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Understanding Coaches' Access to Support Teaching and Learning: Three Coach-principal Dyads' Perspectives

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Abstract

This interview study employs a distributed leadership perspective to explore three coach-principal dyads' perspectives on: (1) the strategies coaches use to gain entry to teachers' classrooms; (2) the barriers that impede coaches' access; and (3) the supports that facilitate coaches' access. Results indicate that the principals were largely unaware of the various strategies their coaches leveraged to gain entry to teachers' classrooms, the range of barriers their coaches encountered while striving to gain access, and the variety of supports that could enhance coaches' access. Implications for school districts and future research are discussed.
Keywords*:* Instructional Coaching; Elementary Principals; School Leadership; School Policy

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The principal must embody a range of multi-faceted, complex, and time-consuming roles, including that of "leader, manager, and change agent" (Mangin, 2007, p. 319). While the role of principal as instructional leader is foundational to effectively supporting teaching and learning (Davis et al., 2005), principals may be overwhelmed by their other roles and struggle to fully embody this important role of instructional leader (Camburn et al., 2003). Thus, principals and administrators across the United States are increasingly hiring academic coaches to assist them in supporting teaching and learning at their schools (Matsumura et al., 2009). Given that coaching as an effective form of professional development has theoretical (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Gibbons & Cobb, 2017) and growing empirical support (Harbour, Saclarides, et al., in press; Harbour, Adelson, et al., 2018; Harbour & Saclarides, 2020; Kraft et al., 2018), the hope is that principals and coaches can work side-by-side to collaborate with one another to achieve instructional improvement (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Spillane et al., 2004). Indeed, research points to the interconnectedness of these two roles and the ways in which the principal's leadership can shape the success of the coaching program (Mangin, 2005; Matsumura et al., 2009).

Arguably, the primary goal of coaching is to support teachers to improve their instruction, which in turn should impact student understanding and achievement (Campbell & Malkus, 2011). However, this likely won't happen if coaches cannot first gain access to teachers' classrooms. As it is discussed below, little empirical research has systematically explored the phenomenon of access, including how coaches work to gain it, barriers that prevent it, and supports that facilitate it. Furthermore, this modest body of literature primarily explores access from the coach's perspective (Chval et al., 2010; Hartman, 2013; Mangin, 2005; Munson & Saclarides, 2020), which raises questions about principals' understanding of how coaches attempt to gain access to classrooms. This is problematic, especially considering recent calls for research on principals and coaches to be more fully integrated (Neumerski, 2013).

Literature Review

While research suggests that coaches may struggle to gain entry to teachers' classrooms (Chval et al., 2010; Ellington et al.; 2017; Mangin, 2005; Marsh et al., 2008; Matsumura et al., 2009; Saclarides & Lubienski, 2020), little empirical work has systematically explored this access. Prior research has focused on three broad access-related themes: (1) strategies coaches leverage to gain access; (2) barriers that interfere with coaches' access; and (3) supports that facilitate coaches' access.

Strategies

I conceptualize an access-granting strategy as a specific action that the coach can leverage, that is within their locus of control, that will ultimately enhance their access to support teaching and learning. Prior work suggests that coaches may draw upon three interconnected strategy types when striving to gain access: (1) *relational strategies*; (2) *pitching in strategies*; and (3) *being visible and available*.

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When coaches draw upon *relational strategies*, they build trusting relationships with teachers so that teachers will feel comfortable engaging in coaching work. Some studies point to the general importance of coaches developing relationships with their teachers (Hartman, 2013; Mangin, 2005). Other literature explicitly states that coach-teacher relationships must be built on trust if coaches are to gain access (Hartman, 2013; Killion, 2008; Knight, 2017; L'Allier et al., 2010). Additional research suggests that coaches must take actions to ensure that teachers do not perceive them to be evaluators as this could potentially disrupt coach-teacher trust and inhibit access (Hartman, 2013; Mangin, 2005; Obara & Sloan, 2009).

When coaches enact *pitching in strategies*, they engage in tasks that reduce the teacher's workload, such as creating bulletin boards, organizing materials, and/or making photocopies (Campbell & Griffin, 2017; Killion, 2008; Mangin, 2005). While teachers may appreciate such support, these tasks do not directly support teachers' professional learning. Thus, coaches should not solely provide this kind of support to gain entry (Campbell & Griffin, 2017).

Last, when coaches make themselves *visible and available* to teachers beyond their classrooms and in common school spaces, coaches' access to classrooms may be enhanced (Campbell & Griffin, 2017; L'Allier et al., 2010; Mangin, 2005). This includes instances in which coaches are present with teachers and students outside at bus duty (Campbell & Griffin, 2017), in the teachers' lounge and school hallways (L'Allier et al., 2010), and at various school activities (Mangin, 2005). When coaches are visible and available to teachers in these diverse settings, this sends the message to teachers that the coach has a vested interest in the school community (Mangin, 2005), which strengthens coach-teacher trust and ultimately the coach's access.

Barriers to Access and Supports that Facilitate Access

I conceptualize *barriers* to access as conditions that make gaining entry to teachers' classrooms more challenging, while *supports* to access as conditions that assist the coach in gaining access. The literature indicates that barriers and supports may exist external to the coach and stem from policies and/or initiatives, principals and/or teachers, or they may be associated with the coach. The same condition can be considered both a barrier to and support for access. In the space that follows, I provide examples of these barriers and supports.

Policies and/or Initiatives

Certain policies and/or initiatives may serve as barriers to coaching or in support of coaching. Some studies have explored how the structuring of the coach's position, which is governed by policy, may ultimately decrease or increase coaches' access to support teaching and learning. Specifically, one study found that when coaches report to district-level administrators (instead of principals), this structuring supports coaches' access as they may have more time to provide teachers with meaningful learning opportunities (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019). Research also suggests that as coaches are called upon to implement new pedagogical practices in teachers' classrooms based on new state- or district-level initiatives, these initiatives may serve as barriers to access or they may support coaches' access depending on teachers' perceptions of the new practice (Poglinco et al., 2003).

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Principals

Principals act as barriers to coaching when they require coaches to assist with tasks unrelated to coaching, such as calling parents, substitute teaching, supervising field trips, cleaning the cafeteria, speaking with angry parents, and organizing book rooms (Camburn et al., 2008; Chval et al., 2010; Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Saclarides & Lubienski, 2020). In taking on these tasks, coaches then have less time to support teachers, which inhibits their access.

