

Does Mentorship Add Value to In-service Leadership Development for School Principals? Evidence from South Africa

Inbanathan Naicker¹, Vitallis Chikoko² and Sipiwe Eric Mthiyane³

*School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X03,
Ashwood, 3605, South Africa*

¹<Naicker1@ukzn.ac.za>, ²<Chikokov@ukzn.ac.za>, ³<Mthiyanes@ukzn.ac.za>

KEYWORDS Mentoring. Mentor-Mentee Matching. Mentor Training. School Leadership. Site-based Learning

ABSTRACT Leadership development has become topical as a means towards growing future leaders. However, what pedagogies and learning methods produce effective leaders remains contested. In South Africa, the National Department of Education has rolled out an Advanced Certificate in Education in School Leadership targeted initially at practising school principals. It combines a content and process rich programme involving work-based learning and employs mentoring as a development tool. In this paper the researchers report on a study of mentors' experiences of their role as leadership developers and through this evidence explore the potential that mentoring has as a leadership development strategy. The researchers adopted a qualitative methodological approach involving semi-structured interviews with six purposively selected mentors. The data was analysed using Krueger's 'framework analysis'. Findings suggest that mentoring practising school principals is a valuable but very sensitive matter requiring careful selection of the mentor and mentoring approaches.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper the researchers report on their study on mentorship as a strategy for the leadership development of school principals. Bush (2009) rightly argues that there is a worldwide recognition that schools need effective leaders and managers for them to provide the best possible education for learners. Such leaders and managers do not arise by accident. They have to be nurtured, hence the need for leadership development. The rationale for the "specific preparation for school leaders is linked to the evidence that high-quality leadership is vital for school improvement and student outcomes" (Bush 2009:375). In this regard, Bush (2009) draws on Leithwood et al. (2006) who argue that in terms of influencing pupil learning, school leadership is second only to classroom teaching. These authors conclude that there "is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership" (Leithwood et al. 2006 in Bush 2009:375).

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Inbanathan Naicker,
Educational Leadership, Management and Policy,
School of Education, Office G313, Main Tutorial Block,
CNR Richmond and Mariannahill Roads,
Edgewood Campus,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 3461
Fax: +27 (0)31 260 1598
E-mail: Naicker1@ukzn.ac.za

In response to the international trend towards leadership development, the South African Department of Education in collaboration with higher education institutions developed and introduced an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in School Principalship in 2006, later called School Leadership (SL). The vision of this programme was to provide structured learning opportunities that promote quality education in South African schools through the development of a corps of education leaders who apply critical thinking, values, knowledge and skills to school leadership and management in line with the values of democratic transformation (Department of Education 2006:3).

The programme has a five-fold aim. Firstly, that of providing leadership and management knowledge and skills to enable schools to give every learner quality education. Secondly, providing professional leadership and management of the curriculum in order to ensure that schools provide quality teaching, learning and resources for improved standards of achievement for all learners. Thirdly, strengthening the professional role of school principals. Fourthly, developing principals who are able to critically engage and be self-reflective practitioners and fifthly, enabling principals to manage their schools as learning organisations and instil values supporting transformation in the South African context (Department of Education 2006:3-4). The rationale for the ACE:SL programme was two-fold: to de-

velop a programme that provides an entry criterion to school principalship, and to provide principals with a career-related professional qualification that is consistent with the job profile of school principals (Department of Education 2006:4).

The ACE:SL programme currently targets practising school principals. They are selected by provincial departments of education in liaison with the higher education institutions tasked to offer the programme. The selection is largely based on the need to achieve representivity of districts that make up the province as well as gender balance. The long term target group are the school management team members comprising deputy principals and heads of department. The learning approaches in the programme include directed and self-directed learning in teams and clusters; site-based learning through mentorship; lectures; portfolios; collaborative learning through interactive group activities; problem-based deliberations; and critical reflection and reporting on personal growth.

Problem Statement

While there is general agreement that leadership does make a difference in school effectiveness, “there is ongoing debate about what preparation is required to develop appropriate leadership behaviours” (Bush 2009:375). Equally so, there is ongoing debate about what process or processes such preparation must follow. As a result of an emerging realisation that classroom learning bears limited results on leadership practice, emphasis has now shifted from content to process rich approaches in countries such as England, South Africa and the United States (Bush 2009). Accordingly, this has necessitated the developing of school leaders through support mechanisms, often through individualisation, that is tailor-made to support the specific needs of individual leaders. Mentoring is one such personalised or individualised learning. Msila (2012), however, observes that mentoring is a relatively new concept in South African schools and that the mentor-mentee relationship can be fraught with challenges.

