CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

It is the author's opinion that the ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of a school lies in its administrative staff. School systems must ensure the administrative staff is supported, qualified, knowledgeable, and at times, assisted. School systems readily ensure these things with new teachers through mentoring programs. However, this frequently stops when one crosses into administration, an area where one is often alone to learn the ropes.

Need for the Study

Through 2005, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projected employment of administrators in education may increase 10%-20% (Blackman & Fenwick, 2000; Borja, 2001). This projected increase is due to a large number of current administrators reaching retirement age in addition to growing school populations resulting in new administrative positions. With the increase in positions comes an increased need to find qualified individuals to fill those positions. Faced with these numbers, national groups began calling for changes in leadership preparation programs as well as recruitment practices to try to teach and attract qualified candidates (West, 2002).

School districts are tasked with filling many vacancies with qualified administrators. Once filled, the next task is to support, develop, and retain qualified administrators. Various programs to identify, train, support, and maintain the novice administrator may be more crucial as job openings for administrators continue to rise. Support groups, coaches, and formal and informal mentors are a few of the means of possibly assisting these new administrators (Ginty, 1995).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, that practicing administrators have towards mentoring. Administrators included

principals, assistant principals, males, females, novice (three years or less experience) and experienced (more than 3 years experience), elementary, middle, and high school. This study examined administrators' opinions, beliefs, and attitudes on the value and need for mentoring, mentor programs, and type or types of mentoring, if any, that is needed for their position.

Research Questions

There were ten research questions for this study. They were:

1. What are the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, practicing administrators have towards mentoring for their job assignment?

2. Is there a statistically significant difference between men and women with regards to their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, towards mentoring for their job assignment?

3. Is there a statistically significant difference between novice and experienced administrators with regards to their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, towards mentoring for their job assignment?

4. Is there a statistically significant difference between principals and assistant principals with regards to their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, towards mentoring for their job assignment?

5. Is there a statistically significant difference between administrators at various levels-elementary, middle, and high- with regards to their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, towards mentoring for their job assignment?

6.   Is there a statistically significant difference between administrators of different ethnic backgrounds with regards to their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, towards mentoring for their job assignment?

7.   Is there a statistically significant difference between administrators who have and have not received formal mentoring with regards to their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, towards mentoring for their job assignment?

8.   Is there a statistically significant difference between administrators who have and have not received informal mentoring with regards to their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, towards mentoring for their job assignment?

9.   Is there a statistically significant difference between administrators who have and have not served as a formal mentor with regards to their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, towards mentoring for their job assignment?

10.   Is there a statistically significant difference between administrators who have and have not served as an informal mentor with regards to their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, towards mentoring for their job assignment?

Overview of Methods

Permission to complete the study was granted from the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech (see Appendix A). The study conducted was a random, online survey of public school practicing principals and assistant principals (with the exception of the 15 surveyed in the

pilot sample to test the instrument) in the state of Virginia. The participants remained

confidential as no identifying information was included on the survey. The data was compared

and analyzed to draw general conclusions with regards to administrators' opinions, beliefs, and

attitudes, including perceived value, towards mentoring. The data was further analyzed to

determine if statistically significant differences exist between: men and women, novice and

experienced administrators, principals and assistant principals, elementary, middle, and high

school administrators, administrators of various ethnic backgrounds, administrators who have

and have not received formal and informal mentoring, and administrators who have and have not

served as a formal and informal mentor. All data was coded and analyzed using the SPSS

software.

Theoretical Framework

The word mentor has its roots in Greek mythology. Homer recounted that when

Odysseus, King of Ithaca, set off for the Trojan War, he entrusted the care of his son,

Telemachus, to his servant/advisor Mentor (Carden, 1990; West, 2002). Homer gave us the name

Mentor, which commonly refers to someone with more experience who teaches someone with

less experience (Crow & Matthews, 1998). Homer outlined three requirements for Mentor as he

taught Telemachus those things that would make him a ruler (Daresh, 1995). First, Mentor was

to serve as tutor. Second, he was asked to share his wisdom regarding the world. Third, Mentor

was to be a companion as Telemachus passed into adulthood. This aspect of mentoring has also

led to the word protégé, from the French term protegere, meaning one who is protected by a

person with experience and influence (Crow & Matthews).

