Does Mentoring Assist in Developing Beginning Principals' Instructional Leadership Skills?

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Abstract

This study examines the perceptions and experiences of six beginning principals in relation to the effectiveness of District-Created Mentoring Programmes (DCMP) and a statewide Administrator Mentoring Programme (AMP) in Missouri, USA. Data were obtained through the researcher-created *Support of Mentors in Developing Instructional Leadership Skills* protocol using semi-structured interviews. The data revealed both types of mentoring programmes were weak in providing the appropriate support in each of the six instructional standards of instructional leadership skills. Additionally six strategies for effective mentoring programmes were identified. Implications for practice are important to both district level and university personnel.

Keywords: principal mentoring; instructional leadership, matching, strategies for effective mentoring

Introduction

Bottoms and O'Neill (2001) recognized the need for changing the way new school leaders are trained to prepare them for meeting today's high-stakes accountability. Yukl (2006) argued that leaders need training to develop competencies necessary to adapt to changing school environments and to encourage teachers to deal effectively with school reforms. However, typical principal preparatory programmes emphasize development of managerial skills with little emphasis on developing cultures that promote student learning (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Some programmes do include internships where principals work within school settings to gain experiences in leadership. However, few leadership programmes actually place interns in situations where they are able to gain valuable experience by leading school improvement activities (Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2005). If principal preparatory programmes are failing future leaders in developing instructional leadership skills, how are these new leaders going to gain experiences to emphasize student learning? Programmes to support new principals need to emphasize the development of appropriate instructional skills for leading in today's schools (United States Department of Education (USDE), Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004).

Participation in effective mentoring programmes is one avenue used to provide support necessary for developing leaders (Reyes, 2003). Mentoring programmes provide encouragement and assistance as experienced principals' work with beginning principals throughout the first year or two in these new positions. Mentors provide guidance and feedback as new principals develop capacity to fulfill the new roles and responsibilities (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Daresh, 2004; Educational Alliance & NAESP, 2003; Hopkins-Thompson, 2000; Reyes, 2003; United States Department of Education (USDE), Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004). While research has validated the effectiveness of administrator

mentoring programmes, little research has connected development of specific instructional leadership skills with participation in mentoring programmes. This study examined the development of instructional leadership skills as supported through the mentoring process. The researchers interviewed six beginning principals regarding the effectiveness of a statewide *Administrator Mentoring Programme* (AMP) and *District-Created Mentoring Programmes* (DCMP). The *Administrator Mentoring Programme is a* statewide mentoring programme that is required for all administrators gaining certification in Missouri after April 2005. In the programme, new principals are matched with experienced principals who served as mentors to provide guidance and support through the first two years of principalship. Provisions are made for mentor training and guidelines specify the minimum amount of contact hours required between the mentor and protégé. If a school district can provide comparable mentoring for their new principals they can opt out of participating (DCMP). However, their principals must document that they have a mentor and that they meet with that mentor on a regular basis.

The following over arching research question guided this qualitative inquiry: "What mentoring strategies did beginning principals perceive to be most effective in developing instructional leadership skills related to the six standards as identified by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2001)?" These six standards include the following instructional elements: leading schools by placing priority on student and adult learning; setting high expectations and standards; demanding content and instruction that ensure student achievement; creating a culture of adult learning; using multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools; and actively engaging the community (NAESP).

Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study

Three constructs emerged from the literature to demonstrate the need for effective mentoring programmes for beginning principals in developing instructional leadership skills. First, examined were changing roles of administrators through the context of various leadership theories. Second, administrator training through preparatory programmes, internships, and professional development were investigated. Finally, mentoring programmes were examined revealing challenges and obstacles as well as benefits of mentoring. These constructs demonstrated the need for additional research regarding the effectiveness of mentoring programmes in aiding new principals in developing instructional leadership skills to guide teachers toward a focus on improved student learning.

Changing Roles of Administrators - Ethical leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership build on the premises of making changes that are morally right for the organisation and benefit the organisation as a whole (Yukl, 2006). Ethical leaders' help teachers recognize problems that are occurring and lead teachers toward discovering solutions that will best fit the needs of the school. These leaders build integrity by ensuring the right things are being done for the right reasons and by following through with reinforcing implementation of improvement initiatives (Anderson, & Martin, 2009; Furman, 2003; Greenleaf, 2002; Kouzes & Pozner, 2002). Servant leadership theory expands on this concept by identifying the needs of others within the organisation as the top priority for change and improvement. The leader is in place to serve others as change is brought about to ensure the best opportunities are in place for all children, regardless of their needs and background (Davis, 2003; Kouzes & Pozner). Transformational leaders emphasize change through common commitment and mutual purpose of improving practices to benefit the group as a whole. These leaders inspire teachers to go beyond meeting basic expectations through the use of empowerment and encouragement, creating conditions where all factions of the community desire to work to create situations leading to school improvement (Davis; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2000).

Instructional leaders focus their efforts on quality of teaching and the learning that takes place as a result of good teaching (DuFour, 2002). These leaders must be able to hire teachers with appropriate knowledge and skills to reach all students and must be able to lead teachers through the growth process to develop new skills resulting in improved student learning and achievement (Fink & Resnick, 2001). The effective use of learning communities, comprised of teachers within a school or district, can facilitate instructional leadership (Elmore, 2002; Lambert, 2002). An online learning community of principals organized by the National Association of Elementary School Principals identified the following six standards that characterize instructional leadership: (a) leading schools by placing priority on student and adult learning; (b) setting high expectations and standards; (c) demanding content and instruction that ensures student achievement; (d) creating a culture of adult learning; (e) using multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools; and (f) actively engaging the community (NAESP, 2001). These skills are employed by principals to lead members of the school community through professional growth opportunities toward providing quality teaching resulting in improved student achievement of all students (DuFour, 2002; Fink & Resnick, 2001).

