ABSTRACT

CARRAWAY, JENNIFER HENDLEY. Principals’ Sensemaking of the Implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory. (Under the direction of Dr. Tamara V. Young.)

This qualitative study examines the perceptions of principals in the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL), an instructional program designed to help principals improve teaching and learning in the classroom. Specifically, this study sought to describe the extent to which components of SOCL were implemented with fidelity and discover internal and external factors that facilitated and impeded the implementation of this instructional leadership program. Data for this multiple case study were drawn from interviews with principals, documents (e.g. staff meeting agendas, implementation notes, and classroom walk-through observations) and observations of coaching sessions. Guided by sensemaking theory, analysis involved open coding to identify emergent themes. The results showed that possessing content knowledge, pre-existing knowledge, structural conditions, social interactions, meaningful policy, identity as an instructional leader, and positive feelings influenced principals’ sensemaking of SOCL. These findings suggest that schools seeking to implement SOCL, or similar programs aimed at improving principals’ instructional leadership should offer more professional development, reflect on administrative obligations and prioritize district initiatives.
Principals’ Sensemaking of the Implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory

by
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my two beautiful daughters, Carolina and Ulana, for your inspiration, humor, insight, love, and endless patience. I also dedicate this dissertation to my husband Chris, for your love, support, and understanding.
BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer Carraway was born in Vance County, NC in 1973. She completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education from Barton College. After teaching for five years, she became a program director at a middle school for an at-risk program. She then accepted a position at an elementary school as the assistant principal. After obtaining a masters degree in school administration, she became principal of an elementary school and has remained in this position for the past three years.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Four years ago, I set out on this journey to obtain my doctorate I want to acknowledge those who have had an impact on my study and have provided me support in completing this journey.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my dear friend Melody Wilson for her continued support and encouragement. We spent many long hours together researching and editing each other’s papers. Without her continued support, I would still be researching and writing.

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For encouraging me to pursue my dream, I would like to thank Pete and Judy for their continued support. Thank you for believing in me and for encouraging my education.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

During the past four decades, the roles and duties of principals have changed. Historically, the primary tasks of principals included hiring, budget decisions, scheduling, and basic building maintenance (Colden & Spillane, 2007). However, today principals are expected to not only perform managerial functions, but also to act as instructional leaders. Instructional leadership is “the principal’s role in providing direction, resources, and support to teachers and students for the improvement of teaching and learning in the school” (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991, p. 1). Despite the growing emphasis on instructional leadership, principals spend only 30 percent of their time on instructional tasks.

Instead, the vast majority of time is spent managing the school building and patrolling the playground and “Unless schools minimize the operational duties expected of a principal, instruction and leadership will not become the first priority” (Holland, 2007, p. 4). As principals face the challenge of shifting their priorities, they must find ways to become effective instructional leaders. To support principals’ development for instructional leadership, specific training programs must be implemented to help principals acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to help teachers improve student learning (Bradshaw & Bucket, 1994).

This qualitative study focuses on the implementation of such a program, Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL), which is designed to improve principals as instructional leaders (Rutherford, 2007). SOCL is a professional development program
focused on high-performance teaching and effective school leadership. The purpose of the program is to enhance the quality of education for children and youth through the personal and professional development of educators. SOCL delivers customized professional development services and resources to educators. The program involves a multi-year implementation process with intensive professional development that includes modeling and practice sessions to help principals become effective instructional leaders. The aim of this study is to describe principals’ perceptions of the implementation of SOCL in their schools.

Programs, such as SOCL, are continuously being implemented in schools to improve student outcomes. Once programs are implemented, it is important to examine the extent to which programs have met their intended purpose. Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004) refer to this evaluation process as program process evaluation or an implementation study. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) suggested that studying the implementation of a program allows researchers to measure improvements regarding the success of a program and provides insights about why educational implementations fail. Leithwood and Montgomery (1980) suggested that using information gained from program evaluations should aid school decisions regarding curriculum practices. Overall, an implementation study can be used to improve existing programs in schools and guide educators as they consider implementing new programs like the Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory.

**Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory**

Developed by the Rutherford Learning Group, SOCL is a unique program designed to help principals improve their instructional leadership skills. The literature on its
implementation and effectiveness is limited. Although the program as a whole has not been sufficiently examined, there is extensive research about the specific components that comprise the program, teacher talents and coaching sessions (e.g., Cummings, 1992; Hunter, 1994; Keefe & Jenkins, 1991; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Polk, 2006; Ripley, 2010; Stronge, 2002). Teacher talents are the natural abilities of individual teachers that contribute to student learning. According to Rutherford (2007), teacher talents are the fundamental teaching principles that researchers have shown promote successful learning. SOCL helps principals learn how to identify a natural talent or principle of learning and supports principals’ coaching of teachers in an identified teacher talent area to improve classroom instruction. Rutherford (2007) defined coaching sessions as the different ways in which instructional conversations take place in order to impact teachers’ talents and their instructional delivery methods. The SOCL construct of coaching sessions is an adaptation of instructional coaching, an idea which emerged as an educational trend in the 1980s. Instructional coaching allows teachers to reflect on teaching practices, assist other educators, and collaborate (Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garneir, 2009).

Professional development is an essential part of the SOCL program. During the first year of implementation, principals participate in one full-day training and five half-day staff development sessions. The first two sessions are dedicated to learning about instructional leadership with special attention to defining and identifying teacher talents. After the first year of implementation, the next phase of professional development focuses on equipping administrators with various strategies for providing instructional guidance to teachers.
through coaching sessions. SOCL consists of seven instructional coaching sessions: 30-second feedback, 5-minute feedback, positive reinforcement coaching, reflective planning sessions, small group coaching, teacher studies, and instructional planning sessions. Overall, the goal of the SOCL program is to provide extensive hands-on professional development opportunities about teacher talents and coaching sessions so that principals can become better instructional leaders.

**Overview of Research Methods**

This study will use a multiple case study format to provide information regarding the implementation of SOCL as it relates to instructional leadership. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define a case study as “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (p. 59). This multiple case study will explore how principals implement SOCL in their school to improve their instructional leadership.

When conducting multiple case studies, it is important to consider the types of data collection methods that produce the rich descriptions in case studies. “Qualitative methods are first and foremost research methods. They are ways of finding out what people do, know, think, and feel by observing, interviewing, and analyzing documents” (Patton, 2002, p. 145). Participants will be selected using purposeful sampling. Data will be recorded in case study format; including interview data, participant observations, and document analysis.
Statement of the Problem

Federal and state mandates place tremendous pressure on school principals to improve student achievement (Blome & James, 2011). To meet this demand for academic success, principals must be trained to lead and support instruction in their schools. However, school districts and states have failed to create situations that support principals as instructional leaders (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). Generally, many school districts either exert complete control over instructional decisions or turn over full control to school principals without district support. SOCL is a district-level program intended to support principals as instructional leaders. As such, SOCL provides districts another option: principals’ control over instructional leadership with district support. This type of support provided by SOCL has not yet been fully examined. Insights from an investigation of SOCL could potentially provide district leaders with details about how to support principals as instructional leaders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe principals’ experiences with the first three years of the implementation of SOCL in one school district. This study also examines the extent to which principals implement the SOCL program as designed, with particular attention to understanding which aspects of SOCL were most and least likely to be implemented with fidelity.
The primary research question for this study was: How are principals implementing Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory? Three sub-questions were used to guide this study:

1. To what extent is Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory implemented with fidelity?
2. What factors facilitate the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?
3. What factors impede the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?

The results of this study will reveal what aspects of SOCL were occurring in schools and the extent to which actual practices resemble intended delivery of the program (i.e., program fidelity). Knowing how SOCL was implemented will allow us to better understand which program characteristics are contributing to desired outcomes, notably principals’ instructional practices. Furthermore, the results may reveal general impracticalities of the program, and thus, provide information to SOCL developers that can help improve the program.

**Theoretical Framework**

“The motivation of the use of theory in the earlier stages of a case study is to create an initial theoretical framework which takes into account previous knowledge and creates a theoretical basis to inform the topics and approach to the early empirical work” (Klenke, 2008, p. 61). To understand principals’ perceptions of the implementation of SOCL, I drew
upon Karl Weick’s theory of sensemaking in organizations and other scholars’ work on understanding what factors influence sensemaking in schools (e.g., Coburn, 2005; Ikemoto, 2007; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Sensemaking in organizations focuses on how people make sense of reality. “Sensemaking is generally understood to be the cognitive act of taking in information, framing it, and using it to determine actions and behaviors in a way that manages meaning for individuals” (Evans, 2007, p. 161). Weick (1995) suggested the strength of sensemaking is the use of participant perceptions. He explained:

Sensemaking is about the enlargement of small cues. It is a search for context within which small details fit together and make sense. It is people interacting to flesh out hunches. It is a continuous alternative between particulars and explanations, with each cycle giving added form and substance to the others. It is about building confidence as the particulars begin to cohere and the explanation allows increasingly accurate deductions. (p. 133)

Weick (1995) described sensemaking, “as a process that is: (1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enactive of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, and (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy” (p. 17). These seven characteristics help to define sensemaking as a theory and fit well with examining the implementation of a program in a school setting and understanding principals’ actions. Ingle and colleagues (2011) noted that, “studies using the sensemaking framework have examined how the beliefs, values, expertise and prior knowledge of school actors shape a number of principals’ activities and practices” (p. 5). Since “all aspects of the study are
affected by its theoretical framework” (Merriam, 1998, p. 47), this theory will guide data collection and analysis. Through this lens, I am seeking to understand what influences principals’ sensemaking of SOCL as a mechanism for improving their instructional leadership.

**Significance of the Study**

This study not only offers invaluable information on the implementation and application of the SOCL program, but it also provides insights about the experiences of principals with instructional leadership. Blase and Blase (2004) contended that there are no in-depth descriptions regarding how principals actually practice instruction in schools. Instead, there are scattered studies that have provided scant data. Because qualitative leadership studies can offer detailed information regarding leadership issues and problems by capturing the views and perceptions of participants (Klenke, 2008), this study, a qualitative study, will directly address this gap in in-depth information from principals about how they actually practice instruction. In addition, Wagner and colleagues (2006) claimed that “teaching and instructional leadership in many schools—both public and private—is often mediocre, and this is the central problem that must be addressed if we are to improve student achievement” (p. 25). SOCL explicitly addresses this need to improve instructional leadership. Thus, a study about SOCL will provide empirical evidence about instructional leadership in schools, providing information to other school districts seeking to support principals’ instructional leadership.
Limitations of the Study

There are four limitations to this study; the first two are due to sample size. First, only principals that have served in their current school for five or more years were selected to participate in this study. Establishing the criterion of five years allowed participants to reflect upon their instructional leadership practices at their current school before the implementation of SOCL with their instructional leadership practices after the implementation of SOCL. Based on this sample criterion, only three principals in the district selected for study were eligible to participate in this study. Consequently, the findings may not apply to principals with less than five years of experience. However, as Klenke (2008) pointed out sample size in qualitative research does not drive the study. It is more important to use purposeful sampling in order to select participants who will be able to contribute to the depth of the study. Therefore, purposive selection of three principals that have participated in the implementation of the study will be sufficient to gather the data needed for this study.

Second, this study focused on a rural district’s implementation of SOCL. So, principals who use SOCL in an urban or suburban setting or without district level adoption may have different experiences with SOCL. Generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research. However, context is critical to understanding how processes are occurring. Principals’ years of experience at a specific school and a school’s setting likely influence their sensemaking, and thus these two factors related to sample size are explicitly addressed as potential limitations.
Third, it is important to note that the implementation of SOCL is a district initiative proposed by the district superintendent. To ensure that participants felt that they could speak freely about SOCL, I established a rapport with participants and assured confidentiality. Therefore, the researcher assumes that the participants honestly reported their perceptions regarding the implementation of SOCL.

Lastly, this study relied on a case study design, which has been criticized as being too subjective and allowing the researcher to make interpretations of the data (Shull, Singer, & Sjoberg, 2008). However, Stake (2006) contended that the use of triangulation in a multiple case study should be used to ensure “that we have the picture as clear and suitably meaningful as we can get it, relatively free of our own biases, and not likely to mislead the reader greatly” (p. 77). Therefore, triangulation was to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation of data.

**Definition of Relevant Terms**

For this study, key concepts are defined as:

*Instructional leader.* The role of a school leader is to provide direction, resources, and support to teachers and students to improve teaching and learning in a school (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991). An instructional leader is charged with motivating and energizing the staff toward the direction of improvement (Pansiri, 2008).

*Veteran principal.* A veteran principal will be defined as any principal who has served in their current school for five years or more.
The Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL). SOCL is a professional development program developed by the Rutherford Learning Group that focuses on high-performance teaching and effective school leadership (Rutherford, 2007). The mission of this group is to significantly enhance the quality of education for children and youth through the personal and professional development of educators.

Coaching sessions. Coaching sessions are the variety of ways in which instructional conversations take place in order to impact teacher talents and instructional delivery methods (Rutherford, 2007). SOCL consists of six instructional coaching sessions: 30-second feedback, 5-minute feedback, positive reinforcement coaching, reflective planning sessions, teacher studies, and instructional planning sessions.

Teacher talents. Teacher talents are the natural abilities of individual teachers that contribute to student learning. They are the fundamental principles that promote successful learning (Rutherford, 2007).

Implementation fidelity. Implementation fidelity is described as the comparison between the program as intended with its actual use (Mills & Ragan, 2000).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a problem statement, specifying the need to train principals to be effective instructional leaders and provide in-depth, empirical evidence about professional development programs involving instructional leadership for school principals. This study will examine principals’ perceptions of the implementation of SOCL, a program designed to improve principals’ instructional leadership practices by teaching them to identify teacher
talents and coaching teachers about improving those talents. The results from this study will provide not only information about SOCL, but also offer insights about principals’ experiences with instructional leadership. In the next chapter, the literature on program implementation, sensemaking, and SOCL will be described in detail.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One described the purpose of the study and explained how it contributes to theoretical and practical literature on instructional leadership. Chapter One also specified key limitations and provided definitions of relevant terms. Chapter Two will review the literature supporting SOCL’s construct of teacher talent. In addition, Chapter two summarizes the literature on principals as instructional leaders and describes in detail organization sensemaking. Chapter Three contains a detailed description of the methodology of this study, including a description of the school district, data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter Four will present the findings of this study highlighting key themes related to each research question. Chapter Five summarizes the key findings and discusses how the findings expand or challenge the current theoretical and empirical literature on instructional leadership. Implications for practitioners and SOCL developers and directions for future research are also discussed.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to describe principals’ perceptions of the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL). By interviewing principals who participated in SOCL, I will be able to understand what factors facilitated or impeded successful implementation of SOCL. The main research question for this study was: How are principals implementing Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory? To answer the primary research question:

1. To what extent is Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory implemented with fidelity?
2. What factors facilitate the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?
3. What factors impede the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?

This chapter will review the literature informing this research. Specifically, theoretical discussions and empirical studies related to program implementation, SOCL, instructional leadership, and organizational sensemaking will be described. The need for this study will be highlighted and an explanation of how it relates to these areas of study will also be highlighted.
Studying Program Implementation

In an effort to improve student achievement, a wide range of programs are continuously implemented in schools. Once programs are implemented, it is important to evaluate to what extent programs are being carried out to meet their intended purpose. Describing how a program is being carried out and examining whether or not activities are implemented as intended is referred to as a program process evaluation or an implementation study (Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004). In simple terms, implementation studies determine if a program is doing what it set out to do. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) defined program implementation as, “the actual use of an innovation or what an innovation consists of in practice” (p. 336). The terms “use” and “practice” in Fullan and Pomfret’s definition of implementation indicates that people (implementers) are key to implementation. The importance of the role of implementers in implementation is also evident in Klein and Sorra’s (1996) definition of implementation within an organization: “the process of gaining targeted employees’ appropriate and committed use of an innovation” (p. 1055). They explained further:

Implementation is the transition period during which targeted organizational members ideally become increasingly skilled, consistent, and committed in their use of an innovation. Implementation is the critical gateway between the decision to adopt the innovation and the routine use of the innovation within an organization. (p. 1057)

In brief, an implementation study can provide information about employees’ skill levels, consistent use of the implemented program, and their commitment to the program. These
insights provide information about the fidelity to the original design, which is “one of the most critical aspects of program implementation” (Urban, 2008, p. 100). Before evaluating the effectiveness of any program, it is important to determine if a program was fully implemented as designed (Patton, 2002). As Patton explained, “Unless one knows that a program is operating according to design, there may be little reason to expect it to produce the desired outcomes” (p. 161). Carroll and colleagues (2007) echoed Patton’s claims about the importance of understanding a program’s implementation fidelity:

Adherence is essentially the bottom-line measure of implementation fidelity. If an implemented intervention adheres completely to the content, frequency, duration, and coverage prescribed by its designers, then fidelity can be said to be high. Measuring implementation fidelity means evaluating whether the result of the implementation process is an effective realization of the intervention as planned by its designers.

(p. 4)

According to Klein and Sorra (1996), most programs fall short not because of poor program design, but because of implementation failure. Further, quality programs often yield little or no benefits because of meager implementation. Indeed, as Fixsen and colleagues (2009) explained that all implementations encounter struggles. However, these challenges should be dealt with promptly and preferably in the early stages of implementation. Program expectations and guidelines can also create implementation failure because as Carroll et al. (2007) pointed out, implementation is affected by the simplicity or detail of the program. In
particular, programs that are too vague or too complex are not likely to be implemented with high fidelity.

Participant buy-in and true commitment to implementation is another challenge to implementation fidelity. Researchers (e.g., Carroll et al., 2007, Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Rowan & Miller, 2007) agree that participant buy-in is crucial to successful program implementation, in fact, resistance to implementing a program is the main reason why educational programs fail (Rowan & Miller, 2007). This resistance arises because many programs require change in behaviors and effort from implementers.

In summary, implementation fidelity affects the success of programs, and high fidelity is difficult to achieve because of program complexity and lack of buy-in or commitment from implementers.

Studying the implementation of programs can provide valuable information about why educational programs are effective or ineffective. According to Patton (2002), “Implementation evaluations tell decision makers what is going on in the program, how the program has developed, and how and why the program deviated from initial plans and expectations” (p. 161). Because findings from an implementation evaluation can help identify modifications necessary for bringing about desired outcomes, implementation evaluations are an integral part of the design and implementation processes. Qualitative implementation studies, in particular, are valuable for providing “an in-depth understanding of a given innovation and its implementation across organizations” (Klein & Sorra, 1996, p.
1076). Given these significant insights that can be attained from implementation evaluations, all educational programs should undergo some type of implementation evaluation.

**Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory**

Developed by the Rutherford Learning Group (RLG), the Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL) is a research-based professional development program that focuses on high-performance teaching and effective school leadership. The mission of RLG is to significantly enhance the quality of education for children and youth in this county through the personal and professional development of educators. Because principals play an important role in the instructional improvement of schools principals’ instructional leadership is a focus of RLG.

SOCL training is a multi-year implementation process with intensive staff development and hands-on practice. Principals receive approximately 36 hours of training per year organized into several half-day training sessions. Principals were required to attend all professional development sessions during the first year of implementation. In the professional development sessions, SOCL trainers modeled instructional leadership approaches and behaviors that principals were expected to use with teachers. Principals were also expected to build internal standards of professional practice by observing teachers, inspecting student work, and helping teachers learn to incorporate new behaviors that were in accordance with SOCL. The training for principals covered recognizing and encouraging teacher talents and utilizing the 7-coaching tool to develop teachers’ instructional skills. By the end of the training, principals were expected to be able to: (a) recognize instructional
patterns in the classroom, (b) identify and retrieve the teacher talents from memory, and (c) utilize the coaching and feedback tools to improve teachers’ skills.

**Teacher Talents**

Why is it that some teachers consistently outperform others? What is it that effective teachers do that sets them apart from their peers? “For years, the secrets to great teaching have seemed more like alchemy than science, a mix of motivational mumbo jumbo and misty-eyed tales of inspiration and dedication” (Ripley, 2010, p. 58). As Polk (2006) pointed out, “The combinations of characteristics and methods that teachers use to achieve those results may seem endless. Still, there are behaviors and techniques that constantly emerge in any evaluation of a master teacher” (p. 23).

