Improving on Strength: Developing Coaching Competencies for the NYC Leadership Academy

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Improving on Strength:
Developing Coaching Competencies for the NYC Leadership Academy

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by

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In memory of
Gladys Howard Yasharian
and
Mercedes Teixidor Crawford

who loved me, believed in me
and dreamed big dreams for me,
expecting so much more from me than a calesa…

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Abstract

The NYC Leadership Academy has been coaching school leaders for over a decade. The Academy is regarded as a national leader in the field of coaching and the organization continues to expand, learn, and refine its coaching work. Over the years their coaching practice has evolved as they learned more about the practice of supporting effective school leaders. This capstone describes my efforts to help the organization improve on this strength, leading a small group of coaches within the Academy in articulating what leadership coaches need to know and be able to do to facilitate strong leadership development. I discuss the challenge of surfacing what NYC Leadership Academy coaches have learned about effective coaching over the years while also creating space for new thinking and learning about coaching practice. I argue that leadership coaching needs to advance equity in schools and have a balanced focus on both instructional leadership and broader leadership skills like communication and building trust. Helping an organization improve in an area of strength is much like the practice of coaching – it requires building trust, leveraging relationships, asking the right questions and facilitating reflection, and capitalizing on the interests of the coachee (or organization). This capstone offers important lessons for practitioners interested in leadership development; for NYC Leadership Academy in its effort to expand and refine its coaching practice; and for myself as a coach and education leader.

Introduction

> There was a moment in sports when employing a coach was
> unimaginable—and then came a time when not doing so was
> unimaginable. We care about results in sports, and if we care half
> as much about results in schools and in hospitals we may reach the
> same conclusion.
> —Atul Gawande, "Personal Best," *The New Yorker,* October 13, 2011

Sadia White, my mentor and supervisor when I first became a principal,

would always remind me that my job as a school leader was to "grow adults to

grow kids." I've carried that notion with me throughout my career, working with

teachers, parents, and colleagues and helping others think differently about

education and their craft. Through my doctoral studies I had the opportunity to

deeply explore this interest within the context of my overall leadership

development, complementing broader learning goals with a focus on adult

development, coaching skills, and transformational leadership.

My interest in supporting adult learners led me to accept a residency at

the NYC Leadership Academy (NYCLA)[1], a national education leadership

development nonprofit seeking to deepen its well-regarded practice and expand

its reach. I entered residency focused on the best way to develop future-thinking

educators, and I soon found myself focused more on the people providing

leadership support than on those receiving it. My strategic project was to design

a new set of coaching competencies and a related theory of action for the

organization, detailing the skills, stances, and aptitudes of leadership coaches

and making explicit what NYCLA's practitioners had learned about coaching

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[1] The organization's full name is NYC Leadership Academy, and not New York
City Leadership Academy. When abbreviated the organization is referred to as

since the academy's inception in 2003. This capstone documents the first two-thirds of my strategic project. I examine the process used to develop the proposed competencies, discuss considerations for implementation (which had just started at the time of writing), and analyze initial outcomes of my work.

NYC Leadership Academy's Changing Context

NYCLA originated as a third-party organization charged with developing school principals in the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) under Chancellor Joel Klein. This included leading a rigorous aspiring principal program/residency, and eventually came to include coaching early-career principals. At the time, it was anticipated that New York City would need 600 new principals over the span of a few years (NYCLA, 2016). Given the size of its charge, NYCLA cultivated a robust coaching corps of approximately 35 coaches, each with an average of 32 years of education leadership experience (NYCLA, 2015*b*).

NYCLA was intended to support the NYC DOE's principal development needs for only three years, but it continued to support the district well beyond that. Over time the relationship between the two entities changed. Under the current Chancellor Carmen Fariña and Mayor Bill de Blasio, the NYC DOE started to transition away from NYCLA services and expand its internal capacity to develop principals. Given this dynamic, along with NYCLA's desire to increase its impact and solidify a national reputation, NYCLA sought to differentiate its body of work. NYCLA developed both direct services and consulting services related to

leadership development for school districts across the nation and abroad. Over the years it has worked with more than 40 clients in 26 states and two countries, and it continues to evolve, expand, and learn (NYCLA, 2016).

Given its expanding work, NYCLA recently replaced a place-based organizational structure (New York City and national teams) with a three-part structure: Administration and Operations, Innovation and Organizational Development, and Client Services and Engagement. Client Services includes three primary areas of service in addition to coaching: preparing aspiring school leaders, supporting school leaders, and supporting district leaders. Under the new structure, NYCLA's coaching practice cuts across all three areas of Client Services. Figure 1 shows a diagram of the new Client Services Structure.

Figure 1: NYCLA Service Areas
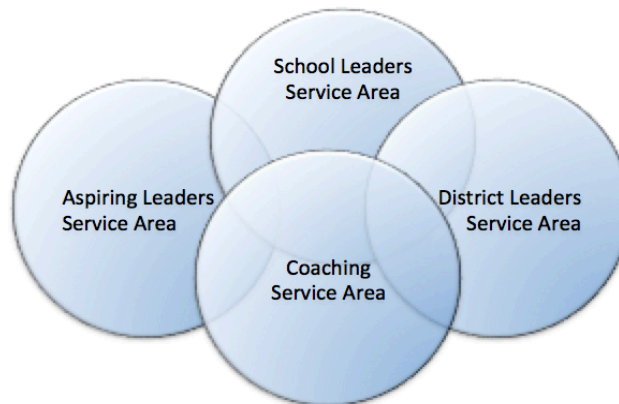
Source: NYCLA, 2015a

In light of the centrality of its coaching practice and the changing organizational context, NYCLA felt it necessary to reexamine its coaching competencies. Doing so would ensure that the competencies could be applied universally, meaning that they would be applicable to work outside of New York

City and appropriate for a variety of coaching clients (not just aspiring and early-career principals).

At the same time it chose to examine its coaching competencies, the organization was exploring how its internal structures and external practices advanced equity. The year before I joined the organization, NYCLA contracted with the Pacific Education Group to facilitate conversations on race and equity, and during my residency NYCLA received funding to address equity more explicitly in its tools and practices. As of the writing of this capstone, NYCLA had not developed a shared definition of equity. Given that, in this capstone I use the term *equity* to mean that people should receive what they need to achieve their potential, and that their race and other aspects of their identity should not prevent access to opportunity, a definition that is in keeping with that of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2008).

NYCLA's transition to a new organizational structure and its focus on equity during my residency supply important context for my strategic project and will be referenced later in this document.

NYCLA's Coaching Competencies and Model

NYCLA refers to its coaching model as "facilitative, competency-based coaching."

> Facilitative, competency-based coaching is an approach to school leadership development in which two people (coach and principal) work together around an agreed-upon set of competencies (skills, knowledge, and behaviors). The coach creates an environment in which the principal engages in critical and targeted reflection on his/her practice as it relates to the competencies with the goal of

9

facilitating the paradigm or behavioral shifts necessary for the principal to develop his/her leadership capacity (NYCLA, 2015*b*, p. 27).

It is important to note that the word *competency* in the model definition refers to leadership skills, knowledge, and behaviors toward which the coach leads the coachee. The competencies examined in this capstone are not leadership competencies but *coaching* competencies: the skills, stances, and aptitudes of coaches in facilitating leadership growth. This distinction is important because the objective of my strategic project was not to change the underlying premise of NYCLA's coaching model but to examine the organization's existing coaching competencies and develop new ones that reflect the robust practice of NYCLA coaches and illuminate what they have learned. That said, as part of NYCLA's overall focus on making equity more explicit in its work, other members of the organization were revisiting NYCLA's leadership competencies to incorporate equity more fully.

The original coaching competencies were written more than ten years before my time at NYCLA and they reflected the organization's focus at its inception. They included specific reporting structures necessary for efficient work in New York City, such as "alerts program staff when appropriate regarding coachee's status" (NYCLA, 2015*b*, p. 24). They also included lists of coaching strategies without additional detail, such as "listening." These lists were very helpful in enumerating the types of strategies coaches could employ; they also served as topics for coaches' professional learning. The resultant learning

arguably became an important part of the culture of the coaches. NYCLA touted this function:

> The [coaching] competencies are the foundation for coach development and supervision, defining our expectations of what coaching should look like in action. Mapping to a coherent set of competencies allows coaches to deepen their practice. The competencies become an engine that drives professional development design, feedback, and coaches' own goal-setting (NYCLA, 2015*b*, p. 24).

While the competencies shaped coach development and learning, the list remained unchanged since it was written. In short, what NYCLA learned about coaching in practice was never incorporated into the document.

The Strategic Project

As my residency progressed, it became clear that developing new coaching competencies was an important leadership task. The task would require carefully examining the work and learning of NYCLA's coaches and elevating a shared vision of the organization's coaching practice for practitioners. Developing new coaching competencies would have implications for business development; onboarding, training, and professional learning; and the many capacity-building engagements the organization led across the nation and internationally. Furthermore, a recent market research study found that NYCLA was viewed as a national leader in leadership coaching, and its coaching was the most highly regarded of its many services. The study concluded that NYCLA's coaching was "particularly strong" and a "key differentiator." In fact, one funder in

the research study said, "NYCLA is *THE model for coaching* in the field. The organization is well-positioned and has the goods to deliver" (Obbard, 2015).

Given this high regard, the challenge of my strategic project was both exciting and daunting, and I approached this charge with the following guiding questions:

- o ***How does one help an organization improve where it already excels? More particularly, how does one illuminate expertise developed by a group of people over time while simultaneously creating opportunities for new learning?***

The majority of the work for the project was completed by a small working group of six of NYCLA's coaches between the months of November 2015 and February 2016, and the project was still ongoing at the time of writing.

Organization[2] of the Capstone

The capstone is divided into three main sections.

First, in the Review of Knowledge for Action, I explore research on the intersection of school leadership and student success, the challenges of the principalship, coaching as a means to address those challenges and strengthen leadership, and organizational learning. Together these research areas explore the *who, why, what,* and *how* of my strategic project. The Review of Knowledge for Action closes with the theory of action that served as the driver of my strategic project.

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[2] The organization of this capstone is modeled on the structure used by Pete Fishman (2015) in his Ed.L.D. capstone. His straightforward approach to describing his residency work and resultant learning helped me structure and share my thinking.

Second, in the Description, Results, and Analysis section, I document the first two-thirds of the strategic project, from its inception through the development of the proposed new coaching competencies and the start of implementation. I then assess the theory of action underlying the project, analyzing how well I was able to enact each part of my intended plan. I also assess how well the new competencies fulfill their designated purposes. The results and analysis include considerations for my ongoing work with NYCLA and its continued work as an organization.

Last, in Implications for Self, Site, and Sector, I examine lessons for myself as I continue to grow in my understanding of leadership and coaching; for NYCLA in its effort to elucidate learning while implementing and to create space for new thinking; and for education organizations interested in leadership development and deepening their central practices.

I. Review of Knowledge for Action

Organization

The Review of Knowledge for Action is divided into four sections: who, why, what, and how. I begin by exploring research about effective school leaders and their role in improving student achievement (*who*). Second, I examine the challenges principals face in their efforts to improve student learning, building a case for *why* leadership development is so necessary. Third, I review literature on coaching (*what*) as a means to promote effective leadership practices and to address the challenges faced by school principals. Finally, I look to Amy Edmondson's (2012) Execution-as-Learning framework to explain *how* I can ensure that the development of new coaching competencies is a meaningful process that both illuminates and generates real learning for NYCLA's coaching staff and the organization. I close by articulating the theory of action that underpins my strategic project, drawn from Edmondson's framework and my own experience.

Who: Principals and Their Role in Student Success

Research over the past three decades has affirmed the importance of the principal's role in school success (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters & Cameron, 2007; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). In fact, Leithwood et al. (2004) found, in a review of leadership research from the 1980s to 2000s, that "leadership is second only to classroom instruction

among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5).

While the specific behaviors advocated for by experts on principal leadership vary, in general researchers argue that principals influence student learning through their support of teachers and their development of organizational capacity. In a meta-analysis of principal impact research, Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) found that "growing consensus on the attributes of effective school principals shows that successful school leaders influence student achievement through two important pathways: the support and development of effective teachers and the implementation of effective organizational processes" (p. 8).

Vivian Robinson's (2011) meta-analysis of leadership behavior studies breaks these two pathways down into five dimensions. The behavioral dimensions include setting goals and expectations, allocating resources to support teaching and learning, ensuring quality teaching, leading teacher learning and development, and ensuring an orderly environment. In her analysis, Robinson attributes to each dimension an effect size on student outcomes. She notes that "leading teacher learning and development" has the highest effect size (.84) on student outcomes (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Effect Size of School Leadership Actions on Student Outcomes
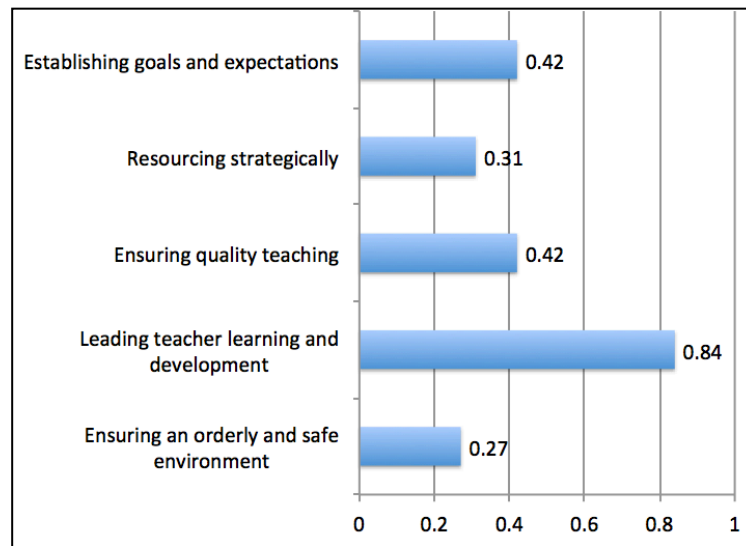
In discussing what it means to lead teacher learning and development, Robinson emphasizes that effective principals are actively involved in teacher learning. They learn with or alongside teachers, as participants rather than experts imparting what they already know. Robinson's research also highlights the fact that fostering teacher learning is a collective endeavor rather than the work of a single person or a one-on-one process.

