facilitate a reflective growth conversation with a teacher was also highlighted during the final interviews. Mr. Washington who admitted that he wanted to quit the program two times shared, "continuously focusing on student outcomes and just breaking it down by asking questions and listening to seek understanding" helped to shift his thinking in how to instructionally support a teacher. Mr. Blake appreciated the opportunity to learn and practice the nature of a reflective growth conversation with a teacher to "formulate their own reasoning behind something I may have been leaning toward anyway." The empowerment and capacity building the assistant principals and teachers supported during the study was enhanced through the power of effective communication and conversation skills.

The program design and responsiveness to the needs of the ARIT was also highlighted during the interviews. Ms. Perkins and Ms. Carruthers attributed their "making it through" to the balance of support they felt from their local school leader and district. Ms. Carruthers felt that she was able to appropriately implement and transfer her learning due to her principal being fully invested in the process and allowing her voice to be part of the process in deciding who to coach. Ms. Perkins stated "the weekly meetings with her principal, then following up with Ms. Lasso on program component" supported her growth.

Mr. Dunn reflected on having multiple "thought partners throughout the learning" which allowed him to "zoom out and zoom in" when he needed to hear different perspectives. Mr. Dunn also commented that the multi-layered approach to the learning in conjunction with the job-embedded practice, self-reflection, and one-on-one feedback conversations served him the best. Mr. Dunn admitted the "documentation part for endorsement purposes" felt like added stress to his already full plate of duties and responsibilities.

The interventions employed during the study were well received by the ARIT. Mr. Blake stated, “I am a visual learner, so seeing all the videos, modeling, and then watching other assistant principals do coaching helped.” Ms. Jenkins added that she saw and understood the logic of “going from theoretical to practical” in the way coaching skills and practices were presented to the cohort. Each time she entered as a learner, she left with “a few more coaching tools” to try out.

The attention paid and responsiveness to each ARIT context as the study unfolded through customizing implementation plans and enhancing communication and availability of ARDT member support positively impacted the retention of the ARIT while in the study. Although four out of the six ARIT members were still wrapping up their coaching cycles with their teachers, all self-reported that they felt confident in their abilities to do so effectively because of the support by the ARDT.

Focus Group

The ARDT participated in a focus group at the end of the study. The goal was to reflect on the semester of learning and support that was provided to the ARIT driven by their needs to address the implementation of challenges and their successes, and to discuss the overall progress and results of the ARIT in their implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices. Moreover, this was the group’s final meeting in which a discussion about their learning as a team would inform the coaching program’s next steps in supporting the assistant principals as they moved into the spring semester of team coaching.

The ARDT acknowledged the work they did to dispel the ARIT evaluator only mindset that surfaced early in the study. Mr. Williams spoke to this struggle that the program faced during its first two years of supporting assistant principals in the program. Mr. Williams and Ms.

Yothers reflected on leaning into this concept early on in their learning through conversation and peer collaboration helped them cast a vision that they were able shape through the job-embedded nature of their implementation and transfer of skills into practices. Mr. Williams stated, “when I bring it up, they are like, what are you talking about. So, it seems to be a non-issue.” Ms. Lasso concurred but added, “the simple frameworks provided, and resources helped get the buy-in to the coaching process” by having something relevant and tangible to start the process of coaching. The researcher’s reflexive journal noted, “APs are appreciating the skills around conversation structures and the small moves and tweaks they could make in their practice to balance their current role.”

As the ARDT began discussing evidence of further implementation and learning transfer, the team spoke to a consistent use and improvement in the use of questioning, paraphrasing, probing, and summarizing the ARIT final submission of video coaching clips. The attention to dialogical thinking and reflection as the ARIT engaged in inquiry with their cooperating teachers was also mentioned as a consistent practice the ARDT noted in their collection of video, artifacts, and documents.

Mr. Williams attested to a shift in the comfort level of his ARIT members coaching toward “meaningful inquiry” during his coaching feedback conversations. Observation notes taken by the researcher during the feedback conversations illustrated an increase in the depth of positive feedback the ARIT members were receiving around communication. Most of the growth feedback existed in the coaching standard of feedback, specifically, in administering constructive feedback in an incremental manner.

Table 4.7 summarizes a sampling of the observable indicators the ARDT noting the improvements the ARIT had related to the levels of consistency and comfort as they reviewed coaching clips and documents/artifacts while facilitating coaching feedback conversations.

Table 4.7

Coaching Standard with Observable Indicators and Documented/Artifact Evidence

Performance Standard	Observable Indicators	Document/Artifact Evidence Sample
Providing Feedback	The coach has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to provide feedback to individuals and teams to build capacity and improve performance in student achievement. The coach will be able to: • provide feedback that reflects best practice based on current research* • utilize a process to provide feedback • formulate and use effective questioning techniques • provide resources that align with identified needs • prioritize and develop a timeline • recognize the fluid nature of the coachee/team(s) plan for continuous improvement*	"The 30 second feedback template will be helpful when providing feedback on my walkthroughs and brief observations. Identify and improve questions help teachers identify strengths and monitor progress."- ARIT member Mr. Blake reflecting in document artifact on how he has shifted his practice of providing feedback "When we discussed the data, I leaned on probing questions technique and focused on listening that required my coachee to deeply think about her actions."- ARIT member Ms. Perkins reflecting in artifact on the use of effective questioning to promote reflection

Table 4.7

Coaching Standard with Observable Indicators and Documented/Artifact Evidence

Performance Standard	Observable Indicators	Document/Artifact Evidence Sample
Communication	The coach has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to communicate effectively with coachee/team(s). The coach will be able to: • utilize effective questioning skills • utilize effective clarifying skills* • utilize positive phrasing • demonstrate proper grammar, usage, and mechanics • use active listening skills • recognize body language and adjust coaching approach as needed • recognize the non-verbal implications of the coaching environment and adjust coaching as needed* • write clear statements for improved performance*	"Some questions led to a deeper understanding of what my coachee was trying to explain. Some questions such as Can you tell me more about…?"- ARIT member Ms. Carruthers reflection during her feedback conversation with ARDT member lead Coach "I will allow the coachee to do most of the talking, I will ask him questions at first then use active listening to identify areas for further focus. Then ask more targeted questions."-ARIT Ms. Perkins document reflection on how she guided "informed self-discovery" by using coaching communication skills
Establishing Relationships of Trust	The coach has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively establish the relationship of trust with all stakeholders in the coaching process. The coach will be able to: • understand the importance of confidentiality and trust • protect and maintain confidentiality and trust	"By listening and clarifying statement that are made, I have been able to establish a positive relationship of high performance with my coachee."- ARIT member Mr. Washington document reflection of effective communication supported establishing relationship and trust

Table 4.7

Coaching Standard with Observable Indicators and Documented/Artifact Evidence

Performance Standard	Observable Indicators	Document/Artifact Evidence Sample
Establishing Relationships of Trust	• communicate to others the importance of confidentiality in the coach/coachee and team relationship • foster a positive relationship for high performance • demonstrate respect for coachee's/team(s) perception, learning style, and individuality* • demonstrate effective listening and reflection* • demonstrate professional conduct at all times • show genuine concern for the coachee's welfare and future • participate effectively in partnerships and networks	"When we interact, it's not about me being "the boss" but about working together for the same goal of improved student achievement."- ARIT member Mr. Dunn document artifact reporting on how he worked to establish relationship and trust

**Note:* New observable coaching indicator noted at the conclusion of Cycle 3

Chapter Summary

This study sought to address the needs of the assistant principals that served as an action research implementation team as they progressed through a semester of implementing and transferring coaching skills and practices while enrolled in a district based coaching endorsement program. The ARIT collectively attended several professional learning opportunities on coaching skills and practices and engaged in a phase of job-embedded implementation and transfer of coaching with a cooperating teacher at their local school. The ARIT was actively monitored and supported by an ARDT member and district coaching program. Several internal and external

challenges surfaced for the ARIT during the study that were addressed during each cycle of implementation by the ARDT. The ARDT worked together in a responsive manner to design interventions such as partnership with local schools and ARIT members, context and context focused professional learning, customized implementation schedules, and one-to-one coaching and feedback to meet the learning needs of the ARIT.