Objectives of the Study

Collectively, the objectives of the study were:

- ♦ To determine how mentors experience their mentorship role in a leadership development programme?
- ♦ To establish whether mentorship does add value to in-service leadership development of school principals in South Africa?

Theoretical Framework

Mentoring is a mode of learning where the mentor not only supports the mentee but also challenges them productively so that progress is made (Smith 2007). Duncan and Stock (2010:296) view mentoring as “a creative method of promoting professional development that encourages self-actualisation and growth and focuses on developing the whole person”. The mentor may be a more experienced leader or a peer. According to Thomson (1993), drawing on Lumby et al. (2003:89):

There is a sense in which the mentoring relationship is similar to that of the ‘master-pupil’ relationship in medieval times; the pupil is learning from the mentor’s experience and the mentor’s role is to encourage and nurture his protégé. Mentors can pass on practical insight derived from experience and can pick up on new ideas and attitudes.

Similarly, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2003:ii) views mentoring as “more generally used to refer to a process whereby a more experienced individual seeks to assist someone less experienced”.

Following an increased use of mentoring in the business world, there is a growth in its use in education in relation to the training of both teachers and educational leaders (NCSL 2003). The NCSL (2003) reports on influential theories of professional learning that point to the learning potential that may arise from mentoring. Firstly, drawing from the field of cognitive skills psychology, they contend that people usually learn real life skills with the aid of some form of coaching. In addition for skills acquisition to occur, appropriate feedback on practice is essential. Secondly, Vygotskian and ‘socio-cultural’ perspectives on learning also render support for the learning potential of mentoring. These perspectives are premised on the belief that human activities are rooted in social participation and that learning occurs with the assistance of others and not in isolation. Thirdly, support for the learning potential of mentoring comes from constructiv-

ist theory and related work on learning styles. In addition, the NCSL (2003) notes that left to themselves, many principals have in the past sought informal mentors or buddies.

With regard to the effectiveness of mentoring, the NCSL argues that evidence tends to be partial and inconclusive. However, mentoring in general has been linked with positive consequences such as career advancement, increased self-confidence and greater sense of belonging on the part of mentees. For mentors, rewards such as establishment of networks, increased career satisfaction, improved workplace skills, and personal pride and satisfaction have been reported (NCSL 2003).

Factors Influencing the Success of Mentoring Programmes

In its review of literature in this regard, the NCSL (2003) found that there are many factors that can and do impact on the effectiveness of mentoring of new headteachers. From these it identifies what it calls the biggest four factors namely (1) the availability of time for mentoring, (2) the matching of mentors and mentees, (3) the qualities of mentors, and (4) mentor training.

Lack of sufficient time was reported as a key constraint in many mentoring schemes (NCSL 2003). Riley (2009) notes that internationally, insufficient time is one of three significant impediments in the mentoring process identified in the literature. Further, literature suggests various possible solutions ranging from reducing the numbers of mentees per mentor, assigning one mentor to a group, the use of technology such as e-mail, secure chat rooms and video conferencing.

Matching mentors and mentees has been reported in many studies as critical to successful mentoring (NCSL 2003; Riley 2009). These authors suggest various ways in relation to making a 'good match'. These include having mentors and mentees based near each other geographically, considering similar interests and learning styles, screening and selecting mentors to determine general suitability with a view to pairing, and developing nationally agreed working protocols. However, in some cases local rivalries such as those emanating from competition among schools would pose an obstacle to the geographical matching.

The NCSL (2003:19) cites Grover (1994) who indicates that mentees saw effective mentors as knowledgeable, experienced, supportive, reliable, flexible, accessible and trustworthy. Thus to warrant selection as mentors, individuals should possess these attributes. Smith (2007) found that possession of listening skills by mentors was essential for successful mentoring. It is also important that the mentor should be seen to be an educational leader and role model. They should be influential within the school and community (Monsour 1998 in NCSL 2003).

