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Heather Verstraete

*University of St. Thomas, Minnesota*, [HLVerstraete@gmail.com](mailto:HLVerstraete@gmail.com)

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Development, Leadership, and Change: An Analysis of Education  
Peer Coaches' Experiences

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, LEADERSHIP AND COUNSELING OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS  
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Heather Verstraete

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2019

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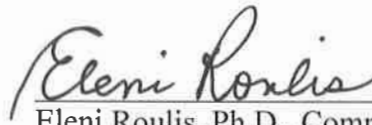
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Development, Leadership, and Change: An Analysis of Education

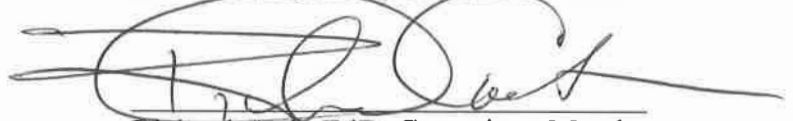
Peer Coaches' Experiences

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee



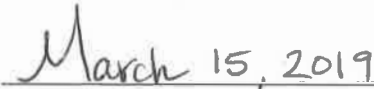
Eleni Roulis, Ph.D., Committee Chair



Richard Cash, EdD, Committee Member



Timothy Anderson, EdD, Committee Member



Final Approval Date

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examines experiences of teachers who left the classroom for a teacher leader role as a Peer Coach, a relatively new and mandated position with origins in United States educational reform movements. The responsibilities of this distinctive position include evaluating teacher performance, providing observation data and feedback, and coaching to improve instructional practices. Conversational-style interviews of ten Peer Coaches in a suburban Minnesota school district established an in-depth understanding of participants' stories, and examination of data focused on the research categories of Development, Leadership, and Change. Analysis illuminated four emerging themes: Identity, Mindset, Behaviors, and Relationships. Results affirmed what is known about teacher leadership, and through application of established theory, findings indicated transformative learning for Peer Coaches. Influential leadership was evident, with opportunities to build authentic relationships and a culture of collaboration, mutual support, and trust. Shared leadership with administrators transpired through evaluating and supporting teachers, creating a strengthened community of practice within the schools and district. Participants experienced autonomy, increased professional network, opportunities for new learning, and a renewed sense of purpose. Grounded theory emerged and constructed unique understandings and insights of participant experiences. Discussion includes decision-making in education and growth flow of Peer Coaches, which shows increased levels of interactions and networks, allowing for broadened professional opportunities. Recommendations include expanding coaching in education with development of a coaching model to enhance teaching and coaching practices. Maximizing the transformative learning experienced by teacher leaders calls for a new approach to professional paths and advancement for teachers. The relevance of Peer Coaches' experiences and perspective of teacher leaders provides insightful information with implications for authentic change in education.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The American educational system is infused with multifaceted issues, including the perception of the teaching profession and educational reform efforts. Historically, the teaching profession in America has been complex and continues to be confronted with increasing demands in the profession while contending with all aspects of societal changes. Changes to the role and responsibilities of teachers are prevalent and challenges facing the profession require attention. Teachers are a significant component in student achievement, and in recent years, increased demands have been placed on teachers through reform and policy.

National educational reform has evolved as the core issues of education have changed. Reform efforts have increased accountability for teachers and generated shifts in professional development and teacher leadership. During the last 30 years, major reform efforts, originating with federal law changes, have placed an emphasis on testing, academic progress, and teacher qualifications. Continued changes to educational law allowed more control at the state level. Formation of state laws are implemented at the local level. New policies and systems for teacher development and teacher evaluation have been put in place to meet the requirements of federal law, consequently creating the evolution and establishment of teacher leadership roles. The focus of this study is on Peer Coaches, a teacher leadership position created through mandates of state law and local policies and based on federal law.

Peer coaching was designed to support and facilitate learning for individual teachers to improve and advance classroom instruction. The concept of peer coaching is teachers working together to increase teaching skills and effectiveness through feedback and reflection. As a widely accepted practice since the early 1980s, further expansion of peer coaching models occurred with national educational reform efforts in the 1990s focused on teacher accountability,

qualifications, and effectiveness. Peer coaching has adapted to changes within the educational system yet remains focused on teachers implementing progressive knowledge and skills into their instructional practices. In the 2000s, peer coaching movements incorporated more formal connections to align with professional development programs and teacher evaluation requirements. Simultaneously throughout the last 30 years, involvement of teachers has increased; implementation of teacher leadership roles have been established and embedded in school reform initiatives to expand educational improvement. Currently, peer coaching practices have been focused on creating job-embedded learning support systems. Recent research includes understanding ways to leverage coaching as a sustainable professional development tool for teachers.

### **Introduction to the Study**

In this chapter, the researcher's journey describes the lens, expertise, and connection to the topic of the study. The importance and potential implications of this study are identified. This qualitative study was designed to examine experiences of teachers who left the classroom for a teacher leader role, with focus on development, leadership, and change. The relatively new and mandated position of Peer Coach in a suburban Minnesota school district was created due to changes in a teacher evaluation policy. Examining the experiences of Peer Coaches and incorporating teacher voice established an opportunity to provide insightful understanding and exposed implications for the teaching profession, further informing education policy and reform.

### **Statement of the Issue**

The professionalization of teaching is complex (Cameron, 2005), and the teaching occupation cannot withstand continued digression, either in actual teaching practices or in public perception. "Teachers must contend with virtually every aspect of society's problems and

challenges” (Cameron, 2005, p. 6). Teachers are the most important school-based factor in improving student achievement (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). In recent years, educational reform and policy increased accountability for test scores, which elevated demands placed on teachers. Presently, the perception of teacher performance deficiencies has been a significant factor in federal and state law and has driven policy at the district level (Hargreaves, 2000; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). A shift towards high-stakes accountability for public schools generated a rise in teacher leadership and has been evident in district initiatives (Carver, Margolis, & Williams, 2013). Attentiveness to teachers and challenges facing the profession is fundamental to understanding effective reform, policy, and practice (Cameron, 2005). Implications of current demands and changes within education have consequences for all stakeholders.

I proposed to research how education Peer Coaches experience development, leadership, and change in their roles at a suburban Minnesota school district. The relatively recent implementation of teacher evaluation policy can be better understood by examining the experiences of Peer Coaches, a Minnesota-mandated peer reviewer position. This research established an opportunity to recognize the perspective of individuals directly experiencing a new and evaluative teacher leadership role due to recent changes in teacher evaluation policy and teaching practices.

This qualitative study was designed to examine experiences of teachers leaving the classroom, becoming a peer reviewer, and eventually leaving the short-term position to return to the classroom or to another position. The term Peer Coach was used in this study for the mandated peer-review position in the Minnesota suburban school district where this case study was conducted. The cycle of the Peer Coach position is unique, with teachers exiting and

returning to a classroom role after fulfilling an evaluative teacher leadership role. I collected qualitative data to explore the experiences of teachers in a Peer Coach role and conducted in-depth interviews with 10 individuals: 7 currently in the role and 3 formerly in the position. Data was analyzed for patterns, key issues, and emerging themes in the experiences of the Peer Coaches, focused on the elements of development, leadership, and change and how the role changed their practice and perspective.

### **Significance of the Issue**

Challenges within the American education system are vast, and education reform efforts have continued to evolve. Core issues include financial burdens of education, deficient teacher recruitment and inadequate preparation programs, teacher quality and retention, student achievement, and increased stakeholder demands (Avalos, 2011; McDonnell, 2005). Educational reforms are dictated by federal laws and state policies, decided upon by government officials, and mandated by school district central office administration (McDonnell, 2005). These laws, policies, and mandates have directly impacted teachers, shaping their daily work (McDonnell, 2005) and ultimately contributing to a continuation of difficulties in the teaching profession.

Changes to education law have had substantial impact upon American education reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 led to changes in accountability, and the more recent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 provided flexibility to states to implement the law (Groen, 2012; Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2017). In Minnesota, the law requires districts to develop and design a process for teacher development and evaluation (TDE) and Quality Compensation (Q Comp)/Alternative Teacher Professional Pay Systems (ATPPS) (MDE, 2017). MDE required school districts to incorporate adjusted teacher pay schedules, professional development requirements to earn merit pay, and teacher



career ladder positions. Q Comp was an effort designed to put a system in place to advance school-wide achievement. The new policies established a mandated peer review process and created Peer Coach and teacher leader positions. Peer Coaches set goals with teachers, conduct pre- and post-observation conferences, perform observations of teacher instruction and collect data, and evaluate teachers based on criteria established by districts.

Reform efforts raised the stakes even higher for teachers to demonstrate effective teaching practices and produced notable shifts in teacher leadership and professional development (Poekert, 2012). Changes to the teaching profession have consequences with broad far-reaching repercussions. Studying the experiences of teachers who become Peer Coaches due to newly implemented policy exposes potential areas for improvement in teacher evaluation, professional development, and teacher leadership. In addition, data from this study generates potential for stakeholders to place a higher value and regard for teachers, influencing future decision-making in education.

### **Problem Statement**

American education policy is at serious risk of failing its education systems (Guthrie & Springer, 2004; Seed, 2008); therefore, transformational change in education must include the teachers' voice. In Minnesota, the emergence of teacher leaders in the form of Peer Coaches has become a recent addition and vital factor to state districts and to local schools' education policy. The experiences of Peer Coaches in Minnesota have yet to be studied. Understanding experiences of these classroom teachers who become Peer Coaches, in their current conditions and culture of the position, may reveal information about the influences of mandated evaluation policy. Results can enlighten Minnesota lawmakers and school district policy leaders to develop informed, balanced, and effective change in teacher leadership.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' experiences of development, leadership, and change while in a Peer Coach role; examine the convergence of data; and represent their stories. The focus on development, leadership, and change as the designated research categories provided a structure for the research. Interview questions were divided into these components to contextualize emerging themes in the data. Although research centered on the fundamental components of development, leadership, and change is applicable to studying individuals in varying professions, the significance of understanding the experiences of teachers, who are at the core of the educational system, has far-reaching implications.

Education has a foundational role in society. The history of the teaching profession is multifaceted, and the current state of teaching in the United States is complex. Recognizing reform movements, such as laws and mandated policies, has effects on the evolution of roles and responsibilities of teachers. Studying Peer Coaches, a teacher leader position with origins in educational reform movements, allows for a deeper understanding of the current state of education and exposes further questions for research. Acknowledging the relevance of teachers' experiences and perspectives is crucial in seeking ways to revolutionize the current educational system.

**Researcher's Journey**

Navigating educational systems for more than 20 years as an elementary teacher and teacher leader, I faced consistent challenges finding opportunities to lead, contribute, and influence other than status quo and hierarchical administrative positions. I pursued excellence and significance beyond the classroom by engaging in professional development, creating innovative programming, serving on committees, and obtaining additional degrees and

certifications. Over the years, teachers, principals, and district leaders sought out my perspective and solution-based thinking, often resulting in thought-provoking, reflective discussions.

Conversations were opportunities for me to employ influential leadership by supporting and developing teachers and providing a safe venue for positional leaders to generate ideas, shift mindsets, and put concepts into action.

I was a classroom teacher whose vested interest was advancing education for students. I consistently sought ways to build an environment which facilitated communication, creativity, and curiosity. Student focus was centered on learning, finding enjoyment in the process, and doing their personal best. I designed learning opportunities which integrated the essential content with a multidisciplinary approach. Students were encouraged to plan and create projects which demonstrated their interests and strengths. The students invested and contributed to the classroom community in many ways, learning the value of collaboration. The classroom décor was constructed by students and reflected their style and quality learning. Students were empowered to understand decision-making and take ownership of their learning.

Classroom experiences were motivating for me because I was able to be a part of students' learning and lives in meaningful ways. Yet my frustration in the educational system continued to increase. Driven to expand my expertise and broaden opportunities, I obtained a leadership coaching certification and engaged with professionals outside of the educational field. Continuing as a full-time teacher, I engaged with clients as a part-time coach. I quickly recognized that coaching facilitates learning for clients, bearing similarity to students in a classroom. Creating a safe, accessible, quality learning environment leads to discovery, creativity, and development, often resulting in change and transformation. Participating in both

professions for more than ten years allowed a means to balance, leverage, and reconcile my skills and experience professionally while fulfilling my personal responsibilities.

My decision to remain in education was based on intuition and the aspiration to cultivate excellence and transformation for colleagues and district leaders—to effectively shift towards the ever-changing learning needs of students. Strategically waiting for potential opportunities outside the classroom, I applied for a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) position as a district elementary mentor. I did not get the position, yet I knew a closed door meant something more purposeful was ahead. The district initiated a conversation with me and requested I apply for a new position being created to assist in developing a partnership with a local university. This door opened and I was offered the position. I spent the next four years creating a framework and implementing systems for collaboration between the district and university. I supervised university students in district practicums, coached mentor classroom teachers, facilitated training and workshops for the university, and participated in numerous professional development and leadership opportunities.

My trajectory in education changed when my experiences as an educator and coach unexpectedly converged. One year into the TOSA position, I was asked to accept a Peer Coach position within community education and split my time between my current role with the university partnership. The Peer Coach role was new to the district; it was to be in compliance with Minnesota teacher evaluation law mandating a peer review process. The position at this district was designed for teachers to leave the classroom, coach and evaluate colleagues for a two- to five-year term, then return to the classroom.

I was approached about the position only a few weeks before the school year started. In late summer, a part-time position had been added due to an oversight of the number of coaches

needed. The Peer Coach team, all full-time positions, had been interviewed, hired, and had begun meeting in the spring, training in the summer, with implementation to begin that fall. I missed the team meetings, coach training, and program induction process, yet with my background in leadership coaching, the role was impeccable fit. I was a part-time Peer Coach for two years, serving in community education.

Peer Coaches who were a part of the initial team collaborated on implementation and communication of the program with their assigned teachers and educational sites. Each Peer Coach was assigned approximately 75 teachers at 2–3 sites, with responsibilities to communicate the process and procedures of the Q Comp program individually and collectively, establish relationships, and provide support to teachers and administration. Peer Coaches followed protocol to coordinate and conduct three observations of each teacher throughout the school year, consisting of a pre-observational meeting, an observation of classroom instruction, and a post-observational meeting. The 30-minute pre-observational meeting provided time for a teacher to review their instructional plan and area of focus with the Peer Coach. The observation included the Peer Coach collecting data during 50 minutes of instruction. The post-observational meeting, also 30 minutes, was designed for a Peer Coach to review and discuss observational data, employ coaching skills to allow the teacher to reflect on their instruction, and evaluate teacher performance. A common framework and rubric were used to evaluate teachers.

My role and responsibilities as a Peer Coach were the same as that of other Peer Coaches, yet my experiences were notably different. I followed the same procedures and protocols; however, my part-time status changed the amount of time, information, and resources which were available to me to execute the position. My assignment with community education included 49 teachers at 5 sites in 3 different suburbs (due to collaborative programs with

neighboring districts). Programs included parent education, preschool, alternative high school programs, and adult education, with teachers educating a wide age range of learners outside of the K–12 setting. The assignment demanded an elevated level of relationship-building in pursuing teacher engagement, given the uniqueness of the programs and a lack of inclusion in previous district initiatives.

During my tenure as a Peer Coach, I refined my leadership skills through supporting and connecting with teachers and district leaders. After two years, the position was expanded to full time. I was required to apply and did not get the position. Another closed door, yet once again I believed a better opportunity would arise. During my last year as a TOSA, I continued facilitating the university partnership combined with a role in the district gifted and talented department, implementing a new expansion for a high school program in partnership with a local community college. Again, an impeccable fit.

The demands, intensity, and challenges I faced as a TOSA for four years were in alignment with my pursuit of excellence and professionalism. The various roles and responsibilities of the position provided me with autonomy, flexibility, advanced and extensive professional development, and leadership opportunities. As the district funding structure changed and shifts in the political landscape occurred, my TOSA position ended without any alternatives to returning to the classroom. This occurrence seemed to have immobilized me professionally, yet my intuitive decision to remain in education allowed an opportunity for profound learning, perspective, and understanding of teachers, coaches, leaders, and organizational systems.

I returned to the classroom and experienced unexpected and arduous dynamics both personally and professionally. My motivation and ingenuity faded along with my perceived

demonstration of leadership and freedom. With the level of isolation, disillusionment of school culture, and demands of the teaching profession, I faced greater challenges as a classroom teacher than I had anticipated. The significance of how I experienced development, leadership, and change as a TOSA brought greater clarity and distinctiveness to recognize my responsibility to contribute to educational research and study the critical role of teachers as practicing professionals. Weaving together my expertise in education with my experience in leadership coaching, I bring an informative understanding to the exploration of teacher development, leadership, and change within the context of an educational setting.

### **Research Question**

How do education Peer Coaches experience development, leadership, and change in their roles at a suburban Minnesota school district?

### **Significance of the Study**

Research based on the experiences of Peer Coaches, a mandated position implemented due to Minnesota law and district policies, has not been previously conducted. This study involved innovative research of individuals in education: teachers, who have been historically marginalized, were offered opportunity to highlight and value their voice. Studying the experiences of Peer Coaches may provide insightful information for stakeholders at all levels in education regarding the impact of this role on teachers. Acknowledging and understanding Peer Coaches' experiences has potential implications and influence on educational reform in policy development and implementation. This research filled a gap in the limited literature incorporating teacher voice in educational change. It also allowed a broadened opening for teachers to become change agents amidst the constant fluctuations in educational reform,

contributing current perceptions and knowledge based on teacher perspective and as a result, advancing educational improvement.

### **Summary**

The role of the teacher in the United States has been significantly shaped by historical complexities and education reform efforts. In recent years, changes to education at the federal and state level have increased accountability for student achievement, intensifying pressure for schools, administrators, and teachers. Shifting landscapes in high-stakes public education have brought new policies, initiatives, and priorities for school districts. Teacher leadership practices and positions, some of which are mandated, have become a fundamental part of district initiatives. Teachers are the critical component in student learning. Understanding experiences of development, leadership, and change for teachers, specifically teacher leaders in a newly mandated evaluative role, has potential for contributions toward advancement in teaching practices, increased regard for the teaching profession, and educational improvement.



## Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined by the researcher for the purposes of this study. Within the discussion of this study, the following terms will be understood to represent the meanings that accompany them.

**Administration:** licensed administrators: school principals, district office administrators.

**Coaching:** a customized process of facilitating purposeful conversation, allowing individuals to explore their thinking; used professionally to build capacity, improve performance, achieve goals, and advance professional practices.

**Colleague:** a professional coworker who is in a similar position.

**Educational Reform:** movements of broad and fundamental change to the educational system at the federal, state, and local levels.

**Evaluation:** a practice of evaluating a teacher's performance using a standardized framework, with a rubric rating of either basic or proficient, based on data collected during an instructional observation and teacher reflection during a pre-observational and post-observational meeting.

**Observation:** a protocol consisting of a 30-minute pre-observational meeting, a 50-minute observation of classroom instruction, and a 30-minute post-observational meeting with a teacher.

**Peer Coach:** a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) who is in a peer reviewer position for a term of 2–5 years and performs the responsibilities of observing another teacher, evaluating the instructor's performance, and providing data and feedback through coaching.

**Peer Coaching:** a process of employing coaching skills and practice obtained through a standardized training protocol, providing feedback on an instructional observation, and facilitating a conversation for the teacher to reflect on their instruction and practices.

**Professional Development:** systematic efforts of training and experiences which expand knowledge and skills, contribute to growth, and enhance effectiveness of practices.

**Teacher:** licensed staff who work with students in a school.

**Teacher Leader:** a teacher in a formal teacher leadership position and out of the classroom.

**Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA):** a teacher who leaves the classroom, yet remains on teacher contract and salary to perform a designated short-term position in the district.

### **Research Categories:**

**Development:** personal growth; the process of developing or being more advanced; the act or event constituting a new stage in a changing situation; personal growth and professional skills (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Goleman, McKee, & Boyatzis, 2002).

**Leadership:** influence; the state or position of being a leader; the art of motivating others to take action towards achieving a goal and providing information, knowledge, and methods to realize that goal (Collins, 2001, 2005; Sinek, 2009).

**Change:** the process or result of becoming different; transforming how one thinks; adapting and constructing new practices to improve one's conditions; direct one's own life, learn and create (construct) new things, do better by ourselves and our world (Gladwell, 2006; Pink, 2011).

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### **The Issue's Historical Significance**

The history of the teaching profession, influences on the development of the American education system, and current initiatives in educational reform efforts will be discussed in this chapter. Changes in teacher evaluation embedded within government policies are core issues facing school districts across the country. Implementing new policy and creating mandated positions have implications for informing teaching practices and programs. The expansion of teacher leadership and emergence of coaching in education are presented, providing context for the current complexities in teaching. Relevant analytical theory based on transformational learning are discussed in association with Peer Coaches' experiences.

### **Historical Background of Teaching in the United States**

Throughout most of history, the teaching occupation in the United States has been held in low regard. Marginalization of teachers and condescending attitudes were perpetuated by a male-dominated society, with discrimination against women in the profession (Herbst, 1991). Teaching was deemed as an acceptable career path for women, viewed as an adequate job until marriage or other suitable employment was available (Cameron, 2005; Herbst, 1991). Men who entered the occupation were subject to similar conditions as women, such as low pay (Herbst, 1991). According to Clifford and Guthrie (1990), origins and development of United States education have perpetuated the perception and attitudes toward the teaching profession. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ideas of Thorndike versus Dewey guided the theory and practice of education, causing many shifts to occur, including increased differentiation of educational roles (Lagemann, 2000). Dewey and Thorndike were educational theorists with an academic background in

psychology who became prominent in the field of education and teacher training (Lagemann, 2000).

The development of the education system was influenced by John Dewey, a psychologist and education philosopher, and Edward L. Thorndike, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century psychologist. Dewey was esteemed among educators, with influence across a wide range of scholarly disciplines, and had sharply differing views from Thorndike, who became more influential in education. Dewey believed the value of education lay in practical and experiential learning to promote social interests in a democratic society. To Dewey, teaching was not prescribed, but a method of a practice where “children [were] encouraged to communicate, inquire, and construct common values and knowledge” (Noddings, 2012, p. 36). On the contrary, Thorndike believed teaching was a result of stimuli and responses, which was more technical, prescriptive, and controllable, and thought that “education could not promote equality or lessen differences between individuals or within and across groups of people” (Lagemann, 2000, p. 62).

Education and educational research were shaped by convincing influences of Thorndike (Lagemann, 2000). One significant impact on education professionals was Thorndike’s influence and emphasis on organizational and professional hierarchy which ultimately created isolation of teachers from administrators. Over the years, teaching continued to shift and adjust with fluctuations in society. Public education was focused on professionalization of teaching rather than cultivating professionalism of classroom teachers, causing mediocrity (Cameron, 2005). Clifford and Guthrie (1990), in alignment with Dewey’s philosophy, contend education reform requires a shift towards teachers. Movements in teacher leadership and professional development preceded teacher evaluation policy and mandated peer review processes. The

impact of a rotating evaluative role introduces a new and significant factor to understanding current reform and guiding future policy at the state and district level.

