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Exploring the Lived Experiences of Exemplary National Blue Ribbon Elementary School Teachers in Improving Student Learning Through Effective Coaching Conversations With Their Principals: A Phenomenological Study

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A Dissertation by

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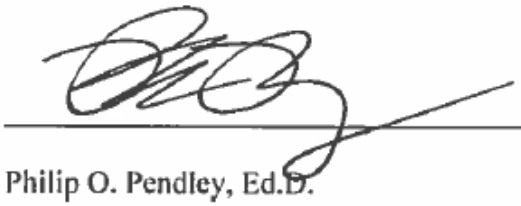

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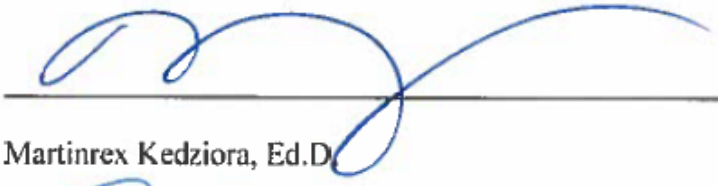

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Exemplary National Blue Ribbon Elementary School Teachers in Improving Student Learning Through Effective Coaching Conversations With Their Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

by Kristin Watson

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers improve student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals. A second purpose was to explore the barriers they encountered to holding these conversations and actions they took to overcome these barriers. The theoretical framework for this study was grounded in Lev Vygotsky's sociohistorical viewpoints of development, which relies on social interaction as an inextricable ingredient in the process of learning.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative phenomenological methodology utilizing in-depth and semistructured interviews of 12 participants. Participants were identified in collaboration with the author and participants in a related thematic study. The researcher collected and coded data collected via the interviews. The interview protocol was directly correlated to the research questions for this study.

Findings: Examination of qualitative data indicated an assortment of findings. Participants identified nine major themes for how they develop coaching conversations with their principals. Four major barriers were identified, along with additional actions taken to overcome these barriers. The most common findings were relative to trust, collaboration, and communication.

Conclusions: The study supported a total of five conclusions. Conclusions included actions that should be taken by both principals and teachers in order to foster relationships and school cultures that result in coaching conversations focused on student learning. Participants in this study preferred engaging in coaching conversations to improve student learning as opposed to more formal evaluations.

Recommendations: Eleven areas of further research were recommended to continue and expand the body of literature based on the findings and conclusions of this study.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

> With this bill, we reaffirm that fundamentally American ideal—that every child, regardless of race, income, background, the zip code where they live, deserves the chance to make of their lives what they will.
>
> —Obama, *Every Student Succeeds Act*

U.S. public schools have for decades continued to fail at meeting the demands of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Further they strive, but miss the mark, at appeasing the public, albeit global, demand to produce college-and-career-ready students while seeking to rebuild the once superpower reputation of the United States as a leader in the world economy, creator of innovations, and the home of the prolific American Dream (Council on Foreign Relations, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). In 1965, in response to the first recognition of this need, Lyndon B. Johnson's administration authorized the ESEA followed decades later with the authorization of the NCLB and now, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Each of these statutes communicates the extreme sense of urgency to increase the capacity of the U.S. educational system to produce college-and-career-ready students in direct response to the call to protect its national security and expand its ability to compete globally.

This 50-year focus in this country has included much research on what needs to be happening in American schools and an increase in accountability has evolved, which has had a direct line into our classrooms. High-stakes standardized testing has been the driver behind much of the focus for the supervision and evaluation of teachers (Embse & Hasson, 2012). The movement to focus on improvement for the overall quality of

teaching, while avoiding doing more harm than good, points toward a need to overhaul the teacher evaluation system in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2013). A shift in view toward the conceptual understanding of the evaluation system for teachers should focus on the continuous improvement cycle, which eliminates the traditional and individualistic approach that results in competitive ranking of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

To prepare the youth to lead this country toward a rising economic standing and return the United States to its once primary position as a world power requires that these young people receive high-quality educational experiences focused on providing access, intentional focus, and application of the necessary skills that ready them for college and career paths (Council on Foreign Relations, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010, 2013; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). The American public is watching and taking notice of public schools' educational failures as evidenced in documentaries such as *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Waiting for Superman*; these documentaries shamed public schools for not providing high-quality education and called public attention to deficient school, principal, and teacher performance (Chilcott & Birtell, 2010; Participant Media, 2006).

A strong focus is needed in order to support principals and teachers with a structure to improve supervision and evaluation (Marshall, 2013; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011; Marzano & Toth, 2013). Aguilar (2013) purported that the strategy of coaching is most effective at building and cultivating educators with the skills needed to increase student learning and achievement. Additionally, the lack of training for administrators in the realm of professional coaching, combined with other factors,

including the fear of conflict and the failure of teachers to process and internalize feedback, leads to the need for an effective strategy that will go into the "intellect, behaviors, practices, beliefs, values, and feelings" of teachers and principals, thus creating the urgent need to explore and understand coaching conversations (Aguilar, 2013, p. 7). Transforming teaching and learning through employing the art of the coaching conversations was the essence of this study.

Background

As a result of the past 50 years of educational reforms and laws, accountability for student achievement has brought U.S. schools to a place of conflict between having produced students who were responsive to a system based solely on standardized testing to one that now requires schools to produce students with the skills needed to insure that they are ready and capable of competing in the 21st century college-and-career pathway (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). New legislation within ESSA requires public education to be accountable on no fewer than three levels, with standardized tests being only a single measure that tells part of the bigger story.

It is critical for students to experience high-quality instruction provided by high-quality teachers to insure that students are prepared for the demands associated with college and career pathways (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Schmoker, 2006). Consequently, school principals are charged with ensuring that students have direct access and interaction with the complex learning demands associated with outcomes aligned to the skills needed to compete in the 21st century through

teachers who employ creative, innovative, and engaging standards aligned lessons (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010).

Historically, from as far back as the 1800s, an underlying theme in the purpose of teacher evaluation has been to provide teachers with specific feedback in order to improve instructional practice as a means of increasing student achievement (Blumberg, 1985; Tracy, 1995). Moreover, research over the past 20 years indicates that teacher evaluations have little impact on improving teacher quality (Danielson, 2009; Schmoker, 2006). Additional research asserted that in order to achieve high-quality evaluations, principals and teachers need extensive, structured, and intentional opportunities to discuss the actual observed correlation between teaching and learning (Aguilar, 2013; Danielson, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

This study relied on a theoretical framework, which pulls from Lev Vygotsky's theory of social development. Vygotsky purported that social interaction must take place prior to any growth in development (Galluci, DeVoogt Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010. The Vygotksy space expanded upon his theory and illustrated how new information is learned via social interactions and lead to changes that are tangible and measurable (Galluci et al., 2010). Teacher supervision and evaluation in schools maintains the ideal that it can and should result in improvement for teaching and learning in schools. Additionally, professional coaching also serves as a vehicle to enact changes and growth for teaching and learning in our schools (Aguilar, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Hunter, 1980; Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, Sandahl, & Whitworth, 2011;

Marshall, 2013; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Schmoker, 2006). Examining the interactions between teachers and principals, both in the context of teacher supervision and evaluation and coaching, provides insight into the understanding of which interactions impact teaching and learning and how that impact is evident (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Fullan, 2006; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010; Marzano, et al., 2011).

Teacher Supervision and Evaluation

Drastic changes have evolved in the teacher evaluation system since the first documented evidence dating back to the 18th century. At its inception, education was focused on demanding that parents take responsibility for the learning of their children rather than being considered and treated as a professional endeavor (Burnham, 1976). As the U.S. population increased and public education became more accessible to families, around 1845, the supervision of schools and teachers began to redirect to a focus in improving instruction (Blumberg, 1985). Within the time frame of the 20th century, public education's role, expectancies, and primary theories of practices were thoroughly discussed and established. What emerged were two competing viewpoints—those of John Dewey and Frederick Taylor. Dewey ascertained that democracy and the practices associated with citizenship should be the basis for school organization. In contrast to Dewey, Taylor took a more scientific view that measured specific behaviors that connected with engineers and business owners (Marzano et al., 2011). Both Dewey's and Taylor's perspectives led to a more formalized practice of schools in which "measurement [of student achievement] is the ultimate tool for a more scientific approach to schooling" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 14).

Throughout the various decades in the 20th century, models of feedback for teachers began to develop and evolve. Initially, Ellwood Cubberley (1929) was first to place an emphasis on data analysis and measurement for teachers in his book *Public School Administration.* Ten years later, William Wetzel expanded Cubberley's ideas to include actual evaluation and in the form of grades for teachers (Marzano et al., 2011). Continuing into the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, some form of clinical supervision was widely used (Cogan, 1973). This transitioned to the development of a five-phase approach to clinical supervision, which provided explicit feedback to teachers and concentrated on specific classroom behaviors. Direct feedback was given to the teacher and the supervisor offered targeted recommendations for improvement meant to address student learning and teacher instruction (Cogan, 1973).

Moving forward, Madeline Hunter's work held a strong influence on evaluation in the 1980s (Marzano et al., 2011). Marzano et al. (2011) noted that this model included reference to a seven-step lesson, and supervisors made determinations regarding teacher mastery based on each step. Throughout the 1980s, a call for increased reflective and developmental models of teacher evaluation began to surface. By the 1990s, Glickman et al. (1998) asserted that teacher evaluation must take a balanced approach, which included feedback that challenged and supported teachers.

Transitioning into the 21st century, Charlotte Danielson's model for evaluation, *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching,* was published. Updated in 2007, it strove to bring to light the deep complexity of all that contributes to classroom teaching (Marzano et al., 2011). The four main domains of Danielson's (2007) model included planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and

professional responsibilities. Marzano et al. (2011) stated that "the Danielson Model must be the reference point for any new proposals regarding supervision and evaluation" (p. 23). Based on the ideas of Danielson, professional conversations, or coaching conversations between principal and teacher are noted as an imperative and valued component to add or include as part of the teacher evaluation process, with the results having a significant effect on the development of teachers and the achievement of students (Danielson, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010).

Teacher perceptions of evaluation. Teachers' perceptions of the evaluation process and how they discern the giving and receiving of feedback, or coaching, related to their professional practice are controversial. According to Marshall (2013), teachers shared that they can experience fear and anxiety from the evaluation process although they believe it has little impact on their teaching. Teachers can become nervous when undergoing the evaluation as receiving feedback from administration is directly related to their job security. Specifically, there are those who have shared their view that the process of evaluation is a way for principals to identify inadequacy, "Teachers perceived evaluations as a method to find fault with teachers in any subjective manner the principal chose" (Roberge, 2013, p. 20). A revelation from one study included that teachers experience evaluation as a vague, subjective, and impersonal process (Sheppard, 2013). In contrast, despite the fact that teachers view the evaluation process as generally ineffective, it has come to light that teachers do give credence to the understanding that the ultimate purpose of evaluation and feedback should be to help the teacher improve and enhance the experience of learning for students (Roberge, 2014).

Principal perceptions of teacher evaluation. In addition to understanding teachers' perceptions, research findings revealed that principals perceive the evaluation process as time consuming with an insignificant effect on the quality of teaching and the increase of student achievement. To illustrate, in comparison to the excessive time commitment required in the process of evaluation, principals report that little impact is evidenced on teacher quality and student growth (Marshall, 2013). In fact, as Darling-Hammond (2013) stated, "It is nearly impossible for principals, especially in large schools, to have sufficient time or content expertise to evaluate all of the teachers they supervise" (p. 1).

As a result, according to Schmoker (2006), mediocrity in teachers often is not addressed as principals choose to "go along" instead of lead (p. 30). In contrast, Sheppard (2013) conducted a study, which reported that the perception of principals is that the process of evaluation does have a strong effect on student learning. An important element that also contributes to an increase in teacher quality and student growth includes the nonevaluative feedback that accompanies professional, reflective coaching conversations (Danielson, 2009; Downey et al., 2004).

Coaching

The objective that teachers can change the quality of learning experiences for students is a crucial precept of coaching (Aguilar, 2013). Additionally, coaching provides an avenue of transformation to a school culture that reaches into instructional change (Aguilar, 2013). Unlike the models of evaluation viewed as more traditional, coaching adds the element of professional support and accountability through the development of relationships meant to foster growth. Furthermore, the current climate of

society blaming schools, principals, and teachers for poor student performance is confronted by coaching; as coaching aims for the transformation of classroom practices that include altering methods related to behavior, pedagogy, and the knowledge of content (Aguilar, 2013; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010).

Coaching Conversations

Research revealed that engaging in feedback through the practice of specific and deliberate conversations focused on the correlation between teaching and learning results in a greater impact on student achievement, the practice of teaching, and more succinct evaluations (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010; Marshall, 2013; Marzano & Toth, 2013). Additionally, principals become more aware of what teaching and learning look like in classrooms when they engage in frequent classroom visits, deliberate debriefs, and engage with the teacher based on what was observed. As a result, the school climate and culture change as this becomes regular practice (Danielson, 2007).

Danielson (2007) stated, "Professional conversation is an essential technique to promote professional learning among teachers" (p. 11). Employing coaching conversations is an exercise that can be utilized to promote and focus professional conversations, thus, enhancing development of teaching and learning. Teachers develop and practice their craft over 9-month cycles (a typical school year; Marzano & Toth, 2013). The frequent and consistent utilization of coaching conversations emphasizes the ongoing development and monitoring of that craft more regularly than traditional evaluation cycles.

It should be noted that coaching conversations come about in an environment that is both trusting and respectful and encourage the idea that the thinking of both parties

involved in the conversation is challenged (Danielson, 2007; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010). The practice of engaging in coaching conversations not only challenges the perceptions of the participants, but it promotes the development of both the principal and teacher in their professional practice (Aguilar, 2013; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010). Furthermore, as Gross Cheliotes and Fleming Reilly (2010) maintained, coaching conversations "focus on building relationships through committed listening, asking powerful questions that result in deeper thinking, and utilizing reflective feedback that holds each person to high standards while at the same time persevering personal dignity" (p. xi). In order for people to be motivated to change, there is an important need for dignity and respect to be a part of the process of coaching conversations (Fullan, 2006, 2014).

The Gap in Research: A Need to Examine Coaching Conversations

A closer examination of the coach-like discourse between teachers and principals as an avenue to improving quality teaching and student learning is an indicated need in the literature (McKinney, Labat, & Labat, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). According to Stevenson's (2009) study, the need for a qualitative study to explore the specific ratings yielded from quantitative findings related to the coaching provided by the principal to support teachers. Several studies suggested further examination of specific leadership behaviors related to direct and specific feedback from principals to teachers within the context of mutually trusting and respectful relationships; thus, studying coach-like conversations may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of essential components of improving teacher quality and student performance (Denton, 2009; Fullan, 2014; Moffitt, 2007; Roberge, 2013; Stevenson, 2009).

Statement of the Research Problem

The United States has one of the most inclusive public school systems in the world. All students, regardless of any circumstance, are entitled to receive an education. The complex demands of meeting the educational needs of students from all walks of life, combined with the ever-changing technological advancements and need for students to be equipped with 21st century skills, has resulted in formidable challenges for teachers and principals. This has left schools in all 50 states with the challenge of how to develop the best teachers and principals possible and how to increase the quality of teaching and learning for students in order to prepare them for college and career (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). A study conducted by McKinsey & Company concluded that the only way to improve the outcomes of schools is to improve instruction (Barber & Mourshed, 2007).

According to several researchers, one of the most substantial factors that results in student growth, achievement, and performance, is the quality of teachers—with the principal holding the primary responsibility for the enhancement and development of quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010, 2013; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Fullan, 2006, 2014; Marshall, 2013; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Schmoker, 2006; Whitaker, 2012b). Traditionally, principals have determined the quality of teachers and provided feedback through the formalized teacher evaluation process, which consists of formal observations and a formal summative evaluation (Blumberg, 1985; Cogan, 1973; Danielson, 2009; Marzano et al., 2011).

Over the course of multiple decades, controversy and conflict have accompanied the teacher evaluation process. The resistance of teachers, especially those holding

tenure statuses, and the resistance of unions, has interfered with the ability of principals to obtain the buy-in of teachers (Danielson, 2009). Combined with the barriers of formal observation being limited to preplanned and staged lessons, the supervision and evaluation systems often do not result in true change (Marshall, 2013). Furthermore, findings from multiple sources indicated that there has been little to no impact on teacher quality and student achievement as a result of the current formal practices for evaluation (Darling-Hammond, 2010, 2013; Marshall, 2013). Danielson (2009) contended that an effective practice, known to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, includes the coaching conversations between principals and teachers that follow unscheduled and more informal classroom observations. These have the greatest prospect of addressing big ideas, problem solving, and increasing the quality of professional practice. Hence, when coaching conversations between principals and teachers occur in a frequent, consistent, and intentional manner, focused on the correlation between teaching and learning, they impact relationship building, collaboration, and school culture which can have a profound effect on teacher quality and student achievement (Danielson, 2009; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010).

Recent studies have pointed toward the pressing need for more investigation exploring the coach-like talk between teachers and principals and the benefits of these to improving the quality of teaching and student achievement (McKinney et al., 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). In the same way, research exists to substantiate the need for and benefits of coaching conversations (Aguilar, 2013; Gilley & Boughton, 1996; Hargreaves, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 2002). However, what have not

yet been explored are the necessary actions that overcome the barriers to holding these conversations between principals and their teachers (Stevenson, 2009).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers improve student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals. A second purpose was to explore the barriers they encountered to holding these conversations and actions they took to overcome these barriers.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one central research question and three subquestions:

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals?

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers develop coaching conversations with their principals?
2. What barriers do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers encounter when holding coaching conversations with their principals?
3. What actions do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers take to overcome barriers of holding coaching conversations with their principals?

Significance of the Problem

The relationship between teaching and learning combined with the impact of frequent and specific feedback are the core elements directly aligned to the principles and research behind the significance of studying coaching conversations (Aguilar, 2013: Fullan, 2006, 2014; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010). The quality of a teacher and the quality of teaching is undoubtedly the source of the greatest influence on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Hattie, 2009). Complementary to this, the primary responsibility of principals is to insure that students receive access to high-quality instruction and experiences (Marzano & Toth, 2013; Fullan, 2006, 2014; Schmoker, 2006). The significance of this study addressed how frequent and specific feedback delivered through coaching conversations between teachers and principals can improve the quality of teaching and learning in California classrooms through utilizing coaching conversations as a means to promote student achievement through respectful, trusting, targeted professional discourse. Additionally, this study sought to fill the gaps in understanding what the most significant elements are for coaching conversations to be effective (Stevenson, 2009). Understanding the elements of effective coaching conversations and how to overcome barriers to these conversations will lead both principals and teachers toward the improvement of teaching quality and student achievement (Denton, 2009; Fullan, 2014; Moffitt, 2007; Roberge, 2013; Stevenson, 2009).

