

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORING FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS*

Ramazan Yirci
Dr. Ibrahim Kocabas

This work is produced by The Connexions Project and licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution License †

Abstract

Mentoring is a kind of professional support that has been very popular in training beginner teachers and principals in education and several studies has been done during the last two decades. The purpose of this study was to examine the literature related to mentoring with the emphasis of its benefits for school principals. The article focuses on principal mentoring since preparation of new principals to the position adequately is really crucial in ensuring students are educated in effective schools. The key conclusions in the literature indicate that school principals who were trained through a mentoring process gained great benefits from the mentoring process in the most troublesome period of their early professional life. Key words: Mentoring, new principals, principal mentoring, school.



NOTE: This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of education administration. In addition to publication in the Connexions Content Commons, this module is published in the International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, ¹ Volume 5, Number 2 (April - June, 2010). Formatted and edited in Connexions by Theodore Creighton, Virginia Tech and Janet Tareilo, Stephen F. Austin State University.

1 INTRODUCTION

Educational organizations like other organizations have to employ qualified employees, train them and develop their skills to achieve the educational objectives. Education systems can achieve the objectives by

*Version 1.1: Apr 4, 2010 7:13 am GMT-5

†<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

¹<http://ijelp.expressacademic.org>

the well-trained, well-equipped educational administrators and teachers' effort. Therefore, in today's ever-changing world it is an unavoidable necessity to train school administrators and teachers in accordance with the changing conditions. This necessity not only increases the importance of training educational employees effectively and also forces systems to find more efficient training methods. When it is used in the educational area, especially to train new school principals, mentoring is a significant method, and it provides infinite benefits to all participants in the process.

School administrators are no doubt the first thing that comes to mind when talking about achievement rate of schools. Because success or failure of schools is generally associated with whether the schools are managed well or not. In other words, school success or failure is directly related to principal's achievement or failure. Training new principals as qualified principals require meticulously prepared pre-service and in-service principalship activities. Mentoring is a remarkable model which aims to combine theory with practice in principal training. It develops beginner principals with the help of a senior principal's support and supervision in a real school environment. Thus, mentoring is used by many countries in principal preparing programs. Furthermore, according to the recent literature and research its popularity continues to increase in the educational area.

1.1 Who is 'Mentor' and what is Mentoring?

The origin of the term 'mentor' is based on ancient Greek. When Odysseus, king of Ithaca, went to fight in the Trojan War, he left the care of his son Telemachus to his old and trusted friend Mentor. Mentor served as the teacher and overseer of Odysseus's son. The role of Mentor was not just to raise and care for Telemachus but to prepare him for the responsibilities and tasks ahead. Hence the term 'Mentor' has now become synonymous with the concept of trusted adviser, friend, teacher and wise counselor (Playko, 1991; Shea, 2002; Pask & Joy, 2007).

Mentor is an admirable person because of his professional and personal skills. A mentor helps you to improve your effectiveness in a certain field, shows you how to become an expert in a profession and teaches you how to develop your skills. Mentor's assistance helps you to open new doors (Mason, & Bailey, 2007). As it is defined clearly, a mentor is a person that he or she has the capability of developing people. People reach new horizons because of their mentor's support. Meyer and Maboso (2007) state that a mentor's role has two aspects. First, one is to supply career development opportunities such as coaching, providing challenging assignments, sponsoring advancement, and fostering the mentee's visibility; second, mentors provide psychosocial support such as counseling support and role modeling. Without a mentor, an individual will learn less, more slowly or not at all.

Mentoring is usually seen as a relationship between a senior and a more junior person such as a master and an apprentice relationship. The process in which an experienced, senior colleague helps a novice colleague is called as a mentoring process. Daresh (2004) emphasizes that mentoring is a frequently used model providing personal and professional development in such sectors as education, industry, art and business. According to Daresh, a mentor is a teacher, guide, counsellor, positive role model, wise and experienced supervisor (Daresh, 2004). Mentoring can be applied in many different forms. The mentoring relationship can be formal, informal, short-term or long-term. Mentoring, as a learning partnership, is one of the most effective ways to transfer skills and offer people the opportunity to learn needed skills that allow them to function at a more senior level. It provides workplace learning in a less stressful environment.