Instructional leadership holds that principals have the responsibility for knowing the attributes of quality classroom instruction so that they can recognize best practices and help teachers continue to improve (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991). SOCL supports the idea that principals can influence teachers and classroom instruction. A key challenge to instructional leadership is recognizing effective teaching. “If good instruction in every classroom and for all students is the central focus of systematic change in education, then districts and schools need to define “goodness” and come to a shared understanding of what is meant by great, or even competent, teaching” (Wagner et al., 2006). SOCL helps districts learn what the elements of effective teaching practices are and how to identify these practices in the classroom (Rutherford, 2007). To explain effective elements of instruction, the SOCL program focuses on the development of *teacher talents* to improve instruction. Teacher
talents are the natural abilities of individual teachers that contribute to student learning. According to Rutherford (2007), teacher talents are the fundamental principles that promote successful learning. These principles of learning are derived from research on human learning. Once the principal has identified a natural talent or principle of learning, principals can coach teachers in the identified areas of teacher talent to promote professional growth and eventually, to improve student achievement. As shown in Table 2.1, SOCL encompasses 17 teacher talents. These talents focus on teachers’ practices in the classroom that support effective teaching and hence student learning.
Table 2.1

*Teacher Talents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Talent</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear Learning Goal</td>
<td>The teacher’s ability to identify and precisely express what students will know and be able to do as a result of a lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congruency</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to design classroom activities that are accurately matched to clear learning goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Analysis</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to identify and sequence all the essential steps necessary for mastery of a learning goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to verify what students already know and can do for the purpose of determining where to begin instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overt Responses</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to regularly obtain evidence of student learning for the purpose of determining next steps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscious Attention</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to gain and maintain students attention during a learning activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chunking</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to segment the curriculum and learning activities into manageable portions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to establish a mental link between intended learning and past learning experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to improve recall and application of learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Relevance</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to embed the intended curriculum into issues and context that are linked to students’ survival or well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locale Memory</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to enhance learning through the location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Models</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to create a structure for learning using images, models, sensory experiences, and symbol systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Time Learning</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to capitalize on the brains tendency to attend to, process deeply, and recall information that is new.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neural Downshifting</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to reduce stress and threat in the classroom environment, to avoid survival mode thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriched Environments</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to shape the physical and social environment to enhance learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to increase and sustain student effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Feedback</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to increase student persistence at a task by providing knowledge of results regarding students’ work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Clear learning goals.** Having clear learning goals is the ability of a teacher to identify and precisely express what students will know and be able to do as a result of a lesson (Rutherford, 2007). Cummings (1992) defined a clear learning goal as “a clear statement of the content, through process, and behavior on the learner” (p. 222). Clear learning goals improve student achievement because students learn better when they know the goal for learning understanding and what to focus on during the lesson (Marzano, Norford, Paynter, Pickering, & Gaddy, 2001). Building on the work of Heath (1994) and Stronge (2002), Rutherford (2007) explained that clear learning goals allow the teacher to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage time in the classroom. Time is a challenging constraint, but effective teachers utilize planning and clear learning goals to maximize instruction, using every available moment for teaching and learning (Stronge, 2002). This intentional planning for high student engagement has a positive impact on student achievement (Heath, 1994).

**Congruency.** Rutherford (2007) defined congruency as the ability of a teacher to design classroom activities that are matched to clear learning goals. Cummings (1992) referred to congruency as teaching to an objective. Specifically, it is, “the part of the teaching-learning process in which the teacher chooses behaviors that are relevant or congruent to the intended objective” (Cummings, 1992, p. 224). In the classroom, congruency represents the ability of a teacher to achieve an exact match between the learning goal and the lesson activity.
**Task analysis.** Task analysis is the ability of a teacher to identify and sequence all the essential steps necessary for mastery of a learning goal (Rutherford, 2007). Hunter (1994) defined task analysis as, “the process of breaking down complex learnings into simpler learnings and then sequencing those learnings for efficient and effective student achievement” (p. 53). Similarly, Cummings (1992) explained that task analysis is not a lesson plan, but a “blueprint” of what the student is expected to master. It is the teacher’s ability to clearly communicate the “sub-skills” to be taught and applies to not only the teaching of specific subject matter, but also skills and social skills (p. 18); that is, task analysis is the road map to reach a destination. One of the three characteristics of an effective teacher is a teacher who “knows how to design lessons for student mastery” (Wong & Wong, 2001, p. 9).

**Diagnosis.** Diagnosis is the ability of a teacher to verify what students already know and can do for the purpose of determining where to begin instruction (Rutherford, 2007). When diagnosing students, teachers determine a student’s prior knowledge of a concept to plan instruction. Rutherford (2007) identified three methods for diagnosing a student’s readiness for learning:

1. Formal diagnosis involves using standardized assessments.
2. Informal diagnosis involves assessing students using a few questions for a quick informational check.
3. Inferential diagnosis is when the teacher predicts what the learner knows or should know (p. 138).
Tomlinson (2010) suggested that teachers could learn the most about students and their needs just by observing students. Informal data can be gathered on students by observing, questioning, and using other instructional techniques like thumbs up or down to signal help, response cards during instruction, and individual instructional conferences (Watson & Bradley, 2009). Powell and Kalina (2009) pointed out that effective teachers know where their students are at any given learning point.

**Overt responses.** The ability of a teacher to regularly obtain evidence of student learning for the purpose of determining next steps for teaching and learning is referred to as overt responses (Rutherford, 2007). According to Cummings (1992), “overt involvement is the behavior we can see and measure. It’s your proof that student minds were thinking” (p. 155). An overt response requires all students to be actively involved throughout the lesson and allows the teacher to gather proof of learning during the lesson.

**Conscious attention.** Rutherford (2007) defined conscious attention as the ability of the teacher to gain and maintain students’ attention during a learning activity. The teacher accomplishes an intentional invitation to the lesson by making the lesson different or having it comprised of unexpected elements, including an emotional appeal that arouses student curiosity. These strategies allow the teacher to gain students’ attention at any time.

Hargrove (2005) argued that engaging students starts with grabbing their attention and then maintaining that focus during the lesson (Watson & Bradley, 2009). When students are actively involved in the content, they learn and retain more of the information. Researchers (e.g., Polk, 2006; Stronge, 2002; Watson & Bradley, 2009) have shown that engaging
students and keeping them on task are important contributors to classroom success. Rutherford (2007) explained that conscious attention is essential to improving student achievement because attention drives learning. Engaging activities make learning fun and help keep students active in their own learning.

**Chunking.** SOCL defines chunking as the ability of the teacher to segment the curriculum and learning activities into manageable portions to avoid working memory overload (Rutherford, 2007). “Consolidating simple chunks into larger ones or building the sophistication and complexity of simple chunks can greatly increase the quantity and quality of learning” (Rutherford, 2007, p. 25). Cummings (1992) explained that organizing content into chunks allows students to master whole concepts more easily. This clustering content into chunks has been shown to be an effective strategy for improving student performance (Branford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

**Connections.** Making connections is the ability of a teacher to establish a mental link between intended learning and past learning or experiences (Rutherford, 2007). Connecting content to prior knowledge at the beginning of a lesson helps students retain and retrieve information (Watson & Bradley, 2009). Strategies for linking new content to past learning include: essential questions, K-W-L charts, graphic organizers, and mapping. These strategies, often performed at the beginning of a lesson, allow students to brainstorm and organize their existing knowledge and link it to new content. Connecting new content to students’ prior knowledge also allows students to retain and recall information easily.
Making clear connections is a strategy that effective teachers use to help students relate new material to students’ lives and help them retain information (Morrer-Reynolds, 2008). Students who have an opportunity to connect new learning to prior knowledge learn more and have a greater appreciation for the content (Flynn, 2007; Morrer-Reynold, 2008). In addition, establishing content relevance and a reason to remember the content creates a deeper understanding (Weimer, 2009). Connecting students’ prior knowledge to new knowledge helps students make sense of the lesson and learn in a way that is best for them (Jackson, 2010; Weimer, 2009). As Burns (2010) shared, “Connecting students with my content has almost never led me astray” (p. 20). “Ignoring the child’s natural memory is to ignore what that child can bring to the learning” (Caine & Caine, 1994, p. 52).

**Practice.** Practice is the ability of a teacher to improve recall and application of learning through effective rehearsal, repeated effort, drill, repetition, study, and review (Rutherford, 2007). Cummings (1992) explained that practice makes perfect when it involves the right amount of time and supports learning. Cummings also suggested that practice in the initial learning stages should be short, because many short practice sessions are more effective than a few long sessions. Practice is a strategy that aids retention because as practice occurs, a person moves chunks of information back and forth from working memory to long-term memory (Rutherford, 2007). Effective practice considers the appropriate duration, amount, frequency, and quality of practice to promote learning.

**Personal relevance.** Rutherford (2007) defined personal relevance as the ability of a teacher to embed the intended curriculum into issues and contexts that are linked to students’
survival or immediate well-being. Hunter (1994) referred to this phenomenon as increasingly paying attention (p. 104). According to Hunter, “the brain pays attention to something that is perceived as important. It is assumed (no one really knows) that what is important was linked originally to survival” (p. 105). Thus, personally relevant curriculum produces the highest level of achievement. Building on the work of Hunter, Rutherford (2007) explained, “the powerful, brain-focusing effect of personal relevance occurs only when the brain perceives incoming information as important to survival or immediate well-being” (p. 57). Teachers can create personal relevance by identifying content that is personally relevant to their students and then embedding that content into the curriculum.

**Locale memory.** Locale memory is the ability of a teacher to enhance learning by organizing information around the learner’s position or location in three-dimensional space (Rutherford, 2007). Locale memory is synonymous with spatial memory. Caine and Caine (1994) explained that “memories exist in relationship to where we are in space, as well as what we are doing” (p. 45). That is, locale memory connects information with the body’s current position or location.

**Mental models.** Mental models are defined as the ability of the teacher to create a structure for learning using images, models, sensory experiences, symbol systems, and creative processing methodologies (Rutherford, 2007). Visual-spatial activities increase content retention because verbal instructions alone do not support academic improvements (Polk, 2006). Mental models require teachers to use non-verbal and tactual-kinesthetic instruction to improve information processing (Cummings, 1992). Demonstrations help
teachers maintain students’ focus while modeling instructional expectations. “It is important that the visual input of modeling be accompanied by the verbal input of labeling the critical elements of what is happening so that students are focused on essentials rather than being distracted by transitory or nonrelevant factors in the process or product” (Hunter, 1994, p. 90). “When the teacher provides both words and pictures, it helps the brain create a structure, or mental model” (Rutherford, 2007, p. 74) and thus aids recall (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Nonlinguistic forms that support mental models include the use of graphic organizers, physical models, mental pictures, pictures, and kinesthetic activities.

**First time learning.** Rutherford (2007) defined first time learning as the ability of a teacher to capitalize on the brains tendency to attend to, process deeply, and recall information that is presented as new, original, or as an initial experience. The phenomenon of first time learning occurs frequently in the classroom. Teachers must recognize when first time learning is occurring and ensure that the information delivered is accurate and that there is enough time to completely process the information (Rutherford, 2007).

**Neural downshifting.** The ability of a teacher to reduce stress and threat in the classroom environment, to avoid survival mode thinking, and to increase higher order thinking keeps students from neural downshifting (Rutherford, 2007). Leslie Hart first used the term neural downshifting in 1978. Caine and Caine (1994) defined downshifting as a reaction to a perceived threat. This reaction is followed by a sense of helplessness. In brief, neural downshifting is the shift from thinking mode to survival mode. “Evidence from different fields suggests strongly that some types of learning are positively affected by
relaxation and challenged and inhibited by perceived threat and fatigue” (Caine & Caine, 1994, p. 68). Rutherford (2007) argued that neural downshifting is triggered by physical threats, psychological threats, or loss of control, but effective teachers can recognize these symptoms and prevent neural downshifting.

**Enriched environments.** Rutherford (2007) defined enriched environment as the ability of the teacher to shape the physical and social environment of the classroom to enhance learning. The classroom environment can influence the quality of learning that occurs. “In general the entire environment needs to be supportive and marked by mutual respect and acceptance both within and beyond the classroom” (Caine & Caine, 1994, p. 90).

According to Rutherford (2007), “enriched environments, over time, result in greater development of the brain’s dendrite structures, increasing the brain’s ability to connect, communicate internally—in essence to learn” (p. 103).

Enriched environments start with classroom teachers and their efforts to establish positive teacher-student relationships (Rutherford, 2007). Caring, humor, engaging, kind, and respectful acts help teachers build relationships with their students that support a positive learning environment (Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008). Positive teacher-student relationships are an essential factor in student achievement (Bell, 2003). Bell also claimed that building positive relationships with students allows teachers to become inspirational teachers. As Weimer (2009) explained,

Good teaching has nothing to do with making things hard. It is nothing to do with frightening students. It is everything to do with benevolence and humility: it always
tries to help students feel that a subject can be mastered; it encourages them to try things out for themselves and succeed at something quickly. (Para. 2)

**Success.** The developers of SOCL defined success as the ability of the teacher to increase and sustain student effort by designing and adapting learning tasks to ensure that students experience success (Rutherford, 2007). According to Rutherford (2007), “success is the #1 most powerful learning motivator known to man! Nothing causes a student to be more focused, pay closer attention, work harder or work longer than good, old-fashion success” (p. 112). If a student thinks that effort will change the results of a class, they are more likely to participate. Furthermore, teachers that have a talent for matching students’ skills with content difficulty help ensure success. Here, success refers to the feeling of achievement when one accomplishes a task. Branford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) supported this notion of success. Specifically, they explained that teachers can motivate students to exert more effort by planning tasks that are appropriately difficult to the learner. Marzano, Norford, Paynter, Pickering, & Gaddy (2001) pointed out that this strategy focuses on the student’s attitude and beliefs instead of cognitive skills.

**Performance feedback.** Rutherford (2007) defined performance feedback as the ability of a teacher to increase student persistence at a task by providing knowledge of results regarding students’ work. Feedback is beneficial for developing skills, knowledge, and concepts (Cummings, 1992). Specifically, one cannot improve without knowing the mistakes they made and how to correct them. Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock (2001) found that timely, corrective feedback produces a large effect size on student achievement because
this type of feedback provides students with specific information regarding how they are reaching the content target. Rutherford (2007) identified the three elements necessary for giving effective performance feedback as abundant, immediate, and specific.

“It would be comforting to suggest that great teaching is algorithmic. If that were the case, all it would take to be a superior teacher would be finding and following recipes. But teaching involves the most variable element in the universe—young lives” (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 13). There is no one strategy that is effective alone. As Hunter (1999) explained: “Teaching, like medicine, is a relativistic, situational profession where there are no absolutes. There is nothing that an effective teacher always does or never does (with the one exception of never causing a student to lose dignity)” (p. 42). It is the combination of knowing effective strategies and understanding when to use the strategies that separates good teachers from highly effective teachers.

These teacher talents need to be recognized and supported by instructional leaders who seek to improve teaching and learning in the schools. “Instructional leadership essentially aims at improving the teachers’ quality of classroom work with an ultimate goal of raising learners’ achievement as well as improving their attitudes and behaviors toward school work and their personal life” (Pansiri, 2008, p. 487). Since instructional leadership plays such an essential role in teacher development, it is important to understand principals as instructional leaders.

**Principals as Instructional Leaders**

Principals play a significant role in bringing about changes in teachers’ instructional practices. Principals give guidance and directions to both teachers and students to ensure that
learning is a top priority (Zepeda, 2003). In fact, a school’s success is a direct reflection of the principal (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991). As Mead (2011) explained:

> Policymakers and educators recognize the critical importance of elementary school principals in creating effective schools and improving student achievement. Research shows that principals alone account for 25 percent of a school’s total impact on student learning, and teacher and principal quality together account for nearly 60 percent of a school’s impact. (p. 3)

Some of this impact can be attributed to the principal’s instructional leadership. Instructional leadership is “the principal’s role in providing direction, resources, and support to teachers and students for the improvement of teaching and learning in the school” (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991, p. 1). Principals’ instructional leadership is affected by their own beliefs and values (Heck, 1992). Instructional leadership focuses on instructional culture, communication, school values, and supporting staff, all of which are easy to see, but hard to define (Zepeda, 2003). An instructional leader is charged with motivating and energizing the staff toward the direction of improvement (Pansiri, 2008). The literature on principals as instructional leaders falls into five broad categories: instructional leaders or managers, coaching teachers, effective communication, the planning of appropriate professional development, and supporting collaborative planning among staff. These themes will be discussed in detail in the next sections.
Instructional Leaders or Managers

Principals are expected to be instructional leaders; however, most principal programs prepare administrators for non-instructional duties, such as legal issues, building management, and school finance (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991). Concentrating on these non-instructional tasks can detract from the curriculum needs of the school. There are a number of reasons why instruction is not given principals’ full attention, including: “student discipline, intervening with angry parents, and completing paperwork and reports needed by central office, complying with special education rules and regulations, administering the testing program, tracking the results of standardized testing, and seeing to the maintenance of the physical plant” (Zapeda, 2003, p. 2). Few principals spend the bulk of their day engaged with instructional tasks (Blome & James, 1985; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Heck, 1992; Wagner, et al., 2006) because as Wagner and colleagues (2006) explained:

Disruptive students, angry parents, concerned board members, and demands to attend hastily called meetings at the central office can serve all to distract and dilute the focus of leaders. Many of these demands and the reactions they provoke have no relationship to instructional improvement. (p. 65)

Similarly, Fink and Resnick (2001) found that principals rarely spend instructional time with teachers for the purpose of improving teaching skills. Overall, “Principals are often so busy engaging in crisis management, administrivia, and the daily operations of schooling that they have little time to devote to thoughtful, reflective research-based strategic planning and
improvement” (Fusarelli, 2008, p. 190). Principals become overwhelmed with daily, non-instructional tasks that keep them out of the classrooms (Whitaker, 1997). Although the principal can delegate some of the managerial tasks, they are ultimately responsible for the entire building, and this affects the time allocated to instruction (Hallinger, 2005; Hoerr, 2007; Zepeda, 2003). Considering the pressures associated with administration and the day-to-day crises that arise, school leaders believe a successful day is when nothing major goes wrong (Fusarelli, 2008).

In order for schools to succeed, principals must focus on teaching and learning of both students and teachers (DeFour, 2002). Consequently, principals must utilize their time wisely in order to impact the educational environment (Heck, 1992). Good schools have good principals (Barth, 1990), but high-performing schools are led by instructional leaders (Heck, 1992; Zepeda, 2003). In his work on effective schools, Edmonds (1979) found that “one of the most tangible and indispensible characteristics of effective schools is strong administrative leadership, without which the disparate elements of good schooling can be neither brought together nor kept together” (p. 32). Increasing the instructional leadership skills of principals pays off with student achievement (Ginsberg, 1988; Heck, 1992).

An instructional leader moves beyond managerial duties, encourages thinking and promotes change by using research-based strategies and models within a set time frame (Bouchard et al., 2002). “Principals perceive their roles as changing, and they report curriculum, instruction, teacher development, and student learning as central among their job responsibilities. Increasingly, instructional leadership is what society demands of school
leaders, as well as what principals expect of themselves” (Calmes, 2006, p. 41). It is these elements that set an instructional leader apart from a manager.

“Principal[s foster the development of a school’s learning climate conducive to teaching and learning by establishing positive expectations and standards by maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers and students, and promoting professional development” (Murphy, 1990, p. 174). Successful principals make purposeful classroom visits daily to support classroom instruction and to participate in the learning culture (Blase & Blase, 2004; Whitaker, 1997; Zepeda, 2003). In a recent instructional leadership study, Alig-Mielcarek (2003) suggested that monitoring teaching and learning by visiting the classrooms and ensuring curriculum alignment was an important aspect of instructional leadership. “Visibility on the campus and in classrooms increases interactions between the principal and students as well as with teachers. Informal interactions of these types provide the principal with more information on the needs of students and teachers” (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, p. 223). These visits are often followed up with feedback from the principal for the purpose of improving instruction. Being visible and providing feedback can affect teachers’ motivation and job performance (Zepeda, 2003). However, Heck (1992) revealed principals spend little time engaging in instructional feedback in order to improve teaching and learning.

It is likely that principals do not spend time visiting classrooms and providing instructional feedback to teachers because principals lack the skill and training needed to be instructional leaders. A recent study conducted by Southern Regional Educational Board
found that districts do not provide principals and teachers with the support needed to promote instructional leadership (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). The 35 interviews with superintendents, school board chairs, and central-office leaders from seven districts showed that districts needed to provide more research-based, quality professional development for principals and teachers to improve instructional practices. A key recommendation from the study was that principals need structured staff development opportunities aimed at improving knowledge and skills required for effective instructional leadership. Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) work also found that instructional leaders are provided little assistance and presented with vague expectations from the district level. Furthermore, those administrators searching for guidance were met with unclear methods.