The teaching occupation in America suffers from decades of neglect in teacher recruitment, teacher salaries, and teacher retention (Darling-Hammond, 1996). In the 1980s, reports of America's failing schools placed teachers under intense public scrutiny, and public debate ensued over concerns of teacher quality, merit pay, and development of teachers as professionals (Herbst, 1991; National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). Federal, state, and district reform efforts in education advanced significant investments, and initiatives focused on improving teacher quality and the conditions of teaching (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Education initiatives addressed the status of teaching as a career option, the development of teachers, and the isolated teacher culture in schools. These reform efforts generated a movement toward the professionalization of teachers, which placed an emphasis on high-quality education. Thus, a notion of teacher leadership emerged (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

### **Emergence of Coaching in Education**

Although peer coaching emerged in education in the 1980s, the development of educational coaching began much earlier. National movements in the 1950s focused on the improvement of academic quality and social equality; these efforts led to an increase of teacher staff development and training (Ackland, 1991; Showers & Joyce, 1996). Over time, questions about the effectiveness of training implementation began to resonate among educators, exposing a lack of research regarding how teachers learn and employ new strategies into their existing teaching practices (Becker, 1996; Showers & Joyce, 1996). By the 1970s, evaluation of teacher staff development and training models were conducted. Reform movements, such as A Nation at Risk, placed an emphasis on school performance of student achievement and motivated

continued changes (Guthrie & Springer, 2004; NCEE, 1983; Seed, 2008). Beginning in the 1980s, training components began to include a focus on teachers effectively transferring their learning into classroom practices (Garmston 1987; Joyce & Showers, 1983; Kent, 1985; Leggett & Hoyle, 1987). Since the 1980s' research and exploration, several terms and types of coaching emerged: technical, collegial, team, reciprocal, cognitive, and peer coaching (Becker, 1996). According to Darling-Hammond (1996), coaching is used for curriculum and instruction innovation, teaching practices improvement, and supervisory purposes.

**Teacher leadership.** The concept of teacher leadership is accepted by researchers, experts, and educators (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002). York-Barr and Duke's (2004) meta-analysis of teacher leadership literature defines teacher leadership as a "process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (p. 288). Teachers who influenced peers, facilitated shared accountability, and embraced teacher-led efforts have been shown to have a greater impact on school improvement (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Fullan (1993, 2007) described how the investment of teachers and teachers leading work with colleagues to improve teaching and learning contributed towards the effectiveness of the profession.

Research described teacher leaders serving in two fundamental types of roles: informal and formal (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Poekert, 2012). Informal teacher leadership was associated with activities, influence, and skills exhibited by teachers in classroom-related activities and through colleague interactions and relationships. This type of leadership is demonstrated by teachers participating in job-embedded tasks and roles, rather than positions created which impose formal hierarchies (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Actively leading other

teachers through collaborative work to influence improvement in teaching and student learning is considered informal teacher leadership (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014). Teacher leadership considered to be formal involved teachers in specific roles and responsibilities, often outside the classroom. Coaching typically fills a formal role outside of the classroom. As described by Danielson (2007), formal roles are when teachers apply, are selected for the position, and receive training for their new responsibilities. Teacher leadership based on forming collegial relationships was shown to be more effective when colleagues and administrators recognized teachers' abilities to lead and influence. Muijs and Harris (2003) suggested various ways teacher leadership, including peer roles, could be developed as central sources of expertise and information. Teacher leaders maintain a facilitating role, draw on additional resources, gain access to external assistance, and contribute to collaborative culture.

**Evolution of peer coaching.** The concept of peer coaching was designed to support and facilitate individual teachers' learning needs in the classroom (Costa & Garmston, 1994) and was first developed in the 1980s (Knight, 2008). Aligning with national educational reform movements in accountability of student performance, peer coaching continued to gain momentum in the 1990s in an effort to improve teaching and learning (Becker 1996; Corcoran, 1995). Reports published by the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future in 1996 generated substantial discussions at the federal, state, and local levels centered on teaching and teachers in America (Becker, 1996; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Amid changes in national reform efforts focused on teacher accountability, qualifications, and effectiveness, peer coaching continued to gain momentum and eventually became a part of state

district and local policy (Garet et al., 2001). According to Showers (1985), the purpose of peer coaching was based on building communities of teachers in continuous collegial studies of knowledge and skills and providing structure to acquire and implement teaching strategies.

**Current practices of peer coaching.** Recent literature on peer coaching practices in education has been centered on creating support systems of job-embedded learning for teachers to directly transfer their learning into their practices (Zepeda, 2018). The partnership approach of teachers learning alongside their colleagues and aligning professional learning with school and district initiatives are factors which impact the effectiveness of coaching models (Knight, 2018). Executing coaching practices requires understanding of how to leverage coaching as a tool for sustained, active professional learning for teachers (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Coaching with fidelity, advancing teacher engagement, and fostering a culture of learning are conduits for implementing meaningful ways for teachers to develop as professionals (Knight 2018; Zepeda, 2018).

### **The Issue's Major Contemporary Themes and Tensions**

#### **Current Initiatives in Education Reform**

The role of the teacher has been significantly shaped through change and modifications to education policy within the American education system. Over the last two decades, national, state, and local education reform initiatives have shifted from a focus on what children learn to the effectiveness and qualifications of teachers (Garet et al., 2001). The demands upon teachers include an emphasis on deepening their knowledge and skills in addition to understanding how students learn (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Most, 1996). In addition, federal reforms and policy at the state level have increased accountability for test scores and intensified the pressure for schools, administrators, and individual teachers to perform. These federal



reforms include No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 followed by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. Teacher leadership roles and new teacher evaluation systems development have become a priority for policymakers and a fundamental part of district initiatives (McGuinn, 2012).

Changes in federal reform efforts and state policy mandates during this period have placed an emphasis on addressing teacher quality and implementing effective teacher evaluation systems. These changes are a core issue facing school districts across the country (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011). Improving teacher quality and increasing student performance are crucial components of developing teacher evaluation systems (McGuinn, 2012). According to Marzano and Toth (2013), teacher supervision and evaluation models have become increasingly important to school administrators. Recent shifts have emerged from a limited view of teacher supervision to a broadened approach, including observation of classroom practices, student learning, and reflective conversations (Danielson, 2012).

With teacher performance and student achievement at the center of reform efforts and educational policies, Woulfin and Rigby (2017) contended that coaching in alignment with evaluation has the potential to improve instruction. In a study by Mangin and Dunsmore (2015), instructional coaches designated to improve literacy practices influenced change through their leadership roles. Their qualitative study was conducted in one school district, situated within a larger regional district, during a 3-year literacy framework development. Data was collected from four literacy coaches through interviews, time allocation logs, and observations. Findings suggested the coaches' training and strategies employed were responsive to support individual teachers, yet limiting for broader change within the district. Implications included framing coach

roles to incorporate professional development opportunities and increasing coaching skills and knowledge needed to influence systemic reform.

Developments in teacher evaluation, teacher leadership, and professional development are significant factors to understand current reform and guide future policy at the state and district level. Training, professional development, and implementation of coaching skills are factors connected to improvement of instructional practices and responsiveness to teachers' needs. Coaching can be framed to support both individual and systemic reform.

### **Leadership in Teaching**

In American school systems, teacher leadership roles and the development of coaching initiatives experienced substantial growth over the last 20 years (Mangin, 2014). As a response to national educational reform and state policies, school district initiatives shifted priorities to improve test scores and establish more teacher-led opportunities (Carver, Margolis, & Williams, 2013). Teachers are an integral part of instructional change, and teacher leadership roles have become embedded in school-reform initiatives to develop professional learning for teachers and expand educational improvement (Poekert, 2012; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leadership, according to Muijs and Harris (2003), is powerful due to the strong collegial relationships, recognition of teachers' ability to lead, and a "new professionalism" for teachers that is possible when teachers become leaders. In school settings, teacher leadership focused on the importance of collegial relationships and collaboration, and supported teacher development led to school improvement (Berry, Byrd, & Wieder, 2013; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014). Although teachers may be reluctant to take leadership roles, they view collaborative work as a significant factor to influencing school improvement (Danielson, 2007; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014).

**Challenges for teacher leaders.** Although research indicates progress and advancements in teacher leadership, with results in educational improvements, over the last 20 years, challenges have also emerged. Teaching differs from most professions because of the limited opportunities to assume greater formal responsibilities and increased influence beyond administration jobs (Danielson, 2007). The organizational structure of schools has remained mostly unchanged for the past century (Elmore, 2000; Muijs & Harris, 2003), while pressure and politics of school districts have limited the implementation of teacher leader initiatives (Carver, Margolis, & Williams, 2013). Teacher leaders, especially those in formal roles, need advanced training and support, which is not addressed in most teacher preparation programs or professional development (Carver et al., 2013; Danielson, 2007).

Attributes of effective leaders are similar to those of effective teachers, yet working with colleagues requires notably different skills. These skills entail navigating the district and school political environment, facilitating group process, and managing interpersonal relationships with administration and other teachers (Carver et al., 2013; Danielson, 2007; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Teachers are reluctant to put themselves in a hierarchical relationship to colleagues due to perceived and potential barriers (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014). Teacher leaders can be ostracized by their peers due to lack of acceptance of the leadership role and experience loss of connectedness and feelings of isolation (Carver et al., 2013; Danielson, 2007).

**Implications for future leadership.** Teacher leaders are individuals who lead collaborative work and incorporate strategies to influence colleagues towards improving teaching and learning. Teacher leadership can be accomplished through formal and informal channels. Fairman and Mackenzie (2014) suggested shifting from a narrow notion of teacher leadership, focused on individuals' qualities and role, toward a view of collective, collaborative work

encouraging the concept that together teachers are stronger. “Teacher leadership implies that it is the job of all teachers to engage fully in fueling the forward movement toward improving learning for students” (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014, p. 81). In a comprehensive review of literature, York-Barr and Duke (2004) described teacher leadership in three different waves: formal roles delegated by principals, instructional roles to implement curriculum, and leading colleagues in professional learning communities to support collaboration and continuous learning. Berry, Byrd, and Wieder (2013) advocated for a fourth wave, where teachers can be an integral part of policy-making, solving challenges, creating solutions, and participating in policy work to bridge the policy and practice gap, rather than only implementing policy and reform initiatives decided upon by other stakeholders.

The development of teacher leadership suggests teachers hold a vital position in the function of teaching and learning in schools (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Complexities based on the cycle of formal teacher leader positions, of leaving and returning to the classroom, has remained relatively unexplored (Datnow & Castellano, 2001), while the improvement of teaching practices and improved student learning were significant factors studied in teacher leadership (Carver et al., 2013; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014). According to an overview of teacher leadership literature by Muijs and Harris (2003), teachers empowered in leadership roles experience increased motivation, self-esteem, and fulfillment of work practices, and teacher leadership promotes higher performance, potentially increasing retention rates in the teaching profession.

### **Coaching and Teacher Development**

Teacher development is a central component in efforts to improve teaching practices and increase student achievement (Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002). Regardless of the professional

development activity, learning opportunities based on relationships and teacher changes in knowledge, skills, and classroom practice generated effective results (Garet et al., 2001). Understanding teacher acquisition and use of knowledge and skills is fundamental to understanding how and in what circumstances teachers use research and evidence to develop their practice (Guskey, 2002; Joyce & Showers, 2002). According to Guskey and Yoon (2009), professional development programs must address the process of teacher change through discussions of specific goals and by understanding meaningful evidence that reflects achievement of those goals as a means to assess and evaluate effectiveness. Implementation of peer coaching and instructional coaching models include teachers working together to increase skill development and instructional effectiveness related to teaching, through feedback and reflection (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Coaching used as a form of professional development included teachers receiving job-embedded learning to support incorporating new strategies into their practice and led to improved practice and teacher efficacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008, Knight; 2008).

**Connection to teacher leadership.** There is a significant connection between teacher development and teacher leadership. As teacher leadership progressed in recent years and gained attention as a means of educational reform for instructional improvement, education efforts at the local level have continued to use school-based leadership roles to increase student achievement (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010; Poekert, 2012). Therefore, understanding the process of teacher change, teacher leadership, and the role of professional development is essential. “Teacher professional learning is a complex process, which requires cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers individually and collectively” (Avalos, 2011, p. 10). The establishment of more formal teacher leadership roles and recognition of teachers defining, designing, and

implementing school initiatives has broadened professional development as both a source and result of teacher leadership (Avalos, 2011; Poekert, 2012). “In the history of education, no improvement effort has ever succeeded in the absence of thoughtfully planned and well-implemented professional development” (Guskey & Yoon, 2009, p. 497). According to Poekert (2012), implementing teacher leadership as a professional development strategy warrants further investigation due to limited research.

**Coaching and its adaptations to education.** Societal changes in social and cultural context gave rise to coaching, which was based on the premise of relationship, human development, and learning (Whitmore, 2010). The coaching movement grew exponentially, and coaching developed and took on an integral role in organizations, professions, and individuals’ lives (Menendez & Williams, 2015). Peterson and Hicks (1996) described coaching as a “process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective” (p. 14). Professional and life coaching showed many variations dependent upon coach training and practices (Creane, 2004), yet Menendez and Williams (2015) contended all coaching is life coaching, even when pursued for professional purposes. Coaching was designed to help enhance the quality of clients’ lives and as an intervention to impact society in useful and positive ways. Theoretical and empirical evidence has become more prevalent in the literature, demonstrating the successful use of many methods and models of coaching (Brock, 2008).

Different coach training models and certifications exist, with various reputable programs and accreditation organizations accessible to develop proficient coaching skills (Brock, 2008). Coach training programs typically include a component of peer coaching in learning and acquiring coaching skills. Coaches commonly practice in various careers as executives,

managers, and consultants and tend to be well educated (Brock, 2008; Grant & Zackon, 2004). The purposes and goals of coaching focus on learning, improved self-efficacy, and increased performance for clients (Whitmore, 2010). Coaching shifted traditional leadership programs of workshops and courses to an individually tailored approach (Hicks & Peterson, 1997). Rather than teaching, coaching was described as creating conditions for learning, generating transformation, prompting personal change, and development for people to take initiative in achieving growth and potential (Whitmore, 2010). Coaching evolved individuals' development more readily when they engaged in the coaching process, and coaching specialties emerged, with executive coaching dominant in the marketplace for corporations (Grant & Zackon, 2004).

Similar to other professions, training is used for coaching in educational settings. Training can vary depending on the purpose of the coach. Various types of educational coaching have been implemented as methods of professional development and training for teachers and teacher leaders (Garmston, 1987). Showers (1985) described the purpose of educational coaching as providing a structure for teachers to acquire new skills and strategies and build a community of teachers to develop their practice. In education, coaching was used for instructional intervention or evaluation for teachers rather than for the purpose of learning, improved self-efficacy, reflection, and teacher development (Costa & Garmston, 1994; Showers, 1985). In contrast to professional coaching, Peer Coaches in education are considered experienced, knowledgeable practitioners in their field. Since the early 1980s, coaching has been used as a method of transferring skill and expertise (Ackland, 1991; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990).

**Coaching and its adaptations to teaching.** Over the last 30 years, teacher professional development and use of various models of coaching have shared a common purpose of improving practices and performance of teachers (Avalos, 2011; Joyce & Showers, 2002;

Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). The process of peer coaching in education was developed for teachers to increase skill through observation and feedback from colleagues (Showers, 1985). As Robbins (1991) pointed out,

The issues of how educators are treated and how they work within their own schools need to be resolved if we are to have lasting, significant change in schools. We need to build bridges across classrooms and restructure our schools in ways that capitalize on the talent that exists in individual classrooms. Teachers need to have opportunities to open classroom doors, talk together about teaching and learning, and solve problems. (p. v)

According to Joyce and Showers (2002), research and implementation of coaching in education has generated a shift in educational professional development for teachers to learn how to effectively implement newly acquired knowledge and skills into their teaching practices. Coaching includes instructional strategy modeling, observing teachers and providing feedback, problem-solving and data analysis, and facilitating conversations about professional development (Killion & Harrison, 2006). Research suggests correlations between implementing coaching and teaching improvements (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). Studies have examined instructional coaching of systemic reform of federal initiatives and found correlations between coach roles and student achievement (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011). Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) advocated for professional development as a means for systemic and individual reform. Yet a gap in the literature exists in framing coaching initiatives and examining outcomes of using the peer review process, or peer coaching, as a means of teacher evaluation at the district level in conjunction with state-mandated policies.

Coaching outside of education varies significantly in training, implementation, and practices. In professional and life coaching, training models focused on coach proficiencies for



coaches to practice in interdisciplinary fields and provide others with knowledge and skills to function more effectively (Peterson & Hicks, 1996). Outcomes of coaching were long-term excellent performance, self-correction, and self-generation (Flaherty, 2005) and excluded evaluative purposes. In education, peer coaching was designed for teachers to learn from one another, enhance teaching practices, and increase teacher development (Muijs & Harris, 2003, Robbins, 1991). Coaching in a formal teacher leadership role included specific training for teachers based on educational research and developed for implementation in an educational setting (Costa & Garmston, 1994). As educational coaching evolved, practices began to include supervisory responsibilities, yet according to Showers (1985), norms of coaching and evaluation should be separated.

Coaching as a method of professional development is prevalent in current literature. Desimone and Pak (2017) discussed the benefits of coaching that is grounded in research-based principles, on teacher learning. In addition, coaching has a plausible connection with effective professional development research-based ideas. Desimone and Pak recommended further research to establish this connection. In a recent meta-study about the outcomes of a variety of professional development activities, Thurlings and den Brok (2017) examined coaching, collaborating, and assessing. Learning outcomes included teacher knowledge, teacher skills, and student learning. Coaching activities produced outcomes improving instructional skills and increasing student learning, noting the importance for teachers to participate in reflective practices. According to Wood, Goodnight, Bethune, Preston, and Cleaver (2016), adopting a multilevel model coaching approach addresses teachers' varying needs and abilities to provide individualized professional development. Multilevel coaching includes an initial in-service

training and follow-up support in the form of coaching for teachers' use of new instructional skills.

### **Current Complexities and Changes in Teaching**

Reform efforts and large-scale improvements of public schools changed the organization of schooling, practices of teaching, and functions of school leadership (Elmore, 2000). Teachers experienced increasing expansion of roles and responsibilities which led to teachers reevaluating their development and professionalism (Hargreaves, 2000). The teaching profession's norms of isolation, privacy, individualism, and egalitarianism challenged teacher leaders and the roles which have developed in education (Berry et al., 2013; Carver et al., 2013). Teacher leadership has become a predominant policy issue both locally and nationwide. Datnow and Castellano (2001) noted that the role of teachers out of the classroom and how their work embedded into traditional school structures was mostly unexplored. Opportunities for teachers and career pathways created by policy development continue to expand, yet experiences of teacher leaders have not been examined: "For teachers who do have short-term, limited opportunities to participate in educational policy development and implementation, how do their careers progress after their terms of service are complete?" (Eckert, Ulmer, Khachatryan, & Ledesma, 2016, p. 688).

The professionalization of teaching has changed over time as the teacher role adapted to reform efforts within the United States educational system. The performance of teachers has been a prevalent issue and focus in education. With the expansion of teacher leadership roles, changes to school structures, and shifts in policies and mandates, further research is needed to explore the perspectives, beliefs, and insights of teachers. Research exploring the experiences of

teachers' development, leadership, and change is needed to better understand and inform future developments in education.

### **Prior Research**

Research studies and articles were available on educational topics involving peer coaching, yet limited in examining how recent reform efforts have shifted the implementation of peer coaching in evaluative roles. Topics included the development of peer coaching, design of models and implementation of programs, and outcomes of peer coaching. Studies on the impact of peer coaching most often focused on teacher efficacy and student achievement. The literature on peer coaching also incorporated studies on teacher leaders and the roles of teacher leadership in educational settings but did not focus on the coaches and their metamorphosis. Although no research was found directly correlated to this study, two studies with commonalities were located which explored experiences of teachers in leadership positions.

After considerable research of current literature, one study was found which was conducted by Fiarman in 2007 which included qualitative case studies of seven schools in Maine. The study was aimed at examining decisions by teacher leaders to either leave or stay in a classroom after their tenure in leadership roles. The researchers included eight Consulting Teachers (CTs) who served a three-year term as peer coaches, or mentors, for beginning teachers. The district designed the CT positions for the teacher leader to return to the classroom. The authors noted all CTs returned to the classroom as required by the district, and some pursued administration or other instructional coaching roles within a few years. The results indicated the CTs described a rewarding experience in the leadership role, and their job choices were motivated by the desire to utilize the expertise and influence they gained during their tenure in the CT position.

In 2014, a collaborative self-study by Munroe and Driskill explored the experience of one teacher leader who returned to the classroom after a district leadership role. The authors collaborated on the study, Munroe as the researcher and assistant professor in a Canadian university, and Driskill as the teacher leader in a school district in Texas. This study referenced Fiarman's 2007 study where the teacher leaders were unaware of the frustrations and tensions they might have experienced during the transition. The notable difference in this study was Driskill's prior knowledge of the complexities of returning to the classroom. Although Driskill experienced similar tensions, the awareness provided an opportunity to navigate the transition with more understanding of what to expect. The authors articulated sources of tension in the career transition and three useful avenues to approach teacher leader transitions back to the classroom: awareness, intention, and support (Munroe & Driskill, 2014).

The limited research located on the experiences of teacher leaders was notable. The studies contained teacher leader experiences and included returning to the classroom, yet did not focus on Peer Coaches. What is missing from the literature are studies on the experiences of Peer Coaches, specifically teacher leaders, in evaluative positions. One reason there is a gap in research is because the Peer Coach role in this study is a relatively new and important component introduced to the existing field of teacher leadership in education.

### **Relevant Analytical Theory**

This study explores how Peer Coaches experience development, leadership, and change. Transformational learning informs this study by providing a framework to analyze the experiences of participants, explain shifts in perspectives and actions, and describe learning which occurred.

### **Selection of Research Categories**

The research categories in this study were chosen for their importance and prominence in one's social and professional existence. These categories have been considered valuable and pertinent in studying individuals, groups of people, and organizations. These areas have been defined, written about, and widely studied by others; therefore, the commonality of development, leadership, and change allowed the researcher to explore the experiences of Peer Coaches with an embedded understanding of these foundational elements. The categories have been defined by the researcher based on copious reading, exploration, and involvement in these areas. Applying these categories to the exploration of experiences within the field of education, the researcher determined notable literature for the purpose of this study.

Development is a process of personal growth in a changing situation. Guiding, supporting, and motivating others includes collaboration and building an ethos of cohesiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Elements necessary in influencing and leading through changing situations are self-awareness, empathy, and collaboration (Goleman, McKee, Boyatzis, 2002).

Leadership is influence and motivating others to take action by providing resources. Actions of those in leadership roles increase effectiveness by building an ethos of distinction and discipline (Collins, 2001, 2005). Understanding the reasoning behind leadership brings greater influence and innovation to professional roles (Sinek, 2009).

Change is the process of transforming thinking and adapting new practices to improve ourselves and the world. Motivation is a key factor in approaching learning and creating new things with purpose (Pink, 2011). Understanding thinking processes and decision making refines the understanding of self, others, and our surroundings (Gladwell, 2006).