Other studies suggest that the ways in which the coach is positioned by the principal to teachers can either decrease or enhance the coach's access (Mangin, 2005; Matsumura et al., 2009). Specifically, when a principal does not explicitly introduce their coach and communicate the coach's role to teachers, coaches may encounter decreased access because teachers are unsure of the coach's role (Mangin, 2005; Matsumura et al., 2009). Conversely, principals support coaches' access by publicly identifying the coach as an instructional support to enhance teachers' instruction and students' learning (Mangin, 2005; Matsumura et al., 2009).

Teachers

Prior studies point to the ways in which teachers may serve as barriers to coaching (Chval et al., 2010; Ellington et al., 2017; Hartman, 2013; Mangin, 2005; Obara & Sloan, 2009). Some studies discuss resistance that coaches may face from individual teachers (Mangin, 2005; Obara & Sloan, 2009), while other studies describe resistance from entire grade-level teams of teachers (Hartman, 2013; Chval et al., 2010; Ellington et al., 2017). Individual and groups of teachers may resist coaching for a myriad of reasons, including that they do not fully understand the coach's role (Mangin, 2005; Obara & Sloan, 2009), or they do not fully agree with the coach's pedagogical approach (Hartman, 2013).

Coach

Finally, prior research suggests that the coach's attributes may serve as barriers to or in support of coaches' access (Hartman, 2013; Mangin, 2005; Poglinco et al., 2003). One group of studies explored the coach's "insider" or "outsider" status – whether or not the coach previously taught in the school district – and how that hindered or supported access (Hartman, 2013; Mangin, 2005; Poglinco et al., 2003). Other studies have pointed to the coach's personality, with qualities such as being "friendly, funny, diplomatic, thick-skinned, [and] flexible" (Poglinco et al., 2003, p. 36) supporting access. Last, some studies have discussed how the coach's years of teaching experience in relation to the teachers they support may also serve as a barrier to or support of coaches' access (Hartman, 2013).

Situating the Current Study in Prior Literature

Taken together, these prior studies provide a useful starting point for beginning to understand the strategies coaches leverage to gain access to classrooms, as well as the barriers that impede access and the supports that facilitate access. However, the primary limitation of this prior literature is that many of these studies take a coach- and/or teacher-centric view in seeking to understand access (Campbell & Griffin, 2017; Chval et al. 2010; Ellington et al., 2017; Hartman,

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2013; Mangin, 2005; Obara & Sloan, 2009). That is, given these prior studies' important research questions and foci, they primarily drew upon interview and/or observation data from coaches and teachers. This, then, raises questions about how principals understand coaches' access to support teaching and learning, and the extent to which principals' and coaches' understandings of access align, which is a gap the current study seeks to address.

Research Questions

This qualitative interview study employs a distributed leadership perspective (Spillane et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2001), to uncover how both principals and coaches understand coaches' access to support teaching and learning. More specifically, from both principals' and coaches' perspectives, I ask: 1) What strategies do coaches use to gain access to teachers' classrooms?; 2) What barriers to coaches face as they strive to gain access to teachers' classrooms?; 3)What supports help facilitate access for coaches to teachers' classrooms?

Guiding Frameworks

Distributed Leadership

Following a distributed leadership perspective (Spillane et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2001), school leadership is not simply a product of one individual working to support instructional improvement across an entire school. Instead, school leadership is distributed, resting on the shoulders of multiple individuals, including "principals, assistant principals, curriculum specialists, reading or Title I teachers, and classroom teachers" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 25). By attending to multiple individuals in these formal and informal roles, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of leadership is possible (Spillane et al., 2003). In the context of the present study, I focus on instructional leadership, which was distributed in the participating school district at each elementary school primarily between the principal and instructional coach. As is discussed below, the coach-principal dyads consistently engaged in collective leading (Spillane et al., 2003, p. 538), where the coach and principal worked jointly to implement various leadership tasks (e.g., facilitating grade-level meetings, planning for whole-school professional development, etc.).

Types of Access-granting Strategies

Taking root in the literature described above, Munson and Saclarides (2020) identify six broad strategy types that coaches may leverage as they strive to gain access. Two of the strategy types – *relational strategies* and *structural strategies* – are related as they involve coaches laying the groundwork necessary to engage in coaching by embedding their coaching work into the daily work of the school. More specifically, coaches enact *relational strategies* when they establish relationships with teachers, establish themselves as individuals to be trusted, and define the work of coaching; while *structural strategies* refer to instances in which the coach makes use of school structures to be involved in the larger work of teaching and learning. The remaining four strategy types (*pitching in, cloaked coaching, indirect strategies, direct offers*) all vary in their overall level of directness for offering coaching to the teacher, and are related as they help the coach physically gain entry to the classroom. That is, while *pitching in*, coaches may engage in tasks that are not directly related to supporting teachers' learning – such as making bulletin boards and photocopies

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– to decrease the teacher's workload. While engaged in *cloaked coaching,* coaches leverage strategies that provide the coach with access without drawing attention to the fact that coaching is taking place. *Indirect strategies* cultivate future, not immediate, opportunities for coaches to support teaching and learning. Last, when coaches make *direct offers,* they directly ask teachers if they want to engage in coaching. Overall, Munson's and Saclarides's (2020) prior work was used as a lens to explore the data in relation to Research Question 1. Specifically, these six broad strategy types and accompanying sub-codes were used during the coding process.

Context and Participants

Midtown School District

This study took place in a public school district, pseudonymously named Midtown, which is located in an urban area in the Midwest. Midtown School District enrolled approximately 10,000 diverse students in 18 schools. The Midtown coaches had full-time release from teaching responsibilities, were responsible to their building principals, and did not evaluate teachers. Furthermore, they were instructional coaches as they were expected to coach across all content areas (e.g., mathematics, reading, writing, science, etc.) and grade-levels (e.g., K-5). The particular coaching structure utilized in Midtown – which I refer to as Teacher's Choice – gave teachers full control over whether and how they interacted with their coach to engage in professional learning opportunities (Saclarides & Lubienski, 2019; 2020). In other words, the teachers were responsible for initiating all work with their coach, and coaches could not ask teachers to participate in coaching. Last, as Midtown placed a high premium on providing administrators and coaches with continuous learning opportunities, all coaches met once a month as a group; all coaches and all building principals met once a month as a group; and all coaches, building principals, and behavior interventionists met four times a year. Next, I describe the three coach-principal dyads, and elaborate on the coach-principal relationship to help contextualize findings that are presented below.

Coach Meg and Principal Miller

Before becoming an instructional coach, Meg[1] taught kindergarten through fifth grade for 21 years in a different school district. She had earned one Master's degree in STEM education, and was working towards a second Master's degree in Administration and Supervision. Although Coach Meg was entering her second year in an official coaching role, at her previous school district, Meg was a teacher leader while still in the classroom. Principal Miller was entering his 10th year overall in education and his 7th year overall as a principal. Principal Miller confirmed that he was eager to offer Coach Meg the coaching position after interviewing her.