An in-depth empirical study conducted by Blase and Blase (2004) revealed that even successful instructional leaders struggle with sustaining the goal of daily instructional focus with teachers. A lack of communication skills, instructional knowledge, planning for change, and focused professional development—these same topics have been identified in the research as essential factors of instructional leaders—contributed to principals’ difficulty with instructional leadership. Furthermore, balancing between the tasks of manager and instructional leader continues to be a challenge for principals. Other impediments to principals practicing instructional leadership are lack of district support and insufficient preparation from principal preparation programs. Quite simply, most principals do not possess the skills needed to be instructional leaders. The call for instructional leadership requires a principal to lead their schools in ways that will require district support and
professional development. As Southern Regional Educational Board recommended, districts must take on a greater role in building the instructional coaching capacity of principals (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). As described, SOCL is a model that districts can use to help principals become better instructional leaders.

**Coaching Teachers**

“Effective instructional leadership by school principals tends to affect teachers holistically, that is, emotionally, intellectually, and behaviorally” (Blase & Blase, 2004, p. 163). Supporting teachers starts with engaging in instructional coaching situations that promote professional growth in teachers. Coaching teachers instructionally emerged as an educational trend in the 1980s. Instructional coaching allows teachers to reflect on teaching practices, assist other educators, and collaborate (Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garneir, 2009). Although coaching teachers is important, very few instructional leaders have had training in this area (Holland, 2007). Blase and Blase (2004) reported that coaching teachers has a positive effect on instructional practices. Generally, coaching teachers allows principals to focus on improving teaching and learning and has become, “the tool of choice for striving districts” (Wong & Wong, 2008, p. 63). Blase and Blase (2004) identified five ways that coaching contributes to the transfer of knowledge.

1. Teachers that are coached often practice newly found skills more frequently.
2. Teachers that are coached utilize their new knowledge more appropriately.
3. Teachers that are coached are more likely to try new strategies with their students.
4. Teachers that are coached show a greater retention of the new skills acquired.
5. Teachers that are coached have a better understanding of the new skills and how to apply them into the classroom.

SOCL explicitly addresses the concept of coaching teachers to improve classroom instruction. Rutherford (2007) defined coaching sessions as the different ways in which instructional conversations take place in order to impact teachers’ talents and their instructional delivery methods. As noted in Table 2.2, SOCL consists of seven instructional coaching sessions, including: 30 second feedback, 5 minute feedback, reflective planning session, positive reinforcement coaching, instructional planning sessions, small group coaching, and teacher studies. These coaching sessions are meant to focus on coaching teachers in a positive aspect. During these sessions, only information relating to teacher talent and instruction, rather than negative feedback, are discussed. Because providing specific positive feedback to teachers promotes a sense of value, and is a powerful strategy for improving teaching and learning in the classroom (Blase & Blase, 1999), coaching sessions can motivate and enhance teachers’ self-esteem.
Table 2.2

*Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory Coaching Session*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching Session</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 Second Feedback</td>
<td>A quick reinforcement session that links a specific teaching practice to a specific learning outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Minute Feedback</td>
<td>A brief conversation that identifies a specific teaching practice, links the practice to a principle of learning, describes the effect on learning and learnings, and engages the teacher in a short dialog affirming the feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Planning</td>
<td>A pre-planning session that seeks to engage the teacher in a brief planning session focusing on an upcoming lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reinforcement Coaching</td>
<td>A coaching session that is help after an observation that seeks to build upon the teacher’s use of effective practices in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Coaching</td>
<td>A proactive method designed to add a new skill to a teacher’s instructional practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Coaching</td>
<td>A collaborative planning session where a small group of teachers plan lessons while focusing on a common instructional goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Studies</td>
<td>A collaborative planning session where a small group of teachers observe a lesson and discuss effective practices observed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Effective Communication

Communication is a critical factor for instructional leadership and communication is considered a characteristic of successful principal leaders (Leithwood, 2005). Instructional leaders communicate clear academic goals and promote high standards for teachers and students (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003). Communication involves the principal being able to establish and communicate the vision of the school (Pansiri, 2008). “A vision is encompassing. Embedded in the vision and by extension the school culture are the beliefs, values, purpose, and goals that when bundled serve as a means to focus the work of the school” (Zepeda, 2003, p. 22). Leaders must communicate a clear vision to others and encourage staff to willingly promote the vision. When a clear vision is established, communicated, and supported by the principal, teachers and students know the expectations and share the same vision (Wagner et al., 2006). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) deemed:

An important dimension of the principal’s role as instructional manager is to define and communicate a mission or purpose for the school. Instructional leaders are often said to have a vision of what the school should be trying to accomplish. Defining a school mission involves communicating this vision to the staff and students in such a way that a sense of shared purpose exists, linking together the various activities that take place in classrooms throughout the school. (p. 221)

Communicating a vision is key in building consensus among the staff and for identifying short-term goals for success, and thus it is an essential component of instructional leaders (Hallinger, 2005). A principal’s ability to communicate a clear vision for
instructional practices has been linked to gains in student achievement (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood, 2005; Matsumura et al., 2009).

Planning Appropriate Professional Development

Most efforts to improve teaching and learning focus on the professional development of educators (Wagner et al., 2006). In order for student achievement to improve, districts must improve the instructional skills of teachers and principals. As Wagner et al. (2006) noted, “our core business is teaching, and our product is student learning. The only way to improve our product is to get better at our core business” (p. 23). Improving student achievement is directly linked to high-quality professional development. So, principals must select and maintain high-quality staff development that supports the needs of the staff.

In a recent study, Calmes (2006) found that one of the needs of principal instructional leaders is professional development focused on district goals of instruction. Instructional leaders should plan and attend formal professional development sessions at their schools that target the needs of the staff (Blase & Blase, 2004; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Additionally, professional development sessions should be aligned to improvement goals and be supported by data (Wagner et al., 2006). Blase and Blase (2004) specified six elements that instructional leaders should consider with regard to professional development:

1. Emphasizing the study of teaching and learning,
2. Supporting collaboration among educators,
3. Developing coaching relationships among educators,
4. Using action research to inform instructional decision making,
5. Providing resources for redesign of programs,

6. Applying the principles of adult growth, learning, and development to all phases of the staff development program. (p. 52)

Instructional leaders also encourage teachers to attend workshops, conferences, and seminars relating to effective instructional practices (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003; Blase & Blase, 2004; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

**Supporting Collaborative Planning Among Staff**

Collaborative sessions within a school are an essential part of improving teaching and learning (Blase & Blase, 2004). “Through collaboration, teachers are able to support growth and development while improving their practices. Collaboration includes such activities as co-planning and teaching lessons, brainstorming ideas, conducting action research, inter-classroom observations (peer coaching), and the reflection and dialogue that follows in post-observation conferences” (Zepeda, 2003, p. 51). Several strategies that instructional leaders can do to support collaboration include modeling teamwork within the school, providing common planning time as a means of supporting collaboration within grade-levels, and encouraging teachers to observe peers as a form of collaboration. Mead (2011) explained the relationship between collaboration and effective schools:

In effective schools, teachers work very differently, engaging in regular collaboration around lesson planning, data analysis, and shared problem solving. Principals play a key role in creating and sustaining this culture of collaboration, including creating
opportunities for teachers to engage in collaborative planning and joint professional development within and across grade levels. (p. 7)

Therefore, instructional leaders must provide opportunities for teachers to plan together regularly. During collaborative sessions, attention should be given to best practices, planning lessons together, sharing resources, and teaching one another (Keefe and Jenkins, 1991).

“Personal mastery and group mastery feed on each other in learning organizations. People need one another to learn and to accomplish things” (Fullan, 1993, p. 17). Without collaboration, teachers can feel isolated. Isolation of teachers is not an effective practice because, “privacy of practice produces isolation; isolation is the enemy of improvement” (p. 130). “It imposes a ceiling effect on inquiry and learning” (p. 34). When teachers work in isolation, they do not learn from others. “In short, without collaborative skills and relationships it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as you need in order to be an agent for societal improvement” (p. 18). Instructional leaders encourage collaboration, not isolation (Zepeda, 2003). Sharing instructional practices allows teachers to be the source of knowledge, and this knowledge has more impact on professional growth than outside assistance (Blase & Blase, 2004). Both teachers and students benefit when teachers work together in collaborative setting to improve instructional practices (Zepeda, 2003).

Principals must accept their roles as the instructional leader within the school and seek ways to improve their instructional skills to effectively perform this increasingly important responsibility. “Our education system was never designed to deliver the kind of
results we now need to equip students for the world today and our future. To respond appropriately, we need to rethink and redesign” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 1). To accomplish this challenge, principals must rethink leadership and begin to take on the role of instructional leader. SOCL acknowledges the importance of instructional leadership in improving student achievement and helping principals become effective instructional leaders.

**Organizational Sensemaking**

The theoretical framework informing this study is organizational sensemaking. The concept literally means making sense of things. Developed in the 1970s by Karl Weick, this theory explains how people make sense of reality. “Sensemaking is generally understood to be the cognitive act of taking in information, framing it, and using it to determine actions and behaviors in a way that manages meaning for individuals” (Evans, 2007, p. 161). People interested in sensemaking focus on constructing meaning through inquiry. Sensemaking also involves individual and social activity. Spillane and colleagues (2002) review of sensemaking revealed that, “social interactions can aid sensemaking not only because individuals learn from one another but also because group interactions bring insights and perspectives to the surface that otherwise might not be made visible to the group” (p. 406). These social interactions can bring new perspectives and understanding to vague situations. Weick (1995) stated sensemaking is understood as a process that is:

1. Grounded in identity construction: Sensemaking begins with making sense. It is the process of discovering what is going on based on the individual sensemaker. Each individual
makes different sense of situations. “I make sense of whatever happens around me by asking, what implications do these events have for who I will be” (p. 23).

2. Retrospective: One makes sense by examining history. It is a reflective step that examines past experiences. “Actions are known only when they have been completed, which means we are always a little behind or our actions are always a bit ahead of us” (p. 26).

3. Enactive of sensible environments: Action is an important part of this characteristic. It is action that produces the environment. Weiss claimed, “People are very much a part of their own environment. They act, and in doing so create the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face” (p. 31).

4. Social: Sensemaking is a social process. What a person does depends on social influences. This social process affects how people interpret actions. “People who study sensemaking pay a lot of attention to talk, discourse, and conversation because that is how a great deal of social contact is mediated” (p. 41).

5. Ongoing: Sensemaking never starts or stops. It is an ongoing process. Interruptions and emotions are two terms associated with ongoing actions. Weiss suggested that interruptions are signs that change has occurred. Emotion occurs because of the change or interruption. “Emotion is what happens between the time that an organized sequence is interrupted and the time at which the interruption is removed, or a substitute response is found that allows the sequence to be completed” (p. 46).

6. Focused on and by extracted cues: This characteristic of sensemaking focuses on extracting information to make sense of the situation. “Extracting cues are simple, familiar
structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (p. 50).

7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy: Decision making and findings are often based on what is reasonable. Weick maintained that accuracy is good but not required in sensemaking studies. “Sensemaking is about plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention, and instrumentality” (p. 57).

Through the lens of sensemaking, this study will gleam principals’ perceptions of the initial implementation of SOCL. These perceptions will be obtained from participants’ existing knowledge and how they frame, construct, and interpret (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002) the meaning of SOCL implementation. Framing this study from a sensemaking perspective will allow the researcher to discern principals’ understanding of SOCL and their beliefs about SOCL and discover how principals’ understanding and beliefs are connected with their instructional leadership practices.

Factors that Influence Sensemaking in Schools

Sensemaking is about how people select information and make meaning of that information. Principals’ actions to implement reforms are influenced by how they make sense of the reform initiatives. Researchers have found that there are different factors that influence teachers’ sensemaking in schools (e.g., Coburn 2005; Spillane, 2000). Specifically, as Coburn (2005) explains, researchers have found that teachers are influenced by their preexisting knowledge and practices (Coburn, 2001; Guthrie 1990; Spillane et al., 2002), structural conditions of workplaces (Coburn, 2001, Siskin, 1994, Spillane, 2000), leadership
line norms that define an acceptable range of responses (Lin, 2000; Siskin, 1994), and their connections to policy messages, such as the specificity of the policy (Hill, 2001), the extent to which implementing the policy is voluntary (Coburn, 2004), and the principals’ content knowledge (Coburn, 2005). Sensemaking is also influenced by social interaction with others: “Sensemaking is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others (Weick, 1995, p. 40). This research, however, focuses on teachers. The research on principals’ sensemaking—how they come to understand and implement policies—is limited.

Principals use sensemaking to make meaning of and respond to educational decisions including school program decisions, interpreting memos, policies, and daily school practices (Evans, 2007). “Principals draw on their own conceptions of what new policy ideas or approaches entail as they make decisions about what to bring in and emphasize, as they discuss approaches with teachers, and as they shape opportunities for teacher learning. These conceptions are shaped by the nature and depth of principals’ knowledge about instruction and teacher learning” (Coburn, 2005, p. 501). School leaders use their knowledge and history to determine how they react to situations. Instructional leaders also draw on numerous aspects of their lives including professional development, training, knowledge, and their experiences when interpreting information and making decisions (Ingle et. al., 2011).

It is understandable that much of the work on implementation has focused on teachers—they ultimately implemented many of the reforms of the last few decades. However, more recent reforms have focused on the thoughts and actions of principals. As
such, it is important to understand what factors influence how principals understand and implement policies that directly affect their actions, such as SOCL, which aims to improve principals’ abilities to be instructional leaders. Extending the work of teachers’ sensemaking to principals’ sensemaking will allow us to more fully understand how principals understand and enact reforms. By providing insight into the mechanisms which influence principals’ interpretation and adaption of SOCL, this study will lead us to a more complete understanding of what conditions support or facilitate substantive implementation of instructional leadership reforms.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter highlighted the importance of conducting implementation studies of educational programs. The program being evaluated, SOCL, was described in detail and the literature on instructional leadership, the targeted outcome of SOCL, was also reviewed. Lastly, the key components of sensemaking and factors that influence sensemaking in school settings were explained. The following chapter outlines the methodology of this study. It includes descriptions of site and participation selection, data collection, and analysis procedures.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature on program implementation, SOCL, instructional leadership and sensemaking. This chapter will review the purpose of this study and describe the methods used in this multiple case study. Specifically, this chapter explains the study’s data collection and analysis procedures. Processes to establish trustworthiness are related as well. This chapter also includes a subjectivity statement, which addresses potential researcher biases.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to document the perceptions of principals’ experiences of the first three years of the implementation of SOCL. This study examined the extent to which principals implemented the SOCL program as designed, with particular attention to understanding which aspects of SOCL were most and least likely to be implemented with fidelity.

The main research question for this study was: How are principals implementing Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory? To answer the primary research question, three supporting questions were explored:

1. To what extent is Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory implemented with fidelity?

2. What factors facilitate the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?
3. What factors impede the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?

**Research Design: Multiple Case Study**

This study sought to understand principals’ experiences with implementing SOCL. Drawing on sensemaking theory, I sought to not only discern participants’ knowledge of and beliefs about SOCL, but also to discover how their understanding connected with their instructional practices. Qualitative research design was employed to answer the research questions. Qualitative research is an ideal design for this study examining the implementation of SOCL because it provides the opportunity for thorough descriptions (Merriam, 1998) and answers how and why questions (Yin, 2003). Because this research focuses on understanding how principals carried out SOCL and why they engaged in certain SOCL practices and neglected others, qualitative research is the appropriate methodology approach for this study. Additionally, a qualitative study allows researchers to understand individuals’ perceptions and gain insights about how they make sense of the world (Merriam, 1998). Because this study seeks to understand the implementation of SOCL from principals’ perspectives, with a focus on their knowledge of and beliefs about SOCL and what influences their knowledge and beliefs, this study is concerned with principals, meaning of a phenomenon and thus lends itself to a qualitative design. Stake (2006) explained that, “qualitative case study was developed to study the experiences of real cases operating in real situations” (p. 3). Qualitative studies are “naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the
phenomenon of interest (e.g., a group, event, program, community, relationship, or interaction)” (Patton, 2002, p. 39). Creswell (2007) described qualitative research as:

An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p 15)

Qualitative research lends itself to inquiry through a variety of data collection methods “that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, using inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subjects point of view” (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 274).

Qualitative methods allow researchers to gather rich data with regard to descriptions of people and places that are not obtained in quantitative methods (Conger, 1998).

A multiple case study design will provide deeper insight into an issue (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008; Stake, 1995). This study used a multiple case study format to describe the implementation of SOCL. Case studies are designed to expand meaning and understanding. They are like funnels because they start broad and end with a narrow focus (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Merriam (1998) described a case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii). A multiple case study examines multiple settings or participants in order to understand a phenomenon (Stake, 2006) and are conducted to gain in-depth understanding of situations (Klenke, 2008; Merriam, 1998). This multiple case study provided an in-depth method of inquiry on the implementation of SOCL. Yin (2003)
explained that a benefit of case study design is that it provides a holistic comprehensive picture of the case or cases.

**Data Sources**

When conducting multiple case studies, it is important to consider the types of data collection methods that produce rich descriptions. “Qualitative methods are first and foremost research methods. They are ways of finding out what people do, know, think, and feel by observing, interviewing, and analyzing documents” (Patton, 2002, p. 145). Huberman and Miles (2002) suggested that case studies rely on observations, interviews, questionnaires, and document reviews. Creswell (2007) pointed out that these forms of data collection provide the researcher the ability to build an in-depth picture of the study. Because this study seeks to understand knowledge and beliefs—meaning—the primary source of data will be interviews.

Participants were selected using criteria-based sampling. In criteria sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, all participants must meet the specific criteria established by the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined purposeful sampling as “choosing subjects, places, and other dimensions of a research site to include in your research to enlarge your analysis or to test particular emerging themes and working hypothesis” (p. 274). Purposeful sampling is ideal when conducting qualitative research (Merriam, 1998) because in qualitative research it is essential to select participants from which the most can be learned. Additionally, participants are chosen because they can provide understanding and insight to the study. The criteria for participant selection are: (a) current principals in the
county of study and (b) at the current school for five or more years. Establishing the criteria of five years at the current school allowed participants to consider their instructional leadership practices at their site before the implementation of SOCL with their leadership practices after the implementation of SOCL. Based on these criteria, only three principals in the district selected for study were eligible to participate in this study. There is no specific number of participants necessary to conduct a qualitative study. Merriam (1998) suggested that instead, the amount of participants depends on how many are needed to answer the research questions.

Prior to and during data collection, contextual data was collected to provide information about the district and the individual schools. The principals work in a small rural county in a southeastern state. This school system serves approximately 9,000 students and employs 560 certified teachers. The student population is comprised of 51% White, 38% Black, 9% Hispanic, and 1% Asian, and 1% Native American. In addition, about 50% of the students in this county receive free or reduced lunch.

Description of the Schools

The principals of study worked at schools identified by the pseudonyms, Apple Elementary, Bumblebee Elementary, and Cabbage Patch Middle School. These fictitious names were used to maintain confidentiality. The three schools are located in various parts of the rural county and are all part of the same school district. A brief description of each school follows.
Apple Elementary

Apple Elementary is located in the northern part of the county. It is a rural K-5 elementary school. The school was built in 1955. It currently serves 394 students. The student population is 52% Caucasian, 30% African-American, 10% Hispanic, and 8% Multi-Racial. Approximately 65% of the students participate in the free or reduced lunch program.

There are 24 classroom teachers, 1 counselor, 1 librarian, 1 principal, 1 assistant principal, and 15 support staff. Approximately 25% of the staff is National Board Certified. In addition, 83% of the staff has been at Apple Elementary for more than 10 years.

In 2010-2011, the school received no recognition for their performance on the state test with an overall proficiency level of 65.8% in grades 3 through 5. The school had a staff turnover rate of 0%. The principal of Apple Elementary has been in this position for 10 years.

Bumblebee Elementary

Bumblebee is a K-5 elementary school located in the center of a small city in the county. The school was built in 1911 and held its centennial celebration this year. Bumblebee Elementary currently serves 508 students. The student population is 60% African-American, 25% Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, 5% Multi-Racial, and 3% Asian. Approximately 80% of the students participate in the free or reduced lunch program. This school has the highest percentage of free and reduced lunch population and the lowest state test scores in the county.
There are 34 classroom teachers, 1 counselor, 1 librarian, 1 principal, 1 assistant principal, and 18 support staff. Approximately 14% of the staff is National Board Certified. In addition, 50% of the staff have been at Bumblebee Elementary for more than 10 years.