Robinson (2011) describes three key leadership capabilities needed to bring about the five dimensions. A school leader must be able to apply relevant knowledge, solve complex problems, and build trust. While solving problems is fairly straightforward, it is worthwhile to define what one means by trust and the ability to apply relevant knowledge. *Trust* is a willingness to be vulnerable with someone else based on the confidence that his or her intent is positive and that he or she is reliable, competent, and honest (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

"Applying relevant knowledge" essentially means that education leaders "have access to up-to-date, evidence-based knowledge of how students learn and of how teaching promotes that learning in diverse classroom contexts" (Robinson, 2011, p. 23). Robinson illustrates the intersection of these five dimensions and the three capabilities with the diagram shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Leadership Dimensions and Capabilities
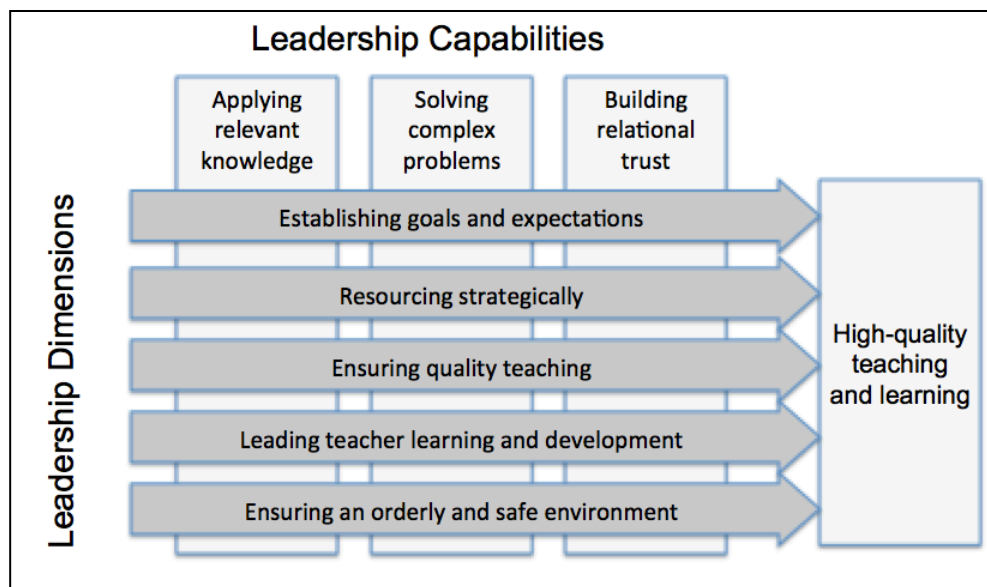
Source: Robinson, 2011, p. 16.

Robinson is joined by Michael Fullan (2014) in advocating for a model of principal leadership that encompasses both instructional expertise and broader leadership skills, such as building trust. In his recent book, *The Principal*, Fullan critiques models focused solely on "instructional leadership," arguing that the term is vague, narrowly interpreted, and over-applied. He contends that the way it is commonly understood and practiced is actually not the most efficient means for a school leader to improve student learning. At the same time, he

acknowledges that broader conceptions of leadership that focus more on

motivation and communication, without specific reference to teaching and

learning, also fall short of describing effective principal actions. He espouses a

balanced view:

> In short, in the current climate, it is easy to go overboard on
> instructional leadership. Principals need to be specifically involved
> in instruction so that they are knowledgeable about its nature and
> importance, but if they try to run the show down to the last detail, it
> will have a very brief run on Broadway indeed (pp. 41–42).

Why: The Challenges of Being an Effective Principal

Given what we know about how education leaders affect student

achievement, why aren't more schools successful? Specifically, where do

education leaders fall short? Why do they leave the role, voluntarily or

involuntarily? Currently, one-fourth of our nation's principals leave the

principalship each year, and half of all new principals are not retained beyond

three years (School Leaders Network, 2014). Given the financial and educational

consequences of such churn, one would think more would be known about the

subject. Unfortunately the research in this area is dated and relatively thin. That

said, one can glean some understanding of the challenges from the existing

literature, along with learning from my own experience as an educator and

education leader.

In a recent conversation with me, Kathy Nadurak, NYCLA's executive vice

president, said, "It can't be a matter of just knowing what to do—if knowing good

instruction is all it took, our nation's school's wouldn't have the problem that they

do" (personal conversation, February 9, 2016). Nadurak's assertion resonated

strongly with me, since I have served as an educator for 16 years and a principal for six. In my experience, knowing what constitutes high impact instruction is necessary but not sufficient to be an effective school leader. The challenge of leading a school rests not only in guiding instruction, but in navigating interpersonal dynamics, managing innumerable daily stresses, solving tricky complex problems, and communicating effectively and communicating enough with a wide array of audiences. Sustaining the energy required of an urban principal is also particularly taxing, a fact that I've observed in countless colleagues and noticed when I moved from leading an urban charter school to leading an independent school in a relatively suburban enclave.

Contemporary thinking and research echo the idea that interpersonal skills, communication, managing stress, problem solving, and sustaining energy are the major challenges and hurdles that make or break principals (Bloom, 2005; Daresh, 1986; Davis, 1997; Davis, 1998; Matthews, 2002; Raisch & Rogus, 1995).

In a 1996 survey of more than a hundred California superintendents, the most frequently cited reason for principals losing their jobs was "a failure to communicate in ways that build positive relationships with parents, teachers, students, and/or colleagues. People skills, pure and simple" (Davis, 1997, p. 75). This was followed (in order of frequency) by poor decision-making or judgment, failure to build support among stakeholders, inability to manage the politics of the job, and lastly, the failure to establish trust with teachers and parents.

19

Matthews' (2002) survey of Tennessee superintendents had very similar findings. The top five reasons for job dismissal, in order of frequency, were a failure to work cooperatively with others, poor decision-making, ineffective problem solving, poor community relations, and a lack of communication skills.

Daresh (1986) outlined the hurdles new principals described as the most challenging. Here too instruction was barely mentioned. The challenges largely encompassed discomfort with power, difficulty navigating interpersonal relations, and socialization to the role (understanding the politics of the system).

None of this detracts from the fact that improving teaching and learning is the most important task of a principal. Rather, these studies suggest that there are myriad obstacles that prevent a principal from doing so, beyond a lack of content knowledge or instructional expertise. Thus, principal support needs to be more expansive, and coaching, as I discuss in the next section, could be a means to address many of the reasons that principals fail to improve student learning.

What: Coaching to Improve Leadership Behavior and Mitigate Challenges

Multiple definitions of coaching exist. In general, the definitions outline an intentional relationship between two people focused on developing a coachee's mind-sets and behaviors to achieve the coachee's goals. In the education sector, three prominent definitions are commonly referred to in practitioner literature, all of which purport to help the coachee improve teaching and learning. Bloom (2005) defines coaching as "the practice of providing deliberate support to

another individual to assist him/her in clarifying and/or achieving goals" (p. 5).

This support can include directly sharing expertise related to instruction as well

as guiding and facilitating reflection. Reiss (2007) describes coaching as a

process to support the development and alignment of a coachee's thoughts,

beliefs, and actions to achieve desired results. The focus is on discovery, insight,

and alignment, and does not require the coach to have any subject matter

expertise. Aguilar (2013) argues that coaching in an educational context is

directed beyond the individual to include his or her school, the people in it, and

education and society as a whole. She writes, "transformational coaching is the

synergistic outcome from two people engaged in transformation of their individual

behaviors, beliefs, and being" (p. 29). In her model, coaching takes into account

the coachee, the coachee's context, and society at large, and it is actively

focused on improving education.

NYCLA brings aspects of these definitions to its model, describing its

coaching practice as facilitative, competency-based coaching, "an approach to

school leadership development in which two people (coach and coachee) work

together around an agreed upon set of competencies (skills, knowledge and

behaviors)" (NYCLA, 2015*b*, p. 27). In the NYCLA model, the coach seeks to

stimulate both mindset and behavioral shifts to improve a coachee's leadership.

Like the other definitions, the NYCLA model centers on a two-way

relationship and includes thoughts and beliefs as well as behaviors. Like Aguilar's

view, NYCLA coaching is meant to affect the school and its students, not just the

coachee. Where the NYCLA definition differs from other conceptions of coaching

is in the centrality of predefined leadership competencies to which an educator (coachee) should strive. Apart from this exception, coaching practices as described by Reiss, Bloom, Aguilar, and NYCLA have much in common. The models all emphasize the importance of developing trusting relationships, diagnosing the coachee, goal setting with the coachee, providing feedback, questioning, engaging in reflection, and connecting coaching work to action and next steps. These common facets align well with what we know about adult learning (NYCLA, 2015*b*).

For the purposes of this review, because NYCLA primarily coaches aspiring and current principals and their supervisors, I consider all coaching practices and relationships that focus on the development of education leaders. I exclude conceptions that focus on coaching teachers as primary coachees, as that is beyond the scope of NYCLA's work. Most coaching of teachers focuses solely on learning and applying new teaching strategies, and as stated in the previous sections of this review, the responsibilities and challenges of an education leader encompass more than just instructional practice.

There is little reliable literature on the effects of principal coaching in K–12 education; most of it lies in practitioner materials and doctoral theses. Lochmiller (2014) writes, "despite promising evidence from other fields (see Bond & Naughton, 2011; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001), research on leadership coaching for novice principals has received limited treatment in the education research literature" (p. 60). There simply aren't enough empirical studies or longitudinal studies that explore coaching for principals.

A lack of causal literature that links principal coaching to student learning should not stop practitioners from engaging in this form of professional learning for school leaders. Causation is incredibly difficult to prove, especially with complex processes like leadership or coaching. That said, research does show that principals are receptive to coaching and positively perceive coaching as a way to grow their skill sets (Bickman, Goldring, DeAndrade, Breda, & Goff, 2012; Lochmiller, 2014; Lochmiller & Silver, 2010; Ward, 2013). Studies also correlate principal coaching with improved instructional leadership (Knapp et al., 2014; Lochmiller, 2014; Lochmiller & Silver, 2010). Given the discussion in the previous section of a principal's influence on student achievement, it follows that coaching merits greater attention.

Knapp et al. (2014) discuss the behaviors of "high-performing instructional leadership directors," a nonsupervisory central-office role designed to support principal leadership development, and very similar to that of a coach. Specific actions that develop principal instructional leadership include differentiating support, modeling ways of thinking and acting, developing and using tools that help principals engage in instructional leadership, and connecting the principal with external resources. Lochmiller and Silver (2010) found that coaching that included using evidence, questioning, reflection, and follow-up on action steps helped principals focus on instruction by developing instructional routines. Principals reported a lack of practical understanding of instructional leadership after their principal preparation or certification programs and affirmed that coaching increased their comfort level and facility with instructional leadership.

Bickman, Goldring, DeAndrade, Breda, and Goff (2012) also found that coaching improved principals' ability to talk with teachers about their instruction and to engage in instructional leadership behaviors. While each of the studies defines *instructional leadership* slightly differently, I use it here broadly to mean guiding teachers in how to teach and aligning school systems to support quality teaching, which is consistent with the ways it is defined across these studies.

In an evaluation of her coaching model, Aguilar (with Goldwasser and Tank-Crestetto, 2011) found that in schools where principals were coached for two years or more, both teacher and principal turnover were reduced, and growth in those schools' Academic Performance Index score exceeded that of other schools in the same district. In evaluating its own coaching program, as of the writing of this capstone, NYCLA does not compare school performance indices or examine teacher and principal retention rates due to the lack of a fair comparison group. Rather, NYCLA explores its coaching impact through surveys exploring principal (coachee) satisfaction, perception of effectiveness, and both coach evaluation and self-evaluation of changes in leadership behaviors. Published NYCLA data (2015b) affirm that 96% of principals rated their coaching experience positively and 99% of the approximately 400 principals NYCLA coached in New York City reported that coaching improved their leadership practice. Ninety-five percent affirmed that "coaching has led to improvements in their ability to develop the capacity of others, and 94% agreed that coaching has led to improvements in school culture" (NYCLA, 2015*b*, p. 14). Notably, in the

near future NYCLA plans to examine the impact of its coaching using both comparison groups and student outcomes.

While education leadership coaching merits greater study, there is considerably more research on leadership coaching in the business sector. In general, the research indicates that executive coaching can effectively facilitate developmental and behavioral change in coachees, and that it has an overall positive impact on leaders and their organizations (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). What follows is a brief discussion of what can be learned from this practice to inform the coaching of school principals and other education leaders.

Kilburg (2000) defines executive coaching as a

helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement (p. 67).

Other definitions expand on the techniques employed by an executive coach to include strategies and methods beyond behaviorist ones, such as methods from constructive psychology (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). In comparison to the definitions from the education sector, two things stand out: the attention to personal satisfaction and development and the explicit purpose of improving the coachee's performance to increase the effectiveness of his or her organization.

Major literature reviews and empirical studies detail important characteristics of effective executive coaching (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson,

2001; Kombarakaran, Baker, Fernandes, & Yang, 2008; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). Common steps or stages in nearly all models of executive coaching include formal contracting, relationship building, assessment, getting feedback and reflection, goal setting, implementation, follow-up, and evaluation (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). All models make frequent use of various assessment tools, including "360-degree feedback questionnaires, qualitative interviews, and psychological instruments, such as personality and leadership style inventories" (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001, p. 210). Presenting and providing data and feedback are critical parts of executive coaching, but they seem to play a smaller role in the principal coaching models discussed earlier. Other aspects of executive coaching deemed critical to its effectiveness are the strength of the coaching relationship and its use as a tool for mutual growth; the coachee's readiness, openness to coaching, and commitment to change; and programmatic and organizational support from the coachee's place of business (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kombarakaran, Baker, Fernandes, & Yang, 2008; Passmore & FIllery-Travis, 2011). Researchers are still trying to understand which specific aspects of a coaching relationship (e.g., age, gender, race, developmental stage) are important (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Passmore & FIllery-Travis, 2011).

Executive coaching is considered effective when it achieves desired results for the individual and/or his or her organization. Individual outcomes include increased productivity, greater resilience and job sustainability, employee satisfaction, and goal orientation and attainment (Grant, Curayne, & Burton,

2009). Other benefits to an individual include helping coachees increase

confidence and self-knowledge, helping them develop people management skills,

dialogue and communication skills, and improved interpersonal relationships; and

the ability to cope with and process organizational change effectively (Grant,

Curayne, & Burton, 2009; Kombarakaran, Baker, Fernandes, & Yang, 2008). To

measure coaching effectiveness, including its effects on the organization and not

just the individual, a variety of methods have been used, such as 360

assessments, well-being and engagement frameworks, return-on-investment

measures, impact on business indices, and Kirkpatrick's Effectiveness of

Learning measure (Corbett & Kennedy, 2014). That said, a review of return-on-

investment studies (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011) found great variability in the

measure but affirmed that executive coaching generally appears to yield a

positive return on investment. Such a measure compares the costs of coaching

to the financial gains or benefits derived from behavioral or organizational

changes attributed to the coaching an executive received. The problem with

return-on-investment measures lies in the subjectivity used in attributing specific

behavioral or organizational changes to the coaching one received.

