SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND LEADERSHIP COACHING

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Education Leadership Higher and Adult Education University of Toronto

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of leadership coaching of secondary school principals. Twelve secondary principals who worked in Ontario along with five coaches who worked with secondary principals in Ontario schools were interviewed to solicit their ideas. The study was based on the main research question: How does leadership coaching as a professional development strategy support secondary principals? This was followed by three sub-questions: (1) How do secondary school principals describe their experience with leadership coaching? (2) How do coaches describe their experience with leadership coaching? (3) In the coaching process, to what extent do secondary principals and coaches believe that a change has occurred with secondary principal’s leadership practices and beliefs?

Most participants reported having a positive experience with coaching although some were hesitant with working with a coach initially. It was found that newer principals felt that coaching was more beneficially to support their work than more seasoned principals did as newer principals felt that the support of the coach helped with the steep learning curve. Some of the seasoned principals felt they were well-versed and confident in their work already. As well, a positive coaching relationship and a positive coachee disposition were key factors to ensure coaching success.
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It was found that coaching supported principals navigating through the challenges especially with resistive staff. It also helped with alleviating the loneliness of the job as it carried with it a social element for the principal. Changes to principal practices and beliefs were noted by most participants with a few participants indicated that no change resulted from the use of a coach. The study concludes with the notion that coaching is a good form of professional support for novice or seasoned principals should there be interest and quality coaching.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter One: Introduction

School leadership is vital for school improvement. It is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affect student learning in schools (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Having such a high degree of importance, principal leadership is a pivotal factor in public school education (Harvey, 2011). A cultivation of professional learning and high expectations as well as a focus on student achievement and well-being define school leadership. At times, school leadership is overshadowed by its challenges. Research shows principals leave the field of education due to mounting pressures, heightened responsibility, and lack of professional supports to remedy the “sink or swim” philosophy that depicts school-based leadership (Sun, 2011). Often times this leads to a bag of mixed emotions including loneliness, vulnerability, fear, and uncertainty as the school principal works to remedy the challenges that are encountered on the job. In addition, existing principals are often ill-prepared and inadequately supported to organize schools to improve learning while managing all other demands of the job (Levine, 2005; Young, 2002).

1.1 Rationale of the Study

The professional support to match the importance of school leadership and its challenges is substantially lacking to effectively deal with the demands of the job. A form of professional development that is used to support principals is leadership coaching.

Leadership coaching is defined as:

An ongoing relationship which focuses on coachees (school administrator) taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals or desires. Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the coachee’s (school administrator) level of awareness and responsibility and provides the coachee (school administrator) with structure, support and feedback. The coaching process helps coaches both define and achieve professional and personal goals faster and with more ease than would be possible otherwise. (International Coach Federation, 2011)
The advantage of leadership coaching is that it permits principal professional development in context from a professionally-trained coach, allowing for analysis and reflection on school-related issues. School principals learn from daily issues while at work rather than being taken from their work to learn (Mitgang, 2008).

The ideal coaching process unfolds over time. It stresses skill development and it provides a means for continual support that is safe, confidential, and goal-oriented (Bush, 2008). Although promising as a professional development strategy for principals, it still needs to overcome a few barriers. It bears a negative stigma of punishment rather than being viewed as a professional support. As well, it can be viewed as a time-consuming task that compounds an ever increasing workload for school principals. Coaching as a professional development tool is readily used in the business sector. In the educational sector, investment in coaching as a professional development strategy is limited and reliant primarily on Ministry-funded initiatives (that is, the Ontario Ministry of Education). In Ontario, such was the case with The Student Success School Support Initiative (The Quad SI) introduced in 2008. The initiative was a Ministry-driven school improvement strategy that involved the use of coaches who worked directly with secondary principals to improve school performance specifically with Grade 9 and 10 applied level courses. Schools eligible were those with pass rates below provincial standards resulting in students not being on track to graduate. Secondary principals who were assigned a coach were expected to actively engage in professional learning teams with teachers. The coaches were retired principals who had previously worked in Ontario secondary schools and had expectations to support principals with improving instruction in their schools. This Ministry initiative was not unique to Ontario high schools as others school systems have attempted this within their own schools (Devita, 2010; Timar et al., 2006).
As a secondary school administrator, I experience the challenges and frustrations that principals undergo on a daily basis. At the secondary level, the inundation of issues and problems provides little time to deeply reflect on decisions and the responses in action on the part of the principal. As well, I continue to see secondary principals who are ineffective in their roles mainly because they lack the knowledge of how to be most effective. Through these observations, I am led to examine leadership coaching as a professional learning tool for secondary school principals and to see if improvements in practices are noted by coaches and secondary school principals through the coaching process.

Although leadership coaching is gaining relevancy as a professional development strategy, the scholarship on leadership coaching needs further exploration in specific areas. One area focuses on the experiences of coaches and principals that partake in leadership coaching. Many studies report findings from the perspective of the coach or the coachee overlooking findings from both perspectives. Sharing findings that include both perspective will allow a comparative analysis on their experience with leadership coaching. A second area that requires further exploration focuses on the intended outcomes of coaching. Does leadership coaching support secondary principals as it’s intended to do and if so, what aspects of the job are being supported? A third area of focus is the impact leadership coaching has on school principals as a professional learning tool. Unexplored is the actual impact of professional learning that leadership coaching has on secondary school principals and how it impacts on their leadership behaviors and practices.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to focus on leadership coaching as a professional development strategy to support secondary school principals. The study seeks to determine the experience of secondary school principals with leadership coaching while examining the impact
leadership coaching has on secondary school principals’ leadership practices. It also draws upon the experience of the leadership coach involved in the coaching process.

The primary question that will be investigated is: “How does leadership coaching as a professional development strategy support secondary principals?”

Within this research question, there are three sub-questions. These questions provide opportunity for detailed responses that can provide focus and depth in the study. The three sub-questions are:

1. How do secondary school principals describe their experience with leadership coaching?
2. How do coaches describe their experience with leadership coaching?
3. In the coaching process, to what extent do secondary principals and coaches believe that a change has occurred with secondary principal’s leadership practices and beliefs?

1.3 Significance of the Study

Leadership coaching in education has not been well-researched and it is the intention of this study to elicit findings that adds to its current knowledge base. Research to date indicates that leadership coaching for school principals as a professional development tool has relied heavily on self-reported data. Studies show that principals report that leadership coaching is useful for improved self-confidence, self-efficacy, and for their becoming better managers of school-related issues after involvement with leadership coaching (Barnett & O’Mahony, 2008; Reiss, 2009). The intent of this study is to go beyond self-reporting data of school principals as participants to also include the coach’s perception. In doing so, it adds an additional layer of data that extends beyond the positive reporting of school principals involved in leadership coaching. It aims to analyze responses from principal participants as well as coach participants in order to compare their coaching experience something that has yet to happen with leadership coaching literature with school principals.
In addition, this study will provide further research on leadership coaching from a secondary school principal context that is scarce in both the U.S. and Canada. As well, findings from this study extends the scholarship on leadership coaching to include research on school principals from a Canadian perspective (Robinson et al. 2008; Williamson, 2011) and from a secondary school perspective. The intent is to add to the leadership coaching scholarship to include secondary school principals working in Ontario schools.

This study will be of interest to various groups that can use the information to further their work. Researchers of leadership coaching and leadership development in education can use the findings to further enhance the scholarship in these respective areas. Minimal research exist in this area so added scholarship is needed. School boards along with their research team can use the knowledge gained from this study to further develop programs that are being implemented in their district. An example is the Peel District School board located in Ontario that provides coaching support to newly appointed administrators to assist with transition of the role. Findings from this study can provide valuable information to ameliorate the coaching support in districts such as the Peel District School board. Associations that provide professional service to principals in Ontario such as Catholic Principals Council of Ontario (CPCO) and Ontario Principal Council (OPC) will find significance in this study. Both association bodies along with others in Ontario can use the knowledge gained from this study to enhance the professional development agenda of their respective members. Lastly, the Ministry of Education can use the findings of the research to enhance their leadership development agenda provincially in Ontario.

As part of the Ontario Leadership Strategy in 2007, the government initiated a pilot project on mentoring and coaching. Since then, the government has recognized the importance of school leadership in achieving quality schooling by committing to leadership development for
school principals. An example is the Ontario Leadership Strategy (www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/actionPlan.html). The strategy is designed to support student achievement and wellbeing by attracting and developing skilled and passionate school leaders. The primary aim of the strategy is to attract the right people to the principalship positions and to assist school principals in becoming competent instructional leaders. The findings from this study can assist Ontario school boards and schools alike to achieve the primary objective of the leadership strategy, as leadership coaching is a tool that can develop skilled leaders as well as competent instructional leaders.

Premised on research, the Ontario Leadership Framework identifies effective school level leadership practices as well as personal leadership resources that support student achievement. The research from this study explores how leadership coaching can influence leadership practices for secondary school principals. This in turn will aid school improvement efforts with the goal of improved student achievement.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following literature review is divided into five parts detailing aspects of leadership development and leadership coaching that provide deeper understanding of the role of principals in secondary schools. The first section will review literature on the role of the principal describing its many facets. The second section will explore literature on the emotionality of leadership. The third section will explore literature that depicts secondary schools and their structures. The fourth section will review literature on leadership development of school principals. The last section will examine literature on leadership coaching providing clarity on its definition and its process. This is necessary to help provide a better understanding of leadership coaching and its components that can determine its success or failure. See Table 1 below for an overview of each section

Table 1 – Literature Review Outline

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2.1 The Role of the Principal

Secondary schools are complex organizations comprised of students, teachers, stakeholders, and support staff who are expected to work towards continuous improvement to increase student achievement. Schools are expected to provide a rich academic and extracurricular experience for students with the pressure on principals to ensure these
expectations are achieved. A report titled “The role of the principalship,” prepared by the Catholic Principal Council of Ontario, raises awareness of the “new” realities of the job: Ministry reform initiatives (altered instruction time for teachers, changes in suspension/expulsion procedures, expansion of provincially mandated standardized testing); changes in technology; a growing emphasis on accountability; union demands; the inclusion of principals on board management teams; and the changing perception of parents regarding their role in education. Faced with these evolving realities, principals are now required to possess a deep skill-set to manage the plethora of expectations. However, it is suggested that principals are ill-prepared for this (Philips, S. 2003).

Cuban (2010) identifies three overlapping functions of the principal’s role that are in competition: managerial, instructional, and political. As an instructional leader, the principal as the “principal teacher” is expected to lead teachers to improve academic outcomes and test scores. The managerial duties of the job continue to consume the principal’s workload. The expectations of creating schedules, submitting plans, and completing reports are longstanding. The third function—politicking—requires that principals work to advance the agenda of schools with parents and other stakeholders. The aim of the political function is to improve the school’s image through such means as the implementation of novel innovations or to involve the school community to improve assets of the school. Cuban asserts that good principals are able to parlay a mix of the three functions into a unique blend while leading their schools. Cuban maintains that the role is so unpredictable that a good principal must come to understand the paradoxes and dilemmas that are inherent in the role. A principal who can manage the paradoxes and dilemmas while providing leadership is referred to as a bifocal principal (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Principals are in a state of constant ambiguity, needing to decide which way to act, how to behave, and what to emphasize. They are caught between managing personnel and instruction
as well as infusing passion, vision, and purpose (Deal & Peterson, 2009). As the principal navigates through the paradoxes and dilemmas, he/she demonstrates the behavior that is expected of the school.

The high expectations, increased work load, and accountability measures from stakeholders put intense pressure on school principals. The intense pressure can exacerbate feelings of isolation, vulnerability, and uncertainty on the part of the principal (Bloom et al., 2005). The literature on the principalship is also focused on effective practices that principals do while engaged in their role. Research provides ample evidence of the importance of principal practices in school improvement efforts (Seashore Louis et al., 2010). The key point is that if principals are ineffective, schools suffer. Research is abundant on practices or behaviours that a principal can undertake to be effective (e.g. Leithwood et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2005; Stronge et al, 2008). Little is known about leadership coaching and its impact on leadership practices for secondary school principals. Some have attempted studies to explore this area, however, they have focused at the elementary level, avoiding high schools due to their organizational complexities (Goof, Goldring, Guthrie, & Bickman, 2014). Exploration at the secondary level is required to further advance literature on leadership coaching.

2.2 Emotionality of Leadership

Scholarship on leadership has primarily focused on its action as an influential endeavour, its actions as a managerial endeavour, and its actions as an instructional endeavour (see Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, Marzano & al., 2005). However, the emotional part of the principal’s job is often overlooked. The complexity and challenges encountered by school principals have an emotional impact on their leadership and how that is handled is important for a principal’s effectiveness. It entails an emotional investment on the part of principals to deal with the daily encounters while on the job. Coined emotional labour, jobs such as the principalship share three
characteristics. They require face-to-face contact with the public. In the case of the principalship, the public includes stakeholders such as parents, students, and outside agencies. Second, they require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person of either gratitude or fear. In the principalship, it could pertain to students and or teachers. Third, they allow the employer, through training and supervision, to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees. It is a dimension of the job that is seldom recognized and not taken into account as a source of on-the-job stress (Hochschild, 2003).

Emotional intelligence speaks to an added dimension important for the principalship (Goleman, 1998). That is recognizing the emotional needs of others in order to provide the support necessary to make better decisions. As cited by Goleman (1998), the success on the job is determined by the capacity to recognize our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.

Principals’ training, as well as professional development opportunities, have focused on emotional intelligence as a skill-set to enhance the leadership skills of principals. Consequently the focus on emotional intelligence is centered on the “others” being led rather than the one is who is leading, in this case the principal. As Lauder (1998) describes it,

Leadership has its highs and lows, its successes and failures. Principals cry, laugh, dream, and become suspicious. There are times when principals do want the fairy godmother to come and save them. While leadership is about courage, about creating the tomorrow of our choice, heroism does not come easily.

Based on the high stakes accountability measures, the principal’s role has been described as stress-inducing, isolating, and frustrating (Beatty, 2000). It is filled with elements of self-doubt, role-strain and competing interests that occupy the principal’s focus. It becomes a struggle between a sense of loneliness and belonging (Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet, 2011). There is no one else with the same position in the school, or a peer group or “real colleagues” in
the school to network with. Evidently, the principal’s position requires support to balance the loneliness that comes with the principalship. Uncertainty, vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power all contribute to the experience of leadership. A body of literature has examined the emotional aspect of the principalship at work (Bauer & Brazer, 2013; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Ketchtermans et al., 2011). It has been noted that principals use strategies to suppress or control their emotions in order to deal with criticisms and survival of the job (Beatty, 2000). Some fear not measuring up to the leadership task of being a principal (Akerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). Due to the emotional strain that the principalship imparts, principals resort to many coping strategies to deal with it. Some chose activities that involve exercising, networking with colleagues, and watching television in order to cope. Others opt for self-medicating strategies. In one study, it was revealed that 400 Ontario principals engage in self-medicating or undesirable behavioural coping strategies to deal with the mental, physical, and emotional toll of the position (Pollock, 2014).

The Ontario Leadership framework identifies personality traits that a leader possesses that enhance his/her effectiveness. Identified as the “psychological” personal leadership resources in the framework, the four traits mentioned are optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and proactivity. These traits or personal psychological resources are internal states of mind possessed by the leader that are essential to how a principal engages, commits to, and resolves challenges. In Ontario, the psychological personal resources are garnering attention in the leadership effectiveness discourse as their presence does have a bearing on how leaders deal with pressing volatile issues and how effective they are in doing so.

Some have suggested professional renewal, mentoring, and peer support throughout the career of the principal are critical and needed to diminish the isolated feeling and emotional toll of the principalship (Zellner, Ward, McNamara, Gideon, Camacho, Edgewood, 2002). Another
suggestion is to have a non-evaluative person to talk to when experiencing emotional challenges on the job, such as leadership coach (Celoria, & Roberson, 2015). Research on newly appointed principals highlights alleviation of isolation as an area that professional support helps with (Bauer & Brazer, 2013., Celoria, & Roberson, 2015, Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). The emotionality of the principals requires more attention. Future research is required on how the emotional toll of the principalship impacts a leader’s effectiveness and how professional support can assist.

2.3 Characteristics of Secondary Schools

Previous studies on leadership coaching have focused on principals working in elementary schools. The focus of this study was to examine leadership coaching from a secondary perspective and this section will provide a brief description of secondary schools. In doing so, it will provide some contextual understanding of the working environment of a secondary school principal and help explain the challenges faced while working in a secondary school.

A major focus of secondary schools is to provide diversified programming for a heterogeneous student population while providing unifying values and ideals for citizenry (Wraga, 2002). Secondary schools must maintain a diverse curriculum coupled by an abundance of student activities. To reach such expectations, secondary schools are complex and challenging contexts for school principals’ work. Tasks that occupy a secondary principal’s time include: searching for teacher supervisors to oversee student activities; finding teacher coaches to provide athletic programming for students; organizing special school events; dealing with parent issues; addressing community-related tasks; handling of staff and student discipline; and facility management (George, 2001). The high number of people that occupy a secondary
school, the differentiation of programming, and the division of the school into secondary departments add to the secondary school’s circus imagery (Siskin, 1997).

In an era of increased expectations, the larger organizational structure of secondary schools provides ongoing challenges and complexities for secondary principals to engage in instructional leadership endeavours. In secondary schools, the managerial function as well as political related matters occupies more of the principal’s workload, shifting focus away from instructional matters (Gibbs, 1993; Levin, 2012). It has been noted that secondary teachers rarely report that school-level leaders engage in instructional matters, leading to a perception that high schools have a greater “leadership deficit” than elementary schools (Seashore Louis et al., 2010).

A barrier toward implementing exemplary instructional programs is the departmentalization of secondary schools, their curriculum fragmentation, and the rigidity and inflexible structure that leads to a culture of minimal collaboration (Hargreaves, 1994; Ilg & Massucci, 2003). The departmentalization requires secondary principals to treat each department fairly since they work as independent entities in competition with each other. Secondary principals must negotiate with departments that differ in outcomes and expectations causing challenges in achieving school improvement goals (Siskin, 1997).

School principals must find ways to provide the leadership necessary to ensure that these challenges are not impediments to success. Often, the abundance of these issues overburdens and overwhelms a secondary principal (Sun, 2011). The structure and culture of secondary schools challenge the secondary school administrator in ways much different than their elementary counterparts. With this difference, this leadership coaching study examined secondary school principals with the intent of providing insights from a secondary perspective.
2.4 Leadership Development

The primary objective of this section is to examine the literature on leadership development first by providing clarity of its meaning and then by examining what the literature says about leadership development opportunities for school principals.

Authored from researchers from the Institute of Educational Leadership (IEL, 2010), a review on leadership development details a distinction between leader development and leadership development. This distinction is relevant given that professional development has been focused on leader development and less on leadership development. Leadership development is “an approach towards building capacity in anticipation of unforeseen challenges”. It helps people work with others by applying social understanding to organizational imperatives. Leadership development improves on the social capital of the organization where the leader is at the forefront of development. In contrast, leader development is described as an emphasis on individual knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with leadership roles. In this case, the focus is on building human capital. Expanding on this definition, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) provides a further distinction between the two:

The individual leadership skills include self-management capabilities, social capabilities, and work facilitation capabilities. Within an entity, leadership development activities enhance —connections between individuals, between collectives within the organization, and between the organization and key constituents and stakeholders in the environment (IEL, 2010).

An earlier examination of leadership development for school principals targets three goals: (1) To build community with other principals; (2) To build capacity with principals poorly prepared for their role; and (3) To provide an appreciation for learning as a lifelong venture and a sense of self-renewal (Hallinger, 1992). A study conducted on successful leadership development programs shows that connecting theory to practice in context is a
common characteristic of successful leadership development programs. Included are data-driven
decision making, learning, and instruction where the principal works with a coach or other
practitioners that guides reflection and feedback for improvement (Darling-Hammond et al.,
2007). When professional development experiences are relevant and meaningful to school-based
leaders, it correlates with gains in student performance (Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Research is
scarce on what leadership development initiatives are most impactful on reaching these targets;
however, tools used to assist in achieving these targets include feedback instruments, executive
coaching, mentoring, networking, job assignments, and action learning. As well, other
dimensions of professional learning for school principals include contextualized learning, self-
knowledge, dialogue, inquiry, and reflection opportunities (Nanavati, 2010).

A national research study on the future of the principalship in Canada was seminal as it
provided context federally on this topic. In the area of professional development, it identified a
need to implement mentoring programs as well as professional development programs to
encourage principals to adopt a distributive style of leadership relying on school staff to drive
improvement efforts (Couture, J et al., 2014). Although seminal in its scope, national and
provincial research on professional development experiences of principals in Canada are scare.
A report from Manitoba on professional development for principal highlights professional
development opportunities that include conferences, workshops, mentoring and university
courses. The report identifies the types of activities and its implementation for principal
development, however, it is void of the effectiveness of each activity (Young, 2005).

In general, professional development of principals have followed three philosophical
models – traditional, craft, and reflective inquiry - to enhance principal learning. The traditional
model is depicted by workshops and in-services which is focused on short-term learning on
narrow topics. The craft model is best exemplified when principals pair up with seasoned
principals to gain insight through learning in the field. The knowledge gained occurs from observing seasoned principals in their day to day interactions. The reflective inquiry model generates knowledge through the process of inquiry where the principals make informed, reflective, and critical judgement about their professional practice. This model is premised on deeper long-term learning using networking, mentoring and reflection as key components to define this model (Fenwick, 2002).

Released in 2011, the Ontario Leadership Strategy provides a framework for school boards to attract and develop leaders of the highest quality. It provides a focus on administrator development that includes mentoring for newly-appointed school and system leaders. Mentoring is a professional growth strategy that supports and matches newly-appointed principals with experienced principals known as mentors. The mentors possess experience, expertise, wisdom and counsel with the intent to help new principals develop professionally and personally (Barnett & O’Mahony, 2008). Criticisms of mentor programs have been noted. One criticism is that mentorship lacks deep learning and is short lived. As well, lack of time to undertake mentoring, and personality or expertise mismatch between mentor and mentee may also be issues (Hansford, 2006). Specifically in principal mentorship programs, the selected mentor may have power and influence in the school board, which make it difficult for novice principals to openly share their concerns for fear of those concerns being shared (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). Mentoring programs can be ineffective if they are unfocused or are limited to “buddy programs” where mentor-mentee pairings are based on familiarity and friendship (Ontario Leadership Strategy, 2011). In Ontario, mentoring support is only provided to newly-appointed principals in their first two years, leaving out school principals with more than two years of experience. Their support must come from other areas such as workshops, professional learning teams, or informal conversations with colleagues.
A promising study that delved into effective forms of professional development for school principals noted that formal mentoring and coaching programs had a positive association with principal effectiveness. Rated lower were school principals involved in university course work as a form of professional development (Grimsson & Harrington, 2010). A study based in the United States examining secondary principal educational attainment, experience, and professional development reported an active involvement of principals in traditional forms of professional development activities. Lacking are more innovative professional development activities such as mentoring, coaching, and peer observation (Rodriguez-Campos et al., 2005).

In certain areas of the US, districts are aiming to revise programs to better prepare aspiring principals as well as to provide ongoing support for working school principals. Through extensive research, two lessons are encouraged to ensure these improvements are achieved: (1) Ensuring that districts exercise power to raise the quality of principal training programs, and; (2) Tailoring coaching and professional development for new and veteran principals based on individual and district needs (Mitgang, L., 2012). In addition, a report authored by Dr. Katina Pollock (2014) in Ontario examined the changing nature of the principals’ work and made recommendations to enhance and support the work of principals. Two recommendations focused on ensuring that professional development aligned with the principals’ work and that aspiring leaders better understand what is required in such a demanding position. Professional development needs to focus on support for newly appointed principal to assist with dealing the complexity of the job and honing the skills necessary to do this effectively. As well, seasoned principals need differentiated support to deal with the contextual difference that exist between different schools that they many not be equipped to deal with effectively (Hammond, L. et al., 2007).
A model for effective professional development for teachers emphasizes the value of coaching as an essential stage for enduring changes in one’s practice. Based on their investigations of teacher professional development, Joyce and Showers (2002) showed a 95% transfer rate of new learning when peer coaching is involved. As noted in the diagram below, peer coaching is an important stage to internalize what is being learned and to keep it as part of the teacher’s long-term repertoire. Although the model focuses on teachers, its four stage model can be applied to leadership development (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Figure 1 – Joyce and Showers Four Step Model

Developing effective school principals is a vital component of school improvement. The concern is that on-the-job professional development for current school principals pales in comparison to the high accountability measures expected of school principals. School leaders require a highly-sophisticated skill-set with constant development and renewal. As suggested by Fullan (2009), leadership development needs to be job-embedded, organization-embedded, and system-embedded. The question is what does it look like while on the job and in context? The
next section will examine leadership coaching as an option for job-embedded professional learning for school principals.

2.5 What is Leadership Coaching?

Coaching in an educational context. Coaching is a strategy that has been used extensively in business for performance enhancement known specifically as Executive Coaching (Kampa-Koesch & Anderson, 2001). In the field of education, teachers have been the focus of coaching. The work of Joyce and Showers (2002) has shown peer coaching to be an effective form of professional development for teachers. The work in this area is well substantiated as classroom instruction has a strong influence on student outcomes and achievement (Cornett & Knight, 2009; Wenglinsky, 2002). Far less emphasis has been on coaching for principals; however, current literature suggests this is changing. A thesis that examined the Ontario Principals Council Mentoring Coaching program suggested that this form of professional development accelerates the process of professional learning for school principals (Nanavati, 2010).

Recently, leadership coaching is being used to support the professional learning of school principals (Bloom, 2005; Robertson, 2005; Wise, 2010). The support for leadership coaching as a professional development tool for principals stems from the limitations of traditional professional development activities such as in-services void of school context and diminishing sustainability. A report by Seashore Louis et al. (2010) identifies leadership in context (viewed as circumstances in which they find themselves) as a factor that influences leadership practices. In this study it was determined that context does matter for principals, suggesting that professional development initiatives should account for this. Coaching programs involving principals have reported positive experiences as they develop new levels of confidence needed for the myriad challenges faced in administrative leadership (Barnett, B. et
al., 2007; Silver et al., 2011; Wise, D. 2010). Existing studies on leadership coaching are
focused primarily on elementary school principals (Huff et al. 2013; James-Ward, 2011;
Williamson, 2007). More research needs to include secondary school principals.

**Distinction between leadership coaching and mentoring.** This section will discuss the
difference between leadership coaching and mentoring as principal development tools and how
each is used to support principal development. In doing so, it will clarify the distinction between
both terms as they are often used interchangeably.