In 2010 - 2011, the school received a designation of Priority School for their continued low performance on the state tests with an overall proficiency level of 43% in grades 3 through 5. The school had a staff turnover rate of 11% last year. The principal of Bumble Elementary has been in this position at this school for six years.

**Cabbage Patch Middle School**

Cabbage Patch Middle School is located in the southern part of the county. It is a rural middle school with grades 6 - 8. The school was built in 1940. It currently serves 630 students. The student population is 69% Caucasian, 20% African-American, 10% Hispanic, and 1% Multi-Racial. Approximately 40% of the students participate in the free or reduced lunch program.

There are 36 classroom teachers, 1 counselor, 1 librarian, 1 principal, 1 assistant principal, and 20 support staff. Approximately 16% of the staff is National Board Certified. In addition, only 33% of the staff have been at Cabbage Patch Middle School for more than 10 years. On average, half of the staff has worked there between four and ten years.

In 2010 - 2011, the school received the designation of School of Distinction for their performance on the state test with an overall proficiency level of 71% in grades 6 through 8. Last year, the school had a staff turnover rate of 17%. The principal of Cabbage Patch Middle School has been the principal for five years.
Data Collection

Qualitative data are a reflection of words rather than numbers (Miles & Huberman, 2002). To put it differently, qualitative data are verbally descriptive instead of statistical (Klenke, 2008). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) referred to the data collection process as fieldwork. During fieldwork, researchers go to the participants to gather qualitative data in the natural.

Creswell (2007) suggested four main types of qualitative data collection sources: observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials. In order to use these data collection methods, the researcher submitted an application to North Carolina State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to gain access to the sites and participants that were selected based on the criteria. After receiving IRB approval, the researcher met with the superintendent of the district and obtained a written informed consent to conduct the study. Table 3.1 summarizes the data collection process. Then, the researcher contacted each principal by phone, explained the study to each person and requested permission to meet with him/her at his/her school. At the meeting, the study was explained in detail. I emphasized that the results would be confidential. Informed consent was obtained from participants. (see Appendices A, B, and C for consent forms)
Table 3.1

Summary of Data Collection Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Post-observation Interview</th>
<th>Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. West Initial Interview</td>
<td>2 Observations Positive Reinforcement Coaching</td>
<td>Questions focused on Coaching sessions</td>
<td>* Agendas *Teacher talent sheets *Reflective rubric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. East Initial Interview</td>
<td>2 Observations Positive Reinforcement Coaching</td>
<td>Questions focused on Coaching sessions</td>
<td>*Copy of calendar *Implementation Schedule *Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. North Initial Interview</td>
<td>2 Observations Positive Reinforcement Coaching</td>
<td>Questions focused on Coaching sessions</td>
<td>*Agendas *Walk-through rubric</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews

Interviews were the main source of data collection for this study. Face-to-face interviews are the most popular form of data collection methods in educational studies (Merriam, 1998). After receiving permission from the superintendent and the principals, I scheduled a time to interview each participant. Each interview took place in the principal’s office and lasted approximately 60 minutes. The researcher used an interview protocol (see Appendix D) during the interview. To create the interview protocol, I reviewed dissertations,
implementation studies, and An Educators’ Guide to School Reform (American Institute for Research, 1999; Carlin, 2008; Stone, 2009; Matsumura et al., 2009; Wiltshire, 2006). After identifying possible questions, I used my knowledge of SOCL to adapt questions to better fit the purpose of this study and elicit information related to each research question. My knowledge of SOCL is based on interviews with the creator of the program, Mike Rutherford, and participation in the SOCL professional development workshops. I intentionally selected questions that allowed for open-ended responses and provided principals the opportunity to offer both positive and negative feedback about the implementation process. The last question allowed for participants to offer any insights that they believed had not been shared in their responses to previous questions. The final interview protocol was semi-structured and included approximately 11 questions. Semi-structured questions allow participants to share their experiences and knowledge (Klenke, 2008). Semi-structured questions, which also combine structured and unstructured-type questions, also allow the researcher to ask probing questions to elicit information. In addition, these types of questions allow participants to describe their understanding of elements related to the study (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviors, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). “Interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Therefore, interviews were an important part of data collection in this study. Interviewing principals was appropriate for this study because the focus was on how principals made meaning—their
knowledge, belief, and experiences with SOCL—what influenced their sensemaking and how their sensemaking influences their practice. The interviews allowed me to discern their point of view—their experiences on their own terms (Klenke, 2008). Because this study focused on principals and understanding their perceptions with regard to the implementation of an instructional leadership program. Teacher and student perceptions were not needed for the understanding of the implementation of SOCL with regard to their instructional leadership. Additionally, principals were the targets of the SOCL program—they attended the professional development and it was their thoughts and actions the SOCL program was attempting to change.

While conducting the interviews, it was important to record participants’ responses to allow for analysis of data. To ensure candor and thus obtain an accurate and full account, I established a rapport with participants and communicated a sincere appreciation for their comments in a nonjudgmental manner. Interviews were recorded electronically and then transcribed. Verbatim transcription provides accurate data for analysis (Merriam, 1998). At the end of the interview, I scheduled a time to visit the school during a SOCL coaching session to complete two observations for each principal. Lastly, I interviewed Mike Rutherford of RLG who designed SOCL. My interview with Mr. Rutherford provided me information about SOCL including the research design, meaning, and implementation expectations.
Observations

After arranging a time to conduct two school observations, I visited each school and used an observation protocol to track the actual use of SOCL in the schools. The protocol was created from the SOCL coaching workbook (Rutherford, 2007). Each coaching session has a specific format to follow and the observation protocol reflects this format in order to observe the use of SOCL by principals. Huberman and Miles (2002) insisted that during observations, it is essential to document what is occurring in the natural setting as opposed to writing down what one thinks is important. Data from observations should consist of “detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviors, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). During observations, researchers can discover things that participants have forgotten or failed to mention. Thus, information gathered from observations, could be used to substantiate findings from the interviews (Merriam, 1998).

Site observations were scheduled during a SOCL coaching session between the principal and a teacher. Each coaching session took place in a teacher’s classrooms. At the beginning of the coaching session, I explained the study to the teacher participating in the coaching session. Then I obtained informed consent from each teacher to observe the coaching session. I sought to observe the principal implementing SOCL by utilizing an SOCL coaching checklist developed in conjunction with SOCL program developer to ensure that the observation checklist was accurate and complete. Each coaching session has required steps for implementation. The checklist allowed me to systematically document the
fidelity of implementation. The observation protocol used in this study is located in Appendix E. During the observations, I documented any management tasks completed by the principal.

Immediately following each observation, the principal and I returned to the principal’s office where I asked how they made sense of the observation (See post-questions in Appendix D). This portion was recorded electronically and then transcribed.

**Document Analysis**

I also collected documents from each principal that supported the implementation of SOCL. These documents included principals’ walk-through notes from informal visits to teachers’ classrooms, memos to teachers relating to SOCL, staff meeting agendas, teacher talent documents created by principals, and calendar dates of scheduled coaching sessions and documentation of coaching sessions. The documents provided additional data about how principals implemented SOCL in their schools. These documents served as the third component of data triangulation necessary to ensure trustworthiness. Merriam (1998) defined the three major types of documents for analysis as public records, personal documents, and physical material. “Document analysis includes studying excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records, memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries; and open-ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). These important documents added to the rich data that was collected in order to discover principals’
knowledge and beliefs about SOCL relating to their actions (i.e., practice) regarding the implementation of SOCL.

**Data Analysis**

“Qualitative analysis seeks to capture the richness of people’s experiences in their own terms. It involves the nonnumerical organization of data patterns, themes, and qualities found in field notes, interviews, transcriptions, diaries, and cases” (Klenke, 2008, p. 10). The process of scanning and organizing the data collected to reveal findings is data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002). Data analysis for this study occurred concurrent with the collection of data. By analyzing the data as it was collected, I reduced the chances of being overwhelmed by the amount of raw data. The process of open coding was used to organize and interpret the data. “Open coding is designed to express data in form of concepts” (Klenke, 2008, p. 93). Using open coding allowed me to discover and label common themes in the data.

Coding data is an essential step when interpreting the research findings. Developing themes within the data allows the researcher to turn chaos and confusion into manageable findings (Patton, 2002). Following Klenke’s (2008) recommendation, coding was based on the research questions, and was guided by the theoretical framework of the study. For this study, I completed the coding by hand to discover common themes in the data that reflected the purpose of the study. I read through all interview transcripts and made comments in the margins of possible themes. The first reading aimed to find recurring themes. As Merriam (1998) pointed out, the categories developed from the coding should answer the research
questions. The second and third rounds of coding involved systematic coding according to the themes. I focused on certain “words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects’ ways of thinking, and events [that] repeat and stand out” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 173). I looked for themes using within-case and cross-case analysis, focusing on similarities and differences in perceptions. Observations and documents were analyzed in the same manner as the interview transcripts.

**Trustworthiness**

To increase the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation was used to verify claims. Creswell (2007) explained that triangulation “involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 202). Methodological triangulation is the use of several methods to gather data to enhance the validity of a claim (Patton, 2002) that is, it refers to verifying facts through multiple data sources (Klenke, 2008). Using several methods of data collection strengthens the credibility of a study (Merriam, 1998). There was a triangulation of data collected until data saturation occurred—when adding additional data did not lead to additional insights. Additionally, participants were encouraged to be frank. To ensure honesty, participants were told that they could refuse to participate, were ensured confidentiality, and every effort was made to create a rapport. Thick rich description was provided to promote credibility as well. I also performed member checks to improve the accuracy of my findings. Specifically, I shared with each principal my key findings and then asked them if my interpretation of the data accurately reflected their thoughts and actions. All three principals concurred with my interpretations.
Limitations

There are four possible limitations to this study. First, only principals that have served in their current school for five or more years were selected to participate in this study. Based on this sample criterion, only three principals in the district selected for study were eligible to participate in this study. The findings may not be applicable to principals with less than five years of experience. However, Klenke (2008) suggested that sample size in qualitative research does not drive the study. It is more important to use purposeful sampling in order to select participants who will be able to contribute to the depth of the study. Therefore, purposive selection of three principals that have participated in the implementation of the study was sufficient to gather the needed data for this study. Second, this study focused on a rural district’s implementation of SOCL. So, principals who use SOCL in an urban or suburban setting or do not have district-level adoption may have different experiences with SOCL.

Third, it is important to note that the implementation of SOCL was a district initiative supported by the superintendent. To ensure that participants spoke freely, I established a rapport with participants and assured participants confidentiality. Therefore, I presume that the participants responded honestly about their perceptions regarding the implementation of SOCL.

Fourth, this study relied on a multiple case study design, which has been criticized as being too subjective, because it allows the researcher to make interpretations of the data (Shull, Singer, & Sjoberg; 2008). I acknowledged my bias with regard to the implementation
of this instructional leadership program in my subjectivity statement and my insider status is not decidedly disadvantageous because it enhances the breadth and depth of understanding of an experience that may not be accessible to outsiders (Kanuha, 2000) and it gives researchers legitimacy (Adler & Adler, 1987). However, in order to address this potential limitation, I have taken Stake’s (2006) and used triangulation. I remained open-minded while collecting and analyzing data and I verified my interpretations with participants in the study.

Lastly, a key advantage of qualitative research is providing detailed descriptions. While I provide considerable details about each theme related to the research questions, some information about the context was not provided to protect the identities of the principals and county.

**Subjectivity Statement**

This study utilized qualitative methods to explore the perceptions of principals implementing SOCL as it relates to instructional leadership. Because the researcher designs and carries out data collection and analyses, a researcher’s biases may affect the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data. The following is a brief description of this researcher’s personal and professional experiences as they relate to the subject.

Instructional leadership is an essential part of my career. As a school principal, it is my professional goal to be a highly effective instructional leader who inspires others to continue to improve. I believe that there is always room for improvement. Therefore, I would consider myself a life-long learner. As such, I read instructional leadership books to gain knowledge and to continue to improve as an instructional leader.
For the past 16 years, I have worked in the county from which data for this study was collected. Currently, I am a principal in this county; and, I am participating in the implementation stage of SOCL and have completed three years of SOCL training. While prior knowledge of SOCL could affect one’s feelings toward the implementation, my position as a researcher is to study the phenomenon. When a researcher studies a phenomenon from within, their position as an insider has the potential to affect their opinion of the topic. Therefore, my experience as a principal in this county has the potential to affect my feelings toward SOCL. However, the combinations of these factors do not prejudice this research.

As I reflect on my role as the researcher in this study, I recognize that there may be several biases I have to address. First and foremost, since I participated in the training of SOCL as an instructional leader, I must recognize the impact of my own personal experiences during the research and not allow my own successes and failures to color the research. Second, I know the participants of the study in a professional capacity, many for several years. The relationships I have established with these administrators have the potential to skew my analysis of the data, as well as what is reported. I must develop a trusting relationship with the participants that will enable them to be honest and forthcoming with me. Additionally, I must maintain their professional integrity and reputations, regardless of what the data reveals. Lastly, I have a vested interest in the research as an administrator in the county. It is my responsibility to ensure that the research findings are applicable not only to my own district, but also to districts across the state and country. As
described in the section on trustworthiness and limitation, I have taken several steps to ensure that my personal biases do not influence this study.

**Ethical Considerations**

It was imperative to ensure that all IRB forms provided by North Carolina State University were completed and approved. In order to safeguard the county and participants in the study, I maintained the confidentiality of each principal by identifying them with pseudonyms. Interview notes and observations were also coded using fictitious labels. All data were stored in a secure data storage location. Also, no references were made in this study that could link participants to this research.

**Chapter Summary**

This study sought to discover similarities and differences in principals’ perceptions of the first phase of district-wide implementation of SOCL in a small, rural school district. In order to understand principals’ perceptions a qualitative multiple case study design was used. Participants were selected through criteria-based sampling. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using open coding procedures to identify themes related to the research questions. Procedures to establish trustworthiness were specified, and a statement of subjectivity was provided. The next chapter describes the findings of this study.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter briefly reviews the purpose of the study and the methodology and then presents the findings. The results are organized into three sections, with each section addressing a research question. Each section is subdivided according to emergent themes revealed during data analysis. This chapter concludes with a brief summary of the findings.

Review of Purpose and Methods

The purpose of this study was to describe principals’ experiences with the first three years of the implementation of SOCL in one school district. This study examined the extent to which principals implemented the SOCL program as designed, with particular attention to understanding which aspects of the SOCL principles were most and least likely to be implemented with fidelity.

The primary research question for this study was: How are principals implementing Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory? Three questions guided this study:

1. To what extent is Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory implemented with fidelity?
2. What factors facilitate the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?
3. What factors impede the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?
A multiple case study design was used to answer the research questions. Data were gathered from interviews, observations, and documents. Interviews were conducted in the school setting. Participants were asked about the implementation of SOCL. Each principal was also observed conducting two coaching sessions. Lastly, principals provided documents related to the implementation of SOCL in their schools. Transcripts from the pre and post–observation interviews, the observation protocol, and documents were open coded to identify themes related to understanding: (a) how principals were implementing SOCL in their schools and (b) what thoughts guided their actions. The results of this study revealed how principals implemented SOCL in their schools and the extent to which actual practices resemble intended delivery of the program (i.e., program fidelity).

**Participants**

Participants were selected using criteria-based sampling. In criteria sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, all participants must meet specific criteria established by the researcher (Creswell, 2007). The criteria for participant selection were: (a) current principals in the county of study and (b) at the current school for five or more years. Based on these sample criteria, only three principals in the district selected for study were eligible to participate in this study.

Due to the small sample size and the possibility of being identified in the county of study, measures were taken to protect their identity. First, each principal was assigned a pseudonym: Ms. Pam East, Ms. Cindy West, and Mr. Van North. Additionally, as a result of the small size of the county of study, these three principals were not linked to the description
of their schools found in chapter three. Background information, beyond what was provided in the methods section, could assist with identifying participants and therefore was not included in this study.

**Finding 1: Implementation Fidelity**

The first research question guiding this study was: To what extent is Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL) implemented with fidelity? According to Mike Rutherford, full implementation of SOCL involves three components: (a) recognizing instructional patterns in the classroom, (b) identifying and retrieving the teacher talents from memory and (c) utilizing the coaching and feedback tools to improve teachers’ skills. So, to describe the extent to which SOCL was implemented, I will discuss principals’ implementation of these components in detail and remark whether the component was implemented with low, medium, or high fidelity. Fidelity ratings were developed from the data provided by the principals, including interviews, observations, and documents. A low fidelity rating means the component was not used at all or very little. A medium rating means the component was used consistently by a principal but not fully implemented. A high rating indicates the component was fully implemented. Table 4.1 summarizes the fidelity ratings that I assigned each principal in the study.
Table 4. 1

Summary of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of SOCL</th>
<th>Level of Fidelity</th>
<th>Overview of Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing Instructional Practices</td>
<td>Ms. West – Medium</td>
<td>- Recognized instructional practices comfortably but merged SOCL observations with formal observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. East – Medium</td>
<td>- Recognized instructional practices comfortably but merged SOCL observations with formal observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. North – Medium</td>
<td>- Recognized instructional practices comfortably but merged SOCL observations with formal observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify and Define Teacher Talents</td>
<td>Ms. West – High</td>
<td>- Identified and defined all teacher talents Taught teacher talents to the staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. East – Medium</td>
<td>- Identified and defined most of the teacher talents Taught teacher talents to the staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. North – Medium</td>
<td>- Identified and defined most of the teacher talents Taught teacher talents to the staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize Coaching and Feedback Tools</td>
<td>Ms. West – Medium</td>
<td>- Utilizes only a few coaching formats but knows the basics of all seven formats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. East – Medium</td>
<td>- Utilizes only a few coaching formats but knows the basics of all seven formats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. North – Low</td>
<td>- Utilizes only one coaching format and knows most of the seven formats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recognizing Instructional Patterns in the Classroom

After three years of implementation, principals in this district should be able to recognize SOCL’s research-based instructional practices when conducting observations. The principals shared that they believe that they could easily identify a teachers instructional patterns when they are observing teachers in the classrooms. The principals indicated that they could recognize instructional patterns because SOCL provided them with a format that focused on instruction. Ms. East, for example, believed that she now focuses on instruction more during classroom visits: “I now know what to look for. SOCL has provided me with a toolbox full of instructional practices. I can identify these practices and then hold a conversation with my teachers. It has created a common language for instruction.” Ms. West also felt that SOCL made her a better classroom observer because she can identify instructional practices in the classroom.

SOCL is best for teachers, and it builds more trust between you and the teacher. And you want to see them continue to do that instructional practice more and more. And then, there are some talents that really do directly impact instruction more, so you really want to see those things like chunking and mental models and local memory. I have been more conscious of that this year. I try to point talents out more to the teachers. Those are the ones that they really need to be focused on more. (Ms. West)

Mr. North agreed that this program caused him to look deeper at instruction when he completed observations.
I think I am adept at going into classrooms and seeing the different elements that we have learned. SOCL has made me a better observer in the classroom. Before, I was looking for mechanics and now, I look for talents, strategies that really make a difference in student achievement. (Mr. North)

Mr. North believed he was a better observer because of SOCL. To recognize instructional patterns, principals must observe teachers. SOCL’s design has observations as stand-alone coaching sessions centered on positive feedback. However, these principals merged SOCL with formal observations for teacher evaluation. This amalgamation was not the intent of SOCL. This change to the design affected the fidelity of adherence to the first key component of SOCL.

Formal observations are a requirement for all principals. It is a task that requires a tremendous amount of time. Although SOCL was designed to support positive coaching sessions between principals and teachers, these principals have merged formal observations and SOCL together. Below is a statement from each principal about why they implemented SOCL with formal observations.

Ms. East stated:

I have used the coaching model to help when doing the post conferences. That is how I do a lot of SOCL. I incorporate it in post conferences. It’s a nice fit and I can complete two tasks at one time. It’s a nice way to add positive feedback during a post conference. I mean, I make a lot of time for observing and doing post conferences, so why not just do them both at the same time? It seems to be more natural for me that
way. We have so much to do and that seems to be the best way to add in SOCL into
my day.

Ms. West stated:

When I go and observe, I try to kill two birds with one stone. To go in and tie a
coaching session in with the required observations we have to do anyway. So I just
bring Mike Rutherford in as well. It’s hard to get it all in. Putting the two together
helps. So, I focus more on SOCL during formal observation times when I have to
observe them anyway.