Overall, Coach Meg and Principal Miller had a positive professional and personal relationship. Meg stated, "[W]e have a really good…personal relationship." While Principal Miller gave Meg a certain level of autonomy in her coaching role (Coach Meg:"[A] lot of programs I've instituted…that weren't in existence before, he's very much letting me go out and try things."), he also set an instructional vision for the school and enlisted Meg's help in bringing that vision to

[1] All participants in this study identified as white.

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life (Coach Meg: "[H]e's got visions for the school…we've got school goals…and we break it apart to what kinds of ways can I support."). Regarding the daily workings of the school, Coach Meg stated that she and Principal Miller were in constant communication: "[W]e work together...a lot and we're constantly you know in contact with stuff." Last, Coach Meg and Principal Miller interpreted school-level data to identify teachers' professional development needs, and co-planned and co-facilitated bi-monthly meetings for grade-level teams.

Coach Claire and Principal Clayton

Coach Claire was entering her second year as an instructional coach at her current school, and her third overall year as a Midtown coach. Prior, Claire had taught 3rd grade and middle school language arts and mathematics for 10 years. Furthermore, she had earned one Master's degree in Administration and Supervision, and a second in a field external to education. Principal Clayton was entering his second year as a principal in Midtown and had previously taught kindergarten and second grade. He felt these teaching experiences were important in helping him relate to teachers.

Coach Claire and Principal Clayton had a positive working relationship. Principal Clayton shared, "[I]t has been really good…Really positive." Claire commented that she and Principal Clayton had open communication ("I'll stop in every morning and say, 'Hey! How's it going?'") and similar expectations for teaching and learning ("[W]e have the same expectations when it comes to student growth and learning and professional development."). Principal Clayton discussed the overall importance of the principal-coach relationship:

> Principals and coaches do need to work together because of anybody here in the building, she understands what I do the best…and I probably understand what she does the best…Because, as the instructional leader, I'm passing it down to her to say I want you to do this, now you go off and do this instructional piece.

Specifically, Coach Claire and Principal Clayton met weekly to discuss and plan professional learning opportunities for whole-faculty, as well as grade-level teams.

Coach Jade and Principal Jackson

Coach Jade was entering her 17th year working in Midtown. She had spent 12 years as an elementary teacher in kindergarten through fifth grade. For the past five years, she had been at her current school: in her first year she was a reading interventionist and was beginning her fourth year as an instructional coach – making her the most veteran coach of the group. Furthermore, Coach Jade was working on her Master's degree in Administration and Supervision. Principal Jackson, the most veteran principal of the group, was entering his ninth year as principal in Midtown, and had worked with Coach Jade since she first became a coach.

Similar to the other coach-principal dyads, Coach Jade and Principal Jackson seemed to have a positive professional relationship marked by mutual respect. In describing Coach Jade, Principal Jackson stated, "She's so good, and she's got really strong background and a lot that she can offer." Conversely, Coach Jade shared, "I think Principal Jackson does a great job balancing goals and relationships with staff." Coach Jade and Principal Jackson co-planned grade-level meetings, and analyzed data to identify school-wide needs.

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Methods

Data Source

As part of this qualitative interview research study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), I conducted a total of eight semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with three instructional coaches and three principals[2]. Each interview lasted between 16 and 50 minutes (39 minutes on average) and took place in the quiet space of either the coach's or principal's office before, during, or after the school day. Although slightly different interview guides were used for the coaches and principals, as a whole, conversations about coaches' general access to support teaching and learning surfaced in response to the following interview questions: What are some of the challenges that you encounter when you are supporting teachers?, Is there anything else that you've found that has helped you gain access to resistant teachers?, What are some of the ways that you and your principal work together to support teachers on this campus?, What are the ways in which district policies and guidelines impact the way you support teachers?, and What are successful ways for coaches to build trust on a campus? The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim using Inqscribe software. After each interview, field notes were completed that attended to initial observations and preliminary findings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis progressed through several phases. In phase one, interview transcripts were read multiple times to gain a holistic understanding of each participant's perspective of coaching access. In phase two, transcript excerpts were coded with a broad *Access* code to signify that the participant described something specific related to gaining entry to classrooms. In phase three, these excerpts were coded using one of three codes to better understand the three overarching research questions: *Strategy* (RQ1), *Barrier* (RQ2), or *Support* (RQ3). As discussed above, *Strategy* refers to specific actions taken by the coach that contribute to gaining entry to classrooms. *Barrier* encompasses any conditions that may limit the coach's access, while *Support* includes conditions that assist the coach in gaining entry. In phase four, data that previously received a *Strategy, Barrier,* or *Support* code were re-explored and all excerpts were tagged with additional codes and sub-codes. Specifically, Munson's and Saclarides's (2020) six broad strategy types and accompanying sub-codes were used as a lens to re-explore the data that had been coded as *Strategy*. Excerpts were tagged with one of the six strategy types (e.g., *Relational Strategies, Structural Strategies, Pitching In, Cloaked Coaching, Indirect Strategies, Direct Offers*), as well as an accompanying sub-code (e.g., *Building Trust, Positioning the Coach as Helper*, etc.), with new codes added as needed (e.g., *Being Vulnerable, Maintaining Professionalism*, etc.). Furthermore, data that had been coded as *Barrier* or *Support* were tagged with one of the broad literature-driven codes identified above (e.g., *Policies and/or Initiatives, Principal, Teacher, Coach)*, as well as an accompanying sub-code, some of which took root in the previously identified literature (e.g., *Years of Coaching Experience*) and some of which emerged from the data (e.g., *Insecurity*). Last, in

[2] Two of the coaches were interviewed twice to ask follow-up questions.

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phase five matrices of strategies, barriers and supports were created for each participant to help detect patterns within and across the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

The three coaches self-reported different levels of access to support teaching and learning at their schools. Coach Meg – the least experienced coach of the three – cited gaining access as a significant challenge:

> [T]he biggest challenge is having people let you come in.

Coach Claire also discussed some access-related challenges:

> I had kind of expressed some of my frustrations of not being able to get into some classrooms.

However, it did not appear to be as pressing of an issue for her as it was for Coach Meg. From his perspective, Principal Clayton stated that most of the teachers at his school seemed to want Claire's support:

> Luckily, we've been very fortunate that everyone has…been on board with her help…and some people, again, more than others.