However, principals need assistance from others within the school community to effectively bring about change in student learning. This can be accomplished by developing leadership capacity within various members of the organisation to share decision-making processes. Such leadership models as distributive and balanced leadership result from this practice and lead to improved organisational effectiveness (Hackman & Johnson, 2000; Hallinger & Heck, 2003; Kouzes & Pozner, 2002; Lambert, 2002; Schlechty, 2000). In these types of leadership, authority and influence are shared among members of the school community allowing a sense of ownership to develop. The leader analyses situations occurring within the change process to facilitate the conditions for empowerment and participation, often utilising teams to develop common purpose and goals from which strategies emerge for various members of the teams to fulfill (Fullan, 1996; Katzenbach & Smith, 2003). Collective accountability results as all members of the organisation have an interest in the success of the entire population and work together to bring about change and instructional focus (Waters & Grubb, 2004; Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004).

With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001 new accountability measures were established for achieving improvements in student learning for public schools across the United States (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; McLeod, D'Amico, & Protheroe, 2003). To meet these increasing accountability standards, educational leaders must draw from the various leadership theories to utilise components from each that are most appropriate to fit the needs of the organisation in order to bring about change, especially with student learning (Waters & Grubb, 2004). Thus, programmes to support new principals at the preparatory level and within school districts need to emphasize the development of appropriate instructional skills for leading in today's high accountable schools (NAESP; 2001; IEL;2000; USDE, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004).

Administrator Preparatory Training - The combination of the changing role of leaders and high accountability have lead to researchers (DuFour, 2002; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) reinforcing the idea that the principals must learn instructional strategies that concentrate on leading teachers toward focusing on student learning. However, there is little emphasis on building these instructional skills in most professional preparatory programmes or in professional development activities (IEL, 2000). "Leadership preparatory programmes have in the past lacked rigorous standards and a systematic approach to recruiting and training leaders" (USDE, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004, pp. 2-3).

Consequently traditional university principal preparatory programmes, often train new leaders for a top-down role, with emphasis on developing skills such as law, finance, personnel, schedules, and supervision. Little emphasis is placed on learning how to learn or on developing relationships and environments that promote student learning (Daresh, 2004; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Mazzeo, 2003). "There is more research on what educational leaders must do to create empowering conditions in schools that lead to greater levels of student performance than there is on how to build preparation programmes that prepare these kinds of leaders" (Grogan & Andrews, pp. 240-241). Furthermore, programmes must be redesigned to more effectively prepare tomorrow's educational leaders for the relevant issues they will be facing (Daresh, 2004; Fry et al., 2005; Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001; Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Since all preparatory programmes need to be held accountable for training principals to develop the skills necessary to impact student learning (Fry et al.2005; Mazzeo, 2003), practitioners and University personnel must "turn attention toward improvement of leadership development and support" (Daresh, 2004,p. 496; Reyes, 2003).

Sherman suggests that the "capstone of a good preparation programme is generally a carefully designed and supervised internship in which aspiring principals are placed in a school and asked to function as a principal" (Sherman, 2000, p.29). Internships can provide significant learning experiences for new leaders, depending on the skill of the supervising principal. Interns need to be involved in the daily work of the principal and need to hear the thinking that takes place prior to decision-making. Supervising principals must provide frequent constructive feedback and help interns evaluate their work (Painter, 2001). Knowledge and experience must be shared and opportunities created for interns to take the lead in various aspects of the leadership role (USDE, Office of Innovation, and Improvement, 2004). Internships can also enlarge the existing pool of administrative candidates and help provide continual experiences to help new principals manage the challenges they encounter (Cromley et al., 2005; Morrison, 2005). The educational leadership within American public schools must work together with universities to establish methods to provide high-quality, reality-based internships (Hale & Moorman, 2003; Pounder & Crow, 2005).

What is needed in the internship is known, however only "a third of the programmes surveyed put interns into situations where they can gain a comprehensive understanding of what they must know and do to lead changes in school and classroom practices that make higher student achievement possible" (Fry et al., 2005, p. 5). Furthermore, few programmes offer practices for interns to observe, participate in, and lead school improvement activities which enable participants to develop competencies in instructional skills needed as they begin as leaders in their own schools.

While internships are one avenue to begin the professional development process for new principals, professional development programmes for aspiring leaders and for principals currently in place can also serve to help develop the instructional skills needed by all of today's leaders to be successful. Such programmes need development based on research that has proven what knowledge and skills are necessary to be a successful instructional leader (Waters & Grubb, 2004). While professional development provides helpful information for leaders, little research provided evidence regarding how the instructional role of the principal is enhanced through participating in these opportunities (Hedgpeth, 2000). The exception to that conclusion is that mentoring programmes are one type of professional development for new principals and educational leaders where research demonstrating effectiveness has been conducted (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Daresh, 2004; Hopkins-Thompson, 2000; Reyes, 2003).