Famous and well-known mentor-mentee relationships exist throughout history. For instance, Socrates and Plato, Freud and Jung, Medici and Michelangelo (Wright & Wright, 1987). It is possible to see additional references to historical mentoring relationships in the history. Plato and Aristotle, Aristotle and Great Alexander, Joseph Haydn and Mozart, Joseph Haydn and Beethoven, Diana Ross and Michael Jackson, Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway, Phil Jackson and Michael Jordan are noteworthy names in the list (Eby & Allen, 2007: 7). In Turkish history, it is also possible to see samples of mentoring relationships in the managerial area. 'Atabeg' in the Seljuk period and 'lala' in the Ottoman period were the princes' mentors, and were responsible for caring and educating the prospective king of the country in that time. The princes who were brought up through the mentoring process and by decent mentors ruled the country

very successfully when they became the king (Akyüz, 2001). When we examine the mentor characteristics in Seljuk and Ottoman periods, we see that like their colleagues from different countries, they were honest, trustworthy, self-confident, wise, loyal advisors, role models, tutors, etc. Accordingly, it seems that the characteristics of mentors are universal as the concept of mentoring is discussed in different countries.

1.2 Training Novice Principals through Mentoring

The first years in every profession are always very challenging for all employees. As people cannot know exactly what they will encounter when they are in their new positions, they may feel nervous. The situation is a bit more difficult for new school principals because they are at the top of hierarchical order in schools. Consequently, when compared to beginner teachers, it is more difficult for new principals to find collegial support and assistance to be successful as beginning professionals if they do not have mentors.

Novice principals either feel themselves willing, hopeful, impatient to begin their job or stressful, nervous and or hesitant about the job. This depends on the environment they may encounter in their schools. A new headmaster at the school may encounter problems in the areas of finance, personnel, student-parent relationships, and school administration responsibilities. To be able to overcome all these problems, principal candidates must be prepared adequately before having a principalship position. Mentoring enables principal candidates to acquire necessary administrative skills (Villani, 2006).

Many of the country's most important professions require some kind of simulated learning before licensure can occur. When it comes to the principalship; however, our future leaders are expected to conquer the motorway without any behind-the-wheel experience. University programs alone will never be enough to prepare principals for the day-to-day challenges of the job (Lovely, 2004).

As Lovely (2004) implied above, there are some insufficient points in the traditional methods used to train school principals. Pre-service and in-service education activities which school principal candidates have to take are generally full of theoretical knowledge, and they hardly ever contain practice. Through the process of mentoring, new school principals receive support from an effective and experienced principal in the most troubled period of their professional life. This assistance comes in the form of peer support and real-world applicability. It takes place in a real school environment. By this way, the most problematic period of time in the profession is easily overcome and provides each candidate with actual administrative behaviors, which cannot be learned through pre-service and in-service training can be learned.

Traditional pre-service principalship programs are inadequate to deal with such issues as school-environment relations, performance evaluation of school staff, arranging school budget, improving student achievement and coping with job related stress. The duration of the principal training activities in those programs is usually very limited and novice principals frequently have difficulty in finding a colleague to share their problems. A mentoring model provides an expert as well as a senior principal for a role model to the novice principal. This enables them to cope with school problems as they occur when they are in the early years of their professional careers as school leaders. Simply, good principals are made, not born. However; a person may become a good principal after an effective principal mentoring process. Training new principals adequately and preparing them to the principalship position is very important as qualified school principals foster successful schools. The opposite case may occur if the principal is inadequately prepared for the position of campus administrator, as well. The mentoring process helps principal candidates to gain the necessary leadership skills, thus increasing the effectiveness of the school. Principal candidates have clearer ideas about school development, how to increase student learning, improving public relations and ethical leadership through the process (Southern Regional Education Board, 2007).