The findings reported in this chapter were gleaned from several sources of data that included individual semi-structured interviews with the ARIT members, focus group discussions with the ARDT, submitted documents and artifacts from the ARIT, and observations notes from ARDT feedback and planning conversations. A reflexive journal was kept which helped to corroborate other forms of data. Following the action research model, each cycle ended with the ARDT reflecting and considering next actions steps to best support the ARIT as they continued to deepen their learning transfer in a job-embedded manner with a cooperating teacher. The data painted a picture of assistant principals actively implementing, transferring, and documenting their learning transfer in their respective context while managing their daily assistant principal leadership duties and responsibilities.

The data were analyzed and coded. The findings in this chapter led to the development of themes that emerged from the findings across the three action research cycles. The thematic findings are addressed in the next chapter as they relate to the purpose of the study, research questions, the logic model, and theoretical framework that guided this study.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

The purpose of this study was to examine the transfer into practice job-embedded coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a district-wide program. The study also sought to examine whether the transfer of coaching practices and skills impacted assistant principals' perspectives about their expanding role as instructional leaders supporting instruction. Participants in the study included a total of six assistant principals (two elementary school, two middle school, two high school) which represented a cross sectional perspective of the district wide coaching program. To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching skills into their leadership role of supporting instruction?
2. How does the transfer of coaching practices impact assistant principals' perspective as instructional leaders?
3. What does the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction?

This chapter presents the themes that emerged from the findings throughout the action research cycles. The themes and analysis relate to the purpose of the study, research questions, the logic model, and the theoretical framework.

The action research cycles that followed the planned interventions and data collected

were described in detail in Chapter 4. The collection of data took place during the fall semester of the 2022-2023 school year in the Lincoln County Public School District. The action research study involved assistant principals being supported in a district program to advance their knowledge, skills, and learning transfer of coaching skills and practices into their role as instructional leaders. The assistant principals engaged in a job-embedded professional learning model that encompassed attending professional learning sessions, implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices with a cooperating teacher, obtaining feedback on their practices, and documenting their coaching work.

The action research design team supported the assistant principals with professional learning and customized supports based on the needs and challenges of the group during the study. Three action research cycles were completed, and the data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observational notes, documents/artifacts, and the researcher's journal.

The theoretical frameworks of the study were based on situated learning and integrative theory of low and high road transfer. Situated learning theory as a theoretical framework for this action research positioned the assistant principals as learners in the center of the content, context, and community of practice as they actively sought to implement and transfer their learning about coaching skills and practices into their instructional leadership of supporting teachers. Moreover, the integrative theory of low and high road transfer influenced the study based on the level of the learner's cognition and development of skills by engaging in thorough and diverse practice and self-monitoring within their respective context. These theories led to the development of a logic model that guided the study. The ARDT provided interventions via professional learning sessions, feedback and monitoring support, and customized implementation plans to complete

the study. The ARIT constructed, synthesized, and applied their knowledge of coaching to build and refine their skills as instructional leaders by consistently facilitating reflective feedback coaching conversations with teachers to support their instruction.

The findings were identified in Chapter 4 for each action research cycle. Analysis of the findings were derived through systematic coding of the data collected. The coding was examined and analyzed through an overall lens and by the study's research questions. Themes in the data surfaced related to each research question. A summary of the emergent themes connected to key finding and the research questions is illustrated in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Summary of Themes Connected to Key Findings and Research Questions

Research Questions	Key Findings	Themes
1. To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching skills into their leadership role of supporting instruction?	Establishing the internal and external conditions for coaching are essential to support instruction Contextual settings and specific assistant principal responsibilities impacted the level of implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices with fidelity	Theme 1: Context and Conditions Matter
2. How does the transfer of coaching practices impact assistant principals' perspective as instructional leaders?	Assistant principal disposition and view of support shifted as they placed additional value on teacher autonomy, voice, and partnership in their coaching conversations with teachers	Theme 2: Improved Self-Awareness Supports a Coaching Mindset Theme 3: Integrate Coaching Through Intentional Actions

Table 5.1

Summary of Themes Connected to Key Findings and Research Questions

Research Questions	Key Findings	Themes
3. What does the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction?	Assistant principals need to clearly see and understand how coaching skills and practices connects to their leadership role Protocols and coaching conversation structures that embed open-ended questioning, probing, and clarifying opportunities, and feedback supported the growth of assistant principals As assistant principals practiced coaching conversations their level of integration and confidence improved	Theme 4: Clarity and Duration of Coaching Practices Drives Leader Capacity

Given that assistant principals are adult learners that seek relevance of their learning into application and practice, the themes that emerged reflect a need for creating optimal internal and external situated learning environments to support effective implementation and transfer of coaching skills. The themes align to the early work of Lave et al. (1991) and situated learning founded on the principle that knowledge is constructed if the learner becomes an active participant. Additionally, Perkins and Salmon (1992) integrative low and high road transfer and Brion's (2020) multidimensional model of learning transfer supports that situated learning and cognition are developed through purposeful and activities in specific contexts. The next section

of this chapter includes an analysis of each thematic finding aligned to the research question that guided the study.

Research Question 1

The first research question articulated further the purpose of the study. To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching skills into their leadership role of supporting instruction? The data showed that the assistant principals needed both district and local school support to effectively implement and transfer their coaching skills and practices effectively. The assistant principals needed customized and targeted professional learning, feedback and contextual support that directly connected to their current assistant principal roles and responsibilities in supporting instruction.

Local school support was necessary to fully understand the parameters and conditions needed for assistant principals to work with teachers to develop a coaching relationship, rather than an evaluative one. Resultingly, it was not so much about the act of implementing the skills and practices of coaching, it more about creating the optimal context and conditions for assistant principals to implement the coaching work while balancing their daily leadership responsibilities.

Context and Conditions Matter

The ARDT were directly asked during the focus group interviews about the ARIT level of implementation and transfer and their answers varied based on each ARIT members school's context and current operating conditions. Mr. Williams noted, "…my assistant principals that are over testing are struggling and now are behind." Ms. Lasso attested that the assistant principal she supported that was split between two schools "is trying the best he can considering his circumstances." Ms. Lasso continued, "the learning spirit of Mr. Blake will pull him through."

Moreover, Mr. Williams felt small success bursts when he met with his ARIT members as a thought partner to affirm and talk through their coaching process to "empower them to push forward." The ARDT realized the importance of understanding each of their ARIT member's school context and specific roles and responsibilities so that the appropriate level of customized support could be offered to maximize the implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices.

The ARIT were directly asked about the progress of the implementation and transfer of their coaching skills and practices with their cooperating teacher during their mid and final semi-structured interviews. Many of the responses expressed by the ARIT members reflected a sense of being overwhelmed by the lack of time to effectively coach the way they envisioned. Mr. Dunn admitted to the feeling of guilt "as I get pulled away each time the 'walkie' goes off." He added, "the biggest barrier is just the time and balancing…I just want to shut off my walkie and just focus." Ms. Perkins offered a positive perspective of her context as she spoke about " the balance of support from the bi-weekly meetings with her principal and Ms. Lasso's district support." She confirmed that her principal's commitment to her growth by investing her time was "fueling her desire to do well in the program."