There are two types of mentors, primary and secondary. Crow and Matthews (1998)

define primary mentors as those who provide a wide scope of assistance and in-depth mentoring.

Primary mentors mentor the protégé in professional, career, and personal matters both inside and outside of the professional role (Crow & Matthews). Secondary mentors provide a more limited scope and degree of mentoring because they assist the protégé in technical skills, knowledge, or processes (Crow & Matthews). Mentoring situations in education may incorporate either a primary mentor role or a secondary mentor role. As well, mentoring relationships can be either formal (official program, assignment, etc.) or informal (calling others when you need it, touching base at meetings, etc.)

Mentors in the field of education are asked to take on a variety of roles in working with their protégés, whether they are novice teachers or administrators (Barnett, 1995). Literature on mentoring is full of definitions of the roles and functions to be fulfilled by mentors. These definitions include but are not limited to teacher, coach, role model, trainer, protector, sponsor, and colleague (Crow & Matthews, 1998). A critical aspect of the mentoring process is the development of a relationship where mutual trust and respect exist. Developing a personal relationship with a colleague who is a novice in the field is the hallmark of mentoring (Barnett). Whatever the specific definition, the element that appears to serve as the foundation of any conceptualization of mentorship is the fact that this activity is part of the nurturing needed by adults at different career and life stages (Daresh & Playko, 1990).

Although mentoring for administrators has traditionally come in the form of a preservice internship, continuing in-service education once a job has begun may be of great assistance for an administrator. Evidence shows that school leaders, throughout all stages of their careers, can benefit from a mentoring system in which a seasoned leader helps the protégé place theory and practice in the context of experience (Malone, 2000-2001). The mentoring process offers hope

for those who seek to be leaders when the world around them does not always respond positively (Playko, 1991).

Effective leadership is critical for the success of an organization, especially in schools. Preservice preparation is crucial to ensure future leaders are prepared to meet all the challenges of their new position. Mentoring does take place in preservice preparation programs, usually in the form of an internship advisor. It is for this reason that literature on preservice preparation is included.

According to Lauder (2000), there are as many as one-fourth of current administrators who are near retirement and there are not enough skilled, trained, and qualified leaders waiting in the wings to take their place. The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) met and reviewed administrative training at the preservice level (Baugh, 2003). One recommendation was that preparation programs include more clinical approaches to learning. The UCEA concluded that adults learn better through on-the-job training in real life situations.

The first year on the job is crucial for many reasons, including socialization. This means learning the ropes, making connections, and applying what has been learned in daily job situations. During the first year on the job, leaders are often trying to fit into their new environment and this offers districts an opportunity to influence the behaviors of its new leaders (Normore, 2003). Induction programs have recently become synonymous with mentoring as they both seek to provide an experienced colleague who can assist in teaching, coaching, and guiding a new leader through his or her first year (Lashway, 2003). Lashway suggested the following to ensure a good induction program for new leaders: (a) helping leaders stay focused on the big picture, (b) including more than one-to-one mentoring (portfolios, study groups, leader

academies, workshops), and (c) embedding induction (learning and improving) into the culture, not just a one-shot activity.