Mentoring involves a senior-level employee in a similar position who provides advice
and information on issues related to the organization. It is a voluntary, less formal practice that
provides support for the newly-appointment principal. In the mentoring process, it involves the
partnering of a novice and an experienced professional, in which the experienced one is sharing
his or her knowledge to inform or support the professional development of the novice
professional (Parylo, 2012). Robertson (2009) explains it as a collaboration between an
experienced principal with a novice principal, forming a partnership to support the development
of the novice principal. Its intended purpose is to support career development through formal
and informal encounters between a mentor and a mentee reflecting on aspects of personal and
professional growth. Mentoring is a long-term discussion modelled by someone in the same role
with more experience that provides advice and suggestions to novice principals regarding
organizational matters. Mentoring is the generic term where coaching is seen as its subsidiary
(Barnett & O’Mahony, 2008).

On the other hand, Leadership coaching is a goal-directed, multifaceted learning process
that improves people’s lives and works with the assistance of professionally-trained coaches
(Campbell & Griffiths, 2009). According to Bloom, G., Castagna, C., Moir, E. & Warren, B.
(2005), leadership coaching is viewed as a professional practice where a coach is someone from
outside the organization who is professionally certified. Bloom et al. (2003) further distinguish between mentoring and leadership coaching as two distinct professional development activities where coaching addresses the needs of the principal focusing on personal or professional goal attainment. Coaching involves a direct and job-embedded practice where the coach and the principal work towards a goal-oriented task. It deepens the learning capacity, aiming to develop competent and self-aware principals. It is premised on job-embedded and context-specific learning. Coaching is a facilitative learning process that seeks to support principal growth through the complexity of the work environment (Barnett and O’Mahony, 2008). Put simply, coaching addresses more specific work-embedded goals.

The thesis by Mary Nanavati (2011) examined a MentoringCoaching program initiated to support newly-appointed principals in Ontario. In it, she highlights the notable difference between mentoring and coaching. **Distinction between Mentoring and Coaching:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentoring</th>
<th>Coaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A self-directed learning relationship driven by the learning needs of the mentee</td>
<td>A self-directed learning relationship driven by the learning needs of the client.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More process-oriented than service-driven</td>
<td>More product-oriented, that is, the skills of the client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses more on achievement of personal or professional development goals; may focus on broader, softer, intangible issues as learning goals (e.g. getting to know the corporate culture), as well as more tangible, specific goals</td>
<td>Focuses more on boosting performance and skill enhancement; usually focuses on the specific skills of the client as learning goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring relationships are voluntary</td>
<td>Coaching relationships are often contracted for pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring lacks standardization and is not a professional field of practice; relationships evolve organically over time</td>
<td>Coaching is a growing, professional field with certification, and established standards and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors usually come from within the organization</td>
<td>Coaches can come from within the organization but are often hired outside an organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually one-to-one relationship but can include peer and group mentoring</td>
<td>Usually one-to-one relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although coaching and mentoring have distinctive features, combining both provides greater results (Bloom et al. 2005; Robinson et al., 2009). From a professional growth standpoint, there is merit in both processes; however, mentoring and coaching are two distinct processes where the intended outcomes are different. In Ontario, investment in leadership development has focused more on mentoring and less on leadership coaching. However, the use of coaches to support the instructional program in schools as well as with teachers and administrators has been noted. This study looked specifically at the work coaches did with secondary school principals.

The coaching process. As the leading governing body on coaching, the International Coach Federation (ICF) defines the coaching process as follows:

Coaching is an ongoing relationship which focuses on coachees taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals or desires. Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the coachee’s level of awareness and responsibility and provides the coachee with structure, support and feedback. The coaching process helps coaches both define and achieve professional and personal goals faster and with more ease than would be possible otherwise. (ICF, 2011)

Bloom et al. (2005) provide an outline on the essence of the coaching process. Referred to as five blended coaching strategies, the coaching strategy is described as instructional, facilitative, consultative, collaborative, and transformational. For the coaching process to be effective, it is framed and simplified as emphasizing three skills with a goal-oriented focus (see Figure 2). Using the three coaching skills model facilitates the attainment of goal achievement established by the coach and the coachee:
The first skill involves *building the relationship* between the coach and coachee. Included in this is the formation of trust and rapport. To foster trust and rapport, Bloom’s model highlights reliability, competence, and sincerity as elements important for success of this process. Rapport is fostered by establishing a personal and professional connection as well as being present. The second skill is *communication*: listening, observing, and questioning. The final skill is providing *feedback* to the coachees, a vital component to the coaching process. This process provides positive feedback that engages the principal in reflective practices that examines decisions made by the principals (Wise & Hammock, 2011).

Reiss (2007) provides a similar model that describes the coaching process. In her model, building relationship, communication, and facilitative learning (similar to feedback) are important to the coaching process as indicated by Bloom et al. (2005). However, she extends her
model to include one more competency: “setting the foundation.” In this competency, ethical and professional standards are created between the coach and the coachee. The purpose of this is to ensure confidentiality between the coach-coachee partnerships.

The success of each model is contingent on the pairing between the coach and coachee. The importance of forming the appropriate professional partnership is critical. A study conducted by Barnett and O’Mohany (2008) examined the principal’s experience involved in a newly-initiated coaching program titled CEP (Coaching for Enhancing the Capabilities of Experienced Principals) in Victoria, Australia. The premise of the program and study focused on one component of the coaching process, relationship building: looking specifically at the emerging relationship between the coach and coachee. The study concludes that the initial encounter between coach and coachee is an essential feature for moving the coaching process forward. In addition, establishing goals and expectations was useful for creating trust, credibility, and direction of the program in a timely manner given the short duration of the program. The initial encounter is crucial for the longevity and success of the coaching process. If the relational component is lacking then the coaching process remains short lived.

In summary, research on coaching has focused primarily on teacher development by altering teaching practices to improve student learning. The shift is now towards school leaders. Coaching has garnered attention as a strategy used for professional growth development for school leaders and school improvement initiatives.

The primary feature of coaching is enabling professional development for school principals in context. It allows for analysis and reflection on current school-related issues that are absent from most professional development initiatives. From the studies mentioned, coaching programs that have involved principals report positive experiences. It is reported that principals develop a new level of confidence needed for the myriad challenges faced in
administrative leadership (James-Ward, 2013). In contrast, some principals have reported a stigma associated with leadership coaching, that it equates to questioning principals’ ability to lead (James-Ward, 2011).

Although literature pertaining to leadership has increased, certain limitations are evident that would add to the scholarship. First, self-reported changes while using coaching as a professional development tool have been noted in the business sector (Ely et al., 2010). In the educational sector, studies have also noted self-reported changes in principals; however these studies have focused on elementary principals (Wise, 2011). Data of this kind are missing for secondary school principals and more research needs to focus on the secondary panel as a gap existing in this area.

Secondly, the evaluation of professional development programs such as leadership coaching is largely based on self-reporting data of participants (Bush, T. 2009). Self-reported changes have been the primary evaluative tool to measure the success of coaching. Other than self-reported changes, research on leadership coaching programs and how they lead to changes in leadership practices is scarce (Barnett & O’Mahony, 2008). Other forms of data need to be collected to expand the literature in this area.

Third, challenges with methodology exist making it difficult to discern what leadership practices are improved in leadership coaching. It is the intent of this study to add to the leadership coaching scholarship focused on secondary principals and involving the coach to add insight into changed leadership practices and behaviours of secondary school principals. Doing so provides more data apart from self-reporting.
2.6 Summary of the Chapter

The intent of the literature review was to provide a deeper look into principalship at the secondary level and how leadership coaching can be a valuable professional development tool to support principals. The sequence of discussion in the literature review was an attempt to provide a closer look at challenges and deeper contextual understanding of the secondary school principal.

The first section was added to provide an overview of the organizational structure of secondary schools. Most studies on leadership coaching have focused on elementary school principals. This study examined secondary school principals, who face different challenges when leading a secondary school. The examination of secondary schools was an attempt to describe the structural make-up of secondary schools, thus shedding light on the task of leading a secondary school.

The second section highlighted the role of principals as depicted in research. The purpose was to provide a deeper look at expectations channeled at the principal and to highlight its complexities and challenges. Other than those in the role, understanding what a principal does on a daily basis is limited to what is seen outside looking in, which may not accurately depict the role. By discussing the role of the principalship, it provides information on the challenges faced by a secondary school principal and why support would be required for a secondary school principal.

This third section examined literature pertaining to the emotional challenges that plague the principalship. In this study, a telling aspect that was articulated by participants was the emotional toll of the principalship. It is a job that influences the personal wellness of the principal and it became imperative to examine literature in this area. Research indicates that the principalship is an isolating and lonely position which can have despairing effects on the school
principals. It highlights the importance of the right kind of professional support in order to deal with this reality, and leadership coaching is an appropriate tool to provide the support.

The four sections examined the leadership development literature. The research was included to recognize that leadership development is an important component for principals. It was also included to discuss aspects of professional development involving school principals and the importance of job-embedded professional development for them. Research indicates that through job-embedded professional development such as leadership coaching that deep learning is more likely to occur and that this professional development bears more relevance to issues that the principals is presently dealing with.

The final section provided a detailed examination of research focused on leadership coaching. The premise of this study is focused on leadership coaching as a professional development tool for principals and it was important to understand how leadership coaching has been used thus far. Also, the intent of the section was to provide clarity on the distinction between coaching and mentoring as both terms tend to be used interchangeably in literature, causing confusion.

The next chapter will focus on the conceptual framework of the study and how leadership coaching is viewed and framed as a professional development tool.
Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework

3.1 Leadership Coaching Framework

The framework for this study is premised on the importance of supporting and improving principal leadership practices to impact student achievement. School leadership is second to only classroom instruction to improving student achievement when outside factors are controlled (Seashore Louis & al., 2010) and it is the central resource for school improvement (Fullan, 2013). Research is abundant on practices or behaviours that a principal can undertake to be effective (Marzano. et al., 2005.; Leithwood et. al., 2010.; Stronge et al., 2008). Highly-achieving schools demonstrate common principal leadership practices that support this success. The key point is that if principals are effective the school thrives.

The framework of this study views leadership coaching as a job-embedded form of professional development for school principals that works at improving both leader and leadership practices. To distinguish, leader development in organizations focus on human capital improvements where individual personal skills such as self-motivation, self-awareness and self-regulation are targeted. It is directed towards the individual to expand their capacity to be an effective leader. Similarly, leadership development focuses on the social aspect of the organization that involves the collective nature of leadership tasks. Improvements in this area include building a capacity for interpersonal relationship to enhance social awareness skills (i.e. empathy, trust, related to others) and social skills (i.e. team organization) (IEL, 2010).

The Ontario Leadership Framework encapsulates effective leadership practices premised on research that supports student achievement. The organization of the Framework highlights key leadership domains that school principals should engage in to support student achievement. The five domains include: (1) Setting Directions; (2) Building Relationships and Developing People; (3) Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices; (4) Improving the
Instructional Program; and (5) Securing Accountability. In each domain, a list of leadership practices identifies what school level leaders can do to ensure that domains are enacted. In addition, three personal leadership resources—cognitive, social, and psychological—complete the framework. These are personal skills that leaders draw upon to effectively enact leadership practices. (See Appendix A for full overview of The Ontario Leadership Framework.) The intent is that leadership coaching is a professional development process that supports school level principals towards improvement in areas identified in the Ontario Leadership Framework. It aims to provide an opportunity to principals that need support to build a deeper capacity for practices described in the Ontario Leadership Framework.

The process of coaching is premised on Vygotsky’s learning theory, emphasized by the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is defined as the area in close proximity to current practice and/or knowledge where the person is most likely to learn. This theory suggests that to enhance a person’s knowledge base, the learner needs to reach the zone of proximal development when reflecting on certain leadership practices. It is achieved through an interaction between someone less competent—the coachee—working with someone more competent—the coach. Through a socially interactive and collaborative process, the coachee will be better able to perform desired tasks as the coach will work through areas of need. For the coaching process to be effective, Vygotsky’s learning theory tells us that the school leader must enter this zone for optimal learning as facilitated by the coach (Chaiklin, 2003).

In addition, a vital component to the coaching process is triple-loop learning (Argyris, 1976). The key premise of triple loop learning is that feedback and reflection in context is critical to the professional development of the administrator. The coach offers the constructive feedback and the tools for the appropriate reflection for the coachee. In the coaching process,
the coachee plays an active and vital role for its success. His or her progress is based on the coachee’s desire and motivation to improve, change and improve their leadership practices. The coaching process is best served when both the coach and the coachee are committed to the process that drives the improvement process.

From a social theory standpoint, Bandura’s (1977) work on self-efficacy helps frame the work of coaching. Self-efficacy is defined as one’s belief in his or her ability to perform a task to produce a desired outcome. Bandura identifies four main influences that people can develop to improve self-efficacy. Three of the influences, known as mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states, can be improved through coaching (Kelleher, 2016). The most important influence towards developing self-efficacy is mastery experiences. This is fostered when a principal witnesses success in his or her work. This is best achieved when the principal has persevered through obstacles and challenges thus resulting in a positive outcome. The second influence, verbal persuasion, is the act of encouragement or discouragement where the coach is working with the school leader to provide appropriate feedback to improve the principal’s belief in their capability to make the right decisions. Encouraging words have a profound effect on those who receive them and a good coach knows to use this technique while engaged in the coaching process. The emotional state is the third influence that impacts self-efficacy and it pertains to stress and anxiety that principals experience while on the job. Stress and anxiety can have a negative effect on self-efficacy and employing positive strategies to deal the emotional state is vital. A stronger sense of self-efficacy can lead to greater persistence towards achieving effective leadership practices as noted in the Ontario Leadership Framework. With a better sense of self-efficacy, principals will be better positioned to make difficult and challenging decisions in the interest of improved student achievement.
In a school setting, Wise (2010) offers a theoretical view on coaching that sees it as a tool to transform the principal to develop an improved vision of student learning. His framework is premised on change where the coach acts as the change agent working with a principal to change individual behaviours and personal beliefs in attempts to make school improvement decisions. His model correlates improved school leadership with improved student learning. As explained by Wise, leadership is viewed as changing people toward new ways of thinking, whereas managing is dealing with daily operations presented at school. While working through the coaching process, the coach provides support for the principal to focus on areas of need through established goals and timelines. The purpose is to shift the focus away from managing issues, which can occupy an administrator’s time and energy, and towards school leadership issues which makes coaching a transformative tool for school leadership.

Figure 3 - Wise’s coaching model
Another theoretical coaching model is the framework provided by Robertson (2008). Both models view coaching as professional development tool aimed to improve leadership effectiveness. A difference is how the coach or coaching is viewed. In Wise’s model, coaching is client based where the coach is a working professional compelled with the task to improve the leadership effectiveness of a principal. In Robertson’s model, coaching is a learning partnership between two professionals of equal status. Similar to a peer coaching structure, both professionals adopt a coaching technique to support each other through dialogue with the goal of fostering a learning partnership. The intent is to form a practitioner partnership where each benefit equally from one another yielding different outcomes determined by the professional need of each partner.

Figure 4 - Robertson’s Coaching Model
In short, the framework for this study share similarities to both models as both aim to improve leadership effectiveness to improved student learning. However, it aligns closer to Wise’s model as the focus of coaching is based on a coach-client relationship along with change as an outcome without the transformational intentionality of Wise’s model. The framework for this study views leadership coaching as an improvement tool to make principals more effective leaders with the intent of indirectly improving student achievement. In this study, the desired improvements aim to focus on changes within the principal’s belief system and their leadership practices as defined in the Ontario Leadership framework as a longstanding outcome. The impetus for improvement is fostered through a collaborative process between the principal and the coach while engaged in the coaching process. The following figure 5. illustrates the conceptual framework that originally guided this research study.

Fig. 5 – Conceptual Framework Diagram
Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Research Design

A qualitative research approach was used to examine the phenomenon in question. Qualitative research is useful in situations that are socially complex, variably rich, and context-specific, as is the case with educational studies (Merriam, 2009). I sought the opinions and ideas of practicing secondary school principals who work in an environment that is complex and unpredictable. The complexity of schooling and the many variables that impact school function lend well to a qualitative approach. In this study I gathered and analyzed interview data about experience of principals and coaches involved in secondary school coaching activities.

This study aimed to examine how secondary school principals make meaning of their personal experience while involved in leadership coaching as a professional development tool. It aimed to delve into the phenomenon of how practicing secondary school principals experience leadership coaching as a means to improve personally or professionally. In addition, I sought the opinions and ideas of coaches who have worked or continue to work with secondary school principals. In doing so, I aimed to determine if experiences articulated by secondary school principals are consistent with those of leadership coaches. As I was a novice researcher, I had to stay focused on the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study. To assist me, I remained concentrated on the research question as well as the conceptual framework to guide my work and continually referred back to each throughout the study.

The data collected for the study came from interviews of principals and coaches discussing their experience with coaching. The samples of coaches and principals did not work together directly but were involving in the coaching process through the Student Success School Support Initiative (SSSSI). The research involved no more risk than in everyday interactions as
the participants are highly-educated professionals making an informed decision to participate. Based on this, the level of research risk and group vulnerability is low.

As I was responsible for collecting and analyzing data, it was imperative that I monitored my subjectivities and biases. Below is a brief overview of my personal biases in relation to this study. As suggested by Peshkin (1988) “one’s subjectivities can make a distinctive contribution to the data that the researcher has collected.” Through this study, I needed to ensure my personal experiences as an administrator and my personal bias in favor of coaching support for administrators did not overshadow the opinions of participants of their coaching experience and the phenomenon being investigated. I myself have never experienced coaching as a school administrator so I had lacked a layer of connection to the coaching experience but I have been actively involved in the mentoring program offered through my school board. It is my impression as a practicing secondary school administrator that more support is required to assist secondary school principals while in the role. The short time that secondary school principals have with principal preparation programs pales in comparison to what is actually experienced on the job. The role of an administrator is complex and many issues encountered are deep rooted and challenging. As a practicing secondary school administrator, it is my position that school principals view complex issues from different perspectives and little time exists to discuss and dialogue through these complex issues. As well, the increasing pressure and the high degree of conflict of the administrator’s role speak to the necessity to discuss and dialogue so better decisions are made.

4.2 Sample Selection

A purposeful sampling approach was used to select participants. I sought out secondary school principals who work in Ontario who have been or are currently involved with leadership coaching. I was looking for secondary principal who were either novice or seasoned principals
who had worked with or who was working with a coach for a minimum of 3 months.

Establishing a three month timeframe would provide a greater likelihood of gaining insight on
the principal’s experience of leadership coaching sought out in this study. Also, I sought out
ICT certified coaches who have worked with or who were currently working with secondary
school principals. The rationale is that the International Coach Federation is the largest
accreditation body in the world that sets the standard on a variety of coaching certification
strategies. It is the leader in the promotion and regulation of professional coaching standards and
it was my intent to solicit the perspective of certified coaches working with secondary
principals, with the following criteria set by the International Coach Federation: (1) A minimum
of 125 hours of coach-specific training; (2) Training on all ICF Core Competencies and the ICF
Code of Ethics; (3) A minimum of six observed-coaching sessions with an experienced coach;
(4) A comprehensive final exam. Also, I intended on searching for coach participants who had
coached other principals with a minimum of one year coaching experience. In doing so, it
would have allowed for more knowledge sharing on their coaching experience.

Although I made significant attempts to recruit certified ICF coaches, I was only able to
find coaches through the Student Success School Support Initiative (The Quad SI). The Quad SI
initiative was premised on supporting secondary schools to improve student achievement in
applied level courses. Secondary schools deemed eligible were those that had pass rates in
Grade 9 and 10 courses below provincial standards resulting in students not being on track to
graduate. (The pass rate is the total number of students in the province who passed the course
divided by the total number of students in the province still enrolled at the end of the course,
expressed as a percentage. As well, enrolment in Grade 9 and 10 applied level courses needs a
minimum of 20%. ) In addition, schools needed to have student enrollment over 350 students as
well as more than 20% of grade 9 & 10 students enrolled in applied level courses. Secondary
principals who participated in the Quad SI were expected to actively engage in a professional learning team and work with a coach, among other things. In this initiative, the coaches were retired secondary principals who had previously worked in Ontario secondary schools. An aspect of the initiative was that a coach would work directly with the principal. They were expected to enhance the capacity of the principal to lead and direct instruction and program at the school. The coaches were trained through OPC (Ontario Principal Council) under the provision of the Ministry of Education. All coaches had to complete a training course to prepare for the initiative, which is less intensive than an ICF coaching certification.

In this study I interviewed 12 secondary school principals involved with leadership coaching as well as 5 leadership coaches who worked with other secondary school principals. The numbers of participants in each group were chosen as it allowed for a range of responses with varying opinions and beliefs, as well as providing validity to responses due to the sheer number of people being interviewed. The validity was solidified by comparing the responses of participants involved with leadership coaching to the responses provided by each leadership coach focused on a secondary school context.

I kept the recruitment of principal participants and coach participants separate to avoid principal-coach pairings. I needed to account for the ethical and confidential nature of the coaching process. The coaching relationship is premised on confidentiality and the work between the coach and the coachee is private. Divulging or sharing of direct information would have breached the coaching agreement and it would have heightened the risk of identification of the participants in this study.

I used a snowball technique to approach the participants for my study. First, I identified participants through discussions with my colleagues at the Dufferin–Peel Catholic District School Board and the Catholic Principal Council of Ontario (CPCO), and through other work-
related contacts. I then asked each participant to refer me to other participants. Once I got the names of the potential participants from my colleagues, I made contact by email to invite participation. Once agreed upon, I set up the interview through appointments. These participants were provided with an Information Letter that outlined my study as well as the interview questions. In addition, I ensured that each participant was made aware of the confidentiality measures that were enacted for this study. Participants were assured that any personal and school information collected for this study was reported in such a way that individuals, schools, school districts, and communities could not be identified. Audiotaped responses and interview transcripts were marked numerically to assure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. At no time were participants’ names associated with their responses to interview and follow-up of the research. If a participant named specific institutions or work-related persons in the interview, each were given a fictional title or name in the final transcription of the data and not mentioned by name or title in the dissertation. As well, participants were made aware of the option to withdraw from the research at any time by contacting the researcher (me) to express their intention to withdraw from the study. They were also made aware that their data would be withdrawn in such a case. If this situation did arise, I would have returned all data to the participant or destroyed it upon their request. None of these measures were taken as none of the participants expressed an intention to withdraw.

All interviews were conducted outside the participants’ place of work and work hours. I did not seek any assistance from the school boards or schools themselves but rather I invited participation through two provincial administrative publications published by two professional associations. One titled Principals Connection is CPCO’s (Catholic Principal Council of Ontario) professional magazine, while the other is The Register, an OPC (Ontario Principal Council) publication.
Because my own professional role is as a secondary school administrator, I avoided selecting participants who work at my school in order to alleviate personal concerns as well as because of common sense assumptions based on the familiarity of the setting (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998).

4.3 Data Collection

The method used to gather data for this study was a semi-structured interview. This is a good way to collect data from a group of people representing broad ranges of ideas (Merriam, 2009). Another purpose for using semi-structured interviews was to provide a level of comfort between the researcher and participants minimizing the potential for anxious feelings. Sharing the questions in advance with each participant helped them be more at ease during the interview, allowing for more thoughtful and reflective data. The questions were developed through consultation with the research committee affiliated with the study and advice was provided on how to best structure the questions so breadth and depth of responses from each participant was more likely. As well, the interview questions were field tested on one person outside of the study who is a practicing school administrator in Ontario. In doing so, it was suggested that I rephrase my interview questions to be more open-ended to allow the interviewee to share more information about the topic and to restructure the questions to follow the sub-questions more sequentially.

The semi-structured interview consisted of using identical questions for each participant. Patton (2002) suggests that using identical questions for each participant helps to limit “the possibility of bias that comes from having different interviews for different people, including the problem of obtaining more comprehensive data from certain persons while getting less systematic information from others” (p. 98).
Approximately sixty minute interviews were conducted using general interview questions to elicit thoughts and comments from each participant at the place convenient to each of them. The interview times were negotiated to work around the schedules of the participants. Each secondary school administrator and coach were asked a series of questions related to leadership coaching followed by probing questions to solicit deeply held opinions and beliefs of the investigative topic. As suggested by Patton (2002), the interview questions focused on three types of questions to stimulate response: experience based; opinion based; and knowledge based. The interviews were conducted face to face and each interview was recorded for the purpose of transcription and for ongoing analysis.

Fortunately, all participants presented as eager and interested, and willingly spoke at length about their experiences. There were no difficulties encountered during the sessions. Each interview ended by asking if there were any questions the participants wanted to ask the researcher. The participants did not ask questions and generally stated that they felt they had said everything that they wished to say. All of the interviews ended on a very positive note.
Table 2 - Relationship between Research Questions and Interview Guide Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Interview Guide Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do secondary school principals describe their experience with leadership coaching?</td>
<td>• The experience of the principals gained from the coaching process&lt;br&gt;• Leadership Coaching Process Goals&lt;br&gt;• Ontario Leadership Framework&lt;br&gt;• Principal</td>
<td>Principal Questions: 5-8, 12-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do coaches describe their experience with leadership coaching?</td>
<td>• The experience of coaches through the coaching process&lt;br&gt;• Leadership Coaching Process Goals&lt;br&gt;• Coach</td>
<td>Coaches Questions: 3-6, 9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In the coaching process, to what extent do secondary principals and coaches believe that a change has occurred with administrator’s leadership practices and beliefs?</td>
<td>• Changes in leadership practices and beliefs from the coaching process&lt;br&gt;• Zone of Proximal Development&lt;br&gt;• Triple Loop Learning – Reflection and Feedback</td>
<td>Coaches Questions: 7-8&lt;br&gt;Principals Questions: 9-11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Data Analysis

Once data had been collected through the interview process, I used the constant comparative method to analyze the data. It was chosen for the design of this study based on multi-data sources (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The constant comparative method is premised on the simultaneous collection of data followed by the analysis of data soon after. This method was adopted after each interview with coaches and principals.

An iterative questioning technique was used to rephrase questions when it was noticed participants had difficulty with a particular question. As well, reflective commentary was
conducted during the interview and after to ensure pertinent ideas were noted as the interview progressed. It allowed for me to highlight key ideas and it provided opportunity to rephrase questions if I felt I was unclear with what was being shared by each participant. Using this process helped me remember pertinent information shared during the interview and it help me reflect on the research study once the interview for each participant was complete. This approach was used instead of a member checks as it assisted with ensuring interpretive validity when identifying emerging themes. I was diligent with this process as I worked under the assumption that I may not be able to reconnect with each participant.

After each interview, I began the transcription process after reviewing my notes gathered during the interview. I was able to hear and record each transcription clearly thus allowing for accuracy of information that was being shared during the interview process which minimized the need for a members check. Once completed, I began making additional notes along the margin of each transcription. The hope was to identify segments of data or categories that provided answers to my research question. I chose to transcribe each interview myself to generate more insight and inferences from the data being collected. I was looking for recurring regularities in the data with each interview, and discerning if changes were required to gather richer data. This began the open coding process with the intent of developing categories from the data collected. This step-by-step approach was used for each interview and intensified with each additional interview as more data was collected.