Last, Coach Jade – the most experienced coach of the three – self-reported rather exceptional access to the classrooms at her school. In describing the results of a survey that she gave to teachers at the beginning of the year to gauge their interest in coaching, Coach Jade stated that only one teacher was not interested:

> [T]he survey I gave them said 'Is there an area you'd like to have a coaching cycle in this year?' and somebody said, "Not really." I just laughed…But, no, most of them were like "Sure!" and listed several things.

Access-granting Strategies

In accordance with the Teacher's Choice coaching structure, nearly all participants discussed the need to allow teachers to initiate coaching. Coach Meg stated:

> [W]ith the Teacher's Choice, you know…it's which classrooms are going to invite you in…it's all about that here in this district.

Furthermore, Principal Jackson said:

> Ideally, a teacher will reach out to the coach…and then they go through the [coaching] cycle.

Although it was certainly the ideal to consistently allow the teacher to initiate coaching, all participants discussed additional strategies that coaches leveraged to enhance their classroom access (see Table 1 below). Here and below, the principals are discussed first, followed by the coaches.

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Table 1
Strategies Reported by All Coach-Principal Dyads

	Coach Meg	**Coach Claire**	**Coach Jade**	**Principal Miller**	**Principal Clayton**	**Principal Jackson**
	n=8	n=6	n=6	n=4	n=2	n=1
Relational Strategies (n=8)						
-Being Reliable			X			
-Being Vulnerable			X			
-Building Trust	X	X	X	X	X	
-Clarifying the Coach's Role				X		X
-Demonstrating Instructional Competence				X		
-Maintaining Professionalism		X				
-Normalizing the Coach's Presence in Classrooms	X	X				
-Praising the Teacher		X				
Structural Strategies (n=1)						
-Supporting Teachers' Evaluation and Professional Growth Plans	X					
Pitching In (n=2)						
-Offering to Perform Instructional Duty	X					
-Positioning the Coach as Helper	X		X			
Cloaked Coaching (n=2)						
-Asking to Learn in Teacher's Classroom	X					
-Working with Groups of Teachers	X					
Indirect Strategies (n=4)						
-Attending to Teachers' Goals and Needs			X			
-Being Visible and Available		X	X			
-Leveraging the Ripple Effect					X	
-Providing Flexibility for Meeting		X				
Direct Offers (n=2)						
-Offering Coaching				X		
-Orienting New Teachers	X					

Principals' Perspectives on Coaches' Access-granting Strategies

Collectively, the principals mentioned five distinct strategies they perceived the coaches leveraged to gain access (see Table 1 above). These strategies span three of the six strategy types identified by Munson and Saclarides (2020).

Relational strategies. Overall, the principals placed a high premium on *relational strategies*, with a majority (three of five) of the access-granting strategies they named falling into this type.

One of the goals of this strategy type is to support the coaches in establishing themselves as trustworthy partners. In this vein, two principals perceived it was necessary for the coach to focus on *building trust* with the classroom teacher to gain access. Principal Clayton talked about building trust in general terms:

> [I]t kind of goes back to…the whole trust thing. And once they value Coach Claire, they'll let her through the door.

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Additionally, Principal Miller mentioned that coaches could build trust with teachers by maintaining coach-teacher confidentiality during coaching cycles:

> [T]here needs to be a high-level of trust built that won't compromise confidentiality…[the] teacher needs to be able to trust that the coach can work with them on something they identify together as a deficit or growth area, um, without sort of the teacher feeling…that it's going to show up on their evaluation as a negative.

Furthermore, Principal Miller suggested that coaches could enhance trusting coach-teacher relationships by *demonstrating their own instructional competence*:

> Another way of building trust I think in the coaching role is to walk the talk...[P]eople need to know that you are a master teacher...That needs to be proven through your actions, not through your resume…So, having opportunities to get in front of the kids and have successful teaching – people are more likely to trust you if they believe you know what you're talking about.

Hence, by "walking the talk" and showing that they are "good" teachers, coaches establish themselves as instructionally competent, which could help teachers trust their coach as instructional experts and enhance coaching access.

A second goal of this strategy type is to help the coaches define their coaching work with teachers. Hence, two principals pointed to the importance of *clarifying the coach's role* as they perceived that coaches could cultivate trust with teachers, and thereby enhance access, by clarifying their own roles to ensure that teachers understood how the coaches could support them. Principal Miller said:

> [I]t's telling people what you're about and being very clear as [to] what your purpose is…because if people feel like you should be the stuff gatherer and they're coming to you for the stuff and you're not searching for the stuff, then they're not going to be very trusting or…put off or whatever. So, I think…having that role conversation.

Overall, the principals stressed the importance of coaches leveraging relational strategies to gain access to support teaching and learning. By enacting relational strategies, coaches could foster trusting relationships with teachers while simultaneously defining their coaching work, which the principals believed would ultimately enhance coaches' access.

Indirect strategies. One principal discussed *indirect strategies*, which are thought to ultimately – although likely not immediately – foster coaching opportunities with teachers. In particular, Principal Clayton described how coaches might *leverage the ripple effect* whereby the coach gains access to one classroom after having been in others due to the good word that is spread from previous teachers:

> I think once people also find out how she [Coach Claire] can help this person, it spreads. It's like, "Wow, she helped me, she was so awesome! She did this and this." And other people go, "Wow! I could use that help."

Thus, by having successful coaching experiences with teachers, coaches could plant the seed for future coaching work with other teachers in hopes that teachers would eventually seek them out.

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Direct offers. Last, one principal discussed the use of *direct offers*, which involve making direct offers for coaching to teachers. Principal Miller spoke generally about *offering coaching*, and the need for coaches to be persistent in offering their support to teachers:

> I think you gotta really put yourself out there as a coach…You may get no 10 times…but that's because that person wasn't ready for whatever reason…but then you gotta ask 11 times, 12 times.

Indeed, it is curious that Principal Miller mentioned this as an access-granting strategy as it does not seem to align with the Teacher's Choice coaching structure. This may be indicative of the different ways in which principals and coaches understand coaches' access-granting strategies – a point taken up in the Discussion.

Coaches' Perspectives on their Access-granting Strategies

The coaches mentioned 15 distinct strategies they used to bolster their access (see Table 1 above). These strategies span all six of the strategy types identified by Munson and Saclarides (2020).

Relational strategies. The coaches discussed the utility of *relational strategies*, with less than a majority (six of 15) of the access-granting strategies they named falling into this type.

The coaches reflected on the need to establish themselves as trustworthy partners. In this vein, all three coaches stressed the importance of *building trust* with the classroom teacher. Coach Jade discussed the general importance of building trust:

> [T]here is that piece of getting to know them and building trust with them. And I don't that that's instant. That happens over time.