### **Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory**

Learning theories provide descriptions of how people learn and the impact of learning in a social context. Transformational learning theory developed by Jack Mezirow describes how adults learn and make meaning of their experiences. According to Mezirow (1991), individuals have a set of perspectives, or frames of reference, due to their upbringing and life experiences. Mezirow (1991) explained meaning structures as a major component of learning. Meaning structures, including an individual's point of view (meaning schemes), and assumptions, beliefs, values, and habits of mind (meaning perspectives) combine to form an individual's worldview. Learners construct, validate, and reformulate the meaning of their experiences. "All transformative learning involves taking action to implement insights derived from critical reflection" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 225).

The development of transformational learning theory explains the process of "formulating more dependable beliefs about our experience, assessing their contexts, seeking informed agreement on their meaning and justification, and making decisions" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4) with implications for adult educators. Through education, adults are better equipped to make decisions with less dependency on the status quo or opinions of others to guide them. "The process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning, perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so they may generate beliefs and opinions will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7). For learning to be transformational, acquiring new knowledge and having new experiences must change an individual's frame of reference through critical reflection and inclusive learning practices.

Development of meaning structures occurs through reflection. Mezirow (1991) explained reflection as analogous to problem solving, and transformative learning profoundly alters an individual's way of feeling and thinking.

Transformative learning changes the way people see themselves and their world, and adults learn to work within their experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Transformational learning theory is based on the principle of “much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends on context—biographical, historical, cultural—in which they are embedded. We make meaning with different dimensions of awareness and understanding” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 3). Learning occurs in four ways as proposed by Mezirow (2000): “by elaborating existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view or by transforming habits of mind” (p. 19). Through reflection, individuals increase understanding of themselves and of their learning. Mezirow (2000) focused on the internal process of adult learning and considered one's identity and reality are shaped by the contexts of their culture and relationships.

Peer Coaches are teachers who exited a classroom to fulfill a new teacher leadership position in the district. The differences of environment, responsibilities, involvements, and experiences in the district position versus a classroom are vast. Classroom teachers perform their work mostly in isolation and engage exclusively in the context of a school setting. Teachers who leave the classroom for leadership roles are exposed to new knowledge and new experiences in the broader environment of a school district setting. Peer Coaches enter a different position, operating in their existing habits of mind, and may be challenged in understanding how to engage and to make meaning of their experiences in the broader school structures of a school district. Understanding ways transformational learning occurs and applies to teachers in a new

leadership role provides constructive and discerning examination of Peer Coaches' development, leadership, and change and their growth of new frameworks and evolution of their worldview.

Peer Coaches who expand their interaction and collaboration with others, critically reflect, and shift their frames of reference may experience transformational learning as they change their habits of mind. As Peer Coaches progress through the tenure in their positions, how do they reconcile shifts in their perspectives and habits of mind in order to construct learning? Using transformative learning theory to analyze their experiences has implications for how Peer Coaches encounter learning, elaborate their learning using their frames of reference, and transform their point of view and habits of mind. As Peer Coaches acquire knowledge and integrate their cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences into their learning, their experiences can be transformational.

### **Summary**

Throughout the evolution of the United States education system and the complex history of the teaching profession, reform efforts have influenced and shaped current initiatives. Changes in teacher evaluation embedded within government policies have created issues for school districts across the country. Implementation of teacher evaluation policies and mandated teacher leader positions—in this study the position of Peer Coach—has implications for the expansion of teacher leadership and teaching practices. Emergence of coaching in education and current coaching practices in education have provided context for the current complexities in teaching. Transformational learning theory based on adult learning informs this study to analyze experiences of development, leadership, and change for Peer Coaches.



## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research was used to conduct a case study of Peer Coaches at a Minnesota suburban school district. This methodology allowed Peer Coaches to share their real-life stories and experiences of development, leadership, and change. A grounded-theory approach was used to interpret data throughout the research process and provided understanding and insight of Peer Coaches' experiences. This chapter discusses the research design, theoretical framework, and rationale for the study. Additionally, the research process, data sources, data collection, and analysis method are outlined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of researcher bias, study limitations, validity, and ethical considerations.

### **Research Design**

#### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research offers a deep, complex understanding of the world around us, uncovering what cannot be seen, heard, or felt without exploring. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggested, qualitative research is "rich in description of people, places, and conversations and not easily handled by statistical procedures" (p. 2). The qualitative research approach was most appropriate for the nature of this study to explore and analyze the stories, experiences, and insights of Peer Coaches in greater depth.

Research using qualitative methods allows researchers to investigate a question, recognize the complexity, and develop meaning from the perspectives of the participants in the context of the situation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Researchers become involved in the qualitative research process due to relationships with participants and play a central role in conducting interviews and data collection (Creswell, 2013, 2014). The qualitative process involves an inductive style of data analysis, and researchers build from specifics to general

themes, making interpretations of the meaning. The study includes five important qualitative features as described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007): (1) obtaining data in a setting to provide context for understanding; (2) explicit attentiveness on the process versus the product; (3) inductively designating the direction of the research as data collection occurs; (4) focus on finding meaning and understanding; (5) descriptive in nature. The qualitative research process includes refining rich data and developing alternative and new learning.

### **Case Study**

Conducting case study research has a history across many disciplines, including education, and is designed to explore real-life case studies in a contemporary context (Creswell, 2013). This case study is primarily designed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of development, leadership, and change for current and former Peer Coaches at Crossroads Schools. Utilizing a case study framework, data was gathered through detailed interviews and examined to provide insight into an issue in one site. This case is defined within the Crossroads School District and the participants are current and former Peer Coaches with varying levels of experience in the position and in education. Researcher familiarity with the school district and experience in the position allowed for an authentic collection of data.

Creswell (2013) described a defining feature of a case study as an in-depth understanding of the case. Although this is typically done through collecting multiple forms of data, this study provided copious, relevant data exclusively through comprehensive interviews. According to Creswell (2013), conducting case study research involves a description of the case, identifies themes uncovered through data analysis, and ends with conclusions about the overall meaning of the case. Concepts of Yinn, Stake, and Merriam all contributed to support Creswell's work on designing and conducting case studies (as cited in Creswell, 2013).

## **Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is a methodology for constructing theory grounded in systematic data collection and analysis; theory which emerged and was constructed from data (Berg, 2004; Charmaz, 2014). Rather than comparing data to previously built theory, grounded theory allows for creative insight which can often result from questioning and interpreting data throughout the case study research process (Berg, 2004). This case study which explores the development, leadership, and change experiences of Peer Coaches in context of their environment was initiated without any predetermined, specific hypothesis or theory to prove or disprove.

Charmaz (2014) emphasized that the inductive methods of grounded theory entail “systemic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data” (p. 1). According to Charmaz, organizing, coding, and analyzing occurs throughout the data collection process. The researcher builds patterns, make assertions, and provides explanations through deliberation and reflection on the meaning and implications of the findings. There is a close relationship between data and theory. Using grounded theory in this study provided a deep understanding of people in an organization and was used to generate theory. According to Berg (2004),

Sensemaking is the manner by which people, groups, and organizations make sense of stimuli with which they are confronted how they frame what they see and hear, how they perceive and interpret this information, and how they interpret their own actions and go about solving problems and interacting with others. (p. 319)

Grounded theory urges the researcher to “direct, manage, and streamline data collection and, moreover, construct an original analysis of the data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 3).

Grounded theory suggests the researcher develop the literature review after collecting and analyzing data (Charmaz, 2014), yet for this study, a preliminary literature review was drafted prior to data collection and revised to reflect additional research based on emergent themes resulting from data analysis. Applying grounded theory proposes a more naturalistic development and descriptive approach, which are key features of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The meaning and implications of the research data generated a theoretical model which can be expanded and further tested in future studies.

### **Research Process and Procedures**

The researcher processes and procedures will be described in this section, which includes the selection of the research site, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Researcher bias, limitations of the study, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations are discussed.

### **Institutional Review Board**

Permission to conduct this study was obtained through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of St. Thomas [IRB#1237495-1]. The purpose of the IRB is to review proposed research studies to ensure safeguards for the rights, safety, and welfare of those involved in research. The regulations follow federal guidelines and maintain ethical considerations for the respect and well-being of participants. The approval process involved explaining the purpose, procedures, research questions. The IRB approved the application and confirmed all the criteria was met to proceed with the study. Permission was obtained from the school district after the research proposal was reviewed, and preliminary meetings were held with the assistant superintendent and research and evaluation departments. Participants were

recruited and obtained permission individually through an informed consent conversation and signed consent form as required by the IRB.

### **Research Setting**

A Minnesota suburban school district was selected to recruit Peer Coach participants for this study. “Crossroads Schools” is a Minnesota suburban public school district with a focus on academic excellence and community engagement. There are 19 schools ranging from early childhood to high school with approximately 10,000 students. District student demographics include approximately 4,800 female and 5,200 male students; 51% ethnic diversity; 14% English learners; 39% free or reduced lunch eligibility; 14% special education, 8% nonresidents. There are approximately 900 licensed teachers and staff and 45 district administrators (25 school principals, assistant principals and 20 in the district offices) at Crossroads Schools. District-wide initiatives and site-based management place an emphasis on student learning, technology integration, and staff professional development.

Crossroads School District, along with other Minnesota school districts, developed and implemented a teacher evaluation plan and participated in Compensation for Quality Teachers (Q Comp), a 2005 bipartisan agreement in the Minnesota State Legislature. Crossroads Schools District Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) positions, with a term of 2–5 years, were established for peer reviewers, titled Peer Coaches. The Peer Coaches are teachers who leave the classroom and receive specific training relative to their role and responsibilities, which includes evaluation and coaching licensed staff.

The school district designed and implemented the merit-pay program in exchange for additional district funding and included five components required by law: career ladder/advancement options, job-embedded professional development, teacher evaluation,

performance pay, and an alternative salary schedule. Crossroads district formed a governing board comprised of eight individuals with the following titles: director of teacher and learning, union president, human resources director, Peer Coach, elementary teacher, secondary teacher, elementary administrator, secondary administrator. The Q Comp governing board oversaw compliance of the Q Comp Agreement and collaborated with Human Resources on staffing decisions.

The district Q Comp application was approved by Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) in 2012, and as part of the implementation process, Crossroads Schools established a Q Comp Coordinator to oversee the program in the district and 10 new Peer Coach positions. Each Peer Coach is assigned to approximately 2–3 schools to complete observations of licensed staff 3 times per school year and provide individual and site-based resources. Although teachers in these positions leave the classroom, they remain on teacher contract and salary. Peer Coaches receive specific training and are given responsibilities relative to their position. They meet weekly to debrief, reflect, and plan and engage in regular collective professional development opportunities.

### **Selection and Recruitment of Participants**

All current and former Peer Coaches in Crossroads district were invited to participate in the study in order to include a variety of experiences and broad view of perspectives. The Q Comp program was relatively new to the district, with implementation six years prior to this study. Potential participants were recruited by an initial email forwarded by the Q Comp Coordinator, with all responses and subsequent communication done directly between researcher and potential participants. In all, 17 individuals were contacted: 16 responded, and 10

participated. All Peer Coaches who expressed interest in participating were selected to be part of the study.

Participants for this study included 7 currently practicing and 3 former full-time Peer Coaches at Crossroads School District (see Appendix B for breakdown of participant status). Of the 7 current Peer Coaches, 4 were returning to the position and 3 were exiting. Of the 3 participants exiting the position, one was returning to a classroom, one was retiring, and one was starting a newly created district position in a school. Of the 3 former Peer Coaches, one participant was no longer in education and was enrolled in a degree program in pursuit of a career change, and 2 were still employed in the district, both in TOSA positions as Dean of Students: one middle school and one high school.

During data collection and analysis, participants were numbered PC1, PC2, etcetera, in order to identify their quotes. Participant numbers were omitted in Table 1 to protect their identities.

**Table 1**

*Participant Profiles*

Peer Coach Status 2017–18 School Year	Gender	Years as a Peer Coach	Years in a Classroom	Years in Education
Former Peer Coach	F	4	11	15
Former Peer Coach	F	3	13	17
Former Peer Coach	M	2	18	23
Current Peer Coach	F	2	12	14
Current Peer Coach	M	6	24	30
Current Peer Coach	M	2	11	13
Current Peer Coach	F	6	8	14
Current Peer Coach	M	4	14	18
Current Peer Coach	F	2	10	12
Current Peer Coach	F	1	18	19

Participant background data was analyzed for a comprehensive understanding of Peer Coaches' experiences. Initial information was collected of participants' educational and professional background to provide foundational knowledge and context of the group. Data was integrated and displayed in charts to represent the collective group (Appendix D). Participants averaged 3.2 years in the Peer Coach position, ranging from 1–6 years. (Note: Two participants were in their 6<sup>th</sup> year, an exception to the 2- to 5-year position term. This decision was approved by the governing board due to unique circumstances and to preserve consistency in implementation and development of the program.)

The average number of years in education was 17.5 and ranged from 12–30 years. Participants' classroom teaching experience averaged 13.9 years, ranging from 8–24 years. Levels of classroom teaching experience included 7 elementary teachers, 1 middle school teacher, and 2 high school teachers. Three participants previously held district positions other than classroom teaching: one content intervention specialist, one reading coordinator, and one instructional coach. One participant held a position outside of education prior to teaching as a professional soccer player. Participants obtained additional education beyond a four-year degree: all participants held a master's degree, one held a doctorate degree, and four had an administrative license (Appendix D).

### **Data Collection**

The study was designed for a comprehensive understanding of Peer Coaches' experiences of leadership, development, and change; therefore, identifying initial background information of Peer Coaches occurred prior to conducting interviews. Participants' professional and educational background data was obtained electronically. Data of participants' experiences of the Peer Coach position was collected through in-person interviews.



Participants received an email confirming their participation, with background questions (Appendix A) to be responded to electronically for preliminary data collection. Background information provided context of participants, individually and collectively. Following background data collection, interviews were conducted. Qualitative data was collected through conversational-style interviews to develop an in-depth understanding of each participant's story of their experiences during their time in the Peer Coach position. Interviews were structured and defined by the researcher with the purpose of obtaining participants' perspectives and descriptions. "Interviews attempt to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1).

Interviewing participants with varied tenure in the Peer Coach position was intentional, to capture the evolution of individuals and the collective group throughout various years in the role during the development, implementation, and refinement of the Q Comp program. Interviews of 7 current Peer Coaches occurred at the Crossroads District Office building, and interviews of 3 former coaches occurred in various public locations. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. All data was collected within a 30-day time frame.

The interview questions were organized into five main categories: Opening Reflections, Development, Leadership, Change, and Closing Reflections (Appendix C). Opening questions were designed for participants to engage by describing their personal and professional background, reflecting on the transition from the classroom to the Peer Coach position, and describing the work of a Peer Coach. The next three categories of questions focused on the three main elements of the study—development, leadership, and change—and were designed for participants to reflect on their experience during the position. The format of the three main categories was specifically designed to begin with an open-ended question on development,

leadership, and change. Participants were invited to respond freely. Follow-up questions were designed to prompt participants on specific topics relevant to each category and were used only when participants did not include the topic in the initial, open-ended question. Closing questions were designed for participants to reflect on the similarities and differences of their experiences from their initial expectations. Participants also articulated their anticipated plans to transition out of the position or reflect upon the completion of the position, depending on the current or former status of the participant in relation to the Peer Coach position. Finally, participants had the opportunity to share any additional thoughts about their peer coaching experience.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Qualitative interview data was compiled and organized in two ways: first by participant interviews and then arranged by interview questions. Data analysis procedures included examination of both data arrangements. Examination and analysis of data incorporated grounded theory coding procedures based on the work of Corbin and Strauss (1990) and techniques crafted by Charmaz (2014). “The procedures of grounded theory are designed to develop a well-integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5).

Data was initially arranged by participant interview. Participant transcripts were read simultaneously with listening to the interview recording, while the researcher added notes and observational comments. Participant interviews were reread for deeper examination of the data and researcher memos were added. According to Charmaz (2014), “Memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyze your codes and data early in the research process” (p. 162). Analyzing data by participant interview provided an essential foundation for this case study and provided an understanding of each participant’s story.

The next phase of data analysis included a focus on participants' collective experiences of development, leadership, and change. Data was arranged and organized by interview questions, and participants' responses were combined into interview question sections. The arrangement of consolidated interview data was thoroughly examined, coded, and analyzed. Researcher notes and observational comments were documented; in addition, researcher memos were added as a part of the coding procedures. Theoretical memos are described by Corbin and Strauss (1990): "Memos are not simply about 'ideas.' They are involved in the formulation and revision of theory during the research process" (p. 10). Analyzing the collective data of participants' responses to each interview question provided an examination and understanding of this case study's research categories of development, leadership, and change.

Merging the analysis of both interview data arrangements, a series of coding processes was completed to synthesize the combined and complete set of data. "Grounded theory coding requires us to stop and ask analytic questions of the data we have gathered" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 109). Coding is the fundamental process the researcher used to analyze data. The three basic types of grounded theory coding were used as described by Corbin and Strauss (1990): open, axial, and selective coding. In open coding, data was compared for similarities and differences among comparable data and were grouped together in categories and subcategories. Open coding included identifying and describing phenomena, labeling by line, segment, or paragraph, and was descriptive in nature. During axial coding, the researcher analyzed the relationship between categories and continued to further develop and look for indications of categories in the data. Axial coding consisted of relating open codes to each other and seeking causal conditions and outcomes between codes. Selective coding entailed the researcher identifying core

categories and themes to represent the entire data analysis and establish the essence of the research.

The researcher utilized grounded theory as described by Charmaz (2014) throughout the data collection and analysis procedures. The researcher explored the data and found commonalities in participants' words, phrases, and thought patterns and refined the data through discovery of relationships within and between the data throughout the research process. Themes emerged from connections and trends found within the data which framed the experiences of development, leadership, and change of teachers in their new professional role as Peer Coaches. Using themes which emerged through coding procedures, theory was generated throughout the data collection and analysis procedures. "The research process itself guides the researcher toward examining all of the possibly rewarding avenues to understanding" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 6). In this study, data was collected and constantly compared to new data, codes were constructed as themes emerged, and theory was developed and adjusted through the process.

### **Researcher Bias**

In qualitative research, the researcher is connected with the research and requires a purposeful design to acknowledge the place of the researcher within the context of the study. The researcher in this study had an active role. "Qualitative research is interpretive research; the inquirer is typically involved in sustained and intensive experience with participants" (Creswell, 2014, p. 187). The researcher background is recognized with previous part-time experience in the position and familiarity with participants. Personal biases, assumptions, and values were identified at the onset and throughout the study to maintain validity and reliability.

Intentional bracketing techniques were used, as outlined by Creswell (2013), to set aside researcher experiences and approach the data with a fresh perspective of focus on peer coaches'

lived experiences. The part-time position status of the researcher and unique responsibilities serving in community education, which is outside the district's K–12 programming, allowed for limited engagement and incomplete understanding of the position, training, and experiences. The researcher had much to learn from those who experienced full engagement in the Peer Coach position serving all of the district's programs, including K–12 education. Researcher absence for the years between having the Peer Coach position and conducting the study provided partial objectivity and natural bracketing of some existing bias and preconceived notions.

The researcher's association with and knowledge of the district, along with the connection and relationship with participants, required a vigorous and attentive control of bias. Participants' initial apprehension of being identifiable in the study prompted the researcher to note assumptions and pay particular attention to the researcher's role with the coaches in order to guard against researcher bias. Throughout the study, particularly during data collection and analysis, the researcher employed an explicit research process, utilizing compartmentalization with a narrow focus on the research purpose, honing in on trained coaching techniques during interviews, and examining data with particular attention to the role of the researcher.

As research was conducted, the researcher employed active listening, paraphrasing, and professional demeanor during the interviews. Questions were strategically ordered and stated to produce open-ended responses without leading participants. Participants seemed comfortable and confident sharing their stories and displayed a sense of trust for the researcher and for the credibility of the study. Participant responses were documented, while field notes were used during and after the interview to acknowledge researcher bias based on experiences in the position. According to Creswell (2014), one of the defining characteristics of qualitative research is reflexivity. Active engagement of reflection through memos, observer comments, and

reflective journal was used to uncover bias, note reactions and conceptualizations, and to continuously acknowledge and challenge researcher opinions, assumptions, and prejudices with the data throughout the process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Recollections, sentiment, and reactions were set aside to avoid interference with observations, interpretations, and analysis and minimize influence of those experiences on the research.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of the study are noted in the scale of the research, which is focused on one suburban Minnesota school district. Experiences of participants in Crossroads Schools are distinctive to how the district implemented Q Comp and the development of the program over time. Other variables exist, including but not limited to the size, location, and demographics of the district. Additionally, the data does not include any Peer Coaches who returned to the classroom, confining a potentially broader scope of perspectives. Researcher familiarity with the district and experience in the role may also be a limitation to this study, although there are notable differences in fulfillment of the position. The experience of the researcher was reduced due to a part-time status, a late start in the position, and responsibilities outside K–12 programming. These variances restricted and altered colleague interaction, training opportunities, and full engagement in the position. Social identities of Peer Coaches were not incorporated in this study due to participants' concern of being identified and may be limiting to a more complete theoretical understanding of their experiences.

### **Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability**

Qualitative research incorporates a focus on conducting and documenting high-quality methods, rather than statistical calculations, as indicators of validity and reliability (Stenbacka, 2001). According to Creswell (2013), validity “refers to the notion that an idea is well grounded

and supported” (p. 259). Strategies used in this study and described by Creswell (2013, pp. 250–252) included prolonged engagement, clarifying researcher bias, and rich, thick description. Researcher experience in education for almost 25 years was considered a prolonged engagement. Acknowledgment of researcher bias and social interactions involved in interviewing were documented. Participant data and analysis supported the emerging themes of this study and rich, thick description was utilized to report findings, discoveries, and conclusions. The process and product of this qualitative research was examined for consistency in alignment with high-quality methods supporting validity and reliability in a ground theory study.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), generalizability refers to “whether the findings of a particular study hold up beyond the specific research subjects, and the setting involved” (p. 36). Interviewing Peer Coaches provided relevant data on the implementation of a school district merit-pay initiative. Findings in this research are specific to one school district, yet the data can be used as a preliminary groundwork for other researchers. This study may have implications for teachers, administration, and school districts regarding implementation of merit-pay programs, including teacher leader positions and peer reviewer evaluations, in addition to applications to the broader scope of educational reform efforts.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Confidentiality was a primary consideration for this study, and participants were treated under the ethical guidelines in accordance with the University of St. Thomas’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Consent forms were provided during in-person conversations with each participant; the purpose and procedures were given, the voluntary nature of the participant role and the choice to withdraw at any time was discussed, and an opportunity for questions was offered. Participants were assigned a code and the school district a pseudonym in order to

protect the identity of participants in published reports. Anonymity of participant interview information was established. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, although participants did not review completed transcripts. Data was printed and organized into binders which included handwritten notes. Paper documents were stored in a secure, personal office location, and electronic files were organized and stored on password-protected drives. All records of this study will remain confidential, including recordings, transcripts, researcher notes, and analysis.