 These findings are important because they suggest that coaching can

indeed address the capabilities education leaders need to develop and the

challenges they must overcome, as described in the previous two sections.

Coaching in the business sector does positively affect interpersonal skills,

communication, problem solving, and managing stress and energy.

In addition to shedding light on the promise of coaching for school leadership development, the executive coaching literature offers many lessons that can inform the practice and study of leadership coaching in the field of education. Implications of the research can inform the focus of coaching, conditions necessary for coaching to be effective, and ways to think about and measure the impact of coaching.

As in executive coaching, when coaching principals, one can consider expanding the focus of coaching beyond professional learning to include personal development and satisfaction. To ensure effectiveness, it's also important to consider the readiness of the educational leaders and how open to the experience and to change they are, as well as the level of support that the school or district can provide.

Another facet of executive coaching research that could be applied to principal coaching is the idea that presenting data and feedback is a critical part of effective coaching. Furthermore, because direct links to improved test scores and other student data cannot be empirically proven, the use of 360 assessments and other impact frameworks merits exploration.

Lastly, one area that is not mentioned in any business or educational coaching literature or practitioner materials I have reviewed is that of creativity and innovative disruption. I wonder if coaching can only push on leadership development within the frame of the system in which principals or leaders operate. Where do audacious goals fit in that don't necessarily align with traditional perspectives on teaching and learning or a business's key function? Is

coaching only about incremental change, or can it be about more? In my own experience with coaching using Kegan and Lahey's (2009) Immunity to Change framework, a major goal and purpose of coaching is to help the coachee know and see differently.

How: Surfacing NYC Leadership Academy's Learning about Coaching

The research detailed above, about the responsibilities and challenges of education leaders and the potential for coaching to positively affect both, greatly informed the approach to my strategic project. From the onset, I knew the coaching competencies we would develop and propose would have to be in service of teaching and learning but not restricted to instructional leadership (as Robinson and Fullan suggest). I also believed that the competencies should reflect what we know about the promise of leadership coaching, namely, that it is most effective in addressing the very things that get in the way of effective education leadership, such as interpersonal relations, communication, and problem solving.

However, I also knew that the literature on school leadership coaching was far from robust, and a large part of my task in the strategic project was to make explicit what NYCLA and its coaches had learned through practice over the past ten years. How would I capture that and facilitate ongoing learning in the process? Curtis and City (2009) say that "effective organizations are clear about their purpose, understand their core business, have a picture of what it looks like when done well, have ideas about how to meet their goals, and continuously

learn" (p. 13). In entering my residency, it seemed to me that NYCLA had a firm grasp of Curtis and City's charge, and the goal of my project was to help them in their efforts to continuously learn about coaching.

To that end, I looked to Amy Edmondson's (2012) Execution-as-Learning framework. I chose this framework because of the emphasis it places on the role of teams (NYCLA carries out most functions through work teams) and because NYCLA is already doing the work of coaching. Furthermore, I planned to complete my strategic project with a small team of coaches, anticipating that the learning we generated would be useful to the entire coaching body of NYCLA and the organization as a whole. It is not my intention to detail the entire framework herein but rather to articulate key takeaways from her work that informed my strategic project.

According to Edmondson (2012), learning organizations frame their work to optimize learning. She says, "framing is a crucial leadership action of enrolling people in any substantial behavior change. . . . Framing helps people interpret the ambiguous signals that accompany change in a positive and productive light and facilitates understanding of new performance expectations" (p. 83). It is important to frame tasks as learning situations instead of performing situations, and to that end the leader takes a participatory role.

In addition to highlighting the role of framing in organizational learning, Edmondson describes learning organizations as psychologically safe places that cultivate a healthy learning disposition to failure and that facilitate teaming across boundaries (i.e., where different work groups engage with each other on

overarching shared goals). Psychological safety refers to "the degree to which people perceive their work environment as conducive to taking . . . interpersonal risks" (Edmondson, 2002, p. 5).

Execution-as-Learning is a specific framework to describe organizational learning. Edmondson says that Execution-as-Learning "requires relentless discipline to keep people aware of the imperfection of today's answers and eager to work together to discover new and better ways to do things. It's not that the goal of learning is placed above the goal of meeting today's performance standards; rather it's about doing work in such a way that learning is a valued by-product of action" (Edmondson, 2012, p. 224). Under this framework, best practices are viewed as a continually moving target rather than settled for all time. Edmondson outlines seven characteristics that set Execution-as-Learning apart from other types of organizational work or processes (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Edmondson's Execution-as-Learning Behaviors

Execution-as-Learning
Leaders set direction.
Deliberately tentative work processes are put in place as a starting point.
Constant small changes are a way of life.
Feedback is two-way.
Employee judgment is essential.
Fear is not a driver as it inhibits experimentation, analysis, and problem solving.
Goal: Create long term value.

Source: Adapted from Edmondson, 2012, p. 226

Theory of Action

In designing my approach to developing new coaching competencies, I sought to apply Edmondson's Execution-as-Learning framework in broad strokes to the small working group I was leading. This included framing our task as learning about coaching, cultivating psychological safety, and then facilitating conversations about coaching with people from across NYCLA to ensure our work could influence the entire coaching staff and overall organization. Drawing on this framework, and my experience as an educator and leader for the past 16 years, I approached my strategic project with the following theory of action:

If I . . .

- develop strong relational trust and credibility with the organization and its coaches,

- engage a team of coaches around a learning frame and purpose that we co-construct,

- establish psychological safety within the team,

- and engage the broader organization in conversations about coaching,

then . . .

- I will surface a shared understanding of what coaches need to know and be able to do, generating coaching competencies that capture coaches' expertise and can guide new learning, and

- the new competencies will enable NYCLA to better describe its

  coaching model, assess its coaching work, and further its efforts to

  build the capacity of its coaches and the coaching programs of its

  clients.

II. Description, Results, and Analysis

Strategic Project Description

When my supervisor and I decided that my strategic project would be developing and refreshing NYC Leadership Academy's coaching competencies, I was excited about the task. Coaching was an essential part of NYCLA's mission and its leaders felt that new competencies could strengthen their work. The original competencies were more than a decade old, designed with a specific set of coaches and coachees in mind: New York–based coaches and early career New York City Public School principal coachees. Even if NYCLA were not expanding its coaching practice to include new types of coachees and new geographies, the competencies reflected what the organization knew about coaching ten years ago rather than the lessons that NYCLA coaches had learned in the intervening years.

Developing refreshed coaching competencies was a priority for the organization, so as an outsider I felt significant pressure leading this work. It was important that the outcome accurately reflect the expertise the organization had garnered over the past decade while capturing NYCLA's evolving work to make equity more explicit in its practice. Developing new competencies could easily be construed as an exercise in description. To ensure that did not happen, the competencies would have to balance experiential knowledge with new ideas. In addition, I wanted to ensure that the competencies reflected different perspectives on coaching while still advancing a unified vision for NYCLA's coaching work. What follows is a description of how I navigated these tensions

34

while endeavoring to produce the best set of competencies possible for the organization. The timeline in Figure 5 illustrates how the strategic project progressed, from its inception to the start of the implementation phase, which was still ongoing at the time of writing.

Figure 5: Strategic Project Timeline

Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Entry	Planning & Preparing		Launch		Capturing Learning			Implementation	
• Materials review • Program design & facilitation	• Coach interviews • Coach shadowing • Start of coaching work in NY & IA • Start of client outreach • Work plan development		• Senior leader interviews • Launch meeting		• Six small group meetings • Midpoint All Coaches meeting			• Final All Coaches meeting • Cabinet meeting • Development of learning & implementation materials	

Entry

Because my work focused on one of NYCLA's key levers for advancing its organizational purpose, I placed a strong value on learning about the organization and its people and forming relationships. I felt that any changes to a critical function of the organization could not be addressed well from a purely "outsider" perspective and thus I sought to embed myself into the fabric of the organization. To do this, I did three things: (1) carefully perused organizational materials to gain a better understanding of how NYCLA approaches its work, (2) dived into projects where my skills and talents could be used to demonstrate my competence and reliability and began building professional relationships, and (3)

talked with my colleagues to build genuine connections through slow, sustained conversations.

I reviewed all the organizational materials I could get my hands on. I examined NYCLA's coaching training curricula, research reports that had been produced about our work, tools that we regularly incorporated into our direct service and capacity-building work, artifacts produced through program evaluation, and anchor texts that team members regularly used in their work, including the *Art of Coaching* (Aguilar, 2013), *Blended Coaching* (Bloom, 2005), and *Teaming* (Edmondson, 2012). I spent considerable time reviewing NYCLA's Leadership Performance Planning Worksheet (LPPW). The LPPW represented the eight leadership competencies that NYCLA believed necessary for educational leaders to be successful: Personal Behavior, Communication, Resilience, Learning, Student Performance, Management, Supervision, and Situational Problem Solving. The LPPW was developed in 2003 and was supported by strong research. Reviewing the LPPW and other organizational materials helped me to better understand NYCLA's coaching model, learn common organizational language and phrasing, and observe how the organization's values were expressed in its tools and resources.

By actively engaging in work not directly related to my strategic project, I was then able to observe how NYCLA's values translated into actions, understand their basic work structures, and build relationships with my new colleagues. This included participating in the curriculum design of a new online leadership residency program. It also included collaborating with the district

leader team in designing and facilitating its first week-long professional learning

program for principal supervisors, called Foundations of Principal Supervision.

As a last part of my strategy for entry, I took time to develop relationships

through small, sustained conversations with my colleagues. This included brief

chats by the Keurig, in the snack room, and throughout the regular pauses during

the workweek. Building relationships was the result of small touch points that

accumulated over time. This proved to be particularly challenging because

NYCLA staff were extremely busy and project work could sometimes get in the

way of building relationships. Most people ate lunch at their desks and communal

lunches were not frequent. The process was made more challenging because

many staff members were assuming new responsibilities as NYCLA transitioned

to a new organizational structure.

Planning and Preparing

After learning as much as I could about the organization and developing a

foundation for continued relationship building, I was ready to craft a work plan to

begin developing the new set of coaching competencies. To prepare a plan, I set

out to enrich my understanding of NYCLA's coaching model. I grounded myself

in relevant research on school leadership and leadership coaching and

developed my plan of action collaboratively with Vice President of Leadership

Coaching Services Michelle Jarney, who had shepherded the coaching team for

the past twelve years in conjunction with another senior leader. To build a deep

understanding of NYCLA coaching, I interviewed and shadowed several coaches,

began coaching for the organization, and sought to learn more about what clients expected of coaching by pitching our services to a prospective client. I also attended a meeting for incoming coachees (principals) to hear how NYCLA described its model.

I interviewed six coaches whom Michelle suggested to me as representing a broad spectrum of NYCLA's coaching practice. In these interviews, I asked a series of questions to learn more about the coaches as people and educators, their approaches to coaching (including tools, strategies, and resources), their approaches to learning and developing the craft of coaching, and their thoughts on how NYCLA's coaching program could grow. I wanted the development of coaching competencies to be a learning experience for the coaching team, so it was important to me to understand how coaches learned and what they were interested in learning. Finally, I hoped that discussing ways to improve NYCLA's coaching would help me identify themes that could be incorporated into the new competencies and push organizational thinking. The interviews were not scripted, but the interview guide I used as an outline can be found in Appendix A.

From these interviews, I learned about the structures in place to facilitate coach learning and began to develop more authentic relationships. NYCLA coaches have quarterly large team meetings, as well as regular meetings in small groups around a facet of coaching that interests them or in which they need support, such as systems thinking or provoking and containing anxiety. I noted these as two potentially useful structures through which I could further the work of developing coaching competencies. I also got a better sense of how NYCLA

coaches think about their craft. I noted themes such as building trusting and confidential relationships, establishing coaching purpose, and adjusting one's coaching strategies as one learns more about the coachee and his or her context.

The final line of questioning yielded less information. Two of the coaches discussed how equity and emotional intelligence could be elevated in the coaching model, but the other four coaches didn't identify areas where the organization's coaching craft could be improved. Perhaps I didn't establish sufficient trust with the interviewees, or the relevant questions I selected were less evocative, or coaches were simply satisfied with the evolution of NYCLA's coaching practice.

In addition to interviewing coaches, I also shadowed a few coaches (including some of those I interviewed). Shadowing coaches gave me insight into what NYCLA's values and coaching model looked like in practice. It was one thing to read about and discuss the model, and another thing entirely to observe coaching in action. The observations, along with debrief conversations, helped me understand how coaches identified goals when coaching a specific person, attended to both the school's and the leader's needs, developed the coachee's self-awareness, and directly engaged the leader in building leadership skills in areas like situational problem solving, resilience, and communication. Interestingly, the coaches I observed were reluctant to describe what I had just observed with them as exemplars of NYCLA practice. While I attributed this to humility and the fact that a single observation was only a snapshot rather than a summary of one's coaching practice, it reaffirmed for me that the new

competencies could support NYCLA in elevating consistency and a more explicit shared understanding of its coaching model.

To further enrich my understanding of NYCLA's coaching work, I began coaching for NYCLA in New York City and supporting new coaches for a contracted project with the state of Iowa. I also sought to engage in developing coaching business, reaching out to a prospective client in a market of interest. As a resident, I was at once inside and outside of the organization, and because my strategic project was so central to what the organization did, it did not feel right to approach it as an outsider looking to change something he didn't fully understand or intimately know. I felt that I would be best positioned to push this work if I was able to see coaching, as best I could, from every angle.

While I was interviewing and shadowing coaches, coaching and supporting other coaches, and developing prospective business, I was also researching the role of school leaders in affecting student learning and the efficacy of coaching as a means to develop the leadership skills necessary to improve student learning. I wanted to ensure that the competencies we developed would reflect research about coaching and school leadership, rather than solely experiential expertise. To be clear, I was not undervaluing practitioner learning and expertise; rather, I hoped to tease out connections to research-based practices. The review of research I conducted was largely presented in the previous section of this doctoral capstone.