Furthermore, Coach Claire underscored the need to ensure that teachers understood that coaching cycles were confidential:

> [I]t goes back to establishing that trust with the teacher so that they understand and know that I'm not telling the principal, "Oh, so-and-so is doing this in their classroom. It's wrong and whatever."

Coach Jade believed she could further build trust with her teachers by *being vulnerable* and putting herself out there while modeling instruction in classrooms:

> I'm always willing to jump in there, make a fool of myself and take that risk for them because I think you need to model what you want your teachers to do. If I'm not willing to do that, then I can't ask them to do that while someone's watching them, taking notes.

The coaches described additional ways in which they could establish themselves as trustworthy partners. In this vein, Coach Claire discussed the importance of *maintaining professionalism with teachers* in spite of, at times, being treated poorly:

> I've had some people that have…completely treated me like poop. But, I have to put that aside to maintain that professionalism so that I can get into the classroom.

She also talked about the utility of *praising the teacher* to increase coach-teacher trust, as well as coaching access:

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> [I]f I do walk throughs, I don't even fous on, "I noticed this, can we work on this?" I always try and focus on the positive because I don't want them thinking that I'm coming in just to see what they're doing.

Finally, Coach Jade stated that coaches could gain access by *being reliable* and showing teachers that she will meet her commitments and do what was promised:

> [Y]ou're consistent. You're there when you say you're going to be there…It starts out with little things. "Hey, I'm helpful for you. I'm reliable for you"…then that builds to the point where I can invite you into my classroom.

The coaches also sought to explicitly define the work of coaching in hopes of enhancing their own access. Specifically, two coaches *normalized the coach's presence in classrooms* by communicating to teachers through their actions that coaches should have a regular presence in classrooms. Coach Claire stated:

> [I]n the first couple of weeks…my plan is to block out time just so I can do walkthroughs so people can see that I'm here and I'm willing to help and it's not out of their comfort zone to have me come in…the other day I walked into a third grade classroom and it was one I didn't get into very much last year, so the response was, you know, "What do you need?" And so I wanna move away from that response when I walk in to just, you know, continuing doing, like maybe like "Hi!" and then keep going. And I would say probably 50% of classrooms, I'm trying to think here now, I would say probably half of the classrooms in the building I can walk in and the teachers will just be like "Hey!" and keep going. Whereas the other half will stop and see what I need and those are the classrooms I'm really focusing on trying to get into more often so they don't feel like I'm always just in there when I need something.

Hence, Claire hoped that, if teachers felt more comfortable with her presence in their classrooms, they would be more likely to ask for support:

> [I]f…they become comfortable with me in there, then it's not gonna be as big of a task for them to ask me for help.

Collectively, the coaches valued using relational strategies to gain entry to support teaching and learning. However, while principals seemed to put the most stock in relational strategies, the coaches identified a host of additional strategies they used to enhance access.

Structural strategies. Coaches draw upon *structural strategies* when they leverage existing school structures to enhance their overall access (Munson & Saclarides, 2020), and one coach discussed using a structural strategy. Coach Meg *supported teachers' evaluation and growth plans* by offering her support so that teachers could be successful meeting administrators' evaluation expectations:

> I…tell people, "Hey, if you collaborate with me that's going to look really good on your evaluation, you know? You're going to be able to put that evidence in there. I'll be able to provide evidence for you, know you?" That sparks some peoples' attention.

However, Meg acknowledged that this strategy may not be the best use of her time:

> [I]f I'm going in there just so they can fill in some box on their evaluation, that's a waste of my time.

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Pitching in. When *pitching in,* coaches support teachers with tasks (e.g., making photocopies) that may be limited in impacting teaching and learning, but decrease the teacher's workload (Munson & Saclarides, 2020). The coaches named two pitching in strategies: *positioning the coach as helper* and *offering to perform an instructional duty*.

Coaches *position themselves as helpers* when they attend to menial tasks, such as making bulletin boards or copies, to help teachers with their daily labor. In this vein, Coach Jade offered to get writing journals for students:

[S]tart off with, "Hey, do you need anything? Can I get you some journals for your kids?"

Furthermore, Coach Meg made photocopies for teachers:

Last year, if they'd asked me to copy something for 'em, I would've jumped, you know?

When coaches *offer to perform an instructional duty*, they may work with a small group of students or implement diagnostic student assessments to lessen the teacher's instructional burden. Coach Meg discussed an experience in which she supported kindergarten teachers by taking on a small group of students. Although Meg wished that there could have been more coaching opportunities, she acknowledged that it opened the door for her to work with teachers:

> So then they [teachers] broke 'em [students] up into four groups, five groups…So it was one of those things that we were all responsible for the kids…and having me push into help…and the thing that I talked to Principal Miller about last time was I didn't like that I had my own group…I was kind of a fifth person, you know? And his statement to me was, "Well, sometimes that's what you're going to be as a coach."…I'm hoping that…it can be more of a co-teaching situation as opposed to I have this group that I'm responsible for. But then again, I have to be flexible because at the end of the day, I want them to want to come back and invite me back in. So, if I say, no I'm not doing that, well I just shut that door. So, it's kind of a give and take. You choose your battles.

Overall, pitching in strategies demonstrate coaches' willingness to help ease the burden placed on teachers by taking on menial tasks, which ultimately enhances coaches' access.

Cloaked coaching. When coaches leverage *cloaked coaching*, they gain and maintain access by downplaying the fact that coaching is taking place (Munson & Saclarides, 2020). Coach Meg mentioned two cloaked coaching strategies. Meg *asked to learn in a teacher's classroom* by telling a teacher that she wanted to try out a new lesson or activity with students to further her own learning (not the teacher's):

> I really try to get out there and just be like, "You know…there's this new thing, I'd love to try it!"…[M]ake it more of a I want to try something in your class, not I want you to try something in your class. You know? And that has seemed to go a little bit better.

Additionally, Meg *worked with groups of teachers* to increase her own access, when teachers might not otherwise choose to enlist in one-on-one coaching with her. She stated:

> [B]asically it is establishing a goal as a grade level. Having me there to support…"[W]e're gonna have this baseline assessment… and then we're gonna do the assessment again after so long, and we'll have some results-based data"…[N]ow, we did it with kindergarten last year…at that point, they really welcomed me in because they realized we're all trying to

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> get this goal. So, that was something that I'm looking forward to doing with more grade levels this year because I think it will provide me more access because then it's not just "I'm doing it with you." It's "I'm working with this grade-level" and that mindset alone, people will be like, "Oh, she's coming in because we're doing this as a grade-level," not "She's coming in because of me."