### **Summary**

Qualitative research design promotes stories of individuals and groups of people to be shared based on participants' experience and perspectives. A case study of Peer Coaches at a Minnesota suburban school district was designed to reveal patterns and connections of development, leadership, and change in their experiences. The methodology used in this study was intentional to incorporate an authentic research design and process which allowed meaning to develop from the perspectives of participants. Research was conducted, data collected and analyzed, and grounded theory developed with a focus on validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.



## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

This qualitative case study is about how education Peer Coaches experience development, leadership and change in their roles at a suburban Minnesota school district. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of teachers in a relatively new and unique teacher leader role. The researcher sought to discover, describe, and represent their stories. The summary of results in this chapter includes an outline and definition of emerging themes from data examination and an analysis of interview data. Findings are presented and organized into five sections. The first three sections are a thematic analysis of the research categories: Development, Leadership, and Change. To provide a full scope of participant experiences, the last two sections are findings from the Opening and Closing Reflections from interview data which were analyzed and described by topics of participant responses. Results are presented, described, and supported with quotes from participants.

### **Research Results**

#### **Summary of Results**

Findings in this qualitative case study were generated from close and strategic examination of interview data. Data analysis focused on experiences of Peer Coaches in the research categories of Development, Leadership, and Change. Through analysis of participant responses, four main themes emerged and were prominent in the data: Identity, Mindset, Behaviors, and Relationships. Within each theme, subsets were determined according to participant statements. Thematic analysis was used to report findings in the research categories. Interview data found in the Opening and Closing Reflections was also examined and reported. Rather than thematic analysis, findings were described in groupings aligning according to related

content of participant responses. The experiences of Peer Coaches using their words from their stories are reported and described.

### **Outline of Themes**

Throughout data analysis and emergence of themes, subsets of each theme became evident. Themes and theme subsets are displayed in Table 2 followed by theme definitions developed by the researcher.

**Table 2**

*Themes and Subsets*

Peer Coach Experiences Themes	Subsets
Theme 1: Identity	teacher, peer coach, leader
Theme 2: Mindset	classroom, district, education
Theme 3: Behaviors	learning, coaching, experiencing
Theme 4: Relationships	teachers, colleagues, administrators

### **Theme 1: Identity**

Definition: the way in which a person thinks about and views self; the characteristics that define a person: qualities, beliefs, personality, and other traits.

### **Theme 2: Mindset**

Definition: the way in which a person thinks; established set of attitudes, collection of beliefs, and disposition that determine interpretations and responses to events, circumstances and situations.

**Theme 3: Behaviors**

Definition: the way in which a person acts or responds to an individual, an action, environment, person, or stimulus; the way in which one conducts oneself.

**Theme 4: Relationships**

Definition: the way in which two or more people are connected and regard each other; connection, association, or involvement.

**Table 3***Themes and Subset Descriptions*

<b>Theme 1: Identity</b>	<b>Theme 2: Mindset</b>	<b>Theme 3: Behaviors</b>	<b>Theme 4: Relationships</b>
<b>teacher</b>	<b>classroom</b>	<b>learning</b>	<b>teachers</b>
participant responses include statements of self as a teacher	participant responses include statements of a classroom and classroom experiences	participant responses include statements of training, professional development, reflection, efficacy	participant responses include statements of relationships with teachers
<b>peer coach</b>	<b>district</b>	<b>coaching</b>	<b>colleagues</b>
participant responses include statements of self as a peer coach	participant responses include statements of the school district and district experiences	participant responses include statements of coaching skills, strategies, responsibilities, motivations	participant responses include statements of relationships with colleagues
<b>leader</b>	<b>education</b>	<b>experiencing</b>	<b>administrators</b>
participant responses include statements of leadership and self as a leader	participant responses include statements of educating students or education in broad scope	participant responses include statements of opportunities, time, freedom, autonomy	participant responses include statements of relationships with administrators

### **Thematic Data Analysis of Research Categories**

Qualitative interview data analysis of Peer Coaches' experiences in the categories of development, leadership, and change produced four main themes: Identity, Mindset, Behaviors, and Relationships. Data results are reported by research category, organized by themes which emerged within each category, and described and supported accordingly. Participant responses are identified in themes and subsets, including when minimal responses were reported, in order to contribute to overall patterns and reflect relevance in the combination of data found in all research categories.

**Development.** Development was defined by the researcher as the process of developing or being more advanced, and the act or event constituting a new stage in a changing situation; personal growth and professional skill. Data patterns in Peer Coaches' experiences of development showed patterns which supported all four themes, yet the number of participant responses varied for each theme. Data showed Peer Coaches were more reflective of themselves as teachers than as Peer Coaches in the category of development.

***Development Theme 1: Identity.*** The theme of Identity was evident throughout the data on Peer Coaches' experiences of development. Responses indicated how participants thought about themselves as teachers and Peer Coaches, and the way they were viewed by others. There was data of participant responses which indicated defining characteristics of qualities, beliefs, personality, and traits.

*Identity as a teacher.* Peer Coaches were reflective of themselves as teachers, both previously in a classroom and in their current view of themselves as teachers, if they were to return to a classroom in the future.

“I saw all of the things I could have been doing differently. I think I was a good teacher. I think I cared about the students, but I realized I just didn’t have the passion for it that some teachers did, and that that was okay.” – PC1

“Another [big aspect of growth for me] was questioning my rationale behind how I discipline students . . . my greatest passion and interest in education was motivation—motivating students.” – PC4

“My growth as a teacher—I think my fundamental belief is that teaching and public education and equity have always been a moral obligation that I committed to for life, based on my own experience.” – PC6

Participants reflected on their learning and ways to apply their experiences into classroom teaching practices.

“I think, going back into the classroom, I’m just going to be way more understanding and aware.” – PC2

“I’m excited to get back into the classroom. Being intentional and present with teachers gave me this renewed sense.” – PC4

In the study, 4 out of 10 participants contributed data specific to their identity as a teacher, and 2 noted their lack of interest in administration.

“Misconceptions I come across: ‘Are you getting your admin license?’ And that’s never been a dream or a passion of mine; it’s something that I just don’t ever want to do.” – PC4

“I’d never fancy myself to be an administrator, or I don’t think that’s necessarily a role for me.” – PC 7

*Identity as a Peer Coach.* Peer Coach identity surfaced in 3 out of 10 participant interviews in the category of Development.

“Working with a whole new group of people was really refreshing. It was really nice to be an unknown and a blank slate to a certain extent, and to be able to define that. But how can I be a really good support, an authentic support to teachers, and to administrators?” – PC8

Also, 3 out of 10 participant data included direct statements to support the participant's identity as a professional.

"I also feel like I've grown in just professionalism, how I view conversation, and [its] importance. I've never really seen myself as an effective team collaborator and communicator." – PC4

"Now I'm affirmed in my desire to and my prioritization of building strong relationships . . . that really solidified the shift that I wanted to make in the way that I approached education." – PC7

"All of us on the team, when [the coordinator] talks about teacher leaders, we're like, 'We're Peer Coaches.' That's why we purposely use that word 'Peer Coaches,' because even though we're not in the classroom, we're like, 'No, we're teachers who just happen to be doing something different right now,' and, 'Okay, that's the reality of how we're seen.'" – PC8

***Development Theme 2: Mindset.*** Peer Coach interview data indicated mindset as a substantial theme. Participants described their way of thinking, established set of attitudes, collection of beliefs, and disposition that determined interpretations and responses to events, circumstances, and situations. Responses showed participant mindset of classroom teaching, school district, and broader education.

*Mindset of a classroom.* Responses indicated that 7 out of 10 participants made statements about their mindset of the classroom, including teaching or teachers.

"I realized how hard teaching is. I don't think I even knew how difficult teaching was until I saw it. The other thing that really came out to me was the dedication of teachers. Oftentimes, teachers don't feel supported." – PC1

"My awareness has changed. When I come into classrooms now, I'm always curious if there are students who are not connecting. I have the luxury currently that I get to sit in the back and I get that view while the teachers are teaching." – PC2

“It’s not about me and what I’m trying to do [as a teacher in the classroom]. I kind of had this perspective shift, and I don’t know what it was about being intentional with teachers that got me to see that.” – PC 4

“More than anything, this has really taught me about what I value in classrooms, and what I value as a teacher, and what I think is really important.” – PC 7

“It’s really affirmed in me just how supportive I feel of teachers. I really do believe all of them have something good that they’re trying to bring. It developed and emphasized those beliefs and values that I have. Teachers work ridiculously hard, and they go above and beyond, and they love their kids.” – PC8

“Educators are so hard on themselves, especially the really good ones. I feel like I have certain balanced perspective outside of my classroom’s four walls.” – PC9

*Mindset of the district.* Data showed a significant amount of information about Peer Coaches’ mindset of a school district in which participants indicated new understanding and learning. In their responses, 7 out of 10 participants made statements about district mindset, including administration and staff.

“I saw that there are a lot of different ways to be an administrator.” “Administrators are stretched thin.” – PC1

“As a teacher, I was always so focused about my classroom and what was best in my moment for my students in my little world. I didn’t always understand the bigger picture. I see more of the bigger picture of how schools run. I think I have a better viewpoint of that, and am maybe a little more open to understanding.” – PC2

“In this particular case—my roles, and the topic of stepping back and growing professionally—I have better understanding of the way a huge system works. So this idea of being a part allows me to get a notion about the huge nature of what a great big school district does and the variety of roles within it.” – PC3

“I’ve gained some more perspective . . . but also just the scope of what a school district offers families and the community and the levels of support, communication and care. Someone in this role is in a great position to eventually become an administrator, because you get such a perspective of the major players and the key components to what makes school climate, school culture operate efficiently. And there’s a little bit of teacher evaluation. There was courageous conversation involved. There’s district level meetings, there’s a lot of that kind of scaffolding that would make a coach a successful administrator sometime down the road.” – PC4

“They’re human [administration]. They are doing the best they can. I think I have a pretty accurate view of those inner workings, and just even between different departments. I think it’s been really helpful to see how it works for better or worse in our district.” – PC8

“I would never ever have known without stepping outside of my classroom. I think the coaching role gives me the most things of bulk, if you will. I now understand so much more about what the administrator does. There are a lot of administrative-type responsibilities and conversations that I didn’t have before.” – PC9

*Mindset of education.* As participants responded, 3 out of 10 made statements about their mindset of education in a broader scope, including educating students.

“I think this position was really the impetus for thinking about, what should schools really look like? I have developed in my thinking and grounded myself in the value of what education is. My perspective about teaching and about education has shifted with the opportunities in this job and the work that I do.” – PC7

“I think [being with peers] has really developed and affirmed in me that passion and value that I have . . . there’s that capacity [to listen, think, be reflective], and that has brought a lot of growth. It comes from the nature of the work, and from the whole mindset of, we want to be our best so we can support teachers. We want to show up and be the very best we can for them because they’re showing up to be their best for students. – PC8



***Development Theme 3: Behaviors.*** The ways in which Peer Coaches described how they conducted, acted on their responses to an action, environment, person, or stimulus are clearly identifiable in the data on experiences in the category of development. Interview data revealed a considerable amount of information from participants about the theme of behavior in the subsets of learning, coaching, and experiencing.

*Behaviors of learning.* In their responses, 7 out of 10 participants made statements indicating behaviors of learning, including training, reflecting, and efficacy.

“We’ve got fairly rigorous training in peer coaching. The [evaluation rubric] . . . being a little more objective in looking at teacher behaviors, and various other professional development opportunities. There’s been a host of professional development opportunities that my team, my colleagues, have used to inform our work with faculty.” – PC3

“We still get to be a part of all the regular district training, so literacy and math, which has been very important to have that same background and experiences. We’ve also done additional work, kind of in that leadership perspective, and so we were able to experience and be exposed to even more opportunities by being in this job.” – PC5

“Having the opportunity to watch other teachers and have dialogue with amazing teachers. If you’re self-reflective, open, and vulnerable, you’re going to grow in this position.” “PD for the past four years has been amazing—the book studies we have had as a group—just layers on layers of learning and development. And then having the opportunity to apply the work the right way.” – PC6

“Going to these trainings, and getting these development opportunities—they’re very affirming . . . and then some of the flexibility of the work that we do. I could actually sit down to read an article to share with my colleagues and to pass on to my colleagues . . . so that I could nurture and support the work that my teachers that I serve wanted to do, but also so I could learn and grow my own practices as well.” – PC7

“I think it was helpful in the reflective process; it allowed for opportunities, too. You’re exposed to different situations with more bandwidth or capacity to be able to take them in and process them. I think for me, that’s been one of the biggest areas of growth—having that dialogue, and then really having the capacity to think about it and be reflective.” – PC8

“I became a much more reflective person. I find it so rewarding to be able to find a way to have challenging conversations in a meaningful nonjudgmental way that leaves both people feeling satisfied and seeing their own growth.” “I really feel like we all put in 100% effort to take on different roles of PD training, that was part of our requirement grounding.” – PC9

*Behaviors of coaching.* In addition, 7 out of 10 participants made statements indicating behaviors of coaching.

“I let go of my preconceptions about who a teacher was or what they were doing, and in a way that I was able to be more impartial as an observer and help them create the analysis of what had happened. [It] helped me to suspend my preconceptions, develop my listening skills, and be able to truly move teachers in their thinking. I was able to grow and was not feeling like I needed to have all the answers or to problem solve for them. My job was not to solve their problems. It was to help them solve their problems.” – PC1

“Truly attending and listening to the people around me. I’ve definitely grown in how I approach professional conversation and then the connection piece, because it’s a passion and a focus and a care, that’s kind of an easy thing to bring in then. [The] coaching group has specifically been tapped to help provide some feedback and resources and partnerships with different individual buildings.” “The want and the need, because it is based on whatever that teacher wants. I provided quite a few teachers with different strategies or resources that might be helpful.” – PC5

“[Being supportive of teachers] was always the goal, and probably my favorite part of this work, to be honest was, not necessarily sitting down from someone for a 30-minute premium or post-meeting, it was, ‘Hey, you’ve been on my mind because you were struggling with this and I just got to read this

article that was talking all about it. Let me connect and be that conduit for you between what you want to learn and the block of time that you have to learn it. Let me synthesize this for you, or let me break this down for you so that it is manageable in some way.” – PC7

“If you’re in there rolling your sleeves up and interacting with kids, the teacher can see that it’s important to admin that kids are interacting.” – PC10

*Behaviors of experiencing.* Only 3 out of 10 participants made statements indicating behaviors of experiencing autonomy, freedom, time, and opportunities as Peer Coaches.

“And that’s what nice about this position, is you have every day, for the most part. There are some days where I don’t have [time], based on the schedule. But every week, I have time in the day to reflect on my work. And that’s really important.” – PC6

“There have been opportunities that I have absolutely gotten to take advantage of because I don’t have a routine; I don’t have students that I need to be there for every day. I have more flexibility, so there have been things that we have been privy to or been given opportunities to be a part of because of the view of us as leaders, potentially teacher leader. I think a lot of it has been really affirming.” – PC7

“I talked to other adults [as a Peer Coach]. We [as classroom teachers] talked regularly at lunch and sometimes before and after school, but this was just more regular and more purposeful, and more often. I know for me, I always thought it was important that adults have a chance to speak with adults. Because we don’t.” – PC10

***Development Theme 4: Relationships.*** Data from Peer Coaches’ experiences of development revealed significant evidence of connection, association, or involvement with others and described ways of connecting with and regarding others. Relationships with teachers showed significant data, while minimal data was found in relationships with Peer Coaches and administrators.

*Relationships with teachers.* Building relationship, rapport, and trust with teachers was a predominant focus for 6 out of 10 Peer Coaches.

“I found that relationship building and building rapport were critical. I was able to connect with teachers. It felt more like a partnership process, and that’s something that definitely developed over time.”

– PC1

“I think it’s developed me as someone who can have more courageous conversations, mainly with adults. I’ve noticed it shifts teachers a little bit, when they found out that my ambition wasn’t to be an administrator—like it alleviated some sort of hidden agenda that I may have being in this role. [It was] empowering to know that I’m also a teacher, and that I enjoy advocating for these people, and that ‘I am one of you still.’ I think that’s an important thing to convey.” – PC4

“Helping connect teachers to other teachers. I can connect other staff that are doing similar things so they can collaborate.” – PC5

“That was huge for me, honestly, just being alongside, walking alongside—power with, not power over. This idea of ‘I’m here, I’m here for you. I’m here because I care about you, I’m here because I empathize with you and I get this. I’m here because a classroom is a lonely place, and we all need somebody who sees what we see and understands the crazy we endure, and the struggles we endure, and the joys, and the triumphs that we get to be a part of as well.’ But that peer aspect of it was always sort of a guiding principle for me. ‘I am not your boss, I am here with you, as much as I can be in the trenches. And if I can’t be in the trenches with you, I’ll be back here getting water to bring you to the trenches.’”

– PC7

“We’re in there building relationships with teachers and building trust.” – PC8

“I love giving teachers information.” – PC9

*Relationships with colleagues.* The interviews with participants showed a small amount of data from 2 out of 10 participants about relationships with Peer Coach colleagues.

“Our PLC [Professional Learning Community]—we have twelve members in the room, so there’s a lot of voices, but there’s also a lot of opportunity to grow from those voices and experiences.” “I’ve definitely grown in how I approach professional conversation with colleagues.” – PC4

“I loved our Fridays together in the afternoon because it was such a bonding, sharing time. That really helped us break our own insecurities, so that when we went to teachers and had those hard conversation—we’d practiced with each other. You experience it. It’s like being a Peer Coach. You’ve experienced teaching, that idea of relatability, connectability, speaking the same language and knowing what you’re saying. I loved a variety of building that I got to be in.” – PC9

*Relationships with administrators.* In the category of Development, only 2 out of 10 Peer Coaches made statements about relationship with administrators, including access and connection with principals, district administration, and other TOSAs.

“We try to team with other areas of the district, like with curriculum and instruction and technology and some of those other groups. I think that also helps develop relationships. With administration, I think it’s been good to have the opportunity to build relationships with a few of the administrators at a closer basis, so, you don’t put them on the pedestal. For me, it’s figuring out, how do I come alongside and help that person to be better at leading their building? How am I an asset to help them be better for their teachers?” – PC8

**Development summary.** Development in this study was described by the researcher as personal growth, the process of developing or being more advanced in a changing situation. Table 4 shows that all themes emerged in this category with the most prominent being Mindset and Behaviors themes. In the Identity theme, the subset of leader identity was not found in the Development category.

**Table 4**

*Themes, Subsets, and Number of Peer Coach Responses from the Research Category of Development*

Theme 1: <b>Identity</b>	Theme 2: <b>Mindset</b>	Theme 3: <b>Behaviors</b>	Theme 4: <b>Relationship</b>
<b>teacher</b> 3 responses	<b>classroom</b> 7 responses	<b>learning</b> 7 responses	<b>teachers</b> 6 responses
<b>peer coach</b> 3 responses	<b>district</b> 7 responses	<b>coaching</b> 7 responses	<b>colleagues</b> 2 responses
<b>leader</b> 0 responses	<b>education</b> 3 responses	<b>experiencing</b> 3 responses	<b>administrators</b> 2 responses
Total Responses: 6	Total Responses: 17	Total Responses: 17	Total Responses: 10

**Leadership.** In this study, the researcher defined leadership as the state or position of being a leader and the art of motivating others to take action toward achieving a goal and providing information, knowledge and methods to realize that goal.

**Leadership Theme 1: Identity.** Throughout the data on how Peer Coaches experienced leadership, responses conveyed ways they thought about themselves, the way they were viewed, and characteristics that defined them: qualities, beliefs, personality, and traits. Identity in the subsets of teacher, Peer Coach, and leader were found in the Leadership category. There was less, yet considerable data to support identity as a teacher; there was extensive data in both identity as a Peer Coach and identity as a leader.

*Identity as a teacher.* There was evidence of identity as a teacher found in 5 out of 10 responses from participants.

“It’s a leadership role, but I’m just a teacher still, right? That’s why I think that I connect so well with the staff I work with. We have the same goals here; I’m not leading any initiatives.” – PC2

“[My students] know that I’ll be there and I’ll catch them if they fall on the other end, and I care about them so deeply that they can take academic risks for me and they know they’ll be safe, and I think that’s a really important thing.” – PC4

“And just like as a teacher, you’re highly invested.” – PC6

“In a classroom, that’s what keeps me going. What positive things are going on here that we can really highlight and build upon?” – PC7

“We [Peer Coaches] were there in the classroom, just on a broader spectrum right now.” – PC10

*Identity as a Peer Coach.* Data showed identity as a Peer Coach in 10 out of 10 participant responses.

“One of the challenges for me was trusting that the process was working, even if I didn’t get that evidence and that confirmation.” – PC1

“A big perspective that I have—to really feel like I had an idea of what’s working, and what teachers are enjoying, or maybe where the struggles are.” – PC2

“Peer coaching, we just support our colleagues.” – PC3

“People look at us for a particular service, and it’s a highly regarded program.” – PC4

“My favorite thing is when I have teachers come back and say they tried something that we reflected on and they thought of. When they come up with specific strategies or goals for the future where I see that the process was validating and affirming for them.” – PC5

“I think the important piece of what motivates me as a Peer Coach now is realizing, ‘Wow, I’ve been siloed before as an educator.’ I know what it feels like when you’re not siloed, and being able to support teachers to just grow their craft so children can achieve and feel part of a community.” – PC6

“I think there’s a little bit more transparency here at times, so people see us, and that’s important.” – PC7

“I feel that burden to be an advocate [for teachers]. I’m another voice.” – PC8

“Those moments when teachers couldn’t recognize success in themselves, whether it was successes or areas of growth, just when they would really truly connect with what was happening in their classroom that day and reflecting on it.” – PC9

“What was important for me as an ambassador [was] to be that conduit for others to be able to talk and grow.” – PC10

*Identity as a leader.* Participant responses showed identity as a leader in 10 out of 10 participant responses.

“Throughout my career, I have taken on leadership positions outside of the classroom. I like to talk to colleagues, and that was one of the reasons why I think I got the Peer Coach job, because people knew me at the district level because I was involved in things.” – PC1

“Really as a leader, I think that’s looking for the really cool things that are happening, and making those connections for other teachers. I think being a leader is looking for where I connect teachers.” – PC2

“Growth mindset, with young people and my colleagues. This notion of, how’s my thinking changed or developed leadership-wise; I think I’m more in tune with strength-based models, growth mindsets. I think an important characteristic of leadership is willingness and ability to collaborate not just on the teacher level, but the principal level, the Peer Coach level.” – PC3

“I am a part of something special and I am a leader, and with that comes the responsibility of maintaining the confidentiality, the no judgment, the being present during conversations.” – PC4

“I contribute to the growth of this program, not just as a system, but in how teachers approach it.” – PC5

“So that leadership component, that’s developing me as a leader—I’m always trying to do things to the best of my ability but also trying to raise the bar for those around me.” – PC6



“How to be genuinely me and still be worthy of a leadership role. How to balance those things. To be approachable and accessible, but to still grow people and challenge people.” “I think having gotten to be at this perceived level, as teacher leaders, or however people might view us in the district, because I think that’s more about how people view us than how we view ourselves. But I do think there is an expectation for us here, so to sort of rise to that occasion.” – PC7

“I think you’re always looking for connections with people and looking for ways that you can be relatable.” – PC8

“In the peer coaching role, you really were expected to step up and be a leader to the [Crossroads] staff.” “I’ve always seen myself as a leader, even in teaching.” – PC9

“In working with adults, I feel like it became more obvious how important leadership is, because of the greater spectrum, the greater vision of working with adults in three different buildings.” – PC10

***Leadership Theme 2: Mindset.*** Details of Peer Coaches’ interview data described their way of thinking, established set of attitudes, collection of beliefs, and disposition that determined interpretations and responses to events, circumstances and situations. Mindset theme in the Development category showed data in the subsets of classroom and education, but not in the district subset.