The last part of planning and preparing for my strategic project involved developing a work plan with my supervisor and mentor, Michelle Jarney. Crafting

the action plan in collaboration with her allowed me to capitalize on her expertise,

both her understanding of coaching and her understanding of the organization.

My first few ideas focused more on sharing research findings and uncovering

vision and direction from the senior leadership team and less on tapping into the

coaches' expertise and experience. Michelle convinced me of the importance of

the latter, however, and together we crafted a plan that began and ended with

unearthing the expertise and exploring the questions of practitioners who

coached school leaders on a daily basis. Briefly, I planned to regularly engage

the whole coaching team in articulating their current practice and to use a small

working group, which mirrored the existing learning structures in place at NYCLA,

to identify how NYCLA's coaching practice could grow and ultimately to craft the

new competencies. Within the working group, I would (1) seek to establish

psychological safety to promote robust dialogue and (2) frame our work as an

exercise in learning while implementing (i.e., producing the new competencies). I

had learned from my interviews with the coaches that simply asking how the

organization's coaching practice could be improved would not be sufficient in

surfacing areas for new learning, so approaching the work with psychological

safety and learning in mind felt particularly important to me. Doing so would help

me lead the working group in surfacing the vision for the new competencies.

The Launch

The launch phase of the project consisted of two activities. I led a meeting

with the entire coaching body of NYCLA to introduce my strategic project and I
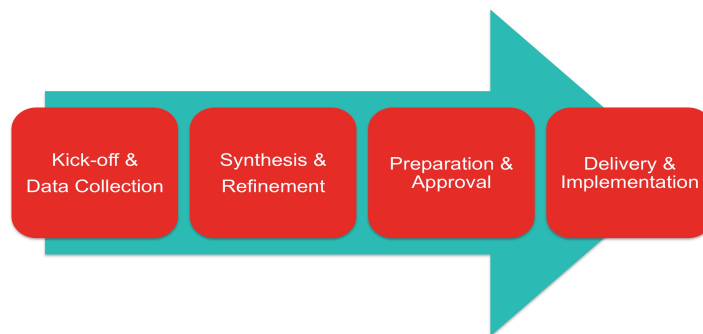
interviewed senior leadership team members about their perspectives on the coaching competencies. I viewed the launch meeting as an opportunity to (1) connect with more coaches, (2) begin to build buy-in for this change project, and (3) start to surface questions and ideas of how NYCLA's coaching work could improve.

On November 16, 2015, I launched my strategic project during NYCLA's annual fall All Coach Meeting. At the meeting, Michelle introduced me and framed the importance of reexamining NYCLA's coaching competencies and developing new ones, describing NYCLA's changing context as it broadened its geographical reach and reached out to new types of coaching clients. In her introduction, she acknowledged that the new competencies would represent a change for the organization and she stated that our work together over the next few months would surface what that change would entail. Her introduction, and her reputation within the organization, lent me credibility, which ensured that the activities I planned to lead at the meeting would be well received. It was also beneficial for the group to hear from their leader the importance of investing time in revising our coaching competencies.

At the meeting I shared my plan to develop competencies with the group. The graphic in Figure 6 represents the four distinct phases of the project that I described for the group. In reviewing the plan, I emphasized that the work would begin and end with the entire coaching team, and that they would be involved all along the way. I also extended an invitation to everyone to join the small working group that would develop the new competencies. I did this in an effort to begin

building buy-in and ownership for the new competencies. I wanted to ensure that everyone knew that they could be part of the development team and that the new competencies would come from a group of their respected colleagues and not just me, a doctoral resident new to the organization who was still proving his commitment to the organization and its mission.

Figure 6: Phases of Development of New Coaching Competencies

Kick-off & Data Collection · Synthesis & Refinement · Preparation & Approval · Delivery & Implementation

After reviewing the plan, I led the group through a series of activities to surface their expertise and questions about their practice. I asked coaches to reflect on their best coaching, enumerate the strategies they employed, and articulate the ideal toward which they strived in their coaching. We also discussed and charted specific actions coaches would take to develop a coachee's skill set in one the eight domains of NYCLA's LPPW, described in the previous section. As we did this, we documented the discussions so the notes could be used as data for the small working group to synthesize later. We then reviewed the original competencies and explored what felt most important, what felt less relevant, and what was missing from the document and the practices it represented. During the discussion it became clear that a focus on improving

learning for *all* students was strongly resonant for the coaches, and many felt that the group's current approach to addressing inequity in schools was "pretty subdued" (meeting notes, November 11, 2015).

The launch meeting ended with an opportunity for coaches to ask questions or provide feedback on the process. One coach said it was difficult to think about developing new competencies without really understanding the purpose for which the competencies would be used. I address this important point in the Analysis section.

After the launch meeting, I interviewed NYCLA's senior administrators about their perspectives on the organization's coaching competencies. I wanted to understand what individual senior leaders felt the purpose of the competencies was and what they needed the new competencies to do for the area of the organization they each oversaw. I also wanted to know how they described NYCLA's coaching philosophy and what improvements, if any, they wanted to see in the new set of competencies. I planned to use insights gleaned from these interviews to inform my work with the small working group, how I would structure internal conversations across the organization, and how I would edit and share the final proposal for the new coaching competencies. The interviews revealed a difference of opinion among the leaders about the role of instructional leadership in our model of coaching. Simply put, some leaders felt NYCLA's model should focus more on instruction and others felt it should focus more on leadership competencies such as communication and resilience.

Capturing Learning through the Small Working Group

During the next three months, I held a series of six meetings with a small working group of coaches to synthesize the data from the launch meeting, as well as their experiences and wisdom, to craft new coaching competencies.

At the start of my engagement with the small working group, it was important for me to establish strong norms to ensure our meetings were psychologically safe. I took time to ensure every voice was heard, started each meeting with personal check-ins, and modeled vulnerability and risk-taking. As an example of this, I shared what I struggled with as a coach (both for NYCLA and another organization) and expressed my own concern about the project's potential for being an exercise in description. To continue nurturing psychological safety throughout the process, I gave time and space at each meeting to the disagreements that naturally came up rather than doggedly adhering to the time I had allotted for specific discussions.

In addition to establishing and nurturing psychological safety, I also made sure to impart the idea that our work was to be focused on learning while executing. I explicitly named learning as a frame and regularly brought the group's conversations back to learning at each of our meetings. I did this by asking questions exploring what strategies and competencies looked like in action, inquiring about the coaches' thought processes in enacting specific coaching moves, and discussing the rationale and philosophies that undergirded the coaches' approach to the work.

In our early meetings we also spent significant time describing the purpose of the new coaching competencies and articulating the target audience. The table shown in Figure 7 summarizes that conversation. As the left column shows, we discussed that the new competencies would help coaches reinvigorate their practice, but at this early stage of our work we did not discuss how the new competencies would achieve that purpose or the others. The idea of incorporating equity as one way to reinvigorate our coaching was briefly mentioned, but it was placed in a "question parking lot" to be discussed at a later time during the development process.

Figure 7: Purposes of New Coaching Competencies

Purposes for Coaches	Purposes for Organization
• Reinvigorate our practice	• Differentiate our model
• Reassess our practice	• Establish consistency
• Reinvent our practice beyond our normal habits	• Serve as a framework to build others' capacity – building capacity of other coaches, with the ultimate goal of building the capacity of the coachee. Also, building district capacity to develop a coaching program.
• Set goals	
• Set standards for coach performance	
• Self-evaluation (against a picture of coaching proficiency)	
• Focus on student performance	• Help others understand our model, its components, and what parts they may be interested in to meet the challenges of their unique contexts.
• Adapt to the coaching needs & standards of a client without losing the essence of our practice/ beliefs	
	• To make the internal process external
	• Help clients assess their existing leadership development coaching
	• Evaluation of coaches/programs
	• Focus on student performance

Another important step in our early work together included determining the structure we would use to organize the competencies. The previous iteration of the competencies grouped them into four domains: accountability, co-creation of a learning environment, stance, and differentiation. Rather than limit us to this frame, I proposed using the phases of a coaching progression as a structure to organize our work. After a robust discussion of the benefits and disadvantages of this proposal, we ultimately decided to organize our competency development work around four elements of coaching: relationship building and learning context, establishing purpose and goal setting, coaching for learning, and reflecting and learning as a coach. We were uncertain if the last element, "Reflecting and learning as a coach," should be embedded in the first three or treated as a separate element. The team believed that reflecting and learning about oneself and one's coaching strategies was an ongoing process and part of every other element of coaching. At the same time, we also recognized that reflection and learning for self could also be seen as its own competency area. Given this, we decided to wait to see what felt more natural after developing the other three elements further.

Another important decision the group needed to make early on concerned what level of specificity would be most appropriate given the aforementioned purposes. Because we felt that the competencies were largely about shaping the learning of new and seasoned coaches, we decided that we should provide examples or list characteristics of competency language. For example, we

agreed that in addition to "Provides effective feedback," we would also have to articulate the characteristics of effective feedback.

Having agreed on the purpose, level of specificity, and organizational structure for the new competencies, we set out to generate competency language that captured what the coaches had learned about coaching through years of experience. The first element of coaching we sought to build out was relationship building and learning context. To focus on their earned expertise, I asked the coaches to reflect on how they did this with their coachees. We discussed how important it was to refrain from thinking about NYCLA coaching materials (generated early on in the life of the organization) and focus instead on the evolution of their own practice. We generated lists of strategies, actions, skills, and questions the coaches used to build relationships and acquire context. We then used this information to write proposed competencies that felt robust enough to accurately communicate the skills a coach needs to enact this first element but concise enough to ensure that the list of competencies for this element was manageable.

Next, we reviewed the competencies we generated by asking ourselves two questions. First, did these competencies provide learning opportunities for both new and seasoned coaches? Second, how did these competencies advance equity? Together these questions comprised a critical thrust of my work with the small team. The first line of inquiry invited the coaches to identify spaces for new learning and consider general areas of improvement for NYCLA's coaching work. The second line of inquiry required coaches to consider the role

of race in their coaching and how they helped school leaders improve the educational experiences and outcomes for all the students in their charge. This latter question was particularly important because, during my brief time at NYCLA, the need for a greater focus on equity was brought to my attention time and time again (e.g., during my early interviews with coaches, during the fall All Coaches Meeting, and in the small working group's discussion on purpose). Given this interest and the grant NYCLA received to bolster equity in its practices, it seemed an opportune time to push thinking in this regard and work with the small working group to explicitly incorporate equity into the new coaching competencies.

Together the small working group and I combed through our work to look for space to push the organization's thinking on coaching and equity. Our discussion around equity in coaching covered numerous topics, including how to understand one's own racial identity as a coach, how to support an education leader in understanding his or her own racial identity, and how to use data to identify inequities and disproportionalities in the coachee's context. We also had to decide if we wanted to create a separate competency focused on equity, or if we wanted to embed equity into each of the competencies we generated. Both approaches had their advantages and disadvantages, and we ultimately decided to do both. Having a distinct competency focused on equity in coaching would highlight its significance and ensure that future users of the competencies would recognize this fact. At the same time, embedding an approach to equity

throughout the competencies would ensure that advancing equity would never be seen as a distinct and separate part of the work.

Our discussions around our approach to advancing equity through coaching was robust, but we also spent significant time considering the stance of a coach and what it means to support someone in becoming a reflective, self-directed learner. Exploring these questions and more allowed us to propose additional competencies, highlight equity, and identify space for new learning. The questions also helped us refine the competency language we had already composed.

Once we felt comfortable with our competency language for the first element, the group agreed that it would be best to have one person edit our language for clarity and precision and to compose the preamble to the competencies document we were creating.

Lastly, before concluding the development of the first set of coaching competencies, we reviewed our process to date using a mid-action review format. The mid-action review was a structured protocol to reflect on what we hoped to do and achieve, what we actually did and achieved, and what we learned. The mid-action review brought out several important considerations to keep in mind as we prepared to develop the rest of the coaching competencies. The group felt it was important to integrate an approach to equity in the initial brainstorming of strategies, skills, actions, and questions coaches employ with a given coaching element. By exploring equity at the end of the process, it seemed like equity was an add-on as opposed to an integral part of our coaching work. We also agreed

that we appreciated tight-loose facilitation; that is, we liked having thoughtfully

planned agendas and protocols for discussion to advance our work and being

able to deviate from the plan to honor the robustness of some aspects of our

conversation and allow for productive discourse. However, we noted that the

group enjoyed lengthy discussions and at times could benefit from being reined

in.

After we concluded and reviewed our group's process, I edited this first set

of competencies and composed an introduction to the list. I shared the proposed

competencies for the first coaching element with my mentor and supervisor, the

coaches, and the organization's vice presidents to ascertain their satisfaction

with our work product and process so far. Their feedback was incorporated into

the document, and the small group then began to develop the coaching

competencies for the other elements of coaching.

As with the first element, we began our work on the next two coaching

elements with a discussion at a Midpoint All Coaches Meeting. This time, we

asked coaches to reflect on how they established coaching purpose and set

goals with their coachees. The group used this data, along with our own

experience, to develop related competencies. We modified the process we had

used for the first element in accordance with our mid-action review, and over the

course of another three meetings we generated the remaining competencies.

Through this process, it became clear that "reflecting and learning as a coach"

did not need to be treated as a separate fourth element of coaching because we

had naturally embedded it into the other elements as we went.

Together, the small working group and I produced a draft set of sixteen coaching competencies described in detail in seventeen pages, including a preamble, a "Competencies at a Glance" page, supporting information for each competency (e.g., behavioral characteristics), a glossary, and an appendix. The proposed competencies explicitly named equity, described in detail what each competency looked like in practice, and introduced terminology from the field of cognitive-developmental psychology, such as *holding environment.* Figure 8 shows the "Competencies at a Glance." While only one of competencies listed in the "Competencies at a Glance" mentions equity, it is important to note that the expanded forms (not shown) of many of the other competencies include concrete strategies for advancing equity. For example, the expanded form of the competency "Explore and identify leadership goals" states that a coach must "introduce and use multiple tools with the leader to assess his/her leadership growth edges including his/her ability to recognize, discuss, navigate, and address issues related to race and equity."

Figure 8: Draft Coaching Competencies at a Glance

Relationship Building and Learning Context
Who are we and why are we together?
- Set parameters for an effective coaching relationship.
- Establish a foundation for equity.
- Nurture an authentic relationship with the education leader.
- Learn about the education leader as a person and leader.
- Learn about the education leader as a learner.
- Use a systems approach to examine the education leader's context.