Thus, by diverting attention away from coaching, cloaked coaching strategies put teachers at ease as they did not feel like they were being singled out to participate in coaching.

Indirect strategies. The coaches discussed three distinct *indirect strategies* they hoped would cultivate future opportunities to engage in coaching work with teachers (Munson & Saclarides, 2020). Responding to the constraints of her teachers' busy schedules, Coach Claire worked to *provide flexibility for meeting*:

> [B]eing super flexible, mornings, after school, you know, being able to move my lunch and plan time wherever it fits.

By being flexible with teachers, Claire hoped that it could lead to potential coaching opportunities. Furthermore, Coach Jade saw the value in *attending to her teachers' goals and needs* by continuously asking her teachers what they want to learn:

> I have to say, "How can I support you?"…I ask them what they want. I ask them what they want to grow in.

By gathering such knowledge about teachers' needs, Coach Jade could potentially leverage it in the future if a coaching opportunity presented itself. Last, Coaches Claire and Jade believed that *being visible and available* could support their coaching efforts because if they had increased visibility in classrooms, teachers might eventually request to engage in coaching.

Direct offers. One coach discussed her use of *direct offers*, which involved directly approaching teachers about potential coaching work (Munson & Saclarides, 2020). Coach Meg would strategically *orient new teachers* and offer support to them:

> [W]ith the new teachers in the building, there's…quite a few, and so I send out an email saying …"[J]ust checking in, would love to meet with you for 10 minutes, find out what your goals and objectives are"…I've heard back from one. So, I mean, I can follow up on that, but I can't force it.

Given that the Teacher's Choice coaching structure did not permit the coaches to directly approach teachers and offer support, Meg only lightly utilized this strategy and acknowledged that she couldn't require that new teachers participate in coaching.

Barriers

Collectively, the three coach-principal dyads named seven barriers that coaches experienced while striving to gain access to support teaching and learning (see Table 2 below).

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Table 2
Barriers Reported by All Coach-Principal Dyads

	Coach Meg	**Coach Claire**	**Coach Jade**	**Principal Miller**	**Principal Clayton**	**Principal Jackson**
	n=2	n=6	n=3	n=1	n=2	n=1
Teacher (n=4)						
-Collective Grade-level Resistance		X			X	
-Lack of Understanding of Coach's Role		X		X	X	
-Insecurity	X	X				X
-Overwhelmed by Coaching			X			
Policy and/or Initiatives (n=1)						
- District Professional Development Initiatives	X	X				
Principal (n=1)						
-Principal Prompting		X	X			
Coach (n=1)						
-Coach Schedule		X	X			

Principals' Perspectives on Barriers to Coaching

The principals mentioned three distinct barriers they believed hindered coaches' access (see Table 2), all of which stem from teachers.

The principals most frequently pointed to how a *lack of understanding of the coach's role* led to teacher reluctance to engage in coaching. That is, some teachers incorrectly perceived that the coaches were administrators who were secretly evaluating them, and/or sharing confidential information about the coaching cycles with principals. Thus, some teachers refused work with their coach. Principal Miller stated:

> One of the biggest challenges of that role, of coach, is you are in no way an evaluator or supervisor…but sometimes you can be seen as such…because people know that you have a close relationship with the principal.

Furthermore, Principal Clayton shared:

> [T]here are times where people are hesitant about having someone come in their room, whether it is the instructional coach or whoever. They get a little nervous about it because, again, it is the unknown. "I don't know if this person is gonna run back and tell the principal. I don't know what this person is going to do with this information."

Hence, from these principals' perspectives, a salient barrier to coaching stemmed from teachers' erroneous perceptions of the coach's role.

The principals mentioned two additional teacher-centered barriers to coaching. Principal Clayton discussed challenges associated with *grade-level resistance* when entire grade-level teacher teams engaged in collective resistance to coaching. He stated:

> [Y]ou might get a grade level that goes, "I don't know. I really don't think that's gonna work." And they offer a little bit more resistance…And then you have some grade levels where the teams have been together and they've been very cohesive and just, you know, trying to have them see what you want them to do is a little bit harder.

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Furthermore, Principal Jackson described barriers related to teacher *insecurity*. Specifically, he believed that teachers who did not feel confident about their own teaching practices and/or knowledge may avoid coaching because this could signify that they need help and are struggling:

> [E]very once in a while you do come across a struggling teacher…those are the ones who hesitate because of their own perceptions of what that might mean about what they're doing. It's harder for them to reach out if they know that they're struggling.

In sum, the principals only mentioned barriers stemming from teachers, and did not discuss barriers that might also stem from other sources.

Coaches' Perspectives on Barriers to Coaching

The coaches discussed a total of seven barriers to coaching stemming from teachers, policies and/or initiatives, the principal, and the coach (see Table 2).

Teachers. The coaches recognized that teachers could serve as significant barriers to their coaching efforts. Coach Claire talked generally about *collective grade-level resistance* and how certain grade-levels simply would not grant her access:

> It's only really certain grade levels…that have completely put up the barrier and do not let me anywhere near.

The coaches further described the root of teacher resistance to coaching. Two coaches pointed to teacher *insecurity* about their lack of content and/or pedagogical knowledge, as well as teaching practices. In this vein, Coach Meg described teacher insecurity stemming from a lack of mathematics content knowledge:

> [G]etting people to even admit that "I may not know fractions as well as I wanted to," or "I may not understand algebraic expressions like I wanted to," you know, and getting them over that hump to be like "Okay, I don't know what I don't know and now I need to understand it."

Furthermore, two coaches discussed teacher resistance rising from a *lack of understanding of the coach's role*. Coach Claire stated that some teachers viewed her as an administrator and for that reason, did not want to engage in coaching:

> Some teachers view me more as administration and are closed off to it. I think they view it more as me coming in and telling them what to do, instead of working with them.

And still, one coach perceived that teacher resistance might stem from feelings of being *overwhelmed by coaching*. Coach Jade stated:

> I think a full coaching cycle is a little daunting…you know, we set a time, 6-8 weeks. And I have this fancy form. But, it's really not that fancy. But, I don't know if that frightens people off.

Policy and/or initiative. The coaches acknowledged that the presence or lack of *district professional development initiatives* could spur teacher resistance to coaching. Coach Claire discussed how Midtown's focus on implementing a particular guided reading template in grades 3-5 was met with resistance from teachers, which caused them to decline Claire's support:

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> [The] guided reading template was very focused on K-1-2 for the last few years and this year they are moving to 3-4-5 and they [administrators] are starting to expect to see it in 3rd, 4th, and 5th…so it falls on coaches to make sure that we're working with teachers to get that implemented in a way that it's supposed to be. So, um, and that's where I can get a lot of the, um, closed door, no not gonna do it, um, and it's tough because I know that they have to and they don't necessarily know how to, but then I have to stop at a certain point.