Mentoring - School improvement is a journey, the type of leadership pertinent to each phase of the journey may not be appropriate during another phase (Fullan, 2002). School Districts need structures

in place to create knowledge and skills within the new leaders to enable them to make good decisions as they lead staff members toward improvement (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Fink & Brayman, 2006). The implementation of this knowledge creation process could occur through participating in an effective mentoring programme. "Learning is maximized through opportunities to share individual knowledge and experiences with others" (Preskill & Torres, 1999, p. 23). Learning from others provides valuable insight into how the organisation works and helps build skills to benefit the organisation as a whole (Preskill & Torres). The induction of new leaders into the school culture creates for them organisational socialization. The school becomes a learning organisation as these new leaders are mentored and supported each step of the way as they learn (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Fink & Brayman, 2006).

Accordingly, administrative mentors typically serve as a support system to help new administrators apply the leadership theories learned in preparatory programmes to daily practices and reflect on the outcomes of the experiences (Cushing et al., 2003). While attracting and retaining competent and caring leaders within a school system also requires a network of support often provided through an effective mentoring programme (Cushing et al., 2003; Daresh, 2004; Pounder & Crow, 2005; Reyes, 2003). More to the point, the rapid turnover of principals along with the changing roles of today's principals demonstrates an essential need for mentoring of new leaders (Fink & Brayman, 2006).

Over thirty-five states in the United States require these mentoring programmes for first year teachers and principals (Daresh, 2004). One such programme in Missouri required participation in the Administrator Mentoring Programme (AMP) beginning in the summer of 2005 for novice school leaders with the goal to enhance the development of leadership skills through mentoring new school leaders (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006a, 2006c). Experienced administrators throughout Missouri were encouraged, through their professional organisations, to apply to serve as mentors. Once applying, the selected administrators were required to go through mentor training. Selection of the mentors was based on demonstration of leadership capabilities, outstanding credentials, and recognized accomplishments in leadership positions. Mentors and their protégés (beginning principals in their first two years of practice) attended orientation sessions prior to the beginning of the school year to learn expectations and requirements of the two-year programme. Mentors were encouraged to visit the new leaders face to face monthly to observe on-the-job experiences and provide weekly feedback via phone or email conversations to enhance professional growth of the protégés. In addition, mentors were to assist the new leaders in developing professional development plans and monitor progress throughout the two years toward meeting the goals described on the plans (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006b). Thus, the mentor understanding their role and responsibilities was essential (Daresh, 2004) to this process of mentoring.

Role of Mentor and Protégé - Daresh (2004) noted that successful mentors are administrators with knowledge of the organisation, patience, the ability to understand others, and good listening and communication skills. Additionally, mentors typically fulfill the role of sponsor, role model, guide, and confidant; a person who is available to answer questions and provide guidance along the path to developing new knowledge regarding the roles and responsibilities of the new administrative position (Daresh). Mentors provide feedback to protégés and help them reflect on the daily experiences as they apply theories of leadership to the practices in place within districts, bridging the gap between theory and practice (Daresh; Hibert, 2000; Reyes, 2003). "Training people to be good leaders is a balance between guiding them through their experiences and letting them make mistakes" (Hibert, p. 18).

Most effective mentoring relationships occur where an open communication system is in place with provisions for feedback, trust is developed, and goals and expectations are established from the

beginning (Allen & Poteet, 1999). A culture of collaboration and collegiality between mentor and protégé cultivate a relationship where appropriate skills can be developed (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000).

Characteristics of Successful Mentoring Programmes - The matching of mentor to mentee is one identified characteristic of an effective mentoring programme (Pounder & Crow, 2005). Moreover, the effectiveness of the mentor depends on characteristics of the mentor and whether an appropriate match has been made between the mentor and protégé (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Pounder & Crow, 2005; Reyes, 2003). Professional goals, interpersonal styles, learning needs, and other variables must be taken into account in matching mentors and protégés to develop appropriate relationships, rather than making matches based on convenience or location (Daresh, 2004). Mentors must be respected within the field of administration, believe in and be committed to the professional development process, and be able to work with the protégé to center learning on needs of the protégé and needs of the organisation. Good mentors must be able to help protégés set goals, identify opportunities for learning, provide constructive feedback, and encourage reflection of experiences (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000).

Organisational support is also essential as is continual monitoring and evaluation of the process to develop a culture of continuous improvement (Daresh, 2004; Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). Both mentors and protégés must be allowed to make the investment of time and commitment to the programme. Sharing of information go beyond just answering questions, and must emphasize reflection of the experiences. Organisations that provide support to all involved in the mentoring process will gain as everyone involved will grow through the new knowledge gained. Relationships that are mutually beneficial will create the most effective results (Education Alliance & NAESP, 2003).

Challenges/Obstacles of Mentoring - Challenges exist in implementing mentoring programmes effectively. One challenge is the lack of resources to sustain and maintain programmes which can impact the effectiveness of programmes in many areas. The financial demands on a district to assume all costs related to mentoring may cause central office administration to seek applicants with experience or work hard to entice current administration to remain with the district. Time demands may be another issue with mentors being assigned to groups of protégés instead of individuals. In these cases, meetings may be held infrequently with reflection logs being submitted electronically and discussion groups facilitated through electronic blackboards (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). Too much reliance on the mentor can also be detrimental to protégés. Protégés' growth can be stifled when they rely on their mentors for too much guidance. Mentors can not provide all the answers to conflicts experienced by protégés; rather they must guide the protégé toward exploring possible solutions to problems and reflecting on outcomes (Daresh, 2004).

Even more important is training of mentors. Training programmes must be well-designed to guide mentors as they develop commitment to the professional development process for beginning administrators and as they learn to provide appropriate feedback. Mentors should be selected to serve as guides based on the quality of their characteristics and not on convenience or availability (Daresh, 2004; Education Alliance & NAESP, 2003). In addition, mentoring must be respected as a legitimate method of learning and must be supported by other administrators within the district. New ideas by the protégés should be valued as they help move a district toward the future and enhance the programmes and practices already in place (Daresh, 2004).