Establishing Coaching Purpose and Goal Setting
Where do we need to go?
- Explore and identify organizational goals.
- Explore and identify leadership goals.
- Support the education leader in envisioning change.
- Develop and reflect on one's development and approach to coaching.

Fostering Learning and Achieving Results
How will we get there?
- Create a holding environment of support and challenge.
- Listen deeply and ask questions to understand and support the education leader.
- Share effective feedback.
- Embody the stance of a coach.
- Facilitate self-directed learning in service of coaching goals.
- Foment and sustain accountability.

Implementation

At the time of writing, this phase of the strategic project had just begun.

During implementation, I had planned to share the proposed competencies with

NYCLA's coaching body, garner approval for the proposal from NYCLA's senior

administration, and develop appropriate training and professional learning plans around this important work. My purpose herein is to highlight early action steps and key considerations in my ongoing work (and the organization's work) to ensure the successful adoption and meaningful implementation of the new competencies.

After developing the full set of competencies, I shared a draft of our work with the Coaching Advisory Pod. At NYCLA, each service area has an advisory pod of about five members that works with the vice president who oversees that work stream. When I shared our work with the Coaching Advisory Pod, we discussed the clarity of the new competencies, their utility, and the role of instruction and equity.

Next, at an All Coaches meeting in March, I shared the draft of the newly proposed competencies with NYCLA's full coaching staff. At the meeting, I emphasized the purposes of the new competencies and sought to learn three things from the group; together we explored what resonated for them in the new competencies, what questions the competencies evoked, and which competencies would require further professional learning for the group. At the meeting we also began to explore what coaching for equity could look like and sound like. A colleague led a discussion about one proposed competency that focused on embedding equity in our work ("Establish a foundation for equity"). She then facilitated a "fishbowl" learning experience, in which coaches practiced this new competency through role-play.

The discussions and learning activity were highly fruitful, and I plan to use what I learned from the meeting to inform final revisions to the draft proposal and to develop a professional learning plan and related training materials. It will also help me as I share the proposal with the cabinet. When meeting with the cabinet, I will need to articulate the value and utility of the new competencies. I also will need to engage everyone in cross-functional talk, with all senior leaders discussing the competencies from their unique organizational vantage point and assessing for themselves the utility of the newly developed coaching competencies for their purposes.

Results

I set out to lead the design of a new set of coaching competencies for NYCLA that reflect what NYCLA's practitioners have learned over the past ten years while fostering opportunities for new learning and goal setting. The new competencies were also meant to serve as a foundation for describing NYCLA's coaching model, assessing its coaching work, and supporting its work to build the coaching capacity of clients. In this section I assess the effectiveness of the process I used to develop the competencies and how well the proposed competencies achieve their purposes. I share results to that end, exploring the four process elements of the "if" part of my theory of action and the emerging outcomes of the "then" part of my theory of action.
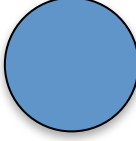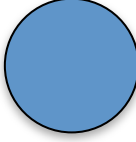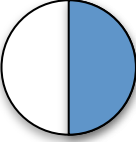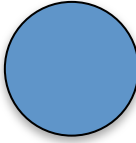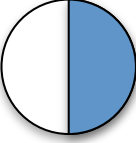
The data I use to assess my results fall into six categories:

1. Artifacts from our small working group meetings (agendas, notes, and

brief post-meeting surveys about what worked and what did not),

2. Interviews conducted at the midpoint of the process (late January to

early February) with NYCLA's executive vice president and the four vice

presidents who oversee NYCLA's four service areas,

3. A comparison of the original competencies with the new ones,

4. Interviews conducted with each of the six members of the small working

group after completing the proposed competencies (late February),

5. Formal feedback and notes from the final All Coaches meeting in March,

when I shared the new competencies with the entire coaching staff, and

6. Observations of both executed and planned actions.

The chart in Figure 9 summarizes my results to date. The results from the

first three elements of my process are largely positive. Unfortunately, evidence

regarding my ability to engage the broader organization in conversations about

coaching was still forthcoming at the time of writing, although the outlook for my

future work in this regard is promising. Lastly, in considering the outcomes of my

process, the data suggest that the new competencies effectively capture existing

coaching expertise and create new space for new learning, and they have the

potential to meet the varied needs of the organization.

Figure 9: Results of Strategic Project

Theory of Action	Success to Date	Key Results
If I… develop strong relational trust and credibility with the organization and its coaches,	(pie chart, ~75% filled)	• Early on I was not included in several meetings. • I was given increasing responsibility over time. • Individuals sought my opinion.
engage a team of coaches around a learning frame and purpose we co-construct,	(pie chart, full)	• Small group members reported evidence of a shared purpose and learning. • Meeting agendas connect to purpose and a learning frame.
establish psychological safety within the team,	(pie chart, full)	• Small group members reported evidence of psychological safety.
and engage the broader organization in conversations about coaching,	(pie chart, ~50% filled)	• Three meetings were held with entire coaching staff. • I met with the vice presidents halfway through the process. • I met with the Equity Steering Committee Project Manager. • The Coaching Advisory Pod discussed the competencies. • I plan to meet with the cabinet.
Then…		
I will surface a shared understanding of what coaches need to know and be able to do, generating coaching competencies that both capture coaches' expertise and can guide new learning, and	(pie chart, full)	• Discussions with small group and with entire coaching staff at All Coaches meeting included evidence of captured expertise and new learning. • A comparison of old and new competencies reveals both captured expertise and new learning.
the new competencies will enable NYCLA to better describe its coaching model, assess its coaching work, and further its efforts to build the capacity of its coaches and the coaching programs of its clients.	(pie chart, ~50% filled)	• Vice presidents gave me positive feedback about competencies at the midpoint of the strategic project. • Questions remain regarding the coaching theory of action, equity, and next steps.

Element 1: Relational Trust and Credibility

The evidence regarding the effective execution of this element is fairly positive. As one might expect, the level of trust and credibility I enjoyed grew stronger over time and arguably continued to grow throughout the strategic project and the writing of this capstone.

Evidence from the first few months of my residency suggests that some parts of the organization readily granted me trust and credibility and others were slower in doing so. One indication is the fact that I served as a regular thought partner for a project leader over the summer and was asked to design the first unit of a new leadership development curriculum. Furthermore, while there was a natural revision process for the curriculum, much of what I designed was kept in its final iteration and one facilitator reported that the unit achieved its intended objectives.

Another example of the trust I earned and later strengthened is my being asked to facilitate a small portion of the new Foundations of Principal Supervision institute that NYCLA was offering. After my facilitation, NYCLA's CEO reported that she liked my "style" and thought I made some important points.

When it came to the coaching service area, developing trust and credibility was a slower process. In the early part of my residency, there were three coaching meetings to which I was not invited and therefore missed. Furthermore, it proved difficult to find an opportunity to begin the work of developing the new coaching competencies. I began my strategic project much later than anticipated

as I worked to build trust and credibility with the coaching services team. The structural changes NYCLA was experiencing also contributed to the slower start.

As time went on, evidence emerged that my relational trust and credibility were growing. One early indicator of this was the fact that I was given increasing responsibility over time. Midway through my residency, I was named the engagement owner (NYCLA's term for a project leader) for a project in a new division of the NYC DOE. This role enjoyed relatively light supervision. Furthermore, I was asked to lead the development of a new service offering for the organization at the intersection of two service areas (coaching and district leader services). My early recommendations for the service offering were largely accepted, and the nine members of the project's advisory team were pleased with the direction we took in developing the new service.

An additional indicator that suggested I was strengthening relational trust and credibility through my work was that people in the organization began to elicit my opinion toward the end of my strategic project. Specifically, four people asked for my input and feedback related to projects of which I was not a part.

Lastly, the most telling evidence of trust and credibility was the autonomy I was granted in leading the development of NYCLA's new competencies. This project was highly important to the organization's ongoing work, and Michelle Jarney entrusted the entire process to me with minimal supervision.

Element 2: Learning Frame and Co-constructed Purpose

To examine the results of my process in working with the small working group, I conducted individual interviews with each coach in mid-to-late February. I provided each coach with the questions beforehand to facilitate deep reflection, and after the interviews, I coded their responses, teasing out themes related to learning and purpose. The same set of questions also generated evidence of the effective execution of the third element of my theory of action (related to psychological safety) as I will discuss in the following subsection. The questions I asked were:

- *How do you understand our team goals and to what extent did we act in alignment with our team goals?*

- *What was a time when we worked really well together?*

- *What was a time when we struggled to get something done as a team?[3]*

- *How satisfied are you with the level of learning in the team?*

- *How satisfied are you with the product at this point?*

With respect to establishing a learning frame and co-constructed purpose, three themes emerged from the interviews as shown in Figure 10. In general the coaches agreed that our purposes included incorporating equity; pushing our group to reflect on our coaching and name, define, and refine our practice given the organization's changing context; and guiding learning for new and seasoned

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[3] These first three questions were not of my own making. Once again, I recognize Pete Fishman (2015) for his ingenious approach to his capstone, upon which I modeled my work.

coaches. This is particularly interesting because incorporating equity was not one of the group's initial purposes, but rather it emerged as a central theme of our work together. Three people mentioned that our group had *process goals* as well, meaning that we were working toward a shared vision of collaboration and teaming as defined by our group norms.

Each coach said that our process facilitated learning and productivity. For example, one coach stated, "We pushed each other on how we were thinking, not just about the content [of our thinking], but how we were understanding. We were talking about how to infuse equity, [and] that required us to think about how we conceptualized the role of equity in the work and in our advocacy" (Coaching interviews, February 2016).

Figure 10: Evidence of Shared Purpose from Coaching Interviews

	Number of Coaches Who Named a Specific Purpose for the Development of New Coaching Competencies					
Named purpose	Incorporating equity	Reflection and naming, defining, and refining practice to reflect changing organizational context	Guiding learning for new and seasoned coaches	Working as a cohesive team	Other	Purpose unclear at times
Number of coaches	*6/6*	*6/6*	*6/6*	*3/6*	*1/6*	*1/6*

An examination of our meeting materials also reflects evidence of having established shared purposes. Every agenda included explicit reference to the overall purposes of the strategic project as well as a specific purpose for each

meeting. In the interviews, team members made specific reference to the amount of time we spent in our first meetings to establish a shared understanding of our group's purposes and to get as clear as we could about what we were setting out to do and how we wanted to do it. The idea that we "went slow to go fast" permeated many of the discussions that I had with individual coaches.

Element 3: Psychological Safety

In large part our group enjoyed a high degree of psychological safety. On the question of what went well and what was a struggle for the group, three themes emerged from the interviews. Coaches consistently described their ability to be honest and engage in productive disagreement, my responsiveness to participant needs and individual working styles, and how our ability to work together effectively improved over time. Half the coaches also cited equity of voice and diversity of voice as strengths of the team. Figure 11 contains an overview of how these themes were expressed.

Figure 11: Evidence of Psychological Safety

Evidence of Psychological Safety as Discussed by Coaches		
Theme	**Number of coaches who shared this**	**Sample quotes that illustrate the theme**
Ability to be honest and disagree	6/6	"We were able to be very honest in terms of making deletions, adding things, and correcting. It wasn't a matter of who was the source, or someone owning a piece; it was a matter of making sense of it and thinking it was valuable."

		"There's a real feeling that you stay focused on the work but it was such— it was done with such a gentle way, it had no edge and it really helped make the work environmentally safe. And you allowed points to be expressed and put on the table. You had a way of grabbing us up and moving us forward that never felt intrusive." "I felt all of our disagreements were about coming to clarity and sharpening our ideas. I really appreciated the opportunity to think and share with a partner and you know how to do that." "I don't see struggle as a bad thing. I think this whole process was one of struggle and that's what it should have been."
Responding to participant needs and individual working styles	6/6	"We were allowed to work in our own style without adopting a different style." "The way that people expressed what they needed as learners, you gave them. When [one coach] said I need [more processing time], you complied. When [another coach] asked for [another accommodation], you did that too. You satisfied the individuals' needs without sacrificing the needs of the group."
Improvement of team functioning over time	6/6	"We got better as we went a long. . . , The last meeting felt most efficient and most productive." "Each one of us was highly engaged in the process, and at the end we got to a point where it was clear that we were playing together—and that was a sign of a successful team."
Equity and diversity of voice on team	3/6	"The mix was good—we had special education, college, and high school [experience], several retired principals. . . . When you looked, we had [a mix of] race and ethnic backgrounds, we had age diversity, and there was the gender and sexual orientation mix. The group came out to be a very diverse group and that was fabulous, I think. It's part of who I am. That diversity leads to a better product and better work." "Everyone's voice was heard and mattered."

In addition to the interviews, as part of the closing process at three of our meetings, I asked the coaches to rate our level of psychological safety. In each

case, all members of the small working group rated the meetings completely psychologically safe. For the post-meeting assessment, completely psychologically safe was described this way: "I feel completely comfortable sharing my thoughts.[4]

Element 4: Engaging the Organization beyond the Small Working Group

At the time of writing, evidence related to the final process element of my theory of action was promising but still in process. I had taken several action steps to engage others outside of the small working group, but one of the most important steps in this regard had not yet happened.

To begin, I engaged the entire coaching body in thinking about new coaching competencies three times. I did this at the launch meeting, at a second meeting in the middle of the process, and then a third time after the proposed competencies were complete. The third and final meeting with the coaching staff was particularly important as it gave everyone an opportunity to discuss a new vision for the craft of coaching at NYCLA, as represented in the newly proposed competencies. The final meeting was also an opportunity to process the work in its entirety.

Another group I engaged in thinking about coaching was the Coaching Advisory Pod. That team considered the clarity and utility of the new

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[4] Coaches were asked to evaluate the psychological safety of the meeting. The evaluation scale was as follows: 5: Completely—I felt completely comfortable sharing my thoughts. 4: Fairly safe— I felt comfortable talking about most things with some exceptions. 3: Average—I felt comfortable talking about some things, others not so much. 2: Less safe—I preferred to speak less and let others do most of the talking. 1: Not safe—I kept my thoughts to myself and deferred to others.

competencies and discussed the role of equity and instruction in coaching. At the time of writing, the group had also begun to explore how the competencies could support its capacity-building work with clients across the nation.

Another piece of data to consider in evaluating my work to engage the broader organization can be found in one of the competencies: Establish equity as a foundation for the work. In describing this competency, the small working group and I noted where we wanted input from the organization's Equity Steering Committee. I met with the project manager overseeing NYCLA's equity work and showed her what we would need from the committee.