Mr. North stated:

The most practical way of doing feedback for SOCL is when you are doing a normal
observation. I mean you’re going to see these talents in a formal observation and
you’re going to post-conference so it’s very natural to bring it up during that post
conference outside of your evaluation.

**Identifying and Retrieving the Teacher Talents from Memory**

As explained by Mike Rutherford, principals should be able to identify the 17 teacher
talents and be able to give a 30 second overview of each talent. During the interviews and
observations all three principals named and defined some of the specific teacher talents with
case. Ms. West communicated, “I have a basic knowledge of teacher talents. I can identify
and define them. I mean I know the talents, what they look like, and sound like and being
aware that these talents are part of good teaching keeps me focused on SOCL.” Throughout
the interview, Ms. West named many of the talents, stating, “I feel comfortable picking out
talents. I think I am good at recognizing what their talent is” (Ms. West). She also provided the researcher with a document that she had completed with her staff that defined and identified keywords for each talent. Figure 1 displays the Teacher Talent document completed by the staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talents</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
<th>Examples for Classroom Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conscious Attention</td>
<td>i.e. Focused</td>
<td>touch your nose when you hear an adjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emotional hook</td>
<td>lower your voice if you have a loud voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>paying attention</td>
<td>arouses curiosity / challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discrepancy (something different)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chunking</td>
<td>Break it down</td>
<td>Break down the skills into smaller bits, like long division, and teaching left/right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-7 chunks depending on age: 2 for 5 yr. olds, 3 for 7 yr. olds, 4 for 9 yr. olds, 5 for 11 yr. olds, 6 for 13 yr. olds, 7 for 17+ yr. olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>link</td>
<td>Put new info. wth something they already know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>link to real world / past experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>misconceptions can follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Practice makes permanent</td>
<td>Long: 3-4 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How long, how much, how often, and how well?</td>
<td>Much: small as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Often: immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Important to have students practice in class to make sure the practice is correct before assigning for homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Relevance</td>
<td>Survival or immediate well-being</td>
<td>Nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Safety (rules and processes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1

*Teacher Talent Document*
The other principals in this study also felt comfortable with identifying and defining teacher talents. Mr. North acknowledged, “I can recognize the teacher talents and can define most of them from memory if asked. I use some teacher talents more than others. Those I can recall easily. There are still a few that I do not know by memory.” Ms. East provided a similar response declaring, “I feel comfortable recognizing teacher talents and defining these talents for my staff. I think that SOCL has clearly provided me with the tools to do that. You know a common vocabulary that has increased conversations around good instruction.” Ms. West could identify all talents; however, Ms. East and Mr. North only could recall and identify most talents, they admitted that there were a few talents that they could not recall.

**Identifying teacher talents.** In addition to naming and defining the talents, principals must be able to recognize each teacher’s talents. Ms. East explained that she focused a lot on teacher talents, and she believed that this has helped the teachers in the classroom. Ms. West revealed that teacher talents was a component that she had implemented with comfort.

> I think I’m very good at recognizing what their talent is. What they are strong in. When I tell them that’s their talent, they’re surprised. They do the talent subconsciously. They’re not even aware that they are doing it. That is, I think, the whole thing about SOCL is helping teachers recognize their talent.

Ms. West also believed that her teachers have a solid understanding of SOCL and are familiar with teacher talents. “They know a basic knowledge of these terms, but haven’t really been able to see it in action in other classrooms. They know it from my feedback with them.”
Mr. North knew how to recognize his teachers’ talents and stated, “It’s easy to talk to them when you see a talent.” He also agreed that his teachers don’t realize that they are using or possess an instructional teacher talent. “They normally don’t think about it as a talent, they just do it.” He went on to explain the process that he uses with his teachers when identifying a talent. “If they don’t know that there is some formal name for it, then I get to show them there is some science behind what they’re doing. And help them actually develop it as a talent. This is when coaching takes place.”

**Teaching teachers.** Part of identifying and recognizing talents is to teach the teachers in their respective schools the talents. Allocating a few minutes at staff meetings to support the implementation of SOCL was a common theme among the principals. Ms. East communicated, “We focused on 8 talents with the staff by teaching them in staff meetings and then practicing it for a month and then observing other teachers and sharing when that teacher talent was noticed.” Ms. East continued, “At some of the staff meetings we discussed a few teacher talents. We also talked about reflective planning and teacher studies. I explained the purpose of these sessions before we tried them.” (see Figure 2 for the Teacher Talent document that displays this school’s schedule for learning different talents at staff meetings.)
Figure 2

Teacher Talent Implementation Schedule
Ms. West believed that one of the most successful strategies for teaching talents that she used occurred at staff meetings during share time. (see Appendix E for an example)

At staff meetings we would have share time. So, I wrote down all the different things that I had observed them doing and I wrote down on the side what I had post-conferenced with them on, which talent. And so, I would, at a staff meeting, say ‘Well, I observed so and so and this is the coaching session I did.’ Then we talked about the coaching session and the talent. (Ms. West)

Mr. North also taught teacher talents during staff meetings. However, he selected a teacher talent each month to introduce to his staff. He had staff meeting agendas (see Appendix F) for an example documenting the focus on teacher talents that support this implementation plan. The findings revealed that generally principals could recall and define most teacher talents and principals sought to teach teachers about the different talents.

**Utilizing the Coaching and Feedback Tools to Improve Teachers’ Skills**

SOCL explicitly addresses the concept of coaching teachers to improve classroom instruction. Rutherford (2007) defined coaching sessions as the different ways in which instructional conversations take place in order to impact teachers’ talents and their instructional delivery methods. SOCL consists of seven instructional coaching sessions including: 30 second feedback, 5 minute feedback, reflective planning sessions, positive reinforcement coaching, instructional planning sessions, small group coaching, and teacher studies. Table 4.2 describes each of the SOCL coaching sessions. These coaching sessions
are meant to focus on coaching teachers in a positive aspect to support instruction. Principals must use one of the seven coaching formats to provide feedback to the teachers.

Table 4.2

Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory Coaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching Session</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 Second Feedback</td>
<td>A quick reinforcement session that links a specific teaching practice to a specific learning outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Minute Feedback</td>
<td>A brief conversation that identifies a specific teaching practice, links the practice to a principle of learning, describes the effect on learning and learnings, and engages the teacher in a short dialog affirming the feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Planning</td>
<td>A pre-planning session that seeks to engage the teacher in a brief planning session focusing on an upcoming lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reinforcement Coaching</td>
<td>A coaching session that is help after an observation that seeks to build upon the teacher’s use of effective practices in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Coaching</td>
<td>A proactive method designed to add a new skill to a teacher’s instructional practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Coaching</td>
<td>A collaborative planning session where a small group of teachers plan lessons while focusing on a common instructional goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Studies</td>
<td>A collaborative planning session where a small group of teachers observe a lesson and discuss effective practices observed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the interview, Ms. West named every coaching session and explained how she used them in the school. She was knowledgeable about all seven coaching formats. “It’s part of my responsibility to coach teachers. I do it because I know teachers crave feedback and they should have feedback. And so I try to coach to just help them improve their teaching.” Ms. West discussed the variety of coaching sessions including the small group sessions that she has utilized in her school. “I do a lot of thirty second feedback and I have given and done some instructional coaching sessions. I guess they’re really probably the hardest. The reflective planning, which I love, I like that one the most. But it’s hard to get in.” Ms. West also explained how she had implemented the positive reinforcement coaching session after completing a formal observation and the 30 second feedback during busy times. During the coaching session observations, she used the positive reinforcement coaching format with both of the teachers being coached.

All three principals have struggled with implementing all seven coaching sessions. Ms. West communicated, “It’s a lot to keep up with and remember.” During the observation part of this study, Ms. West completed two positive reinforcement coaching sessions. She struggled with step three of giving the teachers real life examples of the teacher talent. In addition, she disregarded step six where she obtained feedback from the teachers about how they felt about the coaching sessions. During the coaching sessions she did not use her SOCL coaching book, but instead used her notes from a spiral tablet.
Although Ms. East was fully aware of the different coaching sessions, she was not using all of the coaching sessions. Coaching sessions are meant to focus on coaching teachers in a positive aspect. During these sessions, only information relating to teacher talent and instruction, rather than negative feedback, are discussed. Ms. East believed, “SOCL has [had] improved my ability to provide positive feedback. It has increased my knowledge and coaching skills so that I can offer more feedback.” Ms. East used positive reinforcement coaching session for both of the observations that the researcher conducted. When asked about coaching sessions, Ms. East replied, “It’s a nice way to add positive feedback during conferences. I think this program has really helped me provide positive feedback. Teachers need this.” Ms. East favored the 30 second feedback session the most. “It’s my favorite because its quick but specific, but I also used 5 minute feedback when there is time. I have done most coaching sessions, but probably 30 second feedback, reflective planning and teacher studies more than others.

Although there are seven coaching formats, Mr. North consistently only used one format. “I typically use five minute feedback. I practice this session frequently. I’m not as adept as I want to be in small group coaching sessions.” He presented the researcher with 51 walk-through documents as artifacts (see Appendix G for an example). These documents all supported the format for five minute feedback. He used five minute feedback in both of the observations as well. When asked why he only uses one format, he explained, “This format lends itself to the schools’ daily schedule. You can go into a classroom and walk through for
seven to ten minutes, get some data. Come out, look at it, and then talk to the teacher with a five minute feedback session.”

Mr. North has implemented teacher studies and five minute feedback coaching sessions in his school. He preferred five minute feedback the most and suggested that he was not as comfortable with the small group coaching sessions. Mr. North explained how he has implemented five minute feedback in his school. “I have used SOCL as a coaching tool. I do walk-through observations by going into classrooms to identify talents that I see. I come back and look at the talent, discuss it with the teacher. Share the talent with them and why I see that as a talent and how it can be improved upon.”

Table 4.3 identifies the coaching sessions that each principal said that they implemented and table 4.4 points out their preferred formats. Overall, the findings indicate that principals can name and describe the different coaching formats but when it comes to use, they each have a preferred format. Further, their preferences differ.
Table 4.3

*Coaching Sessions Implemented by Principals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>30 Second Feedback</th>
<th>Five Minute Feedback</th>
<th>Reflective Planning</th>
<th>Positive Reinforcement Coaching</th>
<th>Instructional Coaching</th>
<th>Small Group</th>
<th>Teacher Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. East</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. West</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. North</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4

*Preferred Coaching Format*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>30 Second Feedback</th>
<th>Five Minute Feedback</th>
<th>Reflective Planning</th>
<th>Positive Reinforcement Coaching</th>
<th>Instructional Coaching</th>
<th>Small Group</th>
<th>Teacher Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. East</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. West</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. North</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data also revealed that coaching sessions were being implemented during collaborative planning sessions. Instructional leaders can support collaboration by modeling teamwork within the school and by providing common planning time as a means of supporting collaboration within grade levels. Two of the principals in this study discussed
their experiences with SOCL as it related to implementing coaching sessions during collaborative planning sessions.

Last year I did more reflective planning sessions during grade-level planning. I started finding out that some of my teams, my grade levels were not jiving. Some of the teachers were doing all the planning and telling the others what to do. The other teachers felt like it was not a planning session. I used the reflective planning format to support grade level planning. It worked well with me facilitating. (Ms. East)

Ms. West had the same experience with reflective planning sessions. When practicing this session with some of the grade levels, she discovered that they were not planning effectively to improve classroom instruction.

I did this reflective planning format with the teachers. They had all these neat ideas and all of that, but they were not linking assessment to their instruction. We had a lot of discussion about that after we went through the process with the teachers…. So, I think that’s made the teachers more aware of why they’re teaching a skill and how are they going to assess it. So, it was an eye opener for me as well as the teachers. (Ms. West)

Utilizing reflective planning coaching sessions during collaborative planning sessions provided these two principals with surprising information about how their teachers were working together.

**Mechanisms that Influence Principals’ Sensemaking of SOCL**

The previous section focused on what principals did in regards to implementing SOCL
and explained to what extent those actions matched program design. However, principals’ actions to implement reforms are influenced by how they make sense of the reform initiatives.

As Table 4.5 shows, the findings revealed that possessing program knowledge, pre-existing frameworks, structural of school conditions, social interactions, connection to policy, principal identity as instructional leader, and positive affect influenced their implementation of SOCL and their actions to implement SOCL.
Table 4.5

**Mechanisms that Influenced Interpretation and Implementation of SOCL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanisms</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possessing Content Knowledge</td>
<td>Principals became more familiar with what being an instructional leaders entailed and were comfortable undertaking the role of Instructional leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relying on Pre-existing Knowledge</td>
<td>Principals relied on knowledge of another evaluation tool, TPAI, to make meaning of SOCL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to Structural Conditions</td>
<td>Responding to working conditions, principals modified components of SOCL to meet practical needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Sense Through Social Interactions</td>
<td>Principals discussed components of SOCL with each other to gain understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing the Policy to be Meaningful</td>
<td>Principals genuinely believed that SOCL improved their instructional leadership skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying as Instructional Leader</td>
<td>Principals believed that being an instructional leader is an important function of being a principal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Positive</td>
<td>Providing positive feedback to teachers produced positive feelings for the principals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possessing Program Knowledge

Developed by the Rutherford Learning Group (RLG), the Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL) is a professional development program that focuses on high-performance teaching and effective school leadership. The mission of RLG is to significantly enhance the quality of education for children and youth through the personal and professional development of educators. Because principals play an important role in the instructional improvement of schools, improving principals’ instructional leadership skills is a focus of RLG.

Understanding program purpose. All principals reported a clear understanding of the purpose of SOCL. With ease they identified that SOCL was designed to improve classroom instruction by strengthening teachers’ talents. Ms. East stated, “It is a program that focuses on the strength of teachers instead of their faults. When a teacher is recognized to be good at a talent, the principal coaches the teacher on that talent so that they can get even better.” This principal believed that the focus on teachers’ strengths was refreshing and well received by teachers. She also believed that, “SOCL builds confidence in my teachers and I feel good about that.”

Focusing on the teachers’ strengths is an essential part of SOCL. Ms. West also commented on teachers’ strengths when she was asked to describe SOCL. “We’re always telling the teachers to teach from the children’s strengths. SOCL allows us to do the same with our teachers. It homes in on what they’re doing well and we coach them to continue to improve that talent.” This principal understood the purpose of SOCL and the impact that it
can have on teachers. She went on to say, “It has been the most effective training I’ve ever had as a principal because it’s a better way to observe teaching in our schools.”

When Mr. North was asked to describe the SOCL program, he responded:

    SOCL means to me teacher talent development and identifying talents the teachers have. Talking with them, coaching them, trying to strengthen them as a teacher in the classroom. Finding ways to help kids learn better. The purpose of SOCL is simply to help teachers improve their craft.

Mr. North identified positive instructional conversations as an integral part of SOCL. He felt that SOCL was supportive and helped to build positive relations between him and his teachers.

    The findings revealed that their knowledge of instructional leadership learned from SOCL made them feel more comfortable as instructional leaders.

    I think I am adept at going into classrooms and seeing the different elements that we have learned. SOCL has made me a better observer in the classroom. Before, I was looking for mechanics and now, I look for talents, strategies that really make a difference in student achievement. (Mr. North)

Although all three principals visited and observed classrooms before SOCL, this instructional leadership program provided a concrete format that made the classroom visits more purposeful. Ms. East and Ms. West both supported this finding of improved observation skills.
Relying on Pre-existing Frameworks

When implementing SOCL, principals made connections to their existing knowledge. The principals were all trained to observe teachers using a format called the Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument (TPAI). This training affected how they made sense of and used SOCL. Ms. West commented on how the TPAI led her to be “nitpicky.” She explained:

Well, so many times in the past when I observed, I was trying to catch the teacher doing something wrong. In fact, no matter how good the lesson was, I always felt like well, I had to find something that they needed to improve upon. A lot of times it was nitpicky. That made me feel bad, but it was how I was trained. But now, when I look back, those nitpicky comments did not improve instruction in the classroom. But, I was doing what I was trained to do.

Mr. North agreed with Ms. West’s beliefs that the TPAI did not help improve instruction, remarking:

I used to judge. In an observation, it was positives versus negatives. And I always just hoped that the positives outweighed the negatives. It was how I was trained and I thought it was the right way. It was scripted: teacher starts classes on time, materials were ready and not really an instructional focus. Looking back, I can’t say that I helped teachers improve their craft.
Ms. East added, “Before, I just said what I noticed without giving it much thought. It was about catching them doing something wrong. Gosh, now I know why observations always made teachers so nervous. The feedback was never going to be good.”

Although all three principals communicated that the TPAI focused on negative feedback not effective for improving instruction, they all used some components of the TPAI when implementing SOCL. Ms. West, for example, admitted that changing how she observed teachers was hard at times and she still used some of the TPAI components.

It was how I was trained to observe. I still take notes on how long it takes for transitions and if materials are ready and classroom management but just because that was the first training I got as an administrator. It’s how we observed teachers for years and years. I have been observing for years. This is a different way for me.

The scripting was another component from the TPAI that these principals used during classroom visits. Scripting consists of writing down the majority of what the teacher says during a classroom visit. “I still take notes when I am in the classroom. I script things out” (Ms. West). “Scripting is just part of my routine. I tried not to do it, but it did not feel right. What if a teacher had a question about what I saw? I need my notes to prove it” (Mr. North). Ms. East shared, “I script during the lesson. Then I can go back to my office and reflect on the observation. It helps me remember.”

These behaviors’ were familiar practice that seemed to provide comfort during the initial implementation of SOCL. As a result, SOCL practices were combined with TPAI practices.
Adapting to Structural Conditions

Another reason that all aspects of SOCL were not implemented as intended was because of pragmatics. Quite simply, structural conditions of schools led them to modify SOCL by utilizing certain coaching sessions or merging it with a pre-existing formal observation instrument or other initiatives. Ms. East, for example, favored the 30 second feedback session the most. “It’s my favorite because its quick but specific, but I also use 5 minute feedback when there is time.” For Ms. East, time was a factor in her working environment. Using the 30 second feedback sessions allowed her to briefly talk with teachers about instruction. Ms. East also combined SOCL with other programs. She explained:

It all makes sense now. Once I learned that I could merge the teacher observation tool, SOCL, and Balanced literacy I can make all three pieces work for me now. SOCL fits right into this teacher evaluation tool. It’s making more sense this year. Before, it was a whole lot. They were three different compartments in my brain. It was just something else to do. But now I can kind of pull the three together. I mean I am still learning. Maybe one day it’s all going to make sense. And then, they will come up with something different.

Currently, Mr. North was the only one in his building completing coaching sessions. Time and the hectic school day influenced how he implemented SOCL by using it with formal observations. He remarked:
The most practical way of doing feedback for SOCL is when you are doing a normal observation. I mean you’re going to see these talents in a formal observation and you’re going to post-conference so it’s very natural to bring it up during that post conference outside of your evaluation.

Extracting a component from SOCL that could be merged with a required task was how these principals made sense of the situation; it was how implementing SOCL was plausible. According to the principals, merging SOCL with the new teacher evaluation instrument helped them manage their hectic schedules. They each said that they could plausibly implement some components of SOCL only through the use of formal observations. Mr. North articulated this view, remarking, “It’s a time issue. Trying to make SOCL happen among all the other things going on is an issue.” Ms. West utilized the common SOCL vocabulary in post-conferences. She identified teachers talents, gave examples of the talent, and defined it during post-conferences. Merging these two tasks made implementation manageable for this principal as well.

Mr. North acknowledged that observations and coaching sessions were different. “Coaching and evaluations are different. Evaluation is where you’re actually judging someone’s abilities. Coaching is more that you are capturing their abilities and you’re enhancing these abilities.” However, he merged the two during a formal observation. “During a post-conference, I say, ‘Let’s switch gears. Let me go into my coaching mode. I saw enriched environments in your classroom when I observed formally. This is what I saw and why it was effective’.” He hoped that coaching his teachers this way would provide
them with, “gained knowledge in terms of their practice that they were not aware of beforehand.”

Overall, these principals have all made the decision to combine coaching sessions with formal observations. This is the main way that they have implemented SOCL. They all perceived that it was a reasonable way to complete several tasks at once.

Making Sense Through Social Interaction

Sensemaking is a social process. What a person does depends on social influences. These principals learned and gained support from other principals. Ms. East explained her thoughts on how social interaction influenced how she implemented SOCL.

In the beginning, it was all that we [principals] talked about. It was fresh and a new way of interacting with our teachers. I remember telling other principals from other counties about our training. But as time went on, we got busy. You know there is always so much to do at school. But it was funny, every time we got together as a cohort we talked about our experiences with SOCL. That made me go back to my school and focus on it more. The county used to get us together more to focus on SOCL, but this year we are only scheduled to meet twice.