When I was analyzing the data, the conceptual framework was used as a guide along with the research questions to provide focus due to the uncertainty of what themes would emerge. I was unsure of how participants would answer each question and what ideas and experiences would be shared during the interview. As well, some of the interviewees had more to share than others so I had to rephrase questions or ask similar ones later in the interview.
Ultimately, I was looking for frequency of thoughts or ideas of participants and form my themes with this in mind.

As well, I began analyzing interview data between coaches and principals to cross compare responses and to determine regularities in what was being shared. I began an open coding process with the intent of developing categories from responses from principals and coaches. The small sample size of coaches made the process more challenging to identify themes compared to the sample size of 12 for principals. Again I used the conceptual framework of the study as a guide to assist with identifying emerging themes in their responses and reviewing the sub-questions that were provided in Chapter 1. As an illustration, the notion of coachee disposition was an important component to the coaching process as told by Julie: “In coaching, the principal has to be willing to expose your vulnerabilities.”

Through this inductive process, the intent was to identify emergent themes, reoccurring patterns of meaning, and a rich description of the participants’ responses that built on existing concepts related to the phenomenon of leadership coaching. It was then determined if further sub categorization emerged and it began the process of providing names to each category based on the data as analyzed by me as the researcher. In addition, it was ensured that the compiled categories were sensitive, exhaustive, mutually exclusive as well as conceptually congruent as suggested by Merriam (2009). The practical goal of this process was to explore answers to the research questions and sub-questions and move from an inductive process towards a deductive process.
Chapter Five: Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the interview data gathered from this study. The chapter will begin by introducing the participants and the districts that they work in. It will then provide a description of the findings that emerged from the interviews. The findings will be arranged according the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter Three. The findings are presented with emerging themes specific to the 12 secondary principals. The next set of findings will present the findings of the five coaches. The categories are further divided into subcategories. It should be noted that findings are specific to the 17 participants interviewed for this study and are not reflective of the broader population.

School districts. The participants of the study worked in secondary schools spanning urban and rural districts in Ontario. The educational system in Ontario publicly funds four school systems: English Catholic, English public, French Catholic, and French public. Each publicly-funded school is managed by district school boards, which for the most part are available to all students.

The participants in this study worked in both Catholic and public secondary school systems where district student population range from 38,000 to as high 150,000. The districts and information pertaining to secondary schools are included in the following table. The names of the school districts were changed to pseudonyms to protect the identity of each district.
Table 3 – District Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Secondary Schools</th>
<th>Secondary School Student Enrolment</th>
<th>Description of District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trenton</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>~14,805</td>
<td>Consists of 103 schools comprised of one city and one county</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niami</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>~41,125</td>
<td>Consists of 240 schools comprising three municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techusah</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>~30,577</td>
<td>Consists of 199 schools and is one of the largest districts in Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tillbury</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>~33,000</td>
<td>Consists of 148 schools comprised of three municipalities and one county</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapel</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>~15,000</td>
<td>Consists of 115 schools comprised of twelve small municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort York</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>~30,000</td>
<td>Consists of 184 schools comprised of three counties, three towns, and three cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulsea</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>~87,273</td>
<td>Consists of 600 schools and is the largest school board in Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennag</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>~8,980</td>
<td>Consists of 130 schools, comprised of large municipality serving seven communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2008, the Ontario Ministry of Education began the Student Success School Support Initiative to support secondary schools that showed pass rates of Grade 9 and 10 compulsory applied courses below the provincial rate. According to the Ministry, the Provincial Rate is the total number of students in the province who passed the course divided by the total number of students in the province still enrolled at the end of the course, expressed as a percentage as well as enrolment in Grade 9 & 10 applied level courses needs a minimum of 20% (Ministry of Education, 2014). School districts and secondary schools that continue to participate in this initiative have shown improvements in student achievement. Committing to the initiative, schools were provided with professional capacity building, as well as professional tools and resources. The expectations for the principal involved, among other things: that the principal actively engaged in Professional Learning Team; a focus on teaching and learning in the context
of the secondary school; and a focus on student engagement through the use of evidence-based instructional strategies. An aspect of the initiative was the assignment of a coach to work directly with the principals. All coaches had to complete a training course to prepare for the initiative. This initiative offered support to those schools where students were achieving below provincial standards. The goal of the initiative was to build the capacity of the principal as an instructional leader in order to change instructional classroom practices to improve student achievement. In relation to the Ontario Leadership Framework, the primary area of capacity building is focused on improving the instructional program for the secondary school principal.

5.1 Participants

Seventeen participants volunteered to be part of this study. All who expressed interest to be part of the study were included in the study. Pseudonyms for each of the participants were selected in order to secure confidentiality and anonymity. The descriptions of each participant are listed in the table below. As mentioned, 12 participants were secondary school principals and 5 participants were coaches who worked with secondary principals. Of the 12 secondary principals, six were females and six were male. Most of the secondary principals were Caucasian where one secondary principal was of African descent and another was of Filipino descent.

All worked at various districts across the province of Ontario. Most worked in urban districts in the Greater Toronto Area where three secondary principals worked in rural districts in Ontario. Most of the secondary principals were experienced principals where student enrollment at their schools ranged from 500 to 1200. The age of the participants ranged from mid-40s to mid-50s. Most of the schools were located in the GTA where the demographics include a lower to middle socioeconomic class coupled with observable diversity. The three
participants in the rural communities had a homogenous demographic, however, the communities’ socioeconomic status were identified as lower to middle.

The coaches in the study were retired secondary principals trained through the Ontario Principal Council. The coaches in the study were retired secondary principals who similarly worked in both the Catholic and public secondary school systems. Each coach had worked with multiple secondary principals ranging from as low as four principals to ten principals. The coaching commitment lasted at least one year with a possibility of a second year.

The five coaches in this study were female Caucasi ans each serving as coach for at least a year. Before the coaching role, each was a seasoned secondary principal working at various districts in Ontario.
Table 4 - Secondary School Principal Participants Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>School Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Trenton School District</td>
<td>Seasoned</td>
<td>~954 students&lt;br&gt;~30.3 special needs&lt;br&gt;~42,000 average parental income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Niami School District</td>
<td>Seasoned</td>
<td>~1,400 student enrollment&lt;br&gt;~87,500 average parental income&lt;br&gt;~18.4 ELL population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Techusah School District</td>
<td>Seasoned</td>
<td>~1,100 student enrollment&lt;br&gt;~49,000 average parental income&lt;br&gt;~17% ELL population and 29.7% special needs students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tilbury School District</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>~1,100 students&lt;br&gt;~65,000 parental income&lt;br&gt;~9% ELL population&lt;br&gt;~25.9% students with special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Techusah District</td>
<td>Seasoned</td>
<td>~551 student enrolment&lt;br&gt;~low socioeconomic&lt;br&gt;~high ELL and special needs population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Chapel School District</td>
<td>Seasoned</td>
<td>~435 student enrollment&lt;br&gt;~Average parent income&lt;br&gt;~51,000&lt;br&gt;~51% special needs population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Fort York School District</td>
<td>Seasoned</td>
<td>~1,177 student enrollment&lt;br&gt;~average parental income&lt;br&gt;~69,000&lt;br&gt;~39% special needs population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>School District</td>
<td>Coach Experience</td>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Niami School District</td>
<td>Seasoned</td>
<td>~1,190 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jermaine</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tulsea School District</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>~698 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pennag School District</td>
<td>Seasoned</td>
<td>~864 students</td>
<td>~3.4% ELL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tilbury School District</td>
<td>Seasoned</td>
<td>~834 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pennag School District</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>~961 students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

~ Enrollment Data 2013 – EQAO

Table 5 - Principal Coach Participant Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Coach Experience</th>
<th>Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>* 4 years as an OPC coach&lt;br&gt;* Retired Secondary Principal</td>
<td>OPC Training – 3 Day workshop on Bloom’s Coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dianne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>* 2 years as an OPC Coach</td>
<td>OPC Training – 3 day workshop on Bloom’s coaching. Hearts and Mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Suzanne | Female | * Newly-hired OPC Coach  
* Retired Secondary Principal | Minimal Training |
| Sandra | Female | * 4 years as a OPC coach  
* Retired Secondary Principal | OPC Training – 3 Day workshop on Bloom’s Coaching |
| Olivia | Female | * 4 years as a coach  
* Retired Secondary Principal | OPC Training – 3 Day workshop on Bloom’s Coaching |

5.2 Introduction to the Results

The Secondary Principal Participants. Each of the principal participants in this study were interviewed for approximately 60 minutes. All of the data for this study is gathered from the transcribed text of each interview presented in Appendix A and Appendix B. The results will be supported from quotations gathered from the interview of participants. The results are presented in sequence on the conceptual themes related to the interview questions. It became apparent that the conceptual framework that guided the methodology of the study had to be revised based on the findings which will appear in Chapter six.

The first section highlights the findings of principal participants regarding their experience with leadership coaching. Their findings are organized in sequence of how the questions were asked in addition to how the responses were provided in relation to the conceptual framework. The subsections are organized in the following order: The principalship; their need for coaching; their experience with coaching; noted benefits of coaching; coachee disposition; changes to leadership practices and beliefs; areas of focus with
coaching; and the coaching relationship. Each finding will be discussed in more detail in the subsections to follow.

The second section focuses on common findings from the coach participants interviewed in this study. Common themes that emerged from the findings include a positive coaching experience articulated by the coaches; identified changes in principals practice, articulating the importance of coaching relationship as well as areas of focus during the coaching process. Further discussion of each item will occur in the following subsection.

The third section highlights common findings from both coach and principal participants that revealed the loneliness of the principalship and viewing coaching as an improvement tool for ineffective principals. Further discussion and analysis will occur in the next three section.

5.3 The Principalship

Each principal was asked to provide a brief description of their job. The reason this was requested was to shed understanding of the job as well as the expectations they felt the job required. It provided insight of the complexity and challenges of the job and in turn the professional support that would aid them to do their work effectively.

When asked the questions, most principals identified specific aspects of their jobs that defined the role of a principalship whereas a few spoke of the role of the principals as an ubiquitous venture responsible for everything in the building. It was the combination of all the specific areas that together comprise the job of the principal. Each principal provided some variance in areas they chose to identify as a description for the job, however, some commonalities existed as well.
Two commonalities that existed with principals in this study were a strong sense of obligation towards students and a focus on the instructional program as a core leadership responsibility. Their student-centered focus in describing their role was a prominent feature that was at the core of everything they did as principals. The importance of instructional leadership was an important area that almost all principals identified as a key component of their job and it was something their energy was channeled towards. Along with the instructional nature of the secondary principal’s role, the managerial component was identified as a prominent leadership component of the principalship. Principals devote a large chunk of time to this, as articulated by many of the participants. A few principals described that a part of their role was to develop future leaders and work with staff that do this.

Hillary described the role of the principal as operational, spending a great deal of time keeping the school properly functioning. She reiterated the importance of understanding different labour agreements while keeping a strong instructional focus ensuring that students in her care are receiving the best education possible.

The principal is responsible for the instructional domain . . . the principal also has the responsibility for other labour agreements . . . the principal is responsible for ensuring that the children in their care receive the education that they are entitled to.

—Hillary

Sheila sees the role as impactful and only second to classroom teaching that influences student success in schools. She described the role as having many challenges such as a recent increase in work volume over the past couple of years.

It’s a multifaceted role . . . you definitely have the opportunity to have a positive impact.

The corollary of that is that there are definitely challenges…Volume is one of the them.
Michelle described her role as providing instructional leadership to the school, providing the managerial leadership component required and fostering the opportunity to build new leaders. Often times Michelle is checking the energy of her community including parents, teachers, and students.

My role is managing people’s energy and I have to manage that for them. Parents, students, children . . . There is always a small component that there is a managerial component to it. My own personal focus is the instructional leadership focus.

—Michelle

Anthony explained the role of the principal as having a large curricular focus with the primary goal of student achievement and well-being. A balance between achievement and wellness is imperative according to Anthony.

Julie described the role of the principal as one of an instructional leader with managerial duties who is also an advocate for kids. In addition, she feels acting as a mentor to assist teachers build capacity is paramount to the role.

Number one, first and foremost, is an instructional leader and an advocate for kids. You certainly have to have the managerial piece at the forefront obviously. I think another part of our role is a mentor . . . shouldered tap some of our teachers and given them leadership opportunities.

—Julie

Spencer described the role as being an instructional leader to support the instructional program. He feels that he doesn’t necessarily need to be an expert in all instructional strategies but needs to be a supporter of good ideas who empowers others in the interest of student
improvement. Spencer also described the role of the principal as managerial, working through many items pertaining to the school while ensuring alignment of system priorities without overburdening the classroom teacher.

5.4 The Coaching Experience – The Principal’s Perspective

5.4.1 Coaching need – Mixed feeling. The assigned coach was a key component of the student success initiative. The coaches’ primary responsibility was to work directly with the principal. Ideally, work with a coach is best supported upon the request of the coachee. In this case, the principals in this study were told that a coach was assigned to support them through the SSSI initiative. Although imposed, many secondary principals were receptive and open to the idea of working with a coach, but this also caused hesitation. The openness of working with a coach was more favorable with principals who were new to the role and who had prior knowledge of a coach while seasoned principals were more hesitant. The feeling of hesitation resulted from secondary principals being unsure of coaching and how it was going to impact their daily work. It was felt by experienced principals that they didn’t need a coach to support their work and that they were managing the job well without one. Also, some equated the work with a coach as extra work in addition to the work they were currently responsible for. Some of the experienced principal participants indicated that coaching is more valuable for newly-appointed principals. This sentiment was echoed by the two novice principals in this study as well as principals who were newly appointed in their role when coaching support was provided. They appreciated the coaching support because of their newness to the principalship. The following section will illustrate responses from the participants demonstrating this finding.

Jennifer described her initial reaction to the idea of working with a coach as open. In her first year as principal, Jennifer has truly appreciated the coaching presence. She saw this opportunity as an additional resource. Having the coach support has forced Jennifer to be more
mindful and purposeful. The coach has kept her focus on the initiative given the overwhelming nature of being a first year principal.

As a new principal like I said things can get so overwhelming that the coaching has really forced me to sit down and really make sure I’m doing things mindfully and purposefully and continuously and so it kind of like a checkpoint that, OK this is coming up so it doesn’t get lost.

—Jennifer

Jermaine was accepting of the idea of working with a coach. He felt lucky as a rookie principal that he had a coach through the SSSSI initiative. He felt as a rookie principal it helped him in his new role and it made sense. It helped him with many facets of the job such as dealing with teacher resistance to school culture issues. It provided a therapeutic structure in his first few years of the principalship.

It made every sense of the world to assign me a coach because I’m a rookie principal. It is really because those professional conversations that we had with those people . . . them giving you strategies, some of the little things if you hit a roadblock . . . you’ve got a teacher in the SSI program who is being resistive and you have a conversation: they help you refine an approach on how you’re going to deal with that. So for me having those coaches in my first two teachers was amazing. I would recommend for every rookie principal, not just those are in the SSSSI.

—Jermaine

After six years as a principal, Sheila considers herself experienced. In her district, coaches were provided to newly-appointed principals to support them in their role. Sheila described her initial reaction to receiving a coach as positive. She was appreciative of the coach and welcomed the needed support. The coach assisted her in every aspect of the role in her first
two years and Sheila utilized her support by being prepared at every meeting that she and her coach arranged.

I thought it was excellent. The individual that I was working was —she had retired—she was an exemplary principal by reputation and she was highly experienced so she had everything to offer me. I was new to the role and she was somebody who was wiser, had multiple school experiences as a principal, and I really valued her expertise and her wisdom and her experience. I’m very supportive of it. I think it’s excellent. I had the advantage of having a coach in my first two years as a principal. I think it made a huge difference to me at that time. It really did.

—Sheila

As an experienced principal, Rex described his initial reaction to working with the coach as undefined. He was unsure of its purpose and how it was going to be utilized in the school. However, he believed it would be more relevant for newly-appointed principals to avoid pitfalls common in the first few years on the job.

When I first heard about it I was intrigued because I thought, wow what’s this coach going, who’s going to be the coach, what kind of coaching was I going to get . . . so I was assigned one. Before, it was something new—we never had it before—I wonder what this will look like. I can see a coach as most effective during my first few years as a principal. What a first year or second year principal does is call a principal who’s been doing it for years and say, hey this is what happened what would you do or what did you do when you had the same situation. Probably they could show you a few pitfalls to avoid because you fall in and then you learn through bad experience.

—Rex
Hillary described her initial reaction about being assigned a coach as one of uncertainty. She felt she did not need or want a coach. Initially, the uncertainty was caused by not knowing how the coach would be a benefit to her as a principal and the imposition of the coach caused the initial hesitation. Having been through coaching as a relatively experienced principal, Hillary feels fortunate to have relished in this experience and could have benefited from coaching more as a newly-appointed principal.

I didn’t know I needed a coach. I didn’t know if I even wanted a coach. I’m not sure about requiring people because people get their bristle up when somebody tells them they have to. Maybe it’s part of the whole sphere of education that we think we know everything . . . part of the privatization of teaching: I’m trained, I’m the professional, I’m the expert, I’m going to close my door. I think that beginning principals should have a coach. I’m going to argue that people in my position dealing with the challenges that I’m dealing with in the community that I am in, we need a lot of help, we need a lot of support similar to kids coming to school who are disadvantaged.

—Hillary

Julie described her initial reaction to hearing about the initiative and working with a coach as positive. She was aware of school indicators that made her eligible for the initiative and she viewed it as a great learning opportunity.

Similarly Anthony viewed receiving a coach as favorable. Anthony saw it as a resource that provided support to instructional goals that were already in action at his school.

Steve had a favourable reaction to the idea of a coach. His favourable view resulted from Steve having previous knowledge of a coach and he had also completed several training modules on coaching.
I had already done the first module so I knew something about coaching. So it’s worthwhile so long as you are prepared to realize that coaching is not consulting. I look on it favorably.

—Steve

Teresa articulated her opposition because she felt she didn’t need a coach to support her. She was resistant and negative with the whole notion of working with a coach. Teresa sees herself as a coach acting as a mentor and inspiring others. This was something that she articulated to the coach herself.

As much as I was resistant in the beginning because I see myself as the coach: I’m the mentor, I inspire my staff, the coach doesn’t need a coach. OK. I said how do I feel about this. At first I was negative . . . you know I don’t need a coach and I even told my coach, I really don’t.

—Teresa

Spencer described his initial reaction upon receiving a coach as unclear. He didn’t know how the coach was to be utilized and how it was going to look in his school.

I didn’t know what that was going to look like in the beginning of it and how that was going to work.

—Spencer

In summary, it was indicated by a portion of principals that coaching would be more advantageous for newly-appointed principals. This belief was shared by the two novice principals in this study as well as some of the experienced principals. The notion of working with a coach was mixed. Some had a favourable reaction whereas others were hesitant. The reason for the hesitation seemed to be attributed to the uncertain feelings towards a coach.
5.4.2 Positive coaching experience. Matching is critical to the coaching process (Robertson, 2005). Compatibility and credibility are two matching criteria that when utilized provide a good indicator for a successful coaching relationship (Boyce et al., 2010). A good match can maximize the benefits of coaching whereas a poor pairing can limit the potential of coaching. In this coaching process, secondary principals were imposed a coach, an act that could have minimized its impact. Although imposed, it did impact the experience that most respondents had of coaching. Most principals in this study had a positive experience with coaching. This finding was consistent across experience, gender sample, and socioeconomic status of the school. Only one participant indicated he was indifferent to the experience. This principal viewed it as social experience rather than an improvement tool.

Most of the principals indicated that the positive experience was attributed to them feeling like they had been helped by the coach and the help varied for each respondent. This section is arranged to discuss the positive experiences of coaching for each principal followed by the principal whose experience with coaching was indifferent.

Hillary described her experience as favourable and positive. Her positive experience was attributed to the two coaches she was matched with in with whom she had good working relationships. Hillary believed that working with a coach to support her leadership capacity served as a good learning tool to help her with building teacher capacity.

Sheila was very supportive of the coaching process and described her experience as excellent. As mentioned, Sheila had experienced coaching on two separate occasions.

Although resistant and negative at the beginning of the process, Teresa found her coaching experience to be positive. She was able to shift her attitude of negativity to one of opportunity. In being afforded a coach, she used it as an opportunity to work collaboratively with the coach on the SSSSI initiative. Teresa would work with the coach on particular aspects
pertaining to the initiative such as examining school data, completing templates, or providing a different lens to the school’s improvement goals.

The coach was great. It was very positive. The coach didn’t impose things . . . they were more through reflective questions. The coach helped me with the SSSSI in any way either with the data, understanding the data, with the staff, with reaching my goals.

—Teresa

Jermaine described his experience as helpful especially given that he was a newly-appointed principal. He appreciated the wisdom and the professional conversations provided by the coach. The coach was able to support Jermaine by providing strategies to overcome difficulties and roadblocks he was experiencing in his daily duties

Just to hear you vent about something, honestly was therapeutic but that is not why I say thank goodness . . . It is really because those professional conversations that we had with those people, them giving you strategies some of the little things, you hit a roadblock . . . You’ve got a teacher in the SSSSI program who being resistive and you have a conversation they help you refine an approach on how you going to deal with that.

—Jermaine

Anthony described his experience with coaching as valuable. He felt working with the coach was a good resource for sharing ideas, a support and a mode of affirmation of the work he had been doing with the instructional program at his school. He appreciated working with a coach who also had a good understanding of the role of a principal.

Julie felt the experience of coaching was a good learning opportunity. For her, coaching was a great opportunity to talk about issues from the perspective of the coach and the principal.
She felt the connection with the coach as a retired principal was automatic and she appreciated the non-judgmental, attentive approach of the coach.

It has been nothing but a positive experience.

—Julie

Jennifer described her experience with coaching as a welcome support for a newly-appointed principal. It assisted her with aspects of the job such as staying focused with student success initiative, keeping a focus on the instructional program, and using the coach as a model for ongoing professional learning.

I think coaching is very needed. . . . I think just to have to someone to help you review your own vision, keeping instructional leadership at the focus of what you are doing . . . I think also it’s really important for my staff to know that I need a coach.

—Jennifer

As a seasoned principal, Rex describes his experience as positive. He deemed it a pleasant and worthwhile experience. While being coached, he felt conversations were focused on the SSSSI initiative as well as exchanging school experiences.

Consistent with other principals, Steve valued his experience with a coach. Through the SSSSI initiative he worked with two different coaches and he felt that each coach helped him look at things happening in the school from a different perspective. It helped him to understand the “why” of things that principal often seek to find. Steve didn’t articulate what additional perspective was brought to his attention; however, he did share that the walkthroughs with the coach along with probing questions asked by the coach provided an alternative perspectives to the walkthroughs.
What they did was to get me to look at things through a different lens, through a
different set of eyeballs . . . so I really valued that piece and they would come walk with
me and ask me questions as we did tours and walked around and looked at things. And
the questions helped focus on other things that I might not have been seeing.

—Steve

Stan’s opinion of the coaching process was less positive. Stan appreciated the structured
time with the coach working specifically on the initiative. He enjoyed the conversations and it
helped him think through things. He was adamant that coaching had little impact on his practice
as an experienced principal. Stan already felt he was a strong instructional leader so the need for
him to have a coach through this initiative was not there.

In summary, all participants but one had a positive experience with coaching due to its
helpful nature. The reason for the positive experience varied for each respondent and it had to
do with how the coach was utilized. Some of the reasons articulated were that it was a good
learning opportunity, it was a good resource, it was a needed support, it was a collaborative
working venture, and it was attributed to the coach.

5.4.3 Coaching process – Beneficial. Most secondary principal articulated that coaching
was a beneficial process because it helped them work through challenges. The challenges for
each principal varied as it depended on individual leader skills, whereas one was focused on
leadership development. The areas identified by principals to assist them with their personal
leader skills included help with understanding math concepts, with understanding different
perspectives, with deconstructing problems, with self-confidence, and with affirming ideas. The
focus of leadership development was on working through changing staff mindsets to eliminate
the deficit view of learning of students in impoverished communities. Two of the participants felt that coaching provided little benefit to them to assist in their role. It was deemed more of a social experience as opposed to an improvement experience. Both principals were initially resistant to working with a coach which continued through the process. The following section will share findings from principals who felt the coaching process was beneficial followed by two principals who felt coaching was not useful.

Teresa articulated her needs in the area of mathematics. Seeing herself as an instructional leader, Teresa admitted that she struggles with math. Her present challenge, which coincided with the SSSSI initiative, was learning and supporting the math program in her school. She felt that challenging herself in this area would assist math teachers and her school’s math scores. The coach helped her through this.

I think I could only do that better once I had that coach to deal and to talk about what if I tried this. Somebody might say my pass rate is 98%; that’s amazing that’s great, but what are you doing with the other two percent? So what is happening with the 2%? Because we tend to say 98%, we’re good, but are what are we doing with maybe those 2 kids. OK. What’s the plan with those two kids because they can’t just say let’s just deal with the other 98%? So those are some of the things the coach pointed out.

—Teresa

Steve articulated how coaching forced him to view school-related issues from a different lens. It challenged him to describe his thinking and to articulate his thinking with the coach. He felt coaching was a support missing in the principalship.
Coaching got me looking at things from a different set of eyes and really by the looking through a different set of lens focusing in on things. I looked at things differently when I walked into rooms.

—Steve

Hillary describes the added benefit of coaching as supporting her through the deconstruction of a problem and being able to better understand barriers in her school. The coach was able to provide strategies to deal with these barriers, working through the courageous conversation to overcome barriers.

Coaching was very instrumental in helping me deconstruct the problem so when I went to either the individual or the group I had a tool kit of strategies to deal with personal things that arose within a group dynamic.

—Hillary

Michelle struggled with the mindset and conversations of her staff. In her second year at her current school, her goal was to change her teachers’ mindsets and talk around the deficit view of learning of students in an impoverished community. She benefitted from a coach by working with the coach to enhance staff accountability and focusing her staff meetings with this purpose.

And my coach is really good; the coach has a lot of ideas. So we’ve talked a lot about how to make staff accountable and using staff meetings for that . . . so for instance, picking three students and what are we going to do in the next month or so that’s going to help be more successful and put a plan in place. . . .Making them accountable . . . my taking the plan back and my looking at the plan.

—Michelle
Anthony talked about the benefits of coaching as a forum to bounce ideas and to provide support. It also provided a venue of affirmation and a form of encouragement to keep working at staff development.

That it takes time and again to encourage you not to be too disappointed when people aren’t moving with you.