Many of the early interventions that surfaced to support the ARIT during the study were anchored in helping to create a common understanding of the coaching work and advocating for the appropriate conditions at the local school for the assistant principals to be learners and reflective practitioners. The findings in Chapter 4 noted that although each ARIT member engaged in initial conversations with their principal and Lead Coach about the ideal local school conditions needed to effectively implement and transfer coaching skills with fidelity, large variances in local school contexts, assistant principal responsibilities, and principal support

affected the extent of the implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices. The ARIT members that did not experience large shift to the roles and responsibilities and that had invested local school leaders were able to highly self-reflective on their capacity for growth as instructional leaders. Ms. Carruthers spoke during her final interview:

> I see teachers are more willing to share and try new ideas. They feel that they can trust that I will support their ideas. It has opened the doors and avenues for them to know it's okay to take a risk and try other things. It's okay for me to do as well too. I don't have to strictly stay by the expectations. There is a bigger impact on teachers feeling more comfortable in taking risks and sharing their thoughts and opinions.

As the ARDT designed interventions to support the ARIT members specific requests and contextual needs, implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices occurred at a manageable pace for the ARIT members.

The logic model presented in Figure 3.2 was built on the premise that the assistant principals would learn about coaching skills and practices (content) in an optimal situated professional learning environment with their fellow colleagues (community) and transfer it into practice within their respective context. The ARDT sought to support the ARIT by providing them with coaching and feedback. Additionally, the ARIT implemented and transferred the coaching skills and reflected on their growth as leaders. The ARDT realized early on that the contextual situated learning environment in each school was different for each ARIT member which influenced the extent to which implementation and transfer of practices occurred.

The overall theme for Research Question 1 was that contextual and conditional considerations matter and must be attended to within a situated learning environment to effectively support the implementation and transfer of newly acquired coaching knowledge and

skills into practice. Careful attention and responsiveness to varying contextual and learning conditions supported the ARIT members growth as instructional leaders.

Research Question 2

The heart of this research study sought to glean the perspectives of assistant principals as learners as they integrated coaching skills and practices into their roles as evolving instructional leaders. This was the central idea to Research Question 2: How does the transfer of coaching practices impact assistant principals' perspective as instructional leaders? The research addressed how assistant principals worked to bridge the gap between being a coach and evaluator through being highly self-reflective on their current practices with teachers, understanding the foundations and differences between a coaching versus an evaluative relationship, and considering how to effectively use a coaching approaches in their work to support teacher instruction. The data collected revealed two major themes of improved self- awareness and engaging in intentional actions when integrating coaching into practice.

Although enhanced self-awareness and intentional actions were of utmost importance, the data also revealed the assistant principals' need for clear relevance and connection of coaching skills and practices to their current role and responsibilities aligned with supporting teachers. The more the assistant principals saw connections and opportunities where they could leverage the coaching skills and practices, the more they "bought into" the process of using a coaching approach in their work.

Improved Self-Awareness Supports a Coaching Mindset

The ARIT spoke to the enhanced awareness they gained through learning about and practicing coaching skills and practices. The assistant principals valued the support they received from the ARDT Lead Coach feedback and the program in helping to gain clarity on how

coaching skills and practice could be integrated into their work as assistant principals. Their comments revealed takeaways around shifts in dispositions that lead to an improved self-awareness that supports a coaching mindset. Ms. Jenkins shared that the "goal setting protocol easily fit into her October pre-conference conversations." She admitted that the conversation took a little extra time but found value in the process. Mr. Dunn too reflected on integration, however, felt that the investment of time for each coaching conversation "could not be done" with each teacher that he supports.

As the semester progressed and early interventions were employed to support the contextual needs of the ARIT, interviews revealed internal reflection and improved awareness aligned to a coaching mindset. Mid and final semi-structured interviews noted shifts in thinking about how teacher voice, autonomy, and partnership played a role in supporting teacher growth. Mr. Blake shared his shift in instructional leadership perspective by "empowering teachers to become leaders themselves by working side by side with them." Moreover, the power of facilitating reflection was key in improved awareness to empower teachers to become their own leaders. Ms. Carruthers noted, "…through questioning, teachers are able to formulate their own reasoning that they're more willing to act upon because it came from their thinking, not mine." The sense heightened of self- awareness by the assistant principals was key in shifting toward a coaching mindset.

Integrate Coaching Through Intentional Actions

Assistant principal perspectives as instructional leaders was impacted through the intentional actions they engaged in while in the study. This study sought to closely examine how intentional actions in establishing relationships, communication, and feedback impacted their perspectives. Semi-structured interviews noted that as the ARIT became intentional about their

actions and how they were going to integrate them, their perspectives and approaches to instructional leadership expanded.

The ARIT noted several intentional integration points during implementation. Mr. Washington noted during his mid-cycle interview his urge to "immediately respond to teachers to tell them what to do…[changed to] I'm going to think of the process before responding." Additionally, Ms. Perkins candidly spoke to the difficulty she experienced in shifting how she listens to others in "always wanting to jump in and say something." Overall shifts in communication and understanding how to facilitate a reflective coaching conversation were noted. Ms. Jenkins highlighted during her final interview being "more purposeful in having instructional conversations…at times you lose sight of this instructional leadership aspect."

Observational notes during feedback conversations the ARIT members had with their Lead Coach and ARDT focus group interviews noted intentional shifts in "how the assistant principals showed up" that were occurring. During the final focus group with the ARDT, both Mr. Williams and Ms. Lasso agreed that communication indicators which included evidence of active listening, use of open-ended questions, and monitoring of non-verbals were being used "more pervasively than when the study started." Ms. Lasso offered praise, "they are really slowing down and listening before asking the next question…the non-verbals are also improving." The awareness of their practices brought a newfound level of intentionality to the ways they approached their work of supporting teachers.

A greater understanding of administering feedback using a coaching approach also reflected a shift in perspective for the ARIT. Many ARIT members reflected on the 30-second feedback strengths-based approach that they learned and implemented when working with their teachers. The approach encompassed administering feedback that specifically named an

observed positive teacher action, its impact student learning witnessed within a small interval of time, and an open-ended question that invited teacher reflection. Mr. Dunn quickly integrated the 30-second feedback approach into his practice when conducting walkthroughs. He shared during his mid interview the value of the feedback strategy as an "early win to develop relationship and trust while getting the teacher to talk about themselves." Mr. Blake reflected on recording and watching himself administer this feedback as both "empowering, yet scary, because very specific actions" were discussed which he was not accustomed to administering to support teacher's thinking. Such intentional actions resulted in a shift in perspective on the power of using feedback to support instruction.

Research Question 3

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) played an integral part to the study. The team members took an active role in the support and design of the interventions and helped to analyze the data throughout the study. Research Question 3 sought to understand what the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learned about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction. Data gathered from focus group interviews, observations, and field notes show that at the center of assistant principal application and transfer of coaching skills and practices were the need for clarity on coaching processes and skills and duration of practice which drove improved leader capacity.