Outcomes of Mentoring Programmes - Mentoring programmes provide ongoing professional development for leaders in order to help schools become more effective. Building capacity of new administrators is the key to providing leadership for improved student achievement (Daresh, 2004; Miller, 2003). While beginning administrators often focus on survivorship at the beginning of their careers,

mentoring programmes can assist in developing the skills needed to enhance professional development as well as personal development (Daresh, 2004). According to the NAESP (2001):

> A successful principal, no matter how new or senior in the field, also appreciates the value of and need for mentoring within the principal profession. The principal learns valuable lessons from other leaders. Just as a principal should institute a mentoring programme for teachers within the school, today's principal should also view principal mentoring as a valuable tool resulting in improved leadership skills and, ultimately, a stronger learning environment. (p. 50)

Mentoring programmes also help diminish the effect of administrator turnover through better preparation for effective leadership which helps build efficacy and retains administrators in positions for longer periods of time (Cromley, et. al., 2005; Miller, 2003). However, Lashway (2002) stressed that only activities and strategies that emphasize learning and improved student achievement should take place within schools. What is not working needs to be eliminated in order to spend more time focusing on what makes a difference (Lashway). Thus while mentoring has been effective in supporting beginning principals, little research documented the connection with developing instructional leadership skills (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000; Reyes, 2003).

Methodology

In a statewide system reform effort to improve the leadership experiences of beginning principals, the state of Missouri forged a systemic mentoring programme designed to provide assistance to beginning principals in their first two years. The Missouri
Administrator Mentoring Programme (AMP) was established in the summer of 2005 to provide minimally 30 hours of support annually (personal interaction, phone, e-mail, site visits and collaborative professional development) by a trained mentor to principals during their first two years. The focus of the initiative was, if new principals received focused assistance for two years, impact on student performance should be positive, the new principals' evaluation performance should be successful, and the leaders should prosper and flourish in their new position (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006a, 2006c). The principles guiding this focus were: (a) building a trusting relationship with the mentor, (b) guiding, modeling, and coaching leadership skills, (c) reflective questioning (d) focusing on leadership traits, and (e) problem solving (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). A caveat existed in the establishment of the programme in that any district could opt out of the programme as long as the District personnel provided a comparable mentoring programme to their beginning principals for a minimum of two years.

Since 2005, AMP has trained and mentored and well over 100 new principals. Measurement of progress in meeting the goal of the programme is through the establishment of a Leadership Performance Plan that is discussed between mentee and mentor along with the maintenance of the logs of mentor/mentee meetings. Collaboration at the state level included the linking of support from the following partners: (a) the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, (b) the school districts in the state, (c) the Regional Professional Development Centers, and (d) the selected and trained mentors throughout the state.

Participants

The population involved in this study consisted of 100 principals throughout the state of Missouri who were within the first five years of the principalship. After contacting these 100 principals 49 agreed

to be interviewed if selected. Of these 49 principals four indicated they had not had a mentor and thus were eliminated from consideration (n=45). Twenty-three of the principals had participated in district-created mentoring programmes (DCMP); twenty-two principals had participated in the statewide administrator mentoring programme (AMP). Demographics of the participants who had participated in either type of mentoring programme are shown in Table 1. Categories included gender, age, years of experience, and level of education. Participants were divided into fairly equal distributions of male and female principals. Almost half of the principals were between the ages of 30 and 40, with the others split between age spans of 20-30 years, 40-50 years, and over 50 years. Over three-fourths of the participants were within their first two years of beginning the principalship and over 70 percent held a master's degree.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Principals Responding

Demographic	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	24 (3)	53.3%
	Female	21 (3)	46.7%
Age	20-30	8	17.8%
	30-40	19 (4)	42.2%
	40-50	11 (1)	24.4%
	50 +	7 (1)	15.6%
Years of Experience	1 year	15 (3)	33.3%
	2 years	20 (2)	44.4%
	3 years	5	11.1%
	4 years	2 (1)	4.4%
	5 years	3	6.7%
Level of Education	M.Ed.	32 (5)	71.1%
	Ed.S.	9	20.0%
	Ed.D.	3 (1)	6.7%
	Ph.D.	1	2.3%

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate interview participants.

From these 45 principals six interview participants were selected using a geographical representative sampling process. The six participants were purposefully chosen to provide a cross-section of the demographic population with Missouri. Numbers in parentheses in Tables 1 indicate demographics of the interview participants. Four of the principals interviewed had participated in district-created mentoring programmes (DCMP) and two participated in the statewide AMP. In addition, interviewed participants represented various geographical areas of the state: rural, suburban, and urban settings. Of the six participants, three were female and three were males. Four of the six participants labeled themselves White; one identified himself as Black and one as Hispanic. Five of the participants held a Masters degree in Leadership and one held a Doctor of Education degree.