I cannot say that this action step has been completely successful yet because, as of the time of writing, I had not worked much with NYCLA's senior leaders. However, the interviews I conducted before the project launch required senior leaders to reflect on what they needed the coaching competencies to do, and I plan to incorporate information gleaned from those interviews into the presentation of the proposed competencies to the cabinet. The meeting to present and discuss the new competencies had not been scheduled at the time of writing.

In thinking about the process I used to develop the new competencies as a whole, early data suggest that it was mostly successful, but I cannot say with certainty that this last element of the process will be implemented effectively until after I meet with the cabinet.

The Proposed Competencies: Capturing Expertise and Fomenting New Learning

It is one thing to consider how strong our process was, and another to explore the strength of the results of that process, the proposed competencies. In my theory of action, the proposed competencies were meant to do three things: capture what NYCLA has learned over the past ten years, make space for new learning about coaching, and serve as a foundation for describing NYCLA's model, assessing its coaching work, and furthering its efforts to build coaching capacity. Evidence to date demonstrates that the proposed competencies were successful in fulfilling the first two purposes, and emerging data on the competencies' potential to achieve the third purpose (serving as a foundation for describing and assessing its work and supporting that of others) is promising.

Comparing new competencies with similar ones from the original set reveals that the small working group captured a detailed understanding of what it means to coach education leaders. Figure 12 juxtaposes two new competencies with their original counterparts. The comparison of these two pairs of competencies reflects the overall differences between the two documents. It illustrates how the new competencies simultaneously capture NYCLA's earned expertise related to coaching while having the ability to guide new learning.

Figure 12: Comparison of Similar Competencies

Original Competency	Proposed New Competency
Coach understands and/or is able to employ a variety of skills, techniques, methods, and knowledge, including . . . giving feedback	**Share effective feedback** • Frame feedback to optimize impact, considering the leader's context, learning preferences, and timing to ensure benefit. Effective feedback is: based on low-inference data and observation, and is timely, applicable, useful, honest, and purposeful. • Use a nonjudgmental and non-evaluative stance when sharing feedback. Be cognizant of tone, emotional tenor, eye contact, body language, and impact.
Continuously collects evidence and looks for patterns and trends	**Explore and identify organizational goals** Elicit the education leader's understanding of organizational dynamics and determine the implications for organizational goal setting. Engage the leader in continuously identifying and using multiple measures of data to assess the current state of the organization, formulate hypotheses about organizational needs and points of leverage, set priorities for focus and action, and make adjustments over time. In doing so, specifically analyze and make transparent the data related to equity.

In the original competencies, the coach was expected to give feedback in service of the coachee's learning. There was no further information regarding feedback content or delivery. When the small working group wrote the new proposed competency on feedback, they included all that they had learned over the years about effective feedback and how to share it. The new competency describes characteristics of effective feedback and details the many considerations to which one must attend in providing the best feedback possible for the coachee. The comparison chart also provides an example of how the new competencies make space for new learning. The new competency related to

organizational data describes how to use multiple measures of data, and it introduces the idea of analyzing data related to equity and making it transparent. Using data to coach for equity is new territory for NYCLA coaches.

Notes and formal feedback from the final All Coaches meeting demonstrate that the new competencies are successful in both capturing learned expertise and presenting areas for new learning. At the meeting, I asked all the coaches to review the completed competencies and discuss three questions about the draft in small groups: (1) What resonates? (2) What questions come up? (3) Where would professional learning be required or desired for this group? At the end of the meeting coaches were also given a questionnaire on the new competencies to complete individually (Appendix B).

On the questionnaire, all 25 coaches in attendance said they agreed that the new competencies capture what they had learned about coaching over the years, with 20 coaches completely agreeing, and 5 somewhat agreeing. Coaches commented that the new document "captures the change in our practice" and "clearly delineates our work." This point also emerged in the group discussions at the meeting. Coaches really liked the fact that the new competencies emphasize the importance of self-reflection in coaching. One group of coaches said that the "focus on our own [the coaches'] mental models really resonates. We've learned that if we do this well, we're well positioned to help principals do the same type of self reflection" (meeting notes, March 2016).

In terms of new learning, coach after coach mentioned that the group would need support in coaching for equity. They also identified the need for more

learning around the stance of a coach, identifying sticking points in coaching and strategies to overcome them, creating a holding environment, and exploring various forms of accountability in coaching. Two questions the group wanted to explore in future professional learning sessions are these: How does a coach support principals in understanding their identity and how identity impacts their work? What does celebrating coachees' successes look like, and how does that fit in with taking a neutral stance in coaching?

Interviews with the small working group members after the proposed competencies were drafted also corroborated the new competencies' ability to foment new learning. Each coach heralded the fact that the new competencies made an explicit, up-front reference to equity. The members of the working group argued that the early and explicit reference to equity could help guide coach learning and help prospective clients decide whether or not they were interested in our type of coaching. One coach said the incorporation of equity could shape his or her future learning, saying, "I felt and still feel inadequate in talking about [equity] . . . and I'm right there [in thinking about] what does that mean for the coach. We hadn't in our team meetings[5] really grappled with that in a specific way…I'm looking forward to this yielding more specific strategies…I may be selfish in this regard." Another coach said the incorporation of equity could be helpful to prospective clients: "The fact that we are focusing on equity and that it is front and center will help people decide if this is exactly the type of work that

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[5] Here, the coach is referring to previous All Coaches meetings, NOT the meetings of the small working group.

they need for their principals, and it might help others decide that they don't want to touch that and work with NYCLA."

The Proposed Competencies: Describing, Assessing, and Supporting Coaching

At the time of writing it was still too early to know if the proposed competencies would successfully serve as a foundation to describe NYCLA's coaching model, assess its expanding coaching work, and support it in building the coaching capacity of its clients. Nevertheless, early indicators are promising. Even though I am still in the process of developing the implementation plan and related learning materials, and the competencies still bear a "Draft" watermark, different members of the organization have already started using the competencies to some degree to support internal work and work with clients.

NYCLA's Vice President of District Leader Services recently used part of the competencies to describe high-quality coaching for a national audience. On March 10, 2016, she led a national webinar, "Building a Culture of Learning in Leadership," for those interested in principal development and supervision. When the discussion turned to coaching, she shared two paragraphs from our coaching competencies as participants considered what it means to coach and grow school principals.

To assess the quality of NYCLA's coaching work, the Coaching Advisory Pod has started to enact plans to use the new competencies to outline coach development and delineate what can be expected of new coaches and experienced coaches. The pod is creating a tool to articulate the development of

a leadership coach, describing the differences between novice coaching, intermediate coaching, and expert coaching. They began their discussion of this new work by examining the competencies and considering which ones someone new to the field would have to demonstrate before they could begin coaching for the organization.

The new competencies are also already being used to support learning, both for coaches and for others. As discussed earlier, at the final All Coaches meeting a colleague led a professional learning experience for the entire coaching staff using one of the new competencies related to equity. In another example, a different team (that does not include coaches) recently requested the new coaching competencies to aid in the development of a computer-adaptive role-play scenario to support learning across the organization and with clients.

Lastly, there is early evidence that the organization could use the new competencies to support the coaching work of its clients. Five of the new competencies were used in the design of an interview process for a client to hire principal coaches. Although using the competencies to inform hiring decisions does not equate to supporting the coaching capacity of clients, it is an initial step in doing so.

All these indicators are promising, but at the time of writing, the proposed competencies were still in draft form and had not yet been approved or seen by NYCLA's administrative cabinet. Given that, I cannot definitively say that the new competencies will successfully serve as a foundation for the organization's future work related to coaching.

What will it take to secure approval? As discussed in the Description section, I shared part of the new competencies with NYCLA's vice presidents midway through the development process. At that time, the executive vice president and the four vice presidents expressed largely positive views about the competencies as they had been developed up to that point, but two main concerns emerged from interviews. In critiquing the early draft, two of the five felt that the theory of action described in the draft's preamble was amiss. They also felt that the draft should better define our coaching model. One vice president reported that it was clear to her from what she read that the draft pointed to something broader than instructional leadership, but she felt that it still had not defined the parameters of what NYCLA coaching encompasses and leaves out.

The small working group and I will need to demonstrate that we appropriately address those concerns in the final draft of the competencies. How the organization's senior leaders receive the new competencies and to what extent they and NYCLA's coaches decide to incorporate them into future work will be the true signs of my strategic project's success.

Analysis

The driving question of my strategic project concerns how to help an organization improve in an area of strength, making its learning explicit while creating the opportunity for new learning. Results from my project suggest that the process I used to illuminate the learning of coaches was mostly successful, and the new coaching competencies have the potential to fulfill their purposes. In

this section of my capstone, I analyze the actions and conditions that allowed me to implement a mostly successful process to make coach learning explicit. I then analyze how to ensure that the new competencies will enable NYCLA to better describe its coaching practice, assess its expanding coaching work, and further its efforts to build the capacity of the coaching programs of its clients.

Alignment of People and Task

Much of the success of the first parts of my theory of action can be attributed to conditions surrounding my strategic project rather than any specific actions on my part. The people Michelle Jarney selected as the members of the small working group were exactly the right people for the job. Their experience, dispositions, and skill sets were all congruous to the task at hand.

First, members of the small working group had dedicated their professional lives to teaching and learning, with an average of 32 years of experience as successful education leaders. Thus, framing our work as learning required very little of me as a leader since they had spent their entire careers focused on learning and helping others think about learning. Second, they had all served as coaches for more than ten years. This meant that they regularly thought about interpersonal dynamics and creating psychological safety for the benefit of others. Inspiring a healthy team dynamic is easy when the members of the team are already predisposed to cultivating strong relationships and safe spaces. Furthermore, not only were they predisposed to work well with others, they all had worked together at NYCLA in various capacities for over a decade.

They all enjoyed a healthy collegiality and I was the only newcomer to the group. That said, having longstanding working relationships does not necessarily mean that a group works well together, but from the onset it was evident that the six coaches on my team did.

Another condition worth noting is that each team member was a currently practicing coach, meaning they each had a full roster of coachees whom they were supporting. Their coaching practice was an actively honed skill and it took relatively little effort for them to reflect on it and discuss it. It also meant that the work of developing new coaching competencies was not an exercise in abstraction—what we produced would be immediately relevant to them.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that NYCLA's explicit focus on equity, which started the year before my residency, made it fairly easy to ensure that the new competencies could stimulate new learning. The small working group did not have to search for places to shift coaching practice because incorporating equity into all aspects of the organization was already on everyone's mind. I was able to capitalize on this, and as a result, the small working group wholeheartedly welcomed folding this new area of learning into their work.

Building Trust through Respect, Regard, Competence, and Integrity

Another essential contributor to the relative success of my project was my ability to establish and strengthen trust and credibility. In many ways, trust served as the foundation for everything else that followed in my strategic project, and without it, much of what follows in this analysis would not have been possible, or

even mattered. Anthony Bryk (with Schneider, 2003) provides a useful perspective on deconstructing process elements that lead to trust and psychological safety.

Bryk and Schneider (2003) articulate four considerations in building relational trust: respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity. They emphasize the importance of respect in social exchanges, saying that respect is "marked by genuinely listening to what each person has to say and by taking these views into account in subsequent actions." (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Deeply listening to others has always been a strength of mine, and several coaches noted my skillful listening in their feedback. One coach described how encouraging it was to see me listen to the coaches' input and incorporate it into the draft document as the input was shared. Another coach (quoted in Figure 11) described my facilitation as gentle and focused, saying that I "allowed points to be expressed and put on the table."

I think one can also describe my actions and ways of being at NYCLA as rooted in personal regard and integrity. Simply put, I cared about the people I worked with and tried to show that, and I did what I said I would do. Beyond respect, regard, and integrity, though, the most important way I established trust was through demonstrating competence in core role responsibilities. The coaches reported that my facilitation was adept, other members of the organization recognized that I knew what I was talking about in terms of coaching, and the design work I did was well received. In the beginning of my project, when I was still proving my competence and credibility, I "borrowed" some respect from

Michelle Jarney. She introduced me at the Launch meeting and framed the competency work for everyone, sharing the rationale for and urgency of the revision. Michelle has been with the organization for 12 years and is well respected by the coaches, so she was instrumental in ensuring I was well received by the group.

Team Discipline

I believe that Edmondson's Execution-as-Learning framework explains how we were able to learn as a small group while executing, but it doesn't necessarily explain why we could execute so well together. Katzenbach and Smith (2013) offer one explanation for why our team worked well together. In our interactions, the small working group and I were exercising what Katzenbach and Smith (2013) refer to as the five essential characteristics of effective team discipline: (1) meaningful common purpose, (2) specific performance goals, (3) a mix of complementary skills, (4) strong commitment, and (5) mutual accountability.

Our team had a meaningful common purpose, and we reiterated that purpose at the start of every meeting. Specifically, I always took time to describe how each meeting's goals directly supported our larger purposes for working as a team. As shown in the results, every member of the team was able to articulate our main purposes. Furthermore, as Katzenbach and Smith (2013) suggest, while our team's charge may have originated from senior leadership discussions, we took time in our early meetings to make sense of that charge and formulate

the purpose in our own words. Katzenbach and Smith (2013) reiterate the importance of taking time early on to do this: "The best teams invest a tremendous amount of time and effort exploring, shaping, and agreeing on a purpose that belongs to them both collectively and individually. This 'purposing' activity continues throughout the life of the team" (para. 14).

Second, we knew exactly what our performance goals were: to produce new coaching competencies that reflect NYCLA's expertise and its changing context, that highlight equity, and that can guide coach learning. Katzenbach and Smith argue that specific performance goals can inspire teams and focus team members on the collective effort of the group rather than on individual gains (2013).

Third, our team also enjoyed a mix of complementary skills. Some coaches were highly detailed and more granular thinkers, while others used a more holistic, "big-picture" approach. Furthermore, members of our group held varying coaching certifications and brought to our work different sets of craft knowledge, including elementary expertise, secondary expertise, and more. Figure 11 quotes one coach who recognized the diversity of our team's experiences and identities and in part attributed our good work to that diversity.

Lastly, our team enjoyed strong commitment and mutual accountability. These discipline characteristics stem from having a common objective and approach, and our group always had a clear agenda and process for going about our work and achieving our goals. "Accountability arises from and reinforces the time, energy, and action invested in figuring out what the team is trying to

accomplish and how best to get it done" (Katzenbach & Smith, 2013,

Interpersonal Skills, para. 10). Our group took time to articulate our purpose and

goals for each meeting and then connected that work to the overall goal. This

was important, and members took preparation and participation very seriously.