Current practices of teacher evaluation have left participants void of quality interactions that are meaningful to improvement (Marshall, 2013; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Moffitt, 2007; Roberge, 2013; Schmoker, 2006; Sheppard, 2013). Trust and confidence

have been eroded in the teacher/principal relationships as a result of a system that is largely viewed as negative and a vain attempt at improvement for teaching and learning (Roberge, 2013; Schmoker, 2006; Sheppard, 2013). Subsequently, the findings of this study will contribute to the growth and improvement of the teacher evaluation system, while contributing to prevailing coaching theories by expanding on the elements that create successful conditions for sharing feedback through coaching conversations. Ultimately, the study will provide strategies and insights to school principals for improving the support structures to affect both the quality of teachers and the quality of teaching in classrooms across the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Definitions

The following terms are referred to throughout the study and are defined here in order to provide a precise meaning and perspective. The terms were defined in collaboration with the author of a study that is parallel to this one.

Actions. For the purpose of this study, an action is any behavior the principal or teacher engaged in to improve student learning conditions through coaching conversations.

Barriers. For the purpose of this study, a barrier is any obstacle or challenge encountered by the principal or teacher to holding coaching conversations.

California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSEL). A set of professional standards from the six interdependent educational leadership elements.

California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP). A set of standards from the six interdependent domains of teaching.

Coaching. For this study, coaching refers to the deliberate support and/or feedback that a principal gives to a teacher to help improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom

Coaching conversation. Frequently predetermined and intentional conversation that focuses on a person's strengths and needs. The ultimate purpose of coaching conversations is to provoke "thinking, growth, and change that lead to action" (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010, p. 5).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ESEA was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. Its overarching goal was to increase equal access for all to education while creating a system of accountability and high standards. It funds primary and secondary education. The act provides funding for professional development, instructional materials, resources for educational support programs, and parent/family engagement (ESEA, 1965).

Elementary principal. A position approved by the local school board authorizing complete authority of a school site. Elementary principals are responsible for the outcomes of the assigned school site. For the purpose of this study, elementary principal refers to principals at schools with preschool and/or transitional kindergarten (TK) through Grades 5 and/or 6.

Elementary school. A public expenditure facility that provides free and public comprehensive education for students in grades preschool and/or TK through Grades 5 and/or 6.

Elementary teacher. A position approved by the California Commission for Teaching Credentialing (CCTC). Elementary teachers are responsible for the instruction

of students in multiple subjects in TK up to Grade 6. For the purpose of this study, elementary teacher refers to teachers in public schools in the state of California.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). A major revision to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The ESSA was authorized by President Obama on December 10, 2015. The primary focus of ESSA is to provide a firm foundation for students as they prepare for college and career. It is a reauthorization of the ESEA.

Expert/exemplary principal/teacher. For the purpose of this study, an expert and/or exemplary principal/teacher is defined as a principal/teacher employed at a National Blue Ribbon School in the state of California.

Feedback. The information shared with an individual person or group of people regarding behaviors or actions so that the person or group may adjust and/or reflect on behaviors/actions to improve behaviors/actions in order to achieve desired results.

Instructional coaching. A coach highly trained in providing "intensive, differentiated support to teachers so they are able to implement proven practices" through "model lessons, observations, and simplified explanations of the teaching practice" (Knight, 2007, p. 30).

National Blue Ribbon School. National Blue Ribbon Schools are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for overall academic achievement and/or for closing the achievement gap for subgroups of students. These schools are in the top 15% of all schools in the state.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The No Child Left Behind Act is a previous version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The primary focus of NCLB was to increase student achievement and to decrease the achievement gap for all

student subgroups. It was signed into law in 2001 and expired with the authorization of ESSA in 2015.

Teacher supervision and evaluation. The direct supervision of teacher practice. This includes formal and informal observations as well as a formal evaluation, which rates and provides evidence for teacher performance around the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP).

Delimitations

This study included exemplary teachers who participated in coaching conversations at Blue Ribbon Schools. Further, an additional delimitation to this study was that the sample was pulled from exemplary teachers employed at Blue Ribbon Schools specifically in the Southern California region.

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I included pertinent background information for the problem, presented an explanation of the problem, stated the purpose of the study, identified research questions, provided a definition of terms and included delimitations. Chapter II includes a review of the literature that addresses the national public perception of public schools, the theoretical framework for the study, the background and history of coaching conversations, perspectives of principals and teachers, along with the identified gap in the research. Chapter III presents the research design and methodology for the study, along with procedures for data collection and the population and sample. Chapter IV includes the data analysis and findings of the study. Finally, Chapter V comprehensively discusses the findings, conclusions, and

recommendations of the study. A substantial list of references is provided and additional artifacts are found in the appendices.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter examines the relevant literature related to coaching conversations. Sources reviewed are included in the synthesis matrix (see Appendix A). Four core areas are presented. First, the theoretical framework associated with Vygotsky's (1978) work on social interaction is explored. Next, supervision and evaluation in U.S. public schools is presented. The elements, actions, barriers, and professional development needs connected with professional coaching are the third core area. Finally, the history and core elements associated with National Blue Ribbon schools are presented and highlighted. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature and identifies the gap in the literature to substantiate the need for this study.

Theoretical Framework

This study has its foundation in Lev Vygotsky's sociohistorical viewpoints of development, which describe the processes of learning and change as "the internalization and transformation of cultural tools that occur as individuals participate in social practice" (Galluci, DeVoogt Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010, p. 925). First Harré (1984) and later Gavelek and Raphael (1996) expanded upon these ideas and formed what is referred to as the Vygotksy space (see Figure 1). The Vygotksy space provides an illustration of the evolution of his work to support how individuals grow in their understanding and practice as a result of social interaction (Galluci et al., 2010, p. 926).

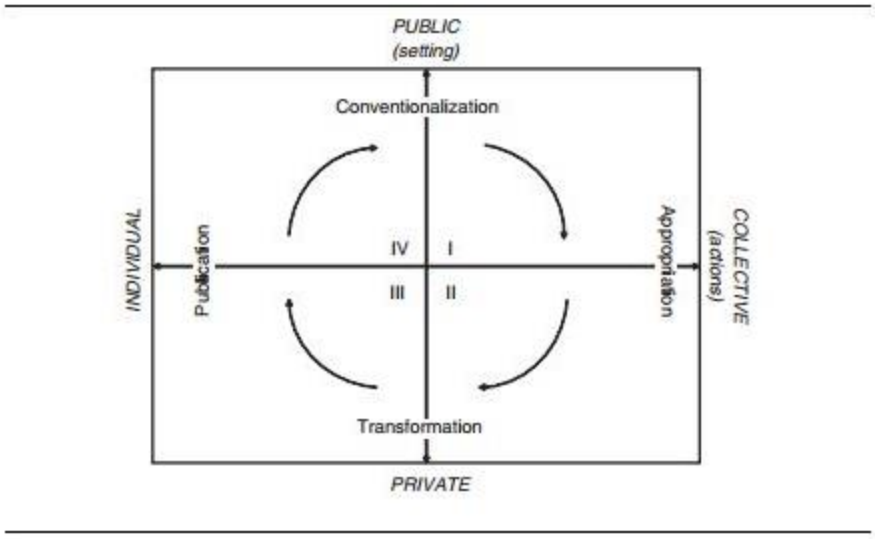

Figure 1. The Vygotsky space. From "Instructional Coaching: Building a Theory About the Role and Organizational Support for Professional Learning," by C. Galluci, M. DeVoogt Van Lare, I. H. Yoon, and B. Boatright, December 2010, *American Educational Research Journal*, *47*, p. 926. http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0002831210371497

Teacher supervision and evaluation, along with professional coaching in schools, both have the goal to improve the quality of teaching and learning through social interactions that take place between teachers and principals (Aguilar, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Hunter, 1980; Kimsey-House et al., 2011; Marshall, 2013; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Schmoker, 2006). The Vygotsky space explicated "the ways that new ideas about practice are taken up and discussed by individuals and groups of practitioners and then later transformed and integrated into practice" (Galluci et al., 2010, p. 926). The Vygotsky space visually represents how learning occurs both from individual and collective perspectives. Further, this connects to both private and public settings. The four quadrants illustrated by the Vygotsky space are nonlinear, but rather demonstrate the results of social interactions that result in learning and action (McVee, Dunsmore, &

Gavelek, 2005). The stages represented include appropriation, transformation, publications, and conventionalization, which are elaborated upon in Table 1.

Table 1

Stages of Learning

Stage	Description
Appropriation	Social interactions as an avenue to create new ideas and concepts.
Transformation	Engaging in practice that allows for exploration of newly learned ideas and notions.
Publication	Publicizing the learning and transforming it into actions and practice.
Conventionalized	Internalizing the new ideas and concepts and having them in place as standardized practice.

Note. Adapted from "Schema Theory Revisited," by M. B. McVee, K. Dunsmore, and J. R. Gavelek, 2005, *Review of Educational Research, 75*, 531-566.

Teacher supervision and evaluation, and additionally, coaching, both pull from the Vygotsky space philosophy as the objective of principals and teachers engaging in social interaction is to improve professional practice. The Vygotsky space directly pinpoints changes in behavior and improvements in practice as a result of social interactions. As a result, these interactions between teachers and principals are highly significant (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Fullan, 2006; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010; Marzano et al., 2011).

Teacher Supervision and Evaluation

High-quality instruction, delivered by high-quality teachers, is imperative to the achievement of students in today's schools (Darling-Hammond, 2013). It is the responsibility of principals to assure that students have this access to quality instruction. Productive feedback is the avenue through which change and growth takes place

(Harvard Business Review, 2014). The evaluation and supervision of teachers requires principals to offer feedback based on observations of instruction and student learning. The employment of lessons aligned to standards that are creative, innovative, and engaging are what these observations focus on (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010). Teacher evaluation and supervision is a professional practice in U.S. public schools that supports the structure of the giving and receiving of feedback between school administrators and teachers as it relates to the quality of instruction and educational methods. Understanding the history of this development and its role in including specific feedback within the teacher evaluation system as a means to improve instruction is a key concept (Blumberg, 1985; Tracy, 1995).

The History of Teacher Supervision and Evaluation

The evolution of teacher evaluation dates back to a time in history, during the 1700s, when parents were looked at as the primary source of instruction for their children. This responsibility was familial and not considered as a profession (Burnham, 1976). By the mid-1800s, the population of the United States had increased and the formation of public schools that were accessible to families had increased in number. It was at this point that supervision of schools and teachers began to form into a focus on teaching and learning via improving instruction (Blumberg, 1985).

As a state senator for Massachusetts, Horace Mann led the movement to create "normal schools" with the goal of training teachers (Goldstein, 2014). Three schools were opened by 1840, and within 30 years, 22 states had followed suit (Goldstein, 2014). It was from this time that documentation exists to substantiate the beginnings of school principals participating in visiting classrooms, observing instruction, and/or modeling

lessons—a strategy that can be connected today to what is celebrated as a best practice (Goldstein, 2014).

Practices for teacher evaluation continued to evolve into the 20th century. Author Ellwood Cubberley (1929) was noted to emphasize data analysis as a form of teacher measurement in his book, *Public School Administration.* William Wetzel's expansion of these ideas included grading teachers as a form of evaluation (Marzano et al., 2011). Merit pay, based on the performance of teachers as a form of evaluation, came in to fashion in the 1920s under the leadership of Chicago superintendent, William McAndrew (Goldstein, 2014). He pulled from the ideas of Frederick Winslow Taylor who meant for merit pay to be incorporated into business, thus giving birth to the movement where teachers would be judged based on measures of evidence for student learning. This practice led to the creation of rubrics to include ratings in personal characteristics and other subjective categories (Goldstein, 2014). McAndrew purported that this method was superior to principals walking through rooms and forming evaluations and feedback via observations. McAndrew's eventual demise, along with his ideas, played a role in the formation of teachers' unions, which continue to this day to impact systems of supervision and evaluation (Goldstein, 2014).

Forms of clinical supervision surfaced as the most widely used tool continuing from the 1950s up to the 1980s (Cogan, 1973). The inclusion of targeted and specific feedback to teachers, accompanied with explicit recommendations for improvement, became the standard practice to address the quality of teaching and learning (Cogan, 1973). The sequence for clinical supervision included a preobservation conference between the administrator, or supervisor, and teacher. It was at this point that an agreed-

upon contract would be developed to guide the rest of the clinical supervision elements. The emphasis in clinical supervision was on the teacher identifying an area of concern and the supervisor observing and offering feedback to address the teacher's concern (Reavis, 1976). Reavis (1976) purported that research during this time and results of surveys indicated that this practice increased teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and treatment as professionals. The 1980s witnessed a transition into a model based on the work of Madeline Hunter.

Madeline Hunter's seven-step lesson plan became the standard model used for evaluation of instruction (Marzano et al., 2011). The seven steps included anticipatory set, objective and purpose, input, modeling, checking for understanding, guided practice, and independent practice (Marzano et al., 2011). Table 2 illustrates and defines these steps:

This model was widely used by principals as a form or checklist to use during observations and within the process of teacher evaluation. Marzano et al. (2011) stated that "if clinical supervision was the prescribed structure of supervision, Hunter's seven step model . . . became the content of the preconference, observation, and post conference" (p. 20). The 1980s did increase focus on the idea of reflection. Hunter also supported the practice of observation and script taping, a practice that offered data to both the supervisor and the teacher on which to base postconference discussions, in order to provide feedback to teachers through her process of supervision (Marzano et al., 2011). However, what is important to note is that Hunter maintained that it was never her intention that her model be used as an evaluation tool (Owen Wilson, n.d.).

Table 2

The Hunter Model of Lesson Design

Step	Description
Anticipatory set	This gives students the opportunity to focus on upcoming learning and can also give the teacher valuable diagnostic and background information regarding prior knowledge.
Objective and purpose	This gives the students specific information on what is to be learned and why it is important. It also impacts the effectiveness of teaching for the teacher.
Input	In this set, the teacher has identified key skills and information students will need in order to achieve the objective by the end of the lesson.
Modeling	Modeling allows the students to watch the teacher in order to see how to achieve the objective. It is recommended to model a variety of examples to insure that students have opportunities to reach the objective in multiple ways.
Checking for understanding	This is necessary prior to moving forward for the teacher to be reassured that students understand what it is they are supposed to do and that they have the minimum skills needed prior to moving forward.
Guided practice	Students practice under the direct supervision of the teacher is needed in order to correct errors in early learning in order to avoid learning and practicing the skill incorrectly.
Independent practice	This should only be assigned once the teacher has a reasonable sense of belief that students can practice with little to no errors. This often is not appropriate after just one lesson and may be delayed pending further guided practice.

Alternative perspectives for teacher supervision were also in practice during this time. Glatthorn (1984) was a proponent of differentiation among teachers that took their career goals and personal input into account. Carl Glickman, like Glatthorn, also supported an approach to supervision that relied on differentiation. He felt strongly that it was necessary to take into account the maturational level of teachers in regard to developing a plan for supervision and evaluation (Glickman, 1980). He had three models and they were coined "nondirective, collaborative, and directive" (Glickman, 1980, p.

179). His early work transformed over the next 2 decades. He supported a systemic approach to supervision and advocated that a significant goal of supervision was to improve instruction (Marzano et al., 2011). In their book, *Supervision of Instruction: A Developmental Approach*, Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1998) noted, "By understanding how teachers grow optimally in a supportive and challenging environment, the supervisor can plan the tasks of supervision to bring together organizational goals and teacher needs into a single fluid entity" (p. 10).

A key study that also took place and held influence during this time was the RAND study. It was intended to give information to school districts to be used for improvement and/or to inform personnel decisions. What was initially determined was that there was very little agreement on the components of teacher evaluation, which led the researchers to conclude that the teacher evaluation system was "under-conceptualized and underdeveloped" (Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Bernstein, 1984, p. vi). Four major problems were identified from the study of the 32 districts involved and were noted to be similar for all:

1. Principals lacked the competence and resolve to provide competent evaluations.
2. Teachers were either apathetic or resistant.
3. There was a general lack of uniformity and consistency in how evaluations were carried out in the districts.
4. There was inadequate training for evaluators. (Wise et al., 1984, p. vi)

Another generalized area that posed difficulty was the overall belief that the system did not recognize differences in performance across grade spans and areas of specialty.

The following were two positive results noted from the RAND study: "improved teacher-administrator communication and increased teacher awareness of instructional goals and classroom practices" (Wise et al., 1984, p. 23). At the conclusion of the RAND study, the authors offered 12 recommendations. In their own words, however, the researchers stated, "Our conclusions and recommendations, therefore, may best be thought of as heuristics, or starting strategies to be modified on the basis of local experience" (Wise et al., 1984, p. 66). Thus, once again the study did not identify best practices to support supervision and evaluation, but rather resulted in generalities that allowed for a variety of interpretations, which did not lead to best and defined practices to be employed.

Charlotte Danielson's work was captured in *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* and was the next influential work to have a deep impact on teacher supervision and evaluation. First published in 1996 and then updated in 2007, Danielson's framework provided for four domains. These domains contain a total of 76 elements to support quality teaching. Danielson's work was impactful as it recognized and honored the complexity of teaching. Her model took the 76 identified elements and broke them down into levels of performance that provide specific descriptions for unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, or distinguished performance (Danielson, 2007). It was considered to be the model that created a very detailed and comprehensive approach to evaluation to date (Marzano et al., 2011).

According to Weisburg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling (2009), "A teacher's effectiveness—the most important factor for schools in improving student achievement—is not measured, recorded, or used to inform decision-making in any meaningful way"

(p. 3). *The Widget Effect* report examined the lack of attention and recognition given to teacher effectiveness and performance, forming the conclusion that with the exceptions of teacher remediation and dismissal, teacher performance is rarely used to inform a multitude of other important decisions (Weisburg et al., 2009). The report resulted in the broad statement that "evaluation systems fail to differentiate performance among teachers," and that there is a general lack of recognition for excellent teachers and very little support and/or professional development for mediocre teachers needing to improve (Weisburg et al., 2009, p. 6). These findings add to the plethora of research, which purports the overall failure of the teacher supervision and evaluation system in the United States to recognize outstanding educators and to rectify those who are moderate or failing in their responsibilities to provide quality instruction.