—Anthony

Julie talked about the benefits of feedback that she received from her coach. Several times her coach provided her with a different perspective on matters relating to teaching strategies and the aspect of growth mindset. Julie appreciated the perspective brought forth by the coach, who used past experiences and personal connection to the issue to assist her with issues.

Sheila talked about the benefits of coaching from her two experiences with a coach (SSI and newly-appointed principal). Through coaching, she benefited in several areas. She found it helped and she was able to build more confidence in the role helping her through challenging situations. She used the coach as a conduit of information and to act as a sounding board.

I think the other piece is that you build your confidence in the role and I think that’s also really important. She was very good at sharing her expertise, sharing her wisdom, her experiences, pointing me to resources . . . sharing processes with me so I found it very helpful.

—Sheila

Some principals were less enchanted by the coaching experience, describing the process as simply a conversation between two professionals. Stan reported that benefits from coaching were minimal. He described the experience as social rather than valuable. He did appreciate how
coaching relieved the isolationism of the principalship by helping him think through things with another person; otherwise coaching didn’t help with much.

Rex found the experience to be an exchange of ideas with the coach acting as a sounding board. It felt like a companionship as opposed to an improvement tool.

It was like more being a companion in the journey, like someone to bounce things off more than coaching really because I was intrigued . . . How would the coach know better than me the situation of my school?

—Rex

In summary, most of the principal participants found the coaching experience beneficial as it helped work through challenges specific to the principal. In this study, it generally focused on leader skills whereas one principal found it helpful in the area of leadership development. Two of the principal respondents found that it lacked benefits as an improvement tool.

5.4.4 Coachee disposition. Some principals in this study described how the disposition on the part of the coachee is critical for its success. Disposition refers to the coachee’s readiness to make gains in the coaching process. Some principals mentioned that an appropriate disposition on the part of the coachee is important for positive results. A poor disposition minimizes the potential of coaching (Whitmore, 1996). Several principals identified characteristics such as a positive mindset and openness that can enhance the success of the coaching experience. According to these principals, it allows for an opportunity to receive constructive feedback with the intent of professional improvement. A second group of principals viewed vulnerability as an important disposition for coaching success. Being vulnerable allows a principal to openly share their struggles thus working towards finding strategies to overcome it. A third group felt that the coaching process is contingent on the coachee committing to the
goals that have been established in the coaching process. The challenges can only be overcome if the coachee commits to overcoming them. One of the principals who identified commitment as an important disposition for a coachee was a principal who felt coaching was ineffective. Ironically, the participant was able to identify an important factor for the process, however the principal gained little from his coaching experience.

Julie offered her opinion on coaching as something with a lot of validity, however the coachee needs to have an open mind and be open to constructive criticism by the coach.

Steve discussed traits that he feels are needed for coaching. He felt the coachee needs a strong personality to allow vulnerability and the confidence as a practitioner to allow for coaching support.

Hillary explained that she and her coach had a good working relationship with minimal conflict. However, she was aware of other coach-coachee pairings that had poor working relationships. She maintained that part of the process is for the principal coachee to allow his or her vulnerabilities to be exposed.

There were negative experiences and I don’t know if it was a personality clash or it was the insecurity that principals feel in exposing those vulnerabilities because you have to be willing to expose your vulnerabilities.

—Hillary

Michelle felt that the coaching process was a valuable tool to support principal development. However, the coachee’s willingness to improve is necessary through this process otherwise the process is futile.

Coaching doesn’t work if you just talk at me for three hours, say “that’s nice” and leave. It has to be something . . . coaching is about changing somebody practices, so it’s getting
them to self-reflect on what they are doing: so now go away and try this. There has to be a willingness to try and improve.

—Michelle

As Sheila articulated, a part of coaching is contingent on the coachee making the desired improvements with his or her personal and/or professional goals.

It relies on the inner expertise of the person setting personal and professional goals, that individual who’s struggling . . . the assumption is the person does not want to struggle.

—Sheila

Stan talked about pushing the coachee to an intentional disposition if improvement is likely. Stan felt that one’s beliefs drive a person’s behaviour and thus their practice. In order to change it in a positive manner, the coachee needs to work in an uncomfortable place for gains to be realized. This is contingent on the coaching process and the willingness of the coachees to work in the realm of uncomfortableness.

You need a situation that purposefully pushes the person into a place where they are going to be uncomfortable and then the magic of the coaching process should support them through it.

—Stan

In summary, it was generally noted by participants in this study that the disposition of the coachee is an important component for coaching success. The respondents were arranged into three categories based on what they viewed as an important disposition for coaches: willingness to receive feedback, allowing for vulnerability, and having a commitment to the process.
5.4.5 **Leadership Practices Changes.** In the conceptual framework of the study, improvements to the principalship are a desired outcome of the coaching process. The conceptual framework identifies improvements that are likely when the coachee undergoes a positive change. Improvements are either personal or professional—both important for the betterment of the principalship. Most principals believed that changes did occur while working with a coach. The changes identified were specific to the individual in the area of the personal leadership resources section of the Ontario Leadership Framework. A change that some of the principals identified was the improved thoughtfulness of practice. Those principals believed that they became more self-reflective, thoughtful, and better at solving problems when dealing with an issue as a result of coaching. A second group of principals worked towards being more intentional with their instructional program at their school. The main strategy used was to visit classrooms and observe instruction as it happens. The principals in this study articulated that they used walkabouts as their primary means to visit classrooms. It was unclear how the walkabouts improved the instructional capacity of the select principals but it gave them closer view of how the students were being instructed. Two principals felt that they improved in two specific areas that they were weak in. One principal identified data analysis as the area that needed work and the other discussed her struggles with mathematics. The coaching assisted with their conceptual understanding in these areas, helping them become more confident in professional conversations with pertinent staff.

Two principals who were unaffected by coaching felt that coaching did nothing to improve their leadership practices. Their indifference to coaching was evident throughout the study. The first group of participants indicated that being more thoughtful in their practices was a change brought on by coaching. Jennifer felt coaching was helpful. The plethora of issues a novice principal deals with is overwhelming. Coaching changed her to become mindful,
thoughtful, and conscious when dealing with an issue, especially with the teaching-learning program of the school.

Spencer enjoyed the instructional experience as he is highly interested in the instructional capacity of his role as a secondary principal. The change he identifies was being more thoughtful about his approach to the instructional program and having a broader understanding of skill sets and ideas that lead to professional learning as a principal.

I think that through the leadership coaching . . . I’ve been more thoughtful. I got a much deeper understanding, a much broader set of skills and ideas to draw from. I think I hope that I’m better, I hope I’m more flexible in leading professional learning.

—Spencer.

Sheila identified her change as psychological. Improvement in knowledge and skill-sets of the role of the principalship as well as improved confidence as a leader are two aspects she identifies as changes she experiences through leadership coaching.

Hillary described her change as being better able to deconstruct a problem quicker and identifying skills gaps in educators. In doing so, this allows Hillary to recognize barriers that are impeding progress in a particular initiative or a school wide goal.

I have a better understanding of things that are standing in the way that will make a difference to achievement, either this board’s goals or broader goals in terms of the commitment we make to the province in relation to supporting pupil learning . . . so I can deconstruct a problem much faster.

—Hillary

Similarly, Julie identified her change as being a more reflective leader. This has helped change her style of leadership allowing others to take charge and removing her as the focal
leader. Adopting this change has allowed Julie to step back more, listen more carefully, and make more thoughtful observations with the managerial and instructional aspects of her school. She sees herself more as a co-learner and she feels this style compliments succession planning as other people in the building will sustain the programming in her absence.

I’m become much more reflective and I really think that I’ve stepped into the role of being a co-learner. I want to give other teachers an opportunity of this so basically being able to be a co-learner and I did say at the beginning an instructional leader, but sometimes leading means sitting back and listening and observing and letting other people run with it.

—Julie

Another set of participants described their change in practice as including an increased visibility throughout the school, especially in the classroom. The coaching process forced some principals to leave their desk work and intentionally go on walkabouts throughout the school. In doing so, they were observing the functional aspect of the school in and out of the classrooms. They were able to be more informed about the learning in the classroom.

Anthony talked more generally about changes in teaching and learning over the course of his administrative career. He feels that teaching is more visible and transparent and students are better able to talk about their learning. When asked about conducting walkabouts, he said it helped him gain a deeper understanding of teaching and learning in his school.

Through the coaching process, Steve describes doing more walkthroughs, highlighting a day when he and his coach conducted walkthroughs throughout the school. This process added an extra lens to observe teaching and learning in classrooms. It helped Steve gauge how students
understand the lessons and the coach was able to probe with questions about the classroom visits.

Coaching got me out of the office and into the school, into classrooms, and looking at things from a different set of eyes.

—Steve

Jermaine articulated changing his practices by leaving his office more frequently to visit classrooms. He believed that without coaching this would have taken much longer to achieve given the amount of new learning that a novice secondary principal undergoes, as he was a newly appointed principal himself.

I am out there in the classes far more than I would have ever been, because as a rookie principal . . . it will happen in your third or fourth year in being a principal not in the first few years. We just have too many things to learn in that first year, but I’m glad this forced me into the classroom.

—Jermaine

Two participants in the study noted distinctive changes in their own practices as a result of the coaching process. Michelle felt she was more adept at data analysis and more able to engage in professional dialogue with teachers, using data to solidify her position. Using data to drive conversations provides an impetus for change towards teaching practice.

Teresa felt her skill deficit was in mathematics. She felt she needed to be more efficient with math in order to support her team. Modelling her struggles in math would prove important for staff to see her work through her struggles. She notes her change to be an increase in confidence with math talk and leading staff more confidently through a math PLC. She felt her coach helped with this deficiency.
I’m always looking for ways on how to inspire my staff. I’m not comfortable with math and that’s huge in this conversation. So it’s really . . . having that mini-lesson with the coach and say does that make sense to you and then sort of use that information with my math department and not fake it. I understand I’m more comfortable with math talk.

—Teresa

Two principals indicated that leadership coaching did not change their practices or belief systems in any way. Rex felt it was a pleasant experience and an affirmation of things that he was doing at the school but nothing had changed. He felt that his beliefs are entrenched and an outside person would have a difficult time altering his beliefs.

Nothing Earth shattering. . . . I can’t think of anything because if I have to think back then it wasn’t anything. It was a pleasant experience.

—Rex

Stan felt his experience with coaching had no value. He found it more to be a social experience with no gains made from a professional or personal standpoint.

I didn’t feel that there was anything. I felt that . . . I didn’t feel it was a valuable experience. I did it. It was a social experience.

—Stan

In summary, changes in leadership practices were noted. It didn’t appear district, school, or experience was a factor in the noted changes. Some principals mentioned that they were more thoughtful in their practice. Some principals noted changes in their instructional commitment while two others mentioned they deepened their conceptual understanding in data analysis and math concepts to support co-learning in their schools. Finally, two principals indicated that coaching had no effect on their leadership practices.
5.4.6 Leadership beliefs changes. In this study, a change in leadership beliefs showed variance among the participants. The participant’s view about changed leadership beliefs are grouped into three categories. One group of participants felt that a change in their leadership beliefs did occur and it was specific to the principal. One change identified was the influential nature they have regarding the instructional program as principal. A second change noted was their revised view of leadership as being less hierarchical and more distributive. A third change that was articulated was refocusing their school goals to a few achievable outcomes instead of many and believing it was the appropriate approach.

A second group felt that coaching only served to reaffirm existing leadership beliefs. This finding is problematic if coaching is serving to reaffirm leadership beliefs that oppose leadership effectiveness. Presumably, coaching is doing more harm than good. A third group of participants felt that coaching did not change their leadership beliefs. With or without coaching, these principals felt that were able to work through the challenges at school.

It appeared that change in leadership beliefs were more likely with a newly-appointed principal or when a principal had an understanding of coaching. As mentioned above, the first group either received coaching as relatively new principal or had an understanding of coaching. The second and third group were experienced principals and they articulated that coaching had little impact in changing their leadership beliefs.

Jermaine and Jennifer felt that coaching changed their leadership beliefs by making them realize how influential a secondary principal can be with the instructional program.

It’s more the fact that before this program I could not believe that a principal can be as impactful by co-planning and co-teaching with teachers. I could never have believed it can lead to kind of impact that I’m seeing in this school.
—Jermaine

I think in respect it’s changed my opinion as to the importance of the instructional leadership and how truly that is the key to improve student success.

—Jennifer

Michelle articulated her change in leadership beliefs as recognizing the importance of data to change teaching practice. Her deficit was understanding and analyzing school data to properly communicate relevant information to staff. The coaching experience helped her to better understand data and use data as an implementation tool to support professional dialogue.

I’m not a data brain as a principal, so I’m having to do a lot my own professional development around data and get my coach to help around that.

—Michelle

Sheila discussed her change in leadership beliefs in being more thoughtful in establishing school goals. She became more disciplined in limiting her focus on specific initiatives and avoided spending energy on myriad other activities as she would have in the past.

So giving you permission to say sorry I can’t do that. And to really hone and focus on what the principal can achieve. A principal can move a school forward but you have to absolutely . . . be relentless in your focus and what you want to accomplish because you can’t do it all. And there’s tremendous pressure to do it all.

—Sheila

Steve and Julie discussed their changes in leadership beliefs with their evolved view on leadership. Both mentioned that effective leadership needs to be less hierarchical and more distributive for initiatives to unfold. To be an influential school leader, reciting orders in hopes of making positive changes can backfire.
One of the things the coaching process did for me…it really showed me that you can’t be a dictator. . . . OK, you got to get people working with you . . . and you have to be alongside them.

—Steve

Well I always believed that a leader has to step out in front first. The leader has to be the front goose and I’m not so sure I believe that anymore. So that’s been quite a profound change for me in terms of my leadership paradigm.

—Julie

The second group of participants said that they did not experience any changes in leadership beliefs. Several participants felt it served only to reaffirm their beliefs.

Rex maintained that his beliefs were entrenched although he did not articulate what those beliefs were.

No, maybe we shared the same beliefs. The coach had strong beliefs that the coach would hang on that it didn’t matter what other people thought and I was on the same mindset.

—Rex

Similarly, Anthony didn’t feel that the coaching experience changed his leadership beliefs as he felt his beliefs were firm. According to Anthony, this is largely due to him believing that learning is continuous and we should never remain stagnant.

I don’t know if they have ever changed. . . . I’ve been pretty firm in my beliefs over the years.

—Anthony
Spencer described his experience with coaching as more reaffirming his beliefs than a change in beliefs. It gave him an opportunity to reflect and state his beliefs through the process and make subtle changes to professional development practice with his staff. He feels that through deep reflection of his thoughts, he was able to alter his PD model from a one-size-fits-all model to customizing to the needs of his staff.

It gave me a chance to try and state my beliefs and my thoughts process and it really helped solidify some of those. So I think that’s an area where some of my philosophy and ideas changed in. So I’ve gone from we are all doing the same thing with this PD to a model where I’ve got 18 professional learning groups.

—Spencer

The third group articulated that coaching had minimal impact on their leadership beliefs.

Stan was just as adamant that no change in leadership beliefs occurred during the coaching experience. Teresa did not feel any changes in leadership beliefs occurred as well.

No there was none. My beliefs have evolved over the last 20 years and they are pretty ingrained. I believe that I’m not stuck in them they sort of have evolved and they’ve evolved from many of the educational experiences.

—Stan

I don’t know if they really changed. . . . I don’t think they’ve changed per se.

—Teresa

In this study, changes in leadership beliefs were articulated and there was variance in response by principal who noted a change. Some principals articulated the coaching process only served to reaffirm their existing beliefs while two principals were adamant that coaching
did not change their beliefs at all. The variation in responses was not exclusive to a particular
district, gender group, socioeconomic status or size of a school.

5.4.7 Coaching process – Area of focus. As illustrated in the conceptual framework of
the study, the coaching process is focused on three outcomes: goal-orientation, professional
learning, and new understanding. It was revealed by the principals in this study that the areas of
focus in this coaching process were identified by at least one outcome mentioned above. The
main goal of the coaching process was to focus on the managerial nature of the student support
initiative, i.e. completing Ministry templates, examining school related data, and discussion of
research-related articles. Three of the principals articulated that the coaching process focused
mainly on the initiative and no other outcomes were achieved. This was not surprising as these
same principals also indicated that coaching had little impact on their practice. It was revealed
by other respondents that professional learning and/or new understanding did occur from the
coaching process. One area of professional learning and/or new understanding was principal’s
dealing with staff resistance. Most principals discussed this as an ongoing challenge irrespective
of experience, district, and the socioeconomic status of schools. Another area of professional
learning and/or new understanding that some of the respondents mentioned was working
through school improvement initiatives, which varied for principals. This will be discussed in
more detail in the following section.

As mentioned, staff challenges were an area of focus in the coaching process. Hillary
described spending time with her coach discussing challenges she had with certain staff. She
talked about the toll it takes on a school principal.

What I found with the coach is the coach was there for me, so as I said a lot of technical
things related to the project, a lot things that would be more of an adaptive nature i.e.
how to work effectively with individuals who might be part of a project who are not contributing . . . so how to deal with those isolating incidents.

—Hillary

Jermaine spoke specifically about discussing how to have courageous conversations with resistant staff and working with the coach to ensure the message is understood.

Several things like, I talked to you about dealing with teachers with resistance and they would tell you have you tried this right . . . dealing with the teacher cutting corners . . . every time you pass their class they are sitting there and the kids are over there. How do you have those conversations? They will help you and give you advice on how to have those conversations without it becoming a big issue.

—Jermaine

Steve talked of how he and his coach discussed working around a resistant staff member who was reluctant to completely partake in the initiative.

So one of the things that I talked to my coach about was my plans to work with and then around that person because I just gave up on the person after a while. . . . The person was not at all supportive of the program, never was.

—Steve

The other area of focus was school improvement initiatives. Some of the principals used the coaching to work and engage in their school improvement goal.

Julie discussed her school improvement goals which included working on instituting a growth mindset with staff. Sheila discussed her school improvement goals with her coach, and to support her the coach would share initiatives that she was aware of at other schools.
Often times your focus is of a technical nature. It could be dealing with a union-related issue or dealing with a challenging staff. But I would say that some of our conversations were also around me sharing with her things that I was doing around school improvement.

—Sheila

Michelle discussed her focus on expanding improved instruction to a large school context. More importantly, she discussed how leadership is influential in large organizational structures such as a secondary school.

There have been a lot of philosophical discussions about what does that leadership look like in a larger . . . taking that into the larger context of the school.

—Michelle

Teresa, Rex, and Spencer discussion of topics did not extend beyond the focus of the initiative. Stan was clear to articulate that the discussion focused specifically on the process of the initiative and his role throughout.

Basically we talked about how’s it going….how’s it going meant wherever I was in the process what were the things that I was doing, did I need any help, and how did I feel about that.

—Stan

5.4.8 Coaching relationship. In this study, each principal articulated that a strong working relationship between the coach and the coachee is a necessity. All participants stated they did not have a conflict with their coach. Some did mention that they had heard of conflict between coach-principal pairings. Ironically, this finding was also shared by two principals who reported that coaching had minimal impact on their professional development. As well, all
participants indicated that working with coaches who were retired principals was a key factor towards strengthening the working relationship. Some of the participants viewed specific coaching skills emphasized by the coach as another key factor. These skills included trust, approachability, and rapport-building.

The importance of the relational component is between the coach and the coachee is well-documented (Bloom et al., 2003; Reiss, 2005) and the literature review highlighted the relationship as a key component of the coaching process. The next section will underscore elements of the relational work as described by the participants.

5.4.9 Coach – Retired principal. As mentioned by the participants, the strong relational component was fortified by the coaches being retired principals. It provided an instant connection between the coach and coachee and it provided an important level of understanding during the coaching process.

. . . No, I can’t say that there was. I think it worked, and it also worked because the coach was a former principal, so she understood.

—Teresa

But the person that I had was outstanding. This individual was a highly respected principal who had recently retired and she was excellent . . . an exemplary principal.

—Sheila

No [conflict] . . . I would say maybe I was fortunate. They were either retired principals that I knew or somehow we had a connection through a friend.

—Anthony

A coach usually is a retired secondary principal and just meeting somebody who has done your role and has retired; there is an automatic connection there.
—Julie

The coaches spent a long time in secondary schools as principals . . . they knew the stresses of my time . . . they knew that a lot goes on in a school, so they were aware of the secondary climate. They were attuned with the secondary way of life and the secondary way of thinking.

—Steve

5.4.10 Building relationship: Trust, approachability, and rapport. An integral part of the success of coaching involves building the relationship between the coach and coachee. Coaching skills that foster this relationship include the ability and willingness to form a relationship of trust and rapport (Bloom, 2005). The relationship building of the coaching process is premised by how coachees feel they are being treated while being coached. All participants indicated that they had a good working relationship with their coach as conflict between the coach and the coachee was non-existent.

Julie felt that the coaching relationship was strong because of how the coach approached the working relationship. The coach’s approach was non-judgmental and open-minded, which Julie appreciated. The feedback was appropriate to assist her through the process. This helped form a trusting relationship between the two.

You also have to have an open mind and it needs to directly refer back to your performance in a non-judgmental way. That’s what coaching is.

—Julie

For Teresa, the coach’s approach was instrumental in fostering a strong working relationship. Teresa mentioned that she had a great deal of trust with her coach as confidentiality of topics was an understood agreement between the coach and the coachee.
Simply put, “Yes we talked about confidentiality and we talked about the importance of maintaining it.” She felt that the coach was great as she avoided forcing things on Teresa and provided reflective questions throughout the process to probe her thinking.

The coach was great . . . the coach didn’t impose things. They were more through reflective questions.

—Teresa

Hillary described her relational experience with the coach. Similar to Teresa, Hillary felt her coach was good at helping her through issues using good coaching techniques. She asked reflective questions without imposition. As well, she did so in way that alleviated damaged feelings or ego.

Rex’s experience with his coach was positive from a relational perspective. Rex felt that his coach was very personable, which made for easy conversations during the coaching process and it evolved into a feeling of friendship. As well, he reiterated that for an effective coaching relationship the coachee—in this the secondary principal—needs to trust the coach.

It became more of a friendship, more of a personal relationship rather than a coach. The coach was very personable. The principal who needs the coaching would have to trust the coach because otherwise nothing is going to happen, and that can happen . . .

—Rex

Spencer described the strong relational connection he had with his coach. He described it as the coach having a skill-set that allowed for a natural relationship as opposed to a supervisory one. Spencer describes his coach as trusting, authentic, and reflective. This disposition drove the coaching process between the two in a positive way.
Michelle had a good relationship with her coach and described her coach as supportive. According to Michelle, the relationship was made successful by the expertise and knowledge of the coach and the trust she had in the coach. From Michelle’s standpoint, she was fortunate to have this experience as some coaches she could have assigned to her were former school principals with poor reputations.

In general, all the principal participants had a good working relationship with their coach. They felt that a primary reason was the coaches being former secondary principals themselves. This helped with contextualizing the work of principals in this study and it made the working relationship easier. This finding was generalized across participants. Another factor shared by some of the principals was the coaching skills possessed by the coach. Skills such as trust, approachability, and rapport-building contributed to the strong working relationship shared in this study.

5.5 The Coaching Experience – The Coaches’ Perspective

There were five coaches who were interviewed for this study. Each coach was a retired principal who gained coaching training through the OPC foundational coaching model. The primary targets were school administrators, helping them navigate through the SSSI initiative. The coaches interviewed for this study did not work with principal participants used in this study. The findings of the coaches were from their experience working with principals in Ontario involved in the SSSI initiatives, and the findings from their interviews will be shared. The main findings from the coaches included the positive experience, the importance of relationship building, the receptivity of coaches, and the principal changes. This section will elaborate on the findings of coaches in more detail.
5.5.1 Positive coaching experience. A general finding was the positive coaching experience articulated by each coach participant. The positive experiences were described as enjoyable, pleasurable, passionate, and rewarding. The coaches found working with principals and being connected with a school in a different capacity as enjoyable given they were former principals themselves. One coach did articulate encountering resistant from one principal but it didn’t overshadow her overall positive experience of coaching.

The positive feeling was consistent with each coach as they worked with different principals spanning the province and varying in levels of experience. The positive feelings expressed by the coaches were similar with how most principals in this study felt about their coaching experience. The following section will elaborate on what was shared by coaches about their experience.

Suzanne enjoyed the experience of working as a coach. She is a strong proponent of student success and has enjoyed seeing the gains with the initiative while working with principals and supporting them.

I really enjoyed my experience as a coach. I guess for me I like seeing the schools . . . I like to see what is going on. I like to see and help in any way that I can that if we can build . . . help to improve in student success so in going to these schools I loved it. I love seeing what was going on . . . I enjoyed talking to the principals.

—Suzanne.

Olivia shared the same sentiment as Suzanne as having a pleasant experience and enjoying the student success focus of her coaching.

I’ve really enjoyed it . . . it’s been a great transition. It’s kept me in touch with what I really enjoyed because I felt that education was at a great place.
Simply put, Andrea loved it. She has enjoyed working with the principal to examine curriculum documents, to conduct walkthroughs alongside the principals, and to observe student learning in the classroom.

Sandra described her experiences as a coach very positively. She identified herself as a passionate coach who liked being part of a secondary school. She believed she had an impact and, according to Sandra, some of her principal coachee’s reiterated this. She maintains that the positive experience wasn’t without challenges. Her main challenge was working with principals who were passive resistant; this was a challenge she had to overcome in order to make gains with the process.

The experiences were all positive . . . not meaning there were not challenges. You had principals who were so inviting, so accommodating, and then you got the other principal who was passive resistant. Those are the hardest.

—Sandra

Diane found it to be a rewarding experience and discussed how she made her visits more purposefully with her coaches. Her experience was working with novice principals and she spent a lot of time working with the coachees to develop a vision for their school. A practice Dianne used to stimulate conversation was to look at the plant issues of the school to engage thinking. She was the only coach to articulate this approach.

In summary, the coaches in this study had a positive experience with coaching. The coaches describe the experience as enjoyable, pleasurable, passionate, and rewarding. One coach did articulate it didn’t come without challenges, however, it still kept the coaching
experience positive. The positive coaching experience expressed by the coaches matched the coaching experience expressed by principals in this study.