Clarity and Duration of Coaching Practices Drives Leader Capacity

While the participants generally felt positive about the added value of integrating coaching into their leadership toolbox, observational notes and initial ARIT semi-structured interviews indicated the need to learn about clear processes and tools to support effective coaching and feedback conversations. The ARDT examined interview data during team planning

and focus group meetings to develop interventions that focused clear coaching skills and practices that were most relevant to current assistant principal instructional duties. Ms. Yothers continued to advocate for "practical bite-size" skills that the ARIT could practice even with teachers they are not formally coaching. Ms. Lasso shared an example of a clear process in the development of partnership agreements which "supported the building of trust and safety" for the assistant principal partnership approaches with teachers. Mr. Blake reflected during his mid-cycle interview that clarity in coaching processes such as questioning, reflective feedback, and active listening helped him see "points of entry into the coaching work." Therefore, understanding the purpose and providing clarity to coaching skills and practices was key application and transfer of coaching skills and practices.

As the ARDT came together throughout the study to develop professional learning, facilitate just in time support, and analyze data after the review of documents and artifacts they noted that learning transfer occurred in small chunks. As coaching skills and practices were introduced and supported with a clear structure or protocol as a scaffold, the ARIT members were able to see where these skills could fit in their practice and be more apt to try it out with their cooperating teachers. The researcher's reflexive journal further noted, " a shift in energy happened when the assistant principals saw the goal setting conversation with integrated coaching skills such as listening, questioning and feedback." Observational notes from the second professional learning session noted where Ms. Jenkins said "I kind of do this already, but not with these questions. I can't wait to try it out." Clarity and purpose enhanced the value of integrating coaching into assistant principal practices.

Building assistant principal capacity during the study was ascertained through a close examination by the ARDT on how to attain a comfortable, yet rigorous pace of duration that

supported consistent implementation and transfer of coaching skills. Initial focus group discussions led the team to realize that although the assistant principals shared a common learning experience as a group, their lived experiences as they engaged in the implementation and transfer was very different. As the ARDT began to share the experiences of struggling ARIT members they realized the key to ensuring the duration of coaching was program flexibility and enhanced communication through open "office hours to discuss pain points." ARDT member Mr. Williams shared "when I talk to them about their coaching, I hear it happening…the moves are there. We discuss and brainstorm through the challenges, then they're good" Ms. Lasso agreed and added that being there as a "thought partner has been the most powerful for her members." The ARDT's ability to come together with an analytic and empathetic lens helped to push the ARIT efforts to implement and transfer coaching skills and practices in a durative manner which supported building their capacity as instructional leaders.

The overall theme from the ARDT when discussing the most applicable and transferable coaching skills and practices were clear coaching skills and practices that served a purpose and alignment to assistant principal instructional roles and responsibilities. Additionally, the ARIT valued the feedback and customized support they received from the ARDT as they worked on the consistent use of their coaching skills and practices to build their leadership capacity to support instruction.

Chapter Summary

There were four overall themes that emerged throughout the data that relate to the study's research questions. Research Question 1 investigated the extent of job-embedded professional learning transfer of coaching skills and practices by assistant principals into their leadership role of supporting instruction. While the evidence of learning transfer was apparent among all

participants in the study, the emergent theme was that context and conditions matter. The extent to which assistant principals' were able to implement and transfer coaching skills and practices were influenced by their contextual conditions and specific local school leadership responsibilities.

Research Question 2 focused on how the transfer of coaching practices impacted their perspective as instructional leaders. Two themes emerged from the data. First, improved self-awareness supports a coaching mindset. All of the ARIT members spoke about an enhanced level of self-awareness they have in how they approach a conversation with a teacher. They felt that the learning and practice they implemented and transferred allowed them to facilitate instructional and feedback conversation through a coaching lens and apply a coaching approach to their work. This new view expanded their perspective and emerged the second theme of integrating coaching through intentional actions to support teacher instruction. As the assistant principals became more self-aware of their default leadership behaviors, they become more cognizant of the intentional coaching actions they needed to employ with teachers to support instruction.

Research Question 3 addressed what the ARDT learned about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction. The theme of clarity and duration of coaching practices drives leader capacity surfaced during the study. The ARDT determined that clarity of specific coaching practices that tightly aligned to the current roles and responsibilities of assistant principals was the most applicable and transferable for assistant principals and therefore, supported duration of coaching practices. The clarity provided by introducing and discussing coaching protocols and resources during professional learning and just in time interventions helped to support the assistant principals in the areas of

establishing relationships and trust, communication, and feedback. Moreover, the ARDT learned that intentional program support by the ARDT members were necessary to enhance the implementation, transfer, and duration of coaching practices. Resultingly, the interventions employed led to improved instructional leadership capacity through the integration of coaching practices.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions of the study as well as discussing the implications and the connections to future leadership practices.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

The purpose of this study was to examine the transfer into practice job-embedded coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a district-wide program. The study also sought to examine whether the transfer of coaching practices and skills impacted assistant principals' perspectives about their expanding role as instructional leaders supporting instruction. To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching skills into their leadership role of supporting instruction?
2. How does the transfer of coaching practices impact assistant principals' perspective as instructional leaders?
3. What does the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction?

This chapter presents recommendations of the researcher to school and system leaders, implications for policy, and suggested areas for continued research. The recommendations and implications are based on the themes that surfaced from the findings of the study.

Summary of the Study

This action research study case began in the fall of the 2022-2023 school year at Lincoln County Public School (LCPS) District. The research was designed based on a qualitative action research design approach to examine how assistant principals enrolled in a district coaching program learned and transferred coaching skills and practices in their work toward supporting instruction. The study was grounded by the frameworks of situated learning theory and integrative high and low road transfer as assistant principals worked to integrate their learning about coaching within their leadership role and school context. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) assisted the researcher in the development of interventions and continuous analysis of the findings.

District Changes

The study was situated in the midst of changes that were occurring in the district. The 2022-2023 school year was the first year several new initiatives were launched in alignment with the district's four strategic priority areas of empathy, equity, effectiveness, and excellence. Local school and district leaders needed to reexamine and learn about resources to strengthen the academic press and supportive community within schools. Some of the changes included the adoption of new elementary literacy resources, changes to assessments practices to track formative student progress, and shifts to the district's student discipline policy. Assistant principals played an integral role in carrying out the vision of the district's plan and supporting their staff with the changes.

The role of the assistant principal took a turn as they needed to heavily support teachers in understanding how to implement the new processes associated with the district strategic priorities. Additionally, the way discipline was handled by an assistant principal pushed their

thinking and actions as the district and nation saw an overall rise in school violence. Resultingly, the urgency for assistant principals to approach their work with an expanded perspective was evident as they worked with teachers to support instruction during this time.

Action Research Study

A group of assistant principals that were enrolled in the district's coaching program comprised the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT). The researcher served as a district coordinator that supports the district's coaching program. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) included the researcher, an external consultant that served as a program lead coach, a local school assistant principal that served as a program lead coach, and a district coordinator that works in the same department as the researcher. The study was comprised of three action research cycles. The action research cycle began with an initial challenge that surfaced by the ARIT. The ARDT worked to develop an intervention that emphasized partnership with the ARIT members and schools to ensure clarity on contextual conditions needed for optimal implementation.

The ARDT worked with the ARIT as they implemented and transferred coaching skills and practices within their context. The ARDT supported the ARIT by reviewing and providing feedback on self-reflected coaching video clips and uploaded artifacts and documents. The ARDT then came together to debrief and reflect. As another challenge surfaced with implementation and transfer of learning, the cycle was repeated to address and support it.

The ARIT members were individually interviewed three times during the study to capture perspectives and determine the how the implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices were impacting their instructional leadership practices. The ARDT participated in focus groups at the middle and end of the study to obtain their view on the extent of learning transfer

and which skills were most applicable and transferable. Data were also collected through the researcher's journal and observation notes of planning meetings and feedback conversations. The analysis of data revealed themes that were embedded throughout the study. The data also highlighted the literature surrounding the evolving role of assistant principals and learning transfer aligned to well-designed professional learning opportunities as presented in the discussion.