Overall, *The Widget Effect* report offered four recommendations for future action, two of which directly relate to this study. The first recommendation states,

1. Adopt a comprehensive performance evaluation system that fairly, accurately and credibly differentiates teacher based on their effectiveness in promoting study achievement. (Weisburg et al., 2009, p. 7)

This includes supporting teachers in their core responsibility to deliver quality instruction that leads to positive student outcomes. In order to promote the growth of teacher quality and effectiveness, this should incorporate frequent observation and ongoing feedback. The second recommendation is,

2. Train administrators and other evaluators in the teacher performance evaluation system and hold them accountable for using it effectively. (Weisburg et al., 2009, p. 7)

Principals and other administrators/evaluators will benefit from professional development that is ongoing and which focuses on offering quality feedback, which will support teachers in the improvement of instruction.

The need for an overall improved system of teacher supervision and evaluation is well established and not new. Quality instruction is at the heart of what needs to happen in every school. Throughout the recorded history of the American public school system, many significant theories have emerged, which have led to a model that includes opportunities for growth, reflection, systemic evaluative features, and purposeful and honest conversations between principals and teachers with the intention of improving instruction and positively affecting student achievement. Theories associated with professional coaching support the movement toward improved educational outcomes.

The Purpose of Supervision and Evaluation

All teachers in U.S. public schools are required to receive a formal evaluation at regular intervals (Sheppard, 2013). Dating back to the 19th century, offering feedback to teachers as a part of their formal evaluation has been in practice in order to improve the quality of instruction. Darling-Hammond (2013) purported that teacher evaluation carries the objective to support teachers in carrying out the purpose to continuously work to improve both the quality of teaching and the quantity of learning. It is important that teacher evaluation be goal oriented and targeted to meet the needs of the individual teacher (Marzano & Toth, 2013).

Marzano et al. (2011) noted that the most important objective of teacher supervision is to enhance the level of teacher expertise. Ultimately, this will also lead to gains in student achievement. Additionally, the process of supervision and evaluation is

important to increase accountability for the teacher and the principal who participate (Sheppard, 2013). As a result, principals are ultimately accountable to increases in student achievement and teachers are accountable to continuously seek to improve the quality of instruction.

The research is clear regarding the positive outcomes that are possible when supervision and evaluation are approached and carried out in an effective manner and focused on teaching and learning (Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marzano et al., 2011; Schmoker, 2006). It is imperative that this process be done well in order to have the greatest opportunity to result in incremental gains for students (Marzano et al., 2011). Developing and carrying out a model of evaluation that is both systematic and focused is necessary to insuring positive outcomes for all students.

One of the challenges to supervision and evaluation is the self-imposed isolation to which teachers can fall prey. They do, however "admit that constructive collaboration would lead to greatly improved instruction" (Schmoker, 2006, p. 25). Engaging in practices associated with supervision and evaluation eliminates ongoing isolation and allows teachers to emerge from isolation and to recognize the evidence of what is necessary to improve the quality of instruction via the process of supervision and evaluation (Schmoker, 2006).

Teacher Perception of Supervision and Evaluation

Platt, Tripp, Ogden, and Fraser (2000) stated, "Teachers say that evaluation, as it is currently practiced in school, does not help them to improve instruction" (p. 181). The research revealed that teachers themselves are in strong opposition to and suspicious of the quality and effectiveness of the current teacher supervision and evaluation system

(Weisberg et al., 2009; Xu & Sinclair, 2002). According to Weisberg et al. (2009), only 49% of teachers agree that their current district of employment recognizes the need to insist upon and hold teachers to a high standard of quality instruction. Three overriding themes within the literature contribute to the factors that support teachers' perceptions of supervision and evaluation. These include a lack of trust and credibility, time, and a general disconnect between that process of evaluation and student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Platt et al., 2000; Roberge, 2013; Weisberg et al., 2009).

In order for supervision and evaluation to be meaningful, a sense of trust and perceived credibility must be present within the school culture (Marshall, 2013; Roberge, 2013; Sheppard; 2013). First, teachers want to trust the relationship they have with their principals and need to feel an authentic connection in order to receive and value the feedback provided through their evaluation (Roberge, 2013). Additionally, teachers often do not feel that their principals are qualified to adequately evaluate them as a whole. This can be contributed to two mitigating factors:

1. Principals are often vague and subjective in their feedback to teachers (Sheppard, 2013).
2. Principals are not always perceived as experts in teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

In addition, teachers also have a general distrust of the evaluation system as a whole. Often it is based on a very limited number of observations and is focused on teacher actions versus the learning of students. Teachers note frustration with principals who offer satisfactory evaluations to those who clearly do not perform in that manner (Weisberg et al., 2009). The Vygotsky space framework has supported the evidence of

the correlation between social interactions and improvement in performance (Galluci et al., 2010). Without the presence of trust and credibility, the interactions that occur as part of teacher supervision and evaluation will provide little to no impact.

Time is another important theme that arose from the research and is supported through the perceptions of teachers. Time is a necessary resource that must be taken into account as having contributed to the perceptions of teachers related to supervision and evaluation. The amount of time devoted to evaluation is related to its failure according to teachers (Danielson, 2009; Marshall, 2013). More time needs to be spent on actions related to supervision and evaluation if it is to have a valuable impact on quality teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2013; DuFour & Marzano, 2009; Schmoker, 2006). Teachers report that increased time related to opportunities for informal observations and frequent, targeted feedback will capture teaching performance and inform practice to a larger capacity than is the current reality (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marshall, 2013; Schmoker, 2006; Weisberg et al., 2009).

The current system of supervision and evaluation has very little impact on the outcomes related to student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2013). This general sense of disconnect between evaluation and teaching is perceived by teachers to be a barrier to effective evaluation (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Roberge, 2013). An additional key factor that contributes to this disconnect is the chasm between supervision and evaluation systems across schools and districts. Furthermore, these practices vary substantially with the methods used to evaluate teachers who are at key milestones in their careers, specifically, preservice, initial probation status, and tenured and long-term licensing (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Finally, there is a detachment between evaluations and

professional development. Darling-Hammond (2013) stated, "Evaluation is rarely used to help teachers access professional development to address their unique learning needs" (p. 5). The overall disconnect breeds lack of coherence to advise teachers and create a culture of improvement.

Principal Perception of Supervision and Evaluation

The overriding purpose of teacher supervision and evaluation is to improve student learning via meaningful dialogue between principals and teachers. The literature reveals that there has been limited to no impact on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marshall, 2013; Schmoker, 2006; Weisberg et al., 2009). Regardless of this lack of correlation, principals do report their perceptions of the supervision and evaluation process to be important to improving student outcomes; however, several factors have been identified that contribute to the failure of the past and current evaluation practices (Fullan, 2006; Marshall, 2013; Schmoker, 2006; Weisberg et al., 2009). These factors include a shortage of resources and additionally perceived personal conflicts and reluctance to record and/or share honest feedback (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Fullan, 2014; Marshall, 2013; Schmoker, 2006; Weisberg et al., 2009).

Today, more than any time in the past, the responsibilities of public school principals are extensive and even overwhelming (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Fullan, 2014). A major barrier as perceived by principals to enacting quality supervision and evaluation is in the form of resources—specifically time, training, and budgetary allocations. Principals have limited time within the school year to attend to the vast variety of tasks and responsibilities of leading a school site. Principals report that putting the large amount of time required into the supervision and evaluation process to include

processes from preobservations up through postconferences is not worth it for the low impact it has on student achievement (Marshall, 2013). DuFour and Marzano (2009) confirmed this as they contended evaluation of teachers to be a low-leverage strategy that has little to do with improving schools especially when taking into consideration the time that it entails. Another impending barrier is the lack of quality training and professional development to insure that principals have the skills to provide appropriate and effective evaluative feedback to teachers (Weisberg et al., 2009; Wise et al., 1984). Without the time for appropriate training, support, and practice, principals have difficulty supporting their teachers in this capacity. Finally, principals share that the lack of fiscal resources to support the time, training, and release time needed to coordinate quality supervision and evaluation is a barrier. Frustration results when the funding for the needed support is not made a district priority (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

The annual ritual of the evaluation cycle is one that even principals often feel heeds very little impact and is largely void of meaningful, change-yielding impact (Marshall, 2013). School principals do believe that supervision and evaluation are important. In fact, Weisberg et al. (2009) reported that 91% of administrators agree that dismissing poor teachers is important to impact the quality of instruction in schools, 81% of administrators report that there is at least one teacher with permanent status who performs poorly in their school, and yet 86% of administrators have never pursued the dismissal of a poor teacher. For those principals who have taken on this task, half of those report that the outcome of following through on the dismissal process did not end up resulting in dismissal (Weisberg et al., 2009). Taking into consideration the large amount of time and resources this takes away from other areas of focus, it is no wonder

principals perceive this as a conflict between what they feel is important versus how they spend their time. Conflict also arises as a result of a lack of self-efficacy and belief in the capacity of teachers to learn and change which contributes to the perceptions of principals (Platt et al., 2000).

The glaring flaws in the current teacher supervision and evaluation system, combined with the cry to improve this system, are hardly new. It is clear that this system requires improvement in order to have the best possible opportunity to improve teacher quality and to increase student achievement. Intentional and targeted interaction, feedback, and communication will lead to this change and provide coherence to a system that holds the key to improving student outcomes and to improving the perceptions of teachers and principals. An exploration of the theories associated with coaching are a logical next step in this journey.

Coaching

Supervision and evaluation of teachers address the need to improve teaching and learning. Whitaker (2012b) asserted that there are two avenues when seeking instructional improvement in schools: hire better teachers or improve the ones you have. Both in business and in education, professional coaching is a tool that is known to get results (Aguilar, 2013; Gilley & Boughton, 1996; Kimsey-House et al., 2011). As work is needed in order to transform a school from a place of crisis to one that has a momentum focused on teaching and learning, coaching can be seen as both a method and a theory (Aguilar, 2013). Ultimately, coaching is a type of professional development that is relational in nature and taps into an avenue by which people from all walks of life learn best (Aguilar, 2013). Coaching offers those who engage in this practice the opportunity

to reflect on personal development and to engage in dialogue that helps to further this growth (Goldsmith, Lyons, & McArthur, 2012).

The heart of coaching includes professionals in a collaborative relationship who are focused on learning processes together that maintain attention on continuous improvement. This may include practices, which include giving and receiving of feedback, questioning, goal setting, data analysis, and implementing new strategies with support (Aguilar, 2013; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010). Coaching embodies the essence that is supported through the Vygotksy space framework as it holds at its core the engagement of two or more people in social interaction, which begins with initial learning, exploration, practice, and is completed when intrinsic operation is achieved (McVee et al., 2005).

Core Tenets of Coaching

Coaching in education aligns with the goal of attaining growth and achievement for both teachers and students. In order for coaching to be most effective, there are tenets that must exist for those engaged in the goal of employing coaching to obtain systemic improvement. These values reveal themselves in the literature from a variety of sources.

Coaching as a data-driven practice is one that can be approached objectively through identifying school-based and specific needs and through including the use of tools to measure the impact (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004; Crane, 2001). The Annenberg Institute for School Reform embraced coaching as professional development. Through its work with school systems engaged in school reform, it sees coaching as a collection of practices that enacts change to include "coherence, focus, and

alignment at multiple levels of a school system" (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004, p. 1).

Malcolm Gladwell's (2008) research purported that 10,000 hours of practice are needed in order to attain mastery of a given concept. A 2009 study focused on professional development for teachers. What was found in this study was that approximately 50 hours of professional development are needed in order to achieve results related to quality teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Engaging in the practice of coaching allows for the building and follows up on knowledge and skills obtained through professional development (Aguilar, 2013). Aguilar (2013) maintained, "Coaching is an essential component of an effective professional development program" (p. 8). The benefits of coaching go beneath the surface and affect relationships, conditions, and a sense of safety that allows for a place where "resilient, joyful communities can be built" (Aguilar, 2013, p. 8). Coaching allows a focus on behaviors and contexts that enhance performance (Crane, 2001).

Coaching as a practice is relational and requires what Crane (2001) terms, "heart." A core belief associated with coaching is the belief that those who are engaged in the practice of coaching are competent and not in need of repair (Aguilar, 2013; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010). Coaching includes the belief that those who engage in this practice are doing so in a relationship that stems from equality and respect rather than expert to student (Aguilar, 2013; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010; Knight, 2007). Humility is key in a coaching relationship as it cannot be assumed that the coach's feedback or recommendations are always correct or appropriate (Crane, 2001).

The coach, in addition to believing in the equality of the relationship, must also see himself/herself as a colearner as well in the relationship (Crane, 2001; Knight, 2007). Knight (2007) purported that teaching is "almost as personal as parenting . . . if teachers are truly equal then their ideas must count" (p. 41). Thus, in order for coaching as a practice to be effective and instill sustainable change, it is imperative that stakeholders in the process see this as an opportunity to grow and learn together in a state that includes trust and vulnerability, with no one person holding more knowledge and power than the other.

Listening, observing, and nurturing are all behaviors that adult learners need to be subjected to in order to grow (Aguilar, 2013; Crane, 2001). A subtle push for change must also be included in coaching as it seeks to transform practice over time. It has to be understood that for coaching to be effective, it takes time to build rapport, trust, and relationship (Aguilar, 2013; Crane, 2001; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010; Knight, 2007). The transformative qualities of coaching rely on the belief that coaching is slower, not faster, and benefits from a quality investment in reducing reactivity and increasing patience and interpersonal communication (Crane, 2001; Knight, 2007).

The Principal as the Coach

Principals, as school site leaders, are tasked with steering their school toward an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. High-quality teachers are at the heart of improving student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Coaching, as a transformational practice, has the potential to change school cultures and practices in order to affect this needed focus on student achievement (Aguilar, 2013). According to

Crane (2001), "Coaching helps people to clarify objectives and to discover more effective approaches for achieving those objectives" (p. 34).

As opposed to a more traditional style of leadership, the coaching model maintains that the leader is not the expert in content or methods, but rather is focused on nurturing a culture with a focus on continuous improvement (Aguilar, 2013; Crane, 2001; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010; Knight, 2007). Gross Cheliotes and Fleming Reilly (2010) described the irony that exists in the reality that many leaders are picked because they are experts; however, they are quick to point out that leaders, especially as they transition to larger and broader roles, must rely on the group as a whole to achieve success. With a leader giving up the title of expert and becoming an equal member of a collaborative group, serving in a coaching capacity, solutions are co-created and thus instill more ownership for both the coach/leader/principal and other partners. Principals, who are coach-like in their practice, instill confidence in others and in their ability to grow and achieve change.

The Teacher as the Client

Teachers hold the responsibility to provide quality instruction for students and to influence the level of learning that takes place in the classroom. Developing as a professional educator is a core standard of the California Standards for the Teaching Profession and holds teachers to the standard that they will engage in collaboration with colleagues, to include administrators, in order to support growth, development, and learning for both the teacher and students. The principal serves as the evaluator for teachers, but through a collaborative process that engages the teacher in a relationship built on respect and trust, the teacher may also engage as a coaching client for the

principal/coach in an educational setting with the goal of developing as a professional educator. Danielson (2009) stated, "When a culture of professional inquiry has been established, teachers will naturally regard their principal as a resource to assist in strengthening practice" (p. 26). Engaging in a coaching relationship with a principal is an opportunity for teachers to further improve teaching (Danielson, 2009). When the school climate has been established and a teacher feels secure in his/her position, he or she is much more likely to take the initiative to reach out to the principal. This is more likely and possible when the teacher feels that the environment is professional and safe for risk taking (Danielson, 2009).

Coaching Conversations

Coaching conversations are best defined from two major works, *Coaching Conversations: Transforming Your School One Conversation at a Time* and *Opening the Door to Coaching Conversations* by Linda Gross Cheliotes and Marceta Fleming Reilly (2010, 2012). This study relied on their definition, which describes coaching conversations as "highly intentional . . . focused on the other person—her strengths and her challenges, and the attributes she brings to the conversations . . . their purpose is to stimulate growth and change" (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010, p. 3). In addition to being intentional, they are most often premeditated (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2012). Coaching conversations maintain the objective to effect change through positive interactions that result in observable actions (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010; Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Shuster, 2010). They foster the engagement in practicing new ways of thinking and ways of acting, which quite literally

develop “new neural pathways in the brain, which then make changed behavior possible and long lasting” (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010, p. 4).

In order to increase capacity and experience positive growth as a result of coaching conversations, there are several crucial coach-like skills to practice and employ: committed listening, paraphrasing, presuming positive intent and asking powerful questions, and providing reflective feedback (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010, 2012).

Committed listening. Perhaps considered the most important coaching skill, committed listening is the foundation for all of the other skills used in coaching conversations (Kee et al., 2010). Committed listening involves the principal in completely focusing on what is being communicated by the teacher—and by what is not being stated (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010, 2012; Kee et al., 2010). In committed listening, there is an absence of opinions, advice, and/or judgements, yet the coach may hone in on verbal and nonverbal cues in order to inform probing questions as part of the process (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010, 2012; Kee et al., 2010).

Paraphrasing. Summarizing what others are saying is a skill referred to as paraphrasing in the context of coaching conversations. This skill is essential in order to offer support to the teacher/client and to insure that communication is clear and that understanding of a given topic is a reached topic (Crane, 2001; Danielson, 2009; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2012; Knight, 2007; Platt et al., 2000). The use of paraphrasing provides evidence to the teacher/client that she is being heard and understood, which can foster a greater sense of trust and connection between the teacher and principal (Danielson, 2009; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2012).

Presuming positive intent and asking powerful questions. When a principal engages in a coaching conversation with a teacher, it is always best to enter into it with a mindset based in positivity and that utilizes language to support presumptions of a positive position (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2012). The presumption of positive intent supports the assertion that coaching relationships are entered into with an equal standing between the principal and the teacher (Aguilar, 2013). This eliminates the assumption that the principal is an expert and increases positive regard for the relationship (Crane, 2001; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010; Knight, 2007). According to Kee et al. (2010), "Skillful use of questions in coaching helps to reveal the information needed to maximize the benefit of the conversation to the person being coached" (p. 62). Presuming positive intent and framing questions from a position of this presumption gives the coach the opportunity to "build trust and collaborations, improve the self-esteem of others, and provide a safe space for growth and change" (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2012, p. 9).