Coaches came to meetings with prepared notes, and they each shared their

reflections and suggestions electronically with the group in advance of one of our

last discussions. This ensured we maximized our time together and could

achieve our agreed-upon goals. Producing a robust document that captured what

NYCLA knows about coaching and created a space for new learning required

everyone to contribute. Arguably, knowing that this document would live on and

have a great impact on practice was a strong motivator in eliciting everyone's

best work.

A Good Handoff

At the time of writing, I had not presented or discussed the completed

coaching competencies with NYCLA's senior leadership. Although this was partly

a function of scheduling difficulties, I also wanted to be strategic in the way I

presented my work to the senior leaders. As I will show, Katzenbach and Smith's

theory of team discipline supports my rationale for strategically approaching this

discussion.

In straightforward situations, such as when I coordinated with the project

manager overseeing NYCLA's equity work or worked with the Coaching Advisory

Pod, I readily engaged others in conversations about the proposed competencies.

For more involved circumstances, I waited and planned to talk later. I did this because I wanted to ensure that I had something substantive to discuss with NYCLA employees outside of the small working group, and I wanted to be sure that I could frame the discussion in a way that inspired thoughtful dialogue, open-minded attention, and understanding.

As discussed in the Description section, my interviews with the senior leadership team at the start of my residency revealed that the senior leaders had different opinions about the role of instructional leadership in coaching. The interviews with the vice presidents midway through the project confirmed this point, and I believe this difference of opinion was at the heart of both their call for greater clarity in our coaching model and their critique of the coaching theory of action included in the early draft of the competencies. A conversation on coaching competencies would likely surface and exacerbate this difference of opinion.

Before engaging the leadership team in this discussion, I wanted to be sure I had captured the coaches' best thinking on the matter within our new competencies and the related implementation plan. After all, the coaches must regularly decide how much to focus on instructional leadership versus a broader conception of leadership in their work coaching school leaders. I have argued herein that the work of a principal involves balancing both, and thus this is primarily a question of degree or emphasis, rather than choosing one over the other. Early uses of the newly proposed competencies (described in the Results section) could help us understand whether we had found the right balance in our

materials. Having these lessons in hand before engaging NYCLA administration in a conversation about instructional leadership versus a broader conception of leadership would do three things. It would ensure that any discussion would be connected to practice. It would help me stay true to my strategic project's intention (i.e., making explicit what NYCLA had learned over the years and providing a space for new learning for coaches). And it would allow me to frame conversations about coaching in the best way possible and help garner the leadership's support and approval for the new competencies.

Katzenbach and Smith's (2013) work on team discipline supports my rationale for waiting to have these conversations so as to ensure that the new competencies would be well received. The small working group was charged with developing and proposing new coaching competencies. A key word in that charge that could be easily overlooked is "proposing"—meaning that we were creating the new competencies for NYCLA leadership and the overall coaching team to ultimately review and approve. Katzenbach and Smith (2013) argue that teams that make recommendations face two critical issues: beginning well and dealing with the "handoff" to ensure approval and implementation. Simply put, choosing to schedule the conversations with NYCLA leaders throughout the organization was a strategic choice. To ensure the handoff went well, I wanted to approach the conversations with as much information as possible, a thoughtful and logical practice-based rationale for our choices, and sound and persuasive framing language.

Tending to Purpose, Picture, Plan, and Part

William Bridges (2009) theorizes that the best way to manage transitions to new ideas and processes is to tend to the "four P's": communicating the purpose for the change, creating a compelling picture of what the new ideas could look like, adopting a plan to integrate them, and delineating the parts people play in carrying a change forward. His work is helpful for understanding what I can do to ensure that the new coaching competencies will be broadly applied to NYCLA's future work.

Establishing a clear sense of purpose for the small working group has already been discussed at length within this capstone, and evidence suggests that I did well in that regard. Having a clear sense of purpose engendered strong commitment and mutual accountability within the small working group and gave the work real energy. To elicit comparable reactions to the new competencies from others in the organization and to inspire their use, I will need deeper understanding of the purpose of the new competencies from the perspective of different stakeholders and I will have to be able to communicate it. As mentioned in the Description section, in the launch meeting with the entire coaching staff, I thought I was sharing the purpose of the new competencies, but in actuality I was merely framing the conversation by discussing NYCLA's changing context. In the future I will need to emphasize the purposes of the new competencies and highlight those that best pertain to the person with whom I am speaking.

Bridges (2009) argues that while purpose is important in transitioning to new ideas, it is does not give people clarity as to where they are going. He writes

that people need a "viable organizational picture," an image of what can be, and what they will "experience that is different" (p. 64). The purposes of the new competencies don't really deliver this. Part of my task going forward will be to clarify what is most different from the old version of the competencies, both in terms of the values expressed and the way they are enacted. To this point, I've argued that the prominent and explicit incorporation of equity is a significant change for coaches, as is an articulation of the balance between instructional leadership and a broader conception of leadership. Crisp definition and shared meaning-making around those two points will go a long way toward creating the picture of what the transition to new competencies will look like for coaches.

With a better understanding of the purposes and picture of the transition to new coaching competencies in hand, Bridges' work suggests that it will also be important to craft a transition management plan that recognizes where NYCLA's coaches are in their current work and focuses on change at the personal level (Ibid). Bridges distinguishes this type of transition management plan from a change management plan, asserting that the latter is oriented toward collective action, starts with desired outcomes, and often works backward. A transition plan, on the other hand, "works forward, step by step, through the process of leaving the past behind, getting through the wilderness and profiting from it, and emerging with new attitudes, behaviors and identity." (Bridges, 2009, p. 67). What can such a plan look like for NYCLA? Even though the implementation plan is not complete yet, Michelle Jarney, the Coaching Advisory Pod, and I have already begun to explore this question, considering where training and calibrating

of practice will be needed and what that could look like; implications for long-term learning, feedback, and supervision structures; and how this work can be translated to support clients in growing their own coaching programs.

Lastly, no plan can really be complete if everyone doesn't have a part in bringing the transition forward. For the new competencies to translate into meaningful learning for the organization as a whole, people cannot simply read the document. They must take an active part in unpacking the new competencies, understanding what they mean, personally integrating them into their practice, and using them to guide their reflection. Bridges (2009) emphasizes this point, arguing that leaders need to give people two parts when transitioning to new ideas and processes. People "need to see their role and their relationship to others in the new scheme of things" as well as have a "role in dealing effectively with the transition process itself" (p. 68). It will be important for the greater body of coaches to see themselves in the new competencies and have roles in the construction of the tools, trainings, and resources needed to support the diffusion of NYCLA's new competencies.

A Revised Theory of Action

The vision for my strategic project always included an implementation phase during which I would secure approval for the new competencies and develop relevant learning materials to ensure that the new competencies could become a meaningful part of NYCLA's work. The analysis of my results underscores the importance of this final phase. Given that, I feel that this should

have been reflected explicitly in my theory of action. In my experience, I have seen numerous committees do great work that never gains traction beyond their members.

In light of the analysis described above, my revised theory of action would be:

If I . . .

- develop strong relational trust and credibility with the organization and its coaches,

- engage a team of coaches around a learning frame and purpose that we co-construct, and establish psychological safety within the team,

- engage the broader organization in conversations about coaching,

- and develop an approval and implementation plan that takes into account stakeholders' perspectives and purposes, details a picture of what the transition to new competencies looks like, and gives everyone a part in making the transition happen,

then . . .

- I will surface a shared understanding of what coaches need to know and be able to do, generating coaching competencies that capture coaches' expertise and can guide new learning, and

- the new competencies will be approved and used to better describe NYCLA's coaching model, assess its coaching work, and further its

efforts to build the capacity of its coaches and the coaching

programs of its clients.

III. Implications

Early indicators suggest that this strategic project can ultimately be successful, but we must wait until the four P's of transition are addressed to truly evaluate the new competencies and the process we used to develop them. However, I can confidently say that my residency and strategic project provided for rich personal learning. It is my humble hope that through my residency and strategic project I have also added value to NYCLA and that in some way the lessons gleaned through this capstone can inform the work of others in the business of leadership development and coaching. In the section that follows, I share my reflections on lessons learned and their implications for self, site, and sector.

Implications for Self

Defining Balance

Life is 10 percent what you make it and 90 percent how you take it.
—Irving Berlin, as quoted by E. Saunders (2015)

Three months prior to starting my residency, I concluded treatment for cancer. That experience changed me at a deep level, and as a result, my priorities in life shifted dramatically. Entering residency, I placed a high value on family life and work-life balance to an unprecedented degree. In fact, it was clear from my conversations with NYCLA leadership that work-life balance was an

organizational value, and that was a major factor in my choice of NYCLA for my residency.

After a few months in New York, I soon found that prioritizing work-life balance was easier than defining it. While I was enjoying my new city and home life immensely those first few months, I was dissatisfied with my level of productivity. I was fulfilling my responsibilities according to agreed-upon timelines, but I was not bringing my whole self and full energy to the work. Before starting my doctoral studies, I had always derived great pleasure from my work, and by some standards I may have been considered a workaholic. After cancer, I knew that I did not want to be the workaholic I once was, yet a few months into the residency, I realized I also did not want to be the new "it-can-wait, hakuna matata" type of leader I seemed to have become. It took time, serious introspection, and intentionality to define and put into practice a level of balance that felt just right to me—one where my personal life was still prized and yet my work life moved with enthusiasm, energy, and growing momentum.

In his article "How Will You Measure Your Life?" Clayton Christensen (2010) argues that one must approach life as one approaches business—by defining ideals and applying strategy to allocate one's time, money, and energy toward those ideals. He proposes that one must ask and answer the following questions to lead a successful life: "First, how can I be sure that I'll be happy in my career? Second, how can I be sure that my relationships with my spouse and my family become an enduring source of happiness? Third, how can I be sure I'll stay out of jail?" (Christensen, 2010, para. 7). In essence, these questions lead

one to define what balance means to him or her and how that balance can maximize purpose and satisfaction throughout one's life.

None of us knows what life has in store for us, but I imagine my current definitions of balance and purpose will continue to evolve. These definitions work well for me right now, but arguably things will change, and so will my understanding of self. Every milestone, be it joyful or sad, will usher in new learning and perspective, and with those things, a different definition of work-life balance and understanding of purpose will take shape and be just right for that particular moment in life. It will be important for me to stay attuned to my evolving needs, and embrace the process of refocusing my priorities with each turn in my life's trajectory.

Finding Value, Making Meaning, and Starting Right

> Doing the right thing is more important than doing the thing right.
> —Peter Drucker, as quoted by J. Shore (2014)

In addition to figuring out my new priorities, another reason I was slow to throw myself wholeheartedly into the work of my residency was a need to make sense of my strategic project and find value in it. When I began the residency, my residency support team and I considered a variety of ideas for my strategic project. The first one we landed on was to develop a new coaching theory of action, which ended up being a sizeable but not a standalone part of my current project. I had a sense that developing the coaching theory of action was important, but I had trouble describing its relevance and value, making personal

meaning of the charge, and creating a vision for bringing the work to fruition. As a result I found it difficult to initiate the work and summon the motivation needed to engage myself and engage others in it. After a series of reflective conversations with my residency mentor, we shifted my strategic project to what I have described in this capstone: developing coaching competencies (albeit with a theory of action for coaching as part of that work). Taking time to find value, make meaning, and identify what needed to be done allowed me to begin my strategic project well and exercise focused, enthusiastic, and creative leadership throughout my residency.

According to Drath and Palus (1994), making meaning is essential to effective leadership, at both individual and social levels. Pulling from cognitive developmental psychology, they describe meaning-making as "constructing a sense of what is, what actually exists, and, of that, what is important" (p. 13). In a nutshell, leaders must possess or develop a framework to understand their own actions and engage others in shared meaning-making, developing a shared framework for understanding. Peter Drucker (2004) offers a practical means to make this happen, saying that leaders must explore and answer two questions before acting: What is it that needs to be done? Is it the right thing? In a world that demands urgency and values busyness, it will be important for me to make space for meaning-making and strategic thinking in my next leadership role.

Integrity and Competence

As I advance in my career, it is likely that I will take on roles of greater responsibility in progressively larger organizations. In the past, strong

relationships have been a major source of my influence. In a larger context, or in a consulting capacity where I interact with a wide array of clients, people won't have an opportunity to know me as well as when I worked as school leader. All of Bryk and Schneider's (2003) components of relational trust will matter (respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity), but competence and integrity will probably take precedence, since respect and regard rely more heavily on social interactions. A tension I will have to learn to navigate is how to demonstrate strong competence while also embracing public learning and embodying a healthy sense of humility. I know this can be done. At NYCLA I repeatedly demonstrated competence in the many projects I participated in or led, but I could still be forthright with my colleagues about needing to learn more about effectively observing and supporting individual coaches for a particular program.

Implications for Site

Articulating Balance

> If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success.
> —Confucius

As discussed in the Description, Results, and Analysis section, NYCLA recognizes the tension between focusing on instruction and focusing on leadership in a broader sense. I hope that the remaining steps of this project will elucidate this tension, and bring the organization closer to defining what navigating that tension looks like in practice.

Taking time to engage in honest dialogue about the limits of NYCLA's

coaching practice around instruction and leadership in general will be critical if

the organization is to successfully expand and deepen its coaching practice. As

NYCLA continues to grow, defining the balance between instructional leadership

and a broader conception of leadership cannot be left to the individual discretion

of coaches. Right now, the coaches have significant shared experience in

coaching a specific type of education leader in a specific place, but it is likely that

that font of shared knowledge will become less reliable as the number of coaches

and the variety of coachees' needs increase due to geography or role.

Fullan (2014) and Robinson (2011) offer ways to approach and define the

right mix of focus on instruction and leadership, as discussed in the Review of

Knowledge for Action. NYCLA should use their research and that of others, along

with the knowledge its coaches have gained through hard-earned experience

and have expressed in the new coaching competencies, to affirm its stance in

this regard. The organization should define its own answer to Fullan's call at the

end of his discussion on the balance of instruction versus leadership (Fullan,

2014, p. 73):

> The implication is not that principals should abandon the focus on
> instruction, but rather that they should get at it by working with
> teachers individually and collectively to develop their professional
> capital. The press for continuous instructional improvement is
> central. There is still a lot of precision to be had—what specific
> expertise is needed for learning in math; what teams are needed for
> what tasks; what is the new pedagogy that enlists students as
> partners in learning and uses technology to accelerate and deepen
> learning. The principal is in there by helping the group get that good.
> The question is, what combination of factors will maximize that
> press for most teachers' learning and therefore for most students'
> learning?