Theoretical Framework and Theory of Change

Situated learning and integrative theory of high and low transfer were the foundational frameworks of the study. The ARIT members were at the center of the learning in their situated environment. The members were supported by the context and community of support they received throughout the study (Brion, 2020, Hajian, 2019; Roumell, 2018). The ARIT participated in job-embedded implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices that were directly connected to their role of supporting instruction. The extent of high and low learning transfer developed through the cognition and engagement of purposeful implementation of coaching skills and practices in their specific school context (Brion, 2020; Roumell, 2018; Taylor, 2017). As the ARIT adapted and refined their coaching skills through diverse practice opportunities, continuous periods of low and high transfer occurred.

The logic model was anchored on the premise that optimal situated learning transfer occurs when professional learning opportunities are effectively designed, and intervention supports meets the needs of the learner through the Plan-Do- Study-Act steps of continuous improvement (Bryk, 2015). The cycles of implementation and transfer along with feedback and support provided by the ARDT facilitated the learning transfer of coaching skills and practices.

The ARDT and district program support provided a firm, yet flexible foundation that was responsive to meet the needs of the ARIT to build their capacity as instructional leaders.

Themes Related to the Research Questions and Scholarly Literature Reviewed

The research study was guided by three questions. The questions focused on the extent of assistant principal learning transfer into practice of job-embedded coaching skills and practices, assistant principal perspectives on the implementation and learning transfer of coaching skills, and the ARDT perspective on the most applicable and transferable coaching skills and practices to support instruction. Through analysis of the compiled qualitative data, themes emerged that connected to each research question and supported the findings in the literature.

Theme from Research Question 1

***Research Question 1*:** To what extent do assistant principals transfer job-embedded professional learning about coaching skills into their leadership role of supporting instruction?

Theme 1: Context and Conditions Matter

The findings from the study confirms that although the role of the assistant principal still has a heavy emphasis on management responsibilities, the need for the 21st century assistant principal to support instruction remains evident (Goldring et al., 2021; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). Supporting instruction by integrating coaching skills and practices when providing feedback to teachers was the method selected for this study. Assistant principals learned about and transferred coaching skills and practices while working with teachers in their school context to support instruction leading to improved instructional leadership capacity.

The findings indicated that the extent to which assistant principal contextual and conditional situated learning environments were supported (during and after professional development) impacted the extent of learning transfer that occurred with fidelity. This finding

aligns with the need for assistant principals to be provided with adequate professional development opportunities and an optimal situated learning environment to transfer learning was evident to meet the contextual needs of today's school (Peters et al., 2016; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021; Zepeda, 2018).

The situated learning environment during professional development that encompassed content models of effective practices, structures, and meaningful learning activities supported by collaboration and active learning helped to build the knowledge and skills to facilitate learning transfer (Barnett et al., 2017; Brion, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2017). Ms. Perkins noted, "models help her see and reference" effective practices. As the learning environment shifted to a local school context, Roumell's (2018) and Brion's (2020) multi-dimensional learning transfer models that emphasize considerations to contextual conditions and follow up support played a greater role in the extent of the transfer of learning into practice.

Assistant principals that worked in a local school context with the appropriate contextual supports and conditions for the implementation and transfer of coaching experienced more opportunities to actively practice, obtain feedback, and reflect on their actions consistently throughout the study. The consistency and duration of job-embedded coaching practice throughout the study led to greater learning transfer (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Assistant principals that were able to engage in multiple and diverse practice opportunities among several different interactions supported high road transfer experiences (Perkins & Salmon, 1988, 1989, 1992). Conversely, assistant principals that experienced contextual challenges during the study experienced mostly low road learning transfer opportunities and their practice was limited and rigid. Contextual and conditional challenges led to a greater need for additional flexibility and support to meet and support their adult learner needs. Therefore, the context and conditions

played an integral role in this study as assistant principals worked to improve their capacity as instructional leaders to support instruction.

Theme from Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How does the transfer of coaching practices impact assistant principals' perspective as instructional leaders?

Themes 2: Improved Self-Awareness Supports a Coaching Mindset Integrate Coaching Through Intentional Actions

Over the course of the study, the assistant principals reflected on their enhanced self-awareness as they facilitated conversations with teachers about instruction. A finding from the study suggests that assistant principals improved their self-awareness and intentionality when implementing coaching skills and practices. It was through this self-awareness and intentionality that their growth as instructional leaders evolved. Ms. Carruthers noted the "intentional internal shifts" she has made in how she approaches her teachers in conversation to "talk instruction." The intentional shifts reflected a dialogical coaching approach where the role of the assistant principal reflected a partnership with teachers as they gave feedback and engaged in conversations (Knight, 2018; Master et al., 2020).

Furthermore, assistant principals noted an improved self-awareness as they realized the importance of creating a safe environment by building trust and fostering relationships for coaching conversations with teachers. As assistant principals worked with teachers, they understood the importance of helping them feel psychologically safe to take risks, make mistakes, discuss challenges, and be reflective about changes in their practice. Assistant principal improved self-awareness supported a coaching mindset. The findings from this aspect of the study align with the literature on how coaching fosters a partnership where adults feel

cared for and can engage in robust conversation and deep reflection about practice (Campbell & Nieuwerburgh, 2017).

Assistant principals' perspectives on approaching a conversation also contributed to their coaching mindset. As assistant principals learned about and integrated coaching, they approached their conversation better equipped to "go back and forth" between directive (consultative), dialogical (collaborative), and facilitative (transformative) coaching stances (Aguilar, 2013; Bloom et al., 2005; Knight, 2018). Hence, assistant principals served as a sounding board and thought partner as they integrated their coaching skills and practices through feedback conversations. Mr. Dunn confirmed that this shift in awareness helped him to feel "a bit freer" in his approach, and he now better understands that he "guides the thinking process" for teachers about their instructional practices.

The literature on coaching best practice aligned to the improved self-awareness the assistant principals acquired as they integrated coaching into their practice to support teachers in examining their behaviors, practices, beliefs, values, and feelings about their instruction (Aguilar, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Zepeda 2019). Furthermore, the literature points to the importance of balancing advocacy with inquiry when implementing coaching to best support teachers to improve teacher transfer to 95% (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Killion, 2020; Knight, 2018; Zugelder, 2019).

The study also revealed that assistant principal implementation of intentional coaching actions supported their growth as instructional leaders. A shift in assistant principal perspectives and confidence as they reflected on their coaching was evident through the collected data. Specific coaching focus areas in the study included communication, feedback, and establishing relationships and trust. Mr. Blake shared that he would not have "asked so many open-ended

question or give wait time" before sharing what was observed in a classroom prior to being part of the program. Mr. Washington expressed the "power in giving specific strengths-based feedback" to establish relationship and trust with teachers at the beginning of the year. Ms. Carruthers consistently reflected on how the way she listens to her teachers and teams "lands differently" with her. Furthermore, the research points to the need for assistant principals to engage in job-embedded professional development to hone their communication skills as instructional leaders to effectively support instruction as one way to transform how they lead teachers (Barnett et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Searby et al., 2017).

Theme from Research Question 3

Research Question 2: What does the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals to implement to support instruction?

Theme 3: Clarity and Duration of Coaching Practices Drives Leader Capacity

The ARDT collectively worked to learn about the most applicable and transferable coaching practices for assistant principals. The ARDT determined that clarity and purpose of specific coaching skills and practices enhanced the value of integrating them into the professional development for assistant principals. Building assistant principal capacity to apply coaching practices encompassed attaining a comfortable, yet rigorous pace and duration that supported consistent implementation and transfer of coaching skills.