Ms. West made sense of SOCL through collaboration with other principals. She explained how she and another principal worked together to create a form (presented to me during for document analysis) that contained all the teacher talents and their definitions.

During the observation, Ms. West also mentioned that her and her assistant principal do classroom walk-throughs and coaching sessions together. When asked why they
performed them together she responded, “When we do it together, we can compare what we saw. You know, are we picking the same talent for the teacher? Most of the time we agree. It’s reassurance that we are doing it right.” Ms. West also worked with her staff to define the teacher talents and create relevant examples for each talent. Ms. West discussed how she has gained knowledge and understanding from training sessions observing other principals coaching as well. “I have enjoyed the trainings and visiting other schools and watching the coaching sessions. I enjoyed that as an observer and I would like that training to be done for all of my teachers. You know, we learn at lot when we see other schools.” Ms. West made sense of this instructional program by collaborating with other professionals. Mr. North found support from participating in discussions within the principal cohort he shared:

Participating in SOCL with other principals helped me. If I had a question about a teacher talent or a coaching session, I called another principal. And when we had our trainings, this gave me an opportunity to listen to other principals and to gleam from them. It was comforting to hear that they had some of the same struggles as I did with finding time to coach teachers.

Mr. North believed that talking with other principals especially in the beginning of implementation helped him understand the specific components of the program, especially coaching sessions. He commented that, “During training sessions, other principals modeled coaching sessions. This really gave me a clear picture of what it looked like. Then all I had to do was take it to my school and do the same thing.” Mr. North used his conversations and
interactions to obtain a better understanding of SOCL. In brief, social interactions facilitated understanding of SOCL.

Believing the Policy to be Meaningful

All three principals found SOCL to be a meaningful tool that supported them as instructional leaders. SOCL provided Mr. North with a clear and concise format that was meaningful. “I think it’s been some of the best training I’ve received. It’s meaningful. I was already, I think, a good classroom observer. SOCL has made me even better at recognizing research-based instruction.” Ms. West also mentioned that SOCL was meaningful because it, “provided me with the common instructional language to support teaching and learning in my school.” Ms. East agreed that this instructional program provided her with a common vocabulary to support classroom instruction. This was meaningful to her because she now feels comfortable initiating instructional conversations.

Identity as an Instructional Leader

Principals believed that SOCL fostered their identities as instructional leaders. Ms. East gained confidence as an instructional leader. She said that she now felt, “more comfortable holding instructional conversations” with her teachers. Ms. East attributed this comfort to the common vocabulary that she acquired during the last three years of implementation and being able to identity “instructional strategies” in the classroom.

Mr. North also communicated that SOCL affected how he observed and communicated with his staff. “It has helped me look at teaching as an art form. I am now
more of a coach and less of an evaluator. Talking instruction with teachers in a positive way feels right. I am able to do this using the instructional practices that Mike has taught us.”

He also stated that because of SOCL, “I look at the classroom in a different way. I now think a little deeper about my role and how I am supporting teaching and learning in my building.”

His changes included inspecting the classroom to see if it was “student-centered”, and if they had teacher and student engagement and healthy classroom interactions.

All three participants focused on instruction more because of SOCL. They used the instructional strategies that they learned from participating in SOCL to guide their conversations with teachers. SOCL supported these principals’ identities as instructional leaders.

**Feeling Positive**

Although SOCL was a change in the way they communicated with teachers about instruction, the principals liked communicating with teachers in a positive way. Mr. North explained the positive feelings he had when coaching, remarking:

I feel good about SOCL. It is a more comfortable conversation. It’s a great way to have meaningful conversations. It’s the right tool to help teachers improve. It is nonthreatening, because I am looking for strengths. It’s easier to talk about positives than to have to talk about negatives. It’s a better way of leading for me. It fits with who I am. I am not always comfortable giving negatives in a conversation even though it’s part of my job.

Providing positive feedback to his teachers made Mr. North proud.
Providing positive feedback to the staff was what Ms. East liked most about SOCL. She said that both she and her teachers felt good and it motivated teachers to work harder. “It makes me feel good when I can share something positive with my teachers. They work hard. They need positive feedback just like the children do.”

Feeling good was an emotion that Ms. West also shared. “It’s nice, you know, the teachers like it. I like it to when I go in looking for something positive. I enjoy giving positive feedback. My teachers now get excited about getting my feedback on what they are doing well.” Although Ms. West found that providing positive feedback to her teachers brought her feelings of joy, she also mentioned that it was a struggle to change her ways. This struggle sometimes caused her anguish. Ms. West explained the inner turmoil:

I did really have to change. I had to make a conscious effort to do things differently.

That was hard. I mean there were times when I would just want to tell them what they were doing wrong during a lesson. But I was not supposed to, and that bothered me. I was so used to finding something wrong. That was a big shift for me. I still struggle with that.

Change is hard and it can produce a mixture of emotions. Even the most positive change can be met with resistance and anguish. In summary the positive emotions associated with implementing SOCL was a major factor for why principals implemented SOCL. Chapter five discussed these results in additional detail.
Finding 2: Factors Facilitating SOCL

The second research question guiding this study was: What factors facilitate the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory? As shown in Table 4.6 there were three factors that facilitated the implementation of SOCL: professional development, the format, and buy-in from participants.

Table 4.6

Factors Facilitating and Impeding SOCL

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<th>Facilitators</th>
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Professional Development

In order for student achievement to improve, districts must improve the instructional skills of teachers and principals. The first year of professional development provided these principals with foundational knowledge of SOCL, which assisted with understanding the purpose of the program. During the first year of training, principals received intensive professional development and hands-on practice to help them learn the components of SOCL. The professional development for principals included presentations, modeling, and simulations.

The principals all agreed that the first year of implementation was about learning the components. “The first year we were just learning about what it was and implementing very slowly. For example, the first year all I did was the homework, you know I did the coaching sessions that we just learned” (Ms. East). Ms. West also mentioned homework when she said, “The first year it was a learning year, so we would just go in and practice. I would say to teachers, I need to come in here and do my homework. And you know, use teachers and really, it was practicing the different coaching sessions.” Practicing the coaching sessions helped the principals become familiar with SOCL components. Mr. North concurred that the first year was about understanding the coaching sessions and learning the common vocabulary.

When asked about their other experiences with SOCL professional development, Mr. North found the ongoing professional development helpful. “If this had been a one-shot deal, it wouldn’t be meaningful but we are a cohort that has continued to meet, even after three
years, to enhance our abilities in SOCL.” Overall, he found the training to be relevant, and believed it provided him with a clear understanding of the program by providing hands-on training. “Seeing the coaching sessions during the professional development helped me realize that if I was going to make this happen, I had to commit to some time for it.”

Ms. West commented that, “The professional development sessions provided me with the common instructional language to support teaching and learning in my school.”

Ms. West added:

> It was all the buzz for months. Everybody was really pumped up and excited about it. Mike Rutherford is a good presenter and trainer. It was very hands-on and entertaining, and it definitely pertained to our job. He probably used about every one of the teacher talents he teaches and we did a lot of training sessions in schools.

Ms. East also commented on the excitement surrounding professional development.

> I think the more exciting the professional development was, the more I was gung-ho about implementing it. At first, it was so exciting, and so, I think it was easier to implement, fresher in my mind, maybe? It gave me a lot of research-based information that allowed me to speak intelligently about teaching and learning. The professional development did take quite a bit of time out of the schools, but I do think that it was worth it.

Professional development was a strength in the implementation of SOCL. These principals all commented on the positive aspects that the professional development added to implementing SOCL in their schools. Modeling was an element of the professional
development that assisted principals with the implementation.

**Modeling.** SOCL included a remarkable amount of modeling. Modeling helped all three principal develop a clear picture of SOCL and to communicate and implement it in their schools. As Mr. North explained:

Mike Rutherford modeled the program for us. I remember going to the schools and watching the teachers in the coaching sessions. It really helped me see what it looked like and how to go back to my school and implement it. Mike has given us the tools and vocabulary to help us improve instruction in our schools. He actually modeled for us what SOCL should look like.

Ms. East believed that the modeling and practice that Mike Rutherford provided was key to her understanding the program and implementing it in her school. As well, remarking:

The common theme throughout all the professional development sessions was the hands-on portion. He modeled everything he taught. He modeled the teacher talents without us even knowing it. He modeled how to have a good rapport with teachers, and how to be positive when giving feedback.

Ms. West discussed a time that she asked Mike Rutherford for additional modeling support. “One time when Mike was doing a training for us, we asked him to model some things that we weren’t real sure about. That was helpful.” Providing continued implementation support and modeling the components assisted principals with the implementation of SOCL. However, all three principals communicated some apprehension about conducting certain coaching sessions and mentioned a need for additional modeling sessions with Mike
Rutherford.

**Format**

The SOCL format was vital for successful implementation for two of the principals. “It’s a format that supports what we are suppose to do as instructional leaders, support teachers…It’s a formula: a format that I can use to talk instruction with teachers” (Ms. East). Mr. North shared that SOCL has improved his instructional leadership skills because of the format as well:

> It’s a package and that has really helped me as a leader. It has helped me focus on instruction with purpose and confidence. I had a model to follow, a format. It was just a matter of taking the model that worked for my school, 5 minute feedback, and making it fit into my hectic schedule.

Mr. North further explained that SOCL was a positive format that teachers enjoy and it gives the administrators a chance to acknowledge the good instructional things happening in the building. “It’s a positive format. I mean, when you’re coaching someone, you’re not typically bringing up things that they’re doing wrong, you’re bringing up things they’re doing right. And you’re helping them to see it and make it better.”

Although the format was helpful to two of the principals, Ms. East cited the format as an aspect that she did not like. She felt like she had to stick to the script, and that was not natural for her. She explained that keeping her instructional conversations short and focused on one talent was a struggle. She stated:
I understand why it’s important to stay focused: to give them this one piece that they’re doing well, and then, let them take that and run with it. I know why it’s set up this way, so they can streamline that talent and run it through everything they do.

**Buy-in**

Just because an instructional leadership program has been selected for principals to use does not mean that it will be implemented. Obtaining buy-in from the staff implementing the program is crucial. When asked about SOCL, Ms. West responded with excitement,

I bought into it immediately. I thought, ‘this is great stuff!’ I mean, not only is he a wonderful presenter and kept my attention, but it made sense to me. It was an immediate buy in. He had my attention from the get go. I thought this makes sense, its good, its what teachers need.

The findings revealed that buy-in for SOCL was gained through the use of positive feedback and instructional improvements.

**Positive feedback.** As discussed earlier, SOCL is a program that provides positive instructional support to teachers. This positive aspect supported the buy-in of SOCL from both principals and teachers. Ms. East repeatedly mentioned that the positive reinforcement piece of SOCL was instrumental in gaining buy-in from principals and teachers. “Teachers gain a sense of pride and I feel good. With everything that’s going on, the lack of workdays and particularly here with the scores as low as they are, this is a way that they are positively, being positively reinforced about good that they are doing.” SOCL helped these principals provide positive instructional feedback to teachers. Ms. East communicated that providing
positive feedback to the staff was what she liked most about this program. She stated:

I think this program has really helped me provide positive feedback. It makes them feel good about what they are doing. So, I would say that is a part of SOCL that has been implemented and received well. Before this, I just kind of said what I noticed without giving it much thought. This program has really made me stop and think before giving feedback. It makes me think, how is this going to help the teachers improve? I really like that aspect of it.

Ms. West also believed that the positive reinforcement made her teachers feel good and it made her feel good. “It’s just nice to be able to give positive comments to teachers. We were not always trained to do that. I always used to find negative aspects when I observed lessons. But now, giving the teachers positive reinforcement supports what I want them to do.” Because of SOCL, Ms. West believed that she gives more positive feedback to her staff. “It’s nice, you know, the teachers like it. I like it to when I go in looking for something positive. I enjoy giving positive feedback. My teachers now get excited about getting my feedback on what they are doing well.” When asked why SOCL has created this change with feedback, Ms. West responded:

The teachers want positive feedback. And they have had enough training now to know or exposure to the different talents so they’re curious, you know, and want to know what is their talent. So it’s almost like they look forward to finding out what did I see and what did I think was the most important.

Ms. East added, “Mike Rutherford is so relaxed and positive in his trainings to us. He gives
us really good examples of how to be more positive in giving feedback and during coaching.”

Mr. North summarized these sentiments best: “The most powerful piece of this program is that there is a new way of observing. You’re observing to find strengths and then you’re providing the teachers positive feedback and that is so powerful.”

Overall, providing positive feedback to teachers for the purpose of improving instruction was be a powerful tool for affecting principals’ motivation to implement the program.

**Improves instruction.** Buy-in was also obtained because principals believed that SOCL improved instruction. As Mr. North put it, SOCL, “ties well to what an instructional leader does. I mean if we’re supposed to be enhancing instruction and helping teachers be better, SOCL fits that premise”. Mr. North expressed that he is much more instructionally focused because of SOCL. Ms. East agreed:

I am more instructionally focused now than I used to be. I used to be more worried about procedural types of things. I never had the tools to talk instruction with my teachers. SOCL has definitely equipped me with a toolbox full of ways to have those types of instructional conversations. It’s really neat, because it is not just the conversations that I have, but I have noticed that it has increased the staff’s conversations around good instruction.

These principals had buy-in to SOCL because it provided them with meaningful tools to help discuss and monitor instruction in their buildings. “It’s meaningful for me. It’s about improving my teachers and my classrooms” (Mr. North). “I think it has made them more
aware and more critical of their own teaching” (Ms. West).

The principals reported that they made more frequent visits to classrooms. After implementing SOCL, Mr. North acknowledged that SOCL got him in the classrooms more. He communicated that he is in the classrooms much more and his visits are much more purposeful. Ms. West added, “I think it has made me go into the classrooms more: just going in informally. It’s nice and the teachers like it.” Ms. East echoed the same findings. She believed that her classroom visits are more purposeful, because she now has the skills to identify good instructional practices and to hold meaningful conversations comfortably. These findings will be described in further detail in chapter five.

Finding 3: Factors Impeding SOCL

The last research question was: What factors impede the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory? Although all three principals thought SOCL was a great instructional leadership program, administrative obligations, effort and time required by the program, and a need for more professional development impeded full implementation of all components of the program.

Administrative Obligations

Principals have many tasks and obligations to fulfill each day. The data revealed that administrative obligations dramatically limited the implementation of SOCL. These obligations included managing the school building and other district initiatives.

Managing the school. These principals all concur that managing their schools takes away from being instructional leaders. As Mr. North put it, “I spend a lot of time putting out
fires and dealing with the daily routine of school”. Although he believed that instruction was important, “Just managing a school building takes time. I am needed in so many places. Parent meetings, parent communication throughout the day teacher concerns, the peripheral of learning; things like PEPs have to be developed and that takes time away from SOCL.”

When discussing tasks that kept them from implementing SOCL, the principals listed their tasks the day of the interview to demonstrate how busy they are with managing the school. Ms. West shared, “Just today I have to go check on things in the media center, and I have a PTO executive board meeting today. So, I have to go get things ready for the meeting: just lots of managerial stuff that gets in the way. Things like that take up time.”

Managing a school building takes time away from instruction. Ms. East exclaimed,

Just today, I have a bus issue, and I need to call parents back. I have parents mad because of a school rule change that I am dealing with. I need to check emails and monitor balanced literacy. There is always something to do. It just might not be instruction.

Mr. North provided a number of tasks that keep him from SOCL as well.

Parent communication, student discipline, day-to-day operations of the school, maintenance, and transportation. All of these have to be, you know, the meetings that the district requires to be off campus. Like I’ve got one today. All of that stuff pulls you away from SOCL. As I said before, the discipline, the budget all of that kind of stuff, the fire drills, and all of that has its place. It takes away from instruction. I mean, everyday has something in it that you have to do. These tasks become priority.
Even though SOCL should be a priority, when other things are lining up that you have to do, to take care of, you can’t get to instruction.

Managing a school involves student discipline. Ms. East believed the biggest thing that kept her out of classrooms was discipline. “This is a tough school.” She expressed that discipline consumes a large part of her day. “It is hard to focus on SOCL when so many students are disrupting the classrooms. I mean, focusing on discipline helps us increase instructional time and the quality of it for our students, but it doesn’t help me with actual SOCL strategies.” Mr. North and Ms. East also mentioned discipline as a factor that impedes the implementation of SOCL. Mr. North stated, “Discipline, student discipline. The school has several opportunities daily to deal with that.” Ms. West agreed that discipline was an issue but it was not a daily issue at the school.

**District initiatives.** The call for instructional leadership requires a principal to lead their schools in ways that requires district support. Their school district initiated other instructional foci that have impeded the full implementation of SOCL. Mr. North with a sigh of frustration uttered, “There are other initiatives that are pushing SOCL out of the way. There is Balanced Literacy, Common Core, technology, trainings, PLC’s, you name it! It’s hard to balance them all.” Ms. West has also found it difficult to juggle all of the districts initiatives. She admitted that it was just too much to do any one thing well.

When I go into classrooms, I’m focused on a lot of things, not just SOCL. I have a checklist. We are also implementing balanced literacy and common core. Oh yeah and we need to be using technology. So, I go into a classroom and look, do they have
this posted up, are they doing this, this, and that. I know I need to coach them but I am also supposed to look at these other things. Basically, I am looking more at what parts do they have of balanced literacy, the math workshop, and what do they not have and what do we need to work on. So when I go in, I’m thinking more about those things than SOCL. Now if something should, you know, jump out at me, then I will incorporate SOCL.

While listing the items that she needed to focus on, Ms. West grabbed a piece of paper to make herself a note of other things that she needed to do. Then she stated, “My goodness, I haven’t logged into ClassScape. I am so bad about that. I need to look through my benchmark data. The county monitors our logins. Oh and I need to get on to MClass today, and look at the progress monitoring results. Oh well.”

Ms. East also communicated her frustration with balancing all the district initiatives.

I don’t want this seen as something else we have to do. We have to do Balanced Literacy and use technology. But we don’t have technology. Even though that’s a push, we can’t get wireless anywhere in the building. So, it’s frustrating. I don’t want this to be seen as something else that piles on layers onto what they’re doing.

All three principals believed that SOCL was an instructional program that provided tremendous benefit. However, other district initiatives impeded implementation.

Additionally, they all shared that they have focused on SOCL less this year because of other district initiatives that were mandatory and monitored heavily. Ms. West expressed this sentiment: “Well, I’ll be honest, last year I did more than I have this year. Cause I really did
a lot in the past about an average of five hours a week, but not this year. I have to add it in to my checklist of stuff to do for county office.” The other two principals also said that they have not coached as much this year and have even selected to focus on one of the coaching sessions because of the push of the other district initiatives by the county office. Mr. North explained that the only way he could fit SOCL in to his activities was by merging it with formal observations and by selecting a quicker coaching format because he was “pulled in too many directions to implement SOCL like I want to.” Ms. East has merged SOCL, formal observations, and Balanced Literacy together because as she puts it, “it’s how I manage all the things I am supposed to do.”

Meeting the district’s expectations with Balanced Literacy, Common Core State Standards, and technology has caused these principals to use SOCL less in their schools.

**Effort and Time**

Some components of SOCL take considerable effort and time to implement. Scheduling coaching sessions and finding common times to meet with teachers was a struggle for these principals. Mr. North reported, “It takes a great deal of time to actually schedule some of these coaching sessions. Booking subs, arranging coverage: I mean the logistics for teacher studies takes a great deal of time. Time that I just don’t have these days.” Ms. West also admitted that part of the difficulty of implementing coaching sessions was scheduling.

I struggle with time to do it all. It’s not so much the components; it’s just how often I get into the classrooms to do it. Just the time factor of going in and giving, observing
more informally, and giving feedback on a more regular basis. But, you need to coach them during their planning time and they may have grade level meetings that day or I have a meeting. Sometimes you just can’t find a common time to sit down and talk. It’s difficult.

Ms. East agreed with the other principals that it was hard to coach teachers because of time and the effort required to schedule coaching sessions. Purposely planning and managing coaching sessions takes time, a precious commodity these principals lacked.

**More Professional Development**

Although professional development facilitated implementation, all three principals communicated that more continued support was needed to help them stay focused and to feel comfortable about conducting some of the difficult coaching sessions.

