

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter presents summary of results, discussion of findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Results

From the results of research question one, the majority of respondents agree or strongly agree ($M = 92.8$) that mentoring is valuable and helpful. The following components of a mentor program were “very important” according to the respondents: gender matching (67.9%) and mentor older in age (69.1%). The following types of mentoring needed would be “very helpful” according to the respondents: supervision and evaluation (77.2%), scheduling (64.8%), special education (68.5%), working with parents (59.9%), working with teachers (65.4%), school management (55.6%), finance and accounting (58.6%), personnel decisions (56.2%), discipline (56.2%), and focusing on the big picture (56.8%).

Research questions two through ten analyzed results for statistically significant differences among various groups for the three sections of the survey. Statistical significance was determined at $\alpha < .05$ for each analysis of variance between the groups. There were four items on the survey where a statistically significant difference was found between gender. They were formal training of mentors ($p(F) = .032$), matching ($p(F) = .042$), same school location ($p(F) = .036$), and assessment and grading ($p(F) = .007$). A statistically significant difference was found for one item when comparing novice and experienced administrators; same school location ($p(F) = .026$). There were four items on the survey where a statistically significant difference was found between principals and assistant principals. They were: curriculum ($p(F) = .045$), paperwork and record-keeping ($p(F) = .027$), school management ($p(F) = .008$), and personnel decisions ($p(F) = .045$). A statistically significant difference was

found for one item between administrators of various levels; learning the daily ‘ins and outs’ ($p(F) = .038$). A statistically significant difference was found for one item between administrators of various ethnic backgrounds; mentoring is helpful ($p(F) = .042$).

There were two items on the survey where a statistically significant difference was found between administrators who have and have not received formal mentoring. They were diverse needs of students ($p(F) = .038$) and special education ($p(F) = .033$). There were no statistically significant differences found on any items between administrators who have and have not received informal mentoring. There were three items on the survey where a statistically significant difference was found between administrators who have and have not served as a formal mentor. They were mentoring is valuable ($p(F) = .017$), time for discussion together ($p(F) = .003$), and making connections with other administrators ($p(F) = .038$). There were five items on the survey where a statistically significant difference was found between administrators who have and have not served as an informal mentor. They were mentor in a superior position ($p(F) = .046$), mentor at same school level ($p(F) = .005$), mentor older in age ($p(F) = .030$), developing a vision ($p(F) = .032$), and communication ($p(F) = .020$). It is important to note that most analyses (393/414, 94.9%) found no statistically significant differences between the various groups.

Discussion of Findings

Daresh (2002) indicates that there are four myths regarding mentor/mentee matching. They are gender, school level, age, and geographical proximity. In this study, gender matching (67.9%) and mentor older in age (69.1%) were rated as “very important” by the respondents. Additionally, statistically significant differences existed with gender and matching, gender and geographic proximity (same school location), novice and experienced administrators and

geographic proximity (same school location), administrators who have and have not served as an informal mentor and geographic proximity (same school location), and administrators who have and have not served as an informal mentor and mentor older in age. In the open-ended responses, a total of ten respondents added comments regarding at least one of these four myths.

While respondents considered these important components and they may actually have a personal preference for same gender, someone who is older, or someone in the same school, these components are in fact myths (Daresh, 2002). In practice, these components do not make a difference in terms of a successful mentoring relationship. According to Daresh, one must remember “the primary role of a mentor is not to know all the answers but rather to work with a protégé to develop common understandings and solutions to concerns, issues, and problems that might occur in practice” (p.59). This type of relationship can occur regardless of gender, school level, age, or geographic proximity. However, personal observation suggests, that in reality, it would be difficult for an older person to take advice from a younger person, no matter how many years of experience that person may have.

Scheduling (64.8%) and special education (68.5%) were two areas of need for mentoring rated “very helpful” by a majority of the respondents. Daresh (2002) also indicates these two areas are necessary for mentoring. Lashway (2003) suggests incorporation of “focusing on the big picture” into the mentoring relationship and the respondents agreed (56.8%). A statistically significant difference existed between administrators who have and have not served as a formal mentor in terms of making connections with other administrators ($p(F) = .038$). Crow and Matthews (1998), Playko (1995), and West (2002) all agree that making connections with other administrators is important, critical, and can be accomplished through a positive mentoring relationship.

Eight respondents commented that they had served as mentors and two of these respondents added they also received benefits from the relationship. Daresh (2002) indicates that mentors can benefit too. Eleven respondents added additional comments regarding increased collaboration and decreased isolation as a result of the mentoring relationship but also added a need for trust and open dialogue. These are positive results and necessary components of a mentoring relationship also supported by Cordeiro & Smith-Sloan (1995), Daresh & Playko (1995), Gaskill (1993), Ginty (1995), and Playko (1995).

Another important finding of this study that supports the literature is that the mentor needs to be qualified, knowledgeable, and respected, not just experienced (Bey & Holmes, 1992; Daresh, 2002). Five respondents added additional comments in the open-ended response about qualifications of the mentor. Five respondents felt the program and matching process needed to be flexible and not a “one size fits all” approach. Daresh agrees and says that the matching and program should be “based on an analysis of professional goals, interpersonal styles and values, and the learning needs of both parties” (p.62).

Six respondents added comments regarding the need for a mentor in times of transition like those new to a school, new to a district, or new to a position. This mirrors research of Crow and Matthews (1998) who designate three times a mentor is needed: when one transitions from the classroom to assistant principal, when one transitions from assistant principal to principal, and when one transitions to a new school, district, or state. The survey respondents, Crow and Matthews, and Reyes (2003) agree that a mentor/mentee relationship would be beneficial to anyone during these transition times.

Implications for Practice

The participants in this study perceived mentoring to be valuable and necessary for their success as an administrator. The results indicate that a mentoring experience, formal or informal, would be rewarding and beneficial in meeting the needs of administrators.

Implications for future practice should be centered on creating, establishing, and maintaining effective and meaningful mentoring programs and mentoring relationships for administrators.

Careful consideration must first and foremost be given to the requirements of a mentoring program; formal or informal, required or optional, during school time or out of school time, etc. It is clear from the participants in this study and literature that the program should be flexible enough to meet the needs of both the mentor and mentee and should not be a “one size fits all” approach. It is only in allowing this flexibility that the full benefit and meaning will be achieved from the relationship and the program.

Although some areas were overwhelmingly indicated as areas of need for mentoring (supervision and evaluation, scheduling, special education, working with parents, working with teacher, school management, finance and accounting, personnel decisions, discipline, focusing on the big picture), the type of and extent of mentoring needed on these and other areas will vary from mentee to mentee. Similarly, type of and extent of expertise on these and other areas will vary from mentor to mentor. It would be important for divisions to complete a needs assessment for each mentee to ensure they are matched with a mentor of appropriate expertise.

The logistical components of a mentor program must also be considered. According to the participants in this study and literature, critical components to be addressed include matching, knowledge level of the mentor, training of the mentor, time commitment required, and meaningful, open, dialogue. Addressing these components will help ensure a successful and

meaningful mentoring experience. This study's primary focus was to understand the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, that Virginia principals and assistant principals have towards mentoring for their job assignment. It is clear from the participants that mentoring is needed and valuable, that logistical components of a program must be carefully planned, and that there are distinct areas of need in terms of mentoring.

The job of school administrator continues to grow more demanding almost on a daily basis. As a record number of administrators near retirement age, school divisions must have prepared administrators ready to assume those positions. However, school divisions must also find ways to support those administrators after the job begins. Prince (2004) states that "if districts want to recruit, hire, and retain the best school leaders, a mentoring program...can assist both new principals and aspiring principals" (p.29). School divisions should listen to the voice of existing research and the voice of these participants and consider implementation of a structured, formal or informal, mentoring program to recruit, support, and sustain quality administrators.

Recommendations for Future Research

Literature identifies the increasing demands on administrators and understands the importance of their role within a school and school division. The literature includes research that identifies the need for and value of mentoring programs, components of the program that need to be considered, and areas of focus for mentoring. However, the numbers of research studies that support this are limited in scope and sequence. This study examined the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, including perceived value, that Virginia principals and assistant principals have towards mentoring for their job assignment. The recommendations for future research are based on the literature, current research, and results of this study.

First, since this study was done in May and a response rate of 31% resulted, there exists a need to repeat this study in a different time of the school year. It would be important to try and gain a higher response rate and then compare the findings to this study to examine similarities and differences. Additionally, this study found approximately 5% of analyses resulting in significant differences. In research, 5% can commonly be attributed to chance, measurement error, instrument error, etc. Therefore, it is even more important to replicate this study for similarities and differences as well as statistical significance.

Second, additional study needs to be done to examine the myths of matching with regards to gender, school level, age, and geographic proximity. A deeper understanding is needed of why administrators value these as so important, yet research indicates they matter not in practice. Of special significance would be to understand why people feel these things are so important. It would be necessary to understand these further so school divisions would know how to address these myths in terms of the matching process.

Third, a study to address the matching process is necessary. It is necessary to have further understanding on what is important, how to balance personal preferences of gender, age, etc. with personality, beliefs, and philosophy. The need for a good fit between mentor/mentee was repeatedly mentioned by the literature and the participants. In many instances, the matching can make or break the entire mentoring experience. This area needs further investigation.

Fourth, several areas of statistical significance were determined between several different groups. Additional study is warranted to investigate these differences further. It would be important to understand these differences so divisions and mentors could take these differences into account when planning programs and developing relationships.

Fifth, a study analyzing existing mentor programs to gain further insight into the logistical components to include, areas of mentoring accomplished, and reasons for success or failure.

Sixth, a case study of a pilot or newly created mentor program would be valuable. It would be extremely revealing to study the whole process from conception to implementation to assessment. This study would yield a much richer and deeper understanding of how to implement a program, what pitfalls to avoid, and what successes to include. Of additional value would be interviews with participants (mentors and mentees) for their complete perspectives of the entire process.