Induction or mentoring programs can be very beneficial for all parties involved. It may be for that reason some recent changes have been made in many areas including state, university, and professional associations. Ohio has a first-year academy built on leadership, mentoring, and portfolio development (Lashway, 2003). Kentucky and Louisiana offer a licensure system where full certification comes only after a successful first year as an administrator. Universities are pairing up with schools to provide guidance to new administrators and professional associations like the National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP) provide workshops, assessments, and training for new leaders (Lashway, 2003). School divisions also need to focus on 'growing their own' and choosing people to pursue administrative degrees based on qualities and skills.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework
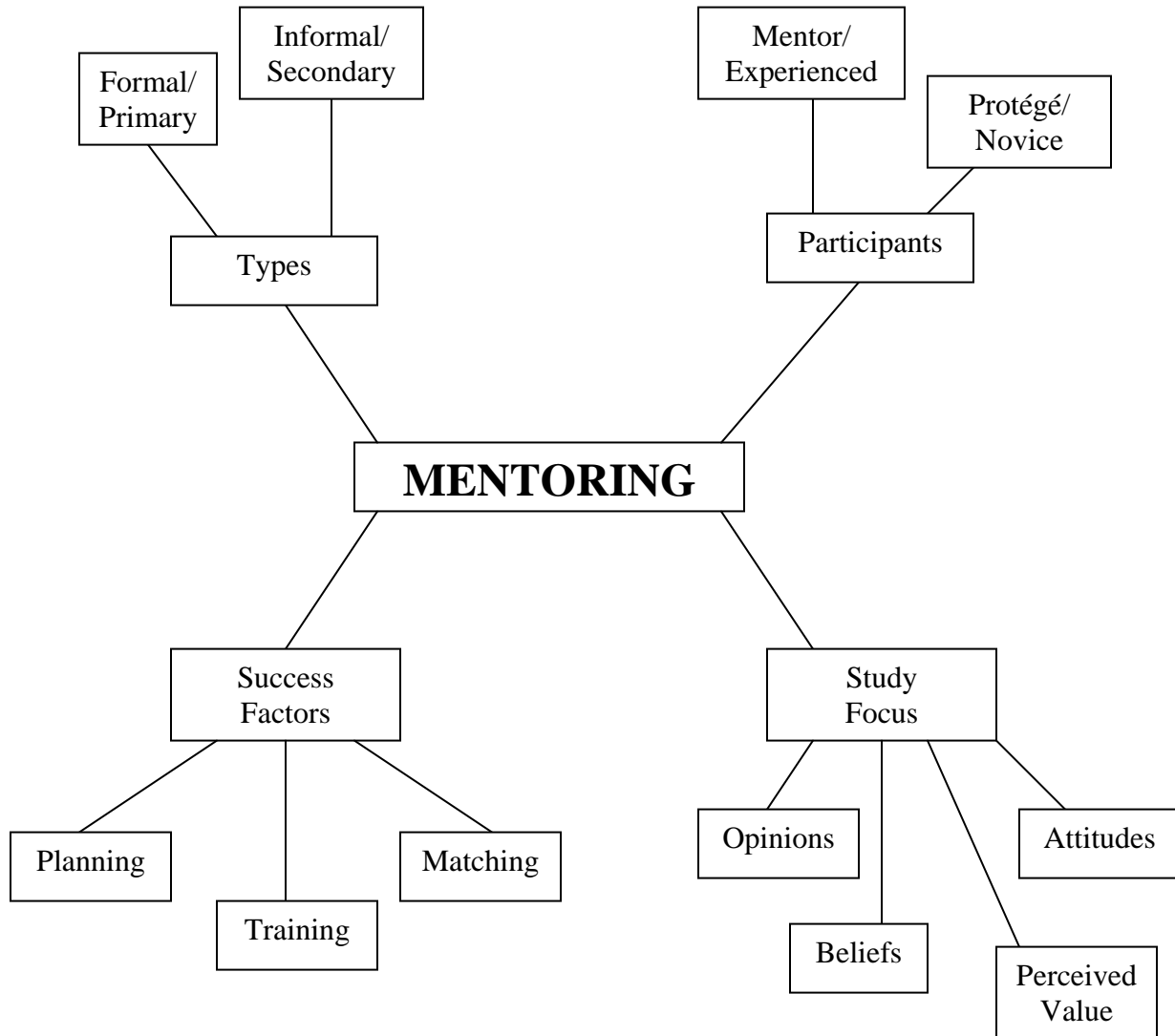
Definitions

For the purpose of this study, several key terms were defined. In some cases, several variations on the definition were presented with the one selected for this research noted at the end.

Experienced Administrator

- a principal or assistant principal with more than three years of experience in administration.

- According to the Virginia School Board Association (2005), "a person employed as a principal, assistant principal, or supervisor…shall serve three years in such position in the same school division before acquiring continuing contract status as principal, assistant principal, or supervisor" (p.179).

Mentor

- a trusted counselor or guide; tutor, coach (Websters p. 725).

- a person who oversees the career development of another, usually junior, through teaching, counseling, supporting, protecting, and at times promoting or sponsoring (Zey, 1984).