5.5.2. Coaching relationships. A common finding from each coach revealed the importance of fostering positive relationships while engaged in the coaching process. The coaches noted elements that improved the coaching relationship. Trust and confidentiality were key elements that fostered a strong working relationship. The coach needed to gain trust and keep the work confidential to maintain the good working relationships with the coachee. It carried a high degree of importance for them, requiring effort, energy, and a commitment on the part of the coach. It was also mentioned that the relationship was easier to foster given that they were former principals and that they were not affiliates of the board. A third element noted by coaches was the principal’s receptivity of working with a coach. They mentioned that when a principal was more receptive to working with a coach, it made the experience more pleasurable and it allowed for quicker progression. When the principal was less receptive, it made the coaching process more challenging to navigate. Each coach revealed that they worked with at least one principal who was resistant to the coaching process and the explanation varied for the coaches. Two coaches attributed it to a lack of trust. Some of the principals felt that the coaches were evaluators of the Ministry, which caused barriers to the initial process. One coach related the resistance to the experience of the principals. The coach felt that seasoned principals were less willing to engage in the coaching process. Another coach attributed it to the priority of the principal. Principals who focused more on the managerial aspects of the job were less engaged in working with a coach. Another coach indicated that some principals didn’t want a coach and were less receptive to working with the coach. The following section will elaborate on this finding.
Suzanne talked about the need to gain trust from the principal, especially an experienced principal. Gaining trust allowed for more candid conversations between both parties. Suzanne mentioned that because she had not worked in the same school board that made it easier on the relational aspect of her work. She felt the principals were more at ease with the coaching process. From the coach’s experience, it was apparent that some of the principals required more energy and time to foster the positive working relationship.

Having a coach you have someone that you can talk to... that’s not part of the school board, that you can be candid with, and also lower your guard and say you know what.

—Suzanne

In her opinion, this is a result of principals being told to participate in this initiative. She shares her struggles with one principal who was adamant that he didn’t need the support of the coach as he was highly experienced.

Sometimes they see the coach as a spy for the Ministry [of Education]... someone to check on. I had one that I knew right off the bat was not happy to have a coach because of the principal’s level of experience. So I had to work a little harder with that one person in gaining the principal’s trust, of who I was and that I wasn’t just somebody off the street with no experience... that I had been in the principal’s seat that I had done her job and that I understood her day to day trials and tribulations.

—Suzanne

Diane spoke about the importance of trust and confidentiality in this process. She felt her coachee formed an immediate connection with her as she was a retired principal not attached to the school board where the principal worked. She did not have a vested interest with board
personnel as you would with a mentor-mentee pairing. This allowed for deeper conversations in the coaching process.

They are more likely to build that trust and confidentiality from the get go. The person they knew was going to not have a vested interest in anything else and also they felt really comfortable in asking questions that maybe with a peer mentor they might not have asked, not because they didn’t want to disclose any weakness.

—Diane

Andrea described the importance of trust and confidentiality to support the process. At times, scheduled discussions of topics pertaining to the initiative were altered due to the nature of incidents that the principals were dealing with. The pressing nature of incidents took priority and the coaching process focused on those issues.

I had gone in a couple of times when the principal is in the midst of chaos where something awful is happening, maybe with a teacher . . . maybe some enormous pressure from the board. Something is happening. It’s professional. Basically we sit for that session, we are dealing with that because at that level at that time . . . the principal trusts you. Sometimes you arrive and you are the support because you don’t have power . . . The principal trusts you, that’s why the confidentiality is so important.

—Andrea

Olivia reiterated the importance of not being part of the board as vital to foster a positive coaching relationship. Olivia described the importance of confidentiality in the coaching process and the fostering of trust in order to ensure a positive coaching relationship.
That’s where it helps when you are not from the board...I’ve become someone they can talk to and I’m not going back to the board office. Confidentiality is huge and they learn to trust me and they can talk.

—Olivia

Sandra described the necessity of having a good working relationship through the coaching process. As coaching is a job-embedded professional development support, it is also contingent on the coach to recognize the feelings of the principal and the unpredictability of the job. Sandra mentioned that she needed to be aware of the pulse of the principal and the issues that the principal was dealing with, and this was made possible by having a good working relationship with her coachee.

I think the other thing is that we had a good relationship because I could tell if it’s not a good time. I had a principal and she was just . . . I was thinking I don’t have a good feel. I often say when I come in, is this a good time, look we can reschedule . . . let me come back.

—Sandra

The third element was the principal’s receptivity to working with a coach. The reason for it varied for each coach. Olivia talked about how she noticed that with some of her principals the instructional component of the principal’s job garnered less priority while the managerial and human resources component occupied more of their time. She felt that principals who viewed managerial and human resources as pressing had a harder time buying into the coaching process and spending time with the instructional aspect of the school.

Some of them are totally on board but some of them really have a hard time finding the time, and there are tons of studies that reveal where they are putting their time in regards
to instructional leadership versus management versus human resources. Still we know
that management and human resources fight for instructional leadership for time. . . . It’s
that they don’t buy in….it’s hard finding the time for them.

—Olivia

Andrea discussed how some principals had a feeling that the coach was a disciple of the
Ministry which at first impacted the relationship. It took a long time to establish an increased
comfort level.

There was only one principal . . . it was very difficult. . . . I persevered until the end and I
would come out and think what must it be like to work in her school because she told me
at the start I don’t need you, I don’t know why you are here.

—Andrea

Sandra mentioned how some principals welcomed the coach whereas others felt they
didn’t need one. Those that welcomed the coach were more accommodating and professional in
their dealings with the coach. Others were passive resistant which provided more challenges for
the relationship. From Sandra’s perspective, it is easier to work with principals who are more
willing to work with a coach and want to make improvements.

Those are the hardest. It is challenging for me where I’m going to take that person and
how we’re going to move along which I think we started to do . . .—Sandra

The coaches in this study viewed fostering a positive relationship as an important factor
in the coaching process. Key components to ensure a good relationship included trust and
confidentiality as well as receptivity to working with a coach. This was a general finding from
all coaches. It was felt by the coaches that the relationship building process was made easier due
to the fact that the coaches were former principals and not connected to the school board in which the principals were employed.

5.5.3. Principal changes. It was noted by each coach that they saw changes in the principals they worked with. The primary change was improvement in the instructional leadership of their job. There were variations in the specific instructional area that principals improved in. One coach noted a shift in language to include instructional phrases when communicating with other teachers. Another coach noticed principals becoming more aware of their instructional responsibility and leading with it in mind. Other coaches noticed principals making it a higher priority when making decisions regarding their schools. One coach felt the change was more focused on the principal’s personal leadership resources skills. In this case, it was improvement in thoughtfulness and deeper reflection before making school-based decisions.

Andrea noted the change with her principals was a shift in the language of conversation in regard to the instructional program. From her perspective, Andrea considered coaching to be a process of dialogue and a shift in language is evidence to suggest a change occurred. It provides a good indicator of a change in perspective and belief. The noted change was an improved ability to identify and be more aware of the instructional programs within the school. She mentioned that principals became more adept at using data to inform their decisions.

The student success team meeting constantly, the conversation, the dialogue going on, the change of language, the change in belief systems . . . My stories are about very small shifts. I think coaching is really paying attention to how the principal’s language shifts over the course of the year because that’s where I think language and action are separate. I think they are enmeshed together.

—Andrea
Suzanne noted changes to be in the area of instructional leadership. A principal should have a certain level of understanding of the instructional program, however, it was noted that one principal had trouble with the professional learning cycle. By the end of the coaching process, this principal evolved into being the visionary for the instructional program in her school.

One particular principal at the beginning needed work. She didn’t understand even the professional learning cycle but in working with her . . . she became truly the instructional leader at that school, in everything, in choosing her teachers, in providing professional development for the teachers in being there . . . Going into the classrooms and talking about . . . I’m going to come into the classrooms and this is what I wanted to see. So she set the direction and become that person to set that direction.

—Suzanne

Sandra articulated changes occurred in the area of instructional leadership. The evidence to suggest this shift was in the coachee’s perceived role of the instructional program in their school. Most principals believed that the instructional and curricular responsibilities rested with the department head. Through the coaching process, the principals shifted this initial perspective and took ownership of the instructional program seeing themselves as co-learners in the process.

They started out saying I was running a good ship, I have great department heads . . . they did not see themselves as instructional leaders because they saw their department heads as instructional leaders and as they got more engaged in the process and learning with the teachers and learning about these instructional strategies and how to align them with curriculum and being involved in the classroom and doing walkthroughs. Some of the principals told me it helped them with the teacher evaluation and I’m thinking that’s exactly what it should be.
Olivia talked about practical examples that her principals engaged in when changes were noticed. For Olivia, it was evident that principals began to recognize their role in student learning, holding themselves accountable for it. Some of the principals began structuring staff meetings with a professional development focus. They began to recognize the continuous work needed to develop staff capacity. Olivia discussed how this shift included meetings with department heads with the focus more on professional development and less on the managerial aspects of department head duties.

I guess the biggest change is that they are honouring the professional development of their staff more and more. Principals now accept the responsibility that they in fact make sure their students are learning and if they are taking the responsibility, and they are going to be accountable to student learning in their schools.

—Olivia

Diane spoke less about the instructional changes of school principals and more about personal resources changes. She felt the changes she witnessed had more to do with the habits and minds of principals. Through the coaching process, she was able to notice that principals were more reflective when issues arose, such as slowing things down without making a rash decision. As well, she noticed that principals began to feel that doubts are a normal process of the job, which lessening the pressure to be perfect.

Some of the barriers around [the belief that] everything has to be perfect at my school. They have questions and they have doubts and I think that they become part of the normal process. So if I can get them to be a little more reflective and slow it all down a bit, that to me will be a successful intervention.

—Diane
In summary, the primary change noticed by coaches in this study was in the area of instructional leadership. Coaches articulated that principals improved in their instructional language, they garnered a deeper awareness of their role as an instructional leader and some principals made it a higher priority while on the job. The next section will look at work related issues that coaches noted with their coachee.

5.5.4 The coaching process – area of focus. A primary role of coaches is to support and work through challenges identified by the coachee. In this study, a common finding articulated by coaches was identifying staff challenges encountered by principals. Each coach consistently noted that most principals identified staff issues as a predominant challenge to the role. Specifically it was revealed by coaches that principals dealt with ineffective classroom teachers and those who were resistant to the SSSI initiative. Additionally, one coach mentioned a principal’s staff issue focused on the vice principal. The coaches in this study identified strategies used to support the principal in dealing with the challenges. A consultative process was used between the coach and the coachee to decide on an appropriate strategy. A common strategy shared by two coaches involved rehearsing conversations between the teacher and the principal. A second strategy involved either working around resistant teachers or brainstorming ways to convince teachers to be less resistant. Another strategy used by one coach was to take a more active role in the initiative to reduce the pressure on the principal. The following section will review in more detail the general findings.

Suzanne described a time when one of her principals was dealing with both a staff and vice principal issue. It consumed a large chunk of the principal’s time. The coach felt it began to impact other areas of her performance and her commitment to the SSSI initiative was minimized. As a coach, Suzanne worked hard to support this principal.
OK, there was an issue with one of my principals. She was having a terrible time with one of her teachers and one of the VPs actually. All of her energy and time was focused on that and no longer on the instructional leadership. You could see her physically get ill. . . . So I thought I should go in and work with the team but I couldn’t do that because I’m not supposed to. But the instructional coaches at the board could so my suggestion to her was, why don’t you ask the superintendent to have the instructional coach come in more like give you more time because you are losing the team and the work that has been done because you are not there to lead it. And so she said she didn’t even think of that. You know what, she thanked me for that so much, and even at the end of the year when I left because it wasn’t something she could have thought of because of where her brain was at the time. It was really sad to watch her. The instructional piece is situational at times.

—Suzanne

Andrea highlighted the decision that some of her principals had to deal with regarding ineffective teachers. The decision was whether to confront the ineffective teacher or work around him or her. Most opted to work around the teacher because choosing the opposite can have dire consequences. Andrea provided an example of a principal who chose to confront the ineffective teacher.

The difficulty is this and it’s the judgement of Solomon . . . if you have a very ineffective teacher do you work around that teacher or do you confront [them]? In one of the schools, the principal was actually moved because when the teacher was addressed, there was a human rights claim made on the basis of ethnicity and it was easier to move the principal.

—Andrea
Sandra talked about a frequent conversation that she had with the principals she worked with. It had to do with reluctant teachers not fully endorsing the initiative and how to move them forward. The predominant feeling from these teachers is that they are doing a decent job instructing in the classroom, which provided a challenge for both the coach and the principals to work through this obstacle.

Similar to Sandra, Olivia discussed the challenge of the noncompliant teacher that principals work through. To deal with this, Olivia and the principal worked on strategies that convinced participating teachers how to enmesh the goal of the initiative into their instruction without increasing workload.

The most common issue is that nonco-operative teacher. So you get that railroader that won’t buy in. I’ve seen it more often than not. I think the biggest way I can help with that is getting them to help them figure out a way to make that particular teacher feel that what they are doing . . . it cannot be an add-on.

—Olivia

Diane recounted a session she had with a principal that focused on a staff member displaying resistance to school improvements goals. Both Diane and the principal worked out ideas on how to specifically move the resistor forward. In this case, the principal and the coach worked towards articulating the concerns, preparing for a one-on-one conversation with that person. A positive result came of the work done by the coach and the principal as the teacher was receptive to the conversation with the principal and it led to the teacher making subtle changes to his work.

The principal and I discussed how maybe to have a one on one with that person and try and find what the real issues were. I was able to follow up with that principal and she
shared with me what the real reasons were, it was a matter of cutting back that person’s role on that committee, it was a little lighter and they were quite happy from then on to continue.

—Diane

In summary, coaches identified staff challenges as a common issue that principal faced. To support the principals while engaged in the coaching process, they worked on strategies to deal with the challenges. Three strategies were used as identified by the coach. One strategy used was rehearsing conversation with the principals. The coach and principal would practice future conversations with a challenging teacher. A second strategy was dialoguing. It would focus on either confronting or circumventing the staff challenge. A final strategy was reducing the principal’s workload. The next section will examine common themes between the coaching participants and the principal participants.

5.6 The Coach and the Principal

5.6.1 Principalship – Loneliness. The literature review highlight the emotional labor that principals endure. In this study, the loneliness of the job was an emerging theme that was revealed from the finding. Both coach participants and principal participants identified it as a problem that plagues the principalship. It was described as a lonely position and the coaching process acted as a supportive tool to counteract the loneliness and isolation of the principalship. A main idea as told by the coaches is that the loneliness of the principalship is accentuated by a few factors. One is the lack of professional networks at the school level as well as outside the school level. A second factor is the feeling that professional support is obscure when difficult situations arise.
The main idea as told by the principals was the lack of professional networking at the school level. Although most secondary principals work with vice principals, a positional separation still exists. A network of professionals with the same position is missed at secondary schools.

The following section will elaborate on this finding. The first set of responses is focused on the coaches followed by the responses of the principals.

Suzanne and Andrea were two coaches who identified loneliness and isolation as a prevalent issue for the school principal. Suzanne discussed the isolation principal’s experience when in the role. She spoke from her experience as a principal having a coach as well as her working as a coach. She mentioned that with teachers a network of camaraderie is established, and as a school vice-principal consultation with your administrative team is provided. In the case of a principal, the ultimate decision rests with you.

When they say it’s lonely at the top it really truly is lonely at the top, and when you become a principal (pause) at first when you become a VP that was the biggest thing that struck me was how I now didn’t have this network like all the teachers you know all camaraderie all of sudden you are now no longer one of them and you really feel it as a vice-principal. When you become a principal, you are by yourself.

—Suzanne

Andrea elaborated on the point of loneliness of secondary principals. She talked about a question she posed to her coachees: Who supports you professionally? The answer to this question varied to include groups of teachers, intentional actions such as walking the halls, or interacting with students. Outside of the intentional actions that the principal takes to alleviate loneliness, few organizational supports structures are in place. Her point is that the secondary
principal position is one filled with loneliness attributed to the high degree of expectations and responsibility thrust on the principal.

One of the questions that was asked was, as a principal, who supports you professionally in your work, and the answers varied. Sometimes it was a group of teachers, the wise teachers in the school. . . . A couple of principals mentioned that the older ones who had been at the school for a while. One of them mentioned walking the halls and being with the kids. Structure support, zero. So here is this principal who’s protecting the teachers and the kids who is…it actually send me back to the educational act and I thought that’s why we are alone as the principals . . . it’s the principal, the principal, not the director.

—Andrea

One of the principal participants alluded to the illusion that support is there for the principal, however, in contentious issues loneliness becomes apparent.

You think somebody behind you is going to support you and when you turn around there is no one there. You are on your own.

—Rex

Hillary articulated the same loneliness as a principal. She described her administrative team as a support, however, she maintains that there is still supervisory role with them. Help from other principals is an option but they are consumed with their own issues at their schools. The coach helps alleviate the loneliness.

You are very much alone as a principal because you are the principal, you have your administrative team . . . one or two VPs, sometimes three depending on your school size. They’re your colleagues, they’re your peers, but you are supervising them…you can call
other principals but really who is there for you in the school? No one. What I found with the coach is the coach was there for me.

—Hillary

Sheila appreciated the coaching as it helped alleviate the isolation of the principalship. As with Hillary, Sheila does mention the secondary principal is part of a larger administrative team to support her work but the ultimate decision rests with the principal. She mentioned her principal association as another form of support, however the meetings are infrequent to provide timely support. Working with a coach provided Sheila with the timely support lacking in the role, whose focus was solely with the principal.

Because the role of the principal really is an isolated one . . . yes you do have a VP and they are part of your leadership team but there is really only one principal in the school. And we do have a wonderful principal’s association in our board but we really only met once a month and those meetings are agenda specific so really your opportunity to network with other principals is really limited. So what with my coach is that he was a principal I could meet with.

—Sheila

In summary, coach and principals identified isolationism and loneliness as issues plaguing the principalship and it was a general feeling that coaching acts as a supportive tool to help with this issue.

5.6.2 Ineffective principals – Coaching as an improvement tool. In this study, it was generally felt that coaching can be used as an improvement tool for principals. Most secondary principals and coaches believed that coaching could improve the performance of an ineffective principal, however participants had distinct opinions on when coaching is appropriate. From
their perspective, the improvement is contingent on the willingness of the coachee to improve and the skill that requires improvement. Several of the coaches mentioned that willingness to change is an important aspect to support the ineffective principal. This finding was corroborated by two principals who also felt that the willingness on the coachee is important for improvement and coaching to be effective. It was felt that the principal needs to identify areas of weakness and work towards improvement.

Some feel coaching is dependent on the degree of improvement required for the principal. It was mentioned that some skill deficiencies are too difficult to be changed by coaching. One coach felt that coaching can support an ineffective principal, however, a good coach is required for it to happen. Two principals felt that coaching would be useful for principals who are stuck in a rut or need help identifying their weakness.

Two principals interviewed for this study felt that coaching will have limited effect on improving struggling principals. It was articulated that principals will mostly figure it out over time or turn to other means to support themselves professionally. In this study none of the coaches shared this view. The following section will elaborate on the specific findings beginning with the views of certain coaches followed by the principals.

As coaches, Suzanne, Sandra, and Olivia viewed coaching as an improvement tool with the coachee being an important piece to the process.

Suzanne reiterated that the principal needs to be open to coaching support and it would depend on how much support is required. If the support required is simply to reprioritize duties to be more effective, coaching can work.

If the principal is open to the coach, and you take baby steps . . . Sometimes principals need to reprioritize their duties to be more effective and a coach can help with this.
Sandra believed the coaching process has potential to improve the ineffectiveness of a principal, however, it is contingent on their weakness. Some weaknesses may require more than coaching support for improvement to be noticed. Sandra mentioned that the notion of weakness is contextual and relative to the school. A weakness at one school can be a strength at another.

I said I have a few things here, I have some questions, and he said just a minute we can’t start without so and so. I don’t handle any of that. So and so has the answer to all these questions. This was a case . . . this doesn’t mean he was an ineffective principal because where that school was and where that school ended up being . . . that’s the principal they needed. He’s got kids, they’re not dropping out, they are coming to class. Sports is what was saving those kids in that community. It gives me shivers because when I saw that sometimes the leadership skills that are needed at a certain time are different for when they’re needed at this time. So at one school the principal is ineffective but at another the principal can be effective.

—Sandra

Olivia is adamant that coaching can help an ineffective principal in both the instructional and managerial realm of the principalship. For this to happen, a buy in is needed on the part of the principal to realize improvement.

Yeah I think it could help if you could get them to buy in to even a few practices that will help with the school. I think it’s hard. Maybe you end up helping them be more effective managers or helping them understand, OK, let’s get an instructional team together in your school.

—Olivia
Similar to the coaches, Michelle and Julie both insisted coaching can help an ineffective principal improve. It is premised on the willingness of the principal to improve and make the necessary changes. Both believe a level of self-recognition and self-reflection on the part of the principal is needed for the coaching process to have the desired outcome.

So I do think a coach can bring on some not so effective principals to a point, and there has to be an openness to hear it . . . there has to be an acceptance to hear it and there has to be a willingness to change it.

—Julie

Rex also affirmed coaching can improve the performance of ineffective principals. In his opinion, two things are required to ensure its effectiveness: A good coach and a personal connection where trust is maximized.

Yeah, I would have to be a very good coach because the coach would have to connect with the principal on a very personal level because the principal who needs the coaching would have to trust the coach because otherwise nothing is going to happen.

—Rex

Spencer views coaching as an appropriate means to support struggling principals. He feels it depends on the need and coaching is good way to make improvements in interpersonal skills. Deeper skills require more time and it can be a slow process to eventually see improvements.

Depends what someone is struggling with. If that’s a weakness I think that’s harder to develop. I don’t know if there is any other way to develop those skills, those interpersonal skills, other than coaching. . . . I don’t think going to a clinic or a workshop
is necessary going to do it. It’s going to take some work . . . I thinking the coaching piece is the best approach to getting there.

—Spencer

Steve maintained that coaching can help a principal who might be stagnant or, worded differently, “stuck in a rut.” Steve cautioned that the ineffective principal needs a strong personality as well as allowing a level of vulnerability for improvements.

I’ve got my own thinking about coaching in general outside of the educational context. . . . If you are stuck in a rut, coaching helps. The only thing you would have to get around in what you are saying is make sure that the principal involved here has a strong enough personality to allow the coach to come. Don’t want to be defensive . . . being vulnerable . . . you have to be confident enough to do that and not feel threatened by it so I think coaching is a great thing.

—Steve

Stan felt that coaching was a social experience with a therapeutic element to it. He feels that principals often work in isolation and it was nice talking to someone from a similar experience to minimize this isolation. Stan was quick to note that in the absence of coaching, he had other avenues to limit his isolation.

It was a social experience. I enjoy sitting and being social. I enjoy sitting and chatting with you. It was nice from the standpoint . . . I think when administrators function we function in isolation, so talking to someone who understands that is therapy so in essence.

—Stan
Teresa believed some principals are able to figure it out and improve on their own accord. Some do not. In these circumstances, coaching can assist the ineffective principal by aiding in areas of need.

In summary, principals and coaches felt that coaching is an appropriate tool to support ineffective principals. It was felt that it is contingent on two aspects: the willingness of the coachee to engage in coaching and the skill deficit required for improvement. There were variations with principals with when coaching should be used, however little variation existed with the coaches. All coaches had similar views that coaching is a useful tool to support ineffective principals. Some principals felt coaching had limitations if the skill deficit is too large and they should resort to other means for improvements.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a brief introduction to the participants in the study. A description of the twelve secondary principals as well as eight school districts in which they worked was provided. In addition, a description of the five coaches as well as their experience was provided. The data were gathered from the responses of both the secondary principals and that of the coaches. After data analysis, common themes emerged.

The primary focus of this study was on the coaching process and its support as a professional development strategy for secondary school principals. The experience articulated from both secondary principals and the coaches in this study provided the data to elucidate the findings. The first part of the findings focused on common themes determined from principal participants’ responses from the interview. Each of these categories contained a number of subcategories that were based on participant responses from the interview questions (Appendix A). The beginning part of the findings described how the principals articulated the role of the principalship. This description is important as it provides a deeper understanding of the
difficulty of the job. It was evident from their commentary that the complexity and the increased expectations that define the principal’s role are challenging. Two commonalities that were identified are the strong sense of obligation towards students and the increased instructional focus of the job. Some principals identified a managerial focus which occupies a lot of time, and a few principals saw developing future leaders as an important aspect of the job.

The remainder of the principal findings focused on the coaching process. In summary, the opinion of the coaching process was mostly favourable from the participants when they heard coaching was to be provided. The novice principals were more open and responsive to the idea of working with coach whereas experienced principals were more hesitant. The hesitant feeling was caused by the uncertainty of working with a coach and the potential for an increased workload. Some of the experienced principal participated indicated that coaching is more valuable for newly-appointed principals. This sentiment was echoed by the two novice principals in this study as well as principals who were newly appointed in their role when coaching support was provided. Almost all secondary principals mentioned they had a positive experience with coaching, with some remarking that they would embark on a coaching venture if the opportunity presented itself. One principal identified it as a social experience rather than a professional support.

Each principal articulated coaching as a beneficial process that helped them work through challenges. The challenges for each principal varied as it focused on individual leader skills, whereas one was focused on leadership development. The areas identified by principals to assist them with their personal leader skills included help with understanding mathematics concepts, with understanding different perspectives, with deconstructing problems, with self-confidence, and with affirming ideas. The focus on leadership development was working through changing staff mind-sets to eliminate the deficit view of learning of students in
impoverished communities. Two of the participants felt that coaching provided little benefit to them to assist them in their role.

A finding that emerged among the principal responses is that the disposition of the coachee is a factor for improvement while engaged in the coaching process. There were variations to how coachee disposition was articulated and the principals were grouped according to their responses. One group identified a positive mind-set and openness as important qualities. Another group identified vulnerability as an important disposition. A third group viewed commitment to the established coaching goals as important.

Besides the work required for the SSSI initiative, a common area of focus for most principals while engaged in the coaching process was dealing with staff resistance. A second area of focus by most principals was working through school improvement initiatives and their implementation. The coach and coachee devised strategies to navigate through both areas of focus.

The principal participants believed that the relational component of the coaching process is a major factor for ensuring its success. A strong relational connection between the coach and the principal is established through a nonjudgmental and competent approach from the coach, appropriate dispositions from the principals, as well as engaging in constructive dialogue during the coaching process. All participants stated they did not have a conflict with their coach. Some did mention that they did hear of conflict between coach-principal pairings. As well, all participants indicated that working with coaches who were retired principals was a key factor towards strengthening the working relationship. Some of the participants viewed specific coaching skills emphasized by the coach as another key factor. These skills included trust, approachability, and rapport building.
Another theme that emerged from principal responses was that coaching changed aspects of their leadership practices. The changes varied for each principal as the needs were unique to the individuals undergoing the coaching experience. The changes were organized into two groups. One group of principals saw a change in their thoughtfulness of practice. A second group became more intentional with the instructional program at their school. Two other principals noted improved conceptualizing of math concepts and analysis of school data.

Changed leadership beliefs were revealed by some principal participants. The views of the principals were grouped into three. One group felt that a change in their leadership beliefs did occur and it was specific to the principal. Changes included a realization of how influential a principal is with the instructional program, a revised view of leadership as being less hierarchical and more distributive, and a belief that a refocus of school goals scaled down to a few achievable outcomes was more effective for school improvement. Another group felt that coaching served to reaffirm existing beliefs and it solidified what they had already known. The third group felt that coaching had no impact on their leadership beliefs.