Interview Protocol

A semi-structured (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) interview protocol, *Support of Mentors in Developing Instructional Leadership Skills,* was created to determine the extent of emphasis on developing instructional leadership skills in the beginning principals through participation in a mentoring programme. Questions were framed around the six standards identified as characterizing instructional leadership developed by principals (NAESP, 2001). Specifically the interview protocol focused on how mentors supported the development of the six standards of instructional leadership, how central office administrators provided support for the mentoring programme, and how other administrator training opportunities impacted the development of instructional leadership skills. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for use in the research. Transcripts were provided to the interviewees for member checking to determine accuracy of the recorded information. Based on feedback from the participants corrections were made. The researchers took field notes during the interview process to record information not reflected on the audio-tapes. Using this triangulation method allowed for elaboration and produced more in-depth data (Creswell, 2003; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Document Analysis

The second source of analysed data included documents (AMP and DCMP documents, logs of participants) which assisted these researchers in gaining an understanding of the espoused values and printed information of the AMP and DCMP. In addition, the artifacts served as a portal to an enhanced vigor of understanding for the researchers regarding the essence of the espoused roles of participating mentees.

Data Analysis

A qualitative approach to research is preferred when a researcher is focused on capturing the meaning of a programme experience to participants, "in their own words, through interviews, and in their day-to-day programme settings, through observation" (Patton, 1997, p. 273). The data analysis of interviews and all documentation (artifacts and field notes) used the constant comparative method (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Systematic coding of data permitted the emergence of categories or themes. As themes emerged a refinement process occurred whereby the researchers identified thematic relationships and underlying theoretical implications. Open and axial coding strategies were used to analyse collected data from observations, interviews, and documents. A gradual emergence and analysis of data resulted in crystallized patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Open coding permitted the emergence of patterns and various themes identified through the framework of the guiding question and narrative descriptions were utilized to portray the findings and interpretations regarding the effectiveness

of the mentoring programmes in developing instructional leadership skills in beginning principals. Axial coding permitted thematic refinement after the completion of each separate stage in the process which helped to identify further follow-up questions and themes (Merriam, 1998). The data gradually evolved into patterns which allowed the researchers to analyse the resulting information in each category (Creswell & Clark). Saturation was determined by the level of redundancy in participant responses. Member checking and triangulation of data validated the findings (Creswell, 2003; Merriam).

Findings

Six Instructional Standards

Discussion on how the six instructional standards by the participants is salient in the investigation of the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of their mentoring experiences on their understanding and use of instructional skills as a principal. The six instructional standards are: (a) *Lead schools by placing priority on student and adult learning,* (b) *Develop high expectations and standards,* (c) *Demand content and instruction that ensures student achievement,* (d) *Create a culture of adult learning,* (e) *Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools and* (f) *Actively engaging the community.*

Lead schools by placing priority on student and adult learning
One of the relative strengths of district-created mentoring (DCMP) programmes was creating and nurturing a community of student and adult learning, where adults as well as students within school settings are always learning and developing. The principle behind this statement reflects the belief that when adults stop learning, so do the students (NAESP, 2001). Communication was identified in the interviews as a strategy that was helpful in developing this skill. One DCMP principal indicated:

> *In creating a community of students, I think the number one is just the communication between my mentor and me, being able to talk about activities at the start of the school. . . . and just the sharing of ideas.*

Conversely, regarding the AMP, one participant felt the overall mentoring programme was "unfocused and very confused," noting "It's really not been a very instructional process for me, other than I've had someone who has had experience and talked about common experiences we've had. . . .[but] his realm of experiences was totally different than mine, so in that respect, he didn't offer me much."

Develop high expectations and standards
Interview data indicated this was the least discussed of the instructional areas focused on for both types of mentoring programmes. One AMP principal commented:

> *As far as providing and insisting that we have high standards, I think probably a lot of the things we would talk about were high standards as far as student behavior, not necessarily academics.*

A DCMP principal, whose superintendent served as the mentor, echoed the lack of emphasis when noting, "I really did not receive support as far as making sure that our school programmes were providing students with what they needed to meet high standards."

Demand content and instruction that ensures student achievement

Five of the six principals interviewed felt their mentor provided encouragement as they refined their skills in observing and giving feedback to teachers. One AMP mentor emphasized the need to be in the classroom regularly to really determine how students were engaged and if curriculum content was being taught. This same mentor encouraged "having the teachers do a reflection after the observation, by themselves—how they felt about it [their lesson]. It gets them thinking of their own." A caveat existed within this standard through monitoring alignment of curriculum with standards and assessments (AMP weakness) and reviewing/analyzing student work to determine whether standards were being taught (DCMP weakness). Both skills required principals to have a strong understanding of curriculum and standards for their respective grade levels, skills that require time to develop. Only one DCMP principal referred to curriculum and student work as a connection with observations and feedback. Only one AMP principal discussed the alignment of student learning to curriculum. In other words, principals were taught to observe and did observations but did not know what to do with the teacher observation data gathered.

Create a culture of adult learning

The strength of recognizing the need to continually improve the principals' own professional practices received mixed understanding by mentees of both mentoring programmes. While one DCMP principal shared that discretion in choosing the appropriate opportunities was critical when noting, "So, they [mentors] have assisted me in understanding what are the most important, the most beneficial things to be a part of and when it's okay to say, hey, we're going to step out of this one." The weakest area discussed from the statewide AMP was in connecting professional development to school learning goals. Another DMCP principal made the connection between professional development and student achievement; however, her mentor did not support these efforts. She stressed:

> *My mentor guided me away from aligning professional development with student learning to the point where he actually suggested that I not 'interfere' with the professional development meetings nor attend them.*

Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools

Participants from both types of mentoring programmes discussed utilising a variety of data sources to measure performance. One AMP principal described her work with her mentor as follows:

> *Beyond common assessments, I spent time with her [mentor] and our assistant superintendent looking at MAP data and I think that this was my first real taste of data on a large scale. How I would present this and disaggregate it as a leader and present it to a staff and have that conversation as a leader?*

An AMP principal indicated his work with the mentor centered on using walkthroughs to generate data in addition to looking at test results. However, the study's data did reveal two weaknesses of the mentor programmes regarding data analysis. The DCMP participants did not feel skilled in identifying strategies for improving student achievement and the AMP participants did not feel skilled in creating a school environment comfortable with data.