*Mindset of a classroom.* Data was reported in 7 out of 10 participant responses in the mindset of a classroom. Participants indicated their views of teaching.

“Just knowing how hard this job is, and how people care so much that they get angry about it and they get frustrated. They’re exhausted, but they’re this way because they care so much about their students. So how do we help them to work smarter instead of working harder?” – PC7

[Leaving the teaching profession] “Yes, it’s very common. I keep reading about how teachers leave because they feel like they don’t have autonomy, they don’t have a voice, they don’t have a say in things, they don’t feel connected. They feel isolated.” – PC7

“I think this is a profession where it’s really easy, especially in elementary, to become isolated and to become an island, despite how healthy a team you might have. It’s just the nature of, you’re in a classroom by yourself.” – PC8

Responses in this subset included statements about how teachers interact in coaching conversations.

“One of the things that challenged me was when teachers had a hard time identifying their strengths. They would go to weakness.” – PC1

“Teachers have a hard time naming the positive things, ’cause everyone’s very humble. So for teachers to become more confident in recognizing the strengths that they show every day—that is wonderful to see.” – PC5

“People can’t talk positively about themselves in this industry. I think it’s really hard for teachers to talk about the good things that they do because sometimes they don’t even know.” – PC7

Participants referred to their perspective of teaching and teachers in relation to the Peer Coach role.

“I get to see how that process supports the students. I think the most exciting part is just when it happens, and when you can tell that there has been a change for students. [To] see how teachers are growing. Even the best teachers, because we can all keep growing.” – PC2

“This is just where they’re at [teachers], and [teaching] is an impossible job to be able to do. So you know that that’s where the real work is [classroom].” – PC3

“I am learning many teachers are doing great things. I am learning from the teachers themselves.” – PC6

*Mindset of education.* Participant interview data was found in 5 out of 10 responses in the Mindset theme subsets of education, and indicated a broader scope of education.

“This work has impacted the way I look at the world of education.” – PC3

“We go into education because we’re passionate people and we care about making a difference in changing things.” – PC4

“My reason why I’m an educator is that I wanted to create a better experience for all children—just the whole human being aspect of education.” – PC6

“I think it always comes back to students for me.” – PC7

“Students. Kids. Knowing that this part was helping others, adults, become more focused, and think about continued growth. That we can’t always be satisfied with just where we’re at. We’ve got to continue to move forward and become better. If we become better, then the students should be able to achieve more.” – PC10

***Leadership Theme 3: Behaviors.*** Peer Coaches described the ways in which they acted on their responses to an environment, person, or stimulus in the category of Leadership and were clearly identifiable in the data. Responses made by participants included the subsets of learning, coaching, and experiencing. Data was minimal in the subset of learning and experiencing, and substantial in the subset of coaching.

*Behaviors of learning.* Participant responses showed 4 out of 10 Peer Coaches indicated the theme of behaviors in the subset of learning, which included training and reflecting.

“What I learned is that being a leader means that you help other people do their best. Identify and work from their strengths instead of necessarily pointing out their weaknesses.” – PC1

“Strong leaders are good at posing questions, and that’s one area where I really wanted to emphasize and grow through this.” – PC4

“Growth in me professionally, the growth I see in teachers, the effect I see it have on students.” – PC5

“This role lends itself to a ton of leadership, especially for professional development. We meet with principals, have a PLC facilitator training, workshop week presentations. I’ve been collaborating

with [district offices], and I don't think I'd be doing that if I didn't have this role as a Peer Coach. It's awesome." – PC 6

*Behaviors of coaching.* Behaviors of coaching others was predominant in 10 out of 10 participants' responses. Participants stated challenges in coaching.

"Finding the right questions to help them engage in reflection." – PC1

"Courageous conversation. Posing the right question at the right time that really can shift thinking. It's a really tough thing." – PC4

"Sometimes it's challenging when you have someone who's not as willing. The fixed mindset can be a big challenge." – PC5

"Working with adults—it's hard. Challenging." – PC10

Participants also stated motivations in coaching.

"It was motivating to me, truly, seeing teachers try new things, seeing teachers think about things in a more intentional way, and seeing teachers get more comfortable with the process and take more ownership of it." – PC1

"If you show someone that you really care for them and you support them, then they're going to be at their best." – PC6

"My goal was building teacher capacity so that achievement could increase. Achievement maybe not in the academic sense, but able to connect with kids so that they could achieve more. Just helping teachers recognize that." – PC10

Peer Coaches indicated coaching skills.

"Being strong in communication and relationships." – PC2

"Being able to focus on strengths—that big idea has had an impact on the way I approach other faculty members." – PC3

"In this role specifically, you really have to be organized—75 different teachers with a million things; you have to facilitate that." – PC5

“Asking [teachers] the right questions to help them produce a cognitive shift in some way. It’s a hard skill, and I’ve gotten a lot better at that: listening, taking in, paraphrasing, being thoughtful about it, and then asking a good question.” – PC7

“I think it’s, how do I stay relatable to teachers but press into challenging them?” – PC8

“Being able to help people get to that reflective place. It goes back to the skill of questioning, the skill of rephrasing, the skill of just listening.” – PC9

*Behaviors of experiencing.* The theme of behaviors showed minimal data, with 3 out of 10 participants’ responses. Data is reported in this subset due to the significance of the theme and combination of data in all three categories of the study.

“Opportunity for leadership. There are other opportunities that, because we’re outside the classroom, we have a little bit more freedom to pursue. We also have a role in helping professional learning communities develop goals and strategies to pursue those. So it’s another leadership opportunity.” – PC3

“I appreciate the opportunity to develop as a leader.” – PC5

“So that leadership component. You know, that’s developing me as a leader. And if I wasn’t in this position, I probably wouldn’t have that opportunity.” – PC6

***Leadership Theme 4: Relationships.*** Data from Peer Coaches’ experiences of leadership revealed significant evidence of connection, association, or involvement with others and described ways of connecting with and regarding others. The Relationship theme in the Leadership category included subsets of relationship with teachers, peer coaches/colleagues, and administrators. More data was found in the subsets of teachers and administrators than with colleagues.

*Relationships with teachers.* Building relationship, rapport, and trust with teachers was evident in 6 out of 10 Peer Coaches’ interview statements in the category of Leadership.

“I found that relationship building and building rapport were critical, and that was something that I could do. I was able to connect with teachers.” – PC1

“People know what to expect when I walk into their classroom, and how I am going to conduct our conversations.” “Having the hard conversation, when I know that there’s a teacher struggling, without again, breaking down that trust or that vulnerability.” – PC4

“You have to create that sense of rapport and safety and respect because in order to take those responsible risks, I guess you might say, and observations, you have to build that sense of trust.”

“Anything we could do to help facilitate that process or make it easier for the teacher.” – PC5

“I think a big piece is relationships. I think it’s true for children, I think it’s true for adults that relationships are super important. You have to have that trust. If you want teachers to be vulnerable and make mistakes, they have to know that they’re not judged, that you’re there to support them and help them grow. And I think a big piece, too, is meeting teachers where they’re at.” – PC6

“You need to honor teachers’ time.” “Helping people see that they need to be gracious with themselves, but encouraging people to have that grace for themselves. It’s about just building those relationships and showing who you are and that you’re trustworthy.” – PC8

“To be able to make connections for people who aren’t connected, because we’re in our own little building, our own little classroom. Building trust was huge. Just so they know that we have the same goal.” “You want to be good. I want to be good. I want you to be better.” – PC10

*Relationships with colleagues.* Only 3 out of 10 participants included statements which indicated relationship with Peer Coaches as a collective group of colleagues. These few responses in the Leadership category were added to contribute to an overall pattern of Peer Coaches creating meaningful professional relationships with others.

“We have each other, fellow Peer Coaches; we have our own PLC to make our work meaningful and bounce ideas off each other and make sure we’re doing the best we possibly can.” – PC6

“Being a part of this group of people, and it felt so engaging, and it felt just really smart, for lack of a better word to say it. It felt like I was joining a group of people that had a strong vested interest in the success of teachers, and in the success of students, and to the success of this district in its entirety.”

– PC7

“I think it’s a really safe place for a lot of people to speak truth whenever and however they want. In general in education, it’s much easier for certain belief systems to share. And I think for others, it’s not as comfortable of a place. So, I think that’s a challenge [of the team] of figuring out, how can this be a safe place for everybody to share and to listen?” – PC8

*Relationships with administrators.* Relationship with principals, district administrators, and other TOSAs was established for 4 out of 10 Peer Coaches in the Leadership category.

“We do have opportunities to meet with departments here at the district office to figure out, where are the initiatives, where is the support?” – PC2

“I’ve gotten to interact with a lot of district level [leadership], not just building level and teacher level leadership. In terms of working with building principals, that’s been an important part in developing leadership for myself, because I get to see from their perspective and doing observations together. Those provide great discussions and opportunities to grow from one another. Also, because I work with a building, I get to have those discussions with staff and principals about themes that are arising and things going on and how I can help support the building and principal as they move in a certain direction.”

– PC5

“It’s also provided opportunities to connect with certain admin at certain sites. And through this, you make these connections and you collaborate and work with people. Connecting district leaders to teachers and teachers to district leaders, and even teachers to teachers.” – PC 6

“I would say with administrators, it’s just learning the ins and outs of what makes them tick and how to approach those relationships.” – PC8

“I think the other thing, too, is collaboration that you have with the principal within your building.” – PC9

**Leadership summary.** In this study, the researcher described leadership as influence, the art of motivating others to take action toward achieving a goal and providing information, knowledge, and methods to realize that goal. Table 5 shows that all major themes emerged in this category with identity being the most prominent. In the Mindset theme, the district subset was not found in the Leadership category.

**Table 5**

*Themes, Subsets, and Number of Peer Coach Responses from the Research Category of Leadership*

Theme 1: <b>Identity</b>	Theme 2: <b>Mindset</b>	Theme 3: <b>Behaviors</b>	Theme 4: <b>Relationships</b>
<b>teacher</b> 5 responses	<b>classroom</b> 7 responses	<b>learning</b> 4 responses	<b>teachers</b> 6 responses
<b>peer coach</b> 10 responses	<b>district</b> 0 responses	<b>coaching</b> 10 responses	<b>colleagues</b> 3 responses
<b>leader</b> 10 responses	<b>education</b> 5 responses	<b>experiencing</b> 3 responses	<b>administrators</b> 4 responses
Total Responses: 25	Total Responses: 12	Total Responses: 17	Total Responses: 13

**Change.** The researcher defined change in this study as the result or process of becoming different; transforming how one thinks; adapting and constructing new practices to improve one’s conditions. All themes emerged in the category of Change: identity, mindset, behaviors, and relationships in participant data. Theme subsets were indicated in 3 out of 4



themes. In the identity theme, the subset of teacher identity was not found in the Change category.

***Change Theme 1: Identity.*** Throughout the data on how Peer Coaches experienced change, responses indicated how participants thought about themselves, the way they were viewed, and characteristics that defined them: qualities, beliefs, personality, and traits. In the category of Change, statements in the data did not directly support participants' identity as a teacher or leader, yet significant data was found in participants' identity as a Peer Coach.

***Identity as a Peer Coach.*** Identity as a Peer Coach was indicated in 7 out of 10 Peer Coach responses.

“We want what we think is the best possible outcome, and oftentimes that is growth and change and new learning, but we can't force that. I can meet you halfway, but I cannot do the work for the teacher.” – PC1

“I've been more [conversational], and then knowing my own experience as a classroom teacher, and then being a TOSA, but then seeing my role as a support for teachers as a peer.” – PC6

“I think, to some extent, people recognize that I have more to give [in this role].” – PC7

“I've always been pretty open to constructive criticism, but I think I'm even more so now, and I think that's important in the role.” – PC9

Loss of a teaching team was found in Peer Coach responses.

“It's not the same. When you're not there every day, and you don't see those connections. I do feel like maybe I'm not seen the same by them [former teaching team].” – PC2

“When you're working with [a teaching team] closely for a number of years, those relationships don't always go perfectly but they're intense. It's like a family. So when you and I left those roles we lost that intense sense of family, and we have a broader role relative to the district. So our relationships perhaps are not as intimate.” – PC3

“I kind of felt like I had to grieve the loss of my old team.” – PC4

Differences of being in a broader district position and perspective of how participants perceive they are viewed by others was indicated.

“This weird phenomena within coaching—that even though we’re still teachers, and even though we push so hard to convey that we’re not, our primary objective isn’t to be evaluative. There’s still this separation between us and teachers, and we’re so involved and we’re so a part of things. There’s this divide of belonging and not belonging.” “It’s so hard to be a part of everything but a part of nothing at the same time.” “I can’t imagine people not viewing you differently.” – PC4

“Kind of being and looking from the outside in instead of from the inside out as a classroom teacher outside of silo. So the whole idea of collective efficacy versus individual efficacy.” – PC6

“I always felt like the coaching role was a very lonely position.” “I’m still a teacher on a teacher contract. I still want to have the respect and trust from my colleagues while having the respect and trust from my administration.” – PC9

***Change Theme 2: Mindset.*** Details of Peer Coaches’ data described their way of thinking, established set of attitudes, collection of beliefs, and disposition that determined interpretations and responses to events, circumstances and situations. Data showed evidence in the subset of mindset of a classroom, district, and broader education, including educating students.

*Mindset of a classroom.* Interview data indicated mindset of a classroom in 5 out of 10 participant responses and included statements about teachers and teaching.

“I do really believe in teachers.” – PC8

“You need to pay attention and listen to what kids are saying. Not just to you, but to others. That’s where you learn most.” – PC10

One participant response included reflecting on past classroom experiences.

“You know, when I was siloed into my classroom, 99.9 percent of the time, I thought about my students, only because that’s who I was responsible for. In this role [I recognize] how important adults are and how important it is to realize that not one adult can make that difference. The more adults involved in a child’s life, the more successful I think that child will be.” – PC6

Perspective on returning to the classroom was indicated in 4 responses.

“I am looking at the classroom more as, how am I going to teach my students?” – PC2

“Wow. Would it be that bad to go back [to the classroom]? I know it so well, but I also have seen so many innovations and changes now that it wouldn’t be the same. It would be very different going back now.” “[This experience] changed my perspective on teaching.” – PC4

“I know going back into the classroom, I’ll be even more thoughtful in the decisions that I make, knowing that no matter how small or how big those decisions are, they really have an opportunity to impact those around you.” – PC5

“One of the biggest things that might change is how I would think about my classroom environment, school environment and that whole [community]. So, being part of different buildings and different environments, but every child is our child.” – PC6

*Mindset of the district.* Mindset about the district was found in 5 out of 10 participants. Participants indicated an increased perspective of the district, schools, teachers.

“I’m just more aware of the programming and what [Crossroads] has to offer; that’s changed me.” – PC4

“I’ve had that opportunity to gain the perspective of, well, 75 new people every year and being able to see how they perceive not only their students in their classroom, but the district as a whole. And that’s important because it helps me to recognize that all the decisions made on a district level truly have an impact in everything throughout our district. Everyone is impacted somehow by it and being able to recognize and realize that.” – PC5

“The idea of being isolated in a classroom as a teacher, but there’s also a sense of isolation within the schools at the district because there are a lot of really great things happening. And we don’t think about that.” – PC8

Participants referenced their perspective of others as a result of the Peer Coach position.

“Oftentimes, administrators do have—I don’t know if bigger personalities is the way to put it, but not everybody wants to do that, and so I think that there can be a level of almost possession about the school, but teachers sometimes have that about the classroom, too.” – PC1

“There are lots of people who have ulterior motives or think that they have a gift to offer to others. I certainly wouldn’t even think that I—I didn’t feel like I had that mindset. It’s always how other people feel. Not what your intent is, right?” – PC10

*Mindset of education.* The subset of education in a broader scope, including educating students, was indicated in 6 out of 10 participant responses.

“It changed me. It created new value, kind of a value system within me that says, that reaffirmed, I guess, all children are really valuable.” – PC4

“I think in this role, being in and seeing the whole picture, that you see how important that is, that collaboration between families, parents, as many adults as possible. The more adults involved in a child’s life, the more successful I think that child will be.” – PC6

“[The experience] matured me, and tempered me a little bit in terms of I see how difficult it can be to make lasting, systemic change in any system, but in a system of this size and of such history. Public education, I believe, hasn’t really changed a whole lot since its inception in this country; it’s always been sort of built by and built for the same kind of person.” “Now I see there’s an imperative need for change here, and we’re leaving a lot of people out of this. School needs to change.” – PC7

“Everybody is striving towards this same thing of being really excellent for kids and helping them to find their best and be their best.” – PC8

***Change Theme 3: Behaviors.*** The ways in which Peer Coaches described how they acted or responded to an action, environment, person, or stimulus are clearly identifiable in the data. Behaviors in the subsets of learning and coaching were significant in participant responses and behaviors of experiencing was minimal.

*Behaviors of learning.* Learning behaviors were found in 8 out of 10 participant responses and included statements about reflection, training and increased perspective. Participants indicated learning based on reflection.

“How do I have that conversation, walk away feeling good, like I truly did my job? And it didn't always happen. And that was my reflection process: ‘What could I have said differently to that teacher, what could I have done differently to help the shift their thinking?’” – PC1

“I've changed in that I'm not afraid of change as much, and growth. I'm not as fearful to get out of my comfort zone and try new things because I know through that comes the greatest amount of growth. By changing my physical environment, going from teaching [in a classroom] to district wide, by changing the people I was around, by changing the clientele, going from [children] to adults, [it] allowed me to be in a place where I could really reflect on what's going well and what's not, and truly change myself, and get a better understanding. Because one of my ultimate goals going into coaching was to figure out, knowing I'm a lifelong teacher, being an intentional learner.” – PC4

Two participants specifically referred to training.

“The training allows productive conversations with colleagues in a professional way.” – PC3

“I think what comes from the training—most of it is feeling confidence and having challenging conversations, confidence in pushing people to go further.” – PC9

Increased perspective of themselves and their professional responsibilities, along with an increased awareness of teaching and education, was indicated by 4 participants.

“My own knowledge on the inequities that are happening, or not happening, and how that is affecting everybody. I’m seeing it then bridging into my own personal life as well. I just feel like it’s changing me.” – PC2

“I want to make mistakes and learn from them, and that’s been something that, to sort of reignite that passion in me of ‘I want to make this better. I want to do something to make this better,’ whether it’s on a really tiny scale in a classroom—no, that’s tiny at all—but smaller scale, or whether it’s grand scale systemically, there needs to be some change that happens.” – PC7

“I think it’s affirmed a lot of this, ‘Okay, I’m ready to try something new.’ And it’s also broadened my horizon to go, ‘There’s so many schools out there doing amazing things.’” “It’s grown me in my confidence in knowing that my voice on things matters and is needed, knowing that it’s important to speak up, to speak your mind on things.” “So, knowing just those two words together [responsible risk-taker], it’s just that sweet balance between the two, and that you’re being responsible, but you are willing to take risks and get out there and try things and speak out.” – PC8

“It was an unusual and enlightening experience to live in the TOSA world, not governed by bells. Professionalism was something that was a whole different opportunity for growth, to find, when you are scheduling your own stuff and not at the mercy of students and others. It was just, ‘Wow.’ That is just something else.” – PC10

*Behaviors of coaching.* Peer Coach interview data indicated 7 out of 10 participants made statements of behaviors, or actions, in the position. Participants referred to ways they approached the position.

“I definitely became less judgmental and more able to let teachers have their own experience of it, rather than me trying to have them have the experience that I thought was beneficial to them.” – PC1

“My first year of coaching was busy because it was learning the job and it was figuring it all out, and I thought, surely my second year of coaching, I’ll have more time because I’m not learning it,

because I'm not figuring out how to coach, because I'm building new relationships with staff that I've worked with for years." – PC7

"We should not even use evaluation in any of this if we want people to become better." "In reality, we talked about what you're doing and then got the person to talk about how they can improve. It was just interesting to see that I believed that they were doing the best they could with what they had available."

– PC10

Participant statements included skills used as a Peer Coach.

"It begins with the idea that paraphrasing this reflective conversation can allow the person being coached to hear their own thinking and perhaps organize it in a cleaner way." – PC3

"I know the process is there for my improvement, but that doesn't mean it makes me feel uncomfortable." – PC6

"It's grown my boldness or just my willingness to jump in and enter into that conversation, that relationship." – PC8

"Play two sides of the fence. There is a fine line that I have to try to manage in work." – PC9

*Behaviors of experiencing.* There was minimal data on behaviors of experiencing in the category of Change, yet was relevant to report in combination of data found in the Development and Leadership categories. In participant statements, 2 out of 10 included opportunities specific to the Peer Coach position.

"I truly see all of these interactions as an opportunity to create a new connection for me, and for them, hopefully. And whether it's an admin or a teacher, they've all contributed to some sort of growth or learning opportunity." – PC5

"I think I've just been much more purposeful, and I think you're afforded that luxury of being more purposeful to have those conversations, to have small talk with people, to just enter into conversation with teachers." – PC8

***Change Theme 4: Relationships.*** Data from Peer Coaches' experiences of change revealed significant evidence of connection, association, or involvement with others and described ways of connecting with and regarding others. Relationships in all subsets were present, relationships with teachers was most predominant, while relationships with colleagues and administrators less extensive.

*Relationships with teachers.* Building relationship, rapport, and trust with teachers was a predominant focus for Peer Coaches for 7 out of 10 participants.

"I see the importance of developing those relationships and trust. I want teachers to feel like they trust me, and I tell them, 'I'm your peer.'" "I have these great relationships, and I feel like they trust me."  
– PC4

"I'm here to support [teachers] and cheer them on, and I'm unwavering in that." – PC8

"I just assumed that we were both trying to become better, and our goal was to make that teacher better." – PC10

Participant statements referred to their perspective on teacher relationships.

"The thing that was a surprise to me about coaching is how some teachers would just open up."  
– PC1

"I think that being with teachers from all levels, and all places, I think it's just broadened that idea of relationships." – PC2

"I think I have a pretty good reasonable plan of how to help a colleague [teacher] move productively." – PC3

"Knowing my own experience as a classroom teacher, and then being a TOSA, but then seeing my role as a support for teachers as a peer, by how important it is to periodically have dialogue with teachers outside of observation conversations, so pre, post conversations. But also, just walked into teachers' classrooms and checking in with teachers just because." – PC6



*Relationships with colleagues.* The Peer Coaches' interview responses indicated a pattern in colleague relationships for only 2 out of 10 participants in the category of Change.