The second part of the finding focused on the coaches who participated in the study. There were five coaches who agreed to partake in this study and findings from the interview questions (Appendix B) were arranged accordingly. Each of these categories contained a number of sub-categories that were based on participant responses from the interview questions (Appendix B). The common findings from the coaches were focused on their work with secondary school principals through the coaching process.

The coaches in this study found the experience of coaching to be positive. Coaching kept the coaches connected to the field of education and to the principalship. It brought upon a nostalgic feeling. The coaches found working with principals and being connected with a school in a different capacity as enjoyable given they were former principal themselves. One coach did
articulate encountering resistance from one principal but it didn’t overshadow her overall positive experience of coaching.

They noted the importance of building a relational connection with the principals that they worked with and the time invested with this. Most coaches felt that key elements such as trust, confidentiality and being former principals assisted with fostering a positive working relationship. It was noted by the coaches that receptivity to coaching aided the relationship in coaching. Each coach mentioned that they had at least one principal who lacked receptivity.

The coaches noticed changes in the principals they worked with although differences existed in the area of change. The primary improvement articulated by most coaches focused on the instructional leadership capacity of the principal. Noted changes included improved language acquisition in the area of instruction, a greater awareness of instructional responsibilities as a principal, and making instruction a greater school improvement priority. One coach noted a change that differed from instruction and it focused on the personal resource skill of the principal. From the perspective of this coach, the principal became more thoughtful and reflective in his decision-making process.

The coaches reported that each principal was dealing with complex issues that limited their commitment to the coaching process. As the principalship is an issue-based position, pressing situations take priority, thus monopolizing the principals’ time and energy leaving little time for other things. The main issues consuming the principal’s time were personnel issues. Most coaches indicated personnel issues focused on teachers, whereas one coach reported a vice-principal was posing challenges to the principal. When time permitted, the coaching process allowed each coach to develop strategies to navigate through the issue. Some of the strategies included rehearsing conversations, working around the distraction, and brainstorming ideas.
The third part of the findings contained common views shared by both principal and coach participants. A common theme that emerged was the view that coaching is a supportive option to improve one’s professional practice. It is believed by most participants in this study that coaching can support and improve the performance of an ineffective principal with a few caveats. It would depend on the willingness of the ineffective principal to improve and the type of skills that need improvement.

Another common finding from both set of participants articulates the loneliness of the principalship. Most participants felt the loneliness is enhanced by two factors. One is due to the lack of professional networks that exists for school principals at the school level and district wide. A second factor is the obscurity of support when difficult situation arise at the school level.

Also noted in the findings is that there were no discernible differences noted in the participant response in respect to the district school boards in which they worked. A difference may have been possible due to each school district having different board improvement plans. Due to this variation, each principal could have channelled their energy and time differently. Similar experiences among participants were found among the eight school districts. Conversely, unique participant experiences were not more common in one school district than any other. In addition, there were no discernible differences between coaches and the district that were working in.

The next chapter, Chapter Six, will focus on an analysis and discussion of the results presented from this chapter.
In Chapter Five, findings were presented from interviews with twelve secondary principals and five coaches who participated in this study. The coaches and principals interviewed in this study were not paired together as they worked distinctly with other coaches and principals. Questions were asked to elicit their experience with coaching to determine key findings. The overall goal of this research study was to examine secondary school principals’ experience with leadership coaching as a professional development tool. It aimed to delve into the phenomenon of how practicing secondary school principals experience leadership coaching as a means to improve personally or professionally. In addition, it sought the opinions and ideas of coaches who have worked or continue to work with secondary school principals. In doing so, it aimed to determine if experiences articulated by secondary school principals are consistent with those of leadership coaches. The data presented provide rich descriptive details that offer insights into the nature of the coaching experiences of these participants. In addition, insights were gained from professional learning and new understanding from the participants that resulted from coaching.

Through this inductive process, the intent was to identify emergent themes, reoccurring patterns of meaning, and a rich description of the participants responses that built on existing concepts related to the phenomenon of leadership coaching. It was then determined if further sub categorization emerged and it began the process of providing names to each category based on the data as analyzed by me as the researcher. In addition, it was ensured that the compiled categories were sensitive, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, as well as conceptually congruent as suggested by Merriam (2009). The practical goal of this process was to explore answers to the research question and sub-questions and move from an inductive process towards a deductive
6.1 Professional Support

One emerging theme was that the experience of coaching was viewed as a professional support to deal with the challenges of the job. Principals in this study were asked to describe the role of the principalship and its challenges. Noted challenges were: Increasing work volume, an increase in job expectations rendering it overwhelming, the volume of managerial issues, the increased focus on the instructional program, and the responsibility of building the leadership capacity within the school. It served to reaffirm what others have noted of the principalship (Beatty, 2000; Fullan, 2008). The complexity of the job and how it was described reveals a need to provide professional support to meet the high expectations of the principal’s job. The “sink or swim” phenomenon that plagues the principalship is an avoidable trap when support is provided to aid principals. Leithwood (2014) conducted a study that examined the workload of secondary administrators. One of the questions asked in the workload study was: What professional learning or training might be helpful to principals in managing workload? It was indicated that differentiating professional learning and training specific to the nature and amount of work anticipated by school assignments is a helpful strategy.

In this research study, the coaching experience provided principals with in-context learning allowing them to work on the SSSI initiative along with working through existing challenges in their role. It allowed for most of the principals interviewed to deal more effectively with the complexity of the job and work through its issues in context. Most principal participants were appreciative and receptive of the support. It allowed for an affirmation of thinking but also of deeper reflection and understanding with ongoing issues. It provided an opportunity to deal with personnel issues that plagued every principal in this study. The issues
were mainly with teachers and one reported case was with a vice-principal. The coaching experience afforded principals an opportunity to work on strategies, i.e. rehearsing conversations and brainstorming strategies in order to confront the challenges.

It was found that coaching as a professional support was better targeted for novice principals than seasoned principals as they require the immediate support needed to navigate the steep learning curve as a newly-appointed administrator. The novice principals interviewed in the study were appreciative and felt fortunate to have worked with a coach while navigating the newness of the job. The experienced principals were also appreciative of the support; however most were hesitant at the type of support they were receiving through the SSSI initiative.

Teresa provides an account on how her school district builds capacity for struggling principals. They are paired with reputable principals and use this structure to provide coaching support. A skill-based coaching technique is used to support the process. Reiss (2006) explains this approach as adopting a coaching style of leadership where leaders learn coaching skills to support others as opposed to receiving the coaching.

Some items of support that Teresa describes include working on difficult conversations with parents and staff. Her opinion of the issue is that principals are ill-prepared for the complexity of the job. Principals graduate from teacher roles to administrative positions with high expectations. A number of secondary principals don’t figure it out and continue to work as ineffective principals. This view is similar to the term coined by Chappleow & Leslie (2000) as the derailed leader who has reached a leadership position with high potential and capability but who has failed to meet the expectations. Rather than continue the journey of ineffectiveness, Teresa maintained that further support is needed for secondary principals and coaching is one way to provide it.
In the literature review, a distinction was made to decipher between leader and leadership development. Leadership development was explained as helping people work with others by applying social understanding to organizational imperatives, whereas leader development emphasized individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with leadership roles. In this study, coaching supported areas mainly deemed leader skills. It served as a professional support and gains were made in specific areas that included understanding math concepts, recognizing different perspectives, affirmation of ideas, and increased self-confidence. One principal identified working towards changing mindsets that coaching helped with. This was the only example that focused on leadership development.

In the educational sector, professional capacity building has relied more on courses and workshops, as well as informal dialogue with professionals (OECD, 2009). Research suggests that short-term workshops are unlikely to influence professional practice and have minimal impact on student achievement (Closing the Achievement Gap, 2012). Mentoring is another form of professional capacity building that exists as a support for newly-appointed principals. However, some problems have been noted with mentoring programs such as its lack of context, its short-lived nature, its limitation to “buddy programs,” and the selected mentor has power and influence in the school board, making it difficult for novice principals to openly share their concerns. (Ontario Leadership Strategy, 2011; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). The focus of professional capacity building should rely less on short-term workshops and mentoring programs and more on in-context learning such as coaching. The commitment of the coaching relationship lasted a year with some extending into a second year. An unexpected challenge in the coaching process arose with new principal appointments and or transfers that caused discontinuity resulting in loss of momentum and re-establishing new relationships.
Better recruitment of people is one option to limit ineffective principals. This is a main goal of the Ontario Leadership Development Strategy (2011). However, ineffective principals will still occupy the system. The principals’ feelings from this study that coaching can improve the ineffectiveness of a principal makes a case for capacity building. More should be invested to improve ineffective principals. The cost of leading schools with ineffective principals bears a huge social cost on society. Many studies have shown the social cost by measuring the impact of student achievement. It has been reported that a highly-effective principal can improve student scores by 10 percent points in comparison to an average principal (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The gap would be larger if the comparison were with a highly-ineffective principal. More recently, it has been found that a highly-effective principal can increase student achievement from a 50th percentile to a 54-58 percentile in one year (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012).

To suggest coaching is a panacea to alleviate the ineffective leader would discount other tools to support leadership development (PLTs, mentoring, and professional networks). Some suggest using a blended model of mentoring and coaching to provide professional improvement (Robinson et al, 2009). Others advocate for professional learning teams focused on problems of practice to engage professional improvement (Katz, 2015). Others support a coaching approach (Bloom et al., 2005; Reiss, 2007; Wise, 2010). Which is more effective as an improvement tool and the costs of each requires additional analysis. An exact dollar figure on coaching programs has been investigated (Gorham et al. 2008; Knight, 2012; Lochmiller, 2014). Lochmiller (2014) estimated the cost of providing a leadership coaching program at $153,000 to $850,000 to support newly-appointed principals. The cost would be higher if all principals were given this opportunity. Initiating a leadership coaching program does require a financial investment, as do
other initiatives, but these costs pale in comparison to the potential social costs if nothing is
done.

6.2 Positive Experience

A second theme that emerged was the positive coaching experience articulated by the
participants in this study. In an open-ended survey posed to 35 elementary principals who had
received coaching more than 90% reported a positive experience (Wise, 2011). This study
reported similar results with secondary principals and coaches. The positivity had even led some
principals to consider engaging in coaching as an option once retired. The positive experience
noted by participants was enhanced by the good working relationship each principal had with
their coach. It was noted as well that the principal participants did not experience conflict with
their coach. Some of the coach participants who worked with multiple principals mentioned that
conflict existed with other pairings in the SSSI initiative, however that was not the case in this
study.

This outcome was surprising as principals were assigned coaches without matching
input. Matching is critical to the coaching process (Robertson, 2005). A good fit between a
coach-coachee pairing maximizes its benefits. In this study, the coaches were assigned to work
with a principal and the principal participants were provided a coach. It is unknown from this
study how the coach-coachee pairing was determined, so the analysis of matching is limited.
The imposed nature of the coaching process could have altered the outcome of the coaching
experience, however this was not the case in this study. In addition, some of the experienced
principals didn’t need or see the value of working with a coach, which could have hindered the
working relationship as well.

As noted in the conceptual framework, an indirect positive relationship exists between
strong principal leadership and improved student achievement. Although most principals were
satisfied with their coaching experience, it is unclear if it was successful from a student achievement standpoint. It still needs to be explored if a positive coaching experience such as noted in this study transcends into improved student achievement outcomes.

Another explanation that may have enhanced the positive experience of the coaching process could be attributed to reaction outcomes. Reaction outcomes refers to the subjective evaluations, including both satisfaction and value aspects; individuals make about their experience and include both affective perceptions (e.g., satisfaction) and utility judgments about the value of the experience (Ely et al., 2010). After the coaching experience had concluded, it provided a sense of accomplishment for the principals. It enhanced the affective perception of the experience, adding value and satisfaction to the experience. The participant’s engagement in the coaching felt positive, thus lead to a satisfied feeling and a sense of value for the coaching experience. Subjective evaluations of an experience provide valuable information for success of an experience, however this is limited as it is a one-dimensional evaluation related to how they felt about coaching. Exploring multiple dimensions of the reaction such as exploring the coach-coachee relationship, examining the coaching process in more detail, and examining the effectiveness of the coach would provide in-depth analysis about the evaluation of their experience. Although the experience was positive, it was unclear if it led to the desired coaching outcomes.

6.3 Coaching Relationship

Another theme that emerged was the relational importance of the coaching process, a key pillar in coaching. Most principals and coaches discussed the value of a strong relational connection between the coach and the coachee. Other authors mention its importance as well (Bloom et al. 2005, Ely et al., 2011; Reiss 2005). A quality coaching relationship is the single most important factor for successful coaching outcomes (Boyce et al, 2010). Its strength was
contingent on a set of skills possessed by the coaches leading to an open approach, focused on trust, and approachability.

A key ingredient that establishes a successful coaching partnership is trust. Trust is founded on a coach having a good rapport with his client (Wattie, 2015). As well, key coaching traits are needed, including self-awareness, honesty, sincerity, competence, reliability, and the ability to be other-centered (Psencik, 2015). Each trait works to establish trust in the coaching partnership.

The lack of trust was an initial barrier that had to be overcome by coaches as some principals viewed them as spies for the Ministry, assigned to schools to report back. It did help the coaching relationship that coaches were former principals and it also provided a level of credibility and commonality for the principal participants. It was felt that it brought deeper and in-context understanding of their work. Coaching credibility and commonality are critical components to the coach-coachee relationship (Boyce et al, 2010).

The coaches in this study mentioned that some of their coaching relationships were weaker than others, resulting in more time and energy devoted to improve the working relationship. Challenges that coaches had to overcome in order to build a strong relational coaching partnership included overcoming feelings of additional work, dealing with principals who were not interested in working with a coach, and the imposed nature of the initiative. Some principals were worried about the additional responsibility imposed by this initiative. A strategy used by some coaches bearing these negative feelings was to re-evaluate the goals and outcomes of the partnership through the coaching process. One coach told how her coaching efforts focused on supporting a principal to properly complete and understand a professional learning cycle. It took two years to accomplish this feat.
Other coaches articulated similar struggles. It was indicated that the imposed nature of the initiative added to their initial struggles. Some resistance ensued as some principals were hesitant to be part of the initiative and this persisted through the coaching process. Lacking the decision to willfully participate in coaching limits its impact. The struggles articulated by coaches are consistent with authors that describe the power of coaching as contingent on the willingness of being coached. A highly-committed coachee is more likely to enact change in his or her performance. The opposite holds true for poorly-committed coachees (Whitmore, 2002).

6.4 Disposition of the Coachee

Another theme that emerged from the findings was the notion that a coachee’s willingness to partake in coaching is an important component of the coaching process. In the SSSI initiative, coaching participation was imposed on principals thus risking a good coaching partnership and potentially impacting their desire to participate. Principals were devoid of input and took their participation in the initiative as a personal reflection of their leadership abilities.

In this study, most principals had a favourable reaction to coaching whereas a few remained skeptical. The skepticism was attributed to the potential workload and the uncertainty of the initiative. As well, some principals felt they had sufficient professional knowledge and skills to lead their schools and did not feel a need for assistance from a coach as they were fine without one.

Based on the coaches’ responses, coaching assignment were based on school data. Principals were assigned coaches based on school data that reflected a need. Low EQAO scores and low pass/fail rates in applied level courses were benchmarks used for coaching assignments. The coaches indicated a mixed reaction with principals they worked with upon receiving coaching support. Some were hesitant of the coaching due to uncertainty and not having worked with a coach before. Others reactions included seeing the coach as spies from the Ministry,
apprehensiveness of the initiative, and uncertainty of how coaching was to improve results. One coach commented that some principals felt it was “The judgement of Cain.” The coaches had to work hard to earn the trust of the principals to make the necessary gains through coaching and to improve the disposition of the coachee to be more engaged in the process. Additionally, most principals felt that a willingness to receive coaching support is a key factor for leadership improvement. Some opt out of coaching due to its stigma. It is perceived that working with a coach is a result of his or her inadequacies and poor performance making leaders less willing to engage in this form of leadership development (Ellam-Dyson & Palmer, 2011).

An alternative method for assigning coaches could have focused on principals willing to work with a coach. Doing so would have shortened the time to foster a positive coaching relationship thus yielding more time towards improvements and gains. Assigning coaches to principals who felt they were working sufficiently without one creates a barrier that is avoidable if an additional selection criterion, such as willingness to participate, was used. Through the interviews of the participants, it was undetermined if candidates opted out of coaching or if others they knew involved in coaching did the same.

Reiss (2005) adds more insight regarding the coachee and their disposition when coached. She highlights that coaches will encounter three types of coachees, and each requires different coaching styles to differentiate. The three include the wide open and ready for change coachee, the fixed in their thoughts and outlooks coachee, and the somewhere in between coachee. In this study, the principal participants viewed coachee disposition as important to the process, however they lacked an introspective viewed on their own disposition. Their reflection focused more on skills required for a proper disposition rather than an internal review of their disposition. Based on the findings, principal responses were grouped into three categories that revealed their perspective on coachee disposition. One group identified openness and a positive
mind-set as a key component for a proper disposition. A second group of principals viewed vulnerability as important, and a third group of principals viewed commitment to the established coaching goals as an important coachee disposition.

Adding to Reiss’s assessment on types of coachee, this study identified participants who fell into various categories. A distinction was evident between novice principals and seasoned principals based on their initial reaction with coaching. Novice principals were in the wide and ready category. Newer principals were eager to work with a credible person to provide them with professional support for their new role. Most other principal participants were in the in-between category. Most were initially hesitant of the coach but their opinions evolved as the coaching process moved forward. Two principals fell into the fixed as their thoughts, and their feelings were rigid initially and throughout the coaching process.

With respect to the coaches in the study, some noted that some principals they worked with had positive disposition that welcomed the support and found it beneficial. In these cases, the principals were more accommodating. Opportunity was used to look at data and to begin working at instructional improvement. The coaches did not indicate whether their coachees were novice or seasoned, so making a cross analysis with the principals in this study is difficult. This belief is consistent with the final stage of the GROW coaching model explained by Whitmore (2002). The final stage of his model is focused on the will of the participant and it outlines that a highly-committed person to the process will make greater strides towards professional improvement.

The coaches noted working with principals with poor disposition required more effort. They had to work harder and had to alter their approach to compensate for the resistance. This was needed to offset the initial poor attitudes of some principals. The coaches did not articulate how their approach differed as well as elaborate on what strategies were used to make the
relationship work. Reiss (2005) claims that maintaining a neutral and nonjudgmental perspective for a coach assists them in the coaching process regardless of the coachee’s disposition. One coach did mention how they spent a lot of time convincing less willing principals of the importance of instruction and how it could be imbedded in the school structure without increasing one’s workload.

A proper disposition allows the coachee to be open to discuss weaknesses. A level of comfort is important to allow for ease of sharing, and the coachee needs to be vulnerable and open to hear suggestions for improvement from the coach. As a receiver of constructive information, a coachee is supposed to utilize it in practice and reflect on it with the coach. Committing to the coaching process is paramount to the degree in which gains are made. One principal in this study mentioned that the coachee needs to work in an uncomfortable place to make the desired gains. Reiss coins this place as the zone of discomfort, and the coachees need to enter this zone for skill improvement (Reiss, 2005). The zone of discomfort is also similar to Vygostksy’ learning theory of zone of proximal development as referenced in the conceptual framework. It suggests that to enhance a person’s knowledge base, the learner needs to reach the zone of proximal development when reflecting on practice. Through a socially interactive and collaborative process, the coachee will be better able to perform desired tasks as the coach will work through areas of need. For the coaching process to be effective, Vygotsky’s learning theory tells us that the school leader must enter this zone for optimal learning as facilitated by the coach (Chaiklin, 2003). It wasn’t revealed how far coaches pushed their coachee to enter the zone of proximal development, nor did the principals in this study reveal this either. To extend coaching research on school principals, a closer examination of the coaching process would give a glimpse into this area that has been minimally explored.
6.5 Coaching Process – Areas of Focus

An aspect of coaching is dealing with issues that coachee’s confront in their professional or personal lives. The conceptual framework viewed the coaching process as a goal-oriented process focused on professional learning and new understandings. In this study, the focus and resulting issues were mainly on the SSSI initiative, however it did extend to other situational issues as well. A common issue among the participants focused on staff challenges. Many principals were dealing with resistive staff, an issue reiterated by coaches as well. Depending on the degree of resistance, it was a daunting challenge for principals to deal with as it could consume a lot of energy. Staff resistance challenges the principalship and, as one principal noted, a staff conflict does impact a principal’s stress level and workload. Some principal’s resort to avoidance of the problem as a coping strategy to minimize stress and workload, ultimately not resolving the issue (Keithwood, K & Azah, V., 2014).

The staff challenges highlighted in this study were similar to a principal work study report conducted by the Ontario Principal Council (Pollock, 2014). It demonstrated that Ontario principals deem teacher resistance to change along with teacher apathy as leading factors that challenge and influence principals’ work. Such challenges can lead principals to poor coping strategies to deal with the stress creating by the challenges. In this same report, it revealed that 25.5% of secondary principals (n = 234) were engaging in self-medicating as a strategy to cope with the mental, physical, and emotional toll of their position. Neither the coaches nor the principal participants reported resorting to negative behaviour to deal with challenges that were revealed in this study. It is unclear if coaching assisted in minimizing the affinity towards negative coping strategies, however further exploration to determine if coaching can help in this area could solidify the value of coaching.
Coaching allowed principals and their coaches to work at positive strategies to navigate the issues. Some principals chose strategies aimed to circumvent the teacher whereas others chose strategies that involved dialogue with the teacher to alleviate the resistance. An example of a strategy was to decide on how to persuade a teacher on the validity of the initiative. It required the principal to convince the teacher of how to imbed the expectation of the initiatives into existing pedagogical practices without it being deemed a workload issue. Another example of a strategy that a coach provided his coachee was to engage in a one-on-one conversation with the resistor. Described as “engaging in courageous conversations,” it is listed as one of five core leadership capacities to help strengthen leadership practices (Ideas Into Action, 2009). Its main purpose is to challenge assumptions of the individual that is candid, open, and trusting. One coach discussed how she and the secondary principal practiced the conversation to minimize a negative outcome with the teacher and it helped the principal be more at ease with the situation.

6.6 Loneliness

Another theme that emerged was the loneliness of the principalship. This was indicated by most principals and coaches. As Ketchtermans et al (2011) describe it, the position and role of the principalship is structurally lonely as there are no members in the school with the same position. Real colleagues holding the same position as a principal in a secondary school do not exist in the workplace. It becomes a struggle between a sense of loneliness and belonging (Ketchtermans et al., 2011). This finding is not overly surprising as a lot is expected of the school principal. They are engaged in working with many stakeholders affiliated with the school community. Included are teachers, students, parents, social agencies, support staff, and local community businesses. Although bearing many expectations in their work, little support is provided to principals, hence the sense of isolation plaguing the principalship (Howard & Mallory, 2008). Many adherents view the coaching process as a tool to help alleviate the
isolation (Bloom et al., 2005; Reiss, 2007; Wise, 2010). The value of this finding extends further than advocating for a coaching mantra to support principals. It reveals the necessity of a social and professional network to ensure longevity and engagement while in the role. It was mentioned that coaching provided a social component leading to a positive coaching experience. Leithwood’s (2014) workload study indicates that administrators manage workload and minimize stress when they engage in professional networks with their colleagues. The demands of the job are barriers to these opportunities thus minimizing the enjoyment of the job. Secondary principals do work with vice-principals, which allows for opportunities for dialogue. However, the onus and responsibility rests with the principal to ultimately make tough decisions for the school. Coaching provided an opportunity for principals to manage stress by engaging in the process and relishing the social component that coaching offers, counteracting the isolationism that plagues the principalship.

### 6.7 Changes in Principal’s Beliefs

As noted in the conceptual framework of the study, an intended outcome of coaching is positive change. It was revealed in this study that some principals felt that coaching changed their beliefs in a positive way. In this study, the degree and type of change in their beliefs varied for each individual. As Leithwood (2014) discussed in his workload study, each administrator possess a set of resources, both unique and personal to the leader, resulting in differentiation of needs.

For some principals, changes in beliefs were focused on having a deeper awareness of their influence with the instructional program. The coaching process forced principals to take an intentional approach towards the instructional program through co-planning with classroom teachers.
One principal felt that they gained a better appreciation of the use of data to make informed decisions. This statement aligns with the work of Katz and Earl (2006) that discusses the process on how to make informed decision using data as the guiding tool for school improvement. Another principal felt her beliefs change from a leader who felt pressure to engage in multiple school goals to a leader focused on a few. The principal indicated more thought and a relentless attitude was required to decide on the chosen goals and to ensure their success. It was not made apparent what the chosen goals were or what challenges were encountered.

Two principal participants spoke about their change in leadership beliefs as to their views on leadership. They felt a more distributive style of leadership was adopted. The two principals did not explain how their views changed and what in the coaching process led to the change. The distributive style of leadership is a perspective that views leaders less as heroes and more as collaborators. Spillane (2005) states that individual principals do not lead schools to greatness. Leadership and greatness requires a dual combination of effective principals and individuals with important tools and structures.

Others mentioned that the coaching process did not change their beliefs but only served to reaffirm their belief systems. The feeling of some participants is that the principalship is filled with many decisions and expectations that cause the principal to second-guess his or her decisions. Through the coaching process, some principal participants felt it helped and provided affirmation while in the role. Affirmation in the areas of continuity of learning and avoiding stagnation as a lead learner were elements that the coaching process assisted with.

A few principals were adamant that the coaching process had not changed their leadership beliefs at all. Their beliefs were solidified before the coaching process and remained
In summary, changes in principal’s beliefs were noted by some participants whereas other indicated that changes did not occur throughout the coaching experience. The principals that noted changes to their beliefs system varied. Some principals were able to recognize the influential role they had with the instructional program. One principal gained a deeper appreciation and recognized the importance of using data to make more informed decisions. Another principal changed her stance on leading with many school goals to accepting that fewer realistic goals were more achievable. Two principals altered their view on leadership to adopt a more distributive style of leadership. The remainder had either noted that changes did not occur with their belief system or that coaching only reaffirmed existing beliefs.

6.8 The Principal: Changes in Principal Practices

Another theme in this study notes the changes that occurred with the principal participants. The conceptual framework of the study views coaching as a tool to enable positive change on the part of the coachee. Findings in this study suggested that principal participants were able to identify changes in leadership practices through the coaching process. Some principals felt that they were more reflective and intentional with their leadership practices in the following areas: instructional awareness, school-related decisions, the deconstruction of a problem, and allowing others to co-lead at appropriate times. This is consistent with other self-reported coaching studies (Goff et al., 2014) and noted changes with participants.