As the assistant principals consistently practiced clearly-identified coaching skills that aligned to their instructional roles and responsibilities, leadership capacity to support instruction improved. The ARDT learned through the analysis of video clips and artifacts that skills such as

active listening, reflective questioning, strength-based feedback, and cognitive coaching skills were “bite size” and transferable for assistant principals to integrate into practice. The research corroborates that building skills in reflective questioning (positive presuppositions), paraphrasing (summary), clarifying (probing, values, meaning), and providing data and resources can support the teacher to explore their thinking behind their practices (Costa & Garmston, 2015; Zepeda, 2019).

The ARDT also learned that clarity and purposeful attention to incorporating protocols and coaching conversation structures into professional learning sessions supported assistant principal implementation and transfer, leading to improved leader capacity. Ms. Jenkins confirmed that the structures allowed her to see where there is a “natural fit” to use them. Assistant principals were able to apply and transfer protocols and coaching conversation structures during their partnership with their cooperating teacher. The ARDT collectively worked together ensure that the follow up features of effective professional learning such as providing coaching and feedback during implementation supported the duration and varying degrees of learning transfer.

The research cites that incorporating focused content, coaching support, feedback, and reflection are important for learning duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Sims et al., 2021; Zepeda, 2019; Zepeda et al., 2022). The ARDT played an integral role in supporting each ARIT member as they sought to apply and to transfer coaching skills and practices leading to the extension of effective scaffolding of learning and implementation of new approaches to practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Zepeda, 2019). Individuals and organizational structures are essential to foster social interactions, the development of skills and their transfer into real-world contexts.

Moreover, these efforts must be applied and maintained over time (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Hajian, 2019; Roumell, 2018).

Limitations of the Current Study

The limitations of the study arose from the qualitative nature of the research and the context of the study. The researcher's positionality as a district administrator for the coaching program brought a level of subjectivity and bias that may have influenced the outcomes of the study. Additionally, as the researcher facilitated conversation with the ARIT members, the role and position may have limited the extent to and influenced members comfort in expressing their full opinions during semi-structured interviews. As an insider, the researcher also served as an active participant on the ARDT which may have presented limitations to the nature of the study.

The design and composition of the study also presented limiting attributes that may have influenced the results and findings. The assistant principals that participated in the study represented schools across the district that each had contextual differences that may have influenced the study's findings. Additionally, the broad focus of assistant principals across the district with only two representatives from each school level (elementary, middle, and high school) presented an overall small sample size (n=6) to represent results from an overall large school district.

Lastly, timing and length were also limitations that influenced this study. As the study was conducted from August to December 2022, interventions became further customized to meet the needs of individual ARIT members. Some ARIT members that experienced contextual challenges were still engaged in implementing and transferring coaching skills and practices after the December 2022 timeline. Resultingly, the time and length of this study may have limited

obtaining a full view of what implementation and transfer of coaching skills and practices look like for assistant principals supporting instruction.

Implications and Recommendations for Researchers

An important theme from this research study was that learning transfer was dependent on the learner's abilities to navigate their specific situated learning environment. As a result of using the process of continuous inquiry, the ARDT leveraged the Plan-Do-Study-Act to develop and implement interventions to support and facilitate the learning transfer of the ARIT members within their respective situated learning environment.

This study used the theoretical frameworks of situated learning and the integrative theory of high and low transfer to guide the ARDT as they worked with assistant principals to implement and examine transfer coaching skills and practices. Learning transfer is a multi-dimensional process that occurs at any stage that could be enhanced through coaching and reflecting in situated learning environments (Hajian, 2019). Additional research about how schools are situated learning environments needs to be studied to see how they are influenced by internal conditions that affects learning transfer. Furthermore, more comprehensive examination of learning transfer at each school level e.g., elementary, middle, and high school) would provide a greater data set to examine patterns, trends, and nuances that may exist.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

The following thematic findings emerged from the study:

- context and conditions matter as assistant principals implemented and transferred job-embedded professional learning on coaching skills and practices into their role;
- improved leader self-awareness and intentional coaching actions contributed to an overall coaching mindset for assistant principals; and,

- clarity and duration of coaching practices supported the growth and development of assistant principals as instructional leaders.

The findings from these themes point to specific implications and recommendations for educational leaders that may impact the evolving role of current and future assistant principals.

Principal Leaders

The research cites that assistant principals must be prepared to tackle today's diverse school challenges, complexities, and contextual factors (Dodman, 2014; Gurr & Drysdale, 2018; Murakami et al., 2019). The findings revealed that context and conditions mattered. Many assistant principals experienced implementation and transfer struggles due to the difference in each school's context and the breadth of assistant principal assigned duties within each context. Moreover, assistant principals highly valued how coaching teachers "changed the conversation" about instruction; however, many wrestled with the implementation and transfer of coaching skills consistently while balancing their managerial assistant principal responsibilities. Although the role of the assistant principal remains undefined between instructional and managerial duties, the expansion must continue to be shaped by a stronger instructional focus and responsiveness to current school environmental needs (Murakami, 2019; Peters et al., 2016; Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021).

The findings suggest that assistant principals need the time, space, and optimal learning conditions to work on their capacity to be an instructional leader. These conditions can be created, fostered, and maintained by an instructionally focused principal leader. A recommendation for educational leaders, such as building principals, is to prioritize the importance of assistant principals becoming instructional leaders. Principals are encouraged to reimagine the role of the assistant principal to intentionally embed instructionally focused

leadership practices such as coaching teachers into their duties and responsibilities. Also, finding the appropriate learning opportunities to support building these types of skills is critical to reshape the assistant principal role. Hence, reframing the assistant principal role will help to shift the traditional paradigm from evaluation to support.

Central Office District Leaders

At the time of this study, LCPS District's Leadership Development Department reported having 565 assistant principals, of which 420 have served for more than 3 years. As assistant principals continue to expand their role as instructional leaders, the focus on quality instruction in addition to a larger goal of maintaining a leadership succession pipeline is imperative (Bengtson et al., 2013; Grissom et al., 2021; Militello et al., 2015; Sun & Shoho, 2017; Zepeda et al., 2012). Resultingly, the acquisition of instructional leadership skills, such as coaching prior to or during assistant principal tenure may contribute to the readiness for future principalship and career advancement, ensuring a pipeline of leadership succession (Gates et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2019; Parylo et al., 2013). It is only through engaging in meaningful and relevant learning opportunities that assistant principals can develop the skills needed to support the long-term leadership succession pipeline.

Findings from this study indicate that shifts in perspectives and behaviors led to an improved level of self-awareness that supported a coaching mindset when working with teachers. As assistant principals engaged in professional development, job-embedded implementation with support, and active reflection, their perspectives and "buy in" to integrating coaching actions surfaced. The research supports this finding as shifts in perspectives and the development of higher cognitive thinking through a supportive community are essential job-embedded

professional learning opportunities for assistant principals (Petrides et al., 2014; Searby et al., 2017).

The urgency to create conditions for assistant principal learning is evident given the movement toward instructional leadership as a necessary and vital component of their work (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). A recommendation for leadership development district leaders is to invest in more customized job-embedded professional development opportunities for assistant principals, such as the assistant principal coach endorsement program. These types of learning opportunities allow assistant principals to heighten their leadership self- awareness, practice new skills that instructionally support teachers, and to obtain feedback on their skills resulting in making intentional shifts in their practices.