Mr. North was still apprehensive about conducting some of the lengthier coaching sessions. He communicated that he would like more professional development sessions with Mike Rutherford modeling coaching. “I am not as adept as I want to be. I don’t believe that I could facilitate that at any level that would be beneficial to my teachers.” He also mentioned that sustaining coaching sessions throughout several sessions was a weakness for him. “Ongoing coaching is an issue. I may give them a talent and coach them once but continuing to support that talent does not happen. How do you do that? How do you make them bring them out more?” Providing continued coaching support has not been modeled to this group of principals.
Ms. West felt that she needed more frequent modeling sessions with the developer of SOCL as well. “I would like to see more demonstrations from Mike. I need a refresher because we don’t see him as much. Maybe go back through and model some more of those instructional coaching sessions. I’d like to see him go back and do more modeling. I did more coaching when I saw him regularly.” When asked why, she responded, “Just to make sure that I’m doing it correctly. You know, and to make me feel more confident about it when I go into the classroom.” Ms. West wanted more modeling of the reflective planning session. “It’s the hardest one for me, but it gives you a lot of insight into that teacher that you are coaching.”

Ms. East needed more modeling too: “Well, more modeling from Mike is needed in our professional development. It’s always good to see it in action.” She also expressed interest in having the developer of SOCL model and show examples of how to actually write the coaching notes during a classroom visit. “Sometimes I feel like I am writing the wrong things down you know, like the old observation format. I would like to compare my notes with Mikes after a classroom visit.” When prompted to explain why she felt that way, she said, “Because I don’t know that I take the right notes. It’s so easy to fall back into old habits. I know how to take notes for observations and I tend to do that when I visit the classroom.” To support the continued implementation of SOCL, these three principals feel that they need more modeling.

**Individualized SOCL school plan.** Two of the principals wanted individualized school plans created by SOCL to assist with the improvement of teaching and learning in
their buildings. SOCL now has a plan called the Instructional Practice Assessment (IPA). This plan requires a team of consultants from the Rutherford Learning Group to observe every teacher in the building. The IPA provides specific data regarding common instructional practices in the school, student engagement, and the school teacher talents. Mr. North explained his desire for IPA, sharing: “After seeing this modeled for us, I think it would help me meet the needs of my teachers and create a framework for improvement here.”

Ms. West also wanted to participate in the IPA to gain information about her school. She believed that this plan could assist her with constructing a school plan to meet the needs of her staff instructionally. “Just like teachers need road maps of assessments to guide their instruction, I need some data to guide what areas of staff development we need. The IPA would let me know if the students are highly engaged or if they are just sitting there dutiful. I could find out which of these talents are seen most often in my school and what talents are not seen at all.” Ms. West also wanted a more individualized professional development session to help her with her weak areas. She thought that receiving extra support with reflective planning sessions would give her the confidence to conduct more of them with her teachers.

Mr. North suggested that Mike meet with each principal and develop a school plan for SOCL implementation. “Each school is different. Each school has different needs. If Mike could show each of us how to implement it in our schools that would maybe help us
develop a specific plan for implementation. Actually, look at a calendar and devise a strategic plan. I want him to tell me what is step one, step two, and so forth for my school.”

Ms. East, in contrast, wanted no part of the IPA that provided instructional data for her school. She cited this part of the training as, “a waste of her time and I hope that they don’t do that training at my school. I have a hard time doing the regular SOCL stuff. It’s too much. I don’t see any benefits.”

**Teacher training.** The principals also believed that they needed more teachers to receive SOCL training because it would help the principals implement the program school wide. Ms. East communicated, “I think that this [SOCL] was well thought out and implemented. I am not sure if this is possible, but some how there should be more teachers trained. I mean, right now, some of my teachers have been trained, but it makes it tougher on me to implement it when we are not all on the same level of knowledge of SOCL. It would be easier and less on me. I mean it would help with instruction.” Mr. North echoed a similar sentiment, remarking, “Right now, I am the only one doing coaching sessions. If I had more people trained in SOCL, I would be able to launch it school wide better.”

Ms. West wished there was a way that her administrative team and a group of teachers could participate in some SOCL professional development sessions together at other schools. Going as a group would provide us all with common coaching sessions to discuss. Then we could come back to our school and have some powerful conversations. It would help them [teachers] better understand SOCL. But again, there’s time. You got to have subs and all
that, and you have to have some money. But, that is the direction that I would like to see for this program.

Chapter Summary

The key findings for this multiple case study were developed from analysis of interviews, observations, and documents. The following three questions were used to guide this study:

1. To what extent is Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory implemented with fidelity?
2. What factors facilitate the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?
3. What factors impede the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?

The results were organized into four sections including purpose of the study, key findings based on the research questions, and a chapter summary. The findings of the principal perceptions revealed that the three key components of SOCL were not fully implemented. There was a medium fidelity implementation of recognizing instructional patterns in the classroom. There was a medium to high fidelity with identifying teacher talents. Utilizing coaching sessions had a low to medium fidelity rate. Principals interpretation and hence implementation of SOCL was influenced by their program knowledge, pre-existing frameworks, structural conditions, social interactions, meaningful policy, identity, and positive emotions. The principals perceived the professional
development, format, and buy-in as factors that facilitated with the implementation of SOCL. However, administrative obligations, other district initiatives, and the need for more professional development that targeted coaching sessions and school needs impeded the implementation of SOCL.

The next chapter will review the key findings, specify the limitations of the study, describe theoretical and practical implications, and propose directions for future research examining the implementation of SOCL.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

This chapter highlights the major findings from this study of principals’ perceptions of the implementation of the instructional leadership program Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL) in one rural county. This chapter will also address theoretical and practical implications from the study and specify limitations. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research on the implementation of SOCL or other instructional leadership professional development programs.

Review of the Purpose of the Study

Not only are today’s principals expected to perform managerial functions, but they are also required to act as instructional leaders. Instructional leadership is “the principal’s role in providing direction, resources, and support to teachers and students for the improvement of teaching and learning in the school” (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991, p. 1). To meet federal and state demands for academic success, principals must be trained to lead and support instruction in their schools. However, school districts and states have failed to support principals as instructional leaders (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). Recently, some districts have begun to provide professional development for instructional leadership. One such program is SOCL.

The purpose of this study was to describe principals’ experiences with the first three years of the implementation of SOCL in one school district. This study also examined the extent to which principals implemented the SOCL program as designed, with particular
attention to understanding which components of the SOCL principles were most and least likely to be implemented with fidelity.

The primary research question for this study was: How are principals implementing Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory? The following questions guided this study:

1. To what extent is Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory implemented with fidelity?
2. What factors facilitate the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?
3. What factors impede the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory?

This study used a multiple case study design to answer these research questions. I focused on the experiences of three principals from a rural school district in a southeastern state. To understand principals’ perceptions of the implementation of SOCL, I relied primarily on interviewing. I also observed principals carrying out a key component of SOCL—coaching sessions, and collecting documents related to implementation of the program. I used open coding to analyze the data and identify themes related to each of the research questions.

The results of this study revealed how principals implemented SOCL in schools and the extent to which actual practices resemble intended delivery of the program (i.e., program fidelity). Knowing how SOCL was implemented allows us to better understand which
program characteristics are contributing to desired outcomes, and highlight any general impracticalities of the program.

**Summary Finding 1: Implemented with Fidelity**

The first research question guiding this study was: To what extent is Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL) implemented with fidelity? “One of the most critical aspects of program implementation is fidelity to the original design” (Urban, 2008, p. 100). An implementation study can provide information about employees’ skill levels, consistent use of the implemented program, and their commitment to the program. These insights provide information about the fidelity of program implementation.

Implementation is affected by the simplicity or detail of the program (Carroll et al., 2007). In particular, programs that are too vague or too complex are not likely to be implemented with high fidelity. All three principals reported a clear understanding of the program, its design, and the impact that it can have on instruction. All three principals were able to communicate the purpose of the study with ease and to list the three major components of implementation without hesitation. There are several reasons for their familiarity with the program: quality professional development, simple design, and use. The principals repeatedly praised Mike Rutherford’s delivery and found modeling, simulations, and observing other principals coaching particularly useful. Additionally, it appears that the ideas were easy to recall because the principals were already familiar with the constructs of talents, SOCL just provided them with labels to attach to their understanding. Lastly,
principals were actually using some of the components of SOCL. Use likely reinforced understanding of the program.

Since programs are not always implemented according to the design, studying the implementation of programs can provide valuable information about why educational programs are effective or ineffective. According to Patton (2002), “Implementation evaluations tell decision makers what is going on in the program, how the program has developed, and how and why the program deviated from initial plans and expectations” (p. 161).

Mike Rutherford, the program designer, indicated that after three years, principals should be able to: (a) recognize instructional patterns in the classroom, (b) identify and retrieve the teacher talents from memory and (c) utilize the coaching and feedback tools to improve teachers’ skills. The findings revealed that the principals varied in their level of fidelity, and they deviated the most from the third component, coaching sessions.

All three principals were able to recognize instructional patterns in the classroom. They also reported that their observations were more instructionally focused than in years prior to the implementation of SOCL. The increased attention to instruction was likely due to SOCL providing these principals with (a) direction and purpose during classroom walk-throughs and (b) clear definitions of constructs with labels they were able to easily recall.

However, the observations were not carried out fully as prescribed by the program. Principals merged SOCL observations with required formal observations.
They merged SOCL with this required task because of a lack of time and because formal observations blended well with SOCL observations.

Mr. North explained this ease of combining the two tasks:

The most practical way of doing feedback for SOCL is when you are doing a normal observation. I mean you’re going to see these talents in a formal observation and you’re going to post-conference so it’s very natural to bring it up during that post conference outside of your evaluation.

Instructional leadership holds that principals have the responsibility for knowing the attributes of quality classroom instruction so that they can recognize best practices and help teachers continue to improve (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991). These teacher talents added to these principals instructional knowledge and allowed them to speak intelligently about instruction. In addition, a key challenge to instructional leadership is recognizing effective teaching. “If good instruction in every classroom and for all students is the central focus of systematic change in education, then districts and schools need to define “goodness” and come to a shared understanding of what is meant by great, or even competent, teaching” (Wagner et al., 2006). Teacher talents were used to define great teaching in these schools and provided the principals with a benefit of increased instructional knowledge.

The developer of SOCL believed that by the end of implementation the principals should also be able to identify all of the teacher talents and give a 30 second definition of each talent. Two principals could not do this; however, they did have a solid foundation of the talents and definitions. All three principals, made a concerted effort to teach the staff and
use a common vocabulary when discussing instruction with the teachers. Identifying teacher talents was carried out with medium to high fidelity because it did not require a major change in behavior. Another possible reason that they did not know all the teacher talents is that some teacher talents were used infrequently. Perhaps the talents were not observable at their school or rather than focusing on the many teacher talents, the principals decided to select the teacher talents that were most important to them.

The last major component of SOCL is utilizing coaching and feedback tools to improve teachers’ skills. Although coaching teachers is important, very few instructional leaders have had training in this area (Holland, 2007). Blase and Blase (2004) reported that coaching teachers has a positive effect on instructional practices. Generally, coaching teachers allows principals to focus on improving teaching and learning and has become, “the tool of choice for striving districts” (Wong & Wong, 2008, p. 63). SOCL explicitly addresses the concept of coaching teachers to improve classroom instruction. Rutherford (2007) defined coaching sessions as the different ways in which instructional conversations take place in order to impact teachers’ talents and their instructional delivery methods.

Coaching teachers and using feedback to improve teachers’ skills was a struggle for these principals and implemented with the least fidelity of the three components of the program. Indeed, as Fixsen and colleagues (2009) explained, all implementations encounter struggles. The principals believed that the coaching sessions were beneficial for providing teachers with positive support but the principals did not practice all of the coaching sessions consistently and they gravitated to one or two of the simpler coaching formats. Interestingly,
each principal preferred a different coaching session. Two of the formats were simple coaching sessions—30 second feedback and five minute feedback. The reflective coaching session was preferred by one principal because she felt it had the potential to produce the results that she wanted in her school but did not feel comfortable conducting this coaching session. Overall, coaching had not been implemented with high fidelity.

In summary, only one of the three components of SOCL was consistently implemented with medium to high fidelity—identifying and retrieving teacher talents from memory. It was by far the component that required the least effort and time. To further understand what influenced principals’ thoughts about SOCL and their subsequent actions concerning implementation, it is appropriate to look at the factors that influenced their sensemaking and factors that facilitated and impeded implementation. In short, we need to not only know what they did but why they did it.

To understand principals’ perceptions of the implementation of SOCL, I drew upon Karl Weick’s theory of sensemaking in organizations. Sensemaking in organizations focuses on how people make sense of reality. “Sensemaking is generally understood to be the cognitive act of taking in information, framing it, and using it to determine actions and behaviors in a way that manages meaning for individuals” (Evans, 2007, p. 161).

During the interview, I asked why questions to gain an understanding of how principals’ beliefs, values, and prior knowledge impacted the implementation of SOCL in each of their schools. A key finding was that they merged SOCL observations with formal post-observations because they all believed that they meshed well and allowed them to
complete two tasks at once. The principals also used old components from previous observation trainings when completing walkthroughs, notably, they used scripted notes. They all scripted notes during classroom visits because it was a part of their past behavior and using past behavior likely provided them comfort when talking to teachers. Not one principal used the SOCL coaching notebook during the coaching sessions. In addition to time and comfort with what is familiar, another plausible explanation for the merging of SOCL with other teacher evaluation activities is scripting, this may be what they and teachers think evaluating a teacher should involve.

The most surprising finding came in the form of principals’ emotions. Principals shared that they felt happy when providing positive feedback to teachers. SOCL emphasizes coaching teachers in only a positive way. The principals believed that highlighting positive traits was the best part of the SOCL program. Not only did giving positive feedback make them feel good, but the teachers also enjoyed receiving positive feedback. Although providing positive feedback was a major behavior change for these principals, they were willing to change because of the benefits from providing positive feedback to their teachers.

Other factors that influenced how they understood SOCL included interacting with their peers to learn SOCL, believing the program was meaningful (i.e., that it would help them become better instructional leaders) and identifying themselves as instructional leaders. It is important to note that these principals believed that principals should be instructional leaders and they wanted that role. Furthermore, they did not ever suggest SOCL effectiveness at helping them become better instructional leadership. Components that they
found meaningful and that provided them with some type of perceived benefit were implemented. The benefits included gained instructional knowledge, comfort, and positive feelings. However, in the case of coaching sessions, their feelings of insecurity coupled with the time required to schedule them negatively impacted the use of coaching sessions.

**Summary Finding 2: Factors Facilitating SOCL**

The second research question guiding this study was: What factors facilitated the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory? Professional development, the format, and participant buy-in facilitated implementation.

Most efforts to improve teaching and learning focus on the professional development of educators (Wagner et al., 2006). In order for student achievement to improve, districts must improve the instructional skills of teachers and principals. SOCL delivers customized professional development services for administrators to improve their instructional leadership skills. The principals considered the professional development to be fresh, exciting, and beneficial. Participating in the ongoing sessions provided these principals with support and helped them develop a better understanding of what SOCL was supposed to look like in their schools. Also helpful, was that principals utilized SOCL immediately after the initial professional development sessions. The principals found the professional development to be useful. Ms. West commented that, “The professional development sessions provided me with the common instructional language to support teaching and learning in my school.”

Format was also cited by two of the principals as a reason that they were able to implement SOCL in their schools. It was a packaged program that provided the principals
with a way to improve teachers’ skills through instructional conversations. However, one principal felt that the program was too scripted and did not align with her leadership style.

Buy-in is an important part of program implementation. Researchers agree that participant buy-in is crucial to successful program implementation (e.g., Carroll et al., 2007; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Rowan & Miller, 2007). Indeed, many programs fail because implementation requires change and implementers resist change (Rowan & Miller, 2007). Positive feedback and the belief that there is instructional impact led to buy-in of SOCL.

Providing positive feedback was a recurring theme. The principals acknowledged that providing positive feedback to teachers made them feel good. Although it was a change, the principals used the component of positive feedback because it made them feel good. The literature on positive feedback largely focuses on how it makes teachers feel and what they subsequently do. As Blase and Blase (1999) explain: Providing specific positive feedback to teachers promotes a sense of value, and is a powerful strategy for improving teaching and learning in the classroom. In contrast, this study suggests that principals enjoyed the responses that they received from their teachers. Here the motive for action is the positive feelings of principals.

Principals play a significant role in bringing about changes in teachers’ instructional practices. Principals give guidance and directions to both teachers and students to ensure that learning is a top priority (Zepeda, 2003). In fact, a school’s success is a direct reflection of the principal (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991). These principals believed SOCL was relevant to their
roles as instructional leaders. They felt that SOCL helped them develop an instructional focus when visiting classrooms. Quite simply, SOCL helped them do their job better. Classroom visits increased and all three principals were more instructionally focused because they had concrete tools to assist them.

Although purposeful classroom visits increased, the principals were not conducting instructional feedback sessions regularly with their teachers. Even though they had acquired the skills to support teaching and learning, they were not using them regularly. The next section will offer insights into factors that impeded the implementation of SOCL.

**Summary Finding 3: Factors Impeding SOCL**

The last research question was: What factors impede the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory? Although the principals thought SOCL was a great instructional leadership program, there were impediments to its full implementation.

Principals have many tasks and obligations to fulfill each day. Administrative obligations limited the implementation of SOCL as it should have been implemented.

It was no surprise that managing a school building impacted principals as instructional leaders. “Principals are often so busy engaging in crisis management, administrivia, and the daily operations of schooling that they have little time to devote to thoughtful, reflective research-based strategic planning and improvement” (Fusarelli, 2008, p. 190). These principals all communicated strongly that managing their schools limited their attention to instructional duties. As Mr. North put it, “Just managing a school building takes time. I am needed in so many places. Parent meetings, parent communication,
throughout the day teacher concerns, the peripheral of learning; things like PEPs have to be developed and that takes time away from SOCL.” Each participant shared how much time they dedicate to instruction during the day. On average, each principal spent only a few hours each week directly engaged with instruction.

There are a number of reasons why instruction is not given principals’ full attention, including: “student discipline, intervening with angry parents, and completing paperwork and reports needed by central office, complying with special education rules and regulations, administering the testing program, tracking the results of standardized testing, and seeing to the maintenance of the physical plant” (Zapeda, 2003, p. 2). Few principals spend the bulk of their day engaged with instructional tasks (Blome & James, 1985; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Heck, 1992; Wagner, et al., 2006) because as Wagner and colleagues (2006) explained,

Disruptive students, angry parents, concerned board members, and demands to attend hastily called meetings at the central office can all serve to distract and dilute the focus of leaders. Many of these demands and the reactions they provoke have no relationship to instructional improvement. (p. 65)

District support is essential for the implementation of instructional programs. Districts do not provide principals and teachers with the support needed to promote instructional leadership (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). However, SOCL is designed to support principals as instructional leaders and is supported by the district superintendent. Thus, it was a surprise to discover that a major factor that impeded the implementation of
SOCL was other district initiatives. The principals indicated that the great pressure placed upon principals to implement and monitor other district initiatives outweighed the instructional focus provided by SOCL. In fact, after the first year of implementation, professional development dropped dramatically to two sessions per year. Countywide professional developments focused more on the new initiatives than on SOCL. The district focus coupled with heavy monitoring of new initiatives greatly impacted the implementation of SOCL in this county.

Principals did not implement SOCL coaching sessions consistently because of the amount of time required to schedule coaching sessions. Mr. North stated it best, “It takes a great deal of time to actually schedule some of these coaching sessions. Booking subs, arranging coverage, I mean the logistics for teacher studies takes a great deal of time. Time that I just don’t have these days.” Instead all three principals utilized the simple coaching sessions that did not require extensive time to arrange. The commitment to time outweighed the benefits of the program.

Although professional development was a strength of the implementation, all the principals believed that more support was needed to help them stay focused and to feel comfortable when conducting coaching sessions. Their request for more professional development was followed by a sense of insecurity. Mr. North, for example, stated, “I am not as adept as I want to be. I don’t believe that I could facilitate that at any level that would be beneficial to my teachers.”
Lastly, two principals both felt that the current implementation plan was not specific enough for their schools and a more differentiated professional development plan was needed. These two principals desired specific feedback from the program about how best to implement SOCL at their schools.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study’s findings have important implications for educators. One of the first theoretical implications brought out in this study is how important the participants are to program implementation. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) define program implementation as, “the actual use of an innovation or what an innovation consists of in practice” (p. 336). Fullan and Pomfret’s terms “use” and “practice” in their definition of implementation shows that people (implementers) are key to implementation. As shown in these findings, implementers make sense of new learning through prior knowledge and social interactions and then they decide if and how they will use it in their environment. The importance of the role of implementers in implementation is evident in Klein and Sorra’s (1996) definition of implementation within an organization: “the process of gaining targeted employees’ appropriate and committed use of an innovation” (p. 1055). They explain further:

Implementation is the transition period during which targeted organizational members ideally become increasingly skilled, consistent, and committed in their use of an innovation. Implementation is the critical gateway between the decision to adopt the innovation and the routine use of the innovation within an organization. (Klein & Sorra, 1996, p. 1057)
The major findings revealed that the principals in this study were essential in the implementation of SOCL in their schools. Each principal adopted components of SOCL but did not implement the whole SOCL programs as designed. Implementers should be a major factor to consider and plan for when implementing new programs.