Other principals indicated an increase in frequency of classrooms walkabouts as a change to their leadership practices. A walkabout is defined as a tool allowing principals to examine classroom instruction under a brief timeframe. Aspects of the walkthrough includes: making them routine, identifying observational focus, actually visiting the classroom, and taking
time to reflect after the walkthrough. The intent is to drive a cycle of continuous improvement within the school (Protheroe, 2009). Improvement with this leadership practice allowed for increased visibility in classrooms and throughout the school. It forced the principals to spend less time in their office, leaving paper work for after school hours. In addition, it provided more awareness of the school’s instructional program.

Two principals noted improvements in data analysis and assessing mathematical instruction. Before coaching, the two principals felt insecure in these two areas. At the completion of the coaching process, both principals managed to work through their deficiencies. They were able to share their struggles with their staff, using them as examples to embrace improvements. They felt sharing their struggles was a good approach to leadership, showing that the principal is willing to make improvements in his or her practice as well.

Two other principals articulated that no discernible changes were made to their leadership practices. They felt that they could neither remember nor provide examples that demonstrated improvements to their leadership practices through coaching. The coaching experience was deemed an enjoyable exchange of ideas but it lacked the impact from a change and professional development perspective. A possible explanation related to the experience of the two principals. Both were seasoned administrators and it is more difficult to make changes to leadership practices with experienced principals. Offering coaching to seasoned principals requires a customized approach and a willingness to engage in this form of professional development. Both principals lacked an eagerness to engage in coaching as they felt the support was not necessary.

Seasoned principals have experience leading to a level of comfort and confidence in dealing with on-the-job situations. Hart (1993) deems this stabilization the third stage of a principal’s professional development. Hart explains that principals travel through three major
stages of career development known as the encounter phase, the adjustment phase, and the stabilization phase. Other career stage of development models include Parkay and Hall’s (1992) five stages of development and Days and Bakioglu’s (1996) four development phases. Without explaining each stage in its entirety, the final stage of each model identifies a pinnacle reached by seasoned principals as one of extreme competence and self-fulfilment, making changes to leadership practices difficult.

It would be worth exploring what causes the disconnect between these two principals and their coaching experience. A way to explore the principal’s disconnect might have been to seek the perspective of the coach who worked with them. This would provide a different perspective of the principal’s view and it would help provide deeper insight to the lack of change.

6.9 The Coach: Changes in Principal Practice

In this study, coaches also noted changes in leadership practices with the secondary principals they coached. Four coach participants in this study noticed changes with principals in specific areas of the instructional program. Specifically, it was noted by one coach that one principal became more proficient in his understanding and delivery of a professional learning cycle. According to the coach, it took two years for this principal to fully grasp how to successfully utilize a professional learning cycle. It was unclear what aspects of the PLC caused difficulty and why it took two years to overcome this obstacle while being coached.

Another coach in this study noted that one of the principals she worked with improved in his instructional language acquisition. He became more proficient in dialoguing in the area of instruction and it helped the principal communicate his ideas more effectively. Another coach participant noticed his coachees becoming more involved in the instructional program. Through the coaching process, his change of behaviour evolved from believing that the instructional
program rested solely with the department heads of the school. In this shift, the principal viewed the responsibility to lie less with the department head and more with him as the principal. He began to see himself as a co-learner setting the direction to move the instructional program forward in his school. Another coach noticed that some of the principals she worked with began being more accountable in their role as instructional leaders. Some of the accountability measures included being more intentional in building staff capacity and lessening the focus on the managerial items at meetings. Primarily, principals ensured staff meetings and department head meetings had a professional development focus, building staff capacity measures as much as possible. One of the coach participants noticed changes in the personal resources of the principals she worked with. The main area was in the habits of mind of the principal. The noted changes included being more reflective before a decision is rendered, viewing doubts in their leadership as normal, and lessening the pressure of perfection, realizing learning from mistakes is part of the learning process.

6.10 Revised Conceptual Framework

Specific to the findings in this study, the conceptual framework has been revised to better reflect the emerged themes that resulted from the interviews. Three interrelated concepts depict how coaching supports secondary principals as a professional development strategy. The revised framework encompasses the coaching process, the connection between coach and principal, as well as change outcomes interconnected to form the improvement process needed for leadership coaching.

To drive the coaching process, the coach and the principal each have a vital role for positive coaching outcomes. Pertaining to the coach, he or she requires set skills that establish the foundation for the working relationship with the coachee. A primary skill that the coach requires is a level of expertise. Possessing this skill allows the coach to better comprehend the
complexity of the principals’ role, and in this study the principals felt the experience was enhanced by coaches being retired principals, thus providing a level of commonality. Secondly, the coach needed a degree of understanding of the principal’s struggles. A nonjudgmental approach is also needed in order for the coachee to feel each issue is significant. Lastly, the coach needed to be deemed competent by the coachee to provide the support thus providing a level of credibility.

The other piece to the coaching process is the role of the coachee—in this case the secondary principal. It is contingent on the principal to be committed to the coaching process to drive improvement. As determined from the findings, the coachee needed to be prepared for the coaching process. An important trait of the coachee was a willingness and commitment to engage in the coaching process to drive change. Also included was an openness on the part of the principal to actively discuss personal or professional goals with the coach in order to engage in the change process. As well, the coachees required a level of self-recognition of their own leadership practices in order to improve personally or professionally. To do this properly, self-reflection is required on the part of the principal to commit and work through the challenges that he or she has encountered.

As the coach and the principal both bring key aspects to the coaching process, once engaged the coaching process provided support in two forms. One was from a psychosocial realm and the other was professional. Again the degree in which the support was needed was dependent on the coachee requiring the support. A body of literature recognizes the emotionality of the principalship (Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet, 2011) and Hochschild (2003) discusses the emotional investment that some jobs such as the principalship demand of an individual. He deems it emotional labour. It is predicated on the emotional aspects that occupy the principal’s job. The principal’s job has a social dimension coupled with professional responsibilities that
are in flux. As a role, the principalship can be viewed as the gatekeeper caught in a web of conflicting loyalties. As discussed, it is the chronic condition of leadership life: uncertainty, vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power. The managerial discourse is often used as the measure of principal successes and failures (student achievement score, teacher performance, staff satisfaction), however, the emotionality is an inherent and often overlooked part of the principal’s job. The position and role of the principalship is structurally lonely. There are no members in the school with the same position to be considered real colleagues in the school. It becomes a struggle between a sense of loneliness and belonging (Ketchtermans et al., 2011). Coaching provided a social outlet for the principal participants and it helped with alleviating the isolationism of the principalship identified by participants in this study.

The socioemotional and professional support is an important resource to ensure the effectiveness of the principal. While engaged in the coaching process, the socioemotional and professional support is driven by ongoing dialogue between the coach and the principal. The open dialogue is necessary in order to hear the issues and to take positive steps towards improvements and change.

In the interviews conducted for this study, it was articulated that the coaching process had led to changes in principals in the form of changes to leadership practices and leadership beliefs. To elaborate, the leadership practices refer to elements listed in the Ontario Leadership Framework as well as the changes the principals made to their practices as secondary principals.

As cited from the Ontario Leadership Framework,

A leadership practice is a bundle of activities exercised by a person which reflect the particular circumstances they find themselves and with some shared outcomes in mind. These practices are used in order for leaders to respond to the situations, events and challenges which present themselves in order to accomplish important goals. (OLF, 2012)
The leadership beliefs refer to the perspective or views that the principal holds in regards to leadership and their role in the school. Many of the identified change in practices and beliefs in this study related to the individual leader skills which showed variance for each participant. Improvement in leader skills identified through the coaching process by participants helped them personally and professionally. It was unclear how improvements in leader skills transferred to improvements in their leadership when considering their social and contextualized setting. As referenced earlier, school principals are second only to classroom teachers to having an impact on improving student achievement. Under this premise, improvements to a secondary school principal’s practices and beliefs can indirectly improve school improvement efforts to increase student achievement outcomes.
Figure 6 – Revised Conceptual Framework.

Coach
*Expertise
*Understanding
*Non-Judgemental
*Competent

Principals
Proper Disposition
*Willingness
*Openness
*Commitment
*Self-Recognition

Coaching Process
*Dialogue (Reflection, Feedback, Zone of Proximal Development)
*Trusting
*Positive Working Relationship

Ontario Leadership Framework

Professional Support
*Challenges of Job
*Novice Principal

Socioemotional Support
*Principal Loneliness
*Social Outlet

Changed Leadership Practices
*Individualized Leader Skills

Changed Leadership Beliefs
*Individualized Leader Skills

School Improvement
(Increased student achievement)
Chapter Seven: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview as well as a summary of the entire study including conclusions drawn from the study. The summary will include a review of the research question, the methodology of the study, and a brief overview of the findings. This chapter presents an overview of the themes that emerge from the field of educational research, and limitations to the study. It will also suggest areas that may be considered for further research and practice.

7.1 Summary of the Study

Leadership Coaching is defined as:

An ongoing relationship which focuses on coachees (secondary principal) taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals or desires. Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the coachee’s (secondary principal) level of awareness and responsibility and provides the coachee (secondary principal) with structure, support and feedback. The coaching process helps coaches both define and achieve professional and personal goals faster and with more ease than would be possible otherwise. (International Coach Federation, 2011)

The importance of school leadership is vital for school improvement. It is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affect student learning in schools (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). With a high degree of impact, principal leadership is an important factor in public school education (Harvey, 2011). At times, the importance of school leadership is overshadowed by its increasing challenges. A cultivation of professional learning and high expectations as well as a focus on student achievement and well-being define school leadership. Research shows principals leave the field of education due to mounting pressures, heightened
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responsible, and lack of professional supports to remedy the sink or swim philosophy that
depicts school-based leadership (Sun, 2011). In addition, existing principals are often ill-
prepared and inadequately supported to organize schools to improve learning while managing
all of the other demands of the job (Levine, 2005; Young, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to focus on leadership coaching as a professional
development strategy for secondary school principals. The coaching became available through a
Ministry initiative titled Student Success School Support that aimed to improve student
outcomes in applied level courses. Forming a professional learning team with key members of
the school, the team worked on instructional strategies to make improvements. The coach
worked directly with the school principal to improve the instructional program at the secondary
school where they worked. This study explored the experience of secondary school principals
with leadership coaching. It aimed to examine the impact of leadership coaching on secondary
school principal’s leadership practices evaluating it through the leadership coach and the
coachee—the secondary school principal. This study aimed to examine how secondary school
principals understand and make meaning of their personal experiences while involved in
leadership coaching as a professional development tool. In addition, it aimed to seek the
opinions and ideas of coaches who have worked or continue to work with secondary school
principals involved in leadership coaching and to share their experience with the process.

The primary question that was investigated was the following: How does leadership
coaching as a professional development strategy support secondary principals? To explore this
primary question, three sub-questions were addressed in the study: (1) How do secondary school
principals describe their experience with leadership coaching?; (2) How do coaches describe
their experience with leadership coaching?; and (3) In the coaching process, to what extent do
secondary principals and coaches believe that a change has occurred with secondary principal’s leadership practices and beliefs?

The design of this study was a qualitative research approach in which semi-structured interviews were conducted in line with the primary and the sub-questions mentioned. The study interviewed 12 secondary school principals who worked in schools located in Ontario and five leadership coaches who were part of the Ministry SSSI initiative implemented by the Ministry of Education in Ontario. The coaches were retired principals hired and trained by the Ontario Principals Council in partnership with the Ministry as leadership coaches who worked specifically with principals in low-performing schools.

The method used to gather data for this study was a semi-structured interview. The appropriateness of selecting this approach is supported by the notion that this is a good way to collect data from a group of people representing broad ranges of ideas (Merriam, 2009). The semi-structured interview consisted of using identical questions for each participant. Patton suggests that using identical questions for each participant is done to limit “the possibility of bias that comes from having different interviews for different people, including the problem of obtaining more comprehensive data from certain persons while getting less systematic information from others” (p. 98). Each secondary school principal and coach were asked a series of questions related to leadership coaching followed by probing questions to solicit deeply-held opinions and beliefs of the investigative topic. Specific questions were designed specifically for the principal participants (See Appendix A for principal interview guide) as well as for the coach participants (See Appendix B for coach interview guide). The interview responses provided answers to the following questions:
7.1.1 How do Secondary School Principals describe their experience with Leadership Coaching? The primary way coaching was provided to schools was through the Student Success School Initiative. Schools were identified by the Ministry of Education based on low-performing results. One goal of receiving a coach was to focus on improved student achievement. The objective was largely determined by the Ministry with the purpose of raising pass/fail rates in core courses at the applied level. This goal followed a prescriptive process with minimal input from the school principal. The purpose of the coach was to provide support for the principal in creating a professional learning team with key members at the school and using data to improve instructional practices in applied level core courses. Established goals by the principal participants in this study was an area that principal had little input. In many coaching models such as GROW framework provided by Whitmore (2002) (Goals, Reality, Options, Will), established goals by the coachees is an impetus for the coaching process. In this case, the imposed nature of the coach removed this option and this study was not able to discern what personal goals beyond the goals of the initiative were identified by the participants.

The provision of a coach was imposed on the principal, which caused mix reactions from principals in this study. Some principals initially viewed the coach as a watchdog for the Ministry which hindered the progress of the coaching process. With time, the relationship between the principal participants and the coach gained in trust and purpose thus solidifying the coaching relationship. It was determined that most of the principals were initially hesitant in working with a coach but realized that a change in disposition was needed if the goals of the initiative were to be realized.

In conjunction with the goals of the initiative, some principal participants articulated that the coach provided professional support with contentious issues that they were dealing with at the time. Predominantly occupying the principals’ time were personnel issues, and through the
coaching process it allowed most of the principal participants to work through the issues with the help of their coaches.

Based on their coaching experience, it was articulated by each principal that coaching can serve as a tool to help ineffective principals, however it depends on what needs improvement. Some areas, such as improving the relational aspect of the job, do require a long-term coaching commitment which school boards are unlikely to invest in due to the potential cost.

It was articulated in this study that most of the principals benefited from the coaching experience. It provided an element of professional and emotional support lacking in the principalship. The professional support focused on areas of improvement outside the SSSSI initiative, which varied for principals. Some improved in the area of instructional capacity. Others appreciated the opportunity to share thinking with an outside voice and having the opportunity of working with someone with a different perspective. Additionally, the emotional support was beneficial for some of the principals as it helped alleviate the loneliness of the job. Coaching also provided a social outlet through which to bounce ideas and to act as a sounding board. It allowed for affirmation when certain principals made decisions relating to school matters and it was an opportunity that some principals were appreciated of.

Most of the participants had a positive experience with the coaching process. Some of the principals mentioned that due to the positivity of the experience that they would consider coaching as an option once retired. It was also articulated that the relationship between the principal participants and their coach was good, possibly explaining why the coaching experience was positive for the participants. It did help that the coaches were retired principals which appeased the principal participants in this study. They felt it provided a better understanding of the principalship as well as the context and culture of working in secondary
schools. Alternately, it was mentioned by several principal participants in this study that they had heard of other principals having a poor rapport with their coach; however, it was unclear what transpired from that.

In this study, two principals felt the process was uneventful and gained little from the coaching experience. They felt the coaching process was more of a social outlet. Although having a social outlet is valuable, it failed to build the professional capacity intended of coaching. It was viewed more as an exchange of ideas and opinions and less of an improvement tool. Based on this, it could be discerned that coaching as an improvement tool is not for everybody.

7.1.2 How do coaches describe their experience with leadership coaching? In this study, all five coaches interviewed enjoyed the coaching process and reacted positively to it. It was deemed enjoyable as it provided a sense of nostalgia. It afforded the coaches who were also retired principals an opportunity to return to a secondary setting to reconnect with the dealings of a secondary school, although in a different capacity.

The coaches articulated that they had good relationship with most of the principals they worked with. It was also mentioned that some relationships were poor and required more effort to establish a positive working relationship. Each coach had to deal with at least one resistive principal although the cause of resistance was unclear. It could be postulated that the resistance from principals was attributed to the stigma of working with a coach or the coach being deemed a Ministry watchdog as articulated by some of the principal participants in this study. To counteract the resistance, the coaches had to invest more energy in fostering a positive working relationship which prolonged the outcomes of coaching.

The coaches did articulate the importance of building a positive relationship with their coachee as it is an impetus for a positive coaching experience. The elements of trust, a non-
judgmental approach, upholding a level of competence, and expertise as a coach are key elements to foster a positive coaching relationship that drives the coaching process.

In this study, the coaches mentioned that work with the principal focused primarily on the SSSI initiative although it did extend beyond the SSSI initiative as well. The work outside of the initiative largely focused on teachers. The coaching process was used to deal with teacher resistance or, in other cases, ineffective teachers. It was mentioned by the coaches that the strategy used to work on the issue was to dialogue through different scenarios. Each scenario had an outcome based on a simulated conversation with the teacher and ramifications of each scenario were discussed. How each scenario played out in reality was undetermined from the study. As indicated from the interviews, a coaching strategy used included dialoguing, determining the best course of action in dealing with the ineffective teacher. In essence, the principals were being coached on how to effectively engage in a professional conversation with the teacher and used the coaching process to prepare for the courageous conversation with the teacher.

From this study, it was determined from the coaches that leadership coaching supports the secondary principals in three areas as mentioned by the coaches—as a social outlet, as an alleviator of loneliness, and as a tool for improvement for ineffective principal. From this study, coaching was deemed an appreciative support as articulated by the coaching participants. It allowed for affirmation of thinking and it provided a social component often lacking as the stress of the job can minimize the enjoyment of the position.

Furthermore, this study highlights the loneliness of the principalship as articulated by the coach participants. It was mentioned that very little support is provided to principals, hence the sense of isolation plaguing the principalship (Howard & Mallory, 2008). The participants in this study viewed the coaching process as a tool to help alleviate the isolation. The value of this
finding extends further than simply providing a critical friend to improve performance in the form of a coach. It is also a support for the wellbeing of the secondary school principal.

7.1.3 In the coaching process, to what extent do secondary principals and coaches believe that a change has occurred with secondary principal’s practices? It was felt by both principals and coaches that changes were noted with principal practices. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a distinction was made to decipher between leader development and leadership development. Leadership development was explained as helping people work with others by applying social understanding to organizational imperatives whereas leader development emphasized individual based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with leadership roles. Most of the changes noted were specific to leader skill development.

In this study, the principal respondents were grouped into three categories based on responses regarding their changes. Some principal participants noted changes to the personal leadership resources portion of the leadership framework. The main area was in being more thoughtful with their practice. Some of the examples provided by the respondents included being more thoughtful with the instructional program of the school, being more thoughtful in making school-related decisions, being able to deconstruct a problem quicker, and being more reflective with leadership decisions. Another group of principals noted changes in their practice by being more intentional with the instructional program. A main way this was demonstrated was increasing the frequency of walkabouts and the frequency of classroom visits throughout the day.

Two principals saw changes and improvement specific to their leader skill deficit. One principal needed to be more proficient with analysis of data in order to make better decision and she felt it was achieved. The other principal needed help with understanding mathematical concepts so she could better support her teachers, and it was felt coaching allowed her to make
changes and improvements necessary. Finally, two principal respondents felt that no changes in practices occurred as a result of the coaching process.

From the coaches’ perspectives, changes in leadership practices occurred with the secondary principals they worked with. In this study, four coach participants noticed changes with principals in specific areas of the instructional program. The changes included taking a more active role in the instructional domain of the school, being more intentional and leading with more accountability with staff professional development, and improving the language of instruction in order to better communicate the instructional vision. One coach participant noticed changes in the personal resources of the principals she worked with. The main area was in the habits of mind of the principal where it was noted that the principal became more reflective before making a decision, dealing with self-doubt, and lessening the pressure of perfection.

In comparing the noted changes of coach and principal respondents, it was evident that both groups of respondents identified changes in the instructional practices of the principal. How the changes of instructional of practice were exemplified varied. As mentioned some changed staff meeting practices to include a professional development focus on instructional practices, others increased frequency of walkabouts and classroom visits, whereas others became more active and involved in the instructional program of the school. As well, both coach and principal respondents noted changes in the personal leadership resources areas of the leadership framework. Articulated changes included thoughtfulness of practices, improved habits of mind and being more reflective in decision making practices. A noted difference between the coach and the principal respondents was that the coaches did not indicate if a lack of change was noted by principals they worked with, whereas two principal respondents did. It
was indicated that coaching had little impact on their practices and no changed occurred as a result of it.

7.1.4 In the coaching process, to what extent do secondary principals and coaches believe that a change has occurred with secondary principal’s beliefs? As one coach in this study articulated, before a change in practice occurs a change in beliefs must precede it. This aligns with the notion of Vygotsky’s learning theory as the coaching process works in the zone of proximal development. The coaching process is intended to engage the coachee in the proximity to current practice and/or knowledge where the person is most likely to learn. It suggests that to enhance a person’s knowledge base, the learner needs to reach the zone of proximal development when reflecting on certain leadership practices and beliefs. It is achieved through an interaction between someone less competent—the coachee—working with someone more competent—the coach. Through a socially interactive and collaborative process, the coachee will be better able to perform desired tasks as the coach will work through areas of need. For the coaching process to be effective, Vygotsky’s learning theory on the zone of proximal development needs to be enacted. It was noted that variations existed in noted belief system changes, as articulated by the principals. The variation of principal responses were grouped into three categories: One group of principals identified changes in their belief systems, a second group articulated an affirmation of existing leadership beliefs, and a final group noted that no changes occurred in their belief system through coaching. With the principal group that noted changes, there were differences in the type of change articulated. Some principals noted that they garnered a deeper influential awareness with the instructional program. Some principals noted an evolved view of leadership viewing it more as distributive and less hierarchical. Another group noted that a “less is more” approach towards the principalship
emerged. They were able to focus on fewer school goals in order to channel more energy towards these chosen goals.

In this study, the findings from the coach respondents did not reveal changes in the principal’s beliefs through the coaching process. This is an area that would require further exploration to garner more information.

7.2 Overview of Themes

Several themes emerged from the findings of this study. First, most of the participants in this study had a positive coaching experience. This would include both the coaches interviewed in this study as well as the principals. In regards to the principal participants articulating a positive coaching experience, being told that they would be working with a coach was met with initial hesitation. Most of the principal participants in this study had little information about the function of a coach, which created uncertainty and a lack of clarity at the start of their relationship with an assigned coach. Over time, this feeling among the principal participants changed as time passed and the relationship between the coach and principal fostered. Some of the principals articulated that they had to alter their disposition to welcome the coach and use the coaching experience as an asset as opposed to a barrier to take school improvement measures.

A second theme that emerged was the relational component of the coaching experience. It is critical component for its success. All of the principals interviewed in this study mentioned that they had a good working relationship with their coach. Some principal participants had worked with different coaches and this feeling still emerged. Selecting coaches who were retired principals helped with the rapport between the coach and the principal as it provided a deeper understanding of the complexity involved in the principal’s role. The coach participants in this study also mentioned the importance of relationship building in the coaching process. As
discussed earlier, the coaches interviewed in this study had to work harder with some principals
to foster rapport. Some mentioned that the benchmark of success shifted with the poor working
relationship. A plausible explanation relates to having the coach being imposed on the principal
cause’s reluctance. Imposing the coaching relationship does limit its effectiveness as the will of
the coachee will be minimized. The will of the coachee is a driving force in the coaching
process (Whitmore, 2002). It is unclear what caused this barrier but it would be worth exploring
in a more in-depth manner for other plausible explanations.

A third theme that emerged is the supportive nature of coaching. It was viewed by the
participants in this study that leadership coaching was a support tool for principals. It was
articulated by the principal participants that it provided a form of affirmation with their
decisions and a beneficial tool for reaching the goals of the SSSI initiative. Supporting the SSSI
initiative was the primary reason for the coach being assigned to a principal. From the
perspective of the principal and coaches interviewed in this study, coaching provided an element
of support that helped minimize the feeling of isolation that plagues the principalship. As well,
the feeling among the participants is that coaching is an appropriate professional development
tool that can support an ineffective principal. However, how its success is contingent on how it
is used. Coaching needs to be used as a professional support rather than as a disciplinary tool to
maximize its effectiveness.

A fourth theme that emerged from this study was that changes in practices and beliefs
were articulated by most of the participants in this study. The changes in practices and beliefs
were specific to the principal and the needs varied as noted by the participants. The changes in
beliefs varied with the principal participant and some of the changes included being more active
in the instructional program, developing a greater appreciation with data use in decision-making,
seeing themselves as co-learners in the instructional program, and viewing leadership as more
distributed. On the other hand, the coach respondents did not mention that changes in beliefs occurred with the principals they worked with. Further exploration would be required to examine reasons why.

In terms of leadership practices, some of the principals articulated that they were more active in their walkabouts, more intentional with staff professional development at department and staff meetings, and developed more proficiency in instructional language, which allowed for better communication with school instructional goals.

Several principals in this study felt that the coaching experience only served as a supportive tool for the SSSI initiative and were not changed by the experience. It only affirmed existing beliefs that had been formed while in the role as principal prior to the coaching experience.

7.3 Contribution to the Scholarly Field

Evaluations of coaching studies have relied primarily on self-reported data to elicit changes in coaching (Ely, 2010). The intent of this study was to go beyond self-reporting data common in leadership coaching studies to include both perspective of coach and coachee. However, soliciting opinions from coach and coachee pairings is in conflict of confidentiality coaching agreements and poses ethical concerns making it difficult to use this type of data. On the other hand, it did bring two sets of data sources together premised on self-reporting albeit disconnected. In doing so, it added an additional layer of data that extended beyond the positive reporting of school principals involved in leadership coaching.

The knowledge gained from this study adds to the Canadian knowledge base on leadership coaching in two areas. The first is from an Ontario context and the second from a secondary school perspective. It was my hope to expand the knowledge base of leadership
coaching to include secondary school principals working in Ontario Schools. The findings from the study add to the scarce Canadian based literature on this topic. A lack of research on leadership coaching from a Canadian context as well as a secondary school perspective has been noted (Williamson, 2011, Robinson et al. 2009).

The revised conceptual framework added to the scholarship on leadership coaching and its importance as a support mechanism. It provides support from a professional standpoint as well as from a socio-emotional one. The principalship is a lonely job and it can weigh on the individual. The plethora of decisions that a secondary principal makes limits the opportunity to engage in deep discussions to analyze a decision. In this study, coaching provided one on one support lacking in the principalship and it was a valued asset. Further analysis is needed to determine if the educational sector can sustain a financial investment to support principals through leadership coaching. More importantly, would the investment return the outcome desired? Determining this does pose challenges as researchers would need to find out how long a coach should be employed for a positive outcome and the cost associated to provide such a service for that period of time.