1.3 Benefits of Mentoring on Training Novice Principals

Blackman and Fenwick (2000) report that the description of the principal's work has changed extensively and become more complex. Today, the school leader is expected simultaneously to be a servant-leader, an organizational and social architect, an educator, a moral agent, a child advocate and social worker, a community activist, and a crisis-negotiator—all while raising students' standardized test performance.

It is clear that today being a principal is more than just governing the school itself. That is why training principals and developing their instructional leadership skills stand as an important issue for policy makers and governments. At this point, mentoring presents great benefits for all parts if it is used to train new principals for professional development.

According to research, many of newly assigned principals face many difficulties in the first year of the profession, and therefore they feel alone and crushed by innumerable responsibilities. However, the new principals who are matched with an experienced mentor state that they get professional support about their problems from the mentor and consequently, they overcome this troublesome period easier than the ones who do not have mentors (Saunders, 2008).

Mentoring brings benefits to every participant in its practice: mentees, mentors, supervisors and the organization(s) for which they work. Mentees have an opportunity to gain wisdom from someone who has passed through the way before them. Benefits of the mentoring program can be examined in two frames of thought: (1) benefits for new school administrators, (2) personal and professional benefits. Professional benefits are related to getting more familiar with the job, networking, developing managerial skills and establishing better communications. Personal benefits of mentoring include having stronger self-confidence, reducing stress, increasing motivation and learning (Lacey, 2000; Cowan, 2006; Caldwell & Carter, 1993; Allen & Eby, 2007; Wilson & Elman, 1990).

Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) outline the benefits of mentoring in the table below. As it is seen easily in the table, at the end of the mentoring process the organization has more gains than the other parts. That is why the use of mentoring in training new principals will be very beneficial for schools, and they become effective educational organizations.

Benefits of Mentoring

For Mentors	For Mentees	For Organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Value and satisfaction ● Learning experience ● Credit ● Own reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Competence ● Goal setting ● Motivation and satisfaction ● Psychological support ● Creativity ● Communication skills ● Organizational change ● Personal change ● Time effectiveness ● Employability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organizational effectiveness ● Motivation and job satisfaction ● Organizational change ● Recruitment ● Retention ● High-flyers ● Organizational learning ● Organizational culture ● Cost-effectiveness ● Time efficiency ● Development ● Strategic success planning

Table 1

NOTE: Source: Klasen & Clutterbuck (2002) *Implementing Mentoring Schemes*, Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann Publications.

Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) outline the benefits of mentoring in the table above. As it is seen easily in the table, at the end of the mentoring process the organization has more gains than the other parts. That is why the use of mentoring in training new principals will be very beneficial for schools, and they become effective educational organizations.

When the mentoring programs for beginner principals are designed well and implemented carefully according to a certain activity plan, they provide valuable support for new principals and positively affect the retention of these principals. By supporting new principals in their beginning years and helping them develop their skills and knowledge through the mentoring process, it becomes easier to find job satisfaction in their new career and may actually give them reasons to remain in the principalship. In addition, mentoring programs foster new principals' confidence while helping them improve their managerial practice by workplace learning.

1.4 Mentoring Principals in Different Countries

Within most educational organizations principal mentoring is commonly used to help new principals acclimatize to the working environment and their role, to improve their performance and to supply professional-personal help. The act of mentoring principals, as seen in different countries, may well address commonalities as well as differences. Although there are some common aspects in these mentoring programs, it is also possible to see minor differences.

Roberts (2007) points out that the main purpose of the mentoring program is to prepare the novice principals for their new roles. He draws attention to some common points in the mentoring programs used in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, America, Hong Kong, Canada and Switzerland. These common characteristics include helping mentees develop skills to:

- Create a mission statement
- Develop as transformational leaders
- Learn about instructional leadership
- Involve themselves with personnel management
- Become a resource manager
- Interface school and community
- Become a coach and networking specialist

In the preparation of school administrators for the position, mentoring programs are consistently used in Singapore. Accordingly, the selected candidates from among the assistant principals attend administrator education classes at the universities for one year. In addition to this formal education, the principal candidates are matched with a mentor principal. The mentor principals are selected from among experienced, successful, prestigious school principals by the Singapore Ministry of Education. Principal candidates observe the mentor principals in their schools. Singapore has been applying mentoring programs for about 20 years, and it has got a significant experience (Lim, 2004).

England also has a well-structured mentoring program for principal candidates. In 1998, the government constituted an institution named 'The National Faculty for School Leadership'. The purpose of this institution is to train future leaders. Principal candidates study mentoring subjects about strategic development, learning and teaching, managing human and material resources in the school (National College for School Leadership, 2006). Through mentoring programs the new school principals have the opportunity to discuss latest issues, to gain problem-solving skills and to make future plans for school development (National College for School Leadership, 2006).

The mentoring programs in the United States are in place and organized to assist newly appointed principals. Such states as Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi and Pennsylvania have formally organized programs. Mentors and new principals have meetings regularly (Archer, 2006). Principal mentors are selected from the nearby schools as much as possible. This is important to be able to establish easier communication opportunities and meetings between mentor and mentee. While matching mentor and mentee, personal characteristics are taken into consideration (Saunders, 2008). In the United States, there are two important principal associations. These are National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). Saunders reports that both NASSP and NAESP approve the effectiveness of mentoring programs in training new principals efficiently (Saunders, 2008).

The University of Waikoto in New Zealand started a mentoring program for novice principals in 2004. Program participants include willing principal candidates from primary and secondary schools. This program lasts for a year and the participants are expected to attend various discussion groups and three weekend courses for the purpose of providing professional development. In addition, the candidates observe their mentor principals in schools. It helps candidates have a deeper understanding about the role of educational leadership (Leckie, 2005).

In Turkey, there are not any formal mentoring programs used to train school principals. However, candidates who want to become school principals have to take an examination. If they are successful on the exam, they start to work as an assistant principal at school for at least one year (Meb, 2004). During this period, an informal mentoring relationship begins and the principal becomes a mentor for the assistant principal. Since there is no formal mentoring program set by the Turkish Ministry of Education, each school creates its own mentoring program informally (Yirci, 2009: 66- 67).

2 CONCLUSION

As in the other organizations, schools have cultures that are unique to them as well. There are rules and behavior expectations which guide school functioning. Teachers and principals have to obey these rules and behavior forms (Karakose, 2008). The role of school principals has changed greatly in the last years. Today's principals have the responsibility of school success and individual student achievement. The challenge of building and keeping up school improvement efforts leading to improved student achievement for all students requires a lot of knowledge of skills. It is clear that all the skills needed by school leaders cannot be taught through traditional preparatory programs which in the past have focused more on developing managerial skills. Now the focus must be on developing instructional leadership skills and mentoring seems the best way to teach new principals those skills.

It should always be kept in mind that even the best principal-preparation programs do not fully prepare new principals for the new professional responsibilities. For many new school principals, the first years are the most stressful period of their careers. They may feel themselves isolated, lonely, desperate and sometimes unsuccessful about school management. New principals need support from other experienced mentor principals within the school community to be able to bring about positive change in their school effectively. This can be accomplished by a well-organized principal mentoring process and novice school principal learns how to become a good principal in this way.

3 REFERENCES

- Akyüz, Y. (2001) *Turkish education history from beginning to 2001*, (8th ed.) İstanbul: Alfa Puplicatons.
- Allen, T.D., & Eby, L.T. (2007) *The Blackwell Handbook Of Mentoring: A multiple perspectives approach*, Oxford:Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Blackman, M.C.,& Fenwick, L.T. (2000). The principalship: Looking for leaders in a time of change. *Education Week*, 19(29), 46, 68.
- Caldwell, B.J., & Carter, E.M.A. (1993) *The return of the mentor: Strategies for workplace learning*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Cowan, S. L. (2006). *So you want to be mentored: An application workbook for usingn five strategies to get the most out of a mentoring relationship*.Massachusetts: HRD Press.
- Daresh, J.C. (2004). Mentoring school leaders: Professional promise or predictable problems? *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40,(4), 495- 517.
- Karakose, T. (2008) The perceptions of primary school teachers on principal cultural leadership behaviors. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*,8(2), 555–579.
- Klasen, N., & Clutterbuck, D. (2002) *Implementing mentoring schemes*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann Publishing.
- Lacey, K. (2000) *Making mentoring happen: A simple and effective guide to implementing a successful mentoring program*.London: Allen & Unwin.

Leckie, I. (2005) *A study on a professional development pilot programme for aspiring and potential principals*. Unpublished Master Thesis, University of Waikato, School of Education, Hamilton.

Lim, L. H. (2004) Monitoring versus trusting in management: Practices of school principals in Singapore. *Management in Education*, 18 (2), 30- 33.

Lovely, S. (2004) *Staffing the principalship, finding, coaching and mentoring school principals*. Alexandria: ASCD Publications.

Mason, C., & Bailey, E. (2007) *Benefits and pitfalls of mentoring*. Retrieved from <http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/barker>²

MEB (2004a) 'Governing Statute for the Appointment and Rotation of Administrators of the Ministry of Education Institutions', *Official Newspaper* No: 25343.

Meyer, M., & Mabosa, J. (2007). Mentoring as a way to transfer learning and accelerate empowerment. Retrieved from <http://www.workinfo.com/free/Downloads/33.htm>³

National College for School Leadership, (2006). . *Coaching and mentoring new headteachers*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org.uk/programmes-index/gmchallengeleadership-index/gm-coachingnewheads.htm>⁴

Pask R., & Joy B. (2007). *Mentoring-Coaching: A guide for education professionals*. Glasgow: Open University Press.

Playko, M. A. (1991). Mentors for administrators: Support for the instructional leader. *Theory into Practice*, 30(2), 124- 127.

Roberts, B. (2007). *The useful elements of pre-principalship preparation*. Unpublished Master Thesis, School of Education. Hamilton, University of Waikato. New Zealand.

Saunders, G. F. (2008). *Principals' perceptions Of mentoring In Montana's Aa, A And B High Schools*. Unpublished Doctorate Dissertation, Montana State University, Montana, The United States of America.

Shea, G. F. (2002). *How to develop successful mentor behaviors*. (3rd ed. California: Crisp Publications.

Southern Regional Education Board (2007). Retrieved from <http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/2007pubs/>⁵

Villani, S. (2006). *Mentoring and induction programs that support new principals*. London: Corwin Press.

Wilson, J.A., & Elman, N.S. (1990). *Organizational benefits of mentoring*, *Academy of Management*, 4(4), 88 – 94.

Wright, C. A., & Wright, S. D. (1987). The role of mentors in the career development of young professionals. *Family Relations*, 36(2), 204- 208.

Yirci, R. (2009) *The use of mentoring in education and a new model proposal to train new principals in Turkey*, Unpublished Master Thesis, University of Firat, Elazig, Turkey

²<http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/barker/5377/Mentoring/BenefitsAndPitfallsMasonandBailey.pdf%20%20>

³<http://www.workinfo.com/free/Downloads/33.htm>

⁴<http://www.ncsl.org.uk/programmes-index/gmchallengeleadership-index/gm-coachingnewheads.htm>

⁵http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/2007pubs/07v05_mentoring_insideandcover.pdf