Actively engaging the community

The only mention during the interviews of anything related to shared leadership/ decision-making was working with PTA groups. Commonalities among several principals were the importance of open communication with various constituents of the community to build relationships so everyone feels welcome in the school buildings. One AMP principal indicated her mentor "modeled the importance of

keeping an open door policy with community members and emphasized that the community should not feel alienated from the school." Specific strategies to engage the community were not identified, but the importance of community involvement was emphasized at least through some discussion.

Strategies for Effective Mentoring Programmes

Overall six strategies emerged from the interviews and documents analysed relating to effective mentoring programmes. The strategies included communication, making a proper match to develop a supportive relationship, amount, and method of support provided, and the need for guidelines for content within the programme (see Figure 1). In addition, most of the principals discussed gaining some techniques for observation and feedback as an effective strategy. Also addressed were reflections on the overall value of the mentoring programme.

Figure 1: Strategies related to Mentoring Effectiveness
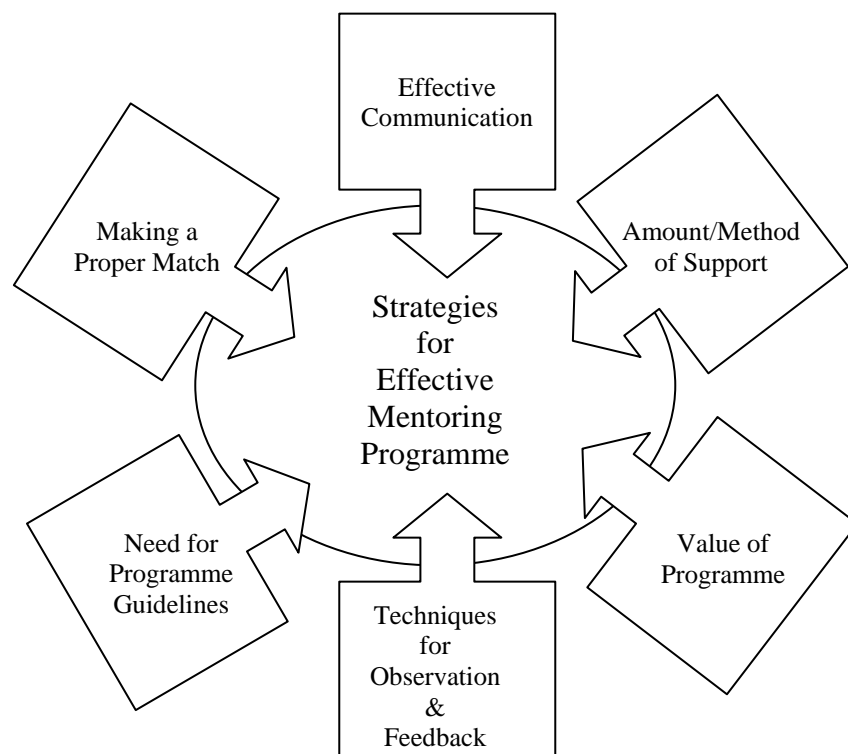
i) Communication. The first strategy essential in providing support to help protégés develop their skills in instructional leadership was effective communication. All six principals indicated the support they received through having a sounding board throughout their first years as the principal helped them negotiate successfully through various situations in those initial years. Identified as a critical need of beginning principals was providing a support system, "The value I found in my mentorship programme came from opportunities to 'talk' or 'debrief' with a peer as various events arose" was a common

statement. All but one of the interview participants indicated at different points in the interview that they could contact their mentor at any time for assistance. One AMP principal felt he could call his mentor at any time and commented:

> *I've called and asked what is this and what do I need to do. . . . The budget was due last month and I had never seen one. So she walked me through that and told me what she was doing and gave me ideas that I could go back and ask my staff if they would be interested in. . . . She calls and asks how things are going or I call her with an issue.*

Another AMP principal added, "He was always available for me to ask questions. I felt like the communication was open through phone calls, emails, and physical meetings". A DCMP principal indicated, "I feel like I've had a great first year because, anytime I struggled, I've been able to call, and say, I'm struggling—help me out." This principal had the theme of communication running through just about every answer on the interview, demonstrating that communication was definitely in place in her mentoring experience.

ii) Making a proper match. A second common strategy among the interview participants was making a proper match between mentor and protégé, a key ingredient necessary in developing a successful mentoring relationship. One AMP participant was from a small rural district and was matched with a mentor from a school with more students than the protégé's school district. Although the mentor was very knowledgeable and had many experiences to share, their experiences were so different, "what he knows how to do, for the most part, wouldn't be feasible for a school our size. I probably would have done better and moved faster if I had a different mentor." Another DCMP participant worked through the programme with her superintendent as her mentor. She expressed concern with having an evaluator as the mentor and described throughout the interview several problems that had occurred as a result of the mentoring relationship.

Several participants focused on having a good match between mentor and protégé. One AMP respondent said, "The idea of having a mentor is a very good one. However, mine was about ninety miles away. Someone in a similar district and closer would have been more beneficial." A another AMP participant commented, "I know the state means well, but rural school districts are not getting what they need from the design of the programme. It is hard to find mentors . . . and maintaining a good working relationship is hindered because of this."