A recommendation toward a balanced approach of pre and in-service professional development is ideal for sustained duration of assistant principal growth. The research points to the acquisition of instructional leadership skills during tenure of assistant principalship as contributing factor to the readiness for future principalship and career advancement, ensuring a pipeline of leadership succession (Gates et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2019; Parylo et al., 2013). Therefore, when districts make an investment to support the growth and development of assistant principals, they are making a commitment to invest in the human capital to create a strong leadership pipeline.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy

An increase in demand for accountability and teacher effectiveness due to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 has resulted in a shift in the leadership role of assistant principals from management to instructional leadership (Searby et al., 2017; Sun & Shoho, 2017; VanTuyle, 2018). A lack of clarity compounded by the absence of

specific professional standards for assistant principals corroborates with this study's findings on the importance of clarity and duration of practice so clear connections to the assistant principal role and responsibility as an evolving instructional leader (Craft et al., 2016; Turnbull et al., 2015).

Policymakers should make a recommendation to develop a specific set of assistant principal leadership standards. The development of specific standards aligned to the role of the assistant principal is an opportunity to consider the necessary shifts and resources needed to make this role more focused on instruction and less on management. Furthermore, casting a new vision for this role may impact the way assistant principals and teachers interact with each other to support and improve student achievement.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to examine the transfer into practice job-embedded coaching practices and skills that assistant principals learned while enrolled in a district-wide program. Throughout the study, evidence of learning transfer surfaced in varying degrees among the assistant principals who participated. The data collected from this study revealed that assistant principals valued the professional learning design and support offered through this job-embedded professional learning opportunity. The professional learning design supported and extended effective scaffolding of learning and implementation of new approaches to practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Zepeda, 2019). Assistant principals learned and adopted valuable knowledge, skills, and dispositions aligned to coaching and best practices. They worked with teachers and reflected on the impact of their coaching actions. Myriad duty and context specific challenges surfaced for assistant principals as they attempted to balance their managerial roles while expanding their instructional leadership capacity by coaching teachers.

An adapted theoretical framework from the research of Brion (2020), Lave (1998), Perkins and Salmon (1992) and Bryk et al's. (2015) logic model guided this study's action research cycle of continuous improvement within the specific context of the Lincoln County Public School District's assistant principal coaching endorsement program. The coaching program implemented a cycle of continuous improvement. The program's learning was designed using professional development best practices, job-embedded implementation and transfer, and customized district support to help assistant principals expand their instructional leadership capacity.

The extent of learning transfer in this study was dependent on the situated learning environment created within a school to support the skill transference and leadership growth of assistant principals. Educational leaders must recognize schools represent a microcosm of individualized situated learning environment for learners. Every situated learning environment must be examined on a regular basis to ensure that the optimal conditions to facilitate learning transfer are present.

Coaching conversations serves as a vehicle for the self-directive learning and the development of teacher practice through the supported actions and behaviors that are facilitated by a coach. Assistant principals experienced a heightened level of self-awareness on their leadership dispositions and behaviors throughout the study. As assistant principals supported teachers by implementing coaching skills and practices, the importance of establishing relationships and trust, effective communication, and providing reflective strength-based feedback were key skills and practices where perspective and behavioral shifts were distinct. The needs and the responsibility of supporting instruction continues to grow and shift. Assistant

principals must be cognizant and reflective about their default leadership behaviors and find a way of doing and being that fits their leadership styles.

Although limited evidence exists on how assistant principals contribute toward student outcomes (Goldring et al., 2021), the findings from this study adds to the body of research on the important role they play and vast responsibilities they have in schools. This study examined shifts in assistant principal perspectives as they implemented job-embedded coaching skills and practices to build their instructional leadership capacity to support instruction.

The findings from the study confirms that assistant principals deserve to be valued and poured into as educational professionals. As schools continue to evolve in dynamics and needs, it is imperative to develop the capacity of assistant principals. High quality, well-designed professional development, ongoing support, and an optimal situated learning environment are critical factors that are needed for assistant principals to effectively transfer learning, reflect on their practice, and thrive as long-term educational leaders that can ultimately support teacher and student success.

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APPENDIX A

Action Research Design Team (ARDT)

Team Member	Primary Role	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	District Program Coaching Coordinator, LCPS	Lead and conduct all research with the action research team, for purposes of data analysis. Develops and facilitates content to program enrolled assistant principals. Brings 2 years of leadership experience and 7 years of coaching experience to the team.
Ms. Evelyn Yothers	District Coordinator, LCPS	Thought partner in the development of professional learning content and interventions to support assistant principal participants. Support the action research team in reducing bias through fact and member checking processes.
Mr. James Williams	External Consultant Facilitator and Lead Coach	Experienced coach with 10 years of coaching individuals and teams. Provides external coaching expertise view. Plans and facilitates professional learning for assistant principals enrolled in the program. Serves as a Lead Coach that provides feedback and support on the transfer of coaching skills and practices to assistant principals.

Ms. Abby Lasso	Assistant Principal and Lead Coach	Experienced active assistant principal with 7.5 years of experience. Serves as a Lead Coach that provides feedback and support on the transfer of coaching skills and practices to assistant principals.

APPENDIX B

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Assistant Principal Participants)

Assistant Principal Participants	School Level	Areas of Teacher Support	Assistant Principal Experience
Mr. James Blake	ES	2nd and 4th grade	Provides 3 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Destiny Carruthers	MS	6th grade Language Arts	Provides 7 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Jason Dunn	HS	Math and Career Technical Education	Provides 3 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Sherry Jenkins	MS	Social Studies	Provides 5 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Ms. Kathy Perkins	ES	Kindergarten and 3rd grade	Provides 4 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.
Mr. Roy Washington	HS	Math	Provides 13 years of experience in assistant principal leadership.

APPENDIX C

State Approved Coaching Rubric

Program Standard	4-Exemplary	3-Proficient	2-Developing	1-Beginning
Providing Feedback	Coach continually provides feedback based on performance criteria and uses feedback to collaborate with coachee/team(s) to plan strategies.	Coach consistently provides feedback based on performance criteria and uses feedback to collaborate with coachee/team(s) to plan strategies.	Coach inconsistently provides feedback based on performance criteria and uses feedback to collaborate with coachee/team(s) to plan strategies.	Coach inadequately provides feedback based on performance criteria and uses feedback to collaborate with coachee/team(s) to plan strategies.
Communicate	Coach continually utilizes effective verbal and written skills for communication and uses effective non-verbal skills to communicate independently of spoken or written words.	Coach consistently utilizes effective verbal and written skills for communication and uses effective non-verbal skills to communicate independently of spoken or written words.	Coach inconsistently utilizes effective verbal and written skills for communication and uses effective non-verbal skills to communicate independently of spoken or written words.	Coach inadequately utilizes effective verbal and written skills for communication and uses effective non-verbal skills to communicate independently of spoken or written words.
Establishing Relationships and Trust	Coach continually establishes and maintains a highly confidential relationship, recognizes, and addresses the significance of relationship building skills,	Coach consistently establishes and maintains a highly confidential relationship, recognizes, and addresses the significance of	Coach inconsistently establishes and maintains a highly confidential relationship, recognizes, and addresses the significance of relationship	Coach inadequately establishes and maintains a highly confidential relationship, recognizes, and addresses the significance of

	maintains a professional ethical environment, and demonstrates collaboration skills.	relationship building skills, maintains a professional ethical environment, and demonstrates collaboration skills.	building skills, maintains a professional ethical environment, and demonstrates collaboration skills.	relationship building skills, maintains a professional ethical environment, & demonstrates collaboration skills.

APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Questions Protocol

Welcome and Instructions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview to share your perspectives and experience about how the professional learning about coaching skills and practices are impacting you as a leader. I am going to ask you some questions about your experience in the course, especially what you are learning and implementing from it, and how it impacted your perspective and role as an assistant principal. I hope these questions will stimulate reflection and perspective on how the professional learning is impacting the teachers you support and your capacity as an instructional leader.