“We have an amazing team, even though we don't get to meet often because we're all in individual places. I have some really great relationships there and I've been able to open up more and just learn more.” – PC2

“I always felt the coaching role was a very lonely position, even though [the peer coach team] would meet on Fridays. I was always meeting with people, but nobody really could understand your job until you met with the other coaches. Even the principals, when they go in and observe teachers, they're observing them for a different reason. It was hardly ever shared common ground with them.” – PC9

*Relationships with administrators.* Access and connection with principals, district administrators, and other TOSA data was established in 3 out of 10 Peer Coaches' statements. Minimal participant responses are present in this subset, yet are noted to contribute to the overall data.

“I used to find administrators to be unapproachable. My experience was they do their thing; I do my thing. And so, to find out they're actually people, and to find out some of their background and education, and that they are willing to participate when they see the value, just like teachers.” – PC1

“I've gotten a chance to strengthen relationships with a lot of different people that I didn't know, having only worked in one building in the district. Having now developed some of these initial relationships with people, it strengthens my work, it strengthens what I want to do, but it also, hopefully, makes an impact on others as well.” – PC7

“I bet Peer Coaches know more people in the district than anybody else. Just because you're working with so many individuals.” – PC9

**Change summary.** The researcher described change in this study as the process or result of becoming different. Table 6 shows all major themes emerged in this category of Change, with

behaviors being the most prominent theme. In the Identity theme, the subsets of teacher and leader were not found in the Change category.

**Table 6**

*Themes, Subsets, and Number of Peer Coach Responses from the Research Category of Change*

Theme 1: <b>Identity</b>	Theme 2: <b>Mindset</b>	Theme 3: <b>Behaviors</b>	Theme 4: <b>Relationships</b>
<b>teacher</b> 5 responses	<b>classroom</b> 7 responses	<b>learning</b> 4 responses	<b>teachers</b> 6 responses
<b>peer coach</b> 10 responses	<b>district</b> 0 responses	<b>coaching</b> 10 responses	<b>colleagues</b> 3 responses
<b>leader</b> 10 responses	<b>education</b> 5 responses	<b>experiencing</b> 3 responses	<b>administrators</b> 4 responses
Total Responses: 25	Total Responses: 12	Total Responses: 17	Total Responses: 13

**Development, leadership, and change.** The number of Peer Coach responses were combined for all three research categories of Development, Leadership, and Change in Table 7 to display the prominence of themes based on the data: identity, mindset, behaviors, and relationships. The data shows the subset which was most evident in each theme: Identity as a Peer Coach; Mindset of the classroom; Behaviors of coaching; Relationships with teachers.

**Table 7**

*Themes, Subsets, and Number of Peer Coach Responses from All Three Research Categories of Development, Leadership, and Change*

Theme 1: <b>Identity</b>	Theme 2: <b>Mindset</b>	Theme 3: <b>Behaviors</b>	Theme 4: <b>Relationships</b>
<b>teacher</b> 13 responses	<b>classroom</b> 21 responses	<b>learning</b> 15 responses	<b>teachers</b> 18 responses
<b>peer coach</b> 23 responses	<b>district</b> 7 responses	<b>coaching</b> 27 responses	<b>colleagues</b> 8 responses
<b>leader</b> 20 responses	<b>education</b> 13 responses	<b>experiencing</b> 9 responses	<b>administrators</b> 10 responses
Total Responses: 56	Total Responses: 41	Total Responses: 51	Total Responses: 36

### **Opening and Closing Reflections Data Analysis**

**Opening and Closing Reflections.** Participants were asked a set of opening and closing questions to provide a structure and interview framework for understanding their experiences of development, leadership, and change. The opening questions set the tone and context for the interview, while the closing questions provided a reflection and closure for the interview. Rather than reporting findings using thematic data analysis, collective participant phrases were grouped together according to interview questions to protect participants' identity while reflecting the professional stories unique to each participant.

**Opening reflections.** The opening set of questions was designed to set the tone and context for the interview. Responses include participant description of themselves, how they came into the position, expectations prior to starting the position, and descriptions of the work of

the Peer Coach. Rather than thematic data analysis, collective participant direct quotations and phrases under general researcher groupings of data were applied.

*Description.* All 10 participants described themselves in the professional setting of Crossroads Schools and only 3 referenced their personal life. Participants described themselves both as a teacher and as a Peer Coach, except one participant who was not specific about the position: “In it for the kids. Enjoy working with the kids.” Participants made general statements about themselves in relation to education. “I knew early on I wanted to be an educator” and “I am an educator, a public educator.” Responses described participants professionally: “I know all teachers probably consider themselves lifelong learners, but that’s one of my strengths” and “I’ve always known I want to keep moving along in leadership. It’s always been a passion of mine, and new opportunities and being more impactful in a broader sense in public education.”

Participants described a minimal amount specific to their Peer Coach experiences, yet some responses included their learning and opportunities.

“Coaching really helped, though, because when I started cognitive coaching training, one of the first things the trainer said was, ‘Your job is to mediate their thinking, not to have an end goal in sight.’ It was going to be a challenge, but it was great.”

“One of the nice things about peer coaching was I got to stay in the structure like the [Crossroads] Schools that I knew, but do something different.”

“I made sure to take advantage and look for those opportunities to grow and learn.”

Relationships were mentioned in participant statements.

“It’s important to me also to be connected with people. One of the hardest things for me now in school is I don’t have a team. I miss that collegiality and the personal relationships of seeing people and having that closeness over an extended period of time.”

“This position has provided [an opportunity] to be in contact with amazing faculty in all different areas, and each one brings such an important perspective on students and education.”

*Peer Coach position.* Participants’ responses about how they came into the Peer Coach position reflected a professional story unique to each participant. Responses included reasons participants applied for the Peer Coach positions early in the program and included mistrust in the education system, “given the history of the merit-based schemes,” uncertainty of the Q Comp program: “I was worried enough about it,” and “I was actually really resistant to the idea of peer coaching at first because it was unknown.” Changes in student population, “student work ethic has been changing slowly,” as well as “happenstance” were noted as reasons stated by participants.

Some participants described previous attempts for position changes. “I tried to get out of teaching at [specific school] and applied for transfers,” or “had applied to be a mentor teacher,” and “applied for the coaching job [#] of years ago, but didn’t get it” and had continued to wait for another position outside the classroom to apply.

Some participants had been offered and accepted positions outside the classroom within a specific building: “I shifted roles in the building,” and were looking to experience something in the district “to just see what things were like in other places” and “it sounded like a great opportunity to be able to get to know even more outside of just the walls of my classroom but looking outside the district.” Other reasons stated were “I needed a change. Reinvigorate—I was looking for something” and “the position seemed like a challenge” and an “exciting thing to consider.”

Others reasons participants applied included being part of the program and experience being coached: “exceptional coaches” and “my coach encouraged me several times to apply” and

“I got coached for two years and [my coach] really got me to think differently about a lot of things” and “[Crossroads] coaches had this reputation, and it’s like I kind of want to be a part of that.”

Learning and opportunity were indicated in several participant responses.

“Ready for some more leadership options.”

“I felt the need to have another perspective shift. I wanted to see the district in more of a global way, rather than, we talked about this micro lens of what education is, and moving towards more of a macro-systemic level view; recognizing that peer coaching was an opportunity to do that, but it was also a chance to nurture teachers in a way that I felt like they were really asking for it.”

“Because of that whole lifelong learning piece, this was a chance to continue to build on that scaffold of what I was doing within my classrooms and with staff.”

Responses included statements about the desire to connect with others.

“I had wanted to do something a little different and support and nurture teachers in a different way.”

“Opportunity to learn and to build relationships with staff.”

“The coaching position made a lot of sense in terms of seeing a bit of a gap in the needs of teachers and in the district’s ability to meet that need, or prioritizing the need to meet that specific need of teachers.”

Although the question was geared toward how they came into the Peer Coach position, several participants reflected on their experiences during the role. Some referred to the learning and relationships.

“It’s been the best PD that I’ve ever had as an educator.”

“You get to collaborate with and support and learn on so many different levels from other teachers through dialogue and conversations, let alone our own PD the last four years as Peer Coaches. My learning curve is steep. I’ve learned a lot and in depth.”

“It translated into being able to do that in a greater level, helping more teachers, supporting more teachers, working to empower teachers to make the decisions that they know they should make or want to make to meet their students’ needs, but maybe don't necessarily feel supported or equipped or capable.”

Responses also included a broader mindset of education.

“When I was hired, it was just an even bigger shift than I had imagined or expected.”

“I could see that there’re some needs in terms of growing ourselves professionally as teachers, as educators, but just really even understanding better the needs of our students, whether it’s academic, or social, or whatever it might be. That lingered with me, and that shifted perspective, I got to sort of shift my own pedagogy as well.”

*Expectations.* Participants were asked about their expectations prior to starting the position. Responses of Peer Coaches who were in the initial group during program implementation stated expectations different from those who joined the Peer Coach team later.

“Part of my expectation was that we were going to be doing something that teachers weren't going to like, that we were going to get pushback from staff, that they would feel awkward being evaluated by another teacher. I was worried that teachers would not put much into the process.”

“I was hopeful that peer coaching would be a model that would better serve my colleagues, and my expectations were that we would do a better job doing both evaluation and coaching because we have dedicated faculty members that don’t have the baggage of hierarchy.”

“I didn’t have any frame of reference for what this was in our district or other districts.”

Statements by participants included more logistical expectations.

“I felt like it was pretty well described. Evaluating teachers, that was a big focus. I didn’t necessarily go for it because I was evaluating teachers, it was the coaching piece, like the title. I'm a peer and I will always be a peer, always be a teacher. But then I get to be a coach. So I get work with what that teacher brings to the table and help go wherever they wanted to go. So though evaluation was a big part of it, it’s really the coaching aspect which drew me to the role.”

“To observe teachers teaching. That was one of the things I always thought was lacking in my teaching, and in all teaching, actually. Seeing other professionals do their work. We get so ingrained and entrenched in our own classrooms that we don’t get the chance to get out to see others and learn from others. I saw that as an opportunity for myself.”

Responses of participants who entered the position after implementation and experienced being coached, expressed various expectations. Some responses included learning and relationship opportunities.

“Even more than being a teacher, I love learning and so I viewed it as an opportunity to really grow and try something different.”

“Being coached, I was really excited to work with teachers. I just love teachers, and I mean, I am a teacher. I had mentored teachers in my department, and I really enjoyed that and just sharing what I know about teaching, and what they know, and working together.”

Participants expressed familiarity with the program.

“I just knew that it was very teacher driven and supportive of teachers. And being a teacher myself, I’ve always felt very comfortable with the peer coaching. But I always knew it was an opportunity to reflect and grow.”

“As an educator and from my personal experience that teachers are one of the number one influences on student achievement. And I know that Peer Coaches, that’s one of their goals, is to support teachers to improve student achievement.”

Experiences being coached were specifically noted by some participants.

“I could see the benefits of certain coaches. I something different from each of those coaches. It was just this idea of what could I bring to people, how might I support people in this, and how might it make this real professional development.”

“I think it was really just from the job performance level—meet with teachers like before, do an observation, meet with them after. It was based on my experience with it. So, that’s what I expected.”



Training and knowledge of the Peer Coach team were referenced.

“You do the training, then you actually get into the job and it all starts to make sense. I guess I just modeled myself after my Peer Coach and I looked at it more of a sounding board, and an advice giver, unless they were asking.”

“I knew it was a very—I heard—high-functioning team, great discussion, diving deep on things, great team dynamics. So I expected that it was going to be a good, rigorous team dynamic.”

*Work of Peer Coach.* When asked to describe work of Peer Coach, support teachers had a common pattern.

“I love giving teachers information.”

“We have to put ourselves aside and be completely there for them.”

“It’s your job as a Peer Coach to reflect back and get what the teacher is saying and doing, to be more of a mirror than evaluating. Just through conversations and being available. Because another thing that teachers don’t get a chance to do is to have the professional conversation. Just being available and fostering, and helping that conversation continue, allows for the teacher to look inside and hear their own words, and make their own discoveries. It’s one of the fantastic things that happened.”

“To support teachers wherever I can, just wherever the teachers need and would like my help. Most of them, we just sit down and really reflect, and I’m working with highly qualified, tenured staff that are great at what they do. Just providing that space to reflect, I think, is huge.”

Challenges of the position were described.

“It’s lonely, but I think the best word for it is intense. There’s just a different rhythm to it than in the classroom, and in the classroom it’s a community; I’m on an island. Other coaches, we see each other once a week, and so it’s a different stress.”

“There’s no illusion that our job is at all comparable to the work, dedication, drive of classroom teachers. It’s a whole different beast, and we all are classroom teachers, so we get that.”

Changes to the work with Peer Coach experience were noted.

“That first year I was just surviving; then I started using visuals more in coaching in my second and third year.”

“Just having different ways of reaching them so it doesn’t get mundane and monotonous.”

Some responses showed effects of the position directly on the participants.

“I became a much more reflective person in myself.”

“Now when I look at coaching, because I use it in so many different aspects of my life, I find it so rewarding to be able to find a way to have challenging conversations and a meaningful nonjudgmental way that leaves both people feeling satisfied and seeing their own growth.”

*Evaluation.* Participants were prompted to discuss the evaluative element of their position. Some responses indicated challenges:

“Just awkward, right? It’s like the weird part. We have this really great reflective conversation, and then we have to shift gears.”

“Initially thought that it would get in the way.”

“It allows some proactive questions. So that is a benefit I didn’t expect, this pairing of open-ended questions with something as scary as teacher rubric.”

“Evaluation is the trickiest, because it’s the one that brings about anxiety in teachers, and certainly to myself in the role.”

“It still needs to be done. It’s still part of it.”

The blend of coaching and evaluation was discussed by participants.

“Let’s just think of that as a secondary thing—focus on you growing, focus on what it is that you [teachers] find valuable in this process, which is hard because a lot of people don’t buy into that, and I think they’re very at odds.”

“Let’s be honest. It’s not evaluation. I mean, it is but it isn’t. If I as a peer coach evaluated somebody negatively, I don’t think it would have had much of an impact on their performance. It’s more

about getting the ships heading in the same direction, and what can we do collaboratively, than actual evaluation.”

“I look to my coaching [a # of years] later and so much of it has evolved and changed. So still maintaining that framework of what we’re required to do in this role, but making sure that it’s really based in the context of the teacher need and want in the whole process.”

Statements of participants referred to teachers.

“I work with amazing teachers, that it [evaluation] really doesn’t get in the way.”

“I think teachers are already critical self-reflectors.”

“Once the teacher decides they have that from you or you get that from teachers, that’s when you can have honest, candid discussions and self-reflection from the teachers for them to grow.”

“It’s always teachers, it’s such a passionate business, right? I mean we put so much emotional and physical energy into this that it’s a deeply personal thing to share with someone, and then to be evaluated on it, it seems hard not to assume that there’s judgment tied to that.”

Participants referred to the importance of relationships.

“I believe that I can let teachers know I advocate and I’m on their side, but also that mistakes can happen and you’re going to grow.”

“The longer these relationships are built, the more they see the value in the conversation.”

“I think that’s a big piece, that in order for this program to be as effective as it can be, that relationship and trust is the most important thing.”

“What I’ve learned in the past four years is that it takes a tremendous amount of relationship building to earn the trust of the staff and the faculty that you work with.”

“Making sure that that connection was there in order to do the evaluative part.”

Peer Coaches reflected on the effective approach to evaluation they received in their training.

“That's something that the coaches really work hard on not doing, is judging teachers, and everything's evidence-based.”

“That's the very first thing the coordinator told me, is that we approach this professionally through confidentiality and keeping our judgments aside, and it's something that the coaches hold true to.”

“Because of the willingness of staff, but also the willingness of the group that was hired on who came from all different backgrounds and experiences, we had to prioritize people first and allow them to create those relationships, to feel comfortable, to take risks.”

“We hold true to no judgment and to confidentiality, and I think that's helped build the reputation that coaches have in [Crossroads].”

**Summary of opening reflections.** The Opening Reflections described the context and uniqueness of participants' stories. Participants described themselves as professionals and reflected on belonging in education. Statements included the learning opportunities and relationships in the Peer Coach role. The reasons for pursuing the position varied, and participants' stories were distinctive to their professional history. Participants described a desire for increased learning and opportunities, a broader network of relationships, and to be a part of the educational system from a different and view and perspective. Expectations of the position varied, and results showed two main groups of participants: Peer Coaches who were a part of the original implementation team with less specific responses and those who had experienced peer coaching as a teacher and shared more informed and personal reasons based on those experiences. The work of the Peer Coach was expressed as a support and resource to teachers, and participants shared challenges in the position. Participants described evaluation as a required part of the position and accepted the place and importance in acknowledging the work of

teachers. The significance of relationships and building trust with teachers was noted, as well as the training and approach to evaluation as a key component to how the evaluation is completed.

**Closing reflections.** Participants were asked a closing set of questions to provide reflection and closure of the interview. Data included participant reflection of expectations, thoughts about their future, and additional thoughts. Similar to the Opening Reflections, collective participant direct quotations and phrases under general researcher groupings of data were applied rather than thematic data analysis.

*Expectations.* Participants were asked if their experiences were similar to or different than their expectations prior to starting the Peer Coach position. Some responses were specific to participants who were in the group of original Peer Coaches.

“I didn’t really know what to expect, right? Because there’s no precedence. I knew that I was going to be able to go see other teachers, and that was one of my professional goals.”

“I was expecting pushback.”

“We were compelled with that responsibility to grow our program and I’m so proud to see what this program has become.”

“I really appreciate how it’s grown from not just specifically cognitive coaching evaluation to really having it become very personable to the teachers that are being observed.”

“I think I’ve de-emphasized the evaluation. It is of little value unless you and I act on it. So it means very little, especially if they don’t buy in to it. I spend more and more time moving into trying to get where the faculty member wants to go.”

Importance of coaches, team, and the program were mentioned by participants,

“It’s so much about the coach, who the coach is, more so than there is a training for how to coach. Anybody can take the training, not everybody can implement it in a way that reaches all people.”

“I think there’s just so many ‘little’ conversations that you have here and there that make a real impact.”

“I actually think in [Crossroads], I mean, you’d have to ask the teachers, but I think it’s been perceived relatively positive. That’s important and I think there’s something to that.”

“I think that there is a lot of value in peer coaching.”

Training, learning and perspective were mentioned in responses.

“I didn’t go in thinking this was going to be the best PD that I ever received. But it has been.”

“I mean it’s definitely opened up my eyes on a broader sense of education and how a district is run and how much you don’t know.”

“I see this as an awesome opportunity that every teacher should have, that really helped me to find that I am capable of leading, even though it may not be in the way that I define leadership.”

“I didn’t expect to just have so much personal growth. That’s not even the goal, right? My goal is to help the teachers grow, but it’s in return, a little bit of my own too.”

“I didn’t expect to build just relationships with [others at different schools]. I can walk into any school in [Crossroads] and just feel comfortable. I don’t have to be so stuck in my little bubble.”

Participants commented on some of the differences and similarities they experienced between teaching and coaching,

“You’re not that same level of in-the-weeds exhausted that it is to be in the classroom.”

“The nice thing about being a peer coach was I didn’t have to bring as much work home as I did when I was a classroom teacher. It just doesn’t spill over into the evenings and weekends as much as teaching, and it’s not as exhausting. I didn’t come home physically, sometimes emotionally, exhausted in the same way I did as a teacher.”

“I just remember being super exhausted for the first half year in this position because of the learning curve. But also, to be an effective Peer Coach I think you obviously have to listen. And that’s hard work.”

Teachers and teacher perspectives were referred to in Peer Coach responses.

“I think it’s that being present and how teachers need that, need somebody.”

“Just how [teachers] appreciate your being authentic and being real and just showing up and not needing to have it all together. Yes. Those are my people. And those are the people that I’m forever going to be cheering for because they have the hardest job.”

“It will be as meaningful for you as you make it for the teachers, and if you get excited about their growth, their learning, their progress, they will continue to see it as such, as it’s intended to be.”

“It’s different in that I think teachers view us, if there were to be like this scale of pure coach/teacher. I’m a teacher, I’m one of you, versus an administrator.”

*Future.* Participants responses included a variety of thoughts when asked about the future in relation to their experiences in the Peer Coach position. Participants described their future including the term of the position, retirement, and changes in their career.

“I knew that the TOSA gig was going to be short term.”

“I thought, well, maybe a career change. I was just really disappointed with the lack of understanding about how to integrate social justice and equity and diversity, and, you know, that stuff into the classroom. I became sort of disillusioned with public education. I wanted to try something different. I’m not saying I will never go back to the classroom.”

“In a new [district] position . . . I’ll still have an opportunity in this role to coach teachers a little bit, but hoping it will be more about collaborating with teachers, co-teaching with teachers.”

Shifts and additional perspective were included and responses of participants.

“Classroom teachers are huge leaders without even realizing it. You’re leading by example. There are ways to help make change in buildings without being a principal.”

“I’ll absolutely take the shift in prioritization, what I believe learning to be, back with me; the shift of, what does real learning look like?”

“I value so much the perspective that I’m getting. I think it’s really growing me. It’ll grow me so much as a teacher.”

“I think it fed into a greater vision of where education could go.”

Many participants referred to increased teaching skills and returning to classroom.

“I’ve got a wealth of strategies and ideas that I want to embed into my classroom in order to make that kind of community, that classroom community really rich.”

“This idea of being a facilitator of learning rather than teacher, being a listener and letting kids really have voice and choice in how they demonstrate their learning.”

“If I went back into the classroom, I would spend way more time community building than I have in the past.”

Some participants expressed potential challenges of returning to the classroom.

“I think that’ll be really hard. I think there’s this expectation and perception that we know everything now, like, you’re going to have this great wisdom and be this font of knowledge, and it doesn’t work that way.”

Other participants expressed positive thoughts about returning.

“I am anticipating going back. I miss teaching. I see teachers that are coming up with really cool things, or we had a really great conversation that energizes me, which just reminds me that my passion is students and the classroom.”

“I am excited! I am scared! I am all those feelings that anyone has moving into something new because everything has changed so much. I’ve changed, but the world of education has changed. I’m going to be like a new teacher again.”

There was a pattern of growth and development in participant statements.

“I love children and I would love the opportunity to teach again. However, I feel on a personal level, it’s always been a goal that I want to take my leadership to another level.”



“I think that no matter what role people do after this role is complete, it brings value. If it’s a teacher or administrator or a different position outside of even the world of education, there are focuses that we’ve had that are applicable to anyone.”

“I feel so very much and, in fact, had I not done the coaching role, I don’t think I would have gotten my admin license. It really pushed me to look at the leadership within education. Just to understand more about me and more about no matter where I go, just having those leadership skills in that training and that background.”

Responses included relationships and connections.

“I am really grateful for the connections I’ve made with staff.”

“Well, I love children. That’s why I came into this role. Not only have I developed relationships with teachers, I’ve developed relationships with children. I know these teachers and I’ve been at the sites, and we’ve been talking about relationships with students and knowledge of our students. And so, relationships and trust.”

“I have a passion for kids, I love kids. I believe that they are wiser than we give them credit for, and I understand how easy it is to lose that perspective and that understanding when you are overwhelmed and stressed and tired and feeling like you’re not getting anywhere.”

“There isn’t a certain role that I have in mind. I just know that whatever role it is, that I want to be a person who advocates for teachers. So, I want them to stick with this career. I think we just have such value in people that there’s a calm and there’s a steadiness and there’s a depth.”