Protégés who indicated their mentoring programme was helpful often commented on the positive relationship they had developed with their mentor. One DCMP principal said, "She has been an awesome mentor. . . . Anything I've asked for, she's sent it right out or told me—this is a good resource. So I just really feel like she's been a strong mentor for me." Another AMP participant expressed the need to have a mentor from outside the district, "Anytime I've had any kind of an issue or concern or question, I feel like she's been great because of her being removed from my situation—kind of a neutral party."

iii) Amount/method of support. A third strategy of effective mentoring revolved around the amount of support received. The amount of time required for contact varied between programmes from twenty-six hours throughout the year to monthly meetings with two additional contacts in between to no specific requirements. One DCMP principal described the process as follows: "We meet formally maybe once a month, but I feel my mentoring really takes place everyday of every week. That happens because I can, at any time, pick up the phone and call any of our other principals." This principal had the support of three other elementary principals within the district and indicated, "I truly feel the process has been

enriched because of the group of mentors that I have in the district. . . . It's been a very fluid mentoring experience." Another AMP principal portrayed his experience in the following way, "We have to meet so many hours in a formal setting and non-formal settings, so many contact hours, an email counts as so many hours and a phone call counts as so many." A third DCMP principal indicated the programme was very informal, "The mentoring occurred when I approached him about something that I was unsure about or that I questioned—situations I needed guidance on. . . . and is probably still there if I needed help." There was no consistency among programmes on the types or amounts of support provided from the principals interviewed.

iv) Need for programme guidelines. The need for guidelines for content covered in mentoring programmes was also identified in the data, especially by various participants who did not feel their programme was successful. One of the DCMP principals felt guidelines would have improved the mentoring experience and shared the following insight: "As a new administrator three years ago, I would have truly benefited from a structured mentoring programme with clear guidelines. It would have helped define the role of the principal versus the role of the superintendent." An AMP principal interviewed indicated her mentoring programme had no guidelines. "I think it's pretty much anything that either one of us thought we needed. Any time I've had any kind of an issue or concern or question, I feel like she's been great." Another DCMP principal interviewed had an experience that had prescribed guidelines but was also open to discussion based on needs. "We had specific things and we also had the ability to do whatever was on our mind, but we had a list of things we should talk about".

v) Techniques for observation and feedback. Five of the six principals interviewed focused on how their mentor helped them develop techniques utilized in observations and walkthroughs to identify appropriate instructional strategies in place in classrooms throughout the buildings. Learning what to look for during these classroom visits and how to have the feedback conversations afterward with the teachers was of great benefit to the beginning principals. One mentor emphasized the need to be in the classroom regularly to really determine if students were engaged and if the curriculum content was being taught. This same mentor encouraged "having the teachers do a reflection after the observation, by themselves— how they felt about it [their lesson]. It gets them thinking on their own." However, none of the principals discussed how student learning would be affected by the teacher observation nor did they note if they had had such a conversation with their mentor.

vi) Overall value of mentoring programmes. Comments relating to the overall value of the mentoring programmes, ranged from exceptional to not worth the time involved. A DCMP principal reported, "I am thankful that I have this valuable resource as a first year principal. My situation was that I had an in-district and an out-of-district mentor my first two years. This was very beneficial! I arranged the out-of-district myself. Both mentors were very helpful." While an AMP principal responded, "It's not very worthwhile as it is. If the state plans on keeping the programme, it needs MAJOR help. I was assigned a mentor. He made contact with me 3-4 times and I've never heard back from him. The mentoring programme, for me, was not effective or valuable." While another DCMP principal whose mentoring process was not positive shared the following feeling:

> *I don't feel like he understood the mentoring process—thought it was more "I'm going to guide the principal until she gets used to the way we do things around here" rather than I want to model and show the principal about school leadership.*

Lastly, another of the AMP principals indicated the mentoring programme was "unfocused and very confused. Having said that, I don't want it to reflect on my mentor because he has been a very knowledgeable individual. He and I come from and work in two entirely different worlds."

Support from Upper Administration

Four interview participants indicated support was provided from various central office administrators. Support ranged from financial support for the mentoring programme to release time to meet with their mentor to providing specific opportunities for growth in areas of curriculum, professional development, and data analysis. The type of support provided varied among school districts, often depending on the size of the district. One DCMP principal worked with a group of elementary principals from within the district and had support from the entire group. She described her support as follows:

> *There are three other elementary principals in our district and I am assigned specifically to one of them. We met formally maybe once a month, but I feel my mentoring really takes place every day of every week. That happened because I can at any time pick up the phone and call any of our other principals, email any of them, call any of our assistant principals. I don't feel like I'm new and I don't know what I'm talking about. I don't feel like any question I ask is a silly question. I truly feel the process has been enriched because of the group of mentors that I have in the district.*

Large districts had more support available than small districts, from central office personnel who focused on training new principals to superintendents who supported the mentoring process by providing release time and funding as needed for principals to meet with their mentors and/or attend various training sessions. Some districts also had curriculum personnel available to help with data analysis and special education directors to assist with the special needs students. One DCMP principal expressed her pleasure in working with central office administrators in the following way:

> *I can call her [assistant superintendent] with a list at anytime and she'll run by and talk to me and she'll go through things. The district office support, I couldn't ask for better support, not just from her, but from special education, from our finance person, from buildings and grounds. I feel I can call any of them. They will get right back to me for any question I have.*

