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Principal Mentoring

By Jay Malone

Although almost everyone agrees that principals need formal training to prepare for their positions, few agree on what the nature of this training should be. Advanced university education may teach examples of leadership behaviors, but it is unlikely to transmit the practical knowledge and characteristic behaviors that are the hallmark of successful principals.

Increasing evidence shows that school leaders, throughout all stages of their careers, can benefit from a mentoring system in which a seasoned leader helps the intern or protege place theory and praxis in the context of experience. When asked to identify a vital component of their preparation, principals typically identify other school leaders as their primary source of help in becoming a school leader themselves, and they confirm that these mentoring relationships served them throughout their careers, not just initially.

Renewed interest in mentoring harkens back to a time in higher education when a master teacher, called a "regent," would shepherd a student through the university years, serving as the student's guide and role model. This system fell away in the 18th and 19th centuries with the increasing specialization of knowledge and the creation of the modern university. Subsequently, professional training narrowed in focus and became depersonalized as students lost the unbroken thread that could lead them through a labyrinthine educational system.

This anomie in education continues unabated but can be offset by mentoring, which provides beginning principals with a sustaining relationship in which they work with an individual--a mentor--who can help them define their approach to educational leadership.

The need for mentoring relationships has become even more evident as studies show that graduate training alone does not necessarily translate into better-led schools. Recent research indicates that when professional development includes a mentorship, novice principals gain a higher degree of effectiveness that endures throughout their professional career.

Unfortunately, mentorships are often ad hoc relationships, lacking any type of systematic implementation. Part of the problem is that mentoring and internships lack a theoretical base that can

allow for the institutionalized support of mentor/protege relationships.

The works reviewed here provide support for the efficacy of mentorships and share findings concerning how to establish carefully structured mentoring relationships.

Gary M. Crow and *L. Joseph Matthews* discuss the parallels between mentoring and dynamic leadership and assert that mentoring relationships can benefit established principals, as well as those just starting out.

Paula A. Cordeiro and *Ellen Smith-Sloan* examine the rise in mentorships and internships in educational administration and the impact that such programs have on educational leaders.

Alton C. Crews and *Sonya Weakley* describe a model for mentoring that allows for the systematic implementation of mentor/protege relationships and highlights the importance of a peer coach.

Thomas J. Geismar and *colleagues* describe an instrument that assists in the selection of mentors for principal interns.

Finally, *Martin Haberman* and *Vicky Dill* detail the characteristics of star principals in urban schools and the necessary steps in training individuals to become star principals in their own right.

Crow, Gary M., and Matthews, L. Joseph. **Finding One's Way: How Mentoring Can Lead to Dynamic Leadership**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc., 1998. 187 pages. [ED 414 263](#).
Available from: Corwin Press, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91329. 805-499-0271. \$27.95.

Recognizing that mentoring should extend throughout a principal's tenure, Crow and Matthews argue that socialization and mentoring should take place throughout one's career. They introduce the concept of mentoring and provide a model of socialization that forms the context in which mentoring occurs.

Crow and Matthews describe the socialization and mentoring processes of aspiring school principals, including those who are involved in principal internships. Principals, especially those who are working in reform-minded school districts, have special socialization and mentoring needs, the authors say.

They assert that principals in all stages of their professional lives need the assistance and companionship that mentors can provide. Since these relationships should not be left to chance, the mentoring process should be systematic in scope. The authors describe such a process and issue a plea that universities and school districts develop formal mentoring programs.

Major issues of planning, mentor selection, matching, training, and evaluation occupy the authors' attention. The monograph focuses on mentoring assistant principals, socialization strategies, career development, professional and psychosocial development, and networking awareness. Some components of mentoring examined at length include goals, directions, mile markers, methods, and content.

Crow and Matthews argue that mentoring is needed at each stage of a principal's career and that such programs not only serve to socialize principals and make them more dynamic leaders, but also enrich teaching and learning throughout a school system.

The authors close with four caveats: good principals do not always make good mentors; mentoring expectations should not be set unrealistically high; some principals obtain mentors more easily than others; and some mentors, out of jealousy, diminish the accomplishments of their proteges.

Cordeiro, Paula A., and Smith-Sloan, Ellen. "**Apprenticeships for Administrative Interns: Learning to Talk Like a Principal.**" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 18-22, 1995. 36 pages. [ED 385 014](#). Available from: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. \$8.92. 1-800-443-3742.

The move toward the systematization of mentoring has become all the more necessary with the rise in internship programs in educational administration. Cordeiro and Smith-Sloan discuss the lack of empirical evidence regarding the effects of internships on both the intern's learning and the mentor-administrator expert and focus on what is unique about internship learning.

The authors examine how internships affect the intern and the mentor, analyze when reflection occurs during the internship, and ask how an internship influences the quality of administrator preparation.

Using a naturalistic design, researchers collected, over a two-year period, data through indepth taped interviews with interns and principals, tapes of discussion sessions between interns and mentors, and artifacts consisting of interns' logs, journals, and other relevant documents. The sample for the study included 18 school principals and the 18 individuals who served as their interns.

All 36 participants rated the internship as extremely important in their professional development. Mentors stated that they felt confident discussing the intern's abilities and areas that needed further growth because they had worked with and observed the interns over a period of one to two years. Both students and mentors observed that the success of the internship depended upon the person with whom the intern was working and the kinds of responsibilities the mentor assigned to the intern.