When one considers the social aspect of sensemaking and the school environment, another theoretical implication becomes apparent; the need to continually support principals with their professional responsibility to become skillful instructional leaders. Principals are expected to be instructional leaders; however, most principal programs prepare administrators for non-instructional duties, such as legal issues, building management, and school finance (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991). As shown in this study, concentrating on these non-instructional tasks can detract from the instructional needs of the school.

The findings revealed that the principals in the study needed continuous professional development in order to gain and maintain these skills. This additional support could improve their instructional leadership skills. “Principals perceive their roles as changing, and they report curriculum, instruction, teacher development, and student learning as central among their job responsibilities. Increasingly, instructional leadership is what society demands of school leaders, as well as what principals expect of themselves” (Calmes, 2006, p. 41). School leaders need continuous support to meet the instructional needs of students and staff and the professional expectations of society.

This study found that many of the factors that explain teachers’ implementation of programs, impact principals as well, such as buy-in, professional development, time and
effort, and format. However, this study identified two factors that have gone generally unnoticed in the literature on implementation—identity and positive affect. They may be applicable to a wide range of programs or specific to instructional leadership programs. In this study, the construct of identity represents a principal’s notion of what being a principal involves. The principals were willing to adopt some of the components of SOCL because they believed that being a principal involved being an instructional leader. Adopting SOCL supported their identity. It is important to examine how this factor influences the implementation of other programs. Additionally, researchers may wish to consider how carrying out a new task makes the implementer feel—it may be possible to redesign programs to generate a more positive affect for implementers, and thus increase the likelihood of implementation.

Practical Implications

As shown in this study, the implementation of an instructional leadership program is affected by the understanding and commitment of its participants. Although these principals believed that SOCL was a beneficial program for improving instructional leadership skills, it was not implemented as designed and is not meeting its full potential for improving teaching and learning.

To support the continued implementation of this instructional leadership program for principals, more consistent modeling is needed for coaching sessions since the principals in this study all struggled with coaching sessions. This information needs to be shared with the developer of SOCL.
The recommendation would be for the superintendent and the developer of SOCL to work together to provide monthly professional development sessions to support the growth on principals’ instructional leadership skills. In his work on effective schools, Edmonds (1979) found that “one of the most tangible and indispensible characteristics of effective schools is strong administrative leadership, without which the disparate elements of good schooling can be neither brought together nor kept together” (p. 32). Increasing the instructional leadership skills of principals pays off with student achievement (Ginsberg, 1988; Heck, 1992). These principals utilized SOCL more after professional development sessions. Scheduling monthly professional development sessions could provide the principals in this district with an increased knowledge of the coaching sessions and improve their comfort level for conducting them. It could also establish a consistent district focus for SOCL at the administrative level.

The implementation of many district initiatives impacted how these principals implemented SOCL in their schools. Based on the findings, the superintendent should revisit the implementation of all district-wide initiatives and decide which ones have priority. A closer look at all initiatives may reveal that all implementations are suffering because of the number of district-wide foci. Since all schools are different and need differentiated programs to succeed, the superintendent could choose to work with each principal and decide which district initiatives are best for each school.

The findings also suggest a need for more accountability with the implementation of SOCL. If the district of study decides that SOCL is a program that can provide instructional
benefits and improve the instructional leadership skills of principals, then a written plan to implement and monitor SOCL at the district level needs to be established. This could assist with implementing the program with fidelity. Implementation fidelity affects the success of programs, and high fidelity is difficult to achieve because of program complexity and lack of buy-in or commitment by implementers. According to Klein and Sorra (1996), most programs fall short due to implementation failure and not because of poor programs. Further, quality programs often yield little or no benefits because of meager implementation. Creating a district plan could set clear expectations and aid principals as they are charged with implementing SOCL in their individual schools. As suggested earlier, with the assistance of the superintendent, the developer of SOCL, and each school principal, an individual plan could be created for each school. Overall, it seems that what gets emphasized is what gets monitored.

In addition to prioritizing initiatives, district superintendents may wish to consider two other options: combining district initiatives that align well or eliminating those that are redundant. Coupling programs that are similar could improve the overall likelihood of achieving the target outcome. Eliminating programs that are similar may reduce or redirect resource needs.

The results showed that the principals were weighed down by managerial tasks and various district initiatives, including SOCL. Although unpopular, it might be reasonable to consider that principals are inundated with enough responsibilities. Either shifting managerial duties to other school personnel or transferring instructional leadership to
someone else, like a teacher leader, would improve the likelihood of effective instructional leadership occurring in our schools.

The principals reported combining traditional formal evaluation with SOCL, indicating that it was a time-saver and the two activities seemed compatible. They also believed that the mandated formal teacher evaluation format did adequately focus on improving instruction. Adapting reforms is common (Cuban, 1996); however, we rarely learn from the adaption—we typically consider the adaption as undesirable. It may be that formal teaching evaluations need to be changed so that they provide constructive ideas for teacher improvement. As we move forward, formal teacher evaluation designers may wish to include components of SOCL. Aligning formal evaluation with SOCL will at the very least ensure that teachers are being evaluated and receiving positive insights about their instructional approaches.

**Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this study. First, only principals that served in their current school for five or more years were selected to participate in this study. Based on this sample criterion, only three principals in the district selected for study were eligible to participate in this study. Consequently, the findings may not apply to principals with less than five years of experience. However, Klenke (2008) suggests that sample size in qualitative research does not drive the study. It is suggested that it is more important to use purposeful sampling in order to select participants who will be able to contribute to the depth of the study. Principals with at least five years of experience are able to consider their
instructional leadership practices before and after implementation of SOCL. Therefore, purposive selection of three principals that have participated in the implementation of the study will be sufficient to gather the needed data for this study. Second, this study focused on a rural district’s implementation of SOCL. So, principals who use SOCL in an urban or suburban setting or without district-level adoption may have different experiences with SOCL. Especially in regards to structural conditions that impeded implementation.

Fourth, this study relied on a multiple case study design, which has been criticized as being too subjective, because it allows the researcher to make interpretations of the data (Shull, Singer, & Sjoberg; 2008). I acknowledged my bias with regard to the implementation of this instructional leadership program in my subjectivity statement. My insider status is not decidedly disadvantageous because it enhances the breadth and depth of understanding of an experience that may not be accessible to outsiders (Kanuha, 2000) and it gives researchers legitimacy (Adler & Adler, 1987). However, in order to address this potential limitation, I have taken Stake’s (2006) and used triangulation. I remained open-minded while collecting and analyzing data and I verified my interpretations with participants in the study.

Lastly, a key advantage of qualitative research is providing detailed descriptions. While I provide considerable details about each theme related to the research questions, some information about the context was not provided to protect the identities of the principals and county.
Directions for Future Research

Further research is needed to deepen our understanding of how to support principals as instructional leaders in their building. Instructional leaders must move beyond the managerial duties and encourage thinking and promote change by using research-based strategies (Bouchard et al., 2002). The results from this study revealed that these principals struggled to balance the task of managing the school building while practicing their new instructional leadership skills. Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) work also found that instructional leaders are provided little assistance and presented with vague expectations from the district level. Furthermore, those administrators searching for guidance were met with unclear methods. However, once administrators have acquired the needed skills to guide instruction, more research is needed to determine how to sustain these skills while managing the school building.

Additionally, we need research on the impact of ongoing coaching sessions and their effect on teaching and learning. Specifically, focusing on continuous coaching sessions that support teachers instructionally for an extended period of time could provide educators with a new insight into the value of coaching teachers. Wong and Wong (2008) cited that coaching teachers was, “the tool of choice for striving districts” (p. 63). However, Fink and Resnick (2001) found that principals rarely spend instructional time with teachers for the purpose of improving teaching skills. In addition, during this study, ongoing coaching sessions were not discovered as a common practice of these principals. It would be beneficial to explore this concept.
It is worth investigating if there are additional explanations for why the principals preferred the different coaching sessions. It may be that there are certain characteristics of principals (e.g., personality types or leadership styles) that influence what coaching sessions principals prefer.

Summary and Conclusion

This qualitative study examines the perceptions of principals in the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL), an instructional program designed to help principals improve teaching and learning in the classroom. Specifically, this study sought to describe the extent to which components of SOCL were implemented with fidelity and discover internal and external factors that facilitated and impeded the implementation of this instructional leadership program. Data for this multiple case study were drawn from interviews with principals, documents (e.g., staff meeting agendas, implementation notes, and classroom walk-through observations) and observations of coaching sessions. Guided by sensemaking theory and the literature on factors that influence sensemaking of actors in school settings, analysis involved open coding to identify emergent themes. The results showed that possessing content knowledge, pre-existing knowledge, structural conditions, social interactions, meaningful policy, identity as an instructional leader, and positive feelings influenced principals’ sensemaking of SOCL. Professional development, format, and buy-in facilitated implementation, and administrative obligations, effort and time, and a need for more professional development impeded implementation. These findings suggest that schools seeking to implement SOCL, or similar programs aimed at improving principals’
instructional leadership should offer more professional development, reflect on administrative obligations and prioritize district initiatives.
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Title of Study: Exploring Principals’ Sensemaking of the Implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Carraway
Faculty Sponsor: Tamara Young

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participation at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form, you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form, it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to document the perceptions of principals’ experiences with the first three years of implementing Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL) concepts. This study will also examine the extent to which principals implement the SOCL program as designed, with particular attention to understanding which aspects of the SOCL principles were most and least likely to be implemented.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, your total time commitment would be approximately 20 minutes. I will observe a coaching session between you and your principal. The focus will be on your principal and how they have implemented SOCL in their school. The observations will also take place at your school. I will only be observing the principal. I will not use any type of audio recordings during your coaching session.

Risks
There is no risk for participating in this study.
**Benefits**

There are no known benefits to you for participating in this study. However, the information gained from this study could be used to improve SOCL and potentially, help guide existing leadership programs in schools and guide educators as they consider the implementation of leadership programs.

**Confidentiality**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in the researcher’s private residence. Your responses will not be recorded in any manner and therefore will not be associated with your name. No reference to you will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

**Compensation**

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Jennifer Carraway.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

**Consent To Participate**

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject’s signature_________________________ Date ____________

Investigator’s signature____________________ Date ______________
APPENDIX B

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH
Program Designer Consent Form
This consent form is valid December 1, 2011 through December 1, 2012

Title of Study: Exploring Principals’ Sensemaking of the Implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Carraway  Faculty Sponsor: Tamara Young

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participation at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form, you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form, it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to document the perceptions of principals’ experiences with the first three years of implementing Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL) concepts. This study will also examine the extent to which principals implement the SOCL program as designed, with particular attention to understanding which aspects of the SOCL principles were most and least likely to be implemented with fidelity.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, your total time commitment would be approximately one hour. During the study, you will participate in one interview. The interview will take place at a school. The interviews will be audio recorded.

Risks
There are no known risks for participating in this study.
Benefits
There are no known benefits to you for participating in this study. However, the information gained from this study could be used to improve SOCL and potentially, help guide existing leadership programs in schools and guide educators as they consider the implementation of leadership programs.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in the researcher’s private residence and your responses will not be associated with your name. After transcription, your interview records will be kept on my computer and the file will be password protected. This data collected will be published in the researcher’s dissertation for North Carolina State University.

Compensation
You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Jennifer Carraway.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature____________________________________Date _______________

Investigator's signature_________________________________Date _______________
APPENDIX C

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH
Principal Consent Form
This consent form is valid December 1, 2011 through December 1, 2012

Title of Study: Exploring Principals’ Sensemaking of the Implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Carraway
Faculty Sponsor: Tamara Young

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participation at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form, you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form, it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to document the perceptions of principals’ experiences with the first three years of implementing Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL) concepts. This study will also examine the extent to which principals implement the SOCL program as designed, with particular attention to understanding which aspects of the SOCL principles were most and least likely to be implemented with fidelity.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, your total time commitment would be approximately two and a half hours. During the study you will participate in one interview. The interview will take place at your school and will last between 45–60 minutes. I will also conduct two observations. The observations will also take place at your school and will last approximately one-half hour each. The observations will take place during a SOCL coaching sessions, where I will use a checklist to document the use of SOCL. Immediately following the observations, I will ask you post-observation questions to gain your understanding of the SOCL program. At the end of the observation, I will request to review any documents that you can provide that document how you have implemented SOCL in your school. Only the
interviews will be audio recorded. Depending on your schedule, I anticipate completing the interview and observations in November and December.

**Risks**
Although the researcher will assign you a fictitious name and take every precaution to ensure that your identity is not identifiable, there is a slight possibility that someone you know could read this dissertation and may be able to identify you in this research.

**Benefits**
There are no known benefits to you for participating in this study. However, the information gained from this study could be used to improve SOCL and potentially, help guide existing leadership programs in schools and guide educators as they consider the implementation of leadership programs.

**Confidentiality**
The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in the researcher’s private residence and your responses will not be associated with your name. No reference to you will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. After a professional transcription, your interview records will be kept on my computer and the file will be password protected. This data collected will be published in the researcher’s dissertation for North Carolina State University.

**Compensation**
You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

**What if you have questions about this study?**
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Jennifer Carraway.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).
Consent To Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature_______________________________________Date _______________

Investigator's signature__________________________________Date ________________
APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Date: ___________________
Principal: ________________

Pre-observation Questions:

• In your own words, describe SOCL and the purpose of implementing SOCL?
• Could you describe, in as much detail as possible, how you have implemented SOCL at your school?
• What components of SOCL do you feel you implemented well? What contributed to successful implementation of these components?
• What components of SOCL are you still struggling to implement? Why?
• Discuss whether or not your focus / job tasks has changed as a result of SOCL.
• Please tell me about your professional development sessions related to SOCL.
• Professional Development: What was most useful? What was least useful?
• Professional development: What would you change or include?
• How did professional development influence your implementation of SOCL?
• Let’s talk about coaching sessions. How much time do you devote to coaching teachers weekly?
• Can you describe a specific event/time when you utilized SOCL with a teacher?
Post-observation Questions:

- Is this observation typical of a SOCL session? If not, how is it different than a typical session?
- What did you think the teacher gained from this session?
- What did you like about this coaching session?
- What did you not like about this coaching session?
- How do you think coaching sessions, in general, not this one specifically, can be improved to bring about desired results?
- Is there anything else that you would like to add?
## APPENDIX E

### Observation Protocol

Date: _______________  Principal: _______________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching Session:</th>
<th>Duration:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>30 Second Feedback</strong></td>
<td><strong>5 Minute Feedback</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Intro</td>
<td>1. Intro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Describe specific event (2 parts)</td>
<td>2. Describe Event (2 parts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you (teaching) It helps (learning)</td>
<td>3. Name teacher talent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Closure (Nice call)</td>
<td>4. Closure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reflective Planning

1. Intro (outline the session)
2. Reflect on goals for upcoming lesson
3. Reflect on planning activities
4. Reflect on assessments
5. Plan observation with teacher
6. Seek feedback regarding coaching exp

### Positive Reinforcement Coaching

1. Intro (outline the session)
2. Diagnosis (to establish prior knowledge)
3. Give example of effective teaching obs
4. Link example to teacher talent
5. Transfer – in the future
6. Seek feedback regarding coaching exp

### Instructional Coaching (add to teacher’s skill)

1. Intro (outline the session)
2. Diagnosis (to establish prior knowledge)
3. Identify teacher talent to add to repertoire
4. Schedule and observe teacher using new skill
5. Transfer – in the future
6. Seek feedback regarding coaching exp

### Small Group Coaching (3 to 4)

1. Intro (outline the session)
2. Reflect on goals for upcoming lesson
3. Reflect on planning activities
4. Reflect on assessments
5. Plan observation with teacher
6. Seek feedback regarding coaching exp

### Teacher Studies

1. Observer for 15 min
2. Meet to debrief (a) identify effective practices (b) transfer gained knowledge (c) suggestions
APPENDIX F

Principal’s Notes Identifying Teacher Talents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample list of some of the talents I shared with the rest of the staff:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concentration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment: rhyming words linked to a well-known song.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practical</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math: simplified practice divided up in groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Management</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer’s Workshop: writing across the pages; teacher modeled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students given a choice of 3 reptiles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Model: create, solve, subtract, multiply word problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Read books/charts to go along with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lily pads (frog jumping) to illustrate word problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students write their own illustrated stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2-step word problem modeled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students work in groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shared need analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Introduce new game format.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Diversit &gt; Comparing/contrasting 2 cultures of Navajo (Native American Month) from book Annie The Old One to students cultural values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observations:

- Direct teaching w/ process of elimination
- Interactive Read Aloud - write sentences on why the book on Amelia Earhart was historical fiction (non-stereotypical role)
- Diversity lesson (resources for picture books)
- Buddy comparison/contrast of characters from make a man China Down
  - newsewl.org website to access resource info.

- SMART Board activity in which students manipulated non-fiction and draw one book note and give only 2 form questions (higher order)
- New technology in PE - pedometers
  - LCD projector & websites (line dancing, hockey skills

- Created a WebQuest (virtual field trip) as a PowerPoint - students @ different points in project - had to find important facts/info to write a letter then post card to teacher on the Governor's Mansion which they will visit

- Writer's Workshop - modeled letters/plots - students chose - students were able to "turn and talk" to share ideas
APPENDIX G

Staff Meeting Agenda

AGENDA

1. Staff Updates and Announcements
2. School Improvement Plan
3. Instructional Spotlight –
4. PBIS – School Rewards
5. Mike Rutherford – Focus (Clear Learning Goals)
6. HR Announcements
APPENDIX H

Walk-Through Documents

Walkthrough Form

Name: [redacted]
Subject: [redacted]
Focus: [redacted]

Date: 9/9/11
Time:
Grade:

Curriculum

1. What is the learning objective(s) for the lesson?

   Scientific Method, SpongeBob, Matter

   Yes

   Instruction

2. Learning objective(s) is evident to the students?

   "I still have people not doing the up."

   Atom drawing

   "I still have people not doing the up."

   Atom drawing

   "I still have people not doing the up."

   Atom drawing

   "I still have people not doing the up."

   Atom drawing

   "I still have people not doing the up."

   Atom drawing

   "I still have people not doing the up."

   Atom drawing

   "I still have people not doing the up."

   Atom drawing

   "I still have people not doing the up."

   Atom drawing

   "I still have people not doing the up."

   Atom drawing

1. Identify instructional practices
   _Coaching  _Modeling  _Teacher-directed Q & A
   _Discussion  _Presentation  _Hands on experience
   _Testing  _Lecture  _Providing directions
   _Learning centers  _Providing opportunities for practice
   _Other:

2. Identify grouping format
   X Whole group  _Small group  _Paired  # Individual

3. Identify teacher talent
   _Conscious attention  _Chinking  _Enriched Environment
   _Personal relevance  _Mental Models  _Locale Memory
   _First Time Learning  _Connection  _Neural Downshifting
   _Performance feedback  _Practice  _Success
   _Clear Learning Goals  _Congruency  _Overt Responses
Walkthrough Form

Name: [Redacted]
Subject: [Redacted]
Grade: 7

Date: 9/5/11
Time: 10:35

Curriculum

1. What is the learning objective(s) for the lesson?
   World Religions - overall - where? Key beliefs/roles

2. Learning objective(s) is evident to the students?
   Yes

Instruction

1. Identify instructional practices
   - Coaching
   - Modeling
   - Presentation
   - Lecture
   - Learning centers
   - Other: Brainstorming
   Teacher-directed Q & A

2. Identify grouping format
   - Whole group
   - Small group
   - Paired
   - Individual

3. Identify teacher talent
   - Conscious attention
   - Personal relevance
   - First Time Learning
   - Performance feedback
   - Clear Learning Goals
   - Chunking
   - Mental Models
   - Connection
   - Practice
   - Congruency
   - Enriched Environment
   - Locale Memory
   - Neural Downshifting
   - Success
   - Overt Responses

Talk about our own culture