Cultivating and Integrating a Shared Conception of Equity in Practice

The other discussion that NYCLA needs to have concerns what equity actually means for the organization and its work. NYCLA leadership already knows this, so this recommendation should come as no surprise. In fact, this work is already in process. A task force is actively taking this on, and I am eager to see what emerges from their collaboration. It will be critically important, however, for NYCLA leadership to manage the transition of ideas from the task force to the larger organization.

The task force cannot simply disseminate its ideas and findings, and give the many teams in the organization a definition of educational equity and related terminology. Such a sensitive and complex topic requires significant sense-making as a group and organization, along with reflection, skill building, and practice. Outlining the tenets of educational equity for leadership development or sharing a technical definition of said concept is not sufficient to move practice, let alone shift the hearts and minds of the people who would be responsible for operationalizing them.

Clarity in this regard may be both welcomed and threatening. There will need to be active processing and construction of meaning throughout the organization, just as there will need to be for the new competencies and for a defined vision of the balance between instruction and broader leadership. Furthermore, a transition plan that moves from understanding to learning and skill building will be essential. Once NYCLA enjoys a shared conception of equity, it will need to get clear on what it looks like to coach for this.

Lastly, NYCLA leadership must ensure that equity is an integral part of the work, and not an afterthought or something to be done in its own time and place. The experience of the competencies working group demonstrates this point. We noted the difficulty in keeping equity in the forefront of our minds as we developed the competencies for the first element of coaching. Despite our best intentions, after our initial attempt to generate a list of competencies associated with relationship building and learning context, we realized that we had failed to mention any action, skill, or disposition related to equity. After a second pass, we were able to clearly describe its role. From that point on, we decided that we had to actively attend to the incorporation of equity into our development process since we did not want to treat equity as an add-on or luxury. That could lead our coachees to treat equity as an add-on in their work of leading schools, which would be problematic for countless reasons. This is easier said than done, however, and NYCLA must ensure that equity is never treated as secondary in any aspect of its work.

Creating a Rhythm for Reflection and Updating Artifacts

Capturing a decade of learning about coaching in a new competencies document was a significant project involving more than 144 hours of work. In the future, producing an artifact that documents what the organization has learned and that foments new learning does not have to be such a large undertaking. Rather than wait another ten years before revisiting and refreshing its

competencies, NYCLA should develop and regularly employ knowledge-sharing structures and processes to support organizational learning.

Etienne Wenger's (2000) work on communities of practice supports this recommendation and provides insight into carrying out the process. He writes that effective communities of practice focus on learning and inquiry, nurture trust among their members, and regularly reflect on their repertoire "to understand [the community's] state of development from multiple perspectives, reconsider assumptions and patterns, uncover hidden possibilities, and use this self-awareness to move forward" (Wenger, 2000, p. 230). Doing so staves off stagnation, ensures cohesion, and prevents a group from becoming limited by its past decisions. In designing an effective community of practice, he suggests two important considerations, among others. He argues that a community has to consider a regular rhythm of events for learning and community building, in addition to considering the learning artifacts it needs and "who has the energy to produce and maintain them so they will remain useful as the community evolves" (p. 232).

To strengthen its processes for learning and sharing knowledge, NYCLA could institute a yearly expectation that service areas will engage in critical reflection. This could be done each October, which is typically a less busy time of the year for school consulting work, and teams could reflect on the quality of their work for the past year, what they learned, opportunities for continued growth, and what artifacts would help them to capture lessons learned and to shape their future work. Currently, NYCLA staff members are expected to document in an

online database the lessons they have learned from discrete projects whenever a project ends. Staff members also upload to a cloud the final versions of curricula they design on a quarterly basis. It remains unclear how these electronic resources are used to inform ongoing work and when the lessons captured therein are revisited. NYCLA's yearly reflection expectation could be more holistic (i.e., focusing on a team's entire body of work rather than just discrete projects) and could include a review of the organization's electronic resources. This would increase the utility of the cloud and online database and could improve overall learning for NYCLA's teams.

For the coaching services team, this could mean updating the competencies document each year to ensure that it reflects NYCLA's evolving expertise in coaching; for example, the team could document what it learns about coaching for equity. When I shared the coaching competencies with the entire coaching staff, I recommended that they become a living document, regularly visited and updated as NYCLA learns more about coaching and coaches in more varied contexts. It is my hope that this becomes part of the way things are done as the coaching services team works with the new competencies.

Walking the Walk

NYCLA is committed to leadership development through coaching. It makes a compelling argument for schools and districts to employ coaches to build and stretch their leaders' leadership capacities. As an organization that professes the benefits of leadership coaching, it follows that it should seek to

reap the same benefits for itself. In other words, NYCLA leaders should consider employing coaches to support their own development. I would not go to a dentist who doesn't take good care of her teeth. I would not trust a principal who would not want her child to attend her school. And I would have no faith in a barista who drinks coffee but doesn't drink the coffee she serves. Using coaches to support internal leadership development would be a clear signal of the organization's commitment to coaching and the belief in its power for all levels of leadership. To do this with minimal cost, NYCLA could pilot a peer coaching program, where individuals in like roles coach each other according to a schedule that works for them. It could involve just the vice presidents and focus on system leadership since each vice president does significant work in that realm. If successful, the pilot could expand to individuals in other roles.

Elevating the practice of internal leadership development and coaching could have three additional benefits. First, it offers an opportunity for even greater learning about the practice of coaching. Second, developing and stretching the leadership of NYCLA employees could help the organization recognize and harness untapped potential. In my personal experience, I know that I've grown a great deal in my leadership, my coaching, and my understanding of both, as a result of both having a coach and coaching others. Finally, it could provide an opportunity to practice NYCLA's approach to coaching for equity, thereby creating a mechanism to continually push internal equity in NYCLA's systems, structures, and practices.

Implications for Sector

Investing in Coaching That Encompasses More Than Instructional Leadership

Today much focus is placed on instructional leadership, but as Fullan (2014) has argued, the term is too vague, over-interpreted, and narrowly applied. Focusing coaching solely on instructional knowledge or ensuring quality teaching is short-sighted. We need to address education leaders' individual needs and balance our focus on instruction with a broader conception of leadership. Fullan (2014) makes this abundantly clear: "the educational leader is the overall leader of instruction, but he or she needs to have time and skills to motivate and build teams and develop leadership capacity in his or her school for change" (p. 64).

Practitioners involved in educational leadership development should focus on supporting principals' capacity to do the five things that matter most and the three competencies needed to enact them. The five leadership behaviors that matter most are establishing goals and expectations, resourcing strategically, ensuring quality teaching, leading teacher learning and development, and ensuring an orderly and safe environment (Robinson, 2011). The competencies needed to enact those behaviors include applying relevant knowledge, solving complex problems, and building relational trust (Robinson, 2011). Furthermore, we know that coaching can help leaders build their leadership capacity in these ways and many more.

Common critiques of coaching include that it is too expensive and that there is simply not enough research on its effectiveness. More research is definitely needed but that should not preclude educators from investing in this

form of professional learning; more traditional forms of principal development simply are not working. As stated earlier, half of all new principals are not retained beyond three years, and replacing principals is expensive (School Leaders Network, 2014). Districts currently spend between $35,000 and $150,000 per principal on recruitment and onboarding (School Leaders Network, 2014). We need to change how we develop and support our principals if we expect to see different results. Coaching represents a promising alternative to more typical forms of professional learning and merits greater attention. Furthermore, it is a modest expense in comparison to replacing principals and thus could generate real savings for districts in their efforts to retain and develop effective leaders.

Starting Improvement with Respect

I approached my strategic project with a healthy respect and regard for NYCLA's coaches and its coaching model. I felt that any changes to the coaching model's competencies needed to come from the people who engaged in the model on a regular basis. My work was to engage the small team in critically reflecting on their practice, eliciting their questions and ideas about how it could be improved. I did not tell them how to shift their practice nor did I identify for them where their coaching could be strengthened. Instead, I helped the small team come to those realizations on their own and then we worked together to generate new competency language. Because of this, NYCLA's coaching body

has accepted in a large part the new competencies and the changes they represent.

In the education sector, change and improvement are often done *to* people and not *with* them. The very people who are responsible for implementation and execution are not treated with respect nor included in decision-making and planning of new programs, improvements, or policies. Consequently new ideas fail to take hold. If leaders believe in the changes they are trying to institute, and want to see real results, they need to include those closest to the work and ensure educators have a part in the change process as Bridges (2009) suggests.

Furthermore leaders cannot lead the call to change by attacking the competence of those who will be responsible for the work. Doing so is demotivating, and I think a lot can be said for starting from a place of respect. Respect engenders trust, which in turn engenders vulnerability and openness to explore one's growth edges. How many projects fail to take off because a group is not ready for or open to the idea of change or additional work?

This idea of starting from respect is particularly important for new leaders and those outside of the schoolhouse. If a new leader, policy maker, or consultant dismisses the work of a school or district, he or she runs the risk of alienating educators rather than empowering them to tackle problems. A healthy respect for the work, a coaching or reflective inquiry stance, and a willingness to collaboratively determine new approaches to the work will allow for greater long-term success. In leading change as a new leader or perceived outsider, one must

both position educators to explore areas of improvement and foster

receptiveness to possible solutions.

An Approach to Equity

Gloria Anzaldúa writes that our belief systems around race and equity

drive our actions and she affirms that our beliefs are the true font of change. She

writes

> The struggle is inner: Chicano, indio, American Indian, mojado,
> Mexicano, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo,
> Black, Asian--our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are
> populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner,
> and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must
> come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in
> society. Nothing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens
> in the images in our heads (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 109).

Educators know that more work must be done to advance equity in

schools and districts, but real solutions will continue to elude us until we critically

examine our core beliefs and practices. Technical strategies have limited results

and opportunity gaps still persist after technical solutions are implemented.

Shifting hearts and minds is essential if we hope to cultivate equitable

experiences and outcomes for students. Coaching with equity in mind could help

bridge the discrepancy between actions and beliefs in schools, and the new

coaching competencies that I developed constitute one way to think about what

this type of coaching could look like.

First, one of the new coaching competencies that I developed, in its

expanded form, names equity as an organizational value and establishes it as a

frame for coaching work. As shown in Figure 13, the competency begins with an

exploration of one's own racial identity and one's experiences of privilege or

oppression. This is important self exploration, as I believe one cannot begin to

shift his or her heart or mind if one does not first understand the place from

where he or she is shifting.

Figure 13: Second New Competency

Establish a foundation for equity.
- Recognize one's own racial identity, experience of varying degrees of privilege or oppression, and triggers and biases. Understand how those things have affected one's journey and perspectives, and use professional judgment in sharing those aspects of self.
- Name equity as a NYCLA value, share what it means, and elevate it as a frame for the work. Equity means that people should receive what they need to achieve their potential and their race and other aspects of their identity should not prevent access to opportunity.

Second, in addition to exploring one's mindset around race and equity,

many of the fifteen other new coaching competencies offer in their expanded

form a concrete approach (or action one can take) to advance equity. The

competencies include skills like using data to explore the state of equity in a

school, examining the discrepancies between a leader's thoughts and actions,

and working with an education leader to identify the systems, processes, and

practices that contribute to inequity in his or her school or district. As a complete

set, the new coaching competencies recognize the tension that Anzaldúa names:

inner thoughts v. outer expressions. As a whole, they provide coaches and

educators with one way to help shift *both* thought and deed. Coaching of this sort

could help leaders looking to address complex problems related to race and equity, serving as a complement to more technical solutions.

While I believe that the new competencies I developed for NYCLA describe coaching with equity in mind, it is important to note that they only offer a starting place from which to grow educators' capacity for advancing equity. They are not a manual or instruction book. Rather, they point to where the real work of learning will need to occur. They offer learning objectives for which one should strive, but they do not delineate the path one must take to master them. Such a prescription would discount the difficulty of the challenge of advancing equity in education and would fail to take into account the uniqueness of the different contexts in which coaching could take place.

Conclusion

Recently I was enjoying a spring afternoon outside of the Grimes building in Des Moines, Iowa, which houses the offices of the state's Department of Education. I felt the warmth of the sun and a soft breeze on my skin as my residency supervisor and I were reflecting on the day and how the newly proposed coaching competencies had figured into our work with our client. I felt a budding sense of accomplishment as we discussed how the process we used to develop the new competencies was very much like the art of coaching.

To help NYCLA improve on its strength, I had to develop trust and credibility. I had to join the organization and see its coaching practice from its perspective. I had to be purposeful in my work and my approach to guiding our learning. I had to ask the right questions and facilitate reflection to elicit how the organization could improve its practice. And I had to capitalize on its interest in equity to stimulate further growth. These are the very things the small working group and I wrote about effective coaching. As my strategic project concludes, I'm also recognizing the need to support the organization in ensuring that its learning can be sustained and that it can continue to improve its craft without need of outside assistance. This too, is not unlike coaching. The good coach supports her client in learning independently. The last competency included in NYCLA's new competencies document states that a coach "positions the education leader to independently construct new knowledge, sustain learning, and champion equity after the coaching engagement."

Helping an organization improve on its strength and continue to grow in its learning is not an easy task. Nor is coaching a talented leader. Paul Kalinithi (2016) wrote in *When Breath Becomes Air*, "You can't ever reach perfection but you can believe in an asymptote to which you are ceaselessly striving." Strive we must. Our changing society and the complex challenges of the 21st century demand that we continually raise our expectations and seek to develop strong educators to lead our schools. Our youth deserve as much.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide for Learning More about NYCLA Coaching

1. Tell me a little about yourself. What's your professional background?

2. How did you get into coaching?

3. What is coaching?

4. How do you continue to learn about coaching and grow?

5. Walk me through the coaching process. What do you do? What tools and strategies do you use?

6. How can your coaching practice improve?

7. How can NYCLA's coaching practice improve?

Appendix B: Questionnaire Distributed at Final All Coaches Meeting

Indicate your level of agreement with the statements below.

The new competencies capture what we have learned about coaching over the years.

a. Completely disagree   c. Completely agree
b. Somewhat disagree   d. Somewhat agree

Please comment/explain your choice:

The new competencies include areas of new learning for our coaching team.

a. Completely disagree   c. Completely agree
b. Somewhat disagree   d. Somewhat agree

Please comment/explain your choice:

Please answer the questions below.

How could this first part of today's meeting have been improved?

Any other comments about the new competencies or the process used to develop and share them?