*Additional thoughts.* Participants were given the opportunity to contribute additional thoughts about their experiences as a Peer Coach. Participants were reflective both personally and professionally.

“I think every experience that we have, whether it’s lovely or awful, shapes us for who we are. I’m 100% sure that without being a coach I would not be who I am. It’s brought an interesting perspective to my life.”

“[What] I’ve learned about myself is I have to do work that I think matters in a larger scale.”

“[I] miss the students.”

“This position lends itself for teachers to grow—if they wanted to be Peer Coaches like myself or a mentor, even, that you really grow as an instructional leader. I mean that’s what’s really struck me here being in this role, the instructional leadership piece.”

Perspective was mentioned by participants.

“Being able to kind of honor and value the process is important too and making sure that you truly are willing to grow and reflect and change based on what you do. Just because it is important and it is an opportunity to think about things, bounce things off somebody else. Take risks in different ways, because we’ve gotten to do that as coaches.”

“You just got to see a bigger part of the system and experience a different part of the system than the people within it. That is the scope of your system, and this position, you moved into a broader system in a different position, too, in relationship and responsibilities, and allowed you to see that, and you took personal responsibility for your place within that system.”

“I do wonder if the amount of initiatives that are placed on teachers constrains their teaching.”

“I always had good feelings about [teachers], but they’re better than I expected.”

Relationships and work with teachers were cited.

“What makes me feel successful at my job is that I always remind myself that I’m supporting teachers. That’s it. If I can always bring it back to that, that’s the important part. Because it can be a lonely job sometimes.”

“I tell people that you get out of this experience what you put into the experience. Part of making sure you get the most out of it is really going in with that growth mindset, both from a coaching perspective but also a teacher perspective too. And that can’t happen unless that relationship is there.”

“I also see the trust developed with teachers, because I can help support them and have dialogue.”

“Relationships and trust and people knowing that you support them and you care about them through your actions.”

The Peer Coach Team and approach to the role appeared in participant responses.

“In many ways, the Q Comp coaching team of [Crossroads] is, I think, impactful and it’s trusted; that’s really where the proof is, that it’s a trusted team.”

“It’s on me, and on us, as a force of educators, to start doing the right work, regardless of what’s been expected of us, or what we’ve been shown.”

“It’s [team] high-functioning in that sense that it has great shared leadership and that really everybody is needed and brings something to it.”

“We need people that are just out of the classroom, and that are very experienced. There is that, just that tapestry. It’s just that makes the team that much more robust. So, I think that’s been a really interesting, good thing to see and how that functions and the trust that’s needed.”

**Summary of closing reflections.** Participants described similarities and differences of their experiences versus their expectations prior to beginning the role. Results showed two distinct groups: Peer Coaches who were a part of the original team with less detailed responses and those who had experienced peer coaching as a teacher with more specified responses based on those experiences. Statements included the importance of Peer Coach colleagues and the program, extensive training, learning and increased perspective. Participants described similarities and differences in their experiences teaching versus coaching, as well as referring to their connection with teachers. The future of the participants included variances according to their individual stories and professional history: some referred to increased teaching skills as well as professional challenges of returning to the classroom. Responses noted participants’ shift in perspective, growth, and development as well as significant relationships and connections. Participants contributed additional thoughts about their experiences as Peer Coaches, including

personal and professional reflective statements and their gained insight into a broader perspective of education, relationships and working with teachers. They also acknowledged the Peer Coach team and approach to the role as notable additions to their experiences.

**Opening and closing reflections summary.** The interview questions in the Opening and Closing Reflections provided a scaffolded interview sequence for participants. Peer Coaches' responses to opening and closing questions produced important data to create context and a framework for understanding of the thematic data analysis of participants' experiences of development, leadership, and change. Data was analyzed, grouped, and reported in collections of participant responses.

### **Summary**

This qualitative research described how education Peer Coaches experience development, leadership and change in their roles at a suburban Minnesota school district. Findings from participant interview data were summarized and reported. Four major themes emerged from the data and were defined. Thematic analysis was used to describe findings in the three research categories of Development, Leadership, Change. Interview data from the Opening Reflections and Closing Reflections were grouped and reported by topics of participant responses.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As this study explored the experiences of Peer Coaches in a suburban Minnesota school district, their perspectives provided significant insight into the challenges and opportunities evident in the current state of teaching and education. This chapter offers a summary of the research question, findings, and analysis as well as a discussion of the results, implications for practice, grounded theory conclusions, and recommendations for future research. The implications of this study lead to rethinking the structure and long-term implementation of new and alternative coaching positions within schools, with comprehensive coach training and conception of an enhanced coaching model.

### **Summary of the Research**

This qualitative case study examined Peer Coaches' stories and experiences while addressing the research question, How do education Peer Coaches experience development, leadership, and change in their roles at a suburban Minnesota school district? Interviews provided in-depth data which was analyzed and developed into a concise understanding of the collective experiences of participants. Research categories focused on experiences of development, leadership, and change, and the interview structure included opening and closing reflections which contextualized the full experiences of Peer Coaches while in the position. Data analysis illuminated four emerging themes of Peer Coach experiences: Identity, Mindset, Behaviors, and Relationships. Findings were interpreted and discussed, with results structured into five sections: experiences of Development, Leadership, and Change organized by themes and theme subsets, and Opening and Closing Reflections, organized by interview questions. The collective evidence of Peer Coaches' interview data provided insight into experiences of a teacher leadership position and revealed the effect of transformational learning.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The responsibilities of Peer Coaches included teacher evaluation, providing observation data and feedback, and coaching teachers to improve their instructional practices. Teacher evaluation was viewed as a necessary, yet minimal, part of their role. Training included the use and understanding of a common evaluation rubric for Peer Coaches to evaluate teacher performance. The evaluative component demonstrates continued influence and alignment with Thorndike's philosophy of technical, practical, and controllable techniques in education. Although the Peer Coach position was created based on evaluative requirements, it was the coaching element that was found to be the most meaningful and significant to the process. Coaching aligned with Dewey's philosophy of practical and experiential learning, as Peer Coaches adapted their coaching techniques and incorporated teacher participation to meet the learning needs of individual teachers. Training included the use and understanding of a common coaching framework agreed upon by the district, which added fidelity to the process. Coaching, or reflective conversation, was viewed as the primary focus by participants.

### **Research Categories**

The researcher decided on the categories of Development, Leadership, and Change due to the significance of these components in professional aptitudes. There is a wide-ranging amount of writing on these topics in research and in general literature. These categories are not exclusive to education but were defined and applied by the researcher to an educational context to frame the experiences of the research.

**Development.** The development experiences of Peer Coaches showed themes of Mindset and Behaviors as most prominent. Peer Coaches experienced development of their mindset in regard to their professionalism and broadened perspective of the classroom, school

district, and education. Participants relayed experiences of coaching and learning behaviors as most important to their development.

The inclusion and network opportunities at the district level allowed a greater understanding of district operations within the school system. The broadened perspective allowed participants to see the systemic functioning of the district and showed more acceptance of how decisions were made at that level. Peer Coaches indicated that the fear and frustration they had experienced toward the district as classroom teachers had now dissipated.

Participants' mindset of administration and classroom teachers was also impacted by their Peer Coach experiences. Administration was now seen as approachable and relatable. Peer Coaches viewed their work as supportive and connected to the work of administration and showed a diminished sense of hierarchical element in their relationships with positional leaders. Participants expressed their higher regard for teachers and deeper understanding of the demands of the profession as observers of classroom instruction. They recognized that their skill development as coaches increased their ability to influence teachers.

**Leadership.** The experiences of leadership indicated the most prominent theme of Identity and then Behaviors. Peer Coaches experienced identity as both a leader and Peer Coach and showed a focus on their behaviors of coaching. Participants acknowledged additional layers of connections, networks, and opportunities provided by their experiences in the Peer Coach role. Recognition of classroom limitations, as well as respect for the job of teachers, was intensified by their Peer Coach opportunities.

Peer Coaches' experiences offered a renewed perspective of classroom teaching and peer coaching. Participants expressed how the role provided opportunities to evolve their leadership.

Table 8 shows a list of words and phrases used by participants when describing the work of a teacher versus that of a Peer Coach.

**Table 8**

*Descriptors of Classroom Teacher and Peer Coach Roles*

Classroom Teacher	Peer Coach
need permission	take risks
restricted, structured	freedom, flexibility
isolated, lonely	connected
directives given	professional dialogue
narrow perspective	broad perspective
deficit-focused	strengths-focused
changing demands	consistency
basic training	rigorous learning
worker	expert
survive	thrive
humble	valuable

Participants viewed themselves as having influence yet were hesitant to refer to themselves as leaders, preferring instead to identify as teachers. The terms most often used were “just a teacher” or “peer,” and they were deliberate in maintaining a relatable status to teachers. This fits the leadership paradigm commonly expressed by the coaches as being a support and resource for teachers to develop in a safe and engaging way. Leadership was seen not as being in charge but as helping people do their best, be successful, identify and cultivate strengths, and creating a shared vision. Peer Coaches viewed their work as a collaboration with administration to support teachers and articulated the increased influence, distinct effectiveness, and critical nature of their role as a peer, with a lack of positional power, in their relationship with teachers.

**Change.** Peer Coaches’ experiences in the category of Change indicated Behaviors as the most prominent theme, followed by Mindset. Change in participants’ mindset and behaviors



were perpetuated by interacting with other and by an increased understanding and perspective of education as a larger system. Peer Coaches portrayed a heightened sense of professionalism from being in a position outside of the classroom and in a role deemed as a teacher leader. Their training and responsibilities increased self-awareness and communication. Opportunities to engage in meaningful learning opportunities and professional conversations with colleagues changed how participants perceived themselves and how they interacted with others. The significance of relationship was evident as well as the ability to connect and create broader networks within the district. Participants made statements about being comfortable with having open dialogue and feeling validated. Peer Coaches experienced change with an increased awareness, clarity, and intentionality in their work. The way they filtered information and fulfilled the work of the role impacted how they experienced change.

### **Emerging Themes**

**Identity.** Peer Coaches had a heightened sense of professionalism in their role, which resonated in their statements reflecting the theme of Identity. Their comments revealed the way Peer Coaches thought about themselves, the way they were viewed by others, and the characteristics that defined them (see Table 7, p. 87). Identity as a Peer Coach permeated their responses, with less evidence of identity as a leader and minimally as a teacher. Peer Coaches reflected on teaching in a classroom and their Peer Coach position. Participants did not describe themselves as leaders or make statements which indicated thoughts or beliefs about classroom teachers being leaders. They defined their Peer Coach role and the impact on teachers they coached, and ultimately students, by their influence and support of teachers' classroom practices. Identity was closely tied to their work as a Peer Coach and they strived to incorporate their strengths and take a positive, humble approach to their self-perception and professionalism.

**Mindset.** The mindset of Peer Coaches reflected a considerable shift regarding the classroom, the district, and education in a broader sense as a result of leaving the classroom and their experiences in the Peer Coach position. (see Table 7, p. 87). The theme of Mindset outlined Peer Coaches' way of thinking, established set of attitudes, collection of beliefs, and disposition which determined their interpretations and responses to events, circumstances and situations. Peer Coaches viewed and responded differently to the day-to-day work in a classroom and the role of teachers, which was seen as challenging and restraining. Peer Coaches viewed their role as meaningful and impactful for teachers, as an expert in coaching versus an expert in content. Adjustments were made in attitudes and language as Peer Coaches considered the changes necessary from working with students as learners to working with and responding to teachers as learners. In their position outside the classroom, participants interpreted district level work to be more inclusive than they previously considered and showed an expansion of their thoughts regarding the broader educational system.

**Behaviors.** Behaviors of learning, coaching, and experiencing was the most prominent theme in the stories of Peer Coaches. The theme was clearly articulated in their experiences, delineating the way Peer Coaches conducted themselves, responded to their environment, and interacted with others (see Table 7, p. 87). The role provided unique and profound training, collegial interaction, and learning in addition to autonomy, time, and flexibility. Participants developed expertise as coaches and mediators of thinking to help teachers improve instructional practices. Their role as coaches added opportunities for teachers to take risks and contributed towards teachers' professional growth, emphasizing the importance of promoting student learning. Peer Coaches expressed that coaching was positive, meaningful work which provided professional challenges, new and different opportunities, and exceptional learning.

**Relationships.** The theme of Relationships showed Peer Coaches' connection, association, and involvement with teachers, colleagues, and administrators (see Table 7, p. 87). The role facilitated unique professional relationships with both teachers and administration, with a prominent emphasis on the importance of teacher relationships. Trust was found to be an important element in this relationship. Peer Coaches were intentional in establishing trust with teachers and discovered it to be determining factor in the effectiveness of their role. Peer Coaches experienced an expansion of their professional network at the district level. Participants expressed notable authenticity and genuineness in these relationships as well, alleviating some of the previous mistrust or misunderstanding of district operations. Relationships with administrators was a collaborative effort based on mutual respect and a shared responsibility to improve district practices of teacher evaluation and support school vision and goals.

### **Research Categories and Themes Summary**

In the category of Development, participants demonstrated a predominant shift in their mindset of the classroom and school district, and behaviors of learning and coaching were attributed to their Development experiences. In the Leadership category, Peer Coaches showed significant identity as a Peer Coach and leader, and behaviors of coaching were also indicated as contributing to Leadership experiences. Peer Coaches' experiences of Change were demonstrated in the themes of Mindset and Behaviors, specifically in learning and coaching. Change was most impacted by interacting with others and increasing their understanding and perspective of education as a larger system.

Participants' identity as a Peer Coach focused on their work with teachers they coached, and ultimately students, by their influence and support of teachers' classroom practices. The mindset of participants demonstrated a heightened awareness of challenges and restraints of

classroom teaching. They viewed their role as significant and supportive for teachers, and showed an expansion of their thoughts regarding the broader educational system. Behaviors of Peer Coaches demonstrated positive, meaningful work of coaching, increased professionalism through new and different opportunities, and exceptional learning. In the theme of Relationships, Peer Coaches developed connection, association, and involvement with teachers, colleagues, and administrators, with a prominent emphasis on the importance of teacher relationships and shared responsibility to improve and support school and district goals.

### **Transformational Learning Theory**

This study incorporated Mezirow's transformational learning theory as a formidable and comprehensive theory. This theory professes, "An adult makes meaning by becoming critically aware of one's own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4). The learning process for Peer Coaches was significant in their experiences, which changed the way they saw themselves and their world, "formulating more dependable beliefs about our experience, assessing their contexts, seeking informed agreement on their meaning and justification, and making decisions" (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 4).

Adult learning, based on Mezirow's theory, states a person's worldview and knowledge, or frame of reference, is constructed on the person's individual experiences, cultural background, social status, and historical contexts (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Participants learned through a new context and environment as the Peer Coach position provided opportunities to develop a new frame of reference based on a larger community versus their individual perspectives. "A more dependable frame of reference is broader, differentiating, inclusive, and integrative of others' perspectives" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19). Transformational learning theory

described how people learn and make meaning of their experiences. Participants demonstrated clear transformational learning in their sense of self, their position as coaches, and in their relationships with teachers and administrators.

The Peer Coach position created an environment and conditions for transformative learning as coaches engaged in critical self-reflection, gained new perspectives, and broadened their existing frames of reference. Participants gained a heightened awareness through exposure to the broader network and systems within the district as they honed practices of coaching and evaluating teachers and participated in additional training and professional development opportunities.

Practices in the Peer Coach position allowed participants to embrace “a more dependable frame of reference . . . one that is more inclusive, differentiating, permeable [open to other viewpoints], critically reflective of assumptions, emotionally capable of change, and integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19). Learning occurred for Peer Coaches with an increased understanding of themselves, expanded interaction and collaboration with others, and critical self-reflection. “By elaborating existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view or by transforming habits of mind” (p. 19), participants placed a greater importance on relationships, valued collaboration, increased their capability of critical analysis, and discovered a greater acceptance of multiple perspectives.

Peer Coaches’ transformative learning was evident in the emerging themes of Identity, Mindset, Behaviors, and Relationships. Participants’ mindset and behaviors showed transformative learning as “learners become more aware of the context of their problematic understanding and beliefs, more critically reflective on their assumptions and those of others, more fully and freely engaged in discourse” (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 31). Participants

engaged in meaningful, diverse relationships with others in an extended network, exhibited an acceptance of multiple perspectives, and demonstrated shifts in perspectives and actions.

Formation of Peer Coaches' identity was supported by the combination of heightened self-understanding and critical thinking abilities, demonstrating transformational learning through their experiences of development, leadership, and change.

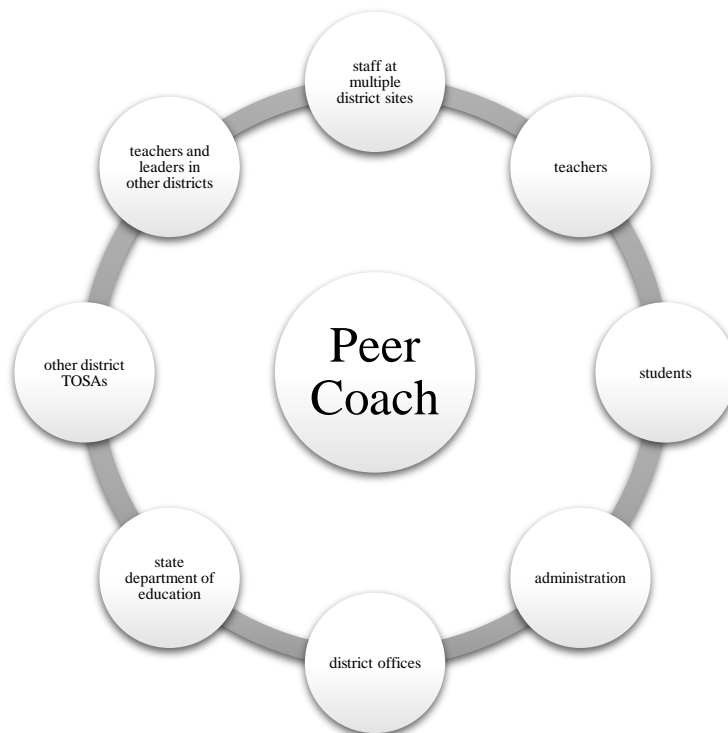
### **Implications for Practice**

The context in which Peer Coaches performed their responsibilities mattered as to how they interacted, acted, and reacted. Who they were as teachers in the classroom expanded and grew into who they were as Peer Coaches outside the classroom. The reasons for growth were not simply because of changes in responsibilities; there was connection to the opportunities and learning they experienced and how that was manifested in their beliefs, values, priorities, passions, thoughts, and actions.

Peer Coaches recognized their ability and responsibility to support teachers and collaborate with administrators. Although as district TOSAs they remained on teacher salary and contract, their role created a unique sphere of influence and opportunities. Peer Coaches' experiences produced a changed perspective and viable opportunity to remain close to the work being done in classrooms, stay connected with teachers, and have meaningful professional growth. Peer Coaches saw their role as a facilitator of learning and as learners themselves. Experiencing transformative learning included acquiring knowledge, deepening understanding, and broadening perspective.

There was discernable evidence of shifts in Peer Coaches' motivation, connection, communication and sense of purpose, passion, and professionalism. They not only experienced these transformations, they were also able to influence and lead teachers to experience similar

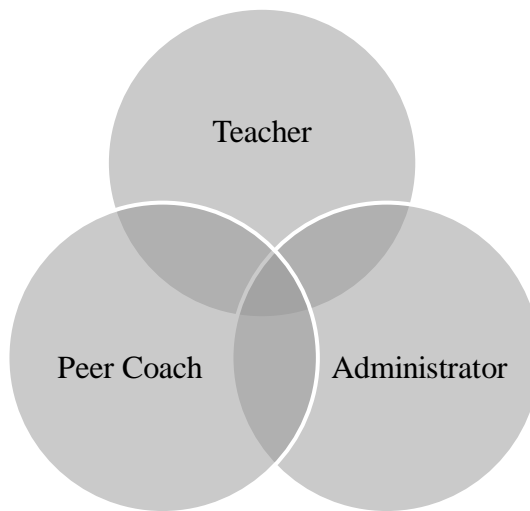
changes. Participants' outlook and mentality of decision-making shifted from things being "done to me" to an understanding of the systemic function of the district in such a way that promoted a "we" mentality. Yet still being "just a teacher" allowed for effective comradery with teachers and a nonthreatening rapport with administrators. The level of interactions, network, and exposure allowed for an expansion of professional opportunities. Participants experienced autonomy, opportunities for new learning, a renewed sense of purpose.



*Figure 1.* Peer Coaches' expanded network of connections

Peer Coaches experienced influential leadership versus positional leadership, which provided opportunities to build relationships and a culture of collaboration, mutual support, and trust. Their dual role as teacher and skilled coach enabled them to build a foundation of authentic relationships with teachers. Teacher evaluations completed by Peer Coaches provided

data and feedback to teachers on their instructional practices and were inclusive of teachers' self-reflection. As TOSAs without a direct hierarchical structure in schools they worked in, Peer Coaches established supportive and collaborative relationships with administrators as well. Peer Coaches collaborated with administrators to evaluate teachers, a type of shared leadership to support teachers and improve instructional practices in schools.



*Figure 2.* Peer Coach collaborative support of teachers

Peer Coaches contributed to the educational environment in multifaceted ways. The shift in participants' mindset moved them to make sense of their learning by taking action in their professional community, exploring real-life challenges through relationships with others, and creating a strengthened community of practice within the schools and district.

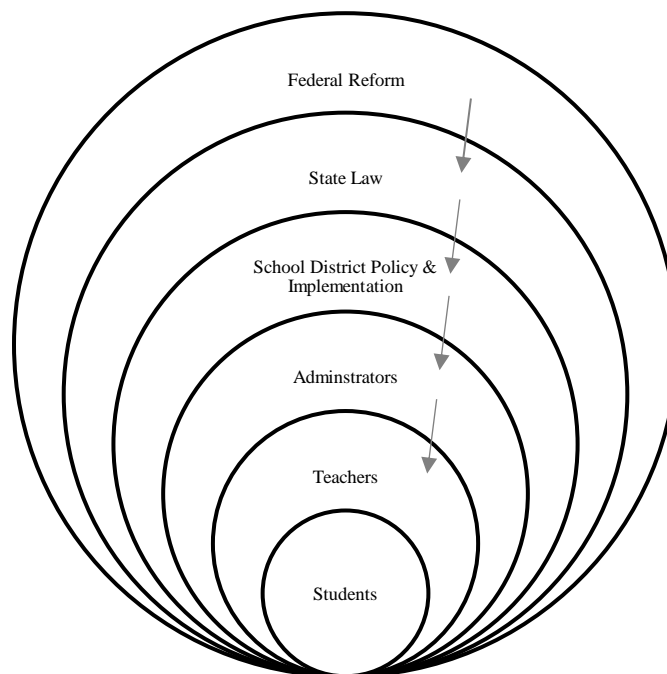
The results of this study show the Peer Coach role constructs an identity as a Peer Coach and influences through their work concentrated on the individuals they coach, supporting their professional practices. The Peer Coach mindset incorporates a heightened awareness and understanding of challenges and strengths in all levels within the educational system. Behaviors of Peer Coaches demonstrate increased professionalism through opportunities, learning, and the



fulfilling, meaningful work of coaching. Peer Coaches establish relationships with a focus on building connections, collaborating, and leveraging involvement with administrators, supporting the priorities and shared vision for school improvement.