Reflective feedback. Reflective feedback is a necessary component of any coaching conversation. Gross Cheliotes and Fleming Reilly (2012) stated, "The objective of reflective feedback is to give honest and direct comments while at the same time preserving the relationship" (p. 11). As a relational practice, coaching seeks to nurture and have a positive impact on teacher quality. Throughout the history of supervision and evaluation, it is noted that providing feedback that is both specific and honest is a best practice but has failed as part of teacher evaluation. Feedback is often delivered in a negative connotation or in a vague way, which does not lead to learning or growth (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2012). Feedback is best offered in the form of supporting

the achievement of goals and through asking questions that clarify understanding, support possibilities, and/or those that lead to a deeper level of thinking (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2012; Kee et al., 2010). Kee et al. (2010) stated, "We know that with adults, learning is voluntary—reflective feedback is offered for consideration" (p. 138).

Coaching conversations provide principals and teachers with a tool to increase the quality of their professional relationship and to have a positive impact on communication with the potential to effect a change for the better in teaching and learning. Incorporating coaching conversations into professional practice contributes to teacher supervision and evaluation being more meaningful (Danielson, 2009; Marshall, 2013; Marzano & Toth, 2013). Coaching conversations, although not evaluative in nature, have the potential to ultimately lead to evaluations that have a positive and lasting impact on teacher quality and student achievement.

National Blue Ribbon Schools

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program began in 1982 under the leadership of Terrell H. Bell, Secretary of Education for the United States. Bell founded this program to recognize schools that had made outstanding gains toward closing the achievement gap in schools, which have 40% or more of its students identified as disadvantaged (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). Bell's intent was to address the findings from a report he had commissioned titled *A Nation at Risk (*National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). An additional intent in doing so was to create public awareness about the best schools in the country and to facilitate dialogue both between and inside of schools regarding best practices (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). National Blue Ribbon Schools celebrate those schools across the

country, in a variety of settings, which despite challenges, thrive, exhibit continued growth, and produce outstanding results. To date, there are approximately 8,000 nationally recognized Blue Ribbon Schools.

Nominated National Blue Ribbon public schools are subject to a rigorous eligibility and performance criteria. Nominations are received from chief school state officers who represent each state and the District of Columbia, the territories, the Department of Defense Education Activity and the Bureau of Indian Education. Once nominated, schools must be determined eligible based on one of two criteria (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). The first possible avenue is to be recognized as a high-performing exemplary school. Schools meeting this criterion are in the top 15% of state rankings for state assessments, in the top 40% of all state schools for subgroup rankings for state assessments and/or attendance or graduation rates, and in the cases of high schools, are in the top 15% of most recent rankings for high school graduation rates (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). The second criterion applies to achievement gap closing at the exemplary level as defined by the chief school state officer. At the very minimum, this includes schools that are in the top 15% of gap-closing measures in the state between subgroups and the all student group in the most recent 5 years of data to include state assessments, attendance, and/or graduation rates (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). Additionally, the school's subgroups must be in the top 40% of state schools for these rankings, top 40% of graduation rates when applicable, and demonstrate evidence of stability in the rates of all school students' growth to not be less than the change in the performance of all students in the state (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.).

The impact on the school and local community for National Blue Ribbon Schools is contagious as many schools report an increase in professional partnerships and donations (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), "National Blue Ribbon schools serve as models for other schools throughout the nation and school personnel are often sought out as mentors" (para. 2). They are often visited and studied by visitors from other districts or educators at the state level in order to increase knowledge and capacity for leadership practices and the implementation of instructional strategies (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). These exemplary schools engage in best practices in order to achieve these high results and to be recognized nationally. Among these best practices, teachers and principals stay close to teaching and learning, which results in the building of professional relationships based on trust and focused on authentic dialogue and feedback between administration and teachers (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). It is these coach-like interactions, coaching conversations, between exemplary teachers and exemplary principals that are at the heart of this study.

Summary

The review of the literature reveals a scholarly debate between the effectiveness of traditional teacher supervision and evaluation versus coaching in the educational setting. Individual growth comes about as a result of social interaction; however, an examination of the history of the social interaction occurring as a result of traditional teacher supervision and evaluation has not resulted in significant changes to teaching and learning and has, in fact, often resulted in vague communication, damaged relationships, and broken trust. Over two centuries have passed in the existence of public schools, and

throughout this time, efforts to provide teachers with effective feedback that will lead to lasting results has fallen short. Both teachers and principals reveal that this system has been inconsistent, suffered from a lack of both fiscal and time-related resources, and has led to a general disconnection between supervision and evaluation and improving instruction.

Joyce and Showers's (2002) groundbreaking work for professional development supports coaching as a model that, given the investment of time for follow-up and practice, will result in lasting changes. The inclusion of observation, active listening, and frequent professional dialogue are all tenets of coaching that support the assertion that teachers are not in need of repair but are in need of involvement and ownership of the process of improving teaching and learning. Through employing the strategy of coaching with principals as coaches and teachers as clients, both participants have the opportunity to learn and grow in their practice, in the quality of their relationship, and in the overall impact to a school culture focused on growth and improvement.

An element of coaching in the educational setting with the most potential to effect change is the tool of coaching conversations. An in-depth examination of this practice uncovered essential elements that, if employed, have the potential to increase capacity and growth in those who participate in coaching conversations. Exemplary schools engage in practices that lead to lasting change. Nationally recognized National Blue Ribbon Schools provide a setting for best practices, including coaching conversations, to take place. They are an ideal setting in which to study exemplary teachers and principals who stay close to learning and effect lasting change as a result of coaching conversations. Focusing efforts on learning more about the effect of coaching conversations will add to

the efforts to increase the body of knowledge regarding how coach-like interactions between teachers and principals lead to overall improvement in the quality of teaching and student performance (Denton, 2009; Fullan, 2014; Moffitt, 2007; Roberge, 2013; Stevenson, 2009).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter outlines the research design and the methodology employed to conduct this phenomenological study of the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers in improving the quality of teaching and learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals. Chapter III includes the purpose statement, a central research question and three subquestions, the research design, population and sample, procedures for data collection and data analysis, limitations of the study, and a concluding summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary National Blue Ribbon Elementary School teachers improve student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals. A second purpose was to explore the barriers they encountered to holding these conversations and actions they took to overcome these barriers.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one central research question and three subquestions:

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals?

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers develop coaching conversations with their principals?
2. What barriers do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers encounter when holding coaching conversations with their principals?
3. What actions do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers take to overcome barriers of holding coaching conversations with their principals?

Research Design

Qualitative methodology is best employed in order to make meaning out of the lived experiences of research subjects (Patton, 2015). The researcher selected a qualitative approach for the intended study to describe the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary teachers in improving the quality of teaching and learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals. Currently, there are no existing valid and reliable measures available to collect the perceptions of elementary teachers. Phenomenological studies are based on capturing the "essence of the experience as perceived by the participants" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 346). Furthermore, data collection takes place via in-depth and unstructured interviews in order to elicit information from participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

When little is known about a topic, it initially makes sense to favor qualitative methods (Patten, 2012). Qualitative phenomenological design was chosen over other methods because the researcher was striving to understand and describe the lived experiences of teachers participating in coaching conversations and the barriers to coaching conversations (Moustakas, 1994). By definition, a phenomenological study

increases understanding; therefore; this method is aligned to the purpose of the study; which was to discover and describe how exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers improve student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Through this methodology, the researcher strove to understand and describe how exemplary elementary teachers "perceive, describe, feel, judge and remember" their lived experiences as participants of coaching conversations to improve student learning (Patton, 2015, p. 115). A phenomenological method was most appropriate as it afforded the researcher an avenue for data collection and analysis via interviews with participants who actively work in the role identified by the researcher's sample. The research design was approved by the Brandman University Internal Review Board (BUIRB) prior to conducting any data collection (see Appendix B).

Population

The population is the group of elements (including individuals, objects, or events) to which the researcher intends to generalize the results of a study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is possible for a population to be large or more targeted and specific (Patten, 2012).

National Blue Ribbon distinction has been awarded to 7,000 schools by the U.S. Department of Education during its 32-year history (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). Schools that apply for National Blue Ribbon distinction must submit and be selected via a rigorous application process that has multiple selection criteria. The target population for this study included all National Blue Ribbon elementary teachers in California from 2011-2015 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). During this time

period, there have been 90 National Blue Ribbon recipients in the state of California (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

The core elements shared among National Blue Ribbon schools include teachers who are held to high standards by leaders who are "staying close" to teaching and learning (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). Additionally, there is a deep culture of mutual respect and trust within the school and exemplary symbols of teaching and learning (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d.). These same core elements directly align to the principles and research that drive the need for utilizing coaching conversations as a means to promote student achievement through respectful, trusting targeted discourse around teaching and learning (Fullan, 2006, 2014; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010). Therefore, these specific characteristics were established as defining the target population from which the sample was drawn and findings could be generalized to practicing principals in the state of California. For the purposes of this study, the population was identified as the 2,430 elementary teachers in the 90 Blue Ribbon Schools in the state of California.

Target Population

However, because this study sought to isolate the elements identified and described by expert teachers, a more specific population from which to draw a sample was needed. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) identified this as a targeted population.

In this instance, for convenience, proximity to the researcher was used as a criterion to identify schools for the target population. There were 31 National Blue Ribbon elementary schools in proximity to the researcher.

To locate exemplary teachers within the Blue Ribbon Schools, the researcher used the following criteria to define the exemplary teacher:

1. Minimum of 3 years of teaching experience.
2. Site or district recognition as a teacher of the year.
3. Recommendation of their principal
4. Participated in coaching conversations with their principal.

The target population for this study was the 930 teachers in the 31 Blue Ribbon Schools in proximity to the researcher who met the criteria as exemplar.

Sample

Purposeful sampling is a strength in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). In order to identify a sample of participants, the researcher employed purposeful sampling through the identification of exemplary elementary teachers who have participated in coaching conversations with their principal during their full-time employment at a National Blue Ribbon elementary school. This information was obtained through the U.S. Department of Education National Blue Ribbon Schools website, which lists that school, location, and contact information (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Thirty-one National Blue Ribbon elementary schools existed in proximity to the researcher. Out of these schools, the researcher identified all teachers in those schools who met the following criteria as exemplar:

1. Minimum of 3 years of teaching experience.
2. Site or district recognition as a teacher of the year.
3. Recommendation of their principal
4. Participated in coaching conversations with their principal.

In addition, convenience sampling was used to select from the identified participants as proximity to the researcher was a factor in selection.

The researcher created an unbiased sample of 12 exemplary elementary teachers meeting the above criteria from the 31 National Blue Ribbon schools to be included in the purposeful random sample (Patton, 2015).

Sample Selection Process

Purposeful sampling cannot be generalized; however, it does reduce potential sampling bias and creates "credibility and manageability, not representativeness" (Patton, 2015, p. 286). Creswell (2014) supported the identification of participants, which assisted the researcher in understanding the problem and research questions. The researcher engaged in collaboration with the author of this thematic study focusing on elementary principals in National Blue Ribbon schools. Twelve elementary principals volunteered and were selected for that study. The protocol for recruitment began with the elementary principals selected for the parallel study. Using what Creswell (2014) termed "single-stage sampling procedure," the researcher worked with each of the 12 principals to identify an elementary teacher who met the following criteria to participate in the study:

1. Minimum of 3 years of teaching experience.
2. Site or district recognition as a teacher of the year.
3. Recommendation of their principal
4. Participated in coaching conversations with their principal.
5. From these names, 12 elementary teachers, one from each of the identified principal participants, were selected to ultimately participate in the study.

6. Each participant was contacted by the researcher by phone and by e-mail. The e-mail included the letter of invitation to volunteer in the research study, which included the selection criteria (see Appendix C).
7. After the phone and e-mail contact, the researcher obtained informed consent to volunteer in the study from each participant (see Appendix D).
8. If a selected teacher declined to participate, another was selected as a replacement using the same process described under the sample heading.

In addition, convenience sampling was used to select from the identified participants as proximity to the researcher was a factor in selection.

Instrumentation

For the purposes of this qualitative study, the researcher served as the instrument through conducting interviews, a data collection method commonly used in research of contemporary education (Merriam, 1988). Standardized open-ended interview questions were developed and employed (see Appendix E). Patton (2015) contended that in collaborative studies, standardized questions can "compensate for variability in skills" (p. 440). The questions included in a standardized open-ended interview, also known as a semistructured interview, are predetermined in both sequence and wording (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2012). An interview protocol, or script, was developed and utilized as part of this process (see Appendix F; Patten, 2012). Using this protocol maintains the integrity of the interview for multiple subjects over time, which allows for replication but at the same time allows the researcher the flexibility to clarify the wording of questions and to ask additional probing questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2012; Patton, 2015). Questions were included at the beginning of the interview

designed to build trust and put the interview subject at ease (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Furthermore, careful attention was paid to the wording of questions to insure that they were truly open ended and not phrased in a dichotomous manner (Patton, 2015). Questions were developed using the research questions, the variables of the study, and the review of literature as key references. Measures were taken to maintain the integrity of this study. The researcher intentionally employed targeted strategies to enhance the reliability and validity of all compiled data including interviews, follow-up observations, and artifacts.

As noted in the sample selection process, the researcher collaborated with the author of a parallel study to identify participants for the study. Prior to beginning each interview, volunteers were presented with a review of the letter of invitation (see Appendix C), informed consent (see Appendix D), an audio release form (see Appendix G) and the Brandman University Institutional Review Board "Research Participant's Bill of Rights" (see Appendix H). Participants who agreed to continue with the interview were asked to sign the informed consent and the audio release, which explained the purpose of the study, the terms of confidentiality, and the terms related to the transcription and use of audio recordings during and after the study. In addition, the researcher created and used a demographic questionnaire, which was also used with the consent packet in order to gather demographic data from the research participants (see Appendix I). This demographic information validated that the sample criteria was met by study participants and was also intended to be referenced by the researcher for future suggestions of research based on the possible categories of age, race/ethnicity, gender, position, and years of experience in current position.

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research is defined by the likelihood of the replication of one's findings and is impacted by the challenge of human behavior not being static (Merriam, 1988; Patten, 2012; Yin, 2009). Furthermore, it depends on the skills of the researcher in developing and maintaining trust, relationships, and approaching the research process from a place of neutrality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) denoted that reliability includes both establishing rapport via respecting the interview participants and neutrality through assuming a nonjudgmental stance toward the content that is shared in the context of the interview/data collection process. The researcher employed a variety of measures to increase the reliability of this research.

Merriam (1988) purported that several techniques can be used to effect the dependability of the results: "the investigator's position, triangulation, and an audit trail" (p. 172). Additionally, reflexivity was employed by the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Reflexivity was accomplished via incorporating four strategies: awareness of self within the context of the research and interviews, giving recognition to the participants through the acknowledgement and validation of their voices, persistent attention toward accuracy in gathering the data and through acknowledging researcher bias and taking steps to transcend personal subjectivity (Pillow; 2003). The investigator's position was addressed via the theoretical framework shared in the review of literature, along with the description of the study population and sample selection. Triangulation of the data was further obtained through collection of artifacts and observations in addition to the interviews. Finally, an audit trail enhanced

reliability through making "as many steps as operational as possible and to conduct research as if someone were looking over your shoulder" (Yin, 2009, p. 45).

Reliability of the instrument was additionally addressed through a standardized approach to data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2012). The researcher conducted all of the interviews. Interviews were conducted face to face whenever possible or via telephone. Semistructured interview questions were developed and addressed in the same order for each participant (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Consistent language was employed within the interview questions and clarification was offered and made at the request of interview participants throughout the process. Prior to conducting any formal interviews, a pilot test was conducted.

Pilot Test

Prior to carrying out the study, a panel of three educational consultants was gathered in order to carry out the pilot test. A pilot test was conducted in order to test the existence of bias in the "procedures, the interviewer, and the questions" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 206). Creswell (2014) and McMillan and Schumacher (2010) both noted that pilot testing also informs the researcher with a means to evaluate the questions for clarity of terms and projected length of interview. Participants engaged in a review of the interview script (see Appendix D), which included a copy of the interview questions. This review informed the researcher via participant feedback of the reliability of the questions, along with the following components: readability, length of interview, clarity of word structure, and intention of the questions (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Post pilot test, the researcher consulted with the committee chair, an additional educational consultant with qualitative interview experience, to review the

interview script and questions. Based on the results of feedback and information gathered from the pilot testing and the committee chair, interview questions were revised and refined.

Validity

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined validity in qualitative research as "the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world" (p. 330). They also further defined validity as "the degree to which the interpretations have mutual meanings between the participants and the researcher" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330). Of the 10 possible strategies noted by McMillan and Schumacher to enhance validity, the researcher used the following listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Strategies to Enhance Validity

Strategy	Description
Multimethod strategies	Use of interview data, observational data, and examination of artifacts for data triangulation
Participant language; verbatim accounts	Use of opportunity to clarify wording between researcher and study participant to insure clarity and understanding in responses
Low-inference descriptors	Use of specific literal descriptive data from the interviews
Mechanically recorded data	Use of two recording devices simultaneously for all interviews to insure possible equipment failure is not at risk
Member checking	Study participants were given opportunity to elaborate via probing questions and/or rephrasing of terms within the scope of the interview to insure clarity
Participant review	Participants were given the opportunity to review the verbatim transcript of the interview and to offer revisions or modifications of data to increase accuracy

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection consists of interviews, observations, and/or fieldwork, and collection of documents and/or artifacts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The purpose of this study was to discover and describe how National Blue Ribbon teachers improve student learning through coaching conversations. To align with this aim, the researcher engaged in interviews as the chief form of data collection. Additionally, the researcher conducted two observations and examined a variety of artifacts with the goal of data triangulation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained the approval of the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB), which included a review of the research design and interview script and questions (see Appendix B). The researcher collaborated with the author of a thematic study in order to identify 12 National Blue Ribbon elementary principals who were contacted and agreed to participate in interviews as part of data collection for that study (Flavin, 2016). Each principal was asked to provide the names of teachers they had interacted with via coaching conversations in their current assignment. A letter of invitation, which outlined the study purpose and key points to inform their decision regarding participation, was e-mailed to each prospective participant (see Appendix C). Participants were e-mailed a copy of the informed consent, audio release form, and Brandman University's "Research Participant's Bill of Rights" prior to the interview (see Appendices D, G, & H).

Confidentiality for all participants was protected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The identities of the participants were kept in a password-protected file

and made available only to the researcher and the dissertation committee chair. In addition, because there was one participant per school, this would make it possible to identify individuals based on the names of the school sites. As a result, the names of the school sites were also available only to the researcher and the chair of the dissertation committee. Audio recordings were transcribed, and within those transcriptions, any identifying information or names were generalized. Once transcriptions were completed, the audio files were erased.

Interviews were scheduled in advance. Two days prior to the interview, a reminder e-mail with the date, time, and location for the interview was sent to each participant and included an additional set of copies of the informed consent, audio release form, and Brandman University's "Research Participant's Bill of Rights" (see Appendices D, G, & H). In addition, an interview outline was attached for each participant (see Appendix J). The interview script was followed for each interview (see Appendix F). Prior to beginning the audio recording, the participant was given the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the study procedures and terms. Once the researcher had insured that signed consents were all completed, the digital audio recording devices were started. Two devices were used simultaneously to lessen the probability toward any malfunctions of the technology affecting the data collection. The participants were reminded of the Brandman University "Research Participant's Bill of Rights" and reminded that they could stop the interview at any time or decline to answer any questions for any reason (see Appendix H).

The interview questions began following the aforementioned formalities. Patton (2015) stated that there are four purposes for taking "strategic and focused" notes during

interviews: to help formulate follow-up questions, a tool to review prior to transcripts, facilitating later analysis, and back-up information in the event of technological malfunction (p. 472). Therefore, during the interview, the researcher took notes in addition to the audio recording. Probes and additional questions were asked in order to better understand the perceptions of the participants and to collect as much data as possible. Prior to concluding the interview, the participants were given the opportunity to add any additional information that they wanted regarding their participation in coaching conversations with their principal. Once completed, the participant was thanked for his or her time and the audio recording devices were turned off.

Data Analysis

Patton (2015) stated, "The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data" (p. 521). In order to analyze the collected data, the researcher engaged in the process of inductive analysis. Inductive analysis is used in qualitative research as a method to synthesize data, organize it into categories, and then seek the relationships and patterns that emerge (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

This study relied on inductive analysis. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) noted that there are four phases of inductive data analysis. The phases are abstract and complex in nature, requiring the researcher to continuously explore the data and refine both the analysis and the interpretation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The three components of data analysis relied on for this study included the collection and documentation of data, the coding and categorizing of the data, the identification of emerging patterns and themes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Collecting and Documenting Data

Patton (2015) acknowledged that data analysis begins in the field during the process of data collection. Whereas this can be overdone, the collection of notes and observations can result in analytical insights that are missed opportunities to inform the study (Patton, 2015). This study used a predetermined interview protocol with all participants, but probing and follow-up questions allowed capacity for additional information to emerge and to be considered during analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Throughout the data collection process, note taking by the researcher was employed to enhance data analysis.

Coding and Categorizing of Data

The coding of the data began with the process of transcription of the data. Following transcription, the researcher engaged in a number of readings of each interview transcription as it allowed for a deeper connection to the data and to get a sense of the overall impressions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Initial codes began to emerge and were identified and recorded. Codes were more specific in nature and were numerous. Throughout the process of coding, the researcher began to identify categories that are used to group related codes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Although introduced to the use of analytical software to assist with the coding and categorizing, the researcher chose to accomplish this "by hand" as it was more conducive to establishing familiarity with the data sets (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Finally, the researcher engaged in what McMillan and Schumacher (2010) coined "recursive" or "constant comparison" where the researcher is "continually searching for both supporting and contrary evidence about the meaning of the category (p. 377).

Finally, to guard against researcher bias, an intercoder reliability process was used to code and evaluate the data. Colleagues who were familiar with but not participants in the study were enlisted to review the data, code it independently, and then compare their results to the researcher's. This process reduced the risk of the researcher's individual bias being inserted into the data analysis process.

Identifying Patterns and Themes

The coding and categorization of data began to result in the identification of patterns and themes. This resulted in a directional change to a more deductive approach to forming conclusions about the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher continuously cross-checked the emerging patterns to insure that they were connecting to the research problem (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). McMillan and Schumacher identified several techniques for pattern seeking. These are addressed in Table 4.

Again, to guard against researcher bias, an intercoder reliability process was used to code and evaluate the data. Colleagues who were familiar with but not participants in the study were enlisted to review the data, code it independently, and then compare their results to the researcher's. This process reduced the risk of the researcher's individual bias being inserted into the data analysis process.

Table 4

Pattern-Seeking Techniques Employed in Data Analysis

Technique	Description
Gauging data trustworthiness	Made considerations for the accuracy of sources, including an awareness of researcher bias and influence.
Use of triangulation	Employed the practice of triangulation in order to "cross-validate" data between interviews, observations, and collected artifacts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).
Evaluation of discrepant and negative evidence	Searched for evidence that was contrary to the emerging patterns in order to strengthen their specificity.
Ordering categories into patterns	Placed categories into a logical order aligned to the research questions and/or components of the research questions.
Sorting categories for patterns	Analyzed patterns and categories, allowing for the inclusion of categories into more than one pattern when appropriate and/or to breakdown and reorganize categories to further define its meaning.
Constructing visual representations	Constructed tables, charts, and figures to assist in analyzing abstract analysis of data.
Doing logical cross-analyses	Crossed-checked categories of data in order to inform suggestions for future research.

Limitations

Phenomenological studies attempt to understand lived experiences that are not necessarily generalizable (Patton, 2015). Within this study there were several identifiable limitations based on those considered by the researcher including "sample size, methodology constraints, length of the study, and response rate" (Roberts, 2010, p. 162).

First, the sample size presents a limitation. The study was limited to a selection of teachers from 31 National Blue Ribbon elementary schools, which may result in the results of the study being limited in generalizability (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010;

Patton, 2015). However, it was noted that phenomenological studies often rely on smaller sample sizes in order to create an in-depth understanding of lived experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

An additional limitation was noted in the sample selection. Although purposeful random sampling was employed to limit bias as much as possible, it is still possible that the teachers recommended by the principal display bias due to the nature of the evaluator/evaluatee relationship.

Participation rates of the sample also presented an added limitation. Participants were recommended by their principal and participated on a voluntary basis. It was assumed by the researcher that responses to interviews were honest and filled with candor; however, it is possible that not all respondents were comfortable knowing that their principal suggested them to participate in the study, which can "skew" the results or affect motivation (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010, p. 142).

The bias of the researcher in the context of interviewing presented a fourth limitation. It was important to avoid "biased items or terms" and to avoid "loaded or leading questions" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 197). It was important to ask questions that gave no indication of desired responses in order to elicit the most reliable data possible.

Finally, a limitation of this study was the possible misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the educational jargon employed in the interview questions. The field of education is ripe with terms that are used synonymously. Awareness of these terms, such as "coaching conversations," and efforts to clarify and reduce disparity in understanding throughout the interviews was given close attention. The burden of posing

understandable questions to insure clarity within the language of the questions falls on the researcher (Patton, 2015). Despite efforts taken by the researcher in the context of field testing and clarification of terms during interviews, this limitation still posed a possible threat.

Summary

Chapter III supplied a review of the purpose and research questions for this study, followed by an outline of the methodology. Included in the chapter was an explanation of the research design, population and sample, instrumentation, and procedures for data collection and analysis. Additionally, the study's limitations were presented and explored. Chapter IV presents the data and findings from the study. Chapter V detects major findings, conclusions, proposals for action, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This study examined the lived experiences of exemplary teachers at National Blue Ribbon elementary schools as they engage in purposeful coaching conversations as an avenue to improve student learning. In this chapter, data are presented and analyzed from 12 interviews conducted with exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers. Chapter IV contains a review and summary of the purpose of the study, the research questions, the methodology, and data collection procedures as well as the population and sample for the study. Finally, the findings for each research subquestion and the central question are presented.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers improve student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals. A second purpose was to explore the barriers they encountered to holding these conversations and actions they took to overcome these barriers.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one central research question and three subquestions:

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals?

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers develop coaching conversations with their principals?
2. What barriers do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers encounter when holding coaching conversations with their principals?
3. What actions do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers take to overcome barriers of holding coaching conversations with their principals?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological methodology to achieve the purpose of sharing the lived experiences of exemplary teachers at National Blue Ribbon elementary schools as they engage in coaching conversations with their principals. Because this study sought to examine the lived experiences of these teachers and the actions they took to overcome any barriers to coaching conversations, it was determined that the most appropriate data collection procedure would be through the use of in-depth, semistructured interviews. The researcher conducted interviews with 12 teachers identified as exemplary by their principals. Ten interviews were conducted face to face, and one was conducted over the phone. All 12 participants were selected from National Blue Ribbon Schools in Southern California, four from Riverside County, four from San Diego County, and four from Los Angeles County. The location, date, and time of the interviews were selected by the participants and took place during the months of October and November 2016. All interviews were conducted at participants' school sites—either in a conference room or their classroom, with the exception of the one phone interview. All participants were provided with an interview outline, containing all of the questions,

in advance of the interview. Each participant signed an informed consent form as well as a release for the researcher to audio tape the interview. The researcher utilized two electronic devices to record the interview, in addition to taking notes on a copy of the interview outline. Once complete, the recording was transcribed. Following the interview, all participants were offered a copy of the verbatim transcriptions to be reviewed for accuracy. Coding of collected data was then employed by the researcher. Data analysis took place in order to identify frequent themes. The emerging codes from this analysis were then correlated to the study's research questions, resulting in the findings for this study. As an additional step to insure against researcher bias, the researcher also used intercoder reliability through collaboration with a peer researcher to code a portion of the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Population and Sample

The population for this study included all elementary teachers within National Blue Ribbon elementary schools identified between the years of 2011 and 2015. This included 90 school sites and 2,430 teachers. The targeted population was limited to expert teachers—teachers identified as exemplary by their principals. In addition, for convenience, proximity to the researcher was used as a criterion, which led to a target population of 930 teachers at 31 National Blue Ribbon Schools located within four counties of Southern California. Ultimately, the results can be generalized to all elementary teachers at National Blue Ribbon elementary schools in California.

Through collaboration with principals participating in this thematic study, 12 exemplary teachers were selected using purposeful sampling—specifically what Creswell (2014) identified as "single-stage sampling." Ultimately, 12 exemplary teachers were

identified who met the selection criteria, which included years of experience, identification as expert teachers, past coaching conversation participants, and geographic location. Four participants from each of three local counties—Riverside, San Diego, and Los Angeles—comprised the sample for this study. The population of National Blue Ribbon elementary schools is limited, and thus, the sample of this study was particularly small in size. As a result, to preserve anonymity, the researcher insured that names and any other identifying information that may compromise the participants was omitted from the presentation of the findings. For the purposes of this study, participants were referred to using numbers (e.g., Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc.).

Presentation of the Data

The central research question for the study sought to discover the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon teachers as they improved student learning through engaging in coaching conversations with their principals. Three subquestions were developed to address the manner in which these exemplary National Blue Ribbon teachers developed coaching conversations with their principals, to identify what barriers existed to holding these conversations, and finally, what actions exemplary National Blue Ribbon teachers took to overcome these barriers. The data were coded and organized into themes categorized to address the three subquestions of the study. The findings for this study are presented by subquestions and include tables, which include the significant themes related to the research question.

Research Subquestion 1

The first subquestion of the study sought to answer, "How do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers develop coaching conversations with their

principals?" Nine themes were identified between the 12 participants, with a range in descending order of frequency from 16 to seven. Table 5 illustrates these findings.

Table 5

Themes Relative to Developing Coaching Conversations

Developing coaching conversations	Frequency
Engage in informal dialogue	16
Foster a relationship of mutual respect	13
Team collaboration includes principal	12
Engage in spontaneous face-to-face communication	12
Being trusted by principal to take risks	11
Intentionally seeking feedback	10
Solution focused conversations	9
Trusting principal expertise	9
Engage in electronic communication	7

Engage in informal dialogue. Eight of the 12 teacher participants reported a total of 16 instances to illustrate that the great majority of their coaching conversations with their principals resulted from frequent engagement in informal dialogue. Many principals were reported to have an "open door" policy and to be highly visible on campus before, during, and after school in settings such as at the front of the school grounds, out at recess, and through informal walk-through visits in classrooms. Teacher 2 reported, "We are able to talk informally and pretty much see each other all around campus. We'll talk in the morning during safety patrol, in my classroom, or I'll see her at lunch and we'll share ideas." Participants also reported that these conversations developed as part of both planned and impromptu team meetings where the principal engaged in conversations focused on student learning. Teacher 6 reported, "Yeah, there's never the big summons. . . . It's always in the lounge or she'll come into my room." Teacher 2 also discussed the ways in which coaching conversations took place at grade-level meetings to address the

entire grade level, “She comes into our grade level collaborative. . . . she’ll come in and speak to us about things fifth-grade related.” These opportunities for informal dialogue are further supported by referencing the Vygotsky space framework, which supports learning through social interaction (McVee et al., 2005).

Additionally, participants noted that informal dialogue helped create a sense of trust and to develop their relationship with their principal, which also contributed to them being open and receptive to coaching conversations. Aguilar (2013) noted that the relational aspects of coaching assist participants in achieving a level of optimum learning. Both Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 felt that they had a true friendship with their principal and this allowed them to be comfortable in both formal and informal situations.

Foster a relationship of mutual respect. Eight teacher participants often noted that a high level of respect for their principal, along with the feeling that they were equally respected, contributed to the success of coaching conversations. There were numerous references to participants’ perceptions that their principals did not operate from an authoritarian point of view. Rather, they were engaged in doing the work alongside of the teachers, therefore showing a willingness to share knowledge and experience, while honoring the knowledge and experience of the teachers engaged in teaching and learning. Teacher 3 stated, “Our relationship is just a relationship of laughter and mutual respect because we listen without speaking.” Teacher 4 related a sense of mutual respect to being evident in posture and body language, “He often sends that message, even with his posture of ‘we’ because he is going to sit next to you . . . we’ve developed that relationship over time with that sense of trust, mutual respect.” Another way in which mutual respect is communicated is through participants noting that both they and their

principal were willing to be vulnerable and honest. For example, Teacher 5 shared an incident where the principal, whom she greatly respected, shared that he felt a situation was awkward for him as well, and he was not quite comfortable as they found themselves addressing the concern of an angry parent. This willingness to share vulnerability and to demonstrate that learning occurs together is a part of coaching that has been shown to lead to sustainable change (Knight, 2007). Teacher 7 captured the essence of mutual respect in the sharing of the site principal as one who is "a partner in business." "I don't feel like he is my boss . . . with him working side by side with you, he's not just there telling you orders or what to do, he's there doing it with you." Teacher 8 added to this idea of a partnership based in mutual respect, "I respect her. She showed what she knew. She would put herself in vulnerable positions. She would teach a lesson so that we could watch." This finding is additional information that connects to the Vygotsky space framework in that a sense of mutual respect opens up the possibility of engaging in exploration and practice, which results in increased understanding (Galluci et al., 2010).

Team collaboration includes principal. Twelve instances were supported by eight participants who noted that coaching conversations were developed through collaborative participation in grade-level and/or vertical teams with their principal in attendance. Participants who referenced team collaboration had several connections to the benefits of team collaboration with a principal and described how that contributed to the development of coaching conversations. Teacher 9 shared how team collaboration leads to better understanding of the principal from a viewpoint that also connects to informal dialogue and mutual respect. She stated,

> When you're doing that [brainstorming], you can't help but kind of get to know the person better, because you're understanding their background knowledge and what they've dealt with previously . . . you feel as if you have more of a rapport I guess when you're in it together.

Teacher 10 noted that whole-day collaboration gave her and the team time to not only get to know the principal, but it also opened the door to having more time to delve into topics where they needed to dialogue around student improvement. Teacher 12 noted that coaching conversations that address entire teams are a result of the principal reaching out to teachers in a setting devoted to problem solving, which allows coaching conversations to develop for teachers,

> She goes to different team meetings, like fourth grade right now. . . . she'll drop in at leadership meetings, weekly RTI meetings with different teachers and we have SST programs . . . so sometimes that is a good time to talk to a particular teacher about a particular student or situation.

Gross Cheliotes and Fleming Reilly (2010) noted that when the principal gives up the title of leader and joins a team, this not only instills ownership but inspires participants to grow in their confidence and take action to change outcomes.

Engage in spontaneous face-to-face communication. Seven of the 12 participants noted a total frequency of 12 for findings that align to instances of spontaneous face-to-face communication as a theme contributing to the development of coaching conversations. These opportunities were noted to take place in a variety of settings, including classrooms, playgrounds, bus loops, and in the principal's office. This theme differs from engaging in informal dialogue in that spontaneous communication

does not fit the profile for the predetermined and intentional conversations described by Gross Cheliotes and Fleming Reilly (2010). Participants noted, however, that instances of spontaneous conversation also result in opportunities to develop coaching conversations with their principals and are often a catalyst to future intentional talks. Teacher 1 noted that many of her conversations with her principal were spontaneous:

> I'm here after school so sometimes before I go home, I'll just come in here and we'll have a conversation because she works late too. Other days, I'll catch her before school or I'll come in at recess, it just depends.

Teacher 6 shared that on more than one occasion, she has engaged her principal in a spontaneous conversation where she admittedly was complaining. Her principal, after listening, responded with a "growth opportunity" to participate in a district-level task force that she said ended up changing not only her outlook but also her grade level. Teacher 6 exclaimed, "My plate was full . . . but bottom line it was important enough to be on it which was the best thing I ever did." Teacher 11 felt that during spontaneous face-to-face conversations, his principal took the time to comment positively on his strengths and he had observed this happen with other colleagues. He stated that an unintended outcome of those interactions was an increase in confidence for teachers, which ultimately led to increased trust and willingness to act on feedback when it did come via a coaching conversation—albeit formal or informal. He made the connection to this being a theme that also related to his principal's role in collaborative relationships and teams. He felt that this practice honored the contributions of teachers and that when she shared her views on the strengths of others as it happened in spontaneous dialogue, it

communicated the message that "the team is built on everyone's strengths and what they can offer."

Being trusted by the principal to take risks. Seven teachers contributed to the frequency of 11 instances noting that principals who trusted their teachers to take risks helped them develop coaching conversations with their principals. These teachers felt that principals who engaged in this display of collaborative trust and mutual respect helped support student learning when they allowed teachers the latitude to try new things and to establish trust in this way prior to and following instances when they engaged in coaching conversations. Teacher 3 reported, "She trusts us to be free and try new things. . . . it's always that freedom to go for it, try it, see if that works . . . being given the professional courtesy provision to do what's best." Teacher 12 noted that as she has, over time, participated in coaching conversations with her principal, she has become a more "competent" teacher, "It's giving me permission to try different things. I've had conversations with [my principal] and I feel comfortable trying different things." Through engaging in risk taking, this teacher found herself opening up to coaching conversations that resulted in growth for both herself and her students. The changes that are affected when teachers are trusted to try new things either prior to or following a coaching conversation lead to changes in the ways that they both think and act, which has the potential for long-term change (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010).

Intentionally seeking feedback. Another way that participants shared that they develop coaching conversations with their principals was by intentionally seeking out feedback. Interviews with eight of the 12 participants resulted in a frequency count of 10 to support this theme. Roberge (2014) noted that teachers do understand the role of

feedback to improve their practice. Teacher participants in this study shared examples of times that they intentionally sought out feedback in attempts to have conversations with their principals outside of the supervision and evaluation process. Teacher 2 revealed his insights into how he sought feedback after his principal brought in a team of principals to observe his classroom, "I enjoy getting feedback from her as I seek to continuously improve my practice, so in doing that I hope to get honest feedback. I know she'll provide that." Teacher 9 communicated that early on during her first few years with her principal, she developed coaching conversations by intentionally seeking out her principal, but that over time, their relationship has matured to a place where her principal more freely offers feedback, "I think I sought it out more in my second year because I was still part of the evaluation process, now . . . I don't really have to seek it out. She's pretty good about giving it." This intentional action of seeking out feedback supports the notion that nonevaluative feedback plays an important role in the both teacher quality and student growth (Danielson, 2009; Downey et al., 2004).

Solution-focused conversations. A different way in which teachers work to develop coaching conversations comes about during interactions with their principals, which involve, for example, looking at data and determining actions to take to improve student growth. Six participants had a frequency of nine illustrations of how solution-focused conversations have an impact on this development. Teacher 1 was quick to point out that in her experience, teachers do not respond well when a principal gives a directive instead of "jumping in to be part of the solution." She shared that when her principal joins her in a conversation that is focused on solutions rather than what may be perceived as the problem, then teacher quality can improve, "It gives you more than one thing to

add to your bag of tricks that you may not have thought of . . . so those conversations are real important in order for us as a teacher to be better in the classroom." Teacher 4 put this same theme into context under the setting of the principal collaborating during a team meeting. She referenced his being there to look at data as a team and that he was there to problem solve with them. She shared that he would say, "What should we do . . . it's more of a 'we do' and not 'what are you doing about it.'" Through engaging in a solution-focused conversation, he demonstrates a shared investment and opens up the door to future conversations with individuals. Teacher 7 said her principal focused on solutions but always pointed back to the data. She noted, "He will always talk about the data. It's not you, this is the data. . . . something is not working so let's take a few minutes to look at other strategies." She shared that because he fostered respect, and he would come to conversations with possible solutions to share, she felt very comfortable opening up to coaching conversations with him. Problem solving—looking at big ideas—has the greatest potential to improve the quality of teaching, and thus, student learning (Danielson, 2009).

Trusting principal expertise. Eight teacher participants shared a frequency of nine examples of how a teacher who trusts the expertise of the principal can move toward developing coaching conversations. Through a system of supervision and evaluation, the literature has established that it is nearly impossible for a principal to have the expertise of content in order to evaluate all teachers sufficiently (Darling-Hammond, 2013). However, when principals work with teachers on the goal of improving student learning, enhancing the level of expertise plays an important role (Marzano et al., 2011). These participants shared that their perception of the expertise of their principal led to them

having greater trust in the information shared within coaching conversations and even was likely to inspire them to take action as a result of the conversation.

Teacher 8 specifically addressed the expertise of her principal as a key skill she had in the development of coaching conversations:

> Curriculum knowledge, she knew what she was talking about. I knew that as we were talking, we were specifically talking about the curriculum, or the lesson. . . . it was just very informed. It was an informed discussion. It was deliberate. She had deliberately thought about it, and then we were going to have the conversation. She showed what she knew.

Teacher 12 also shared a few examples of how her principal's expertise played a strong part in the developing of trust and holding coaching conversations. She felt that her principal's experience as a university professor helped establish credibility with her and her colleagues. Furthermore, as a special education teacher, she had not had positive experiences in the past with principals who understood and supported this element of education. With her current principal, she had a different experience, "I think what I realized immediately is that she understood special ed and she cared about special ed. . . . I felt comfortable coming in." For Teacher 2, the impact of his principal's expertise was directly related to his practice, "If there are suggestions, I will listen to the suggestions and work towards improving this practice."

Engaging in electronic communication. One of the transformative qualities of coaching is found in increased interpersonal communication (Crane, 2001; Knight, 2007). Additionally, in order for a principal, who may be the evaluator, to be perceived as a coach and/or participant in a coaching conversation in a nonevaluative way, the principal-

teacher relationship must be built on trust and communication (Danielson, 2009). Both informal communication and spontaneous face-to-face communication have already been established as significant themes for this study. The use of electronic communication is an additional theme that was evident from five participants with a frequency of seven. These participants shared the value of the accessibility to their principal even in the face of barriers. The relationships needed in order for coaching conversations to be developed were enhanced when principals utilized means of electronic communication to provide accessibility to teachers. Teacher 3 stated that her principal shared an electronic weekly bulletin with the teachers and often included pictures of strategies in use in classrooms or a link to a video. In this example, the principal used these communications as a springboard to open conversations with teachers. Another teacher shared that her principal often used e-mail to address areas of needed growth in a general manner. He then referenced the e-mail as needed in the event that he had a follow-up conversation with the team or an individual. Teacher 7 shared her comfort at knowing that she could text her principal even on the weekends and get a quick response. She felt that this made her more comfortable reaching out to her principal and engaging in conversations knowing how responsive he was. A final example was found in the experience of Teacher 9 in developing coaching conversations. She shared as an example that if her principal had been in her room and she wanted to reach out and follow up, she would send a text or e-mail to initiate contact rather than wait for a time to catch her in person.

Research Subquestion 2

The second subquestion of the study sought to answer, "What barriers do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers encounter when holding

coaching conversations with their principals?" Four themes were identified between the 12 participants, with a range in descending order of frequency counts from nine to four. Table 6 illustrates these findings.

Table 6

Themes Relative to Barriers to Coaching Conversations

Barriers to coaching conversations	Frequency
Time	9
Accessibility to principal	8
Resistance to change	6
Lack of understanding for expectations	4

Time. The barrier with the highest frequency was time. Seven teachers shared this factor as a barrier to holding coaching conversations. The literature points to time as a barrier to effective supervision and evaluation (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Platt et al., 2000; Roberge, 2013; Weisberg et al., 2009). Coaching, given the investment of time, is known to result in lasting change (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Time, as a barrier, was noted with a frequency of nine. Teacher 4 shared that time was a barrier, not only for the principal but also for teachers. She noted that both have responsibility in creating and addressing this barrier:

> Going back to an obstacle, or something I feel is a barrier, still may be time, but I think as professionals and teachers, we need to reach out and ask for what we need too. . . . I think principals just need to be purposeful in their time and also communicate when they're available or make it feel like that open door is for you to walk in.

Teacher 8 brought a unique perspective to the barrier of time as she has had experience in educational administration as well as being an exemplary teacher as identified by her principal. She noted that teachers often do not see the "push and pull" that accompanies being a principal, but also noted that administrators who are not intentional about their time impact their own ability to have coaching conversations, "I think an administration that is not prepared or doesn't spend enough time creates a block for good coaching." Finally, several teacher participants shared that time was a barrier for these conversations due to time as a factor because their principals worked alone without an assistant principal and were often obligated to attend to the many meetings that take place on campus. This absolutely has an impact on time, and additionally, is related to the next most frequent barrier noted as a finding for this study.

Accessibility to the principal. Seven participants shared that a barrier to holding coaching conversations came as a result of having limited accessibility to the principal. This barrier had a notable frequency of eight. Sometimes time was a factor that related to this accessibility, but several participants noted that accessibility also related to conditions that came about as a result of the action, or inaction, of principals. Teacher 2 shared that although he had somewhat frequent interactions with his principal that were relative to coaching conversations, he felt that other teachers did not always receive the same benefit as they were victim to "not being in the right place at the right time." Therefore, in this example, accessibility as a barrier had to do with gaps in communication structures within the school. In addition, accessibility was a factor due to decisions and/or systems in place at the district level. Teachers 1, 4, 7, and 9 all worked at schools that did not have assistant principals. Teacher 7 specifically addressed

accessibility to the principal as she shared, "My principal is only one person and so there are times when other teachers get to him first and I may not get the timely follow up that I am seeking." They shared that this also creates a barrier relative to accessibility because their principals have to attend IEP meetings and curriculum meetings, and are simply at times tied to their offices dealing with parents and students. Teacher 8 works at a school with the support of an assistant principal. She shared her frustration as it sometimes relates to accessibility,

> As a teacher, I am often stuck in my classroom. I mean, I can't just leave my class and walk out. My principal has more freedom to move around, but with all of the responsibilities for meetings and parents and office needs, there are times when I can go days without any contact.

She went on to elaborate,

> From parent concerns to kids to guidance to paperwork to the district office, everyone needs a minute. I think what happens is they forget. I think principals [who] stay in their office, you've got to get out because you can have them on the playground; you can have them in the halls. It's so easy to get stuck in there.

Teacher 8 felt that another barrier in addition to accessibility came about as the principals had to prioritize how to address the needs of many teachers—some of whom were resistant—and thus, take and possibly need more attention.

Resistance to change. Six participants referenced either their own, or others' resistance to change as a barrier to holding coaching conversations. The total frequency for this barrier was six. The literature is quick to note resistance to change as a barrier to the supervision and evaluation process (Danielson, 2009). Resistance to coaching

conversations specifically is not stated in research; however, the findings from this study pinpoint several examples of this barrier as it relates to coaching conversations. Teacher 5 considers herself a newer teacher to both the profession and her staff. She shared that her staff is made up of a split of newer and veteran teachers. She shared that she is very open to change and welcomes the opportunity to participate in coaching conversations but has observed that this is not the case for all teachers:

> I think he has a better rapport with us younger teachers, because our staff right now is half veteran teachers, half younger. I think his approach reaches the younger staff, whereas the veteran teachers are more set in their ways.

Teacher 11 also noted that a barrier to coaching conversations can be resistance to change. He, too, shared that he willingly participates in coaching conversations but noted that some colleagues resist opportunities and/or fear them, "I think sometimes it can be perceived by others in a negative way." This finding was additionally supported by Teacher 12 who expounded on the perceptions of coaching conversations as possibly negative. She noted that many teachers on staff thrive on compliments and praise. She observed, "If you cross them, they will go in the opposite direction." Teacher 6 was a participant who opened up to share her own resistance to change. She was a self-described "complainer" who confessed that at times, because she felt she had a good relationship with her principal, she revealed she could respond, for example, in this way, "I don't have a problem saying, 'I don't agree with this.'"

Lack of understanding for expectations. Clear communication and understanding is a key component to the success of coaching conversations **(**Crane, 2001; Danielson, 2009; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2012; Knight, 2007; Platt et al.,

2000). Four participants each shared with a frequency of four that a barrier to holding coaching conversations is a lack of understanding for what is expected by the principal. Teacher 8 connected this to needing to trust before she could understand how she can hear and understand what is being communicated in the context of a coaching conversation:

> As a teacher, I've got to trust you. I've got to trust that you care about me as a person and help me be a better teacher; you're not just here to judge . . . I have had principals at this school who didn't spend the time to communicate what was expected; therefore, I didn't really value what they had to say.

Teacher 2 felt that not understanding what the principal expected at times was also a barrier to coaching conversations, "We don't often have school-wide meetings and so if you're not around when information is being passed out, you miss the information and may miss an expectation." He additionally shared that his colleagues felt this way more than he did and often asked him to share his understanding for information they may have missed rather than approaching the principal.

Research Subquestion 3

The third subquestion of the study sought to answer, "What actions do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers take to overcome barriers of holding coaching conversations with their principals?" Five themes were identified between the 12 participants, with a range in descending order of frequency counts from 16 to five. Table 7 illustrates these findings.

Table 7

Themes Relative to Actions That Overcome Barriers to Coaching Conversations

Actions to overcome barriers to coaching conversations	Frequency
Collaborate on solutions together	16
Seeking feedback	10
Engage in powerful questioning	6
Maintain high expectations	6
Listening to understand	5

Collaborate on solutions together. Eleven participants identified collaborating on solutions with their principal as an action taken to overcoming barriers to coaching conversations. This occurred with a frequency of 16. Ownership of solutions to challenges is best achieved in a collaborative relationship between the principal and the teacher (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010). This notion was supported in the findings as teachers shared that they felt valued and empowered in coaching conversations when a collaborative approach was taken. Teacher 3 reported that her principal noted that "she just can't do it all." This teacher collaborated with her principal and leadership team to address challenges to student learning prior to coaching conversations that occurred with grade-level teams. Teacher 4 shared that this practice also took a similar form between teachers and principals at her school:

> [My principal] does a really good job of, I call it checking the pulse of if he has an idea or topic he knows he needs to present to a team, he will go touch base with a few teachers like doing a pH test of like "How do you think this will go over?" He presents it as a question to "What do you think is going to come up?"

She pointed out that this prevented or at least prepared him to overcome barriers to upcoming conversations. Teacher 11 shared that he felt his principal's support as they

met to evaluate his goals was collaborative in nature and made him feel validated, "I think that encourages me to want more of that type of conversation."

Seeking feedback. Seeking feedback was a notable finding for ways that teachers developed coaching conversations with their principals, but it was also revealed as a finding related to overcoming barriers. Seven teachers supported this notion with a frequency of 10. Time and accessibility as barriers were addressed directly by this action. Participants shared that they would contact their principal to follow up on class visits or issues with students and parents as a way to create opportunities for communication. Teacher 4 was honest in that she had to force herself to seek feedback at times, "I felt like, yes, I had to push myself to come in even though I knew he would be totally open to hear what I would say." Teacher 9 stated that her principal was approachable and in developing relationships, truly fostered the ideal of mutual respect. This made it more comfortable for her to seek feedback, even when she inferred that her principal was spread thin or not as available:

> I've always kind of felt like she's in it with us. I feel like I can go to her with challenges. I guess I just feel more comfortable seeking guidance or assistance, or just a shoulder to cry on more than I have with other administrators I've worked with.

As a result, she communicated that she was more likely to seek feedback than wait for her principal to have time to contact her directly.

Engage in powerful questioning. Three barriers—time, resistance to change, and lack of understanding for expectations—were addressed through the action of engaging in powerful questioning. Participants shared this with a frequency of six and from a total

of five teachers. Teacher 3 shared this action in the context of addressing teachers who were resisting the change from curriculum-based instruction to standards-based instruction. She observed her principal use powerful questioning at team meetings as a way to overcome this barrier and to encourage teachers to consider taking some risks with their instruction:

> Some are just very resistant to change. The only thing they've known is a plan book in front of them and what they're supposed to do. It's not really their fault. So [my principal] will ask questions like, "How could you address this standard in a guided reading lesson?" or "What instructional strategies can we brainstorm to use here?"

Teacher 4 gave some additional examples of powerful questioning that she engaged in with her principal as she sought out his feedback regarding some challenges as team leader, "He says, 'Where is the area or the problem that you're struggling with? Or what's happening on the team that you feel like is not working right?'" Teacher 10 shared about a time that she was feeling ineffective in communicating with a parent regarding the needs of a student. Her principal had not been available to collaborate due to time constraints, so when they finally connected, she was feeling very overwhelmed and ineffective. Through powerful questioning, her principal helped her see what she could do to possibly change the outcome without having to spend a lot of time going over all of the details. She shared that her principal asked simply, "What would you like the parent to do?" and through that one question, her perspective was reframed, and she was able to improve her situation: "I realized that my communication had been so negative and if I was the parent, I wouldn't want to talk to me either."

This action is supported in the literature. Powerful questioning presumes positive intent and often maximizes the benefit of a coaching conversation for the participant (Kee et al., 2010). Furthermore, when questions are framed and presented positively, that leads to growth and change on the part of those who engage in this practice (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2012).

Maintain high expectations. This action had a frequency of six within the five participants who identified it as an action taken to overcome barriers to coaching conversations. Teacher 2 felt that although he and other teachers sometimes struggled with the barrier of accessibility, their common commitment to maintain high expectations helped them to overcome this, "The expectations level from the community is very high so the fact that we have to meet that need and are constantly searching for new ways to meet that need, it just keeps us sharp in our practice." Teacher 6 commented on how her principal communicated high expectations, which led to a desire to seek out and participate in coaching conversations:

> She holds a very high bar, and she lets us know, "Okay, guys, you did a great job, but guess what? Next year, you have to be 100%." She doesn't allow us to settle for less. We are pushed to improve and to help our students improve. . . . she has a way to getting you to come to a solution yourself rather than just saying, "Hey, listen, I really need you to go do this." I think clearly it's made me a better teacher.

Teacher 8 shared that her principal expressed high expectations in her second year as principal with a staff who felt they were already doing very well and did not see a need

to change. The principal pointed out to the group in a meeting that they could improve their instruction in writing. I asked the participant how that felt and she responded:

> I agreed with her, but it wasn't the same across the board. In any site, you can have resistant, stubborn teachers [who] are very arrogant and they [think] that they are fantastic. . . . It stung a little at first because we're so great and we were thinking she was going to tell us how great we were. At first, it stung, but when you stopped and reflected on it, I know I remember thinking, "This is pretty cool because now we're going to grow. Now we're going to get somewhere."

These examples of high expectations connect to the literature in that these teachers had experiences that linked actions to the idea of working toward continuous improvement—a cornerstone of coaching and coaching conversations (Aguilar, 2013; Crane, 2001; Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010; Knight, 2007).

Listening to understand. Kee et al. (2010) identified listening as an essential skill to the success of coaching conversations. Listening involves being focused both on what is and what is not being stated (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010, 2012; Kee et al., 2010). Five participants noted listening to understand as an action taken to overcome barriers with a total frequency of five.

Teacher 1 shared that at times she is stubborn and can at first be resistant in a coaching conversation. She engaged in listening to understand with her principal to overcome this, "It's more of a change in the voice tone that tells me, 'you're being stupid.'" She added, "[My principal] tries to do it in a nonchalant type way, trying not to be [an] administrator [who is] coming down on you but sort of trying to give little hints. I really try to listen first so that I can take in the information." Teacher 12 noted that as a

teacher leader, she at times engages in coaching conversations in a group setting with teachers who may be resistant or reluctant to change. She noted that although they did not communicate in the moment, "They'll go back and think about it." She referenced them as "sensitive" and different personalities, but "they take the time to listen and will either take action or come back for clarification."

Summary

Chapter IV presented the data that were collected and findings of this qualitative study. The study explored the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations with their teachers. The study focused on how exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers developed coaching conversations with their principals, the barriers they encountered to holding coaching conversations with their principals, and the actions they took to overcome the barriers. The population was National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers across California. The target population was National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers who were identified as exemplary by their principals, within proximity to the researcher. A total of 12 exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers participated in this study. There were four from each of the following counties: San Diego, Los Angeles, and Riverside.

One central research question guided this study: "What are the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals?" Three subquestions were used to examine the central question: "How do exemplary National

Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers develop coaching conversations with their principals?" "What barriers do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers encounter when holding coaching conversations with their principals?" "What actions do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers take to overcome barriers of holding coaching conversations with their principals?"

An interview protocol was established complete with demographic questions, background questions, and seven primary interview questions that collectively addressed each of the subquestions of the study. Eleven of the 12 participants engaged in in-depth face-to-face interviews and one participant engaged in an in-depth phone interview. All interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. Each recording was transcribed. The 12 participants were offered a copy of the transcription. The data were analyzed for codes and were then formed into themes, which were correlated to the study's research questions, which resulted in the findings of this study. An independent review of portions of the data was conducted by a peer researcher familiar with the study to ensure intercoder reliability.

Findings from this study related to how exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers developed coaching conversations with their principals that generated the most frequencies included the following:

- Engage in informal dialogue
- Foster a relationship of mutual respect
- Team collaboration includes principal
- Engage in spontaneous face-to-face communication
- Being trusted by principal to take risks

- Intentionally seeking feedback
- Solution-focused conversations
- Trusting principal expertise
- Student-performance-focused conversations
- Engage in electronic communication

The most frequently detected barriers that exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers encountered to holding coaching conversations with their principals included the following:

- Time
- Accessibility to principal
- Resistance to change
- Lack of understanding for expectations

The most frequently identified actions exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers took to overcome barriers of holding coaching conversations with their principals included the following:

- Collaborate on solutions together
- Seeking feedback
- Engage in reflective questioning
- Maintain high expectations
- Listening to understand

Chapter V of this study provides conclusions derived from these findings. Furthermore, Chapter V offers implications for actions and recommendations for further research based on the findings from this study.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V includes a review of the purpose of this study, the research questions, the methodology, and the population and sample. This is followed by the presentation of a summary, which includes the major findings. Additionally, Chapter V includes a report of the unexpected findings. This is followed by conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers improve student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals. A second purpose was to explore the barriers they encountered to holding these conversations and actions they took to overcome these barriers.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one central question. The central question was divided in into three subquestions.

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals?

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers develop coaching conversations with their principals?

2. What barriers do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers encounter when holding coaching conversations with their principals?
3. What actions do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers take to overcome barriers of holding coaching conversations with their principals?

Research Methods

The methodology selected for this study was a qualitative phenomenological method. The study set out to share the lived experiences of National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers in improving student learning through coaching conversations with their principals. The researcher employed in-depth, semistructured interviews with 12 teacher participants who were identified by their principals as exemplary National Blue Ribbon School teachers. This was deemed the most suitable method for capturing the participants' perceptions in order for the researcher to comprehend and describe the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers.

Population and Sample

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program has been in existence for 32 years, and during that time, has identified a total of 7,000 schools to be honored and identified with the National Blue Ribbon distinction (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d). The population identified by the researcher for the purpose of this study included all National Blue Ribbon elementary schools in California that were awarded this distinction between the years of 2011 and 2015. This included a total of 90 recognized National Blue Ribbon elementary schools (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, n.d). The target population of 31 teachers from these 90 schools was determined through identification as exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary teachers by the principals

selected for a thematic study (Flavin, 2016). Of these 31 accessible teachers, 12 were selected to participate in the study.

Major Findings

The major findings of this qualitative study are organized and presented by research subquestion.

Research Subquestion 1

Research Subquestion 1 of the study sought to answer, "How do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers develop coaching conversations with their principals?"

In this study, ways in which exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers develop coaching conversations with their principals were examined and categorized into nine significant themes. All participants discussed and shared how they trusted and felt comfortable in their relationships with their principals. This occurred most frequently as a result of developing their relationship through informal dialogue and through feelings and actions related to a sense of mutual respect. Although they all had experience with principals through formal supervision and evaluation systems, it was reported that when principals made themselves more visible and available through such things as an open-door policy and being out on campus during "public times" before and after school and during recesses, teachers would more comfortably seek out and participate in interactions with their principal. Principals who shared the responsibility of learning, stayed close to learning, communicated a feeling of "we're in this together," and who showed themselves to be vulnerable, were noted in the data related to mutual respect. Teachers reported that this feeling of mutual respect contributed to the success

of coaching conversations. Building on the findings related to mutual respect, teachers reported that their relationships developed when principals were part of team collaborations. Through this venue, principals were often able to employ coaching conversations in a team setting that not only helped impact student learning, but also led to a deeper understanding of the principal as an individual, which also served to deepen relationships and build trust.

Additional communication that was "looser" in format was another way the teachers developed their relationship with their principals as it related to coaching conversations. Teachers noted that when they took advantage of times to have spontaneous face-to-face communication with their principal, this enhanced their ability to develop coaching conversations. Although this communication was not noted by participants to feel or be predetermined in nature, this gave them opportunities that led to social interactions and served as catalysts to future change in attitudes and/or practices as they related to student learning. In this vein, teachers also shared that being trusted to take risks served as an avenue to coaching conversations. As relationships developed and risk taking was employed, teachers found themselves willing to be vulnerable and reach out to their principals to share learning, which led to another significant finding—intentionally seeking feedback. Teachers noted that they often would take risks with instruction or would purposefully seek out feedback from their principal after having interactions involving informal observations or visits by staff members in their classrooms. This, too, served as a catalyst for principals to have coaching conversations that were related to nonevaluative formats. Teachers seeking feedback and/or who interacted with their principal in a team setting perceived that coaching conversations

developed and took place with a bent toward solutions. A focus on solutions served to open up yet an additional path for teachers to hone in on data and strategies that had a positive impact on student learning.

Through time spent developing trust and building relationships, as evidenced by previous findings, teachers also reported that when they viewed and valued their principals' expertise, this also had a positive impact on how they developed coaching conversations. This perception contributed to teachers not only seeking out and trusting the feedback a principal would offer, but it influenced the likelihood that teachers would take action based on a coaching conversation to improve their practice, and thus, effect student learning.

Research Subquestion 2

Research Subquestion 2 of the study sought to answer, "What barriers do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers encounter when holding coaching conversations with their principals?"

In this study, barriers that were encountered by National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers were examined and resulted in the categorization of four major themes. All participants shared that they themselves rarely encountered barriers as they craved and valued interactions with their principals; however, there were a few key barriers that were either out of their control and/or they recognized as a barrier to coaching conversations taking place for their colleagues. The most frequently noted barrier to occur was time. This often was the result of principals who were the sole administrator on campus and/or who perhaps failed to be intentional about how they structured their time on campus. Closely related to time was the second most frequent barrier of

accessibility to the principal. This also was impacted by schools that had a sole administrator but additionally resulted from systems that lacked clarity in communication. Accessibility was further noted to occur as a result of the actions or inaction of the principal. Principals who were spending a lot of time with priorities outside of classroom instruction (i.e., meetings, district committees, or being "tied" to their office addressing the needs of parents and students) contributed to a lack of accessibility for holding coaching conversations with teachers.

Two other barriers that are closely related occurred, first as a result of resistance to change on the part of teachers. Teachers who may not have the relationship with the principal or who are more "veteran" in their standing may resist coaching conversation opportunities or fail to respond well. This can also occur as a result of fear or the connotation of a coaching conversation as negative. The final barrier, and one that is at times tied to resistance to change, is a lack of understanding for expectations. If a sense of distrust or misunderstanding for what behaviors or changes are desired exists, teachers are more likely to resist participating in coaching conversations.

Research Subquestion 3

Research Subquestion 3 of the study sought to answer, "What actions do exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers take to overcome barriers of holding coaching conversations with their principals?"

Five themes were identified by this study as actions taken by National Blue Ribbon elementary school teachers to overcome barriers to coaching conversations with their principals. These actions were closely tied to the literature, and in the case of the two most frequent themes, were connected as well to ways in which teachers develop

coaching conversations with their principals. The first theme focused on collaborating on solutions together. From the context of overcoming barriers, this was noted as an effective way to maximize time and to not only increase a sense of feeling valued by teachers but also to empower teacher ownership to challenges. It was also noted to be an action taken proactively with a principal when preparing for team coaching conversations. Seeking feedback, too, was an action taken by teachers to overcome the barriers of time and accessibility. Principals may be challenged by time and/or availability, but teachers noted that when they sought out feedback from their principal, this made the possibility of increased opportunities for coaching conversations. Three additional actions for coaching conversations that are clearly identified in the literature as being supported by research are engaging in powerful questioning, the maintenance of high expectations, and listening to understand (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010, 2012).

The action of using powerful questions was most often employed by principals as the initiator; however, teachers shared that through engaging in dialogue and discourse related to powerful questioning, their participation in resulting coaching conversations increased as did the likelihood to take action as a result. Maintaining of high expectations both as a result of the principal communicating these and of teachers holding themselves to a high standard pushed them toward engagement in coaching conversations and the idea of continuous improvement. Finally, actions to overcome barriers concluded with the theme of listening to understand. Teachers noted both in themselves, and as a result of the observation of teacher colleagues, that through listening to understand, teachers will take time to consider the feedback from a coaching

conversation as an action to overcome barriers such as resistance to change and/or of not understanding the expectations. As a result of listening, further clarification may also be sought out, resulting in more opportunity for coaching conversations.

Unexpected Findings

Overall, the major findings for this study were supported by the literature. Coaching conversations have the overriding goal to effect change through intentional and premeditated conversations that are positive in nature and result in observable actions (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010, 2012; Kee et al., 2010). There were, however, two unexpected findings that were not anticipated by the researcher.

Unexpected Finding 1

The review of literature revealed that the current system of teacher supervision and evaluation is rooted in a historical practice that dates back to the origins of public education in the United States. Although there are known components of the systems of supervision and evaluation that are clearly in need of an overhaul, it is also well supported that positive outcomes are possible for supervision and evaluation when they are effectively focused on teaching and learning (Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marzano et al., 2011; Schmoker, 2006). What was noted by the researcher as an unexpected finding was that teachers themselves perceived the informal and coach-like interactions to be more likely to impact their own reflection on their teaching practice than feedback shared via formal observations. They noted that even when confronting their own resistance to change or hesitation at confronting perceived conflicts, they were far more likely to change as a result of feedback shared in the context of a team meeting or through a coaching conversation versus times in their career when they were given

feedback and/or directives from their principal. In examining the data where exemplary teachers compared their previous experience at schools not identified as National Blue Ribbon distinguished versus current assignment working under a principal at a National Blue Ribbon School, they were very open in sharing that the collaborative and solution-focused partnership they felt with their current principal was far superior to past experiences with principals who subscribed to the more traditional/formal role as supervisor and evaluator.

Unexpected Finding 2

A second unexpected finding came about in the examination of the data as they related to the perceptions of spontaneous face-to-face interactions with their principal as opposed to formal or informal predetermined and/or preplanned interactions. The perceptions by teachers of having an authentic relationship with their principal and someone they know outside of the school environment, as well as inside, led them to be more comfortable in approaching their principal for feedback and to seek out interactions that led to opportunities for growth in their capacity to improve teaching and learning. It was shared by several participants that knowing their principal in the context of a relationship built on equal standing and/or a foundation of shared vulnerability actually increased their desire to participate in coach-like interactions, including coaching conversations.

Conclusions

Conclusions resulted based on the findings of data collected for this study and as a result of the literature review. The literature explored and shared in this study pointed to the benefits of coaching conversations. Additionally, it laid the foundation for

understanding coaching conversations as a tool that has the potential to lead to more positive evaluations with a lasting impact on student learning. The following conclusions emphasize the importance of developing and employing coaching conversations between principals and their teachers as an avenue toward increasing the quality of student learning and to produce breakthrough results for elementary schools.

Conclusion 1

The findings for this study indicated that when teachers engage in informal dialogue with their principal and are subjected to a connection that is founded on mutual respect, they are working toward developing a relationship that will lead to them participating in coaching conversations with their principals. This is supported in the literature through research that demonstrates that teachers will hold their principal in high esteem when engaged in a culture of professional inquiry. The findings suggest that these relationships develop as a result of principals who insure that they are available for their teachers and who intentionally seek out interactions with their teachers at various settings on the school grounds. They also come about as a result of principals participating in teams as a member of equal standing while doing the work alongside of teachers rather than seeking to direct outcomes. It can be concluded that principals who create opportunities for accessibility and visibility for their teachers and/or who spend time creating a sense of relationship and trust built on mutual respect, will foster a culture and environment where teachers willingly participate in effective coaching conversations that may lead to increased student learning.

Conclusion 2

Additional findings for this study identified simultaneous trust between the teacher and the principal as a factor that is necessary for teachers to move forward in developing coaching conversations with their principals. When principals stay close to learning and immerse themselves in data and effective teaching strategies, teachers are likely to trust their expertise. Furthermore, the literature review supported the notion that when principals foster a culture that is solution focused, and which trusts teachers to take risks, this opens up the opportunity for principals to offer the positive and reflective feedback, which is a known crucial skill of coaching conversations. It can be concluded that in order for coaching conversations to improve student learning, mutual trust must be established between teachers and their principals.

Conclusion 3

The findings indicated that teachers enjoy the discourse and dialogue that comes with developing coaching conversations with their principals. Danielson (2009) noted that teachers are likely to work toward strengthening their teaching practice in an environment that feels professional and safe for risk taking. Barriers, however, do exist that can prevent coaching conversations from taking place, either in quality or quantity. When teachers are aware of and can identify barriers to coaching conversations, they are more likely to take actions to overcome them through seeking feedback and through engaging in collaborative problem solving. It can be concluded that when principals invest the time and energy to establish a culture where coaching conversations are nurtured, teachers are more likely to take actions themselves to reach out to principals as active participants and initiate or invite coaching conversations.

Conclusion 4

Additionally, the findings indicated that the barriers of time and accessibility often result from a lack of administrative support for principals who are the sole administrator on site. Teachers who had both a principal and assistant principal on site were more likely to report that they felt fewer barriers existed in terms of developing coaching conversations with their principals. Therefore, it can be concluded that principals would benefit from increased support for administrative duties in order to allow them more time to devote to the development and engagement in effective coaching conversations.

Conclusion 5

When further exploring actions that were taken to overcome barriers, the findings pointed to three specific actions that were observed behaviors by exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary teachers of their principals. The literature review specifically cited all three of these skills as being crucial to the development of effective professional coaching and coaching conversations: powerful questioning, maintaining high expectations, and listening to understand. It should not be assumed that all principals have been adequately prepared to engage in and support teachers through effective coach-like behaviors and/or coaching conversations. Therefore, a final conclusion to this study is that principals will benefit from specific and targeted professional development aimed at arming them with the skills needed to increase the quality of professional coaching conversations with their teachers, which has the potential to transform a school culture into one that is focused on collaborative practice directed at collective growth and continuous improvement.

Implications for Action

Based on this study, implications for action are directly related and correlated to the conclusions of the major findings. One implication directly relates to the literature, which substantiates a need for improvement in the traditional teacher supervision and evaluation system. Teachers in this study shared that they preferred engaging in coaching conversations as an avenue to explore and improve student learning as opposed to the traditional cycle of formal observations combined with feedback. School districts should restructure their systems of supervision and evaluation to include more opportunities for principals to engage in coach-like relationships and feedback either in addition to or in place of traditional lesson plan submission and observation.

The exemplary teacher participants in this study shared that when they felt a connection with their principal that was based on informal interactions and that included a sense of mutual respect, they were more likely to engage in and seek out coaching conversations and the resulting feedback that had the potential to impact student learning. Because the essence of coaching conversations is developed and enhanced through relationships, principals should consider devoting time to practices that increase visibility and accessibility for teacher contact. This includes intentionally having an open-door policy, being visible and available during public times, such as before school, recesses/lunch, and after school as well as through joining teams in a collaborative rather than facilitative mode when appropriate. In addition, findings indicated that teachers who were assigned to schools with assistant principals felt that they had more access to their principal. Therefore, school districts should develop ways to provide principals with a level of support that allows them to be more available for teacher/principal interactions

and intentional coaching conversations. This could include assigning an assistant principal but may also be achieved through other administrative supports as identified by a school district such as increased clerical support or teachers on special assignment.

Another significant consideration was designed to insure that both teachers and principals have access to opportunities to increase their knowledge and understanding for the elements of coaching conversations, how to have effective coaching conversations and what potential benefits can be yielded from effective coaching conversations. This builds on the findings and conclusions surrounding the existence of simultaneous trust between teachers and principals who both develop and take actions to insure continued participation in coaching conversations. The implications for action here are threefold. First, university-level educational administration and teacher credentialing programs should embed both professional development and professional practice that includes learning and experience with coach-like relationships and coaching conversations. Second, school districts should embed professional development and support surrounding coaching conversations for principals on an ongoing basis throughout the school year with the intent of continuous improvement in coaching conversation skills for all site administrators, regardless of experience. Finally, principals should build the capacity within their own school site for coaching conversations between teacher leaders and the team members that they collaborate with and support. This may expand the reach of the principal by enhancing the quality of student learning via peer-to-peer coaching.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was limited to a very specific expert population as it relates to the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary teachers who engage in

coaching conversations with their principals. Further investigation into different populations, along with an expanded scope, are areas that would benefit from further research. The following recommendations were made by the researcher in order to continue and expand further research based on the findings and conclusions of this study:

- As this study was part of a thematic study, conduct a study that compares the findings of the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary principals with the findings of the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary teachers in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations.
- Explore the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon middle school teachers in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations.
- Explore the lived experiences of exemplary National Blue Ribbon high school teachers in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations.
- Explore the lived experiences of exemplary teachers at elementary, middle, or high schools not recognized as National Blue Ribbon Schools in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations.
- Explore the impact of coaching conversations on teacher efficacy.
- Explore how teacher union representatives perceive coaching conversations as a venue to supporting teacher practice.
- Explore the effects of unions on coaching conversations.
- Explore the lived experiences of teacher leaders who participate with their assigned team members in improving student learning through effective coaching. conversations.

- Explore the lived experiences of teachers assigned to participate in a Peer Assisted Review (PAR) in improving student learning through effective coaching conversations with their assigned consulting teacher/PAR coach.
- Explore the impact of coaching conversations as perceived by probationary teachers.
- Compare the perceptions of the impact of coaching conversations between probationary teachers and veteran teachers.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

During my career in education, I have had the opportunity to grow in my practice and serve as a teacher leader, later supporting my school as a teacher on special assignment, first as a project coordinator and then as a curriculum coach for teachers. After 18 years, I made the transition to educational leadership supporting several schools as an elementary assistant principal and am now in my sixth year as an elementary principal. The best decision I ever made that impacted my practice as an educator was to take on the challenge of coaching teachers. This experience not only gave me multiple opportunities to learn and grow in my capacity as a coach but also taught me through experience the value of relationship and personal connection when working with adults to effect student learning. It is that experience and passion that I brought with me as I became a site administrator.

As a principal, I began the work of developing relationships with my teachers, but realized at the same time that I was now perceived differently than when I coached as a teacher. I persevered and continue to increase my capacity at using coaching skills as an administrator—it was this passion and desire to learn more about the impact of coaching for teachers that led me to join this thematic study. Executing this study allowed me to

hear from 12 expert teachers at schools with nationally recognized distinction for student learning about their lived experiences and explore through their voices how they perceived coaching conversations with their principals. I was able to learn what they felt they did to develop this practice with their principals, what their principals did to help them want to participate, what barriers they had identified, and most importantly, what actions they took and observed their principals take that overcame these barriers. It is my wish that this research will inspire readers to explore for themselves the practice and value of coaching conversations in whatever capacity they may serve in education. It is my hope that the system of teacher supervision and evaluation can be transformed into one that supports ongoing growth and social interaction for supporting student learning, rather than that which only includes periodic and often isolated episodes of observation and limited feedback.

Upon the completion of 12 interviews of exemplary National Blue Ribbon elementary teachers, which were conducted over a period of 5 weeks in the fall of 2016, it was evident to me that these expert teachers valued the interaction and professional discourse that came about from participation in coaching conversations. Each one of them had a common thread in that they viewed their principal as a partner, engaged in improving student learning, who cared about them as individuals as well as educators. It reinforced for me that time spent as a principal developing relationships and working collaboratively to problem solve and examine data are practices that help lay the foundation for the increased trust and mutual respect that allows for effective coaching conversations to take place. I found myself encouraged that although barriers definitely

exist, they can be decreased and even eliminated as a result of both actions taken by teachers and principals.

This study was limited to an expert population. It is my hope that continued research and investigation will take place and that an expansion of our understanding for the impact of coaching conversations on student learning will increase. In addition, it is my wish that the insights shared by these teachers will help build on the growing literature related to professional coaching and coaching conversations in educational settings.

As an educator with almost a quarter century of experience, engaging in the opportunity to conduct research, complete a doctoral dissertation, and to do so as part of a thematic study with a colleague and fellow coach for whom I have great respect, I am deeply gratified for what I have learned. I know that as a result, I will continue to be inspired toward continuous growth as an educator. Furthermore, it has been my experience that participating in my pursuit of a doctoral degree and the completion of this dissertation, has cemented for me that what I knew instinctually; presuming and nurturing positive intent and interactions with my partners and fellow educators is worth pursuing and makes a difference. I look forward to continuing to develop as both as an educator and as a human being, one conversation at a time.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrix

Source	Theoretical framework	History of teacher supervision & evaluation	Purpose of supervision & evaluation	Teacher perception of supervision & evaluation	Principal perception of supervision & evaluation	Tenets of coaching	Principal as coach	Teacher as client	Coaching conversations	National Blue Ribbon study sample	Methodology
Aguilar (2013)	X					X	X				
Anderson, (2015)										X	
Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2004)						X					
Belcastro (2009)									X		
Blase & Blasé (2004)					X						
Blumberg (1985).		X	X								
Burnham (1976)		X									
Chilcott & Birtell (2010)		X	X								
Cogan (1973)		X									
The Council on Foreign Relations (2012)		X									
Crane (2001)						X	X				
Creswell (2014)											X
Danielson (2007)		X	X								
Danielson(2009)				X				X			
Darling Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos (2009)						X					
Darling-Hammond (2010)		X									
Darling-Hammond (2012)		X	X	X	X						
Darling-Hammond (2013)	X	X	X	X	X		X				
Denton (2009)				X		X					
Dewey (1938)		X	X								
Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston (2004)						X			X		
DuFour & Marzano (2009)				X							
Embse & Hasson (2012)		X									
Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)		X	X								
Fehr (2001)		X	X								
Friedman & Mandelbaum (2011)		X									
Fullan (2006)	X				X						
Fullan (2014)					X						
Galluci, DeVoogt Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright (2010)	X			X							
Gavelek & Raphel (1996)	X										
Gilley & Boughton						X					

(1996)											
Gladwell (2008)						X					
Glatthorn (1984)		X									
Glickman (1980)	X										
Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon(1998)		X	X								
Goldhammer (1969)		X	X								
Goldsmith, Lyons, & McArthur(2012)						X	X		X		
Goldstein (2014)		X									
Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly (2010)	X					X	X	X	X		
Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly (2012)						X			X		
Hargreaves (2009)						X					
Harré (1984)	X										
Harvard Business Review (2014)			X								
Hattie (2009)		X	X								
Hunter (1980)	X	X									
Hunter (1984)		X									
Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Shuster (2010)							X		X		
Joyce & Showers (2002)						X			X		
Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, Sandahl, & Whitworth (2011)	X					X					
Knight (2007)						X					
Marshall (2013)	X			X							
Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston (2011)	X	X	X		X						
Marzano & Toth (2013)	X	X	X								
McKinney, Labat, & Labat (2015)										X	
McMillan & Schumacher (2010)											X
McVee, Dunsmore, & Gavelek (2005)	X					X					
Merriam (1988)											X
Moffitt (2007)					X		X				
Moustakas (1994)											X
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program (n.d.)										X	X
National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983)										X	
Owen Wilson (n.d.)		X									
Participant Media (2006)		X									
Patten (2012)											X
Patton (2015)											X
Pillow (2003).											X
Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser (2000)			X	X	X						
Reavis (1976)	X										
Roberge (2013)				X							
Roberts (2010)											X
Robinson (2011)							X				
Schmoker (2006)	X		X	X	X						

Sheppard (2013)			X	X	X						
Stevenson (2009)						X	X				
Toch & Rothman (2008)		X	X								
Tracy (1995)		X	X								
Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran (2011)						X	X	X			
U.S. Department of Education (n.d.)		X	X								
Vygotsky (1978)	X										
Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling (2009)		X		X	X						
Whitaker (2012a)		X					X				
Whitaker (2012b)						X					
Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Bernstein (1984)		X			X						
Xu & Sinclair (2002)				X							
Yin (2009)											X

APPENDIX B

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB APPLICATION ACTION – APPROVAL
COMPLETED BY BUIRB

IRB ACTION/APPROVAL

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Kristin Watson

☐ Returned without review. Insufficient detail to adequately assess risks, protections and benefits.

☐ Approved/Certified as Exempt form IRB Review.

☐ Approved as submitted.

☑ Approved, contingent on minor revisions (see attached)

☐ Requires significant modifications of the protocol before approval. Research must resubmit with modifications (see attached)

☐ Researcher must contact IRB member and discuss revisions to research proposal and protocol.

Level of Risk: ☐ No Risk ☑ Minimal Risk ☐ More than Minimal Risk

IRB Comments:

On Part 2 of your application, the recruitment area, please wording from "student" to "study"
Part 4 of your application state that you will keep the data for three years before is destroyed.

IRB Reviewer: Dr. David Long

Telephone: _____ **Email:** dlong@brandman.edu

BUIRB Chair: Dr. Douglas DeVore **Date:** 10/06/16

REVISED IRB Application ☑ Approved ☐ Returned

Name: Doug DeVore

Telephone: 623-293-2421 **Email:** ddevore@brandman.edu **Date:** 10-7-2016

BUIRB Chair: Douglas DeVore

APPENDIX C

Letter of Invitation to Potential Participants

Date

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to understand the lived experiences of teachers at National Blue Ribbon elementary schools as it relates to their engagement in coaching conversations. The principal investigator of this study is Kristin L. Watson, Doctoral Candidate for Brandman University's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a teacher at a National Blue Ribbon elementary school who has been identified as having participated in coaching conversations with your site principal. Participation in this study should require about 45-60 minutes of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this investigation is to discover and describe how exemplary National Blue Ribbon Elementary School teachers improve student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals. A second purpose was to explore the barriers they encountered to holding these conversations.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, you will be interviewed by the researcher. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experience participating in coaching conversations with your principal at a National Blue Ribbon elementary school. The interview session will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are no known major risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to be onsite for the interview. Some interview questions may cause mild emotional discomfort.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, but a potential benefit may be that your input will contribute to the body of research that will impact the field of education. The information from this study is intended to describe how National Blue Ribbon teachers improve student learning through coaching conversations.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact the principal investigator, Mrs. Watson, by phone at (760) 333-2975 or email kwatson2@mail.brandman.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Very Respectfully,

Kristin L. Watson
Principal Investigator

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Exemplary National Blue Ribbon Elementary School Teachers in Improving Student Learning Through Effective Coaching Conversations With Their Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Kristin L. Watson, Doctoral Candidate

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Research Participant's Informed Consent Form

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this investigation is to discover and describe how exemplary National Blue Ribbon Elementary School teachers improve student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals. A second purpose was to explore the barriers they encountered to holding these conversations.

In participating in this research study, you agree to partake in interviews, observations and share relevant artifact. The interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and will be audio-recorded. The interview will take place at the school site to which you are currently assigned. During this interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as a teacher who engages in coaching conversations to improve student learning. Additionally, you will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire that will include questions that capture your background information.

I understand that:

a) There are no known major risks or discomforts associated with this research. Sharing your personal experience may cause mild emotional discomfort.

b) There are no major benefits to you for participation, but a potential benefit may be that your input will contribute to the body of research that will impact the field of education. The information from this study is intended to describe how National Blue Ribbon teachers improve student learning through coaching conversations.

c) Money will not be provided for my time and involvement: however, a $10.00 gift card and food will be provided.

d) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Kristin L. Watson, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Mrs. Watson may be contacted by phone at (760) 333-2975 or email at kwatson2@mail.brandman.edu.

e) I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

f) I understand that the study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project.

g) I understand that the audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interview. Once the interview is transcribed, the audio, interview transcripts, and demographic questionnaire will be kept for a minimum of five years by the investigator in a secure location.

h) I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call of the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedures(s) set forth.

_____	_____
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Witness (if appropriate)	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Principal Investigator	Date

Brandman University IRB, (IRB Date)

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Exemplary National Blue Ribbon Elementary School Teachers in Improving Student Learning Through Effective Coaching Conversations With Their Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

INSTRUCTIONS: The questions below will be used to address each of the research questions identified for this study. The same questions will be asked during each interview session conducted with National Blue Ribbon School teachers. All data collected from this interview will be kept confidential.

1. Can you tell me about yourself?
    a. Probe: Have you worked at another school that was not recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School?
    b. Probe: What are the differences between the schools?
    c. Probe: What are common practices of National Blue Ribbon Schools?
    d. Probe: How has being a teacher at a National Blue Ribbon School influenced your professional practice related to:
        i. Teacher supervision and evaluation
        ii. Relationships with your principal
        iii. Student learning

2. How do you develop a relationship with your principal?
    a. Probe: Describe how you listen to your principal?
    b. Probe: How do you respond to your principal or seek clarification?
    c. Probe: What types of feedback do you receive from your principal?

3. How do you know your principal wants to have a coaching conversation with you?
    a. Probe: What actions did she/he take?
    b. Probe: What behaviors does the principal demonstrate during a coaching conversation?
    c. Probe: How do you feel during a coaching conversation with your principal?

4. At what times during the day and/or school week do you find yourself engaging in a coaching conversation with your principal?
    a. Probe: What times do you find most beneficial?
    b. Probe: Are there times that are more of a barrier to a coaching conversation?

5. When talking with your principal, what topics do you find coaching conversations revolve around?
    a. Probe: What effective practices have you discussed?
    b. Probe: What difficult topics have you discusses?
    c. Probe: Describe a time when coaching conversation felt difficult or negative.

6. What topics do you find are difficult to discuss with your principal?
    a. Probe: What behaviors do you see in your principal during a difficult coaching conversation?
    b. Probe: What behaviors have you seen that overcome these behaviors?

7. What strategies does your principal use to address the challenges of coaching conversations?
    a. Probe: What is the result of those actions?

8. What impact have coaching conversations had on the quality of student learning in your classroom?

APPENDIX F

Interview Script

Make personal introductions. Thank the participant for volunteering to engage in the study.

OPENING STATEMENT: My name is Kristin Watson. I am a doctoral candidate in Brandman University's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. I am conducting a study discover and describe how exemplary National Blue Ribbon Elementary School teachers improve student learning through effective coaching conversations with their principals. A second purpose is to explore the barriers you encountered to holding these conversations and actions you took to overcome these barriers. I want to personally thank you for your participation. Your experience and knowledge will contribute to and enhance the body of knowledge and research in this area.

INTERVIEW AGENDA: I anticipate us being together for approximately 45 minutes to an hour today. First, we will review and discuss the Invitation Letter, Informed Consent Form, Brandman University Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Audio Release Form, which you should have already reviewed. Second, after reviewing all of the forms, you will be asked to sign the required documents for this study, which include the Informed Consent and Audio Release Form. Third, I will officially start the audio recorder and begin asking a series of questions related to your participation in coaching conversations. Although the session is being recorded, I may also take notes during this process. If you feel uncomfortable about me taking notes, please do not hesitate to let me know. Finally, I will turn off the recorder and conclude our session. Please remember that anytime during this process you have the right to leave. While gaining insights about your experiences is central to this study, my goal is to ensure you feel comfortable during every phase of this process. I believe firmly in confidentiality, and your identity will not be revealed.

DISCUSS, REVIEW STUDY DOCUMENTS, AND OBTAIN SIGNATURES: Now we will thoroughly review the Invitation Letter, Informed Consent Form, Brandman University Participant's Bill of Rights, and Audio Release Form. Please take a moment to sign the required documents.

BEGIN INTERVIEW: As we work through the interview questions, there may be language or terms (educational jargon) used that require clarification and calibration. Prior to asking these questions and responding, we will take time to define these terms. Now, I will start the recorder and we will begin the interview.

GUIDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: (see Appendix E)

APPENDIX G

Audio Release Form

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Exemplary National Blue Ribbon Elementary School Teachers in Improving Student Learning Through Effective Coaching Conversations With Their Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

I authorize Kristin L. Watson, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give Brandman University and all persons or entities associated with this research study permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the information obtained during the interview may be published in a journal or presented at meetings/presentations.

I will be consulted about the use of the audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising or related to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party Date

_____ _____
Signature of Witness (if appropriate) Date

APPENDIX H

BUIRB Research Participant's Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN University

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Brandman University IRB Adopted November 2013

APPENDIX I

Demographic Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS: Please write or select the answer with which you most closely identify. Your name will remain confidential throughout the duration of this study.

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Race/Ethnicity:
4. Gender:
5. Position:
6. Name of school of employment:
7. Years of experience in current position:

APPENDIX J

Interview Outline

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Exemplary National Blue Ribbon Elementary School Teachers in Improving Student Learning Through Effective Coaching Conversations With Their Principals: A Phenomenological Study

These are the general questions that will be discussed during the interview. If you choose, you may review the questions prior to the interview. Please be aware the researcher, may ask follow-up questions in any of the areas in order to better understand your responses.

Part I: Demographic Questions

The interview will start with some basic demographic/background questions. This information will be used to help aggregate information from the study sample. You may elect to respond as "not specified" on any or all of these questions.

- Age
- Race/Ethnicity
- Gender
- Position
- Name of School
- Years of experience in current position

Part II: Background of Practice

- Have you worked at another school that was not a National Blue Ribbon School?
- What are the differences between the schools?
- What are the common practices of National Blue Ribbon Schools?
- How has being a teacher of a National Blue Ribbon School influenced your professional practice? (related to)
    - Teacher Supervision and Evaluation
    - Relationships with teachers
    - Student learning
- How do you develop relationships with your principal?
    - Describe how you listen to your principal.
    - How do you respond or seek clarification?
    - What types of feedback do you receive from your principal?

Part II: Coaching Conversations

This study draws from the work of Linda Gross Cheliotes and Marcheta Fleming Reilly's work around coaching conversations (2010; 2012). Coaching conversations can be defined as a conversation you have with your principal that is frequently predetermined and intentional that focuses on a person's strengths and needs. The ultimate purpose of coaching conversations is to provoke "thinking, growth, and change that lead to action" (Gross Cheliotes & Fleming Reilly, 2010, p.5).

- How do you know your principal wants to have a coaching conversation with you?
    - What actions were your taken?
    - What behaviors does the principal demonstrate that show during a coaching conversation?
    - How do you feel during a coaching conversation?
- At what times during the day and/or school week do you find yourself engaging in a coaching conversation with your principal?
    - What times do you find most beneficial?
    - Are there times that are more of a barrier to a coaching conversation?
- When talking with your principal, what topics do you find coaching conversations revolve around?
    - What effective practices have you discussed?
    - What difficult topics have you discusses?
    - Describe a time when coaching conversation felt difficult or negative.

- What topics do you find are difficult to discuss with your principal?
    - What behaviors do you see in your principal during a difficult coaching conversation?
    - What behaviors have you seen that overcome these behaviors?

- What strategies does your principal use to address the challenges of coaching conversations?
    - What is the result of those actions?

- What impact have coaching conversations had on the quality of student learning in your classroom?

Part III: Overall Conclusions

The interview will conclude with some general overarching discussion as well as for you to a share any additional insights, comments or questions.