- a teacher, coach, role model, developer, gate keeper, protector, sponsor, and successful leader (Gehrke, 1986).

For the purpose of this study, mentor will be defined as a more-experienced person who assumes the responsibility of assisting, coaching, and teaching a less-experienced person.

Mentoring

- a partnership that links a senior, more experienced person, the mentor, with a less experienced and usually chronologically younger person, the mentee, in professions, other organizations, and almost any area of human endeavor (Matters, p.3)

- a dynamic process in which mentors and protégés move through several stages, phases, or levels…a progression from protégé dependence at the beginning of the relationship to autonomy and self-reliance as the protégé grows into a colleague and peer (Barnett, p. 45).

- a relationship of ongoing professional development provided by a coach or mentor (Bloom et.al., 2003).

- the establishment of a personal relationship for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance (Ashburn et.al., 1987).

For the purposes of this study, mentoring is defined as an ongoing relationship, formal or informal, where one person assists, coaches, and teaches another.

Novice Administrator

- a principal or assistant principal with three years or less experience in administration

- According to the Virginia School Board Association (2005), "a person employed as a principal, assistant principal, or supervisor…shall serve three years in such position in the same school division before acquiring continuing contract status as principal, assistant principal, or supervisor" (p.179).

Preservice Internship

- advanced professional experience within the preservice program—usually occurs in conjunction with a college or graduate course and/or part of degree requirements.

Protégé

- one who is protected or trained or whose career is furthered by a person of experience, prominence, or influence (Mish, p. 936).

- a less-experienced person needing to acquire understandings of building operations, problem-solving strategies, interpersonal skills, and time-management techniques (Cordeiro & Smith-Sloan, 1995).

Protégé and mentee are synonymous terms for the purpose of this study.

Limitations/Assumptions

There were some limitations and assumptions of this study. They were:

1. There is never any guarantee with a mass survey that there will be an ample return rate. For this study, a return rate of 100% was the goal.

2. The survey was distributed in May which is a very busy time for school administrators. This may in turn affect the return rate.

3. The survey was limited to a random sample of practicing principals and assistant principals at all levels in all public schools in Virginia.

4. The combination of respondents that were males, females, novice administrators, experienced administrators, principals, assistant principals, elementary, middle, and high school levels may not be equally representative of the entire population.

Significance of the Study

The job expectations of today's administrators reach far beyond managing the building and all of its components. Today's administrators are expected to be instructional leaders. They are expected "to understand effective instructional strategies, regularly observe and coach

classroom teachers, and be able to analyze student achievement data to make more effective

instructional decisions" (Anthes, 2002, p.1). Policies surrounding the recruitment, preparation,

and retention of school leaders need to be reexamined. The State Action for Education

Leadership Project (SAELP) is currently working with 15 states, including Virginia, to develop

policies for developing high-quality school leadership (Anthes; Lashway, 2003-4). Many of

these 15 identified states are exploring mentoring programs (Anthes) to provide new

administrators the support they need during their first year on the job. SAELP is also hopeful the

use of mentoring will reduce the turnover rate during the first five years on the job.

The benefits of a mentoring program for mentors, protégés, and school districts could be

numerous. They include but are not limited to greater job satisfaction, increased peer

recognition, practice in lifelong learning, exposure to new ideas, effective communication,

collaboration, reflective thinking, seeing theory being put into practice, learning the tricks of the

trade, reduced isolation, higher motivation, and an establishment of a peer network for support

and/or job advancement. Mentoring programs for new teachers are abundant, but most training

for administrators comes in the form of a preservice internship or on-the-job experiences.

Data indicate that graduate training alone does not translate into better-led schools. This

increases the need for the development of mentoring relationships at the administrative level.

According to Malone (2000-01), "recent research indicates that when professional development

includes a mentorship, novice principals gain a higher degree of effectiveness that endures

throughout their professional careers" (p.1). There is a shortage of qualified aspiring principals

and a shortage of competent practicing administrators wishing to move up to higher level

positions. According to Malone (2001-02), this is a result of record student enrollment, the

retirement of an estimated 40 % of principals in the next several years, and increased demands

being placed on principals in today's schools. This study will seek to understand current

opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, of principals and assistant principals

with regards to the possible benefits of mentoring administrators.