Furthermore, Coach Meg stated that given Midtown's focus on literacy-based professional development, teachers seemed to resist coaching cycles that focused on other important topics, such as mathematics and science, that were unrelated to the district's literacy focus:

> So, I think that they're…really heavily based on literacy professional development. And I think there needs to be a little bit more of a balance. So, I find that difficult…because if the district's not pushing it, teachers are gonna be like "Oh well. It's not important to the district, so why do I need a coaching cycle on it?"

Thus, teachers seemed more resistant to coaching cycles when the focus was not aligned with district professional development initiatives.

Principal. Two coaches discussed that *principal prompting* could serve as a barrier to coaching because teachers do not want to feel coerced into coaching. Coach Jade stated:

> I think some principals are saying, "You have to work with so-and-so" – which is a challenge right off the bat because now you're being pointed out.

Coach Claire reflected on an experience at her previous school in the district when her former principal recommended that she engage in a coaching cycle with a teacher. Ultimately, Claire's access was hindered as the teacher did not follow through on what was started during the cycle and refused to continue meeting with the coach:

> There was a teacher who I wasn't forced to work with and he wasn't forced to work with me, but it was strongly suggested. And…that shouldn't have happened. But, what do you do when your boss strongly suggests something? How do you not? And then I'll tell you I spent a lot of time in this teacher's classroom and the minute I left he went back to his old ways. And it was so frustrating because it was a waste of my time. Not only did he go back to his old ways, he blew meetings off. So, we would schedule meetings, I would get there early and he wouldn't show up. Or we would do planning time and he would be like, "Sorry! Gotta go and run and do this."

Hence, although likely well-intentioned, when principals required that their teachers engage in coaching cycles, this ultimately interfered with coaches' access.

Coach. Last, the coaches described how challenges associated with the coaches themselves – in particular the *coach's schedule* – served as a coaching barrier. Coach Jade reflected on her tendency to "overschedule" and "double book" – which inhibited her access by spreading her so thin that she couldn't spend continuous time in teachers' classrooms:

> I can't do that 'cuz I can't keep everything straight and no one gets an extended amount of time.

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Furthermore, the previous school year, Coach Claire planned and facilitated professional learning opportunities at the district-level for teachers who weren't necessarily at her school. She stated that this diminished the time she had to coach teachers at her own school, ultimately reducing her access to support teaching and learning:

> Last year, they actually had us lead some professional development days. Plan and lead them…And I don't mind it. But at the same time, like, where do you want my resources to be? Do you want it to be in the building? Or do you want it to be at the district?

Thus, when coaches are spread too thin and expected to manage hectic schedules, ultimately their access is limited.

Supports

Overall, the three coach-principal dyads mentioned seven distinct supports that could facilitate access for the coach (see Table 3 below).

Table 3
Cross-cutting Analysis of Supports that Facilitate Access

	Coach Meg	**Coach Claire**	**Coach Jade**	**Principal Miller**	**Principal Clayton**	**Principal Jackson**
	n=2	n=1	n=2	n=1	n=3	n=2
Principal (n=4)						
-Establish Trust with Teachers					X	
-Maintain Coach-teacher Confidentiality				X	X	X
-Principal Prompting					X	X
-School Culture			X			
Policy and/or Initiatives (n=1)						
-New Initiatives Facilitate Coaching	X					
Teacher (n=1)						
-Eager Teachers	X	X				
Coach (n=1)						
-Longevity of Coaching Experience			X			

Principals' Perspectives on Coaching Supports

In total, the principals mentioned three distinct access-facilitating supports, all of which stem from the principal. All three principals discussed the need for the principal to *maintain coach-teacher confidentiality* about coaching cycles. In other words, the principals acknowledged the necessity of ensuring that teachers understood that when they engaged in coaching cycles, everything that was discussed would be kept confidential. The principals believed this would enhance the coaches' access. For example, Principal Stacey stated:

> [W]e try to do, especially initially, is making sure that teachers know that the instructional coach and their coaching cycles are private. It is between those two and it is not evaluative. She keeps me up-to-date, but she won't tell me exactly what was said.

Furthermore, Principal Jackson shared:

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> It's kind of a little bit tricky…because of confidentiality between teachers and Coach Jade. I don't ever want to overstep and I don't want to make teachers feel like I'm seeing who's working with the coach…I make it a point not to ask her who she is working with.

Thus, these principals respected the private coach-teacher relationship as they perceived this would ultimately keep classroom doors open to their coaches.

Additionally, two principals leveraged *principal prompting* to enhance coaches' access by suggesting to struggling teachers that they engage in coaching. Principal Stacey stated:

> [I]f I notice a teacher is struggling with something, I might sit that teacher down and say, "These are the things I'm seeing. Here are some people who can help: Coach Claire."

Furthermore, Principal Jackson shared:

> There are times if we do have a struggling teacher where I…suggest that the teacher works with the coach because I think [that] would help.

Although these two principals named *principal prompting* as a support that could enhance coaches' access, interestingly, Coaches Claire and Jade viewed *principal prompting* as a barrier that could inhibit access.

Coaches' Perspectives on Coaching Supports

Overall, the coaches discussed four distinct access-facilitating supports. Unlike the principals who only mentioned principal-related supports, the coaches named supports that spanned all four broad types.

Principals. Coach Jade described the principal-related support of *school culture*, and the idea that the culture of the school as initiated and nurtured by the principal can facilitate access:

> [T]he expectation is, an unwritten rule, that you will continue to learn. Your door will be open. If we want to have people, not in a mean way, but like this is how we are. We're gonna bring people in your room.

Hence, the school-wide expectation, which stemmed from the principal, that teachers would have observers in their classrooms seemed to enhance access for Coach Jade.

Policy and/or initiative. Coach Meg discussed the access-granting support of *new initiatives facilitate coaching*. That is, new district-level professional development initiatives could create conditions under which teachers need additional support and seek coaching. As previously mentioned, Midtown was focused on a number of literacy-driven initiatives. As one example, an external facilitator provided professional development on a particular reading strategy, and expected teachers to implement the strategy in their classrooms and bring back student artifacts to the next session. Coach Meg stated that many teachers sought her help in implementing the new strategy so they could be prepared:

> They [the teachers] had me come in and do it [reading strategy] with them so that they had their artifacts.

