

## Mentoring and School Leadership: Experiences from South Africa

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**ABSTRACT** Among the factors included in the Advanced Certificate in Education-School Management and Leadership (ACE-SML) qualification in South Africa, is the requirement for leaders to be mentored. Mentoring is perceived to be among the most necessary processes in ensuring that practising principals will in turn be able to become resourceful mentors to their teachers. This article explicates the results of a study that investigated the mentoring process in selected schools. It was a qualitative study conducted among Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces' sample of principals. Mentoring is a relatively new concept in South African schools, and in this investigation the researcher found that the mentor-mentee relationships can be fraught with challenges. Among others, in line with existing research, the findings revealed that the personalities of the mentor and mentee are very crucial in ensuring the effectiveness of the mentoring experience. Moreover, the results bring to light that mentors who have received effective training will be more efficient than mentors who did not. Furthermore, future schools will require the services of effective mentors who will understand the agenda of change in schools.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Mentoring in the Workplace

South African school principals face huge challenges that have an impact in the running of their schools (Jugmohan 2010; Msila 2011). Furthermore, the principals usually have myriad tasks to perform and many are daunted by the tribulation of facing managerial obstacles. Jugmohan (2010) argues that to help overcome school principals' overload, a structured mentoring programme can be of benefit. His assertion is reasonable because arguably, many principals are not empowered to manage schools and this is reflected in the performance of their dysfunctional organisations. Yet, all schools need quality leadership. Bush (2007) contends that there is a great interest in educational leadership today because of the widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and learner outcomes. The call for mentoring of school managers comes at a time when organisations such as schools are emphasising quality for the attainment of effective teaching and learning.

The need to resort to school managers' mentoring is based on the premise that if school principals can be empowered, this will have far

reaching consequences including high teacher morale and most importantly, learner success. Given the high number of dysfunctional schools in South Africa, it is an indication that school management and leadership also need to be attended to carefully. It is also important to note that both novice principals and the "experienced" need continuous professional development. There are a number of principals who have been at the helm of management and leadership in their schools who frequently highlight that they were never prepared well for their positions. The Wallace Foundation Report (2007) on mentoring contends that the primary goal of mentoring should be to provide principals with the knowledge, skills and courage to become leaders of change who put teaching and learning first, in their schools. The Education Alliance (2003) at Brown University, also uses an apt example when it points out that the principal's job has become complex and stressful because they are expected to "swim in the deep without a life jacket". Figuratively, effective mentors will supply that necessary jacket or at least equip principals with tips of how to swim when help appears remote.

The recently introduced Advanced Certificate in Education – School Management and Leadership (ACE-SML) for school leaders and managers can go a long way in assisting princi-

pals run schools effectively. Supported by the national Department of Education (DoE), the ACE-SML programme could be perceived as an essential programme that has the potential to enhance the principals' practice in schools. From 2007 to 2009 this programme was piloted and research among the first candidates reflects its potential in improving the school principals' practice (Bush et al. 2009). The ACE-SML is a practice-based part-time programme of study that is aimed at providing management and leadership support through a variety of interactive programmes that improve the students' practice, professional growth and ethos of leadership (Mestry and Singh 2007: 482). The programme equips school managers as they constantly learn about various themes in leadership and management. One of the important themes in the programme is the mentoring of the candidates.

The materials used in the ACE-SML programme demonstrate the value of professional mentorship. Loock et al. (2006) describe professional mentorship as an experience based on the principle that for personnel to develop they need the support of others. Furthermore, these authors contend that a mentor is someone responsible whom an individual can consult on work-related issues. Roberts and Constable (2003) state that mentoring is about one person offering support to another through establishing a relationship and supporting their development, learning and growth. Mentoring needs to be an experience that requires two people in this special relationship to work closely. Cullingford (2006: 2) posits that the concept of mentoring conjures up support and encouragement for the autonomous individual "of the light touch of advice rather than the heavy load of induction." Mentors are supposed to have certain crucial attributes in order for them to be effective. The mentor is the expert, the individual with experience coupled with greater power and influence (Cullingford 2006). It is however, this mentor-mentee relationship that has been lacking in work settings in South African schools. Beginning principals and teachers usually suffer because they do not get the necessary induction into their new positions.

The need to mentor principals in the ACE-SML programme mentioned above, has been necessitated by (among others), the need to fill the void left by the absence of the school principals' induction. Research done has reflected the

benefits of mentoring in various work situations (Matthews and Crow 2003). Furthermore, Matthews and Crow (2003) point out that mentoring can facilitate the socialization of newcomers into the organisation. They also aver that mentoring provides benefits to career development of teachers and administrators and can help shield newcomers from situations that may damage their careers. The main question explored here was: What are the benefits and challenges for principals involved in school leadership mentorship programmes?

### **Mentoring: The Context**

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) argues that effective principals are not born, they are mentored. The challenge faced by beginning principals in South Africa is learning through trial and error whilst on the job. Yet today's schools require talented principals who will be able to act in different situations as they see to it that there is effective teaching and learning in their schools. Throughout the world, mentoring is beginning to be regarded as one of the answers to sustained professional development. Teacher mentoring programmes are now perceived as an effective staff development approach, especially for beginning teachers (Koki 1997: 1). Mentors use their knowledge and experience to guide and teach others. The process of mentoring can enhance promotions, early career advancement, great job satisfaction and reduced turnover among mentees (Ellinger 2010). Koki (1997) also supports this assertion when he contends that supporting novice teachers from the beginning contributes to retention of new teachers in the school. Furthermore, formalising the mentor role for experienced teachers creates another niche in the career ladder for teachers and contributes to the professionalism in education (Koki 1997: 1).

It is crucial though to note that in many mentoring situations both the mentor and the mentee become learners during the mentoring process. Even when experienced teachers mentor novices, there is much they learn about the situation, about themselves, about mentees and a number of related issues. There have been quite a number of innovations in the South African curriculum in the recent years and principals and their teachers have had to deal with the innovations brought by educational transfor-

mation. If teachers are overwhelmed by changes, they might not achieve success in their schools. Yet, mentoring has been adopted by certain segments of the community to help in the enhancement of standards and aspirations (Cunningham 2005: 12).

It is within such a context of change that principals might need mentoring. Mentors have specific skills and have more than competence and ability; they have a desire to share their skills and knowledge with others (USWE 1999). Furthermore, USWE points out that mentors are people who have special and helpful effect on the lives of their trainees. The effect that mentors have on people's lives can range from showing someone how to do something to acting as a 'role model' by setting standards of behaviour and conduct which are inspiring to all concerned. Among others, what mentors do is to teach the mentees how to reflect. Rhodes et al. (2004) state that mentors should use a variety of questioning techniques to lead the mentees to reflect. Reflective practice involves thinking about and learning from the mentee's own practice and from the practice of others in order to acquire new insights into their work so as to enable the mentees to respond to new challenges in lessons as they unexpectedly arise (Rhodes et al. 2004).

USWE (1999: 13) contends that there are four different types of mentoring:

- (a) Highly-structured, short-term mentoring (for example, a new teacher may be paired with an experienced teacher.
- (b) Highly-structured, long-term mentoring (for example, when a successor is groomed for a new position)
- (c) Informal, short-term mentoring (referred to as "off-the-cuff mentoring. There may not be an ongoing relationship)
- (d) Informal, long-term mentoring (sometimes referred to as "friendship mentoring. Mentor is available on a casual basis over a long period of time.)

Arguably, as highlighted above, not many schools have formalised and structured mentoring in South Africa. Informal mentoring can be witnessed between friends. However, this tends to be casual. The challenge with it is that the mentoring halts abruptly when the friends get tired. Therefore, organisations do need structured mentoring to ensure that mentors follow a certain stipulated programme for a certain set

time when they guide their mentees. Schools need the various forms of mentoring as listed by USWE above. It is far better to promote short term mentoring than have no mentoring at all. However, ideally organisations require long-term mentoring that would support sustained professional development and change the practice of mentees for the better.

Craig et al. (1998: 101) underscore the success of a mentorship programme where they witnessed changes in the practice of mentees. These authors point out:

*One observer commented that teachers who at the start of the mentoring programme were shy and afraid to voice their perceived weaknesses and problems are now contributing willingly are active part in the problem-solving process at cluster meetings... The mentors appear to have succeeded in creating an open, trusting environment in the clusters. As teachers gain confidence, they move from problems of a general nature to those in their own classrooms and their personal deficiencies. Rather than always looking to experts for solutions, the teachers now speak of problem-solving on their own.*

The above brings to light the important aspects of mentoring and the main objective being that of transforming the individual to be an effective professional. Buell (2004) also asserts that mentoring relationships can develop under four different models namely cloning model, nurturing model, friendship model and apprenticeship model. These are briefly defined as follows:

*Cloning Model-* the mentor attempts to produce a copy of himself or herself

*Nurturing Model-* the mentor assumes the position of a parent figure, creating an open and free environment

*Friendship Model-* the mentor and mentee are peers rather than unequal

*Apprenticeship Model-* the professional focus is emphasized rather than personal and social aspects (Buell 2004).

The philosophy of a mentor will influence his preferred style of mentoring. Some of these models can be problematic. When one clones good practices there are no glitches. However, it can be problematic when mentors working with mentees clone their own "imperfect" practices. It might not be beneficial for protégé managers to clone the absolute authoritarian style of their mentors.

### Why Professional Development Matters

Mentoring is about professional development and professional development is about growth and advancement. Mentoring as part of professional development enables adults to explore their own thinking and contradictions, enhancing self-development (Drago-Severson 2004). Furthermore, Drago-Severson supports the need for a new model of learning-oriented school leadership that facilitates transformational learning. This author posits:

*I define transformational learning as learning that help adults better manage the complexities of work and life. In contrast to informational learning, which focuses on increasing the amount of knowledge and skills a person possesses and is often the goal of traditional in-service professional development programs, transformational learning constitutes a qualitative shift in how a person organises, understands, and actively makes sense of his or her own experience (Drago-Severson 2004: 17).*

The complex work places today require transformational learners who will transform others as they execute their daily routine. Meticulous managers and visionary school leaders will embrace transformational learning so as to change their organisations for the better. Effective principals will be those who are lifelong learners; lifelong learners ensure that they continuously develop professionally. Furthermore, as pointed out earlier, there are many arguments for transformational learning and transformational leadership that are emerging currently. Prew (2007: 449) cites Leithwood and Jantszi who define a transformational leader as one who builds a school vision and mission, one who provides intellectual stimulation to colleagues while providing individualised support. Furthermore, a transformational leader symbolises professional practices and values, demonstrates high performance expectations, and develops structures to foster participation in school decisions. The need for effective schools has necessitated conscious efforts to empower school leaders in professional development. Prew (2007) recollects the vision articulated by the then South African Minister of Education, Pandor, who stated that there needed to be a relationship between transformational principals and effective schools; the Minister also highlighted the need to strengthen and professionalise the role of principals thus

preparing them to play a critical role in leading and managing schools.

The introduction of ACE-SML qualification in South Africa has shown the seriousness in which the Ministry of Education envisages principalship. The introduction of the qualification depicts the serious light in which the Ministry views the professional development of school managers. Fullan (1991) contends that professional development and school development are inextricably linked. Mentoring as an aspect of professional development opens up new opportunities for professionalism while also exposing logistical and normative constraints to changing the culture of schools and teaching as a profession (Fullan 1991). Principals are expected not only to develop themselves but they also need to develop their teams (DoE 2007). This (DoE) publication also underscores the need to create learning organisations; responsibilities are distributed in many levels and this means that people need to continuously learn and develop. Furthermore, mentoring is seen as one of the crucial vehicles for creating learning organisations.

A growing number of South African schools is dysfunctional, especially those situated in historically Black African areas. Learners in these schools as well as those in rural schools continue to attain low pass rates. Cruddas (2005) affirms that school improvement is far important than raising standards; school leaders have a moral imperative to close the gap between the highest and lowest achieving learners. According to Cruddas, mentors are important part of a school's resources for addressing inequality related to the achievement gap.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Convenience sampling was used in selecting the participants for this study. All the participants selected were registered for the ACE-SML qualification and the programme expected each to have a mentor as long as they were in the programme. Brink (2000) states that this kind of sampling is also referred to as accidental or availability sampling; and involves selecting readily available people for a study. The study was conducted through the use of qualitative research methods using phenomenological approaches. Struwig and Stead (2004) point out that the main goal of phenomenology is to find

common themes to illustrate the range of meanings of a phenomenon. The participants described their lived experiences as they elucidated on their mentoring encounters. Table 1 shows the list of the participants.

**Table 1: List of participants**

<i>Mentor</i>	<i>Mentee</i>
Dr. Louw	1. June 2. Augustus 3. April 4. May
Ms. Dalie	1. Rose 2. Merriman
Mr. Ntaka	1. Ben 2. Bill
Mr. Dolo	1. Siphso 2. Senzo
Dr. Njani	1. Jongi 2. Jama
Mrs. Ndawo.	1. Cindy 2. Thelma

The researcher interviewed the five mentors on three different occasions and all the mentees were interviewed three times each. The researcher asked questions about the mentoring experiences before and after the ACE-SML programme. After the transcription of the interviews, each participant had to verify his or her written responses. Apart from interviews, the researcher also observed the actual mentoring process on various sites where the teachers (mentees) worked. Only Dr. Njani was not visited because he had already completed his allocated visits to the sites. During the observations, the researcher observed what happened in the field when mentors met their mentees. The researcher was a passive observer when he visited these sites. By the end of the study 10 participants and their mentors have been observed at least once. The researcher observed the following during the observation sessions:

- ♦ The nature of individual support; how mentors related with their mentees;
- ♦ The idea of the “perfect match”; what constituted a good mentoring relationship;
- ♦ How the mentors and mentees benefited in the mentoring process;
- ♦ What created the “ideal” mentoring relationship.

The researcher looked at various aspects to be able to get the sense of the above: use of language, listening skills, advice given, conver-

sations on school experiences are all among the aspects that the researcher focused on. In the mentees’ schools, the researcher observed how the mentees were developing professionally as a result of the mentoring. Throughout the study, the researcher followed ethical considerations. The participants were assured that anonymity would be upheld; that their names will not be divulged to any other party. They were also aware of their rights as participants including discontinuing their participation in the research at any stage.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

All the 12 participants reflected different aspects of mentoring in school leadership and management. The mentors and their mentees had a huge role to play in the process; the personalities of the individuals involved were very crucial in their relationship. Among the various mentor-mentee pairs, there were a number of differences as well as commonalities and all of these were influenced by factors that include the personality, professional maturity, emotional intelligence, model used, school circumstances and lastly, it matters whether one is a change agent or not. Change agents for both mentors and mentees learn easily and are open to ideas different from their own. In a mentoring relationship this proves very important because one listens and understands because they have embraced change.

Dr. Louw mentors several principals in the Durban area. In this study, he had four mentees under his wing. He used to be a school principal and has worked for the Department of Education for 32 years; he has also worked in both public schools and a private school. Although he has mainly worked in former white public schools (Model C schools), he has the experience of working with diverse staff. Talking about his experience as a mentor he said:

*When I got this opportunity (to be a mentor), it was a good opportunity for me to see how I could use my professional experience in nurturing other people’s careers. As I am working with the principals now, I so wish that I could be a principal of a school again. I am learning much from the mentees; they are teaching me so much about myself too.*

Dr. Louw’s four mentees attest to his dedication and commitment. They reiterate how he de-

veloped their management and leadership skills. They also concurred that their mentor made them aware of their own strengths and weaknesses; they were all never inducted in their leadership positions and therefore for the first time in their careers they found somebody who was a critical appraiser to what they were doing. Among the qualities that the participants found fascinating about Dr. Louw were that he was; empathetic, committed, knowledgeable, “a true teacher, a listener, understanding, an interested partner”. The following quotations illustrate what the different participants said about this mentor to confirm some of the above reports.

June from a rural high school pointed out:

*When the Doctor came to my school, I was fascinated how he seemed to understand the climate in the school, almost immediately. I was certain that I was dealing with an expert, like a sage he told me about likely challenges I encountered in the school. He told me how as an outsider he perceived collegiality in the school. From there I knew my mentor was the right person despite his being male and I a woman.*

April who had been a principal of a primary school for almost three years, confirmed the above. He was originally from a high school and stated that he frequently encountered challenges having to work in a primary school after working for 16 years in a high school. April argued:

*It was such a pleasing experience to work with Ed (Dr. Louw). The first time he steps into my school he literally diagnosed it! He talked to staff members to get the feel of what the school is all about. He then discussed with me the potential problems. He was genuine as he told me that as a mentor he was learning so much about himself as well... I was always bad when it came to managing time but he showed me the most effective ways. He showed me how to overcome obstacles of diverse teams. His intervention worked wonders.*

Yet some participants displayed the trap that some mentees might get into; the trap of dependency. Augustus claimed:

*I always wished he (Dr. Louw) would be there in my school besides me. He made the work appear light and simple. He appeared to have answers to many problems I encountered. He mentored me in trivial matters such as chatting to kids in the play grounds to serious issues such as resolving conflicts in the staffroom. One would wish to have many of him in the*

*district office. If we can have such a character, many of the schools' problems will be solved. It is a pity that schools cannot have such people around the clock.*

What the participants liked more about Dr. Louw was his approachability and expertise; “he made sense of the policy documents”. The participants stated that it was always challenging for the principals to understand what policy documents were saying. Dr. Louw was also invaluable as a mentor because he had recently retired and was a mentor in his teacher union for many years. His academic and research skills also made him to be able to analyse situations and interpret them.

The story was different in the other mentor who was based in Umgungundlovu. The mentor Ms. Dalie, had worked for 25 years at a public school before she retired in 2008. In her last six years she was a head of department in a school that was “struggling”, as she put it. Ms. Dalie stated that she was usually not certain what to do in guiding her mentees because they too were from very dysfunctional schools and their challenges were different from her own experience. What she normally did was to help the candidates in writing their module assignments than helping them with practical challenges in their schools. When she visited the mentees' schools she chatted with them for thirty minutes, mainly asking them broad questions about the running of their schools. Ms. Dalie posited:

*The mentor idea will work in the long run. This is an idea that should have been entertained long time ago. School managers need much guidance if schools are to be a success and education is to be meaningful. However, with these constant changes, mentors will falter. The government is not sure what it wants to do and this creates a lot of confusion on the ground. As a mentor there is nothing I can do in the face of this confusion.*

It was striking to note how the mentees displayed the apathy of their mentor in their arguments. There was much despondency when they talked about the teaching profession; the general role of teachers and even the ACE qualification. One could see how the mentor had reinforced some of their doubts. Merriman pointed out:

*By her admission Ms. Dee is not a good mentor but at least she is honest about the state of education. It is a mess and it is difficult for*

*teachers to be motivated. Ms. Dee also strengthened us into accepting the current challenges as part of the teaching profession, that there are many things we can never change. But she helped us very much in doing our assignments in the ACE course.*

Rose supported what Merriman stated above. She contended:

*Our mentor was very honest. She was showing us the reality in teaching and we became aware that there are so many things that we cannot change in the system. Her philosophy was to try and do as much of the bureaucratic processes before concentrating on actual teaching and learning. She believed in meticulous administration and maintaining good links with the district office before looking at the welfare of the school. She always stated that a principal who does not have the respect of the (district) office will soon falter.*

Ms. Dalie emphasised aspects she thought were crucial in building effective schools. One of the things she emphasized was the fallacy of good schools. She emphasized to her mentees that good schools teach to the test and that if the mentees want to attain good results in grade 12 (the last class of schooling in South Africa), they need to ensure that teachers use previous examination papers and teach the learners what they think might appear in the final examinations. She also added that education role-players such as the parents, district officials and the community respect principals and schools whose pass rate is very high.

In the Eastern Cape, one mentor who used a strategy similar to Ms. Dalie was Mr. Ntaka who believed in the bureaucratic model of leadership. Ntaka was once a school principal in Amathole District when he was promoted to be an Education Development Officer (EDO) in this district. The EDOs were formerly referred to as *inspectors* in the previous dispensation. What Ntaka frequently told his mentees was to be very wary of exercising democracy because “many schools are destroyed by democracy”. He advised his two mentees Ben and Billy to look carefully at leadership models they exercise in their schools. Ntaka attributed his previous success as a principal to a number of aspects:

- (a) Being honest and truthful
- (b) Putting teachers in their place
- (c) Knowing when to shun democracy
- (d) Working closely with the district officials in leading change

The mentor was certain that he had the “right recipe for success”. Furthermore, he tried to instil these on the mentees. It was interesting to note how the mentees tended to internalise some sentiments shared by their mentors. Ben and Billy did not “fully agree with Ntaka” but they “understood” his philosophy.

Two of the mentors who were praised by the mentees are relatively young; one is an academic in a faculty of education in an Eastern Cape higher education institution and the other Mr. Dolo is a former principal who has now joined the corporate world as a manager. The academic, Dr. Njani, visits the mentees almost once a month, these visits enabled him to discuss the school programme and how there could be improvement. According to the participants, Njani had an advantage of age because he appeared to understand the current changes. One of his mentees argued:

*Dr. Njani always brings a fresh perspective one would have never looked into. Two months ago I had huge difference with one of my teachers. I was angry and I felt disrespected by a last teacher who was not committed to the school. However, my mentor made me retrace my steps and made me understand the conflict from a different frame of reference. I understood the other person better and had a complete picture of the conflict. It helped, now I am working well with the teachers again. Imagine if the mentor was never in the picture.*

The other mentee reiterated these sentiments and added that Dr Njani frequently brings in rich information from the various experts. He stated that it is the way he applied these to their reality that make him useful. The mentee asserted:

*There are so many writers that Dr. Njani has introduced to me. People such as Fullan and Maxwell are some of them. His strength is to be able to use theory and practice well; this enables us to deal with change in the most practical ways. I think his advantage is his age and that he understands the current changes in education very well. He is also a researcher and I think these qualities make him a good resource for school leaders.*

Mr. Dolo also works in similar ways to Njani. He uses his strong educator background combines it with his newly acquired skills as a small company executive, His mentees learn from the experiences of both worlds. The mentees state

that Dolo on his first visit made them understand the operation of the school as an organisation. Both mentees were visited once every two weeks and the mentor stressed the importance of the employees in the organisation. The mentees highlighted that Dolo frequently dealt with topics such as teacher morale, teacher burn out, motivating teams and understanding the general operations of an organisation. Dolo also showed the mentees the importance of working using a vision as a guiding principle. Siphon averred:

*Mr. Dolo made me realise the importance of a vision within an organisation. Most of the time, as principals we hear of the need to have a vision for our schools, but few people really contextualise this. As a mentor he showed me how I can make use of a vision to steer the school to success. I never had anybody explain the vision to me as much as he did. If mentors could only do one thing, it should be how to make a vision practical within the organisation of the school.*

All the mentees reflected various styles and strategies of the mentors. It was apparent that some styles were found to be more effective than others. The mentors operated differently and this included the frequency of meeting the mentees as well as the philosophies used. It was interesting to look at the relationship between the mentor, Mrs. Ndawo and her two mentees. Mrs. Ndawo was serving as an Education Development Officer (EDO) at the time of the study. The mentees were not open when they had to talk about their mentor like the others were. Whilst the mentor said "the mentees were gradually developing, there was no evidence of this". The mentor-mentee sessions were mostly dominated by the mentor who appeared to be speaking alone. The mentees listened most of the time, and there was no debate. The mentor tried to encourage the mentees to discuss issues, but this was to no avail. This was the case with all other (Mrs. Ndawo's) seven mentees outside the scope of this study; the mentees were silent and inward looking all the time. When the researcher interviewed Cindy and Thelma about their mentor, all what they could say was that she was "a good mentor". This case showed that there might be problems when superiors are paired with their subordinates in a mentoring relationship. Below, the discussion focuses on some themes teased out after the findings were

tabled and these are linked to the main question. The themes that were teased out are as follows:

- (a) Mentoring and professional development: benefit to working schools;
- (b) Mentoring as a boon in a time of change; and
- (c) The challenge of finding suitable mentors.

### **Mentoring and Professional Development: Benefit to Working Schools**

Drago-Severson (2004) raises a number of arguments pertaining to mentoring and professional development. She cites several writers who raise various aspects and the huge importance of mentoring. Others argue that mentoring works well when the mentee and the mentor have similar philosophies of teaching or are the same. Others claim that mentoring simply happens best when there is an ability to work together. Some of these aspects were manifest in the study where the mentor shared similar philosophies with the mentees of Dr. Louw, Njani and Dolo reported feeling empowered; able to understand their mentees and trying hard to improve aspects such as time management. In fact, as Drago-Severson (2004) puts it, mentoring is a practice that can build greater capacity to manage the complexities of work and life. When the mentor and mentees open up and share their experiences, growth happens. Dr. Louw's mentees stated that reflecting on their practice with the mentor is "the most enriching experience of the mentoring encounter." In this way mentoring leads to transformational learning as mentees tend to lead the discussions with mentors showing elements of self development and self criticism. Daloz (2000) aptly sums it up when he states that the mentor acts as a bridge as she supports the mentee's current meaning making while providing the necessary challenges and continuity for development. Sharing of experiences enhances learning and learning is crucial for mentoring to happen.

However, it can be seen that mentoring did not work where mentors were less enthusiastic and were generally apathetic about changes. Ms. Dalie for example, usually showed disillusionment with recent educational innovations in South Africa. She tended to be negative almost wishing that "the good old days" should come back. Her disposition to teaching was far different from the expected norm. DePaul (2000)



highlights the importance of ensuring that mentors have similar interests and outlooks on teaching; in the study one could see that pairing a mentee with a mentor who has drastically different beliefs or who is less than enthusiastic about teaching is unlikely to produce professional development. The apathy shown by some mentors was more prone to produce confusion than professionalism.

Another challenge found in the study was encountered by the two participants, Cindy and Thelma who were mentored by their EDO. The participants stated that they did not “feel comfortable to be mentored by one of our supervisors” although they stated that “she is a good mentor”. They were always reluctant to open up and discuss their inadequacies because they learned that the district office would soon “know our shortcomings and reasons why our schools are failing”. Brock and Grady (1998) point out that pairing teachers with their immediate supervisors should be avoided; teachers are less willing to take risks and ask questions. Mrs. Ndawo’s two mentees contrary to what the mentor was saying showed no evidence of development. Fear cannot be a positive element in any mentoring relationship. Mentoring should be about openness and trust. Without these elements there are fewer chances that the mentor-mentee relationship with the district official could be a success. The mentees were associating the mentoring process to “evaluation and inspection”. While one needs to concede that not all such relationships are sure to display these challenges, however, it is more likely to be like this when the mentees are not confident people.

### **Mentoring as a Boon in a Time of Change**

What was crucial with the mentees was that they were beginning to show signs of being change agents and agents of change. However, there needs to be caution when selecting mentors, because mentors, who were not change agents themselves, are less likely to promote this when they mentor other people. The apathy shown by Ms. Dalie is such an example. Feiman-Namser (1996) has raised concerns that generally mentoring has the potential of reproducing conventional norms and practices. This author contends that few mentor teachers practice the kind of conceptually oriented, learner-centred teaching advocated by reformers. As a result

mentees run the risk of picking up less effective approaches and even bad habits from their mentors (DoE 2007). Mentors should be screened, selected carefully and trained before they could be assigned any mentees. If mentees cannot adapt to change then the mentor-mentee relationship can be a futile experience. Education is always in a state of flux and teachers, especially principals, should be on the alert.

Mentors who emphasised vision in the study were preparing their protégés for the future; how to adapt their schools to the constant changes. Mentees need to mature professionally, to develop a sense of efficacy and independence. Many principals always talk about how they missed induction when they were appointed as principals. Therefore, effective mentoring can lead to a confidence and a sense of direction. The mentees need to develop from the relationship and learn from their encounters. According to the DoE Mentoring Guide, mentoring has suddenly gained prominence lately because of different reasons that are all linked to change:

- ♦ The world of work is changing
- ♦ The economy is changing
- ♦ Organisations are changing
- ♦ Relationships are changing

Given all these, mentees need to be prone to changes as education is never stable. Many participants in the study concurred with the promise that the mentoring process has in ensuring the better management of change. This then implies that mentoring should be a learning-oriented model of leadership.

One of the interesting aspects in this study was how some mentees began to learn to think strategically about their organisation of schools. For example, Dr. Louw emphasized the importance of isolating petty conflicts in the staffroom and put them out of the way of an envisaged vision. He also emphasised the need to listen to one another, to respect one another and then pull together.

The Wallace Foundation (2007) posits that mentoring for change is very necessary in current times and that mentoring should be unambiguously be focused on fostering new school leaders. The Foundation also adds that mentoring for change implies helping the principal develop the knowledge, skills and commitment to challenge the status quo where needed in order to promote an effective learning environment.

In being prepared for change the mentees need to:

- ♦ Put learning first in their time and attention and know how to rally their entire school communities around that goal;
- ♦ See when fundamental change in the status quo is needed in order to make better teaching and learning happen; and
- ♦ Have the courage to keep the needs of all children from and centre and not shrink from confronting opposition to change when necessary (The Wallace Foundation 2007: 9).

Mentoring should not or is not desirable if its primary role would be not to change the education landscape. Effective mentoring will lead to conscientious teachers who are prepared to shake current picture if this will change the circumstances of their learners.

### **The Challenge of Finding Suitable Mentors**

In this study it was clear that mentor choice is very crucial in ensuring that the mentor-mentee relationship is worthwhile and meaningful. Mentors who are not suitable will stall professional development than advance it and this has implications not only for the individual school leader but for their school as well. Daresh and Arrowsmith (2003) posit that finding a mentor is the single most powerful thing that a principal can do to enhance personal survival and effectiveness in any school. Yet in some of the cases in the study, it was clear that some mentors were not suitable to their mentees. However, what was more appealing from the study was that suitability of the mentors had nothing to do with gender, age or racial background. An effective mentor tends to be effective to either gender and to a mentee of any age.

It is then very clear that not all mentors will be effective. This then calls for careful selection of mentors. In the study some participants listed the qualities of a good mentor. Fletcher (2000: 8) argues that some teachers cannot and should not be selected to become mentors. The case of Ms. Dalie illustrate that not everybody will be an effective mentor. Fletcher (2000) also highlights that it may be true that every teacher is potentially a mentor, but not all teachers can necessarily be effective mentors. The mentors in the schools were all (by their admission) not trained for an adequate period. Some mentors

might not be suitable for mentoring because they were not well prepared. Fletcher (2000: 9) aptly argues:

*Mentors need to be prepared for their role. Can they be spared to attend mentor development sessions in school and, where available, at the higher education institutions? It is unrealistic to expect a teacher to become an expert mentor in one short training session. There should be a network of support in school for the new mentor...*

The mentors in the study did not get enough support from the service providers; the participating institutions. All were trained for three Saturdays before they were allocated mentees. The Wallace Foundation (2007) underscores the flaw of not holding mentors accountable and not training them seriously. This Foundation's report highlights the need for a serious commitment to the training of mentors. Among the necessary skills that mentors need, are understanding of goal setting, active listening and conflict management. Moreover, high quality training for mentors also prepares them to provide and receive feedback that encourages self-reflection, is not judgemental, and aims at moving the mentee from dependence to independence (The Wallace Foundation 2007).

### **CONCLUSION**

This study has shown the benefits as well as the challenges of the mentoring process. Teaching itself is complex and requires complex solutions. Leaders need to learn continuously from the experiences of others. Effective leaders are lifelong learners who are constantly looking for knowledge. Accepting to be mentored shows commitment and a desire to improve the organisation of the school. Principals who were in effective mentoring relationship reported improvement in their schools. However, mentoring should not be regarded as a panacea to all school leadership challenges. Visionary schools for the future will employ many strategies as they strive for quality and mentoring will be one of the strategies employed by conscientious school leaders.

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