This study did elucidate that principals appreciated working with coaches who had a contextual understanding of the work they do. As retired principals, the coaches were well received and it fostered a strong coaching relationship. Certified coaches used in the business sector and the healthcare sector are extensively used (Carey, W. Philibon, D. & Cummings, G., 2011) where in this study coaches were trained through the Ontario Principals Council through a workshop model approach. It also provided information that a positive outcome can still be reached with OPC trained coaches as opposed to ICF certified coaches which is a more affordable option in the educational sector. It still would be worth exploring coaching research using ICT certified coaches as it might further enhance the expertise element of coaching. It
remains to be determined what aspects would be improved using ICF certified coaches in lieu of OPC trained retired principals.

As part of the Ontario Leadership Strategy in 2007, the government initiated a pilot project on mentoring and coaching. Serving as a foundation in 2008, the pilot project evolved into a province-wide initiative on mentoring and coaching. Since then, the Ontario Leadership Strategy provides opportunities for boards to attract and develop leaders of the highest quality. The two primary goals it to attract the right people to the principalship and to help school principals develop into the best possible instructional leaders (retrieved from www.edu.gov.on.ca). The findings from this study may help to further develop this strategy for Ontario school boards and schools alike to include leadership coaching as a means for principal development and support that includes all currently practicing administrators.

It was the intent of the study to solicit the experience of coaching from both secondary school principals and coaches. As well, it was intended to explore changes on leadership practices and beliefs as articulated by secondary school principals and coaches through coaching. The findings add to the scholarship and knowledge base specific to these two areas on leadership coaching.

With the goal of improved student achievement, it was of the opinions of secondary principal and coaches in this study that coaching can help principals especially those who are struggling. Coaching is not a panacea for all to deal with school leadership struggles but it can make important changes when a commitment is made.

It was the intent of the study to identify leadership practices and beliefs that are improved through leadership coaching. Areas were identified and this will aid in school improvement efforts as coaching can be used strategically to support these efforts.
7.4 Limitations of the Research

As with all research studies, limitations to the research existed, which will be discussed in detail. The first limitation was the 12 participants who agreed to participate in the study. Many of the participants worked in the GTA spanning five districts. The potential generalizability of the findings would have been greater if other districts in Ontario were represented, especially rural districts. Although advertisements in provincial principal association magazines were published and posted, I was still unable to reach out to rural districts that would have provided an added dimension and perspective to the study. In addition, the participants worked entirely in Ontario, limiting the potential generalizability for principals involved in leadership coaching experiences across Canada. Similar research using a sample spanning other areas of Ontario and Canada would help verify the findings of this study.

A second limitation was the lack of cross-representation of participants. The representation of participants who agreed to partake in this study did not reflect a diverse cross-section. Many of the participants in this study were white, reflecting a small sample and overlooking a larger multicultural group consistent in Ontario. Including other ethnic groups would have provided further insight into the research questions while providing diversification of responses seeking out the widest possible range. The same is noted for coaches in this study. All coach participants were female, which again provides a small cross section of opinions and views that limited the research findings. Including male coaches as well as other ethnic groups would have furthered the diversification of the participants.

A third limitation was the time-constraint on the interviews. Each principal participant had allocated 45 minutes to participate in the interview. Many of the principals interviewed in this study work in complex settings with unpredictable unforeseen challenges. Most of the
principals who volunteered to be interviewed in this study had scheduled me in to talk with them after school hours, however it was done with the pressure of the position. It would have been more reliable and valid had the interview been conducted in a more relaxed setting to ensure responses were more thoughtful and less constrained by the pressure of time. At times the interview was interrupted due to pressing matters and a change of location outside of the work environment would have provided more time to probe for answers with more depth.

The extent of the research findings is limited solely to the participants in this study. As well, the views and discourse provided in this study are reflective of 12 secondary school principals and five leadership coaches. The small sample size of 17 participants is a limitation to the research. To overcome this, a larger sample would allow for more breadth and generalization to the findings. As well, five coaches were interviewed. The purpose for involving coaches was to provide triangulation to the data, but five coaches does limit the validity. Ensuring a larger sample size of coaches also would have added more depth and generalization to the findings. As mentioned earlier, the intent of this study was to go beyond self-reporting of data to include both perspectives of coach and coachee. I was unable to solicit views and opinions from coaches and coachees who were paired together through the coaching process. The concern is that it posed challenges due to the potential breach of confidentiality from the coaching process in addition to causing ethical concerns by revealing coaching conversations during the coaching process.

Another limitation involved elements of the coaching process. This study was unable to provide data that might have provided more insight regarding the coaching process. One element was in the inability to discern how coaches and coachees were matched at the board level. Matching is a critical part of the coaching process, so not knowing how this was done minimizes it usefulness. A second element missing was not being unable to discern the timeframe for each coaching relationship. It might have altered the findings and provided more
Another limitation was the experiences of the coaches. The coaches in the study were retired secondary principals who similarly worked in both English Catholic and English public systems. The coaches were trained through OPC (Ontario Principal Council) under the provision of the Ministry of Education and had to complete a training course. Although the coaches in this study understood the context of secondary schools, they lacked ICF training. The International Coach Federation coaching model follows the following criteria: (1) A minimum of 125 hours of coach-specific training; (2) Training on all ICF Core Competencies and the ICF Code of Ethics; (3) A minimum of six observed-coaching sessions with an experienced coach; (4) A comprehensive final exam that evaluates a student's coaching competency. The certification provides a consistent baseline with the coaches which was lacking in this study. This was coupled with no data regarding the training and curriculum experience of the coaches in this study. Gathering this additional information might have allowed for a comparison to the ICF training content and process that is used as an international benchmark. Although the principal participants appreciated working with retired principals who were coaches, certified coaches under the ICF umbrella might have enhanced the authenticity of the coaching process.

A final limitation from the results relates to my personal judgment as a researcher. As I was the primary source for data collection as well as analysis, my subjectivities and biases had to be personally controlled. As suggested by Peshkin (1988) “one’s subjectivities can make a distinctive contribution to the data that the researcher has collected.” Purposeful steps were taken to ensure the data and findings were authentic and consistent with a qualitative research
methodology. The constant comparative method was used in the analysis of data and identical questions were used for each participant limit “the possibility of bias that comes from having different interviews for different people, including the problem of obtaining more comprehensive data from certain persons while getting less systematic information from others” (p. 98). In addition, I used the conceptual framework of the study to guide my thoughts and ideas and to help organize the discussion of my findings. It ensured that the compiled categories were sensitive, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, as well as conceptually congruent as suggested by Merriam (2009).

7.5 Implications for Future Research

This study focused on the leadership coaching experience of secondary school principals and coaches working through the Student Success School Support initiative. The principal participants varied in experience which provided variety and variability to the study. It would be worth extending the research by focusing on participants who are seasoned. In this study novice principals were more receptive to coaching, however studying experienced principals would add to the scholarship on leadership coaching. Exploring leadership coaching with seasoned principals would add knowledge on specific professional needs and see if performance improvements are noted with seasoned principals.

As well, it would be worth carrying out impact studies on leadership coaching as a strategy for school improvement. Studies that focus on principals with underperforming schools, principals in low socioeconomic communities, as well as with principals struggling in their role would add to the scholarship on leadership coaching. Furthermore, a cross-examination of secondary schools where principals are engaged in leadership coaching in comparison to those without a coach would provide further information on the impact of coaching on secondary school principals faced with similar and different types of leadership challenges. Finally, a study
that explores the outcomes of coaching would provide much needed knowledge to the existing scholarship on coaching. A suggested methodology to explore this phenomenon would be to use randomized controlled trials on the coaching process. (Mcdowell & Lai, 2014). Simply put, we need to expand our evidence-base to determine if coaching yields the desired outcomes. This should be done without being attached to an initiation such as the SSSI initiative as the focus of coaching would be directed at the performance of the individual rather than supporting the initiative. However, without a clear purpose the usefulness of coaching might be a harder sell.

In this study, the coaching experience was not a consideration for coach selection. However, examining the experience of the coach would provide added scholarship on the impact of the coach on the coaching process correlated with coaches with different experience profiles. It would determine if the degree of change is impacted by the experience of the coach as well as the coach’s effectiveness. Elements such as the time needed for coaching improvement measured against the effectiveness of the coach should be considered. As well, research is minimal on how coaches leverage their knowledge, skills, and experience to build professional capacity with school principals to lead school improvement initiative (Meddaugh, N, 2014).

A choice to work with a coach was not provided to the principals in this study and information was not gathered on the matching processes. The participants did make the best of the situation and noted changes were still identified. It would be worth to explore further had participants chosen willingly to work with a coach if changes would be noticed to leadership practices and beliefs. When the coachee has a disposition to improve professional performance, it would be valuable to determine the degree of change that results.

Literature highlights the importance of a positive working relationship in the coaching process. The findings of my research highlight this point. Little research on leadership coaching
and how poor working relationship impacts the coaching process exists. Further examination on
the elements of a poor as well as positive working relationships would be useful. It would
provide information on how to repair broken coaching relationships when the alternative is
costlier. An alternative to mending the relationships as opposed to finding another coach would
be more cost efficient.

Leadership coaching is a costly intervention both in terms of financial costs and
opportunity costs as cited in previous studies (Gorham el al. 2008; Knight, 2012; Lochmiller,
2014). In this study, monetary information was absent. Cost breakdowns to include both schools
and district would add needed information on the investment of coaching. A financial
investment was made on the part of the Ministry to subsidize the SSSI initiative, but it lacked a
return of investment analysis. In times of budgetary austerity, a cost analysis on leadership
coaching with school principals in relation to other forms of professional support would help
make informed decisions on monetary allocations from system perspectives and provide
ongoing professional support to system leaders with the notion of improved student
achievement.

7.6 Implications for Future Practice

Findings from this study may be worthy of further recommendations at the system and
Ministry level. With the principalship bearing a high degree of emotional labour, providing a
coaching strategy is a beneficial option to help support school principals. The Ontario
Leadership Framework identifies personal leadership resources as important for the role, but it is
unclear on how a leader should develop these key domains to become better at the role.
Coaching could be used as a leadership improvement strategy and aid principals in their
personal or professional challenges. I would argue that a coaching strategy would be more
effective as a performance enhancement tool than a performance appraisal that is currently in
place in Ontario. As well, coaching should be offered as a service to school administrators through school boards when the need and the willingness of the principal to engage is present. A financial commitment on the part of the Ministry would allow school board to provide this option similar to that of mentoring programs for newly appointed system leaders. Its financial model is based on proportional funding which provides money to school boards to support this initiative depending on how many administrators are newly appointed (see Reach Every Student, 2009). The same model can be used for coaching that supports struggling administrators or those requesting support.

Most participants in this study articulated changes in leadership practices and beliefs. Most of it focused on the instructional capacity of the job, a key driver for school improvement (Fullan, 2013). If coaching expanded beyond the SSSI focus, it is likely that other positive changes would have been noted by the participants. Other aspects of the Ontario Leadership Framework are equally important and require just as much attention for principal improvement. An example would be dealing with resistive staff and strategies that help alleviate this glaring problem noted in this study. The Catholic Principals Council of Ontario (CPCO) and Ontario Principals of Ontario (OPC) are two associations that should invest in a coaching strategy and provide it as a service as part of its membership commitment. Funds invested normally for professional development workshops can be reallocated to support a coaching agenda to support their membership.

Also, it was evident that newer principals appreciate and possibly require support to navigate through the infancy of the principalship. Currently as I see it, there are structures in place (i.e. mentoring) to support novice administrators, but coaching allows for a more in-depth support to principals. Coaching could also serve as a support for seasoned administrators but it would be more effective if it was made voluntary so it would be more beneficial to the system.
As mentioned earlier, leadership development has focused more on the leader and less on leadership. As a distinction, leader development is focused on individual skill development whereas leadership development is focused on the social interaction in an organization that the leader undertakes. It is best exemplified by the interaction that occur in practice and in context.

In relation to the Ontario Leadership framework, the personal resources are focused on leader skills with psychological factors connected to it and the other domains focus on leadership development connected to social interactions. The framework recognizes the importance of both leader and leadership skill development that are needed for leadership effectiveness. Others have shared this view as well (Day, 2001). It is suggested that principal development should focus on both leader and leadership development (Dalakoura, 2010). In this study, the changes identified by the participants focused on leader improvement which carries value to enhance leadership effectiveness. An added dimension to the coaching experience could focus on leadership development of the secondary principals which would require observation of the principal in practice and in context. This would make it more valuable as a professional development tool for experienced principals as well. Not only would this provide an introspective look on leader skill improvement from the principal, it will also allows an external perspective on leadership development from the coach. A duality that will reframe leadership effectiveness and professional development moving forward.
7.7 Development of a Coaching Program

Based on the outcomes of this study, I will make a few recommendations on what I believe are key components to consider when developing a coaching program for school districts provincially.

A key component to consider is focused on the recruitment and assignment of the coach. The strength or Achilles heel of a coaching program is contingent on the coach working in the field engaged in the coaching process. A key skill that a coach should possess is a deep understanding of the contextual working environment that a principal must navigate. Aspects such as working with different union groups, ensuring varied programming for students to enhance student interest and working under a fiscally responsible lens are a few highlights. In this study, retired principals were selected as coaches and it helped support the secondary principals in their work. It is a preferred strategy to ensure that a coach possesses a contextual understanding of working the working environment. Coaches such as retired principal or retired system leaders are good candidates to recruit for district coaching programs. As well, an added preference is that the assigned coach has minimal professional connection to the district in which the school principal works. Doing so eliminates familiarity with personnel in the district who might be the cause of the principal coachee needing support and, in doing so, it will assist with the confidentiality and trusting nature of the coaching partnership both important for its success.

Certification of the coach is an important aspect in the recruitment process. A highly certified coach under the ICF would be more advantageous to make gains expected of a coaching program. In this study, the coaches were certified through a collaborative effort between the Ontario Principal Council and the Ontario Ministry of Education. It followed a workshop approach to equip retired principals with coaching skills to provide the coaching
support for secondary school principals. The ICF model – the global leader in coaching certification- would be ideal to support a coaching program. It aims to train and prepare coaches to provide high level expertise to support coaching as an improvement tool.

A second component is to ensure intentionality of pairing between coach and coachee and that a selection process guides it so the effectiveness of the coaching relationship is maximized. A good strategy to employ is to select coach-coachee pairings based on areas of interests. If a connection is already established, it would provide an impetus for a strong coaching relationship. Another strategy is to base the pairing on professional commonalities. It would be advantageous if the coach has worked at a school similar to the coachee involved in the coaching program to establish a contextual connection. This would allow for deeper understanding of the issues that the principal might be navigating and it will provide more guidance and support through coaching. Considering a selection process for a coaching program is important to maximizing positive coaching relationships, however as a caveat, a breakdown can still occur and a follow up plan is encouraged. Either temporarily suspending the coaching partnership until the issue is resolved or consider reassigning the coach or coachee to work with someone different could be two options to explore.

Another key component is to ensure that a willingness exists for the coachee to partake in a coaching program. In this study, the coaching initiative was imposed on the secondary principal relying on school data that identified it as needing support. This method of identifying participants caused hesitancy among the participants in this study thus minimizing its effectiveness. Another strategy to employ is to volunteer and be a willing participant of a coaching program. Reiss (2007) provides a readiness checklist to recruit potential coachees to be part of a coaching program. Among the 16 item checklist, two criteria are that the coachee is excited to work with a coach and that he/she wants to grow is his/her professional life. The gains
of a coaching program are more fruitful personally and professionally when the coachee is a willing and committed participant.

A final key component to consider is the length of time of the coaching program. It is recommended that the coaching commitment be established for a minimum of a year with end goal of three years to ensure a fluid working relationship between the coach and the coachees. As well, it will ensure that the coaching relationship be established and reach a level of comfortableness so the coaching relationship and its end goals are reached. With this in mind, a three year coaching commitment requires a monetary investment for such a venture. I would argue that it would be money well spent on a vital cog to the educational enterprise such as professional development through coaching of school principals (or systemic leaders). To obtain the funding, a redistribution of allocated funds from one initiative to another is an option. Proportional funding to drive the mentoring program in Ontario is an example. Currently, funds are provided to school districts to support and implement mentoring initiatives for newly appointed administrators. The return of investment for a mentoring pales in comparison to a coaching program that would be accessible not only to novice administrator but also to seasoned leaders in a system as well.

In summary, the development of a coaching program in school districts requires consideration of several key components. Among them include the recruitment and certification of coaches involved in the program, the willingness and commitment of coaches that volunteer to be part of the program, the selection criteria used to identify coaching pairings as well as a minimum time commitment of one year connected to the coaching program are recommendation that could be used to establish a coaching program. The recommendations are general in scope void of district context which would require a planning committee to ensure the context of the district is considered when a coaching program is in the process of being developed.
7.8 Conclusion

Based on the participants in this study, the coaching experience was generally positive. Both the principal participants and the coach participants articulated this. Coaching provided an element of support for the participants that helped guard against the isolation of the principalship. Through the coaching process, it allowed the participants to change leadership practices and beliefs for professional improvement. The degree of change varied for each participant and a few participants articulated that coaching has little impact on changing their leadership practice and beliefs. This indicates that coaching is not for everyone, or perhaps that it is not carried out equally well in every situation. However, the coachee’s disposition or willingness to engage in the coaching process does bear importance on its success. Most of the participants had a positive disposition from the onset of the coaching experience or improved their disposition to have a positive experience with coaching. Some participants made little gains with their coaching experience. The reasons for this were not explained in depth, however the responses did seem to be limited to feeling fine without a coach and having confidence in their abilities as principals.

As indicated, the coaching relationship is vital component of the coaching process. The principal participants all indicated having a positive rapport with the coach, which made the experience pleasurable. For the most part, the coach participants had good working relationships with the secondary principals they coached, however some experienced challenges. In these situations, the coaches articulated that they had to make adjustments in their approach and goals given the reality.

The supportive nature of coaching for the principalship was an important finding from both an emotional and professional aspect. The principals as well as the coaches articulated the loneliness experienced while in the position as well as of the professional demands. The
principals were appreciative of the coach supporting them professionally and emotionally in times of calm and in times of unrest.

In context, coaching is a professional development tool designed to support and improve performance. The question is, who decides what areas require improvement? Does the onus rest with the coach, the coachee, or the organization? If it is the coachee, he or she will have an idea on improvements needed in their own leadership practices. If it is the coach, the benefit is that he or she will provide a different lens on what changes are necessary for the coachee to improve. Alternatively if it is the school district, they will determine the competencies that principals require to fulfill the vision of the organization. This option is rare as research indicates that principals feel that districts do a poor job of providing quality professional development (Seashore-Louis, et al. 2010).

Enhancing principal leadership in Ontario is achieved in one of two ways: either through recruitment of good leaders or investment in ongoing professional support. Recruitment is beyond the scope of this research study, however professional support is what coaching provides. Secondary principals navigate in complex (at times turbulent) school environments, facing internal and external pressures to improve student achievement. As secondary principals are expected to provide strong school leadership in times of increased expectations, it becomes imperative that investment on professional support and capacity building is continued. It is imperative how coaching is used and viewed by principals. It must not be viewed as an additional burden for principals as this will suppress the potential of coaching. Rather, it needs to be structured as a support and delivered in this manner.

The intent of this research was to add to the scholarship on leadership coaching from a Canadian context and its value as a professional support and performance improvement tool for secondary school principals. Others continue to use coaching to provide professional
development and tailored support for principals. As part of “Districts taking Charge of the Principal Pipeline,” six large districts in the US have embraced coaching as a means to provide professional support to its district principals with a larger focus on leadership capacity building. Coaching along with mentoring had a strong impact among participating principals as a perceived stimulus to change in professional practice (Turnbull, B. Riley, D. & MacFarlane, J., 2015). Although focused on novice principals, this project shows coaching’s usefulness as a professional support to the educational leadership sector. It is imperative that research on leadership coaching continues as it does have a place in education to build professional capacity for effective as well as ineffective school principals—novice or seasoned.
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Appendix B – Interview Questions: Secondary Principal Participants

1. How long have you been a secondary school administrator?

2. How would you describe the role of the secondary school principal to someone?

3. What professional learning opportunities did you engage in to help with your role as a secondary school administrator?

4. Why did you feel you needed a coach?

5. What is your opinion on coaching?

6. Describe your experience with the coaching process?

7. What topics are discussed during the coaching process?

8. Was there a time when there was conflict between you and your coach?

9. Tell me a story about a time when you used the information during a coaching meeting and implemented it in practice?

10. What changes have you noticed in yourself through leadership coaching?

11. Tell me a story about a time when you felt that your leadership beliefs changed through the coaching process.

12. Is there anything in the coaching process you would like to have changed? If so, what?

13. Do you have any final thoughts or comments about your experience with coaching?

14. Is there anything we haven’t covered yet?
Appendix C – Interview Questions for Coach Participants

1. What is your work experience as a leadership coach?

2. Why do secondary principals seek out leadership coaches?

3. Describe your experience with working with secondary principals.

4. What topics are discussed during the coaching process?

5. Tell me a story about a time when you felt the information discussed in coaching meeting was implemented back at school?

6. Tell me a story about a time when you felt coaching helped the secondary school administrator with an issue?

7. Tell me a story about a time when you felt that the coaching process had an impact on the secondary principal’s leadership practices?

8. What changes have you noticed with secondary principals through leadership coaching?

9. Is there anything in the coaching process you would like to have changed? If so, what?

10. Do you have any final thoughts or comments about your experience with coaching a secondary school principal?

11. Is there anything we haven’t covered yet?
Appendix D – Participant Advertisement

Secondary School Principals and Leadership Coaching Study

If you are a secondary school principal and would like to participate in a research study on leadership coaching conducted as part of my EdD thesis at OISE/UT, please read on. I’m looking for research participants to partake in a 60 minute face to face interview for a study focused on leadership coaching. The study will seek to examine secondary school principals’ experience with leadership coaching. If interested in being part of or hearing more about this study please email me at your convenience at ftantalo99@yahoo.com and I will answer any questions pertaining to the study.

Ferd Tantalo

Vice-Principal – Ascension of Our Lord
Doctoral Student - OISE/UT
Appendix E

Section A – Letter of Invitation/Information Letter

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in this study. This is a study conducted through OISE/UT supervised by Dr. Nina Bascia - Professor Associate Chair, Director, Collaborative Educational Policy Program Department of Leadership, Higher & Adult Education. It involves you participating in a sixty minute face-to-face interview where you will be asked a series a questions. The purpose of this study is to focus on leadership coaching as a professional development opportunity for secondary school principals.

Areas I hope to touch on through this study are:

1. What goal(s) are identified by secondary school principals engaged in leadership coaching?
2. In what capacity does leadership coaching support professional learning for secondary principals?
3. In the coaching process, to what extent do secondary principals and coaches feel that a change has occurred with administrator’s leadership practices and beliefs?
4. How do secondary principals and coaches describe their experience with leadership coaching?

As mentioned, the interview is semi-structured lasting approximately one hour. The interview will be audiotaped with your permission for the purpose of transcription and followed by data analysis. At no time during the interview, will you be judged, evaluated and be at harm. As well, no value judgments will be placed on your responses. Once the audiotapes of the interview(s) have been transcribed, the raw data will be stored under lock and key in the OISE Leadership, Higher and Adult Education department chair’s office as well as at the home of the researcher. Only Dr. Bascia and I will have access to this raw data. The raw data is to be kept in a password protected computer and it is also backed up on an encrypted portable USB memory device (Product – Kingston Data Traveller). In the transcripts, names and other identifying information about the participants and any institutions will be systematically changed. Identifying codes that could connect the participant’s name or the participant’s organization with the changed names will also be kept under lock and key in the places designated above. The audiotaped interviews will be erased once the transcription is complete. The primary data will be stored in locked cabinets in the researcher’s home for one year after the completion of the study and then be destroyed. As a participant, you will receive a copy of the transcript of your interview upon request. Any section which you request to be deleted from the transcript of your interview will be deleted. Participants have the option to withdraw from the research at any time. To withdraw from the research, participants can contact the researcher and express their intention to withdraw from the study. They will be asked if they would like their data withdrawn as well. If so, the researcher will return all data to the participant or destroy them upon their request. There is no consequence, penalty and judgment for withdrawal from this study.

Upon your request, a copy of the final paper will be sent to each participant. A copy of the research findings will also be available in the UofT library when the study is complete.
Appendix F – Informed Consent

Informational/Consent Letter to Participants

Researcher: Ferdinando Tantalo
Supervisor: Dr. Nina Bascia
Date: ________________

Dear:

Thank you for considering to participate in, or contributing to, my research project. As I noted in our first contact, I am a doctoral student in Educational Administration program at OISE/UT as well as a vice principal for the Dufferin Peel Catholic School board. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing, and to decide whether or not you choose to participate. Participation is completely voluntary, and should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Because of administrative and ethical issues related to research done in universities, this letter is a form letter. I have filled in comments, ticked appropriate boxes, and included sections specific to this study. At the end of the letter, you will find a place to indicate whether or not you wish to participate. Please check the appropriate box, sign, and provide the date. Return one signed copy to me and keep the other for your reference. Should you have any questions regarding your rights as a participants, please or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, you can contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273.

The name of this research project is:

Secondary School Principals and Leadership Coaching

The nature and purpose of the research is:

The purpose of this study is to focus on leadership coaching as a professional development opportunity for secondary school principals.

What, essentially, I am doing is the following:

The study will seek to determine the experience of secondary school principals with leadership coaching while examining the impact leadership coaching has on secondary school principal’s leadership practices evaluating it through the professional coach and the coachee – the secondary school principal.

Your part in the research, if you agree, is:

To partake in a semi-structured interview that will take approximately 1 hour. At no time during the interview, will you be judged, evaluated and be at harm. As well, no value judgments will be placed on your responses.

Potential limitations in my ability to guarantee anonymity are:
The context of the school will be mentioned in my study as well as some of the issues that you have encountered as a secondary school principals involved in Leadership Coaching. In addition, opinions and issues articulated through the coaching process will be mentioned in the study.

Potential benefits you might derive from participating are:

This research will provide you with the opportunity to reflect upon your experience with leadership coaching. It will allow you to talk about the relevant issues that are encountered in the coaching process. In addition, it will allow you time to reflect on your own practice and action encountered in your daily work. As such, the results of the study could contribute to discussions with the Ministry, school boards as well as principal associations about the value of investing resources in coaching as a leadership strategy. You will have an opportunity to review your responses on a later date and use this information to guide your leadership practice.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Ferdinando Tantalo
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Vice Principal – Ascension of Our Lord
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I have read this document and any enclosed documents. I understand what is being asked and the accompanying conditions and promises. I understand the nature and limitations of the research. I also understand that with my permission, the interview will be audio-taped to later be transcribed to elicit findings for the study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without consequence.

I agree to participate in the ways described.

If you wish to have a summary of the research findings, please check
I do not wish to participate in the research

______________________________ (Signature)