Teacher. Two coaches acknowledged one teacher-related support: that having *eager teachers* who are excited to participate in coaching would facilitate access. Coach Meg stated:

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I've got a couple of teachers that are like, "Oh yeah! Come on [in]!"

Furthermore, Coach Claire said:

[T]eachers are like, "Oh my gosh!...[C]ome in! Like, this [coaching] is awesome!"

Coach. Last, Coach Jade named one coach-related support – *longevity of coaching experience*. Specifically, Coach Jade described how she had been in her current position for a number of years, which enhanced her access because she already knew most of the faculty:

I've been here for a while and knew a lot of people already.

Discussion

The overarching purpose of this study was to employ a distributed leadership perspective (Spillane et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2001) to better understand coaches' access to support teaching and learning from the perspectives of both coaches and principals. As prior research primarily takes a coach-centric approach to exploring how coaches gain access (Campbell & Griffin, 2017; Chval et al. 2010; Ellington et al., 2017; Hartman, 2013; Mangin, 2005; Obara & Sloan, 2009), one contribution of this study is to paint a more comprehensive picture of this phenomenon by considering not only the voices of coaches, but also their principals. The results for each research question are summarized below, and discussed in light of prior research.

Access-granting Strategies

All participants recognized that the coaches needed to employ various strategies to gain access to classrooms. And yet, significant differences were detected between the principals and coaches. The principals mentioned less strategies than the coaches (n=5), and exhibited less variation in the strategies they named, spanning only three of the six broad strategy types identified by Munson and Saclarides (2020). The coaches named more strategies (n=15) and had more variation in the strategies they named, spanning all six of Munson's and Saclarides's (2020) broad strategy types. These results importantly indicate that although prior research suggests that relational strategies are indeed important for gaining access (Hartman, 2013; Killion, 2008; Knight, 2017; L'Allier et al., 2010; Mangin, 2005), these coaches understood they must draw upon more than just relational strategies to gain entry to classrooms, which paints a more complex understanding of access. Furthermore, these results demonstrate that principals may be unaware of and/or not fully understand the full range of strategies that coaches must leverage to gain access. The principals believed that coaches primarily pulled from a set of relational strategies to gain access, and did not seem to recognize that coaches must also leverage a diverse suite of access-granting strategies depending on the teacher and other contextual factors.

Barriers to Access

All coach-principal dyads acknowledged that certain barriers impeded coaches' access. Although prior research points to potential barriers that stem from policy and/or initiatives (Poglinco et al., 2003), principals (Saclarides & Lubienski, 2020; Kane & Rosenquist, 2019), teachers (Hartman, 2013; Mangin, 2005), and coaches themselves (Mangin, 2005), the principals and coaches in this study emphasized different barriers. The principals only recognized barriers

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stemming from teachers, while the coaches understood that barriers could stem from not only teachers, but also policy and/or initiatives, the principal, and the coach. This finding suggests that principals may have a narrow view of the barriers coaches typically encounter. Coaches, on the other hand, who are in the trenches, have a more complete understanding of the diverse set of hurdles they must overcome on a daily basis if they hope to gain access.

Supports that Facilitate Access

Last, all participants understood that particular supports could facilitate coaches' access. Prior research suggests that policy and/or initiatives (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019), principals (Mangin, 2005; Matsumura et al., 2009), and coaches (Hartman, 2013; Poglinco et al., 2003) may serve as supports that enhance entry for coaches. Findings from this study suggest that these principals and coaches understood supports differently. The principals took a principal-centric view and only seemed to name supports that stemmed directly from the principal, which suggests they believe that the principal plays a pivotal role in shaping access for the coach, and they may be unaware of other supports that could also facilitate the coach's entry into classrooms. The coaches discussed a broader range of supports, which spanned the categories of principal, policy and/or initiatives, teacher and coach. Given that these coaches were on the ground working with teachers, they likely had a more comprehensive understanding of the supports that ultimately made access easier for them on a day-to-day basis.

Limitations

Like all research, this study has particular limitations that must be acknowledged. Given that this study was situated in one mid-sized school district located in the Midwest, and that data were collected from only three coach-principal dyads, results should be interpreted cautiously and should not be generalized to other contexts. Relatedly, results must also be interpreted with an understanding of the specific coaching structure that was in place in this particular school district. As previously mentioned, the Teacher's Choice coaching structure stipulated that coaches were not permitted to approach teachers and offer their support. Hence, findings from the coaches as well as principals may have been different given a different coaching structure. Last, given that this study exclusively relied upon interview data, it is unknown whether the strategies mentioned by the participants actually granted the coaches access, and whether the barriers and supports actually impeded or enhanced the coaches' access.

Implications

Practice

Several practice-oriented implications are offered for administrators and coaches in elementary schools. First and foremost, this study illuminates the ways in which principals may not fully comprehend the complexity of the coach's role. Hence, principals must be provided with ongoing and meaningful learning opportunities so they can better understand the coach's role, including the variety of barriers and supports that can hinder and enhance coaches' access, as well as the diverse set of strategies coaches might leverage to gain access. Furthermore, to help principals develop an even more complete understanding of the coach's role, principals and

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coaches must find time to meet regularly to discuss the daily workings of the school, as well as emergent challenges encountered by the coach. By participating in ongoing professional development with the goal of learning more about the coach's role, coupled with regularly meeting with the coach, principals can ultimately deepen their understanding of coaching. Second, given that principals may not fully understand the coach's role, coaches need to be prepared to advocate for themselves, and be intentional about helping their principals fully understand complexities involved with coaching. Specifically, this might include coaches naming supports that perhaps the principal could help put in place that would ultimately enhance coaches' own access, as well as barriers that perhaps the principal could help address that impede coaches' access.

Researchers

Continued research is needed to better understand how coaches gain access to support teaching and learning, as well as the barriers that impede access and the supports that enhance access. Specifically, given that this study only drew upon interview data, additional research should combine interviews with observation data to better triangulate findings, and uncover how information shared from interviews with coaches and principals plays out on the ground as coaches interact with teachers. Furthermore, given that this study took place in one school district with only three coach-principal dyads operating under the confines of a particular coaching structure, future research should explore coaches' access to teachers' classrooms on a larger scale, with different kinds of coaches and principals working across different contexts. Additionally, although the purpose of the current study was to focus on coaches' and principals' perspectives regarding access in an effort to bridge these literatures (Neumerski, 2013), further work should also consider incorporating the voices of teachers and other school stakeholders to paint an even more nuanced picture of access. Last, researchers might consider exploring which access-granting supports can most effectively address particular access-related barriers. For example, for coaches who frequently face grade-level resistance as a barrier to access, which support most effectively mitigates or addresses this barrier?

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