Interns acquired knowledge in four areas: (1) basic knowledge about day-to-day building operations; (2) strategies for information collection and problem-solving; (3) effective ways to work with a variety of adults; and (4) how to manage their time given multiple tasks.

Cordeiro and Smith-Sloan also discuss an intern transition model, which describes the phases interns pass through as they move from a state of limited understanding of the work of school administrators to a state of high self- and cultural-awareness.

Crews, Alton C., and Weakley, Sonya. **Making Leadership Happen: The SREB Model for Leadership Development.** Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board, 1996. 73 pages. [ED 404 723](#). Available from: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. \$13.38. 1-800-443-3742.

Competence in the principal's office becomes all the more critical as governments and school districts increasingly turn over more control to local schools. Crews and Weakley describe a model that promotes a systemwide process of mentoring. The model, developed by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), was pilot-tested and refined to help educators develop leadership skills.

The SREB model incorporates four strategies: teamwork, personal planning, building community collaboration, and coaching and mentoring. The last element calls for an external peer coach (from a different school system) who is a knowledgeable, veteran education leader and has demonstrated exemplary leadership skills.

The peer coach serves as a technical advisor to a team, helping team members develop the best strategies to meet district goals. The coach also helps team members collect information from leadership profiles and reflective learning journals, and encourages members to develop plans for personal improvement. The coach attends training sessions with the team and visits members periodically in the home district. During these sessions, the coach observes and advises team members about personal and team goals.

Because the mentor is not a part of the team's school system, the proteges do not perceive the mentor as a threat or fear being judged. However, the coaches are familiar enough with the team's district that they can provide insights that address unique circumstances present in that district.

Geismar, Thomas J.; Morris, John D.; and Lieberman, Mary G. "**Selecting Mentors for Principals Interns.**" *Journal of School Leadership* 10 (May 2000): 233-47. Available from: Roman and Littlefield

Publishing Group, 15200 NBN Way, Blue Ridge Summit, PA 17214. \$31.00 (includes S&H). 800-462-6420.

An obstacle to any kind of systematic mentoring program is the somewhat haphazard development of the mentor/protege relationship. Many times this search is initiated by the protege or is carried out by a local authority without much thought given to who could best fill the role of mentor. Geismar and colleagues describe an instrument that can assist in the selection of mentors for principal interns.

Although administrative internships have many potential benefits, internships do not consistently contribute to interns' leadership development. In fact, many principals report that their internships were the weakest component of their administrative preparation due to a lack of compatibility with the mentor, a reluctance by their school mentor to assign responsibility, and the tendency of internships to ignore important facets of principal preparation.

Mentoring, as part of an internship experience, may help individuals to function more effectively in a new leadership role by assisting them in establishing a network of peers and experienced professionals who can provide support and guidance.

The authors examine whether standards already used to assess principals' competence could be effectively employed in the selection of principal mentors, thereby enhancing the value of internships. For the study, 19 competencies for basic and high-performing principals were identified. These competencies were then arranged into six clusters: purpose and direction, cognitive skills, consensus management, quality enhancement, organization, and communication.

Geismar and colleagues focus on the traits of mentor principals and how they ranked principal competencies so as to create a predictive measure of mentoring skill.

Five clusters of mentoring traits were examined and then modified by a panel of five principals from the Broward County, Florida, public schools. These clusters became the criteria for successful mentorship. The instrument was then mailed to all 164 principals in Broward County; 91 returned questionnaires were used to assess the instrument.

Results revealed several subsets of predictor variables that could be used to classify principals as either mentors or non-mentors. The prediction model that most accurately classified the total sample consisted of two principal competencies: cognitive skills and quality enhancement. Mentors were most accurately classified by a model consisting of purpose and direction, the authors concluded.

Haberman, Martin, and Dill, Vicky. **"Selecting Star Principals for Schools Serving Children in**

Poverty." *Instructional Leadership* 12:1 (January 1999): 1-5, 11-12. [ED 437 723](#). Available from: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. \$4.46. 1-800-443-3742.

This article hinges on the observation that even the most dysfunctional urban school districts include some highly effective schools. It examines the factors behind this success and concludes that the star principals who lead effective schools engage in certain behaviors that are undergirded by a firmly held ideology.

This ideology of success includes the following beliefs:

- The safety and security of everyone is an absolute prerequisite.
- I am here to help teachers improve students' learning.
- Children of poverty and their families must be connected to all kinds of health and human services.
- For me to be accountable for instruction, I must be involved in the selection and assignment of new teachers to the building.
- The reason I am paid more than teachers is not because I work harder, it is because I am accountable and responsible for the effectiveness of the total school.

Haberman and Dill claim that it is a waste of time to train individuals to learn this ideology. Star principals have already internalized this world view and possess the core of beliefs that characterize highly effective principals. The authors cite a study of graduate programs in educational administration that showed training seemed to have little or no effect on attributes that characterize effective schools. Nevertheless, individuals who possess the essential ideology can be trained to become star principals if their training includes an on-the-job internship in which the administrator in residence can be coached weekly by a star principal.

Haberman and Dill examine what the purpose of such coaching should be, the importance of motivating and supporting teachers, the need for star principals to model and coach teachers in innovative ways, the desirability of reaching parents and using them as the teachers' best resource in educating students, and strategies for evaluating teachers and helping them grow professionally.

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