Another DCMP principal indicated strong support from the district office and communicated his feelings about the programme in saying:

> *I've been in a mentoring programme in three different school districts. [School district] is much advanced over the other two for several reasons. It's large enough that there are people that that's their job to train us. . . .We have four all day meetings we have to be at which we cover different items. The last one, we covered professional development; we covered PBTE; and followed up on classroom walkthroughs. So there's always several topics presented and the people presenting are always top-notch.*

One AMP principal entered the district as an elementary principal the same year in which the high school principal and superintendent were also new to the district. With all new administrators in the district, the lack of experience within the district caused some difficulties for all involved. That principal commented:

I felt that I got all the support I really asked for. Our biggest issues were not knowing where to look or go for certain things. . . . He [superintendent] didn't know any better than I did. The two of us spent an awful lot of time doing the same things, figuring the ins and outs of Title programmes and we're still learning. Had we had an experienced superintendent, that effort could have been spared.

Another AMP principal indicated her mentor might have provided more assistance by talking "about some of the leadership things instead of the management side, which it was highly focused on."

One DCMP principal was from a small school with no central office personnel, the only other administrator being the superintendent, who served as the mentor. This principal indicated little support was provided from the superintendent and suggested mentoring between an immediate supervisor and their employee was ineffective.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be suggested from the data gathered in this inquiry. First of all, mentoring programmes included in this study are providing weak support, at best, for principals as they develop instructional leadership skills during their first five years, according to this data set. The principals interviewed noted that throughout their mentoring experiences managerial tasks were emphasized at the expense of instructional tasks and processes. Various reasons were given for this lack of meaningful instructional focused discussion from mismatched mentor and mentee to the mentors' lack of either knowledge or experience in the instructional arena.

Data from this investigation also indicated participation in mentoring programmes is struggling in its efforts to assist new principals make the connection between what they see in the classrooms on walkthroughs and formal observations and what needs to be happening to improve student achievement. Deeper understanding by beginning principals, of what constitutes 'best practices' in instruction is necessary if enhanced student learning is going to occur.

Also revealed in these findings is that beginning principals are not developing the skills to use data to work with the teachers in making instructional decisions to help all students. These are skills principals leading today's schools must develop quickly in order to impact student achievement (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Mentoring programmes hold promise to bring about these changes but only if we listen to those currently participating in the programmes as they express their needs and concerns to make programme improvements.

The importance of appropriate matches was further emphasized in this data set. Protégés who indicated their mentoring programme lacked in effectiveness were typically principals whose mentor was not from a similar-sized school, but may have been located in close proximity to the protégé or selected for another unknown reason. Additionally, the use of evaluators (superintendents) as mentors did not prove to be advantageous to the skills developed by the mentee nor the trust level needed to enhance communication. Thus, the skill set of the mentor is essential for success of the mentoring experience.

Effective communication between mentor and protégé was another finding identified as a key aspect of developing appropriate mentoring relationships. By using communication skills, enhanced by discussions and reflections, protégés were more apt to translate theory into practice.

Implications for Practice

The study's findings have direct implications for university programmes, state departments of education, school districts, and mentors. One of the most critical aspects of building an effective mentoring programme is ensuring an appropriate match between mentor and protégé. Suggestions from participants in existing programmes indicated mentors should be from a school of similar size to that of the protégé in order to share like experience that would be most beneficial to the protégé. Location was also an important factor when scheduling meetings and observations between the mentor and protégé. Participants also indicated the importance of avoiding placing a protégé with a mentor that served in a supervisory role to the protégé. The protégé needs to have confidence that the mentor is there to help, not to evaluate.

Opinions differed when considering whether the mentor and protégé should be from the same district or from different districts. There were some benefits identified from both situations and the final decision should be contingent upon the comfort level of the protégé. According to the data large districts with enough administrators and resources seemed to have positive results from their existing mentoring programmes. Further examination of these in district mentoring programmes should determine how similar experiences could be created for small rural district to allow for similar results. Such strategies as small size districts cooperatively pooling resources and developing mentoring programmes will result in mentoring programmes where protégés are matched more effectively with mentors with like experiences.

Mentors need training provided by either the State Department of Education or District that provides networking opportunities share what is working within their mentoring relationship and what is not working. These training sessions should focus on the processes and practices that will enhance student learning. The curriculum for this training should be comprehensive in nature and should reflect 'best practices' of instructional strategies as noted in the literature.

Since this research revealed that the AMP programme is no more effective than district-created programmes currently in place, a complete external programme evaluation should be conducted. Furthermore, those in charge of the Missouri Administrator Mentoring programme should listen carefully to the feedback they are receiving from the participants of the programme and make improvements while the programme is still in its infancy. Using the strategies indentified in this inquiry should serve as a guide to create the changes needed to develop an effective programme for all new school leaders.

Additionally, Universities may need to make changes in their programmes to reflect the needs of today's accountability standards. The managerial-style of leadership is often ineffective in bringing about improved student learning. Principals must have the instructional background to be able to lead teachers through school improvement efforts fluidly. Until University programmes have adapted to the changing needs of today's future administrators the preparation they delivery will be lacking in the instructional focus needed.

This investigation raises concerns that many of our new principals are entering the field without the proper preparation. Support for these new school leaders is critical in light of the accountability standards enacted by our state and federal policy-makers. Effective mentoring programmes should be in place to assist all new principals as they begin to create and sustain learning communities, but our current practices need improvement. Current school leaders and policy-makers must not ignore this issue. As they grow into the instructional leaders of the future, new leaders must be supported and encouraged

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