### **Grounded Theory**

Demands placed on teachers have progressively increased over time and impacts of reform efforts have significantly changed the teaching profession. The fact remains that reform efforts in education begin with federal and state stakeholders who are the decision-makers furthest away and disconnected from teachers and students, where the actual work of education is conducted. Decisions are made, laws passed, mandates enforced, and policies implemented without a reciprocal stream of balanced, informed communication coming from stakeholders at various levels of the system, especially teachers.



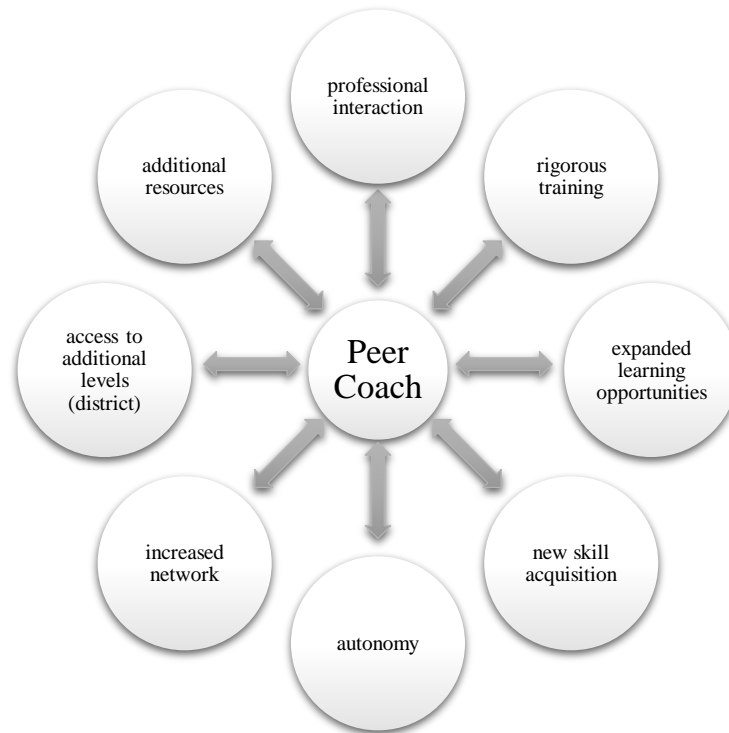
*Figure 3.* Levels and direction of decision-making in education

With teacher accountability at the forefront of educational issues, an expanded design of the Peer Coach position would be a functional asset to education models. Integrating the perspectives of Peer Coaches in this study, the researcher suggests development of an innovative approach to coaching in education. A grounded theory model reenvisioning the structure and implementation of coaching in education will be discussed following a synthesis of Peer Coaches' experiences in context of schools and the school district.

The construction of grounded theory was based on explorations of Peer Coaches' experiences. The inductive methods of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) was used throughout the organizing, coding, and analysis process, which led to creative insight from questioning and interpreting data. There is a close relationship between data and theory in this study. Through deliberation and reflection of the meaning and implications of the findings, the researcher built patterns, made assertions, and developed a well-integrated set of concepts to provide a theoretical explanation and model (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The flow of growth in the Peer Coach job design included connection, interaction, and openings to navigate the educational systems on a relational level. Peer Coaches embraced the responsibility to provide a service to teachers by supporting their development as a professional: a facilitator of thinking to create space for learning, creativity, and exploration. Coaching served as a guide and advisor, accompanying teachers through the tension and balance of the challenging and meaningful day-to-day work being done with students in the school setting. Peer Coaches also had access and interaction with different hierarchical levels within the district, additional and varied resources, and opportunities for autonomy, flexibility, and influence. Participants endured tensions within the district system while maintaining balance and a frame for space and creativity in their role. The role of the Peer Coaches was focused on teachers and

served as a conduit for connection within the current flow of leadership at all levels. Figure 4 shows the elements and flow of growth in the Peer Coach position.



*Figure 4.* Peer Coach growth flow

Peer Coaches became a conduit—filling gaps, making connections, and becoming a resource to others. Increasing their personal fortitude, Peer Coaches served as a conduit for teachers to experience authentic professional growth, fulfilling a need in education. The impact of their work potentially increases quality instructional practices and longevity in the profession for teachers. The unique TOSA role provided opportunity for Peer Coaches to leverage their responsibilities and supported the work of administrators by performing required teacher evaluations while simultaneously supporting learning and practices of teachers, contributing to school improvement.

**Grounded theory model.** Peer Coaches' transformational experiences of development, leadership, and change impacted their professional practices and could lead to new and meaningful career paths—if they existed. With limited options, most participants expressed their intention to return to the classroom rather than pursuing administrator positions, the only two current choices within the school district. The other option is to leave the teaching profession. Based on the results of this study, the researcher proposes creating an alternative career option for teachers beyond the Peer Coach role with potential to have a notable impact on authentic change in education.

The distinctive Peer Coach role facilitated an evolution, or metamorphosis, of participants as professionals. The value of studying Peer Coaches is discovering and understanding participants' transformational learning and constructing avenues to extend the learning in ways that increase professionalism in teaching. Maximizing the transformative learning experienced by Peer Coaches demands a new way to approach professional paths and advancement for teachers in education. The results of this study highlighted and affirmed what we know about teacher leadership and provides an in-depth insight into experiences of Peer Coaches, leading to an innovative approach for developing instructional leaders by expanding teacher leadership through the existing function of the Peer Coach role.

Conceptually, it became apparent that Peer Coaches are a valuable asset that extends beyond the classroom. Peer Coaches had developed a clearer knowledge of district networks and systemic functioning. Expanding positions for peer coaching within a school district and incorporating unique and varied functions would allow coaches to make adjustments according to the changing needs of teachers. Alternative coaching positions within schools offer additional

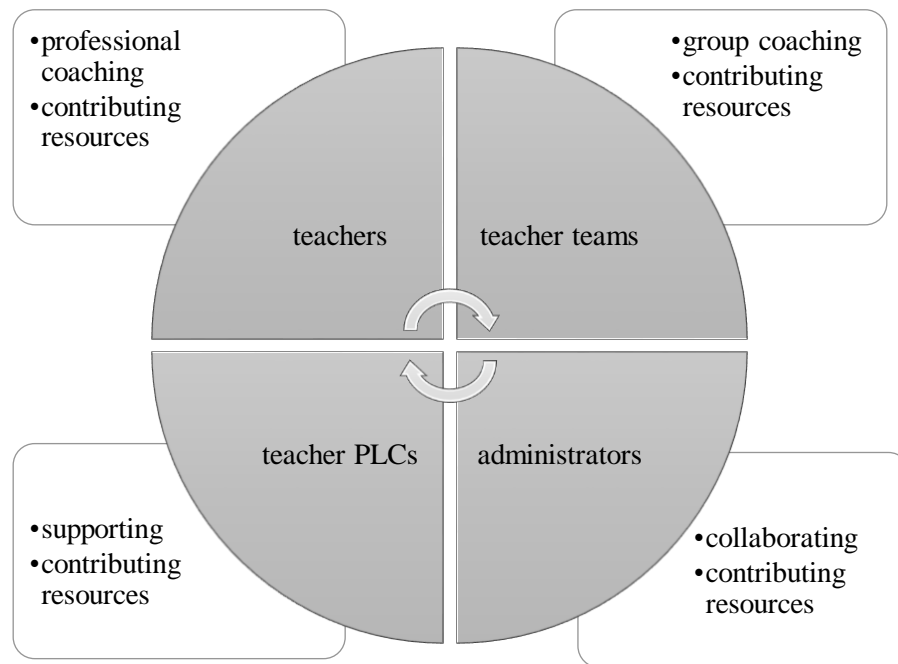
opportunities for teachers to extend their learning and strengthen the work of teachers in classrooms, leading to school improvement.

Utilizing the grounded theory in this study, the researcher suggests a coaching model to include an innovative, advanced position. The model of Professional Development Coach, titled for the purposes of this study, would be integrated into assigned schools and focused on facilitating professional growth and providing resources based on the specific needs of teachers. In addition, Professional Development Coaches become a bridge in creating a synergy within the culture and context of the district. This coaching role is designed to empower teachers, support partnerships with administrators, facilitate understanding of district operations, connect broader networks with individuals and departments at various levels, and help teachers create a revolutionized approach to their profession. In essence, the Professional Development Coach position is designed to create a coaching culture conducive to producing transformational learning opportunities for teachers at the school level, increasing the professionalization of teaching.

The Professional Development Coach role remains closely connected to teachers and directly linked to the work being done to improve student learning. Responsibilities include integrating group coaching with teacher teams, supporting professional learning communities, and, most important, incorporating personalized professional development coaching with teachers. This is distinctly different from instructional or evaluative coaching. Professional Development Coaches concentrate on the teachers as professionals, with teachers deciding on the coaching focus.

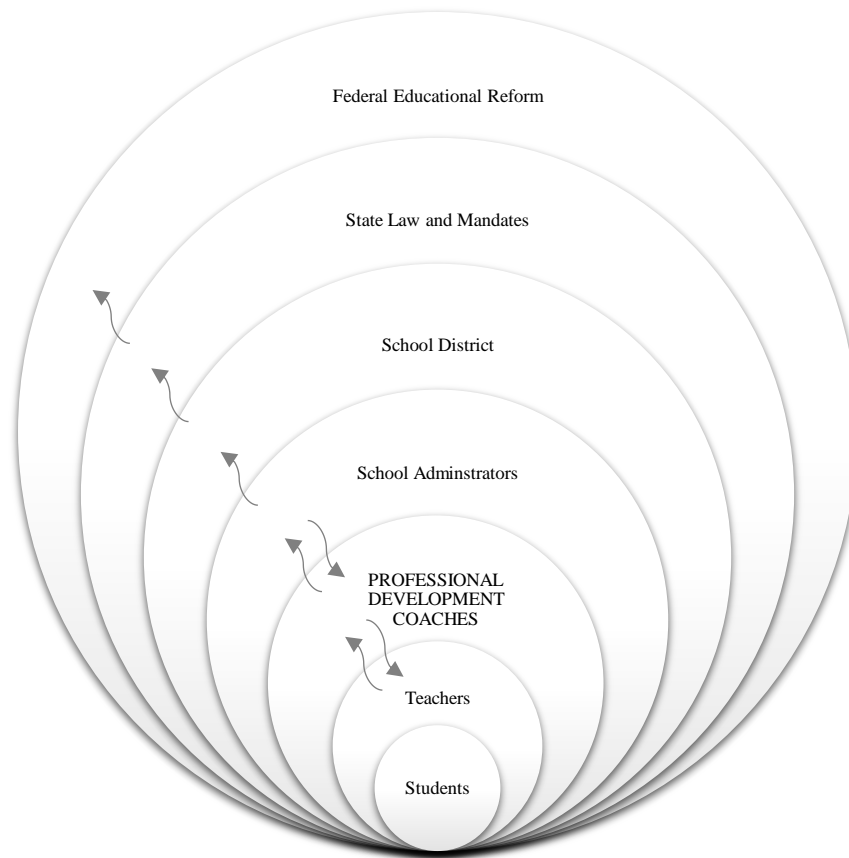
The value of coaching offers a continuation of transformational learning for both coaches and classroom teachers. An additional component of this role becomes a bridge to facilitate accurate,

succinct, and judicious articulation of the changing needs of teachers, providing insight for administrators. The coach becomes an integral part of a school, supporting administrators by understanding, collaborating and sharing the goals and vision for the school.



*Figure 5.* Professional development coach model at the teacher level. The term PLC refers to Professional Learning Community.

Implementation of this model is designed for a team of Professional Development Coach positions to be aligned with existing coach roles and situated within the current infrastructure of the district. This role would be designed to include comprehensive coach training and obtain extended opportunities for an expanded network, generating more progressive thinking and creative educational resources. In this coaching model, the Professional Development Coach position facilitates an increased flow of information, bridging communication between hierarchical positions, and supporting informed decision-making as seen in Figure 6.



*Figure 6.* Professional development coach information flow

## Conclusions

This grounded theory model seeks to address the continuing evolution of peer coaching within school districts and offers alternative ways to implement coaching within schools. The current Peer Coach role has been well defined to evaluate teacher performance and help teachers develop instructional practices. Creating professional alternatives maximizes the investment in the existing Peer Coach position and offers a model for educational improvement at the teacher level. In education, decision-making takes place at levels removed from the work of teachers and student learning. Opening up the field of teaching with a broader scope of coaching positions would provide more collaboration and support experiences of development, leadership,

and change within the teaching profession. Incorporating teacher voice into the decision-making process would generate more authentic reform efforts and foster progress in education.

This model could also serve as a foundation in efforts to implement coaching to improve instructional practices and student learning by supporting district organizational goals and providing consistent contribution to professional development. Structuring the training, work, and opportunities of coaching for teachers and administrators, at the school and district levels, could leverage broader positive effects, further balancing the exchange of information, and influencing decision-making at all levels within the educational system.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research was limited to one Minnesota suburban school district. Broadening research into several suburban school districts could represent a larger range of Peer Coaches' experiences. Replicated studies could be conducted in urban, suburban, and rural Minnesota school districts to provide comparisons of experiences. Additional studies are needed to understand experiences of Peer Coaches in greater depth, including varied models of program implementation and development. Recommendations for further research include a comprehensive view from other stakeholders to incorporate multiple perspectives and maximize effectiveness of Peer Coaches and program models.

Further research considerations may include a focus on Peer Coaches who return to classroom teaching. As teachers increase their professional experiences in the Peer Coach role, studies focused on individuals reentering a school environment could explore effects on teaching practices, collegial relationships, and school culture. Understanding more about how experiences of development, leadership, and change for Peer Coaches influence professional



choices may provide additional information about teacher leadership in addition to impacts of policy and educational reform.

Suggestions for additional studies include how experiences of Peer Coaches and other teacher leadership positions impact teacher quality and retention, further informing the literature on the teaching profession and educational reform efforts. Given current demand of reform efforts and increased accountability in America's public education, what is the impact and what are the effects of this position on the teaching profession and on the educational system? Research can be an opportunity to explore the experiences of teachers, provide teacher voice in literature, and allow an enhanced understanding of how to advance educational progress. This study can be used as a foundation for future research on experiences of development, leadership, and change, as these fundamental categories are applicable to individuals in all professions. Researching experiences provides data which can be interpreted into understandable, relatable, and insightful applications of learning.

### **Summary**

This study centered on the fundamental components of development, leadership, and change, specifically on the experiences of teachers in a Peer Coach position, a teacher leader position with origins in educational reform movements. Through discussion of thematic analysis of findings, application of transformational learning theory, and an established grounded theory, implications for practice of this research included development of a coaching model to enhance educational teaching and coaching practices. The significance of understanding teacher experiences in this research has far-reaching implications. Education has a foundational role in society and teachers are at the core of the educational system. The complexity of the teaching profession in the United States, historically and currently, is multifaceted. Incorporating

educational reform through laws and mandated policies has effects on the evolution of roles and responsibilities of teachers. This research on Peer Coaches' experiences contributed deeper understanding of the present state of teaching and education and exposed further questions for research. Peer Coaches' collective stories on their experiences of development, leadership, and change contributed teachers' voice to teacher leadership literature. The relevance of teachers' experiences and perspective provided insightful information with implications for educational improvement.

### **Researcher's Personal Reflections**

For many years, studying leadership both formally and informally has been important to me. Pursuing learning through this leadership doctoral program has allowed for a depth and breadth of learning beyond gaining knowledge, understanding, and perspective. The research has allowed me to experience what I've always believed: leadership is a verb; leadership is taking action. In my notes from the beginning of my doctoral program, I wrote, "Critically thinking and analyzing past, present, and future allow a deeper understanding of ourselves, others, and the world around us. There are defining moments when crossroads create opportunity to seek clarity and understanding."

Becoming a researcher and scholar has strengthened the significance of my decision to remain in education. This research shaped the convergence and blending of my beliefs, ideas, and vision for education. Remaining in the classroom presented challenges and celebrations while providing strength, resilience, and capacity through the freedom and self-empowerment I established throughout the years. My experiences as a classroom teacher and brief time in a TOSA role allowed me to study and reimagine the educational system and the culture of teaching from an inside perspective. My pursuits outside of education broadened my expertise, provided varied experiences, and allowed for increased capacity to learn and lead. I am a classroom teacher whose vested interest is advancing education for students.

Revolutionizing teaching through the transformation of teachers ultimately transfers into classrooms. Authentic change is change from the inside out, and teachers are the key to authentic change in education. In the words of philosopher and educator Paulo Freire, "You never get *there* by starting from *there*, you get *there* by starting from *here*."

*Here* is where my focus begins so that we, as educators, can get *there*.

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## APPENDIX A

### Participant Background Questions

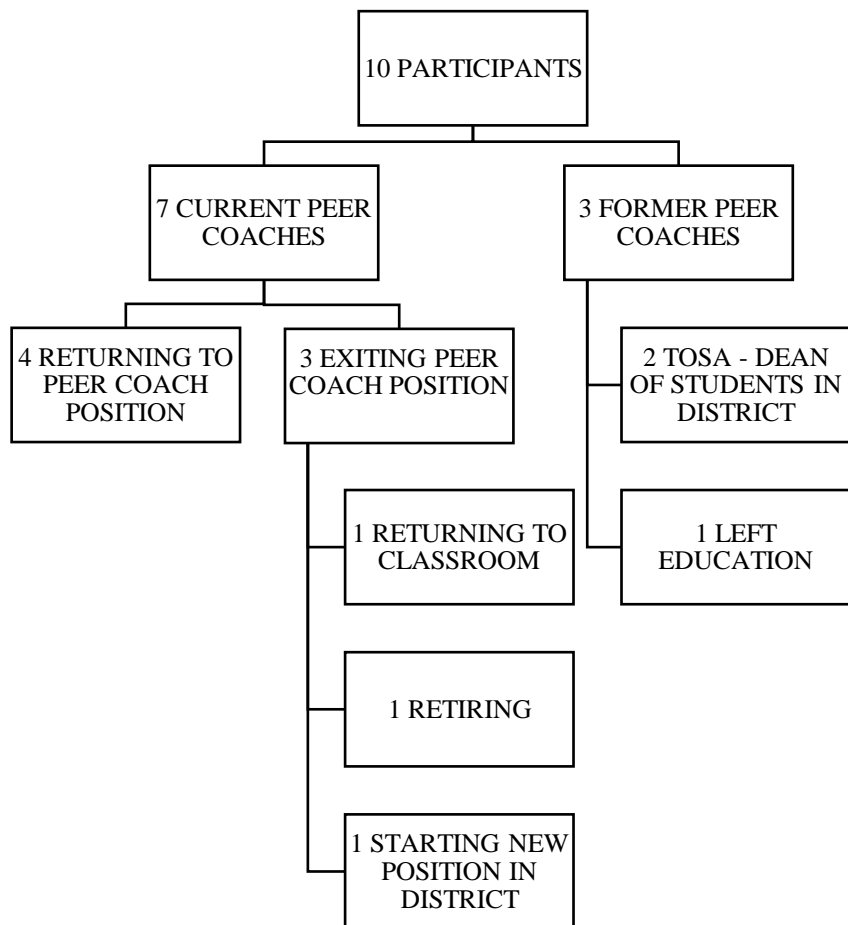
Background questions were designed to provide context for Peer Coaches individually and as a collective participant group. These questions were asked electronically prior to the interview. (Note: Questions were rephrased in past tense for former Peer Coach participants.)

#### Background

1. Number of years in education.
2. Number of years in a classroom.
3. Number of years as a Peer Coach.
4. List any previous district positions other than the classroom or outside of education.
5. List your degrees and certifications beyond your 4-year teaching degree.
6. After you conclude your peer coaching position, are you anticipating to:
  - return to a classroom
  - obtain a different district position
  - obtain an administrative position in a school or district offices
  - leave the teaching profession

**APPENDIX B**

**Participant Position Status**



## APPENDIX C

### Participant Interview Questions

This conversational interview was designed to explore the perspectives of Peer Coaches' experiences of development, leadership, and change. (Note: Questions were rephrased in past tense for former Peer Coach participants.)

#### Opening Reflections

##### 1. Describe yourself personally and professionally.

Follow-up Prompts:

- how you came to be in the Peer Coach position
- aspects which appealed to you
- expectations of the Peer Coach position

##### 2. How would you describe the work of a Peer Coach?

Follow-up Prompts:

- thoughts on evaluating peers

#### Development

##### 3. Core Question:

**In what ways have you experienced development since you started in the Peer Coach position?**

Follow-up Prompts:

- trainings, activities which have contributed to your development
  - ways you experience, process, or apply learning differently
- describe shifts in perspective about:
  - teaching, education
  - you as a professional
  - you personally

#### Leadership

##### 4. Core Question:

**In what ways have you experienced leadership in the Peer Coach position?**

Follow-up Prompts:

- qualities and characteristics exemplified as a Peer Coach
- what motivates you as a Peer Coach
- what challenges you as a Peer Coach
- contributions you are making to education



## Change

### **5. In what ways have you experienced change in the Peer Coach position?**

Follow-up Prompts:

- ways your mindset has shifted
- ways your actions and behaviors have changed
- relationships and interactions: peers, classroom teachers, administration
- how the role influenced your perspective of classroom teaching or administration and other changes

## Closing Reflections

### **6. Earlier we talked about your expectations of the role. In what ways were your expectations similar to or different from your actual experiences in the role?**

### **7. What are your thoughts about the future?**

Follow-up Prompts:

- change over time
- Peer Coach role influence

### **8. What additional thoughts would you like to offer about your peer coaching experiences?**

## APPENDIX D

## Participant Background Data

**Table A1**  
*Years of Experience*

	Average	Median	Range
Years as a Peer Coach	3.2	2.5	1–6
Years in Education	17.5	16	12–30
Years in a Classroom	13.9	12.5	8–24

**Table A2**  
*Level of Teaching Experience*

Elementary	7
Middle School	1
High School	2

**Table A3**  
*Other Educational Positions or Other Professions*

In Education, Crossroads School District	3	1 content intervention specialist 1 reading coordinator 1 instructional coach
Outside of Education	1	1 professional soccer player prior to teaching position

**Table A4***Degrees, Certificates, License Beyond Bachelor's Degree and Teaching License*

Master's Degree	1 MA Teaching and Learning 1 MA Early Childhood 1 MA Elementary Education 1 MA Educational Leadership
Master's Degree and Administrative License	1 MA Differentiated Instruction; Ed Specialist K–12 Principal License 1 MEd Elementary Education; Ed Specialist K–12 Principal License 1 Ed Specialist; K–12 Principal License 1 MA Teaching & Learning and PK–12 Administration; K–12 Principal License
Master's Degree and Enrolled in Additional Master's Program	1 MEd Elementary Education; enrolled in MA Biological Sciences
Master's Degree and Doctorate	1 MSE Education; PhD Curriculum and Instruction