You may ask me to repeat a question if needed. But, apart from that, I will contribute as little as possible. I am also going to record the discussion, so please speak clearly. There is no right or wrong answers. I want you to feel free to voice your opinions and perspectives during the interview.

As a reminder, your responses are confidential, and your identity will not be disclosed to anyone outside the research team.

Opening Question

- Tell us your name, and where you work.

Introductory/Transition Questions

- How did you hear about this professional learning course? Why were you interested in participating in this professional learning opportunity?
- Think back to when you first started the professional learning on coaching skills and practices. What were your first impressions? How have your impressions changed?

Key Questions

- How do you define instructional leadership?
- What coaching practices have transferred into your role as an instructional leader?
- What impact does the transfer of coaching practices have on your leadership approach?
- How does implementing coaching practices influence how teachers view instructional support?
- How does implementing coaching practices impact your perspective as an instructional leader?

Ending Questions

- What did we miss? Is there anything you want to add, but did not have the opportunity to talk about?

Note: Additional follow-up or clarification questions may be asked as needed

Appendix E

Focus Group Interview Protocol

Welcome and Instructions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a discussion about your experience as an Action Research Design Team (ARDT) member in the study focused on assistant principal learning transfer of coaching skills into their practice as instructional leaders. I am going to ask you some questions about your experience as an action team research member and lead coach that supported the participating assistant principals.

I will also be asking questions that I hope will stimulate discussion amongst the group that will help us learn about the most applicable and transferable skills for assistant principals. The discussion during this focus group will help the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) make decisions on what modifications need to be made as the participants continue with implementation a well as long term implications for future professional learning opportunities for assistant principals. I will not be contributing to the discussion, but I am here to moderate the session by keeping track of time and making sure that all the topics in which we are interested are discussed.

You may ask me to repeat a question if needed. But, apart from that, I will contribute as little as possible. I am also going to record the discussion, so please speak clearly and try not to interrupt one another. There are no right or wrong answers. I want everyone to feel free to voice your opinions, build on what another person says, or offer differing opinions. As a reminder, your responses are confidential, and your identity will not be disclosed to anyone outside the research team.

Opening Question

Tell us your name, where you work, and your current role.

Introductory/Transition Questions

Tell us about your involvement in the design and implementation of the research study?

Key Questions

- What coaching practices are most applicable for assistant principals to implement that support instruction?
- What job-embedded coaching practices were transferred by assistant principals that support instruction?
- What coaching practices are most transferable for assistant principals?

- What was the evidence of learning transfer?
- How extensive was assistant principals' transfer of job-embedded coaching practices?

Ending Questions

- What barriers, if any, influence the implementation and transfer of coaching practices?
- How should the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) develop professional learning opportunities about coaching to meet the needs of assistant principals to support instruction?

Appendix F

Feedback Protocol for Action Research Design Team Lead Coach

Thank you for your taking the time to invest in your professional growth as an assistant principal by engaging in the professional learning about coaching practices and skills and this research study. Today, will be an opportunity for you to reflect on your growth as you implement the coaching skills and practices at your local school with the teachers you support. I will also be providing you with some feedback on how you are progressing in the implementation and transference of your coaching skills and practices based the artifacts you have submitted so far throughout this study (e.g., self-reflected video, commentary, narrative reflections).

The protocol today will be facilitated by me in two parts. First, I will provide you an opportunity to share your thoughts, feelings, and perspective on how you believe you have integrated the coaching skills and practice you learned from the professional learning into your leadership practices. Feel free to use the language from the coaching standards and indicators to support your reflection. The second part of the protocol is where I will provide you some specific feedback using the language of the standards to support you in your areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

You may ask me to repeat any part of the feedback as I may also ask you to repeat parts of your reflection. The researcher of this study is present with us today to ensure the protocol is facilitated with full fidelity and you are provided with feedback that reflects the criteria outlined in this research study.

Are there any clarifying questions before we begin our conversation? (Facilitator addresses any clarifying questions)

Introductory Reflection Questions

- On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel you are doing with the implementation and transfer of coaching skills in feedback?
- On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel you are doing with the implementation and transfer of coaching skills in communication?

The lead coach will share two areas of strength and two areas of growth for the assistant principal to consider. The following stems should be used when providing feedback.

Strengths feedback stem

- I noticed in your (video, commentary, narrative reflection) you demonstrated evidence of implementation and transfer of the coaching skill/practice of_____. The evidence

of you implementing and transferring that coaching skill/practice was _____. This impacted your feedback conversation with the teacher by_____. I appreciate you trying that skill/practice out in your feedback conversation with the teacher.

- Repeat the above step with another observable coaching action

Opportunity for growth feedback stem

- One coaching skill/practice where there was a missed opportunity was in _____ (state coaching standard and indicator). In this coaching standard and indicator, a coach would _____ (provide example of what the indicator looks like). There was opportunity in your _____ (video, commentary, reflection) to demonstrate the implementation and transfer of that skill. I encourage you to practice this coaching skill and integrate it into your future conversations with teachers. Let me know how we can work together, so I can support you with it.

- Repeat the above step using a second non-observed coaching indicator from the same or different coaching standard.

Ending Reflection

- What are you left thinking after our conversation today?
- What are your next steps? How can I support you?

Appendix G

ARIT Support Team Meeting Agenda

Candidate Name:
School:
Date:
Time:

Candidate Support Team:

CST Members

- Principal Sponsor:
- Candidate:
- Lead Coach:

1. **Coach Camp Takeaways/Implications for work so far:**

2. **General self-reflection: What areas of the CE rubric would you like to focus on?**

Strengths	Areas for Growth

3. **Coach Endorsement Rubric Overview:**

- Standards 1-6 align to standards for coaching
- How to demonstrate proficiency: PD&E coaching plan, artifacts, Sibme video, Lead Coach conversations
- Completion of CE requires proficiency **in all indicators by the end of the school year.**
- Hold the seat of a learner
  Tip: have your rubric close by as you complete coursework. More detailed information will be provided in the asynchronous home learning.

- **AP CE Program Overview**

Professional Learning:

- Coach Camp 1.0
- Asynchronous learning
- Fall PL session-Individual Coaching Cycle
- Field Experience
- Just in Time w/ Lead Coach
- Spring PL session-Team Coaching Cycle
- Just in Time w/Lead Coach
- Coach Camp 2.0

Job-Embedded Coaching Cycle Implementation:

- Fall: Individual Coaching Cycle w/ Lead Coach support*
- Spring: Team Coaching Cycle w/ Lead Coach support*

***Customized Lead Coach support throughout. Candidate will submit artifacts in PD&E and video clip(s) in Sibme for Lead Coach review and feedback.**

4. AP Coach Endorsement Vision Casting:

- What opportunities does the assistant principal have to serve as coach this year? (with teachers/teams)
- What local conditions will need to be considered to ensure candidate success in the program? How can the conditions be created prior to candidate implementation?

6. Administrator/AP Candidate Partnership

- What will partnership look like between administrator and coach?
- **Review partnership agreement template.**
    - Candidate and principal will work on and finalize agreement after CST meeting
    - Candidate will upload completed agreement onto PD&E Coaching Page (#6-Establishing Relationships and Trust)

7. Resources

- CE monthly, which will include:
    - Coaching cycle support
    - Due dates
    - Professional learning dates
- Candidate resource page on your school Google Classroom account

8. CST Partnership

What do we need from one another to feel supported?

Questions/Concerns: