ABSTRACT

The Only Person in My Way is Me: A Multiple Case Study Exploring the Perspectives of Experienced School Principals Regarding the Perceived Impact of Executive Coaching

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School principals serve as fundamental leaders in the educational system. These leaders are essential in ensuring that students in PK-12 schools receive high-quality instruction to prepare them to contribute as productive citizens in society. Principals have many responsibilities, including the critical task of developing teachers and educating students. Within the educational landscape, principals’ duties are immense and complex; therefore, it is essential to prepare them to effectively lead on the campuses where they serve. The United States has experienced an increase in principals leaving the profession. While several factors contribute to principal turnover, one key component is the lack of job-embedded professional development. Experienced principals, which I define as those who have been in their roles for four years or more, need job-embedded professional development to meet their professional needs. Experienced principals often lack specific, intentional, targeted, and differentiated professional learning. This study aimed to examine executive coaching to provide targeted, precise, and meaningful professional development to experienced principals.
In exploring the problem, I conducted a multiple case study with the purpose of examining how principals with at least four years of experience perceive the impact of executive coaching on their self-efficacy as leaders. I aligned this study to a theoretical framework centered on self-efficacy. In alignment with the theoretical framework, data collection occurred through semi-structured individual interviews, a focus group interview, and written reflection from participants. This study’s methodology provided an opportunity to understand the perceptions of principals who were engaged in executive coaching and how they perceived how executive coaching impacted their efficacy as a principal.

This study’s findings indicated an increase in the perceived self-efficacy of experienced principals after participating in eight executive coaching sessions. Specifically, I found that principals who received executive coaching experienced stronger leadership skills. This study also found that executive coaching provided a safe space for principals to be vulnerable. Finally, the study revealed that executive coaching provided principals with a validation of their experiences as school leaders.

*Keywords:* executive coaching, self-efficacy, validation, vulnerability, imposter syndrome
The Only Person in My Way is Me: A Multiple Case Study Exploring the Perspectives of Experienced School Principals Regarding the Impact of Executive Coaching

by

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A Dissertation

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To begin, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to my faculty advisor, Dr. Leanne Howell, for her unwavering support and guidance through every step of the process leading up to the completion of this dissertation. I am incredibly grateful for her time and dedication to developing me as a researcher and scholar in my field of education. I also want to thank my defense committee, Dr. Ryann Shelton and Dr. Lacy Papadakis. I am also thankful to my cohort, Sic ‘Em Six, for being an outstanding group that pushed me to be my best self on a daily basis.

A tremendous thank you to the Baylor University professors and instructional team who consistently encouraged me throughout this journey. The positivity exhibited by the Baylor University team helped to maintain focus through the challenges of developing a comprehensive, thoughtful, and impactful research study.

I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to my husband, Robert Saddler, and my two children for their unwavering support during this process. I am forever grateful for the time and space to write. Additionally, I could not conclude this section without thanking my parents, Rev. John and Valencia Thompson. They instilled a commitment to personal growth, ongoing improvement, and a passion for continued learning and development. I am thankful to my parents for their emotional and financial support through this amazing doctoral journey.
DEDICATION

To my parents, my husband, and Edolya Napier and Dr. Sylvia Saddler, two women in my family who dedicated their lives to and paved the foundation for academic excellence.
CHAPTER ONE
Background and Needs Assessment

Introduction

In the 2018–2019 school year, approximately 47.4 million public school students in kindergarten through twelfth grades were educated in more than 130,000 elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the United States (Riser-Kositsky, 2019). Educating the nation’s youth offers a tremendous opportunity for its citizens’ continued development and growth. As such, it is critical to develop America’s children to become productive citizens and successful adults (Sargrad et al., 2019). In the quest to educate the nation’s youth, school leaders, teachers, and staff aspire to impact students in positive ways. Teaching may be ideal for those who want immediate and direct connections to students. School leadership, otherwise known as the principalship, is yet another avenue for others who wish to enact change on a larger scale.

Principals are essential to the effective functioning of a school (Hesbol, 2019; Rowland, 2017). Due to the nature of the responsibility connected to principals, the role requires extensive academic preparation and training (Darling-Hammond, 2010). There are many ways to develop and support principals. Their roles are complex and require many different skill sets. This study aims to examine executive coaching as a form of developing principals’ self-efficacy. While the complexity of the principal role is elevated in this study, I specifically explored executive coaching for principals who were in the leadership role for a minimum of four years. I focused on one specific form of
professional development, executive coaching, geared to supporting the wide range of skills principals need to effectively perform their jobs.

Statement of the Problem

The PK-12 educational landscape of teaching and school leadership in the United States presents a troubling dilemma. Compared to 200 countries worldwide, American schools ranks 13th when examining access to early childhood education, completion of elementary school (or the equivalent), high school completion, high school graduation, dropout rates, and college graduation (New Jersey Minority Educational Development, 2022). Teacher shortages are at record highs, and principals continue to leave leadership positions in their schools at alarming rates (Kaufman et al., 2022; Rowland, 2017). Across the country, half of principals leave their leadership role between their third and fourth year (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Rowland, 2017; School Leaders Network, 2014).

Schools are essential organizations in American society and principals, the primary leaders in schools, are equally crucial. Schools contribute to the academic achievement of children to develop quality citizens to compete in a global society. Principals matter to the success of schools and the success of students (Hesbol, 2019), so it is critical for them to develop the myriad of skills necessary to be effective leaders. Across the country, considerable research focuses on professional learning for teachers, but little exists to spotlight professional growth for principals (Rowland, 2017).

Principal Responsibilities

The role of a PK-12 principal is dynamic. Principals dedicate their time to service as they serve parents, staff, and the overall school community. Due to the complexity of their work, principals must lean into a variety of skills, tools, abilities, and resources to
navigate the role successfully (Beausaert et al., 2016; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). While a principal’s work has exciting components, the role has changed over time. In the 19th century, principals managed small schools with core and finite expectations to educate students in reading, writing, math, and citizenship (Rousmaniere, 2013). However, the role of a principal significantly shifted in expectation in the middle of the 20th century, especially with the emergence of civil rights. Principals’ jobs evolved to more supervisory roles, which included overseeing compliance, ensuring accountability, and serving as instructional and organizational leaders (Rousmaniere, 2013). Principal responsibilities have continued to increase over the past few years (Grissom et al., 2021).

Principals no longer have a singular lens through which to view the role. Instead, principals collaborate with multiple individuals and groups to benefit students. As school leaders, principals work with school teams to increase student achievement, ensure student proficiency on local and state administered assessments and increase graduation rates (Beausaert et al., 2016; Fullan, 2014). Principals also oversee student behavior incidences and attend to students’ and teachers’ mental health and social-emotional needs. As such, they are also responsible for creating a dynamic work and learning atmosphere, oversee the safety of the physical building structure, evaluate teachers and staff, and ensure parents and the community have a voice (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Beausaert et al., 2016; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Fullan, 2014). Multiple stakeholders are represented in schools, and principals must serve as brokers between all stakeholders (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013); hence, the principal is accountable to the stakeholders for student success (Bush, 2018). Failure in any of the myriad of responsibilities could jeopardize the principal’s job (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012).
While shifts for leaders are anticipated, principals cannot have a singular focus, as they must continually address a variety of school needs in service to students.

**Challenges for Principals**

Principals face incredible challenges (Collie et al., 2020). Principals’ work does not occur between the traditional nine to five hours; instead, principals keep long and exhausting work hours (Levin et al., 2019). Significant systems within a school depend on the principal, including school climate and culture, student behavior, teacher dynamics, parent and community engagement, and district relationships (Kaufman et al., 2022; Levin et al., 2019; Rowland, 2017). For example, principals enact policies that influence all aspects of student achievement (Bartanen et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2021). Positive school climates and increased student academic growth cannot occur without high-performing principals (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013). Grissom et al. (2021) specified that principals impact students’ mathematics and literacy scores on district and state assessments. Grogan and Andrews (2002) stated, “the school principal is a key lynchpin between teacher development and school improvement” (p. 249). High-quality principals do not occur by chance but are developed and created through intense training and preparation (Grissom et al., 2021).

The demands placed upon principals are profound. Among many other responsibilities, principals plan, implement and deliver professional learning to their teachers and staff to support student achievement (Carpenter et al., 2022; van Veelen et al., 2017). Principals’ responsibilities also rest in developing the leadership capacity of their teams, creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment for students, and managing the daily operations of the building (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013). School
leadership requires a high level of decision-making that affects the entire school community (Wirawan et al., 2019; Gray & Bishop, 2009).

Principal Turnover

Principals continue to leave their profession at alarming rates in the state of Colorado (Beckett, 2018). Carpenter et al. (2022) found that half of Colorado principals left their schools over five years between 2013 and 2018. Reasons for principal turnover include “inadequate preparation and professional development, poor working conditions, insufficient salaries, lack of decision-making authority, and high-stakes accountability policies” (Levin & Bradley, 2019, p. 3). Principal vacancies at such high rates in Colorado signal the need for additional support to reduce this attrition.

Support for principals is lacking across the state of Colorado (Beckett, 2018). “School leaders lack the ongoing support and development required to maintain and foster sustained commitment” (School Leaders Network, 2014, p. 1). Recent research indicates the average turnover for a principal is approximately every four years, regardless of gender or ethnicity (Grissom et al., 2021). Grissom et al. (2021) asserted that principals do not necessarily leave the principalship due to dissatisfaction with the work or the role. Levin and Bradley (2019) confirmed that the catalysts for a principal’s departure are complex and multifaceted as they involve school, district, community, and political conditions. The high pressure from serving others, managing budgetary constraints, facilitating high-stakes tests, and juggling bureaucratic policies contribute to the stressors connected to principal attrition (Grissom et al., 2021; Levin & Bradley, 2019). Interruptions to school leadership have cascading effects on students, teachers, and the school community (Bartanen et al., 2019). Principal turnover is a nationwide problem
(Rangel, 2018; Rowland, 2017). The responsibilities of school principals are immense, so it is essential that principals receive continual support and training in their quest to perform at optimal levels.

Support for Principals and Current Gaps

One key type of support for principal development is professional learning. The concept of professional learning is broad; therefore, this research focuses on the need for specific professional learning opportunities connected to the development of self-efficacy for principals. Principals may have the credentials to help them acquire their positions as leaders, but to execute the work expertly, they need to also develop and nourish their sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an individual’s belief in their ability to exercise control over their lives (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy impacts a leader’s performance and development (Murphy & Johnson, 2016); however, most school district administrators do not embrace differentiated learning opportunities designed for their experienced principals. Van Veelen et al. (2017) found many studies focused on professional learning for teachers but less on professional learning for principals. As such, it is essential to study the efficacy needs of principals to ensure their training in the skills necessary to engage in the task of the principalship. Leaders’ self-efficacy influences confidence in decision-making, an essential skill for principals (Hesbol, 2019). Considering the totality of their responsibilities, principals must be nurtured and developed to provide leadership to others. Overall, self-efficacy is essential in supporting experienced principals in their quest to improve the educational landscape for all stakeholders.
The self-efficacy of principals has an impact on their performance as leaders. Federici and Skaalvik (2012) highlighted the connection between self-efficacy, burnout, and principal turnover. Individuals with higher self-efficacy persist during challenging circumstances (Bandura, 1997). Principal burnout and turnover are symptoms of the isolating nature of the role (Aguilar, 2017; West et al., 2010). The high turnover rate for principals requires further exploration into the catalysts for the lack of retention of these school leaders (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Exploring the importance of self-efficacy among principals is necessary due to the pressures they experience as school leaders (Beausaert et al., 201; Versland & Erickson, 2017).

In addition to the responsibilities connected to principals’ work in developing students and teachers, their development as a leader is also important. Based on understanding the development needs of principals, Kochan et al. (2005) challenged administrators in PK-12 educational spaces to redesign and reframe how professional learning is approached. The charge stems from the need to overcome obstacles principals face with disconnected professional learning that does not promote and reinforce their self-efficacy as school leaders. Hesbol (2019) argued that principals’ self-efficacy increases as they gain more experience.

Focus of Current Study

Self-efficacy and self-efficacy theory are thoroughly studied topics by seminal researchers (Bandura, 1986, Wood & Bandura, 1989). An increased understanding of self-efficacy aids in gaining a deeper understanding of how to develop principals. Additionally, understanding professional development strategies designed specifically for principals supports increased knowledge of how to decrease principal turnover and
increase principal longevity. One such professional development strategy connects to executive coaching for principals who lead in public school settings.

Principals are key leaders in education (Levin & Bradley, 2019). While there are significant complexities, challenges, and obstacles associated with their professional roles, they are vital to the stability of school communities (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Rowland, 2017). Principals need high levels of self-efficacy to optimize their performance (Hesbol, 2019). Higher self-efficacy in principals allows them to be effective leaders and positively impact their school community. In this study, I investigated the complexities connected to the principal role and the use of executive coaching as a viable approach to supporting principals to increase their self-efficacy. I aimed to shed light on the importance of developing principal self-efficacy through executive coaching to benefit and increase the success of these school leaders. It is critical to address the problem at hand: Too few experienced principals receive the professional development they need to build their own self efficacy to excel in their professional roles as campus leaders (Kaufman et al., 2022; Rowland, 2017).

**Literature Review**

Multiple studies exist examining the complexities of the PK-12 school principalship (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Rowland, 2017; School Leaders Network, 2014). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis’s (2004) research emphasized self-efficacy among principals and documented the obstacles and barriers encountered in the role. However, there is a lack of research regarding how self-efficacy specifically connects to the success of school principals. This literature review aids in developing an in-depth understanding of self-efficacy, addresses why self-efficacy is important for
leaders, specifically principals, and offers ideas to increase self-efficacy among leaders. The literature review also highlights research perspectives of executive coaching.

This literature review unfolds in four main steps. First, I examine the role and responsibilities of school principals. Next, I transition the literature review to the concept of self-efficacy and include the importance of self-efficacy for principals, as well as the sources of self-efficacy. In the third portion of the literature review, I examine professional learning for school principals. In the final sections of the literature review I provide an overview of executive coaching and then discuss this training as a specific form of professional development for principals. The literature review concludes with a call to further explore the connection between executive coaching and self-efficacy, specifically for school principals.

*Understanding the Work and Role of the School Principal*

Across the United States, principals serve as the central leaders of their schools. The act of being a principal, often called the principalship, offers opportunities to develop teachers, build the capacity of aspiring leaders, guide and direct grade-level instruction, and set and lead the culture and climate of the school (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). As such, principals understand the learning that needs to take place for their entire school community, specifically teachers and students (Grissom et al., 2021), and sets the conditions for this learning to occur. Moreover, the principal is a key factor in quality and exemplary learning experiences for students who attend that school (Rangel, 2018; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). School principals serve as change agents to improve learning conditions within the school environment (Schechter & Qadach, 2016; Skaalvik, 2018). In addition to supporting quality learning conditions for students and teachers, principals
also build the capacity of aspiring leaders within the school building (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013). The responsibilities, roles, and tasks connected to the work of the principal have been well documented (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013; Beusaert et al., 2016; Collie et al., 2020; Wahlstrom et al., 2010; Wells & Klocko, 2018; West et al., 2010). While there are innumerable benefits to serving in an essential leadership role within a school, researchers have also noted the challenges of this role, especially being responsible for student learning, staff development, school climate and culture, and wellness of the learning community (Grissom et al., 2021).

Principals are arguably a key factor to student achievement (Devine et al., 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). They are visionaries, culture builders, and developers (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). School leaders create and shape the learning environment for students and establish the work climate for teachers and staff, all of which impact student achievement and academic outcomes (Levin et al., 2020; Linn et al., 2007; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Principals “are powerful levers for change,” and the changes needed within a school are impossible without adequate support, development, and training (Rowland, 2017, p. 3). Principals have an immense amount of responsibility to the overall school community.

The responsibilities of being a principal involve intense pressures and stresses in the form of increasing external accountability due to state mandates and policies, and expectations to manage students, staff, and parents (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Collie et al., 2020; Rowland, 2017). In one qualitative study, West et al. (2010) interviewed seventeen principals from an urban school district in the United States. The researchers noted workplace pressures felt by principals due to accountability measures, such as state
testing, mounting responsibilities, conflicting priorities, and the need to take on multiple roles to satisfy the needs of the school and school community (West et al., 2010). The responsibility placed upon principals is immense. Principals are only second to teachers in influencing student achievement (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013). The intense level of responsibility is often taxing on principals and causes increased stress and potential burnout (Beausaert et al., 2016). As leaders, principals often experience periods of exhaustion, feelings of being overworked, and attempts to juggle multiple tasks (Skaalvik, 2018; Wells & Klocko, 2018). Principals have reported stresses of managing their demands as supervisors, navigating school board policies, managing multiple and sometimes conflicting priorities, supporting children and adults, reinforcing school and district priorities, and juggling a balance between work life and home life (Klocko & wells, 2015; West et al., 2010). Unfortunately, interruptions to school leadership have cascading effects on students, teachers, and the school community (Bartanen et al., 2019). When principals leave, the ripple effect of the loss of momentum within leadership can have resounding impacts on multiple cohorts of students (Bartanen et al., 2019).

As part of the preparation for the role of a school leader, the principal works to earn credentials sanctioned through an official licensing program. There are technical aspects of the principalship addressed in university preparation programs directed at supporting and understanding instructional leadership, supervising school staff, understanding maintenance and operations, school finance, and school law (Kaufman et al., 2022; Linn et al., 2007). While a principal may be proficient in the technical skills associated with the position, principals must also believe in their ability to enact their leadership skills (Verlsand & Erickson, 2017). Individuals’ beliefs in their ability to
perform a task or skill is known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012). Levin and Bradley (2019) reported that the more efficacious principals are, the less likely they are to leave the principalship. These researchers connect the principals’ efficaciousness to ongoing support. As principals maneuver through their roles, the educational field will benefit from understanding how the principal’s self-efficacy impacts longevity and success.

*Understanding Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy is a well-researched topic with robust studies on how humans show, embrace, build, and develop a sense of belief in themselves (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997; Bandura, 2012; Flammer, 2015; Wood & Bandura, 1989). The concept of self-efficacy recognizes the uniqueness of human abilities (Bandura, 1997). The theory of self-efficacy identifies the impact of self-efficacy on individuals’ thinking, affect, and behavior (Fisher, 2014; Skaalvik, 2018). As such, self-efficacy is the belief people have in their ability to perform a task or skill (Bandura, 1997; Flammer, 2015; Petridou et al., 2012). Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Self-efficacy was born from social cognitive theory, which addresses how individuals have agency or control over their behavior or functioning within various environments or circumstances (Bandura, 2012).

Bandura further explained that self-efficacious beliefs are not universal (Bandura, 2012). For example, an individual with high self-efficacy in one area, task, or ability does not necessarily have high efficacy in a different area, task, or ability. However, success in a specific area increases efficacy in similar areas (Bandura, 1997). Efficacious feelings are specific to a situation, not a generalizable personality trait (Bandura, 1997; Fisher,
Individuals may identify themselves as being efficacious in a particular area or across many areas (Bandura, 1997). Simply possessing a skill is not enough to be successful. As such, individuals who have unwavering beliefs in their abilities also demonstrate increased self-efficacy.

A key to understanding self-efficacy is recognizing how self-efficacy may appear similar to other closely related terms to self-concept. Distinguishing the differences between self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem is important. Self-confidence is a cognitive process in which one’s thoughts influence behavior and determine how one responds to a specific stimulus (Efklides, 2011; Stankov et al., 2012). Federici and Skaalvik (2012) made connections between self-efficacy and self-confidence. Artino (2012) distinguished that while self-efficacy and self-confidence are similar, they are not the same concepts. Bandura (1986) warned against making self-efficacy and self-confidence synonymous. What distinguishes self-confidence from self-efficacy is that the idea of self-confidence lacks a theoretical framework. Instead, self-confidence is an idealized personality trait but lacks a theoretical basis (McCormick, 2001). Despite these distinctions, researchers continue to conflate self-efficacy and self-confidence into one concept (Bandura, 2012).

Self-efficacy is often confused with self-esteem; however, self-esteem differs from self-efficacy in that self-esteem refers to how individuals evaluate themselves, while there is no self-evaluative component of self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Bandura (1997) further explained that self-esteem is how individuals assess their self-worth, while self-efficacy is how people assess their capability within a task or activity. One clarification includes Bandura’s statement, “people tend to cultivate their capabilities in
activities that give them a sense of self-worth” (Bandura, 1997, p. 11). Distinguishing the differences between self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem add clarity. While these concepts bear similarities, conflating the terms can lead to confusion and inaccuracies in fully understanding self-efficacy and its impact.

In addition to understanding how self-efficacy differs from interpersonal characteristics, opportunities exist to understand where self-efficacy begets specific interpersonal characteristics. As such, connections between self-efficacy and self-regulation have appeared extensively in the literature. Self-efficacy connects to how a person assesses the likelihood of success with a task. The efficaciousness of a person determines whether the person tackles a challenge or succumbs to it (Maier & Curtin, 2005). Feelings of self-efficacy impact how a person perseveres with difficult tasks or situations and the level of motivation exerted to perform a task (Bandura, 1997; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Maier & Curtin, 2005). Strong self-belief equates to increased resiliency (Pajares, 1996; Wood & Bandura, 1989). As such, individuals with high self-efficacy often gravitate toward activities that they feel will have a successful outcome (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Conversely, individuals with lower self-efficacy tend to shy away from activities they presume to be less successful (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016; Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Another vital connection to elevate is the relationship between self-efficacy and agency. Bandura (1997) defined agency as “acts done intentionally” (p. 3). Bandura (1997) explained how agency is born out of self-efficacy because a person must hold a belief in their ability to influence control over their actions. Agency is self-efficacy in action. The intentionality of one’s actions is what gives the person agency (Bandura,
1997). If individuals believe they can enact change, most will try (Bandura, 1997). However, if individuals feel they are passive spectators in their own life with no ability to control their environment, they will make no effort to change. Belief in self and the ability to act on the belief is key to igniting change.

Self-efficacy theory connects to social cognitive theory, a broader theory combining the impact of behavior and cognition (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016; Bandura, 2012). Social cognitive theory supports how the processes of human interactions inform the intersectionality of human behavior, thoughts or cognition, and the surrounding environment (Bandura, 1986). Other theories may elevate behavior, cognition, or environmental stimuli; however, social cognitive theory combines all three. As such, self-efficacy theory developed as an extension of the parental social cognitive theory.

Failure and success are inevitable for all individuals. A difference exists between how those with high efficacy and low efficacy view success and failure. Additionally, research is abundant in examining the impact of high efficacy versus low efficacy. Highly efficacious individuals believe themselves to be more accomplished (Artino, 2012) and focus on their past achievements. Low efficacious individuals focus on failures and choose activities that require little effort to minimize failure (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Individuals with low self-efficacy have an increased sense of stress and feelings of inadequacy (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Self-efficacy also plays out in professional relationships. Principals with high self-efficacy are more likely to seek out and sustain supportive collegiate relationships than those with lower self-efficacy (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996).
Pessimism, depression, and emotional burnout are common feelings of individuals with low self-efficacy (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Self-efficacy also connects to feelings of happiness or contentment in that individuals with high self-efficacy manage stressful situations more effectively than those with low self-efficacy (Flammer, 2015). A principal’s high or low self-efficacy has an impact on their ability to perform their job.

Connections have been made between individuals’ self-efficacy and their ability to set goals and see them to completion. Bandura (2012) identified that in addition to self-efficacy connecting to the ability to set goals, individuals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to commit to goals. Individuals need agency to act upon the goals set and see the goals to completion (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Understanding how self-efficacy connects to goal setting prompts further examination on the impact of self-efficacy specific to the school principal.

*The Impact of Self-efficacy on Principals*

The work of a principal is intense, complex, and filled with enormous responsibility. Principals often experience periods of exhaustion, feelings of being overworked, and attempts to juggle multiple tasks (Skaalvik, 2018). Leadership efficacy is specific to how principals view their belief in the ability to lead, direct, and support their direct reports (Hannah et al., 2008). The power for principals to enact change is what Bandura (1997) terms as agency. Agency is a fundamental part of self-efficacy with respect to principals, as it is the intentionality by which principals make decisions, create and implement new policies, and shift course in the face of data. In reference to the idea that agency is self-efficacy in action, Bandura (1997) explained “People’s level of
motivation, affective states, and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true” (p. 2). Considering the work, a principal’s belief in their abilities is paramount to enacting change.

Hesbol (2019) studied principals and self-efficacy and confirmed that principals who believe in their abilities are more successful as leaders. This is especially the case when making complex decisions. Hesbol (2019) stated, “a principal’s self-efficacy and her perceptions of the school as a learning organization improves with experience, as these principals develop mastery experience which indicates their ability and confidence to lead a successful school” (p. 46). Federici and Skaalvik (2012) answered the call to further understand the implications of self-efficacy on the school principal and found strong connections between self-efficacy, “burnout, job satisfaction, and the motivation” to continue or leave the principalship (p. 295). Principals with elevated levels of efficacy are more likely to persevere and show resilience through demanding and challenging situations (Bandura, 2012). These principals are also more likely to believe they can function through the dynamic changes of the role. Highly efficacious principals view challenges as opportunities rather than deficits and failures (Artino, 2012; Bandura, 1997; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Maier & Curtis, 2005). No matter the level of efficacy held by principals, what is certain is that leaders’ efficacy affects their behavior and practices as leaders (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008) and will, in turn, impact their school community. Because demands on principals are plentiful, increasing their self-efficacy seems key to their continued pursuit of impacting their school communities.
Sources of Self-Efficacy

A well-rounded view of self-efficacy includes understanding the sources of self-efficacy and how self-efficacy develops. Bandura’s (1997) seminal research identified four sources of self-efficacy as:

- **Enactive mastery experiences** that serve as indicators of capability; these experiences come from how an individual perceives their own experiences. Personal experience with success or failure will influence one’s perception about the ability to perform tasks (Bandura, 1997).
- **Vicarious experiences** that alter efficacy beliefs through transmission of competencies and comparison with the attainments of others; these experiences are learned through observing others succeed in similar roles or situations (Bandura, 1997; Lau et al., 2018).
- **Verbal persuasion** and allied types of social influences that one possesses certain capabilities; these influences can be internal or external (Bandura, 1997; Lau et al., 2018).
- **Physiological and affective states** from which people partly judge their capableness, strength, and vulnerability to dysfunction (Bandura, 1997).

The four sources of self-efficacy shape how individuals view themselves and their ability to navigate tasks and situations (Gebauer et al., 2020).

Self-efficacy develops as a result of information received from the four sources (Lau et al., 2018). The first source of self-efficacy is mastery experience (Bandura, 1997). Mastery experience derives from how an individual perceives their own experiences. Personal experience with success or failure will influence one’s perception about the ability to perform tasks (Lau et al., 2018).

The third source of self-efficacy is verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1997), which appears as affirming thoughts. The thoughts can be internal where the individual is self-affirming or external where they are shared by other individuals (Gebauer et al., 2020).

The final source of self-efficacy is physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997). Others refer to the source as physiological arousal (Gebauer, 2020). The state of
arousal experienced in this final source refers to an individual’s internal reaction to a situation. Stress-producing situations, resulting in increased anxiety, may result in lower feelings of self-efficacy (Gebauer et al., 2020).

Leaders’ efficacy is important to their success. Hesbol (2019) spoke to the importance of a leader’s successful experiences reinforcing contributing to efficacious feelings, thus reinforcing the desire for additional experiences. Hesbol (2019) further noted that principal self-efficacy connects to a community of support within their respective school and district. Hesbol (2019) contended that principals with prior success and high self-efficacy are persuasive with other leaders, teachers, and the larger organization. Sources of self-efficacy are within a principal’s grasp; however, school districts must create conditions for developing and progressing a leader’s self-efficacy.

Professional Learning for School Principals

Many principal development programs in the United States focus on preparing future and upcoming principals to serve as school leaders. The preparation is even more important based on the complex nature of the principalship and the immense responsibility to the overall school community. Considering the challenges principals face (Wells & Klocko, 2018), many researchers contend that professional learning is the mechanism to drive school improvement (Brown & Militello, 2016). Shin et al. (2012) highlighted the connection between professional learning and student achievement. The researchers found that student achievement was higher when the principal understood the importance of professional learning and made connections to the school’s focus (Shin et al., 2012). In addition to improving learning conditions, most principals work in spaces where they must consistently plan, implement, and deliver professional learning to their
teachers and staff to support student achievement (van Veelen et al., 2017). School leadership requires a high level of decision-making and multiple decisions that impact the entirety of the school’s community (Wirawan et al., 2018). Principals continue to grow and develop their professional skills as a result of professional learning experiences (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). The learning opportunities that are personal and targeted to the individual needs of principals are more apt to lead to change within the practice (Netolicky, 2016). Principals’ learning, growth, and development are paramount to preparing for their professional roles.

Principal professional learning is essential in education; however, the manner in which principals internalize new learning experiences often varies. Many principals view professional learning as coercive and see themselves as passive participants (Brown & Militello, 2016). These perceptions may relate to beliefs around the impact of professional learning. In a mixed-methods study of thirty principals, researchers uncovered principal dissatisfaction with the type of professional learning offered (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). In this same study, principals identified a need for professional learning to be considerate of their time (or lack thereof), connect to specific content and their interests and needs. In addition to the short-term nature of professional learning, many principals view the learning as disjointed from their work and needs. Some principals see professional learning opportunities as coercion and disconnected from their work as leaders instead of being part of ongoing growth and development (Brown & Militello, 2016). If school district administrators’ focus for professional learning is more targeted to the collective needs of the district rather than the individual needs of the leader, feelings of dissatisfaction and disconnectedness may intensify.
Principals across the United States continue to stress the need for individualized but effective professional learning (Rowland, 2017). Research from elementary and secondary principals revealed that “today’s principals have too few opportunities to hone their craft and focus on improving key practices for teaching and learning” (Rowland, 2017, p. 2). The need for improved professional learning opportunities for principals as a strategy to combat turnover is imperative.

The compilation of evidence leads to the need for an increased understanding and development of professional learning that meets the needs of school principals. Researchers agree that professional learning for educational leaders is essential (Harris et al., 2016), and leaders respond to personalized and specialized learning (Johnson, 2016; Johnson et al., 2020). Netolicky (2016) found, “The highly individualized nature of professional learning suggests a need for it to be flexible, differentiated, and driven by the individual” (p. 280). To contribute to the literature connected to professional learning for principals, Goldring et al. (2012) named core tenets of learning for leaders, which included the need to connect professional learning to the leader’s daily work and understand leaders’ individual needs. Rowland (2017) found that in some districts, specific principal professional learning is lacking to the point that they are relegated to attend teacher professional development. Principals who do have the experience of attending professional learning experiences designed for them often find it lacking in effectiveness (Rowland, 2017). Most educational leaders value learning opportunities in their professional environment (Hulbos et al., 2016) and desire learning that encourages a relevant leadership journey, a reflection of learning, application of learning, and consultation with others (Kochan et al., 2005).
Executive Coaching

Executives function as the head of their respective organizations. Likewise, principals are the executives of their school. The International Coach Federation (ICF, 2021) views executive coaching as a process of “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential” (p. 1). Executive coaching centers on transforming principals. Ciporen (2015) stated, “Coaching is a partnership; coaching is a process that guides an individual through development” (p. 6). The executive coaching process and partnership allow principals to grow in their position as the executive of their school.

Executive coaching offers principals development unique to typical learning opportunities (Minnesota Department of Education, 2016). Executive coaching is an avenue of professional development that has recently gained traction in education (Devine et al., 2013; Huff et al., 2013) and has been a well-established practice in corporate settings (Griffiths, 2015). Private companies and industries employ executive coaching techniques to develop leaders and have found success with the approach (Van Oosten et al., 2019). Although limited, there is research connecting school leader development with executive coaching (Aguilar, 2017; Lochmiller, 2018). Principals have identified coaching as a preferred form of professional learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010), and researchers have deemed the coaching construct as effective for school leaders (Bozer & Sarros, 2012; Smither et al., 2006) as it highlights ongoing learning and development (Bozer et al., 2014). Moreover, coaching has emerged as an effective form of professional development (Goff et al., 2014).

To further understand the concept of executive coaching, it is important to explore its definition and purpose for developing school principals. Furthermore, executive
coaching as a form of professional development requires further exploration regarding its potential impact on school principals. While a universal or standard definition of executive coaching does not exist (Bennett & Bush, 2009; Bozer & Sarros, 2012; Bozer et al., 2014), several researchers and scholars have developed definitions utilized in the field. According to the Executive Coaching Forum (2015),

Executive coaching is a one-on-one individualized process to benefit the leader and his/her organization. Working with goals defined by both the leaders and the organization, a qualified and trusted coaching uses various coaching methods and feedback data to develop the leader’s capacity for current and future leadership. This coaching is guided by a coaching partnership to achieve maximum impact and highest level of learning. (p. 8)

The definition indicates that executive coaching is a formative, cooperative process guided by either the principal or the executive coach.

Executive coaching involves a formal agreement between the professional and the executive coach and aims to set specific goals and devise plans of action (Joo et al., 2012; The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015; Van Oosten et al., 2019. Executive coaching focuses on executives’ learning needs (Lochmiller, 2018) to outfit them with skills, understanding, and the opportunity to further their development as a professional (Trevillion, 2018) to the benefit of their organization (Baron et al., 2011; Grant, 2014). To ensure the purity of the role, the executive coach has no evaluative or managerial relationship with the professional (Aguilar, 2017). Executive coaches collect feedback from colleagues, direct reports, and professionals’ supervisors to create a complete and comprehensive picture of the professional (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015). A primary outcome of executive coaching is for the professional to transfer and apply skills learned in the coaching sessions (Baker & An, 2019; The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015).
Executive coaching as a form of professional development has existed for more than 20 years (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015). While executive coaching has considerable research, it is not government regulated, and much of the constructs of executive coaching have been grassroots, growing from those actively engaged in the work and conducting the research (Wilson, 2011). Though government regulation does not exist, the International Coaching Federation, the world’s largest community of coaches, works to endorse, train, and certify coaches (International Coaching Federation, 2018). Researchers agree that more research on executive coaching is needed (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; deHaan et al., 2019; Trevillion, 2018).

While it is necessary to explain what executive coaching is, it is equally important to distinguish what it is not. Executive coaching often appears interchangeable with counseling and mentoring, but executive coaching is a different professional development approach. While there are psychological origins to executive coaching, researchers have been careful to distinguish executive coaching from forms of therapeutic or counseling practices and mentoring (Griffiths, 2015; Theeboom et al., 2014). While an outcome of successful executive coaching is behavioral change (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015), other approaches designed to change employee behavior may be an outcome of counseling or mentoring.

Counseling and mentoring are uniquely different from executive coaching. Counseling is more aligned with therapeutic practices, psychological frameworks and governed by counseling principles (Griffiths, 2015; Joo et al., 2012). Mentoring is an informal relationship sanctioned by the organization or company that covers many topics relevant to navigating the organization (Richards, 2015). Mentoring pairs an experienced
employee with a new employee (Griffiths, 2015; Richards, 2015). Executive coaching is typically brief, while mentoring is lengthy, sometimes spanning years (Richards, 2015). While mentoring and counseling add value to an employee and the organization, there is a precise distinction between these forms of support as compared to executive coaching. Due to the intent and purpose of executive coaching, a cooperative and positive relationship between the coach and the professional is essential.

*The Relationship between the Principal and the Executive Coach*

The relationship between the executive coach, or coach, and the principal, or coachee, is one worth highlighting. Evers et al. (2006) stated, “The relationship between a coach and coachee can be characterized by mutual respect, patience, and reservedness. Moreover, the coach looks upon the coachee as an equal whom he will stand by in an objective but also supportive way” (p. 174). Executive coaching as a form of professional learning provides an opportunity for coaching to elevate the importance of developing a symbiotic relationship between the principal and coach, setting goals, being reflective, and exploring the possibility of building the resiliency needed as a school leader (Aguilar, 2017; Campone, 2015; The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015).

Central to the relationship between the principal and the executive coach is the need for a cooperative relationship. The impact of executive coaching occurs when both parties build a trusting relationship, are vulnerable, and address problems without placing blame (Campone, 2015; Grant, 2014). When these conditions occur, there is an opportunity for reflection to occur, and principals can precisely pinpoint their role in the conflict or problem (Wilson, 2011). A quality relationship between the principal and the coach is not automatic; instead, commitment from both parties is necessary to develop
and nurture a meaningful relationship over time (Campone, 2015). The Executive Coaching Forum (2015) identified seven principles that are important attributes of executive coaches. These principles included “systems perspective, results orientation, business focus, partnership, competence, integrity, and judgement” (pp. 16–29). Building a partnership and developing a relationship are relevant factors to both the principal and the executive coach. The Executive Coaching Forum (2015) stated that executive coaching “always involves a partnership among executive, coach, and organization” (p. 12). A solid relationship between the executive coach and the principal often signals the success and outcome of coaching.

Benefits, Effectiveness, and Impact of Executive Coaching

In an educational setting, coaching is a typical support provided. Often, schools employ instructional coaching for teachers or peer coaching for staff. These coaching approaches are important but are broad in scope and are potentially available to all school employees. Executive coaching provides support separate from that which is widely available to all employees. Executive coaching is specific to developing current leaders, helping them foster leadership skills, and determining ways the leader can benefit organizational goals (Ciporen, 2015; Devine et al., 2015; The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015; Gyllenstern et al., 2020).

Executive coaching is a two-way engagement that has proven successful and impactful in shifting practice (Bennet & Bush, 2009; Campone, 2015). In a global study of thirty-one managers, Grant (2014) found a connection between executive coaching and increased self-efficacy in the managers who received coaching. Executive coaching is most impactful when the executive and coach understand the purpose, create goals, and
incorporate feedback as part of the coaching process (Baker & An, 2019; DeWitt, 2016). This research expanded on the benefits of executive coaching for principals and offered, “coaching is one of the most impactful forms of professional development because it’s individualized” (DeWitt, 2016, p. 2). Executive coaching is beneficial for principals, as it demands attention from the principal, specificity from the executive coach, and collaboration between the coach and the principal (DeWitt, 2016).

Past studies offer evidence of the effectiveness of coaching and how that process influences the leader and impacts the organization (Baker & An, 2019; Collie et al., 2020; Grant, 2014; Gyllenstern et al., 2020). Through coaching strategies, executive coaches aid principals in transforming their leadership practices, developing relationships with peers and direct reports, and managing the inevitable variables accompanying the work (Baker & An, 2019; The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015). Executive coaching positively impacts an organization by helping the executive with skills that support overall performance, including self-regulation, stress management, resiliency, and goal setting (Theeboom et al., 2014).

Looking closer at past studies, Bozer et al. (2014) conducted a quasi-experimental study on coaching effectiveness based on the coach’s credentials. Baron et al. (2011) examined the relationship between the executive coach and the executive professional through a quasi-experimental study where data collection centered around perceived factors or the working relationship, as reported by the coach and the executive. Past studies also focused on the outcome of coaching and the impact of coaching on the executive. Goff et al. (2014) conducted an experimental study of 52 principals to discover the impact of executive coaching. In this study, half of the principals were in a treatment
group and the remaining half were in a control group. The researchers concluded there was a positive impact on leadership development because of executive coaching.

Through executive coaching, principals receive support to develop and work toward specific job embedded goals (Huff et al., 2013). The executive coaching process also includes collaborating with supervisors and others in executive positions and understanding how to understand reports connected to principals’ evaluations (deHaan et al., 2011). Executive coaching also provides the executive with the ability to engage in in-depth conversations specific to the executive, receive nonevaluative feedback, address organizational issues, and engage in precise learning that may not be possible in other learning contexts, such as large-scale, district-wide professional learning (Hall et al., 1999). Aguilar (2017) stated, “Principals need a neutral outsider with whom they can talk confidentially; they need job-embedded, differentiated professional development; and they need a safe space to explore the identity questions that are often at the forefront of internal and external conflicts inherent in their roles” (p. 33). In general, coaching has a positive impact on reducing stress, encouraging the leader to be goal-oriented, facilitating change management, increasing coping and leadership skills, and increasing work productivity (Anthanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Theeboom et al., 2014). In a longitudinal study of 52 elementary and middle school principals, coaching positively impacted leadership development (Goff et al., 2014). Executive coaching is a powerful tool to develop and support school principals.

*The Need for Additional Research*

Multiple studies highlight the connection between executive coaching and the development of executive leaders; however, each has its limitations pointing to the need
for additional research (Bozer & Sarros, 2012; Bozer et al., 2014; Huff et al., 2013; and Van Oosten et al., 2019). Huff et al. (2013) approached executive coaching research through the lens of the coach, while other studies included the perspective of the executive (Bozer & Sarros, 2012; Bozer et al., 2014; deHaan et al., 2011; Huff et al., 2013; Van Oosten et al., 2019). Several researchers utilized self-reports and perspectives from executives to shape the findings and results of their study (Bozer & Sarros, 2012; Bozer et al., 2014; deHaan et al., 2011; Huff et al., 2013; Van Oosten et al., 2019). A smaller selection of studies examined coaching strategies (e.g., Huff et al., 2013; Lochmiller, 2018). Even fewer studies involved a principal as the executive professional receiving coaching (e.g., Goff et al., 2014; Huff et al., 2013). Limited studies exist that examine principal self-efficacy of principals in coaching. Baron et al. (2011) conducted quasi-experimental studies on the self-efficacy of executive coaching, but no participants were school principals. In examining the breadth of research available on executive coaching, additional research related to experienced principals is needed.

While extensive research exists on executive coaching, gaps exist in the literature. Research on the impact of executive coaching is still evolving and developing (Ciporen, 2015). The literature suggests studies focus on executive coaching for business leaders (Bozer & Sarros, 2012; Bozer et al., 2014; Huff et al., 2013; and Van Oosten et al., 2019). Studies also focus on the importance of self-efficacy among principals (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Hesbol, 2019). A principal’s self-efficacy is an asset in how they approach the role as the leader of their school. It is important to understand the connection between self-efficacy and executive coaching. It is evident through the
literature that while research has been conducted on executive coaching, gaps exist in examining how executive coaching impacts the self-efficacy of experienced principals.

**Synthesis of Literature**

Principals are the executives of their schools and various researchers addressed the dynamic complexity of the role (Collie et al., 2020; Fullan, 2014; Grissom et al., 2021). Considerable research has been conducted on the work of school principals (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Rowland, 2017). The influence of principals on their stakeholders has been well documented; their impact on students and the educational community is undeniable (Fullan, 2014; Grissom et al, 2021). Despite the value of the principal’s work, they are leaving the profession at astounding rates (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Rowland 2017). The School Leaders Network (2014) indicated a national principal shortage and Beckett (2018) highlighted principal turnover, specifically in the state of Colorado. Efforts need to change to keep principals in the role; therefore, it is critical to uncover ways to help them build the myriad of skills needed to perform the job effectively are critical.

While the importance of the principal role is clear (Bartanen et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2021), researchers have also been vocal regarding the challenges principals experience in their school leadership duties (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Rowland, 2017). Wells and Klocko (2018) found increased workload and overall stress to be common factors in principal retention. While researchers present a myriad of challenges from managing staff, financial constraints, federal and state accountability measures (Spillane & Kenney, 2012) to navigating bureaucratic systems, inadequate professional learning, and surmounting community needs, it is equally as important to focus in on a solution
that can be leveraged for maximum benefit to principals, students, teachers, and the overall community. Principals need support to present their best selves as they engage in the daily work of leading their schools. Professional learning for principals is a salient and viable option for school systems.

Also evident in the research is the importance of offering principals individualized professional development that meets their unique needs (Johnson, 2016; Levin et al., 2019; Rowland, 2017; Superville, 2020). Through examination of the literature, it is evident that a more targeted and differentiated professional development opportunity are needed to build the self-efficacy of principals. While there are a number of professional development pathways in education, executive coaching is one targeted option for principals. Executive coaching is a well-researched approach to developing professionals; however, research specific to executive coaching for experienced principals is limited. This literature review demonstrated a need for further research such as this study which examined how executive coaching impacted principal self-efficacy. In the next section I detail the theoretical framework central to this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework I selected for this study was self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986). The theory originates from social cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura (1986). Social Cognitive Theory originated with five constructs, which include “reciprocal determinism, behavioral capability, observational learning, reinforcements, and expectations” (LaMorte, 2019, p. 1). The sixth construct, “self-efficacy” was added as the theory evolved (LaMorte, 2019). Self-efficacy connects to how humans function, explain, and organize the world around them, a core part of social cognitive theory.
Social cognitive theory indicates that people are not passive participants in life. They can influence their environment, but they are also influenced by their environment (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) explained, “human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocity in which behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other” (p. 18). Bandura distinguished social cognitive theory from behaviorism in that individuals do not simply function because of observations but internalize thoughts, interactions, and environmental influences to inform behavior (Bandura, 1986). As part of social cognitive theory, humans become self-referent and cognizant of their thoughts, experiences, and behaviors (Pajares, 1996). The act of being introspective and reflective leads to self-efficacy, the belief individuals have in their abilities (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 1996). Bandura explained, “efficacy involves a generative capability in which cognitive, social, and behavioral subskills must be organized into integrated courses of action to serve innumerable purposes” (p. 391). Central to efficacy is agency, the ability to act on beliefs with precision and intentionality (Bandura, 1986). It is important for individuals to have belief in their ability and the internal capacity to act upon those beliefs.

Individuals need more than skills to be successful; they also need belief in those skills (Siwatu, 2007). Belief is essential, and beliefs impact an individual’s behavior (Bandura, 2012). People gravitate towards tasks they feel efficacious in and avoid tasks where they feel inefficacious (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). Self-efficacy theory signals the need for the development of self-efficacy in humans. Bandura (1997) stated, “Self-efficacy theory provides explicit guidelines on how to enable people to exercise some
influence over how they live their lives” (p. 10). Core to self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986) underscores the importance of being efficacious and its impact on human interactions.

Bandura (1997) explained the four core components central to self-efficacy theory. These four components are illustrated in Figure 1.1 and include enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Each source is derived through information received through a variety of experiences (Bandura, 1977).

![Diagram of Four Components of Self-Efficacy](https://www.iedunote.com/self-efficacy-theory)

**Figure 1.1.** Four components of self-efficacy. Note: From by iEduNote, 2021. https://www.iedunote.com/self-efficacy-theory. Copyright 2021 by iEduNote. Reprinted with permission.

Efficacy builds from the core components, either individually or collectively. One way to describe enactive mastery experiences is through success and failure. Success helps self-efficacy grow, but successful experiences must be meaningful and earned, not
contrived and manufactured; otherwise, easy, unearned wins lead to inefficaciousness. Accomplishing challenging tasks enhance a person’s self-efficacy, while performing easy tasks diminishes a person’s self-efficacy (Hendricks, 2015). Hard-earned wins create resilience and perseverance (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997). Mastery experiences lead to sustainable self-efficacy as individuals refer to an experience to draw strength (Hendricks, 2015; Usher & Pajares, 2009).

Another way to inform efficacy is through vicarious experiences. When one person witnesses another person be successful in a similar task, efficacy is made stronger in the observer. Efficacy is dissuaded when individuals watch others fail (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997). Vicarious experiences do not always occur by observation. Bandura (1997) names “self-modeling” as an opportunity for a person to achieve success in a controlled and manufactured environment (p. 87). One’s self-efficacy can be impacted by having negative experiences. Vicarious experiences can either reinforce the negative experience or override the negative experience through a positive vicarious experience (Bandura, 1997).

The third source of efficacy is verbal persuasion, which manifests through words of affirmation, constructive feedback, or acknowledgement of one’s work (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy flourishes with positive input. The impact of verbal persuasion increases when a relationship exists with the person providing the input (Usher & Pajares, 2009). Bandura (1997) warned that false, disingenuous ego strokes are counterproductive and are not valid for verbal persuasion. If an individual’s firsthand experiences are contrary to verbal persuasion, results can be counterproductive (Bandura, 1997). Verbal
persuasion is the least sustainable of the four sources of self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2009).

The final source of efficacy is physiological arousal (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997). This source includes individuals’ awareness of how their body responds to a state of calm, agitation, arousal, stress, or excitement. Individuals avoid activities or stimuli that produce what they consider to be negative physiological results, such as stress or fear, as these emotions may affect performance (Bandura, 1986). A person’s self-efficacy increases when operating in a stress-free environment (Hendricks, 2015). A person’s physiological arousal becomes activated when faced with activities requiring perseverance (Bandura, 1997). Individuals often gravitate more to activities that do not produce unfavorable reactions.

Self-efficacy theory speaks to individuals’ belief in their abilities. The four sources of self-efficacy are central to the theory (Bandura, 1977). Including the four sources allows for an in-depth understanding of individuals and their engagement in a task or activity (Bandura, 1997). Several studies have utilized self-efficacy theory to determine the efficaciousness of individuals in an organization and the likelihood of the individuals experiencing success (deHann et al., 2016; Murphy & Johnson, 2016; Skaalvik, 2018; Versland & Erickson, 2017). Murphy and Johnson (2016) used self-efficacy theory to create effective programs to develop and sustain quality leaders. Skaalvik (2018) focused on principal self-efficacy to impact the collective efficacy of large groups. Self-efficacy theory is a framework utilized by a range of researchers.

Behavioral studies that seek to explain human thought and interactions widely reference Bandura’s self-efficacy theory (Williams & Rhodes, 2014). A criticism of the
theory is that the sources of self-efficacy reflect motivational factors already in place for the individual instead of directly impacting the factors (Williams & Rhodes, 2014). The study presumes that some individuals may be predisposed to leveraging efficacy from the four sources of self-efficacy (Williams & Rhodes, 2014). Bandura (1977) explained that self-efficacy develops over time after successful experiences. An individual generalizes the success to similar situations to increase efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Due to the multiple contexts in which principals work daily, self-efficacy theory remains the best theoretical framework. Principals draw from many experiences to perform their daily duties (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018), and these experiences are a foundation for continuing to build self-efficacy.

Conclusion: Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine how principals with at least four years of experience perceive the impact of executive coaching on their self-efficacy as leaders. I designed the study to understand the unique, unfiltered, and authentic experiences from the perspective of all four participants. Extant literature revealed that leaders’ increased self-efficacy has an impact on factors such as their performance, job satisfaction, perseverance, and other skills necessary for the principalship (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). The primary research question that guided this study was: How do experienced principals perceive the impact of executive coaching in developing their self-efficacy through enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and activating their physiological arousal?

Principals are key leaders within the landscape of PK–12 educational spaces. Hence, those who perform this role must be adequately trained and able to successfully
lead diverse groups of stakeholders. The United States relies on schools to educate children, and principals directly lead those schools. Understanding the significance of the principal’s role is equally as important as recognizing the skills they need to take on the role. Principal self-efficacy is central to their success as effective school leaders. The findings of this study are critical to shed light on how a specific form of professional development, executive coaching, equips principals to accomplish their complex work. In the following chapter, I outline the research design, methodology, data collection procedures, and data analysis for this study.

Definition of Key Terms

Coachee: An employee receiving coaching from an executive coach (Joo, 2012).

Differentiation: The process of adjusting a learning approach or concept to fit the various needs of individuals taking part in the learning. The process of making learning different for groups by distinguishing the learning of one group from another (www.merriam-webster.com).

Executive Coaching: “Executive coaching is a one-on-one individualized process to benefit the leader and his/her organization. Working with goals defined by both the leader and organization, a qualified and trusted coach uses various coaching methods and feedback data to develop the leader’s capacity for current and future leadership” (The Executive Coaching Forum, p. 8).

Principal: Executive of a school organization and charged with leadership responsibilities on behalf of the school and the school community (Minnesota Department of Education, 2016).
*Professional Development/Professional Learning:* “Professional learning is learning that supports administrator, teacher, and student earning and is focused on school improvement” (Zepeda et al., 2012, p. 943).
CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

Introduction: Research Questions

In Chapter One, I highlighted the importance of PK–12 principals, the complexity of their work, as well as aspects that may influence their roles. I also presented literature about the concept of self-efficacy and its importance in the role of school leaders. It remains a critical task to study the impact of executive coaching as a construct to support principal development. Specifically, I wanted to gain a deeper insight into principals’ perspectives regarding the perceived impact executive coaching had on their four sources of self-efficacy. In the first chapter, I provided context for the study, including identifying the problem and need for the study of self-efficacy and executive coaching among experienced principals. Chapter One concluded with a robust description of self-efficacy theory, the theoretical framework for this study.

In Chapter Two I focused on the methodological approach for the qualitative case study. Specifically, I review the research design, rationale for the design, theoretical framework, and the collection and analysis of qualitative data. I conclude this chapter by addressing the study’s trustworthiness, ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations.

Using a case study design, I aimed to examine how principals with at least four years of experience perceive the impact of executive coaching on their self-efficacy as leaders. One primary research question guided the study: How do experienced principals perceive the impact of executive coaching in developing their self-efficacy through
enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and activating their physiological arousal? The importance of this research stems from the considerable need to address PK–12 principal turnover. Research identifying the lack of differentiated and intentional professional development and the importance of self-efficacy among leaders helped frame the research question (Brown & Militello, 2016; Hesbol 2019; Johnson, 2016; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018; Rowland, 2017). Principals are necessary, and their rapid departure from education is a crisis for all stakeholders.

Researcher Perspective and Positionality

My career in education began in 2008 when I started my work in the Marvel Public School district (a pseudonym) as a school social worker. I had an unconventional path to school leadership, which was not the traditional transition from a classroom teacher. Instead, I began in mental health as a school social worker. My initial mental health training allowed me to focus on supporting everyone in a school setting, including students, parents, teachers, and staff. My job was to completely understand how to deliver support based on the specific needs of the individual. After encouragement from leaders in the district, I eventually pursued formal leadership roles.

After several years as a school social worker, I returned to school to earn a Master of Education and an administrator’s license, and soon after earning this degree, I began to transition into leadership roles slowly. My official administrative assignment started as an assistant principal. After two years, I accepted a principalship at a school that served preschool through eighth-grade students. In 2018, based on the instructional gains experienced by the teachers and students on my campus, I transitioned to a district-level position, which entailed directing the instructional programming for all multilingual
learners throughout the district. My career trajectory allowed me to experience perspectives through the lens of a teacher, a campus leader, and a district leader.

As a former school principal, I understand the complexities of this role and the internal strength and fortitude needed to do the job well. The position provides rewarding experiences, celebratory moments, and opportunities that impact generations of students. The role also involves challenges, self-doubts, questioning of decisions, missteps, and loneliness. As a first-year principal, I received a mentor, a cohort group focused on shared learning, and access to district leaders. The support was exceptional and welcomed. As I continued in the principalship, the individualized level of support decreased. My professional learning was no longer specific to my needs as a leader; instead, professional learning that addressed district initiatives and goals, as well as large-scale priorities, such as curriculum implementation, teacher evaluation rubrics, and budget allocations. District-level support did not address the specific needs of being an instructional leader, nor did it focus on my individual growth as a leader. There was no agency in my development as a professional, and I questioned the beliefs in my abilities.

To push me and grow as a leader, I began seeking learning options that met my unique needs and fueled my beliefs in my abilities. I slowly began to realize that developing my self-efficacy would be my responsibility. I leaned on colleagues and peers, but many of them were navigating their challenges of learning and growth, so I often felt alone without support or someone to be my thought partner. The absence of collegial connections made it difficult to reach out to others in my district who understood the work of principals. I doubted my work, my thinking, and my decisions.
While I did not know what executive coaching was during the early days of my principalship, I began to learn more about it as I moved through my career.

Once I transitioned to a leadership position at the district level, I learned more about executive coaching as a professional development construct for leaders. I was eager to learn from someone external to my district but still understood the nature of my work. Having a thought partner to help me navigate specific obstacles, understand the larger scope of my work, grasp the impact on my team, and develop a plan for my growth and development was refreshing. My new learning finally connected to my work and was specific to my busy schedule. The acts of problem-solving during the executive coaching sessions focused on real situations, real problems, and genuine solutions. I quickly recognized how the executive coaching experience impacted not only my own effectiveness but that of everyone on my team. It was the professional lifesaver that I had needed for quite some time.

My experiences drove my desire to conduct this study. One of my overarching goals for this research is to understand principals’ perceptions regarding the impact of executive coaching on their self-efficacy. Principals in Marvel Public Schools (MPS) receive ample individualized support as new principals, but the personalized access does not continue as they become more experienced. I believe that support and individualized professional development must continue for experienced principals to maintain stamina through the difficult work associated with their jobs.

In qualitative case studies, the participants’ worldview becomes central to the research, thus connecting the design to a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist worldview allows for the opportunity for people to construct their reality through their
individualized and unique experiences (Stake, 2010). The core of the executive coaching construct connects to professionals’ experiences, how they see and interact with the world, and how their viewpoint shapes their movement. The principals learned through their experiences, constructed meaning as they developed as leaders, and connected learning to their specific professional context. The idea that learners construct meaning from their experiences and learn within context is a critical component of the constructivist worldview (Hein, 1991). In this study I aimed to understand how principals with at least four years of experience perceive the impact of executive coaching on their self-efficacy as leaders.

During the 2020–2021 school year, I had the opportunity to begin serving as an executive coach for principals. The opportunity developed out of a need to support an influx of new principals. As part of onboarding into their new roles, the principals entered the relationship as willing participants, looking for more connected and personalized professional development.

As a former principal, I understand the complex nature of the principalship. Many principals currently serving in the principal role in the area where this research occurred were colleagues. While I transitioned from the principal role four years ago, personal and professional connections still exist. I recognized these working and personal relationships as potential biases. Similar to times when I was providing professional learning to principals, coaching principals, and providing them with explicit instructional guidance, it was imperative to establish and maintain boundaries during this study. My position as a researcher and my worldview perspective guided the selection of the theoretical framework chosen for this study.
Theoretical Framework Application

I selected Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory as the framework for this study. The theory explains how individuals’ beliefs about their abilities influence their actions and behaviors (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). This theory includes four sources of self-efficacy: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and activating physiological arousal (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997). The concept of self-efficacy attempts to explain individuals’ beliefs in their abilities and how these beliefs influence events around them (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997). Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory applies to principals and the executive coaching construct by focusing on how specific areas of self-efficacy are developed, specifically through executive coaching. This study aimed to understand how executive coaching impacted experienced the four sources of principals’ self-efficacy. The self-efficacy theory provided significant guidance to the overall construction of the study’s research questions, the data collection, and the data analysis processes.

The theoretical framework shaped the research questions by explicitly elevating the four sources of self-efficacy so that I could identify where the sources appear throughout the executive coaching process for principals. Each source of self-efficacy, as outlined in the self-efficacy theory, was listed in the research question: How do experienced principals perceive the impact of executive coaching in developing their self-efficacy through enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and activating their physiological arousal? The inclusion of all four sources allowed me to make multiple connections between individual principal interview responses and focus group interview questions, all connected to the research question. It also allowed me to
ascertain which sources were more prevalent as outcomes of the executive coaching process.

Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 illustrate how the three sources of data collection aligned with the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework shaped data collection comprised of individual, semi-structured interviews, one focus group interview, and written reflections. I collected the first pieces of data through virtual, individual, semi-structured interviews. The questions in these interviews aligned with the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). I asked open-ended “how” and “why” questions that elicited robust responses from my participants (Patton, 2015; Stake, 2018). I crafted each question to elicit information connected to one or more of the sources of self-efficacy, as indicated in Table 2.1. Because the framework shaped the construction of the interview questions, I constructed all probing questions to support the research question.

For the second source of data, I facilitated a focus group interview. Due to scheduling conflicts, the focus group interview consisted of only two of the four participants involved in the study. I asked semi-structured, open-ended questions during the focus group interview, allowing participants to elaborate on questions based on their unique experiences (Patton, 2015; Stake, 2010).

During the focus group interview, I facilitated interactions between participants but did not contribute or interfere with communication (Patton, 2015). The compilation of my research focused on the impact of executive coaching. Specifically, focus group interview questions addressed how executive coaching supported the principals with demonstrating flexibility and adaptability, utilizing leadership skills, leveraging
communication skills and supporting with resiliency skills. Table 2.2 shows the connection between the focus group interview questions and the theoretical framework.

Table 2.1

*Theoretical Framework Alignment with Semi-structured Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Enactive mastery experiences</th>
<th>Vicarious experiences</th>
<th>Verbal persuasion</th>
<th>Activating physiological arousal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was executive coaching meaningful for you? If so, why and how?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching impacted your work as a principal?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What experiences have you gained from executive coaching that were not available before coaching?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching motivated you as a principal?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching changed how you interact with or support your administrative team?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What professional or personal success have you experienced because of executive coaching?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are three key pieces of information you recall hearing from executive coaching sessions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching impacted how you see yourself as a principal?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching helped you learn from success? Failure?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching addressed stressors associated with the principalship?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2.2

**Theoretical Framework Alignment with Focus Group Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Interview Question</th>
<th>Enactive mastery experiences</th>
<th>Vicarious experiences</th>
<th>Verbal persuasion</th>
<th>Activating physiological arousal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching impacted you as a principal?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching increased your value as a principal?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching supported how you identify your leadership skills?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching supported how you utilize your leadership skills?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching supported your communication skills?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain how the quality of interactions with colleagues, direct reports, peers, or supervisor(s) has shifted during executive coaching.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain shifts in your resiliency during executive coaching.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each focus group interview question aligned with the theoretical framework. The virtual focus group interview provided participants with an opportunity to hear about the experiences of others and offer more robust information (Patton, 2015). Additionally, I gathered rich information that provided context for the executive coaching experienced by each participant (Stake, 2010). The focus group also allowed me to hear from participants, gain information about the participants’ experiences with executive coaching and hear details about the impact of their individual executive coaching experiences.
The third source of data was written reflections from the participants. These reflections allowed participants to express their thoughts and ideas in a way that was not captured through individual or focus group interviews. Table 2.3 illustrates the connections between the written reflection prompts provided to principals and the theoretical framework. As principals engaged in their daily work, I collected written reflections on two different occasions, once at the beginning of the study and once at the conclusion of the study. Written reflections directly captured the participants’ voices as they explained how they perceived executive coaching impacted their self-efficacy.

The theoretical framework also guided the data analysis process. Each data source, the individual, semi-structured interviews, the focus group interview, and written reflections, aligned to the four sources of self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura’s (1986) self-efficacy theory. Collecting three sources of data allowed me to triangulate the data. I also identified connections between principals’ mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal and the principals’ experiences with executive coaching.

Each data collection source allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of self-efficacy development through executive coaching. Additionally, the specificity of the prompts from the individual, semi-structured interviews, focus group interview, and written responses, ensured participants provided well-rounded and comprehensive information. The data contributed to a complete understanding of all four sources of self-efficacy and underscored essential elements of the self-efficacy theory. All three sources of data aligned to the design of the study.
Table 2.3

*Theoretical Framework Alignment with Written Reflection Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence Stems</th>
<th>Enactive mastery experiences</th>
<th>Vicarious experiences</th>
<th>Verbal persuasion</th>
<th>Activating physiological arousal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My self-efficacy improved this week in the following ways…</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways did executive coaching this week tackle flexibility and adaptability connected to your work as a principal?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did this week’s executive coaching support your leadership?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways did executive coaching impact your interactions with colleagues, direct reports, peers or supervisor(s) this week?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did executive coaching impact your personal resiliency this week?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Research Design and Rationale*

The research design for this study was a multiple case qualitative design. A qualitative design consists of conducting research in an authentic, genuine, and realistic setting to understand experiences through the eyes of the participant (Miles et al., 2020). Qualitative research allows researchers to investigate the world with an inquiry approach led by curiosity. This design is about making meaning of how the world operates, functions through the eyes of those engrossed in the experience, and allows participants to shed light on their direct experiences (Miles et al., 2020; Patton, 2015). As a part of qualitative research, a case study is an empirical approach to collecting data (Yin, 2018)
and allows the researcher to learn more about a phenomenon through the participant’s perspectives (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) explained that within a qualitative study, a case study is the best design when researchers want to learn more about the aspects of a program. Additionally, a qualitative design capitalizes on multiple data sources describing the participants’ experiences (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). This study reflected the tenets of a multiple case study.

Through this research design, participants described the depth and impact of executive coaching on their self-efficacy as principals. In the study, I used specific and targeted questions because the quality of the questions impacted the answers provided by participants (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). This study’s research question required a deep and complex understanding of executive coaching and self-efficacy. The level of knowledge and depth of information I sought to glean would not have been feasible through a quantitative research design.

One of the strengths of this study was its design. This qualitative design incorporated the participants’ perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018) based on authentic experiences and situations (Patton, 2015). While some studies have examined the quantitative aspects of executive coaching (Bozer et al., 2014; Goff et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2016), few have uncovered how executive coaching impacts leaders’ self-efficacy from their own words and actions.

Central to this qualitative study was the need to capture the context of the environment alongside the participants’ interview responses, focus group interview responses, and written reflections (Patton 2015; Yin 2018). As indicated in Figure 2.1, the multiple case study design provided a more robust look into participants’ self-efficacy
as a result of one specific professional development, executive coaching (Miles et al., 2020). A qualitative design was used to capture the perspectives, experiences, and ideas from participants in their own words (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant, or principal, represented by one individual case (Miles et al., 2020). A case study was the best approach to gather information from participants based on their shared experiences (Patton, 2015). Due to the multiple participants involved in the study, the best design was that of a multiple case study.

*Figure 2.1. Qualitative multiple case research design.*
Specific to qualitative research is the data collected for the research question. The use of three data collection sources, individual interviews, a focus group interview, and written reflections, elevated the credibility of the design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

The design of this qualitative study is aligned to best practices for conducting a multiple case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). The design is justified through the construction of the research questions in addition to the types of data collected. Participant experiences are central to this study; thus, each data set incorporated principals’ voices and their interactions with executive coaching.

Site Selection and Participant Sampling

Site selection provides additional context for this study as the site was rich with potential participants who lead various schools across one school district in Colorado. In this section, I highlight the intentionality behind selecting the site and the methodology I used to select participants. First, I provide pertinent data to describe the site. Second, I outline the process for participant sampling. To further understand the participants and the rationale for their selection, I provide demographic data collected from the participants.

Site

The site for this study is Marvel Public School district (a pseudonym). The inclusion of the Marvel Public School (MPS) district stems from the convenience of the district, as well as its community and student diversity. MPS employs approximately 4,000 teachers and staff and serves approximately 30,000 students in PK–12 grade (Local School District, 2021). A majority of the MPS employees and principals identified as White. In MPS, approximately 62% of employees identified as White, and approximately
90% of the principals identified as White. The student population of MPS was much more diverse. At the time of this study, MPS students were from over 100 different countries and spoke over 100 different languages. The most frequent languages spoken by families in the district included English, Spanish, Arabic, Amharic, Nepali, Somali, Burmese, Karen, Karenni, and Vietnamese. In MPS, approximately 55% of students were Hispanic, and approximately 17% were African American/Black. Table 2.4 illustrates the staff, principal, and student demographics of MPS (Local School District, 2021). The communities that MPS serve include low-income, middle-class, and affluent areas. MPS has a wide selection of school options, making the district an optimal choice for a research site.

Marvel Public School district is located in Colorado and boasts a diverse community of students. At the time of this study, the district had more than 60 schools, both traditional public schools and charter schools. Schools within MPS included exclusively preschool sites called child development centers; elementary schools serving preschool through fifth grade; middle schools serving sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students; and comprehensive high schools for ninth through twelfth-grade students. MPS also had non-traditional schools for students who need various instructional programming options. Finally, MPS had two online programs. One supports students from kindergarten through eighth grades, and the other had a design specifically for ninth through twelfth-grade students. Over sixty principals led each of the 63 schools in the MPS district. Principals throughout the district ranged from first-year principals to more experienced ones with more than thirteen years of experience. The average number of years of service for MPS district principals was seven years.
Table 2.4

Marvel Public School Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Information</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee demographic information</td>
<td>4,800 employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61.7% - White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.6% - Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.4% African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4% Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.08% American Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal demographic information</td>
<td>63 principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>92% - White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3% - Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4% - African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1% - Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student demographic information</td>
<td>38,000 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48.1% Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51.9% Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56.7% Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.9% African American/Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.4% White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1% - Two or more races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.9% Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.0% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.7% American Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special population information</td>
<td>42% of students are multilingual learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.4% are identified with a learning disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.9% are identified as gifted and talented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of families</td>
<td>Students and families are from 160 different countries and speak 130 different languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42% of students and families are multilingual learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top languages spoken</td>
<td>English, Spanish, Arabic, Amharic, Nepali, Somali, Burmese, Karen, Karenni, Vietnamese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a diverse community, MPS had district departments dedicated to the support and development of administrators, including a leadership development department and a professional development department. The professional development department supported teachers and supplies content-based learning to leaders. The leadership development department supported fostering leadership skills in new and aspiring leaders. The construct the district specifically began in 2018 was Leverage, Empower, Achieve, and Develop (LEAD). LEAD exclusively created a pipeline of new leaders while also developing current leaders. The leadership development department supplied professional learning to all principals and supported the LEAD program. In 2019, the LEAD program expanded to provide executive coaching to new principals. In addition to the broad professional learning, new principals received individualized executive coaching specific to their needs as leaders. At the time of this study, the organized structure of executive coaching did not exist for experienced principals, those in the role for at least four years, in the district.

At the time of this study, there was no systematic structure for executive coaching for experienced principals within the MPS district. Instead, experienced principals received large-scale professional learning through the district-based leadership development department. While professional learning was available to all leaders in the district, executive coaching was reserved for new principals as they transitioned into the role. As such, targeted and individualized professional learning through executive coaching was unavailable to all principals.
Participants

Participants for this study were experienced school principals within the MPS district who had competed at least four years in their current roles as principals. I selected participants through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves finding participants for a study based on alignment to specific pre-established criteria (Etikan et al., 2016; Patton, 2015). Moreover, purposive sampling allows the researcher to ensure participants are able to speak to the components of the theoretical framework (Etikan et al., 2016). Purposive sampling also ensures participants can offer perspectives about the experiences in which they are engaged (Patton, 2015). Using purposive sampling ensured the participants could confidently speak to their experiences specifically connected to executive coaching.

I created a general survey to seek interested and qualified participants. This survey appears in Appendix A. I emailed the district-wide survey to all 63 principals and requested the following information:

1. Principal name
2. Principal location
3. Number of years in MPS district
4. Number of years as a principal in MPS district
5. Number of years as a principal in any district
6. Is the principal currently receiving executive coaching?
7. Interest in receiving 8 weeks of executive coaching

Of the 63 principals emailed, I received 28 responses. Based on the responses received, I determined which principals fit the criteria for the study. I used exclusionary criteria for principals who had not completed at least four years in the role as a principal, whether in
the MPS district or another district. For the six principals remaining in the sample, I sent a personalized email to each one, explaining the study, the study purpose, and asking for voluntary participation in the study. Of those who expressed an interest in the study, six principals met the study criteria. I randomly selected four principals from the pool of those six principals. The four principals selected indicated their current involvement in an executive coaching series. To support consistency among the sample, it was ideal that all principals were at the same stage within their executive coaching experience. I emailed the four randomly selected principals to request more details about their current executive coaching involvement and experience. I confirmed that each participant’s participation in executive coaching included the principal and executive coach developing a formal agreement for coaching. Patton (2015) identified this sampling as a “purposeful random sample” (p. 268).

The participants’ involvement in executive coaching was required for inclusion in the study. Each participant confirmed their involvement with an executive coach external to the organization. As such, each participant’s executive coach was not an employee of MPS. Three participants had the same executive coach while the fourth participant had a separate executive coach. Since the executive coaches were external to the participants’ organization, the participants engaged in their own process to determine the executive coach’s credentials and appropriateness for the work. All four participants were in the same stage of executive coaching in that they were scheduled to conclude executive coaching at the conclusion of the school year.

During executive coaching, the coach and principal engaged in a one-on-one meeting for about one hour, usually weekly. The goal of these meetings was to discuss
concerns or obstacles the principals were experiencing within their current context (Williams & Lowman, 2018). Executive coaching was structured and designed to meet principals’ unique and individual needs (Baker & An, 2019). Executive coaching sessions centered on a professional problem or a personal problem connected to the principal’s professional environment (Williams & Lowman, 2018). Core to the executive coaching process was the opportunity for the principal and coach to identify a challenge, or problem, and work through that issue together (Bozer & Sarros, 2013). The anticipated outcomes of executive coaching were behavioral changes, shifts in beliefs, acquisition of new skills, tools, or resources, and renewed energy to engage in leadership behaviors (Allen & Fry, 2019; Bozer & Sarros, 2019; Van Oosten et al., 2019).

I collected comprehensive demographic information from the final list of four participants, which is included in Table 2.5. The information I collected included participants’ age, gender, ethnicity, the total number of years in MPS district, the number of years served as a principal within the MPS district, the number of years served as a principal in a previous district, and the participants’ highest degree earned. While MPS district had a diverse community of learners, its principals were not as diverse as the community they served. All four study participants identified as White females. Participants in the study had an average of 7 years of principal experience and an average of 9.5 years employed in MPS. None of the participants had experience as a principal outside of the MPS school district.
Table 2.5

**Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Hannah</th>
<th>Monica</th>
<th>Tori</th>
<th>Kimberly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional or Charter School</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Charter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Current School (Elementary, Middle School, High School)</td>
<td>Elementary and Middle (P-8)</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>High School and Post-secondary</td>
<td>Elementary and Middle (K-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Years in MPS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Years in the Principalship in MPS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Years in the Principals in a Previous District</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data Collection Procedures and Protocols*

Qualitative studies rely on an inquiry approach where humans interpret the behavior of other humans based on shared or common experiences (Stake, 2010). Furthermore, a case study is an empirical approach to qualitative data collection involving investigating a shared experience (Yin, 2018). The shared experience in this case study focused on the real-life experiences of four principals engaged in a specific form of professional development, executive coaching.

This study involved three different methods of data collection. The first involved conducting semi-structured, individual interviews with each participant. The second
involved facilitating and moderating one focus group interview with all participants. The third data collection method included written reflections from each participant, collected on two different occasions throughout the research process.

I conducted four steps to launch the data collection process. Prior to launching the study, I first contacted the district’s Accountability and Research department to receive approval to conduct the study. Second, I submitted to the Office of Research Compliance for review and received an exempt determination. My third step involved contacting principals with an initial questionnaire (see Appendix A). I accessed emails through a district listserv housing all principal email addresses for traditional PK-12 schools. I emailed the questionnaire to all principals leading traditional and charter schools.

The fourth step involved contacting specific principals based on their responses to the initial email questionnaire. Principals who indicated they had four or more years of experience in this leadership role (either in the MPS district or another district) were emailed an invitation to participate in the study. Then, I emailed the consent form (see Appendix B) to four randomly selected principals who met the principal experience criteria. The consent form included information about the intent and purpose of the study, as well as what to expect as a participant. I informed participants that their involvement in the study was voluntary and they could discontinue participation at any time for any reason. I also informed participants of the need to audio record and video individual and group interviews through the consent form. I included a request to audio and video record the interviews on the consent form.
Individual Interviews

The first method of data collection was through semi-structured individual interviews. The interview form I created (see Appendix C) included all interview questions and a location to record principal responses. As part of a piloting process, I submitted the interview questions to two current principals involved in executive coaching but not part of the study to gather feedback, input, and suggestions for modification. Another purpose for piloting my questions was to ensure the construction of the questions did not present my biases. Once I fine-tuned the interview questions and adjusted the questions from suggestions, I began the individual interviews.

I conducted one 60-minute semi-structured interview with each participant at week four of the eight weeks of executive coaching sessions. Stake (2010) indicated that a one-hour interview is sufficient to gather quality information from participants. Hardon et al. (2004) explained that a benefit of semi-structured interviews is that they allow the researcher to be “versatile and flexible” (p. 2955) to expand upon questions and have more of an authentic interaction with the participant. For additional flexibility, interviews were virtual via the Zoom platform and conducted individually at a time chosen by each participant. All interview questions were open-ended, allowing comprehensive responses from the participants. Patton (2015) shared that a case study needs to include open-ended questions that enable the participant to respond meaningfully and authentically. Interviews were recorded with permission from each participant. Yin (2018) explained that recording interviews ensure the accuracy of information.
Focus Group Interview

The second method of data collection was the focus group interview. Focus group interviews offer an additional perspective for gathering participant experiences. All participants served as school principals making it a homogenous group, ideal for a focus group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). “The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their views in the context of the views of others” (Patton, 2015, p. 475). I requested available dates and times from participants to find a common time for all participants to meet for the focus group interview. Due to scheduling conflicts due to the end of the school-year activities, the focus group interview only included two of the four participants. The focus group interview was conducted virtually at an MPS district office and scheduled for 60 minutes. I introduced myself to the participants as a researcher and informed them of my role as a focus group moderator. In preparation for the focus group interview, I followed processes and procedures as illustrated in Figure 4. While asking interview questions to the focus group, I maintained an objective stance on participant interactions and participant responses. I made field notes from the focus group using an interview protocol (see Appendix D). Patton (2015) explained that field notes are a critical part of the data collection process as the researcher details what occurred during the focus group interview. Patton (2015) reinforced the expectation that field notes are “descriptive, concrete, and detailed” (p. 387).

Written Reflections

The third method of data collection included collecting two written reflections from each participant. Participants engaged in a total of eight weeks of executive coaching. Participants were emailed the electronic, written reflection (see Appendix E) at
the beginning and conclusion of the study. Written reflection prompts aligned with the theoretical framework and focused on the impact of executive coaching on participants’ flexibility and adaptability, leadership skills, interactions with colleagues, direct reports, peers or supervisors, and resiliency.

I aligned each data collection method to the theoretical framework. Table 2.6 illustrates the connection between each data collection method and the components of the theoretical framework. Each data collection method aligned with all four components of the theoretical framework of self-efficacy theory and data collection methods.

Table 2.6

*Theoretical Framework Alignment with Data Collection Methods*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Enactive mastery experiences</th>
<th>Vicarious experiences</th>
<th>Verbal persuasion</th>
<th>Activating physiological and affective states</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Interview</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Reflections</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To answer this study’s research question, data collection allowed elevation of the voices of the principals involved in executive coaching process. Their voices and experiences were collected through individual interviews, a focus group interview, and weekly written reflections. The data collection timeline is reflected in Table 2.7. The initial data collection began in March 2022 and concluded at the end of MPS school year, in June 2022.
Data Analysis Procedures

I analyzed the data for this multiple case study in five steps by using Creswell and Poth’s (2018) data analysis spiral. The procedures in Table 2.7 align to the steps from Creswell and Poth’s (2018) data collection spiral. As part of the first step in data collection, Patton (2015) stated, “Thick, rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting” (p. 533). Analyzing the participants’ voices and experiences was central to the analysis of the qualitative data.

Table 2.7

Data Collection Procedures Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Procedure</th>
<th>Data Collection Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obtain site approval and IRB determination to conduct study.</td>
<td>March 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emailed initial questionnaire to all K-12 principals in MPS. This included principals of traditional and charter schools. Principals were given two weeks to respond to the questionnaire.</td>
<td>March 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on those who fit the experience criteria, consent forms were sent to four random principals. Principals were given two weeks to sign and return the consent form.</td>
<td>April 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One 60-minute semi-structured interview conducted with each principal.</td>
<td>April 2022–May 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administer two written reflections to each principal.</td>
<td>April–June 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One 60-minute focus group interview conducted with all available principals.</td>
<td>June 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review transcribed interview notes, interview recordings, and submitted reflections.</td>
<td>July 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code and categorize data</td>
<td>July 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesize and report findings</td>
<td>August 2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following the data collection process, I started data analysis. The six steps to the data analysis process are outlined in Table 2.8. I indicated the procedure along with the type of data collected.

Table 2.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Analysis Procedure</th>
<th>Data Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review data collection</td>
<td>Interview notes, transcribed interviews, video recordings and open-ended written reflections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize data collected</td>
<td>Found patterns among the raw data including notes and recordings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code data using NVivo software</td>
<td>Verbalized language from participants as well as concepts from observations. Participant audit of data including quotes, meaning derived from statements, and observed behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess and interpret data</td>
<td>Use codes to uncover themes from the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesize data</td>
<td>Comprehensible report using figures and tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report findings</td>
<td>Completed data report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first step in the data analysis was to review the data to ensure I had all portions of the data, including individual and group interview notes and video recordings from the interviews. These data were in their purest form. Patton (2015) shared, “Raw field notes and verbatim transcripts constitute the undigested complexity of reality. Simplifying and making sense out of that complexity constitutes the challenge of content analysis” (p. 553). Once I reviewed the data, I moved to the second step.

The second step was to organize the data. This step included sifting through the raw data to find patterns (Patton, 2015). Patterns emerged as similarities from principal
responses, similarities in behavioral mannerisms, or similarities from topics that arose from the data sources. In determining patterns, Patton (2015) cautioned against trying to move too quickly into the interpretation of the data. Once I found patterns in the data, I moved into the third step of coding the data.

The third step involved coding data through coding using the NVivo software. The software allowed me to extract themes from raw data. I sifted through hours of comprehensive data from interviews, my observations, and participants’ written reflections. Patton (2015) shared that in analyzing case study data, the goal is to “integrate and synthesize interview responses from throughout the interview into a coherent story” (p. 443). Miles et al. (2020) explained, “Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 62). Transcripts from the principals were entered into NVivo to capture themes from spoken data. Concepts were also included in the NVivo software to extrapolate larger ideas. Miles et al. (2020) called the idea of grouping emerging ideas not connected to specific verbalized language “concept coding” (p. 66). The concepts or general ideas captured from the principals served as valuable data to uncover the themes.

Once I uncovered the themes, the data needed to be interpreted for meaning. During this multiple case study, a key consideration was maintaining the integrity of the information collected from participants. Stake (2010) explained that coding is essential in the interpretation phase as coding assists researchers in data organization. The importance of eliciting descriptive data emerged during the assessing and interpreting portion of the data analysis. Patton (2015) explained, “Thick description sets up and makes possible
thick interpretation” (p. 606). For the integrity of the study, I maintained the voices and experiences of the principals.

After completing the first three data analysis steps, I began the fourth step of interpreting the data. Assessment and interpretation involved making sense of the data and understanding what the data revealed (Patton, 2015). Researchers uncover meaning through the sense-making process (Miles et al., 2020). When interpreting the data, I created assertions by connecting the themes to the theoretical framework. In this fourth step of the data interpretation process, I synthesized the data in an effort to share the participants’ stories using their own words.

In the fifth and final step, I created comprehensive reports to summarize the findings. The totality of the data analysis process resulted in a report of the lived experiences of school principals. The report I generated in the synthesis included graphics that assisted with this process. The themes developed from the data provided a complete response to the study’s research question.

The thematic analysis process began with the initial coding from the data I entered into the NVivo software program. This process involved determining codes (Miles et al., 2020). Outputs from NVivo provided a quantifiable frequency of specific phrases, concepts, and ideas. I read through the data several times to determine the connection among the phrases, concepts, and ideas to the theoretical framework. The analysis process involved determining what data were relevant to extrapolate based on its alignment to the theoretical framework (Patton, 2015). The four components of my theoretical framework guided the convergence process, a process that supported me in
determining what aspects of my participants’ statements were aligned and worked together in service to the research question (Patton, 2015).

Once codes were determined with the aid of NVivo, I identified the study themes. For example, when participants spoke of a concept such as developing their leadership skills, this concept was extrapolated through the story they shared or the example provided. Sometimes the mention was overt, and other times it was enveloped within their statement.

**Trustworthiness and Authenticity**

Accurate, reliable, and trustworthy data are essential in research. In as much, it is vital that this study stands on its own merit. Core to the essence of a case study approach is the collection of multiple pieces of data (Yin, 2018), the triangulation of that data (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018), and the use of “thick, rich description” (Patton, 2015, p. 533). Triangulation of data is a form of validating and consistency within the data (Patton, 2015; Stake, 2010). Triangulation refers to “comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means” (p. 662). I triangulated data collection from my participants through semi-structured interviews with each participant, a focus group interview, and written reflections.

The participants’ words and sentiments support the validity of this study. It is difficult to refute direct verbiage from the participants. Patton (2015) referred to participants’ words as “face validity” (p. 26). I incorporated the words of the participants to ensure the accuracy of those words strengthens the authenticity of this study. The participants in this study communicated thoughts, sentiments, and feelings connected to their work, coaching, and development as a leader. The principals were vulnerable and
provided a unique opportunity to understand their experiences by candidly sharing their stories.

Another form of validity connects to the auditing process. Stake (2010) called the auditing process “member checking,” where the researcher asks participants to examine the data for accuracy (p. 123). Stake (2010) encouraged researchers to devote ample time to the auditing process, as delays in the analysis timeline can be impacted by contacting participants and providing time for data review. Understanding the flexibility needed for this study, I extended the timelines for the study in case of unforeseen adjustments. I also started the data collection process as soon as I received the IRB determination to optimize my calendar timeline.

I made every effort to incorporate other forms of trustworthiness and authenticity through confirmation and reliability of the data collection process (Miles et al., 2020). I was intently aware of the importance of explicitly noting each step in the data collection and analysis process so that my research could be duplicated with ease. Another researcher should be able to follow my data collection processes and procedures based on the level of detail described (Miles et al., 2020). Likewise, I fully disclosed my connection to the site and participants to support my study’s reliability (Miles et al., 2020). I accomplished this by disclosing this information at the start of the interview. This process outlines the steps taken within the study to establish and maintain trustworthiness, authenticity, and validity.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were taken at every juncture of this study. I submitted to the Office of Research Compliance for review and received an exempt determination. As
indicated in Appendix B, participants were provided consent forms that outlined the minimal risks involved in the study. Participants’ voluntary involvement in the study was confirmed, and they were informed of their option to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Considering my former role as a principal and my connection with the site and the participants, I knew that confidentiality was integral to this study. Data were stored and maintained on a secure server and my notes.

I guaranteed participants’ privacy at every juncture of this study. I assigned the district and the participants pseudonyms to protect their identity, and the data collected were not used for any purposes outside of the confines of this study. I maintained the dignity of the participants and monitored for any discomfort during the study. I communicated the minimal risks associated with this study to participants and included potential disclosure of professional goals, personnel matters impacting the principal, disclosure of performance struggles, and the time needed to devote to eight executive coaching sessions. Potential benefits for participants of the study included the chance for participants to attend to their own professional growth and development, the ability to engage in a tailored learning process, and the ability to impact research on a larger scale.

Ethical considerations were held in the highest regard for this study. To protect the participants in the study, I stored focus group recordings, transcriptions, and field notes on a secure server. I maintained an open perspective and listened to participants without judgement or preconceived notions. All verbal and written information from participants was accepted as their valid, individual, and unique experiences.
Limitations and Delimitations

In a qualitative study, limitations and delimitations are natural elements occurring within the study. Limitations included events and circumstances presented in the study that were outside of my control (Theofanidis & Antigoni, 2018). One limitation for this study included how the selected participants chose to engage in executive coaching. While consent was required prior to the study, once involved, I did not influence factors such as their relationship with the executive coach or their level of engagement in the executive coaching process.

Another limitation was in how executive coaching functions and operates. Executive coaching is flexible, and it is variable from person to person. Each participant held a different relationship with their executive coach and the depth they were able to achieve in each session. The relational aspect of executive coaching presented limitations.

A final limitation was the timing of the study. Based on the study extending into the end of the school year, I encountered scheduling conflicts specific to the focus group interview. I offered participants several options for focus group interview days and times. Despite several attempts, only two of the four participants were available to participate in the focus group interview. I decided to continue the focus group interview with half of the participants to remain within the confines of the study timeline.

While limitations were present in this study, so were delimitations. Delimitations in qualitative research are the guardrails set by the researcher for the study (Theofanidis & Antigoni, 2018). One delimitation for this study was the inclusion of principals with a minimum number of years of experience. Due to the need to gather the voices of more experienced principals, I chose to exclude principals from this study who had less than
four years of experience as principals. Another delimitation included the number of executive coaching sessions the participants attended. Due to the scope of this study, I limited these executive coaching sessions to a total of eight. Finally, based on the scope of the current study, delimitations existed with the number of individual interviews conducted. I conducted one interview for each participant.

Conclusion

In this multiple case study, I sought to learn more about how principals with at least four years of experience perceive the impact of executive coaching on their self-efficacy as leaders. Specifically, I sought to uncover how their enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and activated psychological arousal states changed as a result of their participation in eight weeks of executive coaching. Through the data analysis process, I made clear connections to the theoretical framework that framed this study.

The methodology of this study proved appropriate for the theoretical framework because a case study design allowed me to capture experiences from the perspective of principals who participated for eight weeks in executive coaching. The data collection and data analysis sections were constructed based on research, and they aligned with the theoretical framework. The methodological processes and procedures collectively addressed the study’s overall reliability, validity, and trustworthiness.

The components of the current chapter provide guidance for how I conducted the study and the methodology I used. The processes and procedures for data collection and analysis were also shared. This chapter also illustrated the connections between the data
collection methodology and the theoretical framework. In the next chapter, I share the findings from this study and offer related implications.
CHAPTER THREE

Results and Implications

Introduction

In Chapter Two, I provided a detailed outline of the processes and procedures I followed in the data collection process. This process included reviewing the data collected from four participants, coding the data, and analyzing the data to develop themes in line with the self-efficacy theoretical framework. All data collection and analysis components were congruent with the research question: How do experienced principals perceive the impact of executive coaching in developing their self-efficacy through enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and activating their physiological arousal? The a priori framework from Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory helped me frame the study. I aligned the four core components of the research question to emerging themes from participant voices and experiences. In Chapter Three, I provide findings from the qualitative study and shed light on the impact of principals’ self-efficacy through one specific form of professional development, executive coaching.

To construct Chapter Three, I relied on three data sources of triangulate my findings. These data sources were individual interviews, written reflections, and one focus group interview. I engaged in several steps to distill the information into the themes highlighted in this chapter. For each participant, I share findings related to each research question. Then, I outline the themes that I uncovered before offering a section to explain additional themes, which were unrelated to the theoretical framework I selected for this
study. Next, I provide a discussion before ending the chapter with implications and recommendations. Last, I include a summary and conclusion.

Case Descriptions

I selected four participants for this study who participated in executive coaching for eight weeks. Three of the principals led a traditional public school and one principal led a charter school in Marvel Public Schools (MPS). Each participant engaged in an individual interview and submitted two written reflections. I conducted the individual interviews at week four of the study. Two of the four participants participated in the focus group interview. I conducted the focus group interview at week eight of the study after the executive coaching sessions had concluded.

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years as a Principal in MPS</th>
<th>School Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tori</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Charter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case One: Hannah

Hannah was 47 years old with five years of experience as the principal of a traditional school. Hannah had one year of executive coaching with her current executive coach. Hannah participated in a one-hour individual interview, a one-hour focus group interview and provided two written responses. As an established leader, Hannah presented as humble and reflective about her leadership journey. Despite her experience,
in her individual interview, Hannah articulated that she is still growing into herself as a principal stating, “I may not be remembered as the best leader that they’ve ever had, but the legacy to me doesn’t matter.” Hannah continued by sharing, “The biggest impact is actually on our kids and our kids saying they feel cared about at the end of the day, that is my truth. That is my true north.” During individual interview, Hannah shared data reflecting climate and culture feedback collected from students earlier in the year. Hannah beamed when sharing the impact she and her staff had on students, stating, “Those are the things that fill my heart.” Through the interviews and written reflections, Hannah demonstrated a commitment to her school community and to her own development, as evidenced by her responses in the data collection, which helped me to answer the research question.

*Enactive mastery experiences.* The first component of the research question was connected to enactive mastery experiences. When I asked Hannah during the individual interview, how executive coaching impacted her work as a principal, she explained the opportunities she has with her coach to work through challenging situations, sharing,

> Executive coaching has allowed the space to practice and get some perspective on hard conversations and how to have hard conversations in a kind, compassionate way that hold people to the line, but also be responsive to the human side of things.

Hannah highlighted the time and opportunity provided by her executive coach to work through situations that she recognized as difficult. Executive coaching helped Hannah learn how to maintain a compassionate stance in the midst of a challenging situation. Also connected to enactive mastery experiences, I asked Hannah how executive coaching motivated her as a principal. Hannah spoke to having initiation and described how
executive coaching taps into what she already knows but needs support to enact. In her individual interview, Hannah described being empowered to lean into more human centered skills in this way:

I think probably the most important part is it is supportive of my intuition. I’m building that confidence, and that I know the right thing to do. I find that I’m moving away from the logistical questions to a softer skill set.

Hannah’s statement indicated that her internal feelings were validated. As an additional connection to enactive mastery experiences, I wanted to gain insight on what personal or professional success Hannah experienced as a result of executive coaching. During this portion of the individual interview, Hannah got excited and asked to share her screen to provide climate and culture student data. The data did not include any identifiable information about students. Hannah shared,

Students in my school treat each other with respect, we grew three and three-quarter percentage points. For ‘students in my school respect students from all cultures and races,’ we grew through almost three and a half percentage points. For ‘students in my school care about each other,’ look at that 69-point increase. Students disagreed with the statement, ‘I’m often bullied.’ That was an increase of almost 20 percentage points. Same for ‘I’m often bullied because of certain characteristics.’ And then we get down to the bottom and we really honed in on having trusted adults in the building this year. But, you know, this resonates with the data that we have in that most of our kids feel connected. I’ve just been so pleased with how big the gains are, and they’re statistically significant.

Hannah highlighted the student climate and culture data to reinforce a connection to learning in her executive coaching session. Hannah’s focus with her executive coach has been on having difficult conversations with staff. The positive student data that Hannah shared was representative of Hannah’s commitment to the conversations with staff which ultimately benefit the students. In the individual interview, Hannah also shared how beneficial executive coaching was in providing her with the skills to tackle conversations that elicit an emotional response for her as a leader. She shared,
I have some crunchiness and stuff that we’re still working on. But the coaching work that has allowed me to find my voice as a leader, and I have made a commitment to the staff, based off of some things that came out of our work with an external agency. A really tough session needed to happen and it was cathartic and brought some things to the surface that people couldn’t ignore. My commitment at that moment was, you bring it to me that we’ll have the hard conversation. It makes me feel sick to my stomach, but I’m going to do it.

Hannah described how executive coaching prepared her to have hard conversations with her staff despite a visceral reaction to the idea of having the conversations. Hannah expressed value for the time dedicated to think through a situation in an environment that provides time to process and internalize her next steps.

*Vicarious experiences.* Hannah spoke about how she and her executive coach walked through scenarios with her that aligned with vicarious experiences. Hannah shared how the executive coach seeks to truly understand her experiences as a principal and walk her through ways to address specific struggles. To gain insight into where vicarious experiences appeared in executive coaching, I asked Hannah about the experiences she gained through executive coaching that were not available before coaching. During the individual interview, Hannah stated, “I think they’re in the trenches, walking alongside us in the sense that she’ll walk me through some of those hard conversations or how to handle some tricky parents.” Hannah’s description of her executive coach being in the trenches with her indicates that the executive coach has a depth of understanding of Hannah’s work challenges.

In connection to vicarious experiences, during the focus group interview, I asked what leadership skills strengthened because of executive coaching. Hannah reiterated the importance of having difficult conversations with her executive coach and the clarity gained by having the experience by sharing,
Hard conversations, I’ll just name that one right off the bat. Having somebody to talk through hard conversations and problem solve ways to get at the conversation, so that you’d say, soft on people, tough on issues. Be that clear. Clarity is kindness.

Hannah’s statements captured the skills that have been strengthened through her executive coaching experience. Hannah spoke about navigating through problems by having conversations with her executive coach. Hannah looked to her executive coach as a key figure in understanding and dissecting the situation and determining a solution.

Verbal persuasion. Hannah’s written reflection provided insight to the connection with the verbal persuasion component of the research question. She spoke of the importance of being validated as she shared, “It was helpful to have my coach validate my experiences, as leadership can be particularly isolating, and that can have a significant impact over the course of time.” Hannah described the importance of being acknowledged by her executive coach in a way that may not occur from others in her building.

In Hannah’s individual interview, I asked her how executive coaching impacted her work as a principal. She shared the benefit of having someone objective to listen and provide feedback, stating:

I think one is having an objective thought partner, somebody to bounce ideas off of, and to help me go through the verbal processing, and then having somebody objectively name the things that they’re hearing. That’s been incredibly helpful, just like the act of listening, and the reframing of, ‘So what I’m hearing you say is.’ That has allowed me to crystallize what I’m grappling with which then allows me to have a clear path forward, instead of being stuck in the weeds.

Hannah mentioned her executive coach listening and verbally reframing her statements as a way of processing through situations Hannah is navigating. During the individual
During physiological and experienced executive coaching, Hannah has changed how she interacts with or supports her administrative team. She discussed the dynamics of her team, revealing:

There is a lot of trust with all three of us. But I would say that that is something that I need to work on because I’m still learning. The way my brain works is I like to experience the process so that I understand so that I’m not making decisions that have unintended consequences. And I find that when I don’t understand the process all the way, that’s when I’m making bad decisions. So sometimes that feels like micromanaging. But I think my team members I have enough trust with each other that they know that that’s just how my brain works.

Hannah shared the ongoing work she is doing within herself to ensure her team trusts each other. Hannah was open in recognizing that she has more work and learning to do.

Activating physiological arousal. During Hannah’s individual interview, I asked her how executive coaching addressed stressors associated with being a principal. She shared stressors connected with the safety of her students and the overwhelming nature of the work. Hannah revealed:

I think it has been great to know, one that they’re normal. The stressors are a part of the job. It’s okay to have moments where it is incredibly hard and that you can be human and break down in a safe space and the encouragement that it’s gonna be okay, it’s gonna pass and kind of keeping things in perspective of what feels like a really big thing. You know, were you on the news? Did everybody get home? Did everybody get fed? Is going to be okay. Yes, yes. So it’s sometimes that outside perspective that allows you to get outside of your head and just focus on what is really important. Then there are moments where you’re just like, I just don’t know if I can do this anymore.

Hannah’s verbalized statement revealed that while stressors exist in the principal role, her executive coach provides a safe place with doubt and uncertainty appear. As an experienced principal, Hannah has moments of security in the purpose behind her work and other moments where she questions her longevity. An element of activating physiological arousal was also elevated when Hannah was reflecting on student data.

During the data conversation of the individual interview, Hannah illustrated a dichotomy
between the internal self-efficacy struggles within the principalship and the importance of maintaining celebrations resulting from her leadership. Hannah shared, “When you are somebody who goes to all of the things that are awful about yourself, it’s incredibly hard, but here’s what we have in front of us that we keep on the screen because this is a celebration.” Hannah recognized the strengths from the student data and identified areas that still require work.

*Hannah’s summary.* Hannah’s presence in the individual interviews, focus interviews, and written statements revealed an overall sense of reflection on her role as a principal, her impact as a school leader, and how she has grown due to executive coaching. In connection to enactive mastery experiences, Hannah elevated key experiences with her executive coach that support her interaction with staff, advocacy of students, and intentionality in decision-making. Hannah’s executive coach reinforced her intuition when dissecting events she experienced. In connection with vicarious experiences, one of Hannah’s strongest examples was in how her executive coach walked alongside her in the principal work. Hannah shared the benefit of opportunities to navigate difficult conversations as they arise. There was strength in Hannah’s sentiments connected to verbal persuasion. Hannah discussed the loneliness of the principal position and the benefit of finding her voice as a leader based on the encouragement received in executive coaching. Hannah discussed taking ownership of and celebrating her wins in connection to verbal persuasion. Hannah’s demonstrated the strongest connection to activating physiological arousal when discussing how she manages stressors of the role by focusing on priorities.
Case Two: Monica

Monica was 54 years old and with six years of principal experience in a school in MPS. Monica had worked with her executive coach for the past eight years. Monica participated in a one-hour interview, and Monica was extremely reflective in her individual interview as she shared her invaluable experiences with executive coaching. Monica described the most meaningful aspect of executive coaching as having an external thought partner to process challenges and tackle various components associated with the principal role. Monica shared, “My executive coach helps me think through the immediacy of the situation and can provide additional supports that I hadn’t thought about.” One unique detail that emerged from the interviews is the length of time Monica has received executive coaching. Monica mentioned working with the same executive coach for eight years. Through her individual and focus group interviews and written reflections, Monica shared that a benefit of having a lengthy coaching relationship is that her coach can speak to growth over time.

Enactive mastery experiences. During the individual interview, Monica spoke to enactive mastery experiences through the executive coaching process where she gained the confidence to interact with senior leaders based on the encouragement from her executive coach. Monica developed a needed skill that proved beneficial. Monica experienced success with a task involving her supervisor as she shared:

I attribute the growth in my relationship with my supervisor to conversations with my executive coach. She’s been supportive in helping me coach up to the level above me, and I believe that skill has benefitted myself and my supervisor. Coaching up (or “managing up” as it’s more commonly called) has been a challenge for me for many years, so I’m relieved that I am finally getting a handle on it thanks to her tips and support.
Monica credited her executive coach for providing the tools to interact with her supervisor in a meaningful and effective way. Connected to the research question, enactive mastery experiences appeared in the executive coaching sessions based on the relationship Monica had with her executive coach. Monica shared during her individual interview that her coach connected prior experiences to current ones based on their longstanding working relationship. Monica recalled the interaction stating:

She can look backwards and help me pinpoint my growth over the long term. She is able to say, ‘Remember when you used to do this, remember when you used to worry too much about whether your staff liked you?’ She can pinpoint that and say, ‘Look how far you’ve come. It’s less about whether they like you and more about whether you’re effective.’ So that long range view backwards is helpful to be reflective.

Monica expressed appreciation for the relationship she has with her coach that has been developed and refined over time. The quality of the coaching relationship allowed Monica to open up to her coach in a way that would not be possible without the strong relationship. Evidence of the relationship appeared during the individual interview, when Monica processed through how she and her executive coach worked through ways that a former situation could have been addressed. To gain additional insight into executive coaching, I asked Monica how executive coaching helped her learn from success and failure. During the individual interview, Monica stated:

So if I’m coaching a teacher, I’m trying to get them from point A to point B. But the way my coach does it is so different, because she still gets me from point A to point B but over time. It’s through this lens of what’s on your mind right now, what is churning in your brain, in this instance. So whatever is in my brain might be good or not good. The reflection backwards to how we got to that point might be a huge success. How did we get to this point of success? What got you here? Because there are intentional actions that get to those successes. And then when it’s something that’s not necessarily a positive thing, she will ask, ‘What led you to that? What got you to that place? Where this did not go? Well, this conversation with a staff member went poorly, like, how did that happen?’ And it’s never with judgment of like, you screwed up.
The questions Monica shared from her executive coach indicated a metacognitive process that encouraged Monica to understand her own leadership actions and behaviors that lead to the success. Monica was asked to connect to what she did well and what worked instead of solely focusing on the negative aspects. As such, Monica was encouraged to see her contribution to the success of a situation.

*Vicarious experiences.* In connection to the research question, a tie to vicarious experiences appeared in Monica’s written reflection. She provided information about a role play experience to support a conversation needed with a teacher. Monica recalled the experience stating:

> My executive coach helped me think through a challenging situation with a teacher who is close to retirement. Having a coach to bounce ideas around with and role play some difficult conversations make a huge difference to me this week and gave me a way forward in this situation, but also provided a lot for me to think about and consider with other teachers who are nearing the end of their career cycle.

Monica described a role play opportunity before engaging with a teacher nearing retirement but also spoke about building a repertoire of ways to address challenging conversations. Monica mentioned the application of her learning and how she could transfer the skills learned for one teacher and apply them to other teachers.

During the focus group interview, Monica spoke more about the role play experiences with her executive coach. She communicated the flexibility of the role play opportunities used by her executive coach, sharing:

> Having somebody to roleplay those with, as well, I think that’s one of the things I often do with my executive coach, is we just roleplay. And sometimes that’s her being me, so that I can hear how that language might sound. And sometimes that’s just me practicing on her, like, here’s what I’m thinking that might sound like. And yeah, that gives me a great opportunity to practice before I go into it for real.
Monica identified the role play experience as valuable to try on different language depending on the circumstance. She elevated the importance of practice which helped Monica experience the verbal interaction in a controlled and safe environment. The flexibility gained in role play provided Monica with the opportunity to adjust before engaging in actual communication.

*Verbal persuasion.* During the focus group interview, Monica displayed honesty and vulnerability in her responses to the questions. I asked how executive coaching supported communication skills as principals. Monica explained how she processes her thoughts internally. To benefit her team, Monica shared that she needed to learn how to communicate differently. As such, Monica shared how the thinking process that occurs internally must be communicated externally to ensure everyone is on the same page. She stated:

We’re processing constantly and taking input in and pushing it through our own brains. And other people don’t see that workings. It’s not like a factory model where you can see that idea went in here and it got this and twisted here. And this was added and this was taken off and then it went to this next area and it was shifted again, something else was added something else was taken off. People don’t see all of those steps unless you’re super explicit about them. And so yeah, executive coaching helps with being forced to articulate clearly what’s happening, what decisions have been made, and why and how.

Monica expressed how the verbal processing in executive coaching helped her be clear in other communication opportunities. Connected to verbal processing, Monica also shared during the focus group interview how executive coaching has supported her resiliency as a principal. Monica provided an example of how her executive coach verbally dissected a problem presented during an executive coaching session. She shared:

I don’t like making mistakes. I’m still a recovering perfectionist, I don’t like it. And I always have this feeling of if I admit I screwed up here and I do screw up
quite often, this person is going to stop liking me or not want to hang out with me anymore. And having been with my coach for so long, she is just completely 100% accepting. When I say I screwed this up or this was the biggest fup ever, there is no judgment. There is none. She will say, ‘let’s unpack that because it probably wasn’t as bad as you think it was.’ There’s never a judgment of you are such a horrible person, how could you do that? And I think that helps absolutely build my resiliency, knowing that there’s at least one person in the world of education that’s not going to judge me negatively for my mistakes.

Monica communicated the internal struggle she engages in when making mistakes as if it is a reflection of her likeability as perceived by others. During the focus group interview, Monica shared how her executive coach’s supportive and accepting language, and suspended judgement, lead her to not be as tough on herself when she makes mistakes.

Monica communicated grace to herself which was also mirrored in the grace extended by her executive coach. Monica was open in sharing how she judges herself when things do not go the way she intended and that the comforting words from her executive coach aid in building her resiliency to continue in the face of those mistakes.

*Activating physiological arousal.* Throughout Monica’s individual interview and written responses, she elevated the importance of connecting with the executive coach in order to have meaningful and impactful executive coaching sessions. In her written reflection, Monica shared how she felt efficacious during the week as a result of executive coaching. She wrote:

This week, I engaged in some individuals who are much higher in the organization than I am. For the most part, I felt efficacious in conversation with them rather than that twinge of imposter syndrome I have had in the past. I felt like I belonged in the conversations and was heard. That’s a huge leap for me, as I often have felt in the past like I haven’t done “enough” to earn a seat at the table.

In the written reflection, Monica wrote how the executive coaching session provided her with an internal sense of belonging in the midst of feeling out of place in the past. Monica
identified the feeling as imposter syndrome. Within activating physiological arousal, Monica wrote of the resiliency she experienced at the conclusion of her executive coaching. Her written reflection included the following:

At the end of the year, reflecting on progress made, strategies used, and even on mistakes helps me to identify my strengths, my challenges (which seem to consistently resurface), and to hold a mirror up so I can see how far I’ve come.

Monica shared how her executive coach helped her engage in long-range reflection of what her learning and leadership gains over the course of the year. Other areas of activating physiological arousal emerged during the focus group interview. During the focus group interview, I asked the group how executive coaching increased their value as principals. Monica provided context that spoke directly to the question, stating:

It assumes we have value as principals. I think executive coaching makes me stronger and helps me find my blind spots faster so that I can course correct. And without it, I’d still be able to course correct, but at a much slower rate. And maybe not really pinpointing the root cause, whereas with executive coaching, I can get to that root cause which increases my value just because I’m better at my job.

The first sentence in Monica’s response underscored her feelings surrounding the principalship. Monica recognized that while she could potentially identify what she called her blind spots and root causes to circumstances on her own, having an executive coach makes the process more efficient and in turn makes her a more effective leader.

In the final question of my individual interview with Monica, I asked her how executive coaching addressed stressors associated with the principalship. Monica spoke with candor and put into words the feelings that emerged as she opened up to her executive coach. Monica mentioned loneliness as a byproduct of the higher level of accountability she experiences as compared to others in the building. She stated:
The number of times that I have just sobbed on the phone with my executive coach over the years is a lot and sometimes that alone, is a release of stress. It’s such a lonely position because you are the only one in the building that knows the burdens and the things that you’re dealing with. There’s nobody else in the building who has that same level of accountability and that same level of emotion attached to it. So when I’m able to talk to my coach who knows from experience, the kinds of burdens and challenges that come with this role, there’s an unburdening and an opening up of like, I’m just going to dump this stuff because it’s weighing me down right now and it’s keeping me from being successful.

Monica’s words communicated the immense pressure felt as a principal and the time and space needed to verbally process her feelings. She clearly articulated the pressure connected the level of responsibility she holds as a principal. Monica identified the feeling of being unburdened and freed through the act of communicating with her executive coach. Key in Monica’s statement was her mention of the empathy her executive coach provides due to both having experience in the principal role. Based on the relationship with the executive coach, Monica shared how her vulnerability and the release of stress and the weight of the principal role allowed her to be successful.

Monica’s summary. As an experienced principal, Monica was open about the complexity of her work, and the intentionality of her decisions and displayed vulnerability during her interviews and written reflections. Monica’s strongest connection to enactive mastery experiences developed as she spoke about her reflection alongside the executive coach about her journey as a principal and the growth the executive coach witnessed since Monica’s first year in the role. Monica shared the opportunity to extend her learning to build and develop her administrative team as a result of the experiences. As Monica shared executive coaching experiences, the strongest connection to vicarious experiences was revealed as Monica spoke about the role play opportunities with her executive coach. The role play experiences provided Monica a safe space to try on
different approaches to situations. The strongest connection to verbal persuasion was communicated as Monica shared aspects of the non-judgmental feedback received from her executive coach. Monica described being met with warmth in the face of mistakes. By shifting focus to what went right in a situation instead of what went wrong, the executive coaching sessions allowed Monica to replicate her successes. She frequently spoke about honest and earnest conversations with the executive coach. Monica’s statements revealed opportunities for applying learning and generalizing her learning in similar situations. Key components of Monica’s statement that connected to activating physiological arousal occurred as Monica tapped into the intellectual and emotional aspects of executive coaching. She articulated her feelings, aspirations, growth, and outcomes as a direct result of her executive coaching experiences.

Case Three: Tori

Tori was 56 years old, serving as the principal of a secondary school in MPS. Tori had engaged in executive coaching experience over the past four years. For this study, Tori participated in a 60-minute individual interview and provided written responses. Due to schedule conflicts, Tori could not participate in the focus group interview. During the individual interview, Tori spoke of the ability to be selfish in executive coaching because time rarely exists when leading a school. When discussing experiences gained from executive coaching, Tori stated, “I struggle to find that selfish moment. I’m so busy, and it’s hard to capture an hour where it’s all about me, my problems of practice, my needs. As principals, we don’t put our struggles first.” Tori shared the importance of speaking freely and being vulnerable during executive coaching sessions. The sessions are times when Tori can have a neutral thought partner. Tori stated, “It gives me the opportunity to
have full freedom to talk about what’s hard and what I need help with.” Tori identified the value she finds in being open and honest with her executive coach.

*Enactive mastery experiences.* Among the participants, Tori identified as the longest serving principal with eleven years of experience in MPS. She provided information connected to the coaching she received over the course of the study and how the coaching helped her as a school leader. At the beginning of the study, I asked Tori to provide a written reflection of how her self-efficacy improved over the course of the week. The time of the study corresponded to the last quarter of the school year. Tori spoke to her self-efficacy improving through coaching while navigating the end of school year events. She shared:

> This time of the school year brings many challenges as staff and students begin to run out of gas. I am continually working on supporting others in a way that meets their needs and makes them feel heard and seen. I am focusing on listening to hear and not listening to solve. This is a skill that I have been working on for a while. I have been given many opportunities lately as the needs are high. I am continually working on this skill and am confident that I have the ability to improve this skill. I believe that being intentional with this focus will pay off.

Tori recognized listening as a skill that is needed by her staff and one that she continues to work to improve through the executive coaching process. She recognized listening as a need to support her community to ensure they have what they need from her as their leader. Within the area of enactive mastery experiences, during the individual interview, I asked Tori how executive motivated her as a principal. She revealed:

> I don’t shy away and I’m not afraid of having hard conversations or telling people the truth. But it empowers me in a way that I feel like I’m going to approach the person appropriately. I will ask, can you help me with my delivery? And so that’s very empowering to feel like I have the correct delivery, even though I know what I need to convey. It’s just now I feel like I know the right way to do it.
Tori spoke to being reflective about her delivery when having challenging conversations through the question she posed asking for help from her executive coach. Tori demonstrated a need to ensure that she is communicating with teachers and staff effectively. Tori is cognizant of her role as a school leader and the importance of communicating in a way that will be well received.

*Vicarious experiences.* During the individual interview, I asked Tori to share how executive coaching has shifted how she supports her administrative team. She spoke to the support her executive coach provided in the wake of addressing an issue with her administrative team. Through executive coaching, Tori learned to elevate the talents of each person on the administrative team to create cohesion amongst the team. Tori specifically mentions an opportunity where she and a member of her administrative team met with the executive coach with the goal to repair tension within the relationship caused by isolation experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic. Tori mentioned:

> It’s all around ensuring that I’m approaching them individually around who they are and that’s been helpful, because one of them had a real hard time during the pandemic. We came to an agreement that we would allow my coach to facilitate us, because this particular assistant really fell off the rails. Being remote made her a whole different person and she was really struggling to survive it. And I was really struggling because she wasn’t surviving. And so we had an agreement that our coach could bridge that for us.

Tori engaged her executive coach to salvage not only her team member but also their relationship. Tori recognized that her team member needed something that she could not provide on her own but had confidence in her executive coach to be able to assess and address the situation. As part of the written reflection, I asked Tori about ways executive coaching impacted her interactions with colleagues, director reports, peers or supervisors, over the course of the week. She spoke to the purpose and intentionality she used to
approach her executive coaching sessions in order to optimize the time and ensure her needs are met as a leader. Tori described the attention and dedication she put into ensuring that the uniqueness of each staff member is honored. She utilized her executive coach to verbally process the best way to interact with staff members in a way that would elicit the most positive results. When asked how executive coaching changed how she supported her administrative team, Tori wrote:

This is one of the biggest spaces that I seek coaching in. I work hard to ensure that I approach staff in ways that meet their needs and the needs of my school. I process situations and the plan for the appropriate response with my coach. I have a few complex staff members that require unique interactions to continue to move them in the right directions. My coaching sessions often include these individuals and next steps to continue to evolve them as leaders and strengthen trust and viability in their positions. I seek the right approach and timing to ensure that I can build on their strengths and create a positive impact on our relationship.

Tori was the only participant who spoke about utilizing her coaching sessions to benefit the development of others. Tori’s statement and the time spent working through staff related issues demonstrated how she values her relationship with her staff. The central focus from Tori’s statement was not just on Tori becoming a better leader but extending her opportunities to impact the growth and develop of budding leaders.

Verbal persuasion. During the individual interview with Tori, she mentioned aspects of her executive coaching experience that connected with verbal persuasion. In the written reflection, I asked Tori how executive coaching supported her leadership. Tori wrote about the safe space created by her executive coach and the ability to be vulnerable through executive coaching resulting in strengthened leadership skills and the ability to navigate diverse situations with confidence. In the written reflection, Tori shared:

My executive coaching supports my leadership every week. Having a safe space to process situations and make a plan of action to tackle issues increases my
leadership daily. I feel confident in my leadership and know my blind spots. It makes all the difference when I can work through a scenario and feel prepared to meet the needs of those who depend on me. I am working through a couple of staff issues and appreciate the sounding board and the tiny moves that are provided to ensure I approach the challenge with the best angle.

Tori recognized what she called her blind spots and that executive coaching helped her identify those blind spots and work through scenarios that developed strategies to address a multiple of issues that may arise. In the individual interview, Tori spoke to the verbal persuasion experienced in executive coaching through descriptions of she and her executive coach tackled issues and developed plans to move forward with her staff.

Additional areas connecting to verbal persuasion appeared in the individual interview with Tori where I asked how executive coaching impacted how she sees herself as a principal. Tori responded by referencing her administrative team and how she has had to shift her approach in interacting with them. Tori referenced how her pace of work varies from the pace of others on her team. Tori has a very fast paced way of operating and through executive coaching, she learned that she needs to adjust her approach to connect with her team. She stated:

Well, I’m not still and quiet very often and that has an impact on others. I have my admin team where three of the four are introverts and two of us are extroverts. And so I’m looking at myself and remembering that I’m not for everybody. I need to remember that with my approach and try to reach the team in a way that sometimes I need to be still and I need to be quiet. I need to slow down the speed of my wings.

Executive coaching sessions provided Tori with an increased awareness of how she is perceived by others and the specific adjustments needed to accommodate the various members of her administrative team. Tori spoke of the need to be conscious of the speed of her work and the need to slow down from time to time, which Tori refers to as her
wings. Tori being conscious of difference between her work pace and the pace of others on her team indicates intentionality for change in her leadership.

*Activating physiological arousal.* During the individual interview, Tori communicated responses connecting to the components of activating physiological arousal. Through executive coaching, Tori made emotional connections to the work and processed ways to navigate the various situations with staff. Tori explained how executive coaching has been meaningful and impactful in how she approached staff interactions. In the individual interview, she stated:

So, it’s really meaningful for me because I really have started using it as a place to take problems of practice. And often it is personnel problems of practice, because I really want coaching on how to individually approach conversations, situations, problems with practice, that are so often around personnel, and just situations with a variety of personnel. I have 180 staff have about 190 staff members, so there’s a lot that goes on here. And I also hire industry experts instead of teachers, which brings a different dynamic. So, I really use coaching a lot.

Tori shared that she leverages her executive coach to be thoughtful and intentional with how she approaches situations considering the number of staff members she leads. Tori also connected to the activation of physiological arousal in her written reflections where she was asked to share how executive coaching impacted her personal resiliency over the week. Tori wrote about the how she navigated the emotional aspect of the principalship with her executive coach. In her writing, Tori explained the need to balance between technical and adaptive aspects of the principal role and shared:

Executive coaching is very empowering for me. I feel that she honors my resiliency as we work through staff issues and navigate the human side of the principalship. It is easy to move into operations mode when decisions are critical ... coaching reminds me to recognize the work and the humans it effects. This week has been heavy with staff meltdowns and high emotions. We are going to
survive and coaching is a great place to process and ensure that I am making a full circle with those folks that are struggling … and having big wins along the way.

Tori found executive coaching to support with interacting with the complexity of emotions and the varying dynamics of working with unique individuals. In her writing, Tori sounded hopeful and optimistic about being successful in navigating issues and challenges presented by her staff. She contributed this positive approach to executive coaching.

Through her written reflection, Tori also identified ways executive coaching tackled flexibility and adaptability in her work as a principal. Tori reflected on how executive coaching supported her to be cognizant of the most appropriate time to address issues with staff members. Tori expressed that she had reached a key juncture with a staff member and needed to take action. Executive coaching empowered her to take the action needed. In the written reflection, Tori wrote:

I have a tough long term employee situation. I have been trying to solve and move the relationship forward for years. We have come to a critical space in the relationship. I am ready to make critical moves. My executive coaching has created the pause needed to ensure that I remain flexible and adaptable because the staff member is not ready for the next level of movement. This is a person in a leadership position. As the principal I know that I have to make the right moves at the right time. My timing is not always conducive for others. Having a coach to navigate these types of situations with increases my leadership capacity as a principal … and protects me from my urgency.

Tori’s reflection indicated a desire to be intentional about her decision with the employee. Tori credited her executive coach with helping her slow down and increase intentionality around a situation involving an employee.

Tori’s summary. Tori provided a viewpoint of executive coaching that addressed her leadership through the lens of navigating personnel challenges. The highlight of
enactive mastery experiences was revealed as Tori identified executive coaching as a way to develop her leadership skills where she began to understand how to be the best leader for her team. Tori’s responses elevated an understanding of how her personal leadership style impacts others and how she can adjust to meet the needs of her leadership team. Tori’s interaction with her administrative team connected strongest to vicarious experiences. Tori expressed an extension of executive coaching to her team members and how the collective work resulted in an in-depth understanding of the impact of her leadership and her leadership style on others. With verbal persuasion, a key component Tori elevated was the opportunity to have a safe space created by her executive coach. The safety of the environment provided Tori an opportunity to uncover the blind spots in her leadership. Finally with activating physiological arousal, Tori wrote about how the increase in her resiliency as a leader and the ability to navigate heavy and emotional situations. Through her vulnerability and openness, Tori revealed a desire to grow through executive coaching for the benefit of her own development and the ability to lead her school.

Case Four: Kimberly

Kimberly was 35 years old and the principal of a charter school in MPS. Kimberly participated in the individual interview and provided written reflections. Due to scheduling challenges, Kimberly could not attend the focus group interview. As a school leader, she has had multiple experiences with executive coaching and found her current coach through networking through her university program. During her two years of executive coaching, Kimberly explained the benefit of her unique experiences, including the opportunity to work with leaders outside her current school district. Kimberly shared,
“I really like executive coaching. I’ve been able to build more relationships with others because I’ve been connected to other school leaders through my coach.” Kimberly continued to share about her travel around the country to visit other schools to grow her practice. The travel Kimberly experienced within her executive coaching experience are unique among the participants in this study. She shared a global perspective that other participants did not experience. In reference to the school visits orchestrated by her executive coach, Kimberly stated, “I wouldn’t have broadened my own content knowledge in a way unless I had that sort of direction.” Kimberly’s executive coach offered opportunities that expanded her outlook on school leadership.

*Enactive mastery experiences.* Through the individual interview, Kimberly addressed specific skills connected to her role as a school leader. I asked Kimberly about personal or professional successes she gained because of executive coaching. Kimberly spoke of her increased ability to manage her staff and understand what it means to be a principal and lead people. She stated:

I think one of the biggest components is just my overall ability to effectively manage people, because that’s like a huge part of like a principal job, right? You have to manage effectively all the people in your building, whether that’s like the staff, students and parents, and I think it’s really helped me understand accountability for adults. I think that’s been really helpful also learning how to build systems for a school.

Kimberly shared how executive coaching supported her understanding of holding adults accountable and effectively maintaining her building’s expectations. Kimberly communicated that executive coaching supported her learning to develop school systems. Aligned with understanding the successful experiences due to executive coaching, I asked Kimberly to expand on her thinking. She shared about her increased confidence in
decision-making. Kimberly responded, “Helping me understand that you can hear others’ opinions and value them without actually having to make that choice. You can still hold your own and make your own choices. I think that’s been really helpful.” Kimberly explained how she has learned to listen to the input of others while still making the final decision as the school leader. Kimberly shared how her ultimate decision adheres to the best decision for the entire staff, not just a select group.

In maintaining the conversation about the impact of executive coaching, in the individual interview, I asked Kimberly how executive coaching assisted in helping her learn from success and failures. She shared the pressures associated with the principal role and how her coach helped her maintain perspective. Kimberly reflected on how some challenges appeared more significant and impactful than they were due to the ability to dissect the challenge alongside the executive coach. In the individual interview, Kimberly stated:

She has amazing context. I might feel like we totally failed at something, like this is horrendous. But she’ll be like, relative to other people I’m coaching, you’re actually doing this successfully but let’s consider this change. She can help me feel a little bit better about some things when I’m very much like, everything is just awful, nothing is meeting expectations.

Kimberly revealed how her executive coach helped her reframe the challenge and provide an alternative perspective. Kimberly’s statement indicates how having an external thought partner to process through situations provides balance. Because Kimberly is in her school every day, executive coaching helped her have an alternative viewpoint of her leadership. As such, executive coaching helped Kimberly ground herself in her specific context.
As part of the written reflection, I asked Kimberly how her self-efficacy improved over the week as a result of executive coaching. Kimberly shared her ability to engage in tasks that support in closing out the school year. Kimberly stated how she able to attend to these areas that provide the staff space to accomplish their work in a timely manner. Kimberly wrote, “I have focused on tackling some of the end-of-the-year tasks that need to be completed and have mapped out when things need to happen so that staff have adequate time to complete the work before their summer begins.” Kimberly’s executive coach helped her think through prioritization of tasks for her staff to increase the effectiveness and efficiency during a critical time of the year.

Vicarious experiences. During the individual interview, I asked Kimberly about experiences she gained through executive coaching that were not available prior to executive coaching. Kimberly spoke about opportunities to learn from other school leaders. These opportunities were orchestrated by her executive coach to broaden her network. She stated:

I really like that with executive coaching that I’ve been able to build more relationships with others because I’ve been connected to other school leaders through my coach. My coach is recommended. So I’m able to know more people and I can reach out in times of help.

Kimberly spoke of the broadening of her system of support based on the opportunities provided by her executive coach. The experience of visiting other schools and principals was one that was unique to Kimberly and not mentioned by any other participant.

Kimberly provided additional context to the vicarious experience and indicated:

With my executive coaching I’ve also been able to actually travel to other schools like around the country that my coach has identified. He may say, ‘I don’t think your school is doing this well right now. I know this school is doing it. I want you
to go visit this school.’ I wouldn’t clearly have known that and that’s an experience I definitely wouldn’t have had.

The ability to travel across the country to visit schools and leadership styles is unique to Kimberly’s experience. She identified the ability to engage in an experience that she would not have taken in absence of her executive coach. To further understand vicarious experiences as a source of self-efficacy, I asked Kimberly how executive coaching changed how she supports her administrative team. Kimberly described the use of role play as a way to apply the learning from executive coaching. She revealed:

It honestly helped me understand how to support an admin team. She would do a lot of modeling for me and actually going through role play in the conversation, like, how do you roll out this new initiative to your leadership team? She also helped me do a lot of problem solving.

In Kimberly’s response, she mentioned modeling alongside role play as an opportunity to learn from her coach regarding how to approach a situation. Kimberly experienced different perspectives from her executive coach to understand a challenge.

*Verbal persuasion.* In the individual interview, I asked Kimberly about information she recalled hearing from her executive coach that was meaningful.

Kimberly spoke of an honest conversation she had with her coach. Kimberly described the conversation as dark; however, the darkness did not diminish the impact of the statement. She recalled the interaction stating:

He said, ‘You have to be prepared for disappointment, because everybody will disappoint you.’ It sounds really dark. You know, I came in very naive about managing people was like, everyone’s always gonna be their best selves and we can overcome any challenge and it’ll be great. When that didn’t happen, in the back of my mind, I would think that they are just people and disappointment really is just a normal part of the job.
Kimberly presented how she entered the principal role with an idealistic view of the position. She was open about her executive coach’s statement and how it influenced her interactions with staff moving forward. In the individual interview, I asked Kimberly about additional information received from her executive coach that resonated with her. Kimberly described how her executive coach provided meaningful advice connected to her presence as a leader and how others perceive this presence. She stated:

Another one is lighter but I like the importance of the it and it really stuck with me. It is about setting the tone. The leader sets the tone. People follow your lead so if you don’t care about something, most other people aren’t going to care about that either.

Through this response, Kimberly shared salient examples of verbal support provided by her executive coach. Kimberly alluded to the impact of executive coaching on how she approached how she leaded her staff. During my conversation with Kimberly, I probed into specifics regarding how her executive coach provided encouragement during the executive coaching sessions. She shared:

And in her own capacity, she also provides a lot of feedback. So we would record meetings to get her feedback so that she could watch it and tell me that I did a good job doing this and next time to try whatever. And so that it really helpful to get all of that feedback.

Kimberly provided context to nature of her sessions that were focused on feedback. Kimberly identified that the focus was on meetings she had with her staff. During the coaching sessions, Kimberly and her executive coach dissected Kimberly’s recorded staff meetings. Kimberly found a high level of support in the opportunity to review the recordings and hear her executive coach’s suggestions for improvement.
Activating physiological arousal. I asked Kimberly how executive coaching impacted how she sees herself as a principal. Kimberly spoke of the emotional aspect of leadership and how executive coaching helps her manage those emotions and shared:

It’s helped me better understand my strengths and my weaknesses. It’s helped me understand some positive things like I’m generally warm and approachable and some negative things like I can be very, very quick to frustration and judgment. So I think it’s just helped me be more reflective so that I can figure out what I’m doing okay and not okay.

Kimberly spoke of the ability to learn more about herself and be reflective on her leadership skills and abilities. She communicated the complexity of her emotions as she shifted between being warm and approachable to displaying frustration and judgement. Kimberly shared how executive coaching has encouraged her to pause and reflect to avoid letting impulsive emotions overshadow her approach with her staff.

In the written reflection, I asked Kimberly how executive coaching tackled flexibility and adaptability connected to her work as a principal. In her response, Kimberly wrote about her ongoing work to be adaptive within change efforts. Kimberly wrote:

I think that the overarching lesson has been to learn about flexibility and adaptability. One of the things that I am still working on is how to support staff to develop their ability to handle adaptive change. I think that I need to be more mindful about naming the actual process and the why behind our work.

Kimberly shared the need to be mindful and have clarity around the purpose of the work occurring within the school. Kimberly spoke of adaptive change occurring in her building and the need to support her staff to navigate the changes. She indicated a level of awareness of change management and how change can impact staff. Kimberly’s statement elevated the desire to better understand how to increase her capacity to lead in the midst of a changing environment.
**Kimberly’s summary.** Kimberly’s individual interview and written reflections provided a unique perspective of executive coaching that other participants did not offer. Her lens as a charter school leader aided in experiences with executive coaching that can extend beyond traditional approaches. Connected to mastery experiences, a highlight from Kimberly was the depth she provided through her executive coaching experiences which were unique compared to other participants. Kimberly communicated an increased certainty of her decisions while honoring the thinking of others. She expressed an increased ability to navigate change and prepare for shifts that occurred at her school. Related to vicarious experiences, Kimberly provided context to the rich experiences received through executive coaching, including observations of other school buildings, collaboration with principals from across the country, and the ability to take an authentic view of her leadership style through recorded meetings Kimberly had with members of her staff. A key statement connected to verbal persuasion included a sentiment Kimberly shared from her coach about the reality of interactions with others. While Kimberly described the comment as dark, she utilized her executive coach’s words as momentum in her leadership journey. For activating physiological arousal, one of Kimberly’s strongest statements connected to her quest to slow down to be judgmental and more likely to recognized the positive aspects of situations. Kimberly offered a unique approach to executive coaching and was able to leverage executive coaching in ways that developed her self-efficacy as a school leader.

**Cross Case Analysis**

Through the process of reviewing data from individual interviews, focus group interviews, and written reflections from the four cases in this study, patterns and themes
emerged in response to the research question. I determined similarities and connections between and among participant responses. I made a note when commonalities emerged multiple times among participants. Commonalities signaled a key concept or idea. There were times when the commonalities were redundant; in this case, I found emerging themes. I took the themes and connected them to the theoretical framework.

Themes Related to the Research Question and Theoretical Framework

The four components of the theoretical framework emerged through participants’ verbal and written statements as trends appeared across the voices of the four participants. Table 3.2 illustrates the emerging themes from the theoretical framework that aligned to the research question: How do experienced principals perceive the impact of executive coaching in developing their self-efficacy through enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and/or activating their physiological arousal?

The research question contains the four theoretical framework categories as indicated in Table 3.2; therefore, the themes that evolved from my research question were also the same themes connected to my theoretical framework. Four themes emerged from the research question connecting to the theoretical framework categories. Enactive mastery experiences aligned with theme one. Vicarious experiences aligned with theme four. Verbal persuasions aligned to themes two and three and activating physiological arousal aligned to themes three and four. Within the findings, another theme emerged that was disconnected from the theoretical framework. Three of the four participants mentioned imposter syndrome as a factor impacting their self-efficacy as a leader. Due to the consistency among the participants, I incorporated imposter syndrome as a theme in
the findings. As such, I identified imposter syndrome as an additional emerging theme for this study.

Table 3.2

*Research Question and Emerging Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Framework Category</th>
<th>Emerging Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enactive Mastery Experiences</td>
<td>Theme 1: Executive coaching strengthened participants’ leadership skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 4: Executive coaching provided a safe space to show vulnerability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicarious Experiences</td>
<td>Theme 2: Executive coaching provided a place for validation of leadership experiences.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Theme 3: Executive coaching increased efficacy as a leader.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal Persuasion</td>
<td>Theme 3: Executive coaching experience increased efficacy as a leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 4: Executive coaching provided a safe space to show vulnerability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activating Physiological Arousal</td>
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**Theme One: Leadership Skills Strengthened**

The first theme I uncovered in this study was that executive coaching strengthened participants’ leadership skills. Theme one aligned to enactive mastery experiences. A principal’s enactive mastery experiences are centered in their own achievements and accomplishments (Bandura, 1997; Hendricks, 2015). Connected to theme one, individual interviews with participants revealed consistent mention of how coaching strengthened their leadership skills as a principal. Hannah mentioned that executive coaching allowed her to find her voice as a leader and that she has learned to have difficult conversations
with her staff. Tori also spoke about how coaching supports with having feedback conversations, stating:

I receive coaching on how to deliver feedback because my coach is a magician with feedback and I am not. I know what I want to convey but I want to convey it in a way that is focused, actionable and valuable for the person.

Tori’s statement demonstrated a value of her executive coach’s skill and a discrepancy between her own skills connected to providing feedback. Tori understood the importance of effective feedback and the need for a principal to improve the skill.

Participants spoke about how their executive coach helps them understand who they are as leaders. Theme one emerged through conversations about their values, leadership skills, and how to be their authentic selves as leaders. Participants also elevated the relationship with their executive coach that connects with theme one. During the focus group interview, Monica spoke about how executive coaching helped her understand her value as a leader. Monica shared, “With executive coaching, I can get to that root cause which increases my value because I’m better at my job.” Tori also made a connection to her leadership capabilities through executive coaching. In her written reflection, Tori shared how the executive coaching process increases her leadership skills by sharing:

My executive coaching supports my leadership every week. Having a safe space to process situations and make a plan of action to tackle issues increases my leadership daily. I feel confident in my leadership and know my blind spots. It makes all the difference when I can work through a scenario and feel prepared to meet the needs of those who depend on me. I am working through a couple of staff issues and appreciate the sounding board and the tiny moves that are provided to ensure I approach the challenge with the best angle.

As indicated through the conversations and in the written reflection, through executive coaching, participants attended to their leadership skills and needs.
During executive coaching, participants were able to tap into a variety of leadership skills. In the written reflection, Monica wrote about how executive coaching allows her to understand how to transfer learning from one situation to another and remain true to who she is as a leader. She indicated:

My executive coaching always includes both present application as well as conversation about transferability to future situations. I get to think through my values regularly as they are connected to my work as a principal to ensure that I’m living my espoused values. This week, I definitely bumped up against a situation that made me check that I am living my espoused values in a way that is clear to others. To me, that’s part of being flexible and adaptable within my values.

Monica tapped into the leadership skill of flexibility while still aligning to her values.

Hannah also connected to values as part of the development of her leadership skills. During her individual interview, Hannah shared how executive coaching encourages her to value the work done as a principal. She stated, “Executive coaching has really pushed me to honor the good work and the successes, because I tend to dismiss that and give that away.” Hannah continued in sharing her growth as a principal and the growth in her abilities as a leader by stating:

But I think that, in general what has shifted in me is from moving from an imposter standpoint to I still have a long way to go, but I can do this. I can do this work, I’m capable. And I am I’m okay at it. Sometimes I’m good at it.

Similar to Hannah, Kimberly also spoke about her approach to the principal role and how executive coaching has helped her reflect on how she interacts with others as a leadership skill.

I’m not for everybody. And I need to remember that with my approach, and try to reach them in in a way that if I need to be still, if I need to be quiet, if I need to slow down this the speed of my wings, and it’s been, I’m a, I’m a very self-aware person to a point. I’m aware of myself, but often I am not aware of myself in relation to others.
Kimberly’s statement illustrates an increased awareness of how she is perceived by others. In her written reflection, Tori made connections to executive coaching supporting her empowerment as a leader and belief in her abilities to support her team.

Executive coaching is very empowering for me. I feel that she honors my resiliency as we work through staff issues and navigate the human side of the principalship. It is easy to move into operations mode when decisions are critical … coaching reminds me to recognize the work and the humans it effects. This week has been heavy with staff meltdowns and high emotions. We are going to survive and coaching is a great place to process and ensure that I am making a full circle with those folks that are struggling … and having big wins along the way.

In connection to theme one, during the focus group interview, Hannah also spoke about executive coaching impacting how she reflects on decision making processes.

My journey this year has really been about not putting up armor. I think that oftentimes, as a recovering perfectionist, and being a people pleaser, and being a servant leader, it’s, it’s incredibly hard when you know, you’re making the right decision for kids, but that you’re coming into conflict because of that. I know this in my heart of hearts to be best for kids, and y’all can fight me on it.

Within theme one, participants connected their individual growth as a leader to executive coaching. Participants were able to articulate the impact of executive coaching on the development of their skills, the belief in their skills and the ability to engage in self-reflection for continual improvement. In addition to speaking to their own development, participants elevated the importance of their executive coach validating their experiences throughout the executive coaching process.

Theme Two: Validation of Leadership Experiences

The second theme I uncovered in my study was that executive coaching provided a place for validation of leadership experiences. Theme two aligned with the theoretical framework category of verbal persuasion. Bandura (1997) found verbal persuasion to be an outcome of feeling that one’s efforts and achievements are acknowledged by another
person with whom a relationship exists. Verbal persuasion also derives from affirmation and motivation (Hendricks, 2015). Alignment to theme two emerged from the individual interviews, focus group interviews, and written reflections. Participants spoke about the importance of being validated by their coach and how validation motivates them in their leadership journey. During her individual interview, Monica stated, “Sometimes it’s just the validation that gets that motivates me.” In her written reflection, Monica shared validation by her executive coach impacted her relationships with her staff. She wrote:

By feeling validated in my experiences, I feel that my interactions with my staff improved in that I was more emotionally constant and was able to be more tactful in moments of heightened emotional intensity (i.e., supporting staff through difficult parent/student conversations, etc.)

Participants spoke about the importance of being validated and how validation is motivating as a leader.

Kimberly also spoke on the connection between validation and motivation. During the individual interview, Kimberly shared:

I want to bring to the table something positive from the week. I seek that validation of like you’re doing a good job. So, I want to do things that would give me the validation from someone like, yeah, you’re doing a good job. That’s been highly motivating.

Kimberly also shared how validation from her coach supports her leadership due to the loneliness of the principal role. In her individual interview, Kimberly shared, “One of the most valuable things of executive coaching for me is the pure validation of my experience. Being a leader is incredibly lonely.” The isolating nature of the principal role increases the importance of the relationship with the executive coach and the value of the validation. Monica also noted the isolating nature of the principal role and why the validation from her executive coach was invaluable. Monica shared, “It was helpful to
have my coach validate my experiences, as leadership can be particularly isolating, and that can have a significant impact over the course of time.” The validation principals spoke about aided in the ability to be affirmed in their work as a school leader.

Theme Three: Increased Efficacy as a Leader

The third theme I uncovered in my study was that executive coaching increased a principal’s efficacy as a leader. Theme three aligns with activating physiological arousal and verbal persuasion components of the theoretical framework. The activation of physiological arousal is similar to supporting an individual to build stamina, perseverance, recognize and address stressors, and understand what gives a person energy and what depletes their energy (Bandura, 1997). The verbal persuasion connection to theme three is highlighted in the executive coach’s feedback to principals (Hendricks, 2015). Verbal persuasion is impactful when the executive coach verbalizes faith in the principal’s abilities (Bandura, 1997).

Theme three connects to the development of a principal’s efficacy through the source of physiological arousal and verbal persuasion. During the individual interview, Hannah shared, “I’m building that confidence and that I know the right thing to do.” The confidence developed in the principals supports them in knowing what to do and how to approach challenging situations. Tori identified this support as empowerment as she stated, “I don’t shy away and I’m not afraid of having hard conversations or really telling people the truth. But executive coaching empowers me in a way that I feel like I’m going to approach the person appropriately.” Hannah also spoke about executive coaching increasing her ability to have hard conversations. She reflected on how she previously
approached the hard conversations and how she has grown through coaching. Hannah shared:

   My commitment at that moment was, you bring it to me that we’ll have the hard conversation, it makes me feel sick, my stomach, but I’m going to do it. And so we joke that I’m really good at having hard conversations, and just jumping in, and I may not do it beautifully, but I’m having the conversations.

While the nature of the conversations does not get easier, the principal’s feelings of efficaciousness increased due to the principal’s development and preparation.

   Monica recalled an executive coaching session that supported her increased efficacy. Through her written reflection, Monica expressed the impact of executive coaching on her ability to soundly to make difficult decisions. She wrote:

   The coaching session this week helped to re-ground me in my decision-making process and be more confident in how I make decisions. I was also able to talk very openly with my coach about challenges I’ve been having, which helped me focus on building up my own resiliency to respond to challenges and manage my feelings of stress as they arise.

The decision-making challenges that principals face are broad but the efficacious feelings developed through executive coaching extend to multiple situations. Hannah wrote of her increased self-efficacy while grappling with budgetary issues through the following statement:

   My self-efficacy improved this week after my meeting with my coach in that my confidence was raised regarding some challenges with our budget for the upcoming school year. While I am still quite stressed/overwhelmed, I feel more confident knowing that I have the skillset to problem the challenges that arise because I also have a solid support system of individuals who I can reach out to for advice.

Hannah’s efficacy appeared in her ability to navigate the complexities of her school budget.
Monica provided examples of efficacy in one of her written reflections. She wrote about her feelings of efficacy when being invited to engage with senior leaders of the district. Monica shared:

This week, I engaged in some individuals who are much higher in the organization than I am. For the most part, I felt efficacious in conversation with them rather than that twinge of imposter syndrome I have had in the past. I felt like I belonged in the conversations and was heard. That’s a huge leap for me, as I often have felt in the past like I haven’t done “enough” to earn a seat at the table. Monica’s sentiments of how she felt in the past attribute to her current feelings of belonging in the role and working alongside the senior leaders. During the individual interview, Monica shared a moment where her efficacy as a leader was reinforced. Monica revealed to her executive coach that she was invited to join in a conversation with senior leaders. Monica shared that her executive coach was not surprised at the invitation. Monica captured the moment with her executive coach and provided insight into the conversation as she shared:

When she hears that I’ve been invited to the conversations at other levels, she doesn’t express surprise. Rather, she expresses a calm confidence by saying things like “Of course you belong at the table!” or “Of course they called you!” as though these were foregone conclusions in her mind. Her continued belief in me and my growth has fueled my own belief in myself.

Monica’s statements illustrate the power of not only her coach’s belief in her abilities but the verbal expression of those beliefs.

*Theme Four: Safe Space to Show Vulnerabilities*

The fourth theme I uncovered in my study was that executive coaching provided a safe space to show vulnerabilities. Theme four aligned with the theoretical framework’s physiological arousal and vicarious experience components towards examining how executive coaching connects to a principal’s sense of safety and ability to be vulnerable.
Theme four connected to how the participants’ perception of increased self-efficacy increased through experiences related to physiological arousal and vicarious experiences through their executive coaching opportunities. Monica identified the importance of having dedicated time and space to be open about her needs and to process situations.

I’m so busy and hard to capture an hour where it’s all about me my problems of practice my needs, and I any principal we don’t put our struggles first. And so it gives me the opportunity to just have full freedom to talk about what’s hard and what I need help with and, and it’s easy to you know, share your weaknesses, and your gaps and say, help me I don’t have a clue what to do.

Monica’s mention of having full freedom indicates a level of openness with her executive coach translating to opportunities for growth.

During the focus group interview, Monica provided further clarification about the importance of having a relationship with the executive coach in order to be vulnerable.

And then with coaching, there is such a depth of you have to if you’re going to do it right. You have to be vulnerable with the coach. And if you don’t have the right relationship for that, I should say for myself, I would struggle if I could not really connect with my coach, because then I would feel like I couldn’t be vulnerable and really express my fears and my concerns. That’s a big part of it.

Monica elevated the importance of the relationship with the executive coach as a factor in having a safe space and being vulnerable. Hannah connected her ability to have a safe space to be vulnerable with resiliency.

Knowing that I have a safe place to share my needs as a leader. I felt like this time of this year was different than any I have ever experienced before. Having an executive coach to plan and process with was a great place to take a deep breath and continue to be resilient in the work.

Hannah’s statement speaks to the ability to pause and reflect with her executive coach and the impact of the process on her as a principal.
As a source of self-efficacy, physiological arousal refers to the ability to recognize and manage stress (Bandura, 1997). In her individual interview, Monica spoke about the cathartic response after meeting with her executive coach.

So, when I’m able to talk to my coach who knows from experience, the kinds of burdens and challenges that come with this role, there’s an unburdening and an opening up. I’m just going to dump this stuff because it’s weighing me down right now and keeping me from being successful.

Monica captures a physical and emotional response to having time with her coach to share what is weighing on her mind.

Other Emerging Theme: Imposter Syndrome

In addition to the themes identified across the four cases, one additional theme emerged beyond the theoretical framework. Three of the four participants spoke about navigating through imposter syndrome and approached the concept similarly. This additional theme emerged from data collected from Hannah, Monica, and Kimberly. Imposter syndrome does not explicitly connect to the theoretical framework, but this emerged as a significant theme as part of the cross-case analysis.

Most principals referenced imposter syndrome through the lens of being hired for the principal role. Hannah communicated initial feelings of imposter syndrome after being named as the principal of her building. Hannah shared, “I can’t believe they picked me for this. I think like it was imposter syndrome. At some point, they’re going to realize like, oh, this was a bad call.” Monica also connected with having imposter syndrome. She shared her internal questioning surrounding her transition into the principal position and articulated how executive coaching helped her overcome feeling like an imposter.

I think that over time being coached has helped me to see that I do belong in the principal chair. Because sometimes I don’t feel that way. And I certainly didn’t. My first few years, every morning when I walked into that building, I would say,
Holy shit, they gave me the keys to this place. What were they thinking? How insane were they to give me keys to a building. And I felt that way for a very, very long time. And there’s still times when I slide into that impostor syndrome of like, oh, crap, my supervisor is going to find out I have no idea what the hell I’m doing.

Monica identified that executive coaching helped her find her worth within the leadership role. There was a sense of belonging as a principal that developed that was not present initially. Monica revealed her humanness by sharing that she reverts back to the feelings of impostor syndrome but alluded that the feelings do not linger.

While Hannah and Monica referred to impostor syndrome in terms of their initial transition into the principal role, Kimberly spoke of impostor syndrome through her current functioning in terms of managing her staff. Kimberly’s lens revealed a shift in how to approach internal questions about decisions to make as the school leader.

I think one of the biggest components is just my overall ability to effectively manage people, because that’s like a huge part of like a principal job, right? You have to manage effectively all the people in your building, whether that’s the staff, students and parents, and I think it’s really helped me understand accountability for adults. It’s also helped me build a lot of confidence because I had a lot of impostor syndrome. Then I was thinking, I don’t really know what I’m doing. So we’re going to just go with everyone else’s ideas but that actually wasn’t great.

Kimberly revealed that her decision-making processes and the ability to be a quality leader were impacted by feelings of being an imposter. Kimberly credited executive coaching with helping her to not blanketly accept the ideas of others but to balance the input from others with her own knowledge.

Discussion

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine how principals with at least four years of experience perceive the impact of executive coaching on their self-efficacy as leaders. The study highlighted the principals’ experiences pertaining to
executive coaching as a mechanism to increase their efficaciousness as school leaders. The discussion portion of this section highlights the findings of this study in partnership with self-efficacy research.

**Discussion of Theme One: Leadership Skills Strengthened**

The first theme I uncovered in this study indicates that executive coaching strengthened participants’ leadership skills. Participants in my study shared the complexities present within their leadership roles as school principals. Participants shared their fears and aspirations as leaders through the interviews and written reflections. Findings from my study indicate that executive coaching is a meaningful and impactful mechanism to increase the self-efficacy of experienced principals. Additionally, my findings indicate an increased belief in the principal’s leadership abilities, increased capacity as a leader, validation of their experiences, and an increase in their perceived feelings of being efficacious due to the individualized professional development from executive coaching.

**Discussion of Theme Two: Validation of Leadership Experiences**

The second theme I uncovered connects to executive coaching providing a place for validation of leadership experiences. This study’s findings align with research examining the impact of executive coaching on leaders and reveal that experienced principals engaged in executive coaching perceive an increase in efficacious feelings (Baker & An, 2019; Campone, 2015; Devine et al., 2013; Grant, 2014; and Gyllensten et al., 2020). The study’s findings are reinforced by literature indicating that executive coaching impacts a leader’s sense of efficacy, increases their resiliency and the capacity to address challenges, and allows them to be self-aware in their positions as leaders
(Baker & An, 2019; Campone, 2015; Devine et al., 2013; Grant, 2014; and Gyllensten et al., 2020). Within the study, participants spoke about the importance of having a safe space to reflect on their leadership, organize their thinking, sift through problem-solving, and uncover the motivation to continue their leadership work (Grant, 2014). The sentiments from this study’s participants mirrored findings from Grant (2014). The participants in my study spoke of the importance of having dedicated time with their executive coach and using that time to work through problems. My study participants also identified the motivation received from their executive coach to increase their capacity to navigate the various issues that arise that are integral to the principal role. My findings are aligned with findings shared by Grant (2014) and Devine et al. (2013), which indicated that executive coaching increased leader resiliency and self-efficacy. Participants in my study spoke to an increased feeling of being capable of tackling problems, addressing staff and school issues, and navigating difficult situations.

This study underscores the importance of the principals as school leaders and the depths of their impact on their respective school systems. The participants spoke of the various aspects of their responsibilities as school leaders and the loneliness accompanying that particular leadership position. The participants’ statements are aligned with research documenting the complexities connected to serving as a school principal (Grissom et al., 2021) and the feelings of isolation specific to the role (Aguilar, 2017; Levin et al., 2019). The participants in my study revealed how executive coaching validated their experiences as the sole leader and equipped them to be more successful in working through challenges. Participants shared examples of role-playing scenarios, and opportunities to work through challenging situations to problem-solve solutions. The
research gathered by Gyllensten et al. (2020) is echoed by the sentiments of my participants. In connection with my findings, Gyllensten et al. found that executive coaching resulted in leaders gaining new and different perspectives connected to work-related problems and eventually changes in their behavior (Gyllensten et al., 2020). My participants identified that as a result of executive coaching, they grew in their ability to have hard conversations with their staff and supervisors. The tools, skills, and resources that my participants developed through executive coaching made them more effective and efficient as leaders.

Discussion of Theme Three: Increased Efficacy as a Leader

The third theme revealed that executive coaching increased a principal’s efficacy as a leader. Specifically, this study’s findings align with research examining the impact of executive coaching on leaders and reveal that experienced principals engaged in executive coaching perceive an increase in efficacious feelings (Baker & An, 2019; Campone, 2015; Devine et al., 2013; Grant, 2014; and Gyllensten et al., 2020). The study’s findings are reinforced by literature indicating that executive coaching impacts a leader’s sense of efficacy, increases their resiliency and the capacity to address challenges, and allows them to be self-aware in their positions as leaders (Baker & An, 2019; Campone, 2015; Devine et al., 2013; Grant, 2014; and Gyllensten et al., 2020). My findings are aligned with findings shared by Grant (2014) and Devine et al. (2013), which indicated that executive coaching increased leader resiliency and self-efficacy.

Discussion of Theme Four: Safe Space to Show Vulnerabilities

The fourth theme I uncovered in my study identifies that executive coaching provided a safe space to show vulnerabilities. Within the study, participants spoke about
the importance of having a safe space to reflect on their leadership, organize their thinking, sift through problem-solving, and uncover the motivation to continue their leadership work (Grant, 2014). The sentiments from this study’s participants mirrored findings from Grant (2014). The participants in my study spoke of the importance of having dedicated time with their executive coach and using that time to work through problems. My study participants also identified the motivation received from their executive coach to increase their capacity to navigate the various issues that arise that are integral to the principal role. Participants in my study spoke to an increased feeling a sense of safety in being capable of tackling problems, addressing staff and school issues, and navigating difficult situations.

Clear connections emerged related to the importance of having a safe space to be vulnerable. Digging into problems and exploring solutions is possible when a meaningful relationship exists with the executive coach. Participants in my study shared the importance of the executive coaching relationship the need to be vulnerable, open, and honest about their problems. While vulnerability is not explicitly identified as a necessity in executive coaching, the findings of this study identify vulnerability as a factor in increasing a principal’s perceived self-efficacy. Instead, studies speak to the importance of the coaching relationship (Campone, 2015; Collie et al., 2020). My study highlighted the importance of encouraging principals’ ability to express vulnerability to their executive coach to increase their sense of efficacy. The vulnerability is coupled with the time and space with the executive coach.
Discussion of Other Emerging Theme: Imposter Syndrome

A particular point deserving discussion is the emergence of imposter syndrome among three of the four participants. Imposter syndrome frequently appears in medical research (Chrousos & Mentis, 2020; Khan, 2021; Kimyon, 2020; Mullangri & Jagsi, 2019). Considering the prevalence of the concept of imposter syndrome among my participants, additional insight is needed, specifically as it relates to the role of school principals. Gadsby’s (2022) research indicated that imposter syndrome is still a developing concept requiring more research and attention among a wide number of fields. In further understanding imposter syndrome, Gadsby (2022) indicated that the concept is driven by an internal set of beliefs about one’s own performance in relation to others. Bothello and Roulet (2019) explained that imposter syndrome becomes prevalent when individuals fear a discrepancy between their skills and the expectations of their skills from others. The participants in my study indicated feelings of imposter syndrome in line with the work of Gadsby (2022) and Bothello and Roulet (2019). My participants expressed feelings of doubt, uncertainty, and questioning by others of their ability to perform their leadership roles. Despite the feelings of being an imposter, the participants in my study identified that executive coaching assisted in mitigating those feelings.

My participants spoke with reverence and appreciation of their executive coach. Their statements indicated they found the executive coaching to be impactful and meaningful. Devine et al. (2013) recognized the impact executive coaching has on changing a leader and identified executive coaching as essential for principals. My study reinforces the importance of the relationship between the executive coach and the principal to elicit optimal growth from the principal.
Implications and Recommendations

The findings in this multiple case study provide context to the importance of intentional and precise development and support for experienced PK-12 principals. The principals in this study clearly understood their needs as leaders and where to focus their efforts. An overarching component that illuminated from the participants was their voice in directing the trajectory of the executive coaching session. While the participants in this study had a handle on the work, their experience did not impede their desire to develop into better leaders. As such, central to this study is the challenge to increase the self-efficacy of experienced principals in ways that validate their expertise while recognizing gaps in additional and ongoing support. The participants highlighted the importance of dedicating the time and space to verbally process with their executive coach, which enhanced their ability and capacity to tackle their work as principals.

The themes from this study open an opportunity to engage in more research focused on principals, specifically those who have been in these roles for longer than four years. It would benefit all stakeholders to learn more about what this specific group needs to be successful as school leaders. This study revealed how executive coaching provides targeted, individualized, and personalized growth and learning opportunities in a way that leverages the strengths of each participant principal. This study also demonstrated the depth of impact executive coaching has on increasing how experienced principals view themselves in the context of their work. Several groups can learn from the findings in this study including, senior district leaders, the district Board of Education, principals, principal supervisors, district professional learning leaders and local principal preparation programs.
Senior District Leaders

While this study identifies opportunities to leverage executive coaching as a structure for increasing the self-efficacy of experienced principals, the study also revealed the need for additional research. Experienced principals continue to be an underrepresented group in scholarly literature. Further research must focus on experienced principals and their engagement with executive coaching. Supporting and sustaining the leader of a school campus, the principal, is essential to the overall health of the school (Collie et al., 2020; Kaufman et al., 2022). As senior district leaders consider the overall health and viability of the school district, they must ensure that quality principals are in place to lead schools. Senior district leaders must maintain an invested interest in their support of current principals.

District Board of Education

As a district’s Board of Education supports the development and reinforcement of policy, the Board must understand the importance of improving the retention rates of principals within the district. Additionally, the Board of Education must understand the impact principal turnover has on all stakeholders within the school community. Frequent turnover and ongoing hiring practices have implications for the Board of Education in their effort to sustain practices and gain momentum with policies. Due to the invested interest in the prosperity of its constituents, the district Board of Education must ensure principals have what they need to be successful in their roles.

Principals

As principals navigate their daily work, opportunities exist for them to advocate for their own learning and professional development. As the recipients of the learning,
principals know what they need to remain in the position. I recommend that principals make their professional learning needs known and advocate for professional development opportunities, like executive coaching, to support their development as efficacious school leaders. When interacting with those whose daily work is outside of a school building, principals must continue to elevate the complexity of their work and the magnitude of their impact. As leaders, principals have important information to share, and they must make their voices heard.

**Principal Supervisors**

Principal supervisors have an opportunity to advocate alongside principals for practices that create spaces for campus leaders’ professional development. As part of their roles, principal supervisors invest in developing the principals they supervise. I recommend that principal supervisors partner alongside their principals to advocate for executive coaching. Principal supervisors have an opportunity to maintain a wide lens on the needs of campus leaders. My recommendation is that the principal supervisors collectively advocate to senior district leaders on behalf of the principals they supervise.

**District Professional Learning Leaders**

While planning the scope and sequence for professional learning, those developing the learning for leaders must understand the unique needs of experienced principals in the district. Creating professional learning for principals is not recommended without the principals’ input. When principals’ needs are met through executive coaching, leaders of district professional learning have an opportunity to provide more targeted and meaningful district-based learning. I recommend that executive coaching address individualized learning for principals and district-based
professional learning focus on the development and implementation of district-level systems and practices.

Principal Preparation Programs

As principal preparation programs recruit aspiring leaders, the program developers have an opportunity to incorporate executive coaching into their programs. With executive coaching as an integral part of the program, new principals would have a familiarity with this specific form of professional development, even before they begin to lead on school campuses. Additionally, the principal preparation programs should advocate to school district officials to maintain executive coaching for principals who are transitioning into permanent leadership positions. I recommend a partnership between principal preparation programs and school districts to leverage executive coaching as a consistent professional learning structure.

In addition to the contributions this study makes, there are recommendations for future studies. Additional research is needed to uncover potential solutions to the revolving door of principals leaving the profession. Understanding the impact of school principals is essential, and the voices of experienced principals must continue to be heard in order to learn from their expertise.

This study consisted of a small sample size, so expanding to a larger sample would be an opportunity to uncover how executive coaching impacts principals of all experience levels. This study focused on principals who were incredibly busy towards the end of the school year. Despite several scheduling attempts, scheduling conflicts and obstacles prevented the availability of all four principals to participate in the focus group interview. The inclusion of the voices of all four participants would further strengthen
this study; however, the scheduling difficulties speak to the complexity of a principal’s work and reinforces the research provided in this study. Within the themes of this study, the concepts of validation of the principals’ experiences and imposter syndrome were revealed among participants. As key areas expressed by participants, these concepts deserve additional attention and focus within the realm of executive coaching.

Summary and Conclusion

In the United States, principals are critical to the success of the K-12 schools where they lead (Devine et al., 2013). Principals are essential to the academic success of students (Hesbol, 2019; Levin et al., 2020); however, many continue to leave their positions due to the incredible responsibilities and pressures placed upon them (Collie et al., 2020; Rangel, 2018; Rowland, 2017). Solutions must be uncovered to support and retain principals in public schools across the nation.

To address the problem of principal turnover, I sought to share the stories of four participant principals who had been in their professional roles for at least four years. I used Bandura’s (1986) self-efficacy theory as the theoretical framework for this study. I conducted individual and focus group interviews and collected written reflections from the four participants. The participant principals were open and shared their experiences and perspectives about their perceived increase in self-efficacy due to executive coaching.

This multiple case study revealed findings that have the potential to impact the landscape of principal development in school districts. The key findings highlight the impact of executive coaching on how experienced principals navigate the complexity of the principalship through increased self-efficacy. This study revealed the importance of
self-efficacy in principals, the need for intentional and personalized professional learning, and the benefit of the support delivered through executive coaching. The participants in this study highlighted the multiple ways to increase their perceived self-efficacy due to the intentional, personal, and meaningful professional development received through executive coaching. The impact of this study’s findings has the potential to impact how school districts approach principals’ professional growth.
CHAPTER FOUR
Distribution of Findings

Executive Summary

In this study I investigated the perceived impact of executive coaching on the self-efficacy of experienced principals in PK-12 schools. Principals serve a community of learners and are key to the functioning of the community. Within the principal role, a considerable number of responsibilities require a depth of knowledge to perform. While training is available to prepare and develop principals for their work, few focus on developing their self-efficacy as school leaders. In this study I aimed to focus on understanding how a specific form of professional development, executive coaching, influenced principal’s self-efficacy. Throughout this study, I specifically explored executive coaching for principals who had worked in these leadership roles for a minimum of four years. This study focused on executive coaching as one specific approach to supporting the wide range of skills needed for principals to perform their jobs effectively.

A problem exists in schools throughout the United States where school-aged children do not receive quality education to prepare them to compete in a global society. The Global Education Report (2022) found that schools in the United States ranked 13th in student achievement compared to 200 countries worldwide. In addition to student achievement, the United States faces a teacher and principal shortage as both groups vacate their position in record numbers (Kaufman et al., 2022; Rowland, 2017). Specific to principals in the United States, approximately 50% of them leave their role by their
fourth year in the position (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Rowland, 2017; School Leaders Network, 2014). Principals, the primary leaders on school campuses, are essential to the social and academic development of the nation’s children. Principals are necessary for student success (Hesbol, 2019). While some studies exist on support for teachers, fewer exist pertaining to the professional development of principals (Rowland, 2017).

Schools exist to nurture, guide, and educate students, and principals are necessary for the success of schools (Devine et al., 2013). As school leaders, principals shape the staff’s functioning, set the building’s tone, impact working conditions for teachers, and establish the foundation for student achievement (Levin et al., 2020). The work needed to turn schools around cannot be done without an effective principal (Rowland, 2017).

The responsibilities of school principals are vast and complex. In Colorado, support for principals is lacking (Beckett, 2021). Researchers from the School Leaders Network (2014) report on the lack of support for principals, stating, “School leaders lack the ongoing support and development required to maintain and foster sustained commitment” (p. 1). Principals are not vacating their positions solely because of dissatisfaction with their work (Grissom et al., 2021); instead, principals leave due to external factors such as politics and district expectations (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

Principals who leave their positions have a cascading impact on the school’s community. Their departures have cascading effects on students, teachers, and the greater school community (Bartanen et al., 2019). The responsibilities of school principals are immense, but so are the responsibilities of educating children. It is essential that principals experience not only the initial preparation for this enormous role but also
receive continual support and professional training in their quest to perform at optimal levels.

Executive coaching offers unique opportunities to develop leadership skills, unlike many typical district learning opportunities (Minnesota Department of Education, 2016). Executive coaching has been established in corporate settings (Griffiths, 2015) but has recently gained more attention within the realm of education (Devine et al., 2013; Huff et al., 2013). While research connecting school leader development with executive coaching is limited (Aguilar, 2017; Lochmiller, 2018), principals recognize the benefits of coaching as a form of professional learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Additionally, research indicates that coaching is an effective mechanism for professional learning for school leaders (Bozer & Sarros, 2012; Smither et al., 2006) due to the ongoing learning and development that emerges through the coaching process (Bozer et al., 2014).

Studies highlight the connection between executive coaching and the development of executive leaders; however, with each having limitations, the need for the more studies exists (Bozer & Sarros, 2012; Bozer et al., 2014; Huff et al., 2013; and Van Oosten et al., 2019). Limitations within some studies include the researchers’ results based primarily on the leader’s self-reports and the leader’s perspective connected to executive coaching (Bozer & Sarros, 2012; Bozer et al., 2014; deHaan et al., 2011; Huff et al., 2013; Van Oosten et al., 2019). Other studies have focused on executive coaching strategies without including leaders’ voices (e.g., Huff et al., 2013; Lochmiller, 2018). Additionally, fewer studies have included the principal as the leader receiving the coaching (e.g., Goff et al., 2014; Huff et al., 2013). The current study is essential as limited studies have examined principals’ self-efficacy and incorporated the principal’s
voice as the recipient of executive coaching. As indicated in the literature related to executive coaching, the field can benefit from additional research on the impact of executive coaching on principals. As such, I conducted this study to examine how principals with at least four years of experience perceive the impact of executive coaching on their self-efficacy as leaders.

The theoretical framework central to this study was the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986). The theory originated from social cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura (1986). Self-efficacy connects to how humans function, explain, and organize the world around them, a core part of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Social cognitive theory indicates that people are not passive participants in life. The research question central to this study was: How do experienced principals perceive the impact of executive coaching in developing their self-efficacy through enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and activating their physiological arousal? To answer the research question, I conducted a multiple case study with four participant principals from Marvel Public Schools (MPS), a pseudonym.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

I sought to answer the research question by engaging principals from one local school district in the state of Colorado. I utilized purposive sampling to narrow the participants to four principals who met the criteria for inclusion in this study. The criteria for the study mandated that the principal be actively engaged in executive coaching and have at least four years of experience as a school principal. This study centered on three different data collection methods, including semi-structured individual interviews, a focus group interview, and written reflections.
The first form of data collection, semi-structured, individual interviews, were conducted with each participant via the Zoom platform. The second form of data collection was a focus group interview. Only two of the four participants participated in the focus group interview due to their hectic work schedules. The final form of data collection included written reflections that I gathered at the beginning and the conclusion of the study. I aligned each data collection method to the theoretical framework to maintain consistency.

When analyzing the collected data, I focused on the triangulation of data from the individual and focus group interviews and two written reflections. I analyzed the data for this multiple case study in five steps in alignment with Creswell and Poth’s (2018) data analysis spiral. Analyzing the participants’ voices and experiences was central to the qualitative data analysis. As part of the first step, I reviewed all of the individual interview and focus group recordings, as well as the written reflections. In the second step, I organized the data to determine emerging patterns. Once I identified patterns, I moved to the third step of coding. Using NVivo software, I reviewed, organized, and coded the data to determine the study themes. At the conclusion of the coding process, I found themes emerging among the four participants and the three data sources. With the themes identified, I moved into the fourth step of data interpretation to create assertions by connecting the themes to the theoretical framework. In the fifth and final step, I created comprehensive reports to summarize the findings.

Summary of Key Findings

Findings from my study indicate that executive coaching is a meaningful and impactful mechanism to increase the perceived self-efficacy of experienced principals.
The participants in my study spoke passionately about the school campuses they lead and the community of learners they support. While they expressed a passion for their work, each communicated the stressors and pressures synonymous with their leadership roles. Despite the complexities, the participant principals in this study demonstrated a desire to increase their leadership skills, improve their work efficiency and develop their success as school leaders. I included principals with four or more years of experience due to turnover rates among this group. Principal retention is an important topic that permeates the field of education (Carpenter et al., 2022). During the individual interviews, each participant expressed her commitment to her professional role. Even with a commitment to the work, principals face considerable challenges. Principals in the study indicated an increased belief in their leadership abilities, increased capacity as a leader, validation of their experiences, and an increase in their perceived feelings of being efficacious as a leader. This study underscores the importance of the principal as a school leader and the depths of their impact on their respective school systems.

Four themes emerged from the research question in connection to the four theoretical framework categories. The first theme aligned to enactive mastery experiences, emerged as executive coaching strengthened participants’ leadership skills. In the study, principals shared how executive coaching increased their ability to navigate various aspects of the principal role. The second theme was that executive coaching provided a place for validation of leadership experiences and was connected to verbal persuasion. During the study, principals shared meaningful encouragement and verbal feedback from their executive coach. Principals communicated readiness and empowerment as they tackled challenging situations. Theme three emerged as executive
coaching experience increased efficacy as a leader. Theme three was aligned with verbal persuasion and activating physiological arousal. Principals in the study spoke to their increased capacity to engage in challenging conversations, advocate for themselves and their buildings, and believe in themselves as school leaders. Within theme three, principals communicated how they perceived an increase in their efficacy through verbal input and feedback and by being consciously aware of what was occurring internally as they dissected challenges alongside their executive coach. The fourth theme from this study aligned with vicarious experiences and activating physiological arousal. Theme four indicated that executive coaching experience provided a safe space to show vulnerability in their feelings, fears, hopes, and aspirations. Theme four emerged as principals describe role play opportunities and the ability to share openly and honestly with their executive coach free of judgement. Another theme pertaining to imposter syndrome developed outside of the theoretical framework.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings in this multiple case study provide context to the importance of intentional and precise development and support for experienced PK-12 principals. Participants in this study understood their needs as leaders and where to focus their efforts. Central to this study is the challenge to increase self-efficacy independent of external support. The participants highlighted the importance of dedicating the time and space to verbally process with their executive coach, which enhanced their ability and capacity to tackle their work as a principal.

The themes from this study open an opportunity to engage in more research focused on experienced principals and their needs to be successful as school leaders. This
study revealed how executive coaching provided targeted, individualized, and personalized growth and learning opportunities in ways that leverage the participants’ strengths. This study also demonstrated the power of executive coaching in increasing how experienced principals view themselves in their work. A principal’s experience does not automatically equate to increased efficacy. Principals with experience in the role still desire input and feedback to maintain, support, or enhance their feelings of self-efficacy.

While this study identifies opportunities to leverage executive coaching as a structure for developing experienced principals, the study also revealed the need for future research. Further research is needed among experienced principals through an executive coaching platform to bolster the research for this underrepresented group of school leaders. Supporting and sustaining the principal is essential to the overall health of the school (Collie et al., 2020; Kaufman et al., 2022). Additional study is needed to retain experienced principals and capitalize on the learning the leaders have gained throughout their time in the role. It is important to further understand what principals with experience need to be optimal school leaders.

Research is also needed as an extension of this study. The theme of imposter syndrome was also revealed among participants. As key areas lifted by participants, these concepts deserve additional attention and focus within the confines of executive coaching.

The information gathered from this study is impactful to school districts around the country. As principals continue to be in an essential position in schools, attention and focus must be dedicated to increasing the capacity of these leaders. The findings from this study offer an opportunity to engage in dialogue to embrace executive coaching as a
viable construct to build, develop and retain school principals. To leverage this study’s findings, I recommend the following stakeholder groups: senior district leaders, the district Board of Education, principals and principal supervisors, district professional learning leaders, and local principal preparation programs.

**Senior district leaders.** Senior district leaders have the opportunity and bandwidth to impact system-level change. I recommend the senior leadership team gather historical trend data on the percentage of principals who have vacated their position in the district. I recommend disaggregation of data for principals with four years or less experience and principals with more than four years of experience. In navigating through the retention data for principals, I recommend the district leaders compare the district’s data to national data. Additionally, I recommend that district leadership collect exit surveys for each vacating principal that provide qualitative and quantitative information. The district must have a complete picture of the problem within its context before understanding the value of taking action.

**District board of education.** The district’s Board of Education is a governing body that establishes policies for the district. While they are not engaged in the day-to-day operations of the district, they establish the need for policy connected to large systems central to the functioning of the district. The Board of Education will benefit from understanding the work of the principal, the connection to the district they serve, and the impact of policy change specific to professional learning and executive coaching for the district’s principals. After I provide a short presentation to the Board of Education, I recommend convening a committee to review the district’s current policies connected to
principal professional learning to determine its effectiveness in meeting the needs of principals as indicated in the current study. Additionally, I recommend examining previous, small-scale executive coaching for new principals to determine how to expand the opportunity to experienced principals in the district.

Once the district identifies the need, I recommend the senior leadership team publicly identify principal development and retention as a district value. Identifying principal development and retention messages to school leaders their value and importance. Continued value occurs by allocating resources to principal development and retention. Therefore, I also recommend that district leaders identify and allocate monetary funds and resources to demonstrate a commitment to their principals.

The next few recommendations are focused on a blended group of both principals and principal supervisors. While principals are engaged in the day-to-day work of leading their campuses, the principal supervisors have a large-scale view of the challenges their principals face daily. For momentum with the recommendation, principals and their supervisors must work collaboratively and cooperatively to illuminate the challenges around principal retention. I recommend a joint venture between principals and principal supervisors to advocate to senior district leadership and their local Board of Education for executive coaching as a form of targeted and job-embedded professional learning designed to focus on what each principal needs for optimal growth.

*Principals.* In addition to joint advocacy between principals and principal supervisors, I recommend a structural shift in how principals engage in executive coaching. In some districts, the principal supervisors also serve as the principals’ coach. Some principal supervisors have also identified themselves as executive coaches. The
principals in this study recognized the importance of having a listening ear and someone who understands the work; however, based on the sensitivity of topics, the importance of vulnerability and safety, and the need to be unfiltered in communication, I strongly recommend that districts identify an executive coach for principals who do not also serve in the role as the principals’ supervisor. It is essential for the progression of the principal’s learning and development of their self-efficacy that the principal feels comfortable speaking openly and freely to their executive coach.

**District professional learning leaders.** I recommend that the leaders of district professional learning make efforts to understand the individualized and unique needs of principals in the district. By providing personalized learning through executive coaching, district-level learning can be focused on large systems and structures. I recommend a multidimensional approach to principal learning. The individualized approach of executive coach meets a different need than that of learning that serves district initiatives and policies.

**Principal preparation programs.** The final recommendation extends to principal preparation programs. As licensed educators desiring to become principals engage in university-level coursework, a focus must be on longevity within the position. New principals must know the outlets available for support and guidance. Not all districts have funds and resources available for executive coaching; therefore, principals need information about executive coaching prior to transitioning into their first principalship role. As more stakeholders lean into executive coaching, there are opportunities for executive coaching to gain traction for school leaders and school districts.
Findings Distribution Proposal

In this section, I discuss the proposed methods for distributing the findings of this study and the intended impact on the target audiences. Due to the nature of principals’ work, these school leaders must receive the support and development needed to be optimal in their work in service to their students. In this section, first, I share the target audience with whom I hope to share this work. Next, I outline the method that I propose to distribute the findings. Finally, I provide the physical mode for the distribution of the findings.

Target Audience

There are four target audiences that I focus on to distribute these findings. The audiences include senior district leadership principals, principal supervisors, the district Board of Education, and scholarly practitioners. These groups can benefit most from the findings to enact change on their behalf and on behalf of all school leaders in the district. Executive coaching is a mechanism for principal development that has the potential to grow throughout the district. Marvel Public Schools (pseudonym) continually expresses its appreciation of principals and the work occurring in schools. Dedicating intentional development of the principals demonstrates the district’s commitment to the leaders.

Proposed Distribution Method and Venue

To reach the intended audience to distribute my findings from this study, it is necessary to engage those audiences in an organic way and in a structure that currently exists. To reach principals and principal supervisors, I plan to attend monthly meetings facilitated by principal supervisors for all their principals. This is a small forum to have dialogue about the study where I can facilitate a presentation and a call to action through
an interactive Google slide deck. The intention of the time is to highlight the purpose of this study, the findings, and the recommendations.

Communication to district leaders and the Board of Education must be targeted and precise. As such, the executive summary will be narrowed down into a one-page document with high level points of interest and a call to action. Access to these groups occurs by appointment only; therefore, prior approval will be needed to be placed on the senior district leader agenda, as well as the Board of Education agenda.

The final group for distribution includes scholarly practitioners to reach a local and national audience. Within Colorado, there are opportunities to present at local conferences focused on principal development, leadership, and retention. I plan to submit proposals to share my research and findings at local and state conferences. Proposals will focus on designing a sixty-minute presentation to review the problem and need, components of the study, the findings, and recommendations for developing and retaining highly efficacious school principals.

In line with addressing scholarly practitioners, addressing a national audience is also key. To reach a wider audience of educational professionals, I plan to submit my research to national journals that focus on educational leadership. I will focus on publications such as The Journal of Educational Research, The Journal of Educational Administration, and Education Week. Each journal publication communicates their submission requirements and my study fits in line with their focus and audience.

**Conclusion**

It is imperative that the state of the educational system in the United States receive the attention needed to address critical issues. One of the issues facing the
national educational landscape is the retention of public school principals. Many principals have expended considerable time and energy developing teachers and students. Those who have demonstrated dedication to their school also require a commitment to their professional development. Students deserve leaders who believe in themselves and are equipped with the tools, skills, and resources to excel in the monumental task of creating quality citizens for a greater society. All stakeholders within the educational landscape must support principals’ self-efficacy. Throughout the United States, all students in grades K-12 depend on their principal to create the conditions for a high-quality learning environment. Principal self-efficacy is essential in accomplishing the important task of impacting student achievement. This study provides an important step towards elevating principal self-efficacy, a topic of interest and concern. Principals are the leaders who have a significant impact on the next generation’s lives.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Doctoral Study Interest Questionnaire

I am excited to inform you about a research opportunity. As a doctoral student at Baylor University, I am studying the self-efficacy of K-12 principals. Completion of this brief questionnaire is greatly appreciated. This study has been approved by the Accountability and Research department in [redacted] and has received IRB approval from Baylor University.

The questionnaire consists of 8 brief questions. Thank you for your participation!

* Required

1. Principal Name *

2. School/Location *

3. Number of Years in [redacted] (in any position) *

4. Number of Years as a Principal in [redacted]

5. Number of Years as a Principal (in any other district) *

6. Would you be interested in learning more about a potential research opportunity pertaining to self efficacy?
   Mark only one oval.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

7. Are you currently receiving executive coaching? *
   Mark only one oval.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

8. Are you interested in receiving 8 weeks of executive coaching as part of this study? *
   Mark only one oval.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

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APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Baylor University
School of Education

Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: Consent Form for Research
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Ashlee Saddler

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to be part of a research study. This consent form will help you choose whether or not to participate in the study. Feel free to ask if anything is not clear in this consent form.

Important Information about this Research Study

Things you should know:

- The purpose of the study is to understand how experienced K-12 principals in public school settings perceive how executive coaching impacts their self-efficacy as leaders.
- In order to participate, you must be a current principal with at least four years of experience as a principal in the Aurora Public School district.
- If you choose to participate, you will be asked to engage in a maximum of eight executive coaching sessions over the course of 2 months (8 weeks). Each executive coaching session must last for 60-minutes. You have choice to decide the time of day for the sessions and the location of the sessions. All sessions must be in person.
- Risks or discomforts from this research include needing to be transparent with the researcher who is a district employee.
- The possible benefits of this study include contributing to larger research for public school principals.
- Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

More detailed information may be described later in this form. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research study.
Why is this study being done?
The purpose of the study is to understand how experienced K-12 principals in public school settings perceive how executive coaching impacts their self-efficacy as leaders.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?
If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in eight, one hour long executive coaching sessions over the course of eight weeks. Each executive coaching session will last 60 minutes. The session times are flexible based on the principal and executive coach schedule. All sessions will be held virtually. If you choose to participate in this study, you agree to engage in a one semi-structured interview, one focus group interview with other participants, and submit two written reflections, as detailed below. Please indicate that you agree to each form of data collection

Interview

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<td>I agree to be interviewed one time during the executive coaching process. The interview will be conducted virtually in person and will last a minimum of 60 minutes.</td>
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<td>I agree to have my interview video recorded.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Initials</td>
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Focus Group Interview

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<td>I agree to participate in one sixty-minute virtual focus group interview.</td>
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<td>I agree to have my focus group interview video recorded.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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Written Reflection

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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Initials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I agree to submit one written reflection at the beginning of the study and one written reflection at the end of the study, for a total of two written reflections.</td>
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</table>

How long will I be in this study and how many people will be in the study?
Participation in this study will last 8 weeks. There are a total of four participants who will take part in the study.

What are the risks of taking part in this research study?
Minimal risks associated with this study include disclosure of sensitive or personal information. Through the process of observed executive coaching sessions and interviews, you may reveal sensitive information that may cause discomfort.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?
You might benefit from being in this study because of the executive coaching sessions and the benefit to your own professional practices.

What if you learn something about my health that I did not know?
Although the executive coaching sessions you will have in this study are being undertaken for research purposes only, it is possible that researchers may notice something that could be important to your health. If so, we will contact you to explain what was noticed. If you so desire, we will also talk with your private physician. If you do not have a private physician, we will refer you to an appropriate clinic for follow-up. It will be your choice whether to proceed with additional tests and/or treatments to evaluate what we observed, and you or your insurer will be responsible for these costs.

**How Will You Protect my Information?**

A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality.

We will keep the records of this study confidential by having restricted access to individual interviews, the focus group interview, written reflections and any accompanying data. The information collected will be stored on a secure server, not accessible by anyone at the site. We will make every effort to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records.

The following people or groups may review your study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:

- Representatives of Baylor University and the BU Institutional Review Board
- Federal and state agencies that oversee or review research (such as the HHS Office of Human Research Protection or the Food and Drug Administration)

The results of this study may also be used for teaching, publications, or presentations at professional meetings. If your individual results are discussed, your identity will be protected by using a code number or pseudonym rather than your name or other identifying information.

By law, researchers must release certain information to the appropriate authorities if they have reasonable cause to believe any of the following:

- Abuse or neglect of a child
- Abuse, neglect, or exploitation of an elderly person or disabled adult
- Risk of harming yourself or others

Alleged incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking, committed by or against a person enrolled at or employed by Baylor University at the time of the incident

**Will information and/or biospecimens you collect about me be used for future research studies?**
Information and/or biospecimens collected from you as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies, even if the identifiers are removed.

**Will I be compensated for being part of the study?**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

**Is it possible that I will be asked to leave the study?**

The researcher may take you out of this study without your permission. This may happen because:

- The researcher thinks it is in your best interest
- You can’t make the required study visits
- Other administrative reasons

**Your Participation in this Study is Voluntary**

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to withdraw at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. You cannot withdraw information collected prior to your withdrawal.

If you are a Baylor student or faculty/staff member, you may choose not to be in the study or to stop being in the study before it is over at any time. This will not affect your grades or job status at Baylor University. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research study.

**Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research**

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact:

Principal Investigator: Ashlee Saddler  
Phone: [redacted information]  
Email: [redacted information]

Or

Secondary Contact: Dr. Leanne Howell  
Phone: [redacted information]  
Email: [redacted information]

**Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant**

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Baylor University Institutional Review Board  
Office of the Vice Provost for Research  
Phone: 254-710-3708  
Email: Deborah_L_Holland@baylor.edu
Your Consent

SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT:
By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. We will give you a copy of this document for your records. We will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

____________________________________   __________________
Signature of Subject                      Date

Assent of Adult Subject Requiring an LAR:

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

____________________________________   __________________
Signature of Adult Subject                Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:
I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

____________________________________   __________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent     Date

Optional Research

Consent to Use Data for Future Research
I agree that my information may be shared with other researchers for future research studies that may be similar to this study or may be completely different. The information shared with other researchers will not include any information that can directly identify me. Researchers will not contact me for additional permission to use this information. (Note: This separate consent is not necessary if you will only store and share deidentified data.)

YES_______ NO_______ Initials _______

Consent to be Contacted for Participation in Future Research
I give the researchers permission to keep my contact information and to contact me for future research projects.

YES_______ NO_______ Initials _______
## APPENDIX C

### Interview Protocol

#### Self-Efficacy Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Principal Response/Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching been meaningful for you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching impacted your work as a principal?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What experiences have you gained from executive coaching that were not available before coaching?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching motivated you as a principal?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching changed how you interact with or support your administrative team?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What professional or personal success have you experienced because of executive coaching?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are three key pieces of information you recall hearing from executive coaching sessions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching impacted how you see yourself as a principal?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching helped you learn from success? Failure?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How has executive coaching addressed stressors associated with the principalship?</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX D

Focus Groups Protocol

Focus Group: 60 minutes

Focus Group Date:

Participant Names:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Questions:</th>
<th>Responses/Reflections:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How has executive coaching impacted you as a principal?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How has executive coaching increased your value as a principal?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. How has executive coaching supported how you identify your leadership skills?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How has executive coaching supported how you utilize your leadership skills?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How has executive coaching supported your communication skills?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Explain how the quality of interactions with colleagues, direct reports, peers, or supervisors has shifted during executive coaching.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Explain shifts in your resiliency during executive coaching.</td>
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APPENDIX E

Participant Reflection

Participant Pre and Post Reflection

Participant Name: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Instructions: During the course of the research study, complete one written reflection at the beginning of the first week your executive coaching and one written reflection on the last day of your final week of executive coaching.

Enactive Mastery

1. My self-efficacy improved this week in the following ways....

2. How did this week’s executive coaching support your leadership?

Physiological Arousal

3. In what ways did executive coaching this week tackle flexibility and adaptability connected to your work as a principal?

Vicarious Experiences

4. In what ways did executive coaching impact your interactions with colleagues, direct reports, peers, or supervisor(s) this week?

Physiological Arousal

5. How did executive coaching impact your personal resiliency this week?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