Mentor training is reported to be another important factor to successful mentoring. Daresh and Playko (1992) advise that even when mentors possess all the necessary attributes and characteristics of effective mentors, they still need additional training to carry out this important role. The NCSL (2003) stresses the importance of training by warning that advice from experienced school principals indicates that with the absence of training, mentoring could simply reinforce traditional role expectations instead of opening avenues for the rethinking of ways of doing things.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this is a qualitative study. Qualitative research involves the production of data that reflects the quality or nature of a particular phenomenon in the form of description (Uys 2003). Qualitative researchers are, according to Merriam (1988), interested in meaning, that is, how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences and how they structure their social world. The researchers were interested in making meaning of how the mentors experience and understand their role as mentors in the process of developing school leaders in the ACE: SL, and whether mentoring adds value to this leadership development process. Thus the qualitative approach suited our study.

The data in this study was generated using individual face-to-face interviews. All the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed *verbatim*. The researchers interviewed each participant once at a venue and time of their choice. Each interview lasted about one and half hours. Guided by Gilham's (2000) assertion that interviews provide rich and vivid data, the researchers were convinced that this method of data pro-

duction would suite the aims of this study. Further, the semi-structured format was employed in interviewing the mentors. The researchers considered this type of interview suitable for interviewing the mentors because it has more structure when compared to unstructured interviews and it is very open in style (Gilham 2000). Additionally, it offered the researchers some latitude in the use of probes and prompts in order to obtain depth into some of the information the mentors were volunteering. The researchers constructed an interview schedule that covered the following broad areas: biography of the mentors; ACE:SL framework; mentor preparation; relationships in the mentoring process; and benefits of mentoring.

South Africa comprises nine provinces. The researchers conducted this study in one province: KwaZulu-Natal, among mentors that were hired by one university that offers the ACE:SL programme. While KwaZulu-Natal province is the country's third smallest province in terms of land size, it remains the most populated (Republic of South Africa 2012).

Sampling and Research Participants

In keeping with the policy of decentralization in the provisioning of education in South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal is divided into 12 educational districts. For the purposes of this study the researchers purposively sampled through convenience (Cohen et al. 2011) 6 districts (3 coastal and 3 inland) namely Pinetown, Ilembe, Empangeni, Sisonke, Umgungundlovu and Vryheid. This sample offered us heterogeneity in terms of the mentors with regard to gender, race, locality (urban/rural) and educational experience. In terms of how mentoring is configured in the ACE:SL each district has only one appointed mentor with the mentor-mentee ratio being approximately 1:15. The 6 mentors formed the sample of this study.

A brief biography of the participants follows. In order to anonymise the participants *nom de plumes* are used.

Mr Joule

Mr Joule is a retired 70 year old African man. He is academically very highly qualified. He holds three degrees with his highest qualification being a Master of Education. He has a wealth of

experience in education. At school level he rose up to the rank of principal where he served for 15 years. He also served for many years as an Official of the Department of Education in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. The highest post he occupied was that of Chief Director of Education. Overall, he has in excess of 40 years of service in education.

Dr Lux

Dr Lux is a retired white woman. Her highest academic qualification is a Doctorate in Education. She served as a Grade R teacher for many years before being promoted to the post of Head of Department. From the post of Head of Department she was promoted to the post of Principal in which she served for 13 years before retiring a couple of years ago.

Mr Tesla

Mr Tesla is a retired Indian man. He has 40 years of experience in education and has served as principal of a high school for several years. His highest academic qualification is a Masters degree in Education. He has also served as a national executive member of a teacher association and a union. He currently serves on one of the sub-committees of the South African Council of Educators (SACE).

Mr Pascal

Mr Pascal is a retired 70 year old African man. He has two diplomas and two degrees. His highest qualification is a Bachelor of Technology (Educational Management). He has 38 years experience in education and served for a number of years as principal. The highest position he has occupied in education has been that of school inspector.

Mr Kelvin

Mr Kelvin is a retired 65 year old Coloured man. He holds two diplomas in education. His entire experience is in schools. He worked his way up the ranks, progressing from a level 1 (classroom based teacher) to Head of Department and then to Deputy Principal. Thereafter, he served as Principal for 14 years. Mr Kelvin has served at schools representing a wide variety of contexts in South Africa.

Ms Candela

Ms Candela is a 55 year old African woman. She holds two diplomas in education and has 27 years experience in education. She was promoted from a classroom-based educator to principal, a post which she occupied for 9 years.

Data Analysis

In order to 'bring meaning' to the transcripts the researchers adopted Krueger's 'framework analysis' (Rabiee 2004:657). Framework analysis is a process encompassing a number of distinct stages in the analysis process namely, familiarisation; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; and mapping and interpretation (Rabiee 2004). Firstly, the researchers engaged in the repeated reading of all six transcripts in order to get an overall sense of what the participants were saying. Secondly, the researchers identified broad themes by writing short phrases, ideas or concepts in the margins that arose from the reading of the transcripts. Thirdly, the researchers sifted the data in order to identify key *verbatim* quotes. Fourthly, the researchers took the *verbatim* quotes and re-arranged them under the developed themes. Lastly, the researchers looked at creative ways of presenting the *verbatim* quotes so that it links to the data as a whole.

Ethical Issues

Prior to the commencement of the semi-structured interviews the participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and were assured that any information furnished by them would be used solely for the purposes of research. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses as well as anonymity of their identities in any reporting of the data that they furnished. In terms of the written informed consent given to them, they were free to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section the researchers present and discuss findings under the themes that emerged from the analysis, namely mentors understanding of the ACE: SL and their role; mentor preparation; the impact of time as a resource; mentor

confidence; matching mentor and mentee; mentee over-dependency; benefits to principals; and improving the mentorship model. Infused under each theme is a discussion of the data.

Mentors' Understanding of the Aims of the ACE: SL and Their Role as Mentors

The mentor's understanding of what the ACE: SL intends to achieve was, by and large, congruent to the aims of the programme as set out by the Department of Education. Mr Tesla remarked:

'Schools require strong leadership and this programme [the ACE: SL] is designed to specifically do that.'

Mr Kelvin pointed out that it is:

'Some form of empowerment of principals... to make them efficient and effective school managers'.

Mr Pascal added that he understood the programme as:

'Serving to equip principals with some leadership skills for better job performance.'

These understandings of the aim of ACE: SL tie in with the aim of the programme of strengthening the professional role of the school principal (SAIDE 2007). Further, Mr Joule alluded to the transformational aspects of the programme by stating that it:

'exposes the principals to the new changes that are taking place [in education]'.

Dr Lux extended on the transformational aspect of the ACE: SL by stating that:

'principals needed to be upgraded because the whole education system changed but principals did not change'.

These comments are congruent with the aims of the programme that sees school principals as agents of change (SAIDE 2007). Given the educational transformation in the country which was linked to the socio-political change that South Africa underwent, mindsets on how schools are led and managed needed to cohere with the democratic principles that underpinned life in South Africa. Thus, school principals were seen as key agents in furthering democratic values.

The mentors were also able to link their role in the ACE: SL to the broader aim of the programme of professionally developing school principals. Almost all of them alluded to their role as providing guidance, support, motivation and a challenge to the mentees. To illustrate, Mr Tesla asserted that:

'the mentor is not there to lecture but rather to untie the knots'.

Mr Joule very unambiguously pointed out that:

'as a man who has experience, it gives me a chance of sharing my experience with the younger principals'.

He went on to add that mentoring is meant to give the principals:

'more confidence in running their schools'.

Mr Kelvin commented that:

'our purpose is mainly developmental... to develop the person so that that person can grow'.

Dr Lux was more to the point when she stated that:

'... the mentor would go to the school to assist the student [mentee] on what he was taught academically'.

The findings in terms of how the mentors viewed their role in the programme is supported by literature. An effective mentor is seen as an expert in the subject matter that the mentee is grappling with (Orland-Barak and Hasin 2010). In the context of the ACE: SL the subject matter would be school leadership and management. Given the vast expertise of the mentors as former school principals/school inspectors, they are well equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required of school leaders. From an expertise point of view, they are ideally suited to nurture and develop school principals in the competencies identified in the core modules of the ACE: SL because they have practiced them over a considerable period of time. In addition, they do not keep this knowledge and skills to themselves but are keen to pass it on to their mentees. They thus reinforce the view that effective mentors in school leadership programmes are those who are willing to transfer skills and knowledge and who are willing to share their experiences (Stott and Walker 1992).

Preparation of the Mentors

All the participants indicated that they were trained for their role as mentors. However, the duration of the training varied. Some of the mentors indicated that the training they received extended over two to three days involving two sites, Pietermaritzburg and Edgewood and was of a good standard. According to Ms Candela:

'We were trained for three days and that in terms of quality it was very good... they [the trainers] showed us what we must do at schools'.

Mr Tesla added that:

'literature was given... and people [trainers] gave us their views of what mentorship should be about.'

In contrast to this, Mr Kelvin felt that the one day training he received was far from adequate. He commented that:

'in my humble opinion I think one day is hopelessly inadequate to be trained and to be put out in the field'.

The training of mentors is increasingly being fore grounded as a prerequisite for successful mentoring. A study conducted by Bolam et al. (1993 cited in NCSL 2003) found that mentors who have undertaken training both value it and are more satisfied with the experience of mentoring than those who have not. This supports the view that experience alone, as school principal, is not sufficient to ensure quality mentoring processes. Daresh and Playko (1992) confirm "that not all experienced school leaders are necessarily capable of serving as mentors". What is needed in addition to experience is specialised training in areas such as human relations skills, instructional leadership skills and basic understandings of what mentoring is as a form of instruction (Bush and Middlewood 2005).

Mr Pascal indicated that one shortcoming in the training was that there was no follow-up workshop on mentoring. He indicated that:

'If he [the trainer] had come back to reinforce what he had taught, we would have found our way'.

The mentors believe that training should not be a once-off occurrence. Rather, on-going workshops are needed. Drawing on Stott and Walker's (1992) experience in mentoring headteachers, training of mentors should be seen as a continuous process throughout the mentoring programme rather than a once-off activity. They add that where mentors are selected on a medium to long term basis, which is the case with the ACE: SL, the training should extend into subsequent programmes as well. Continuous training builds on earlier knowledge, skills and attitudes gained and helps mentors to reflect on the experiences from the mentoring period itself.

The Impact of Time as a Resource on the Mentoring Relationship

The reactions of the mentors to the issue of having sufficient time for face-to-face interac-

tions with the mentees drew mixed reactions. Three of the six mentors indicated that time was a constraint in the mentoring relationship. This notwithstanding, some mentors used creative ways to ensure that they spent sufficient time with the mentees. Where challenges were common among mentees some of the mentors met with their mentees in groups so as to maximise time as a resource. Mr Tesla found group mentoring to be more effective. He maintains that:

'When they are in groups principals learn more from their own colleagues... if colleague A is given a question and he has to answer, principal B is learning from that as well.'

In some instances, mentors met with the principals over the weekends owing to the fact that this was least disruptive to the school principals work schedule. Mr Tesla pointed out that:

'The principal's day is not yours... the principal has enormous responsibilities at school and when you come there [to the school] you are interfering.'

Owing to the dispersed geographical location of schools in some Districts, the distance and the terrain impacted on the time available to spend with mentees. Mr Kelvin remarked that: *'because some of the schools were so remote and the roads were so terrible... when we eventually got to the school... we only had about an hour or so before the school closed'*. Owing to the deep rural location of some schools negotiating through the natural terrain curtailed time available for mentoring. Ms Candela commented:

'One school was across the river... we had to take-off our shoes... pick-up our skirts and then we went across.'

The physical distance also impacted on the number of face-to-face visits to mentees. According to Mr Kelvin:

'Those that were closer, we were able to pay them a second visit [per term]... with the others we just had to use our cellphones'.

At times mentors also dovetailed mentoring sessions with university contact sessions in order to overcome distance and location as a barrier.

The findings regarding time as a constraint in mentoring programmes is corroborated by literature (Norton 2008; Stott and Walker 1992; Hansford and Ehrich 2006). The physical distance in terms of the location of the mentor and mentee in the ACE: SL impacted on the time available for

mentoring. Mansour (1998 cited in NCSL 2003) suggests that mentors and mentees should be based near each other geographically in order to maximise time as a resource. An encouraging development in the ACE: SL is that mentors are working around time as a barrier to the mentoring process by engaging in group mentoring. The group mentoring as resulted in principals forming networks among themselves. When their mentors were not available they were able to liaise with their fellow principals and share ideas with each other. Thus, a spin-off of the formal expert-novice mentoring model gave rise to informal peer mentoring where the principals viewed each other as a critical friend.

Some mentors creatively used technology to work around time as a barrier to mentoring. They used various technological devices to enhance the mentoring process. Mr Tesla indicated that:

'I guided principals in Nelspruit while here in Durban... technology has made life so easy for us... there is now internet, e-mail, phone, etc...'

Other mentors such Mr Kelvin also used the cellphone as a tool in mentoring while Dr Lux made effective use of e-mail as a mode of communication with mentees. The use of technology (e-mail, chat rooms, cell phones, video conferencing) is viewed as novel ways of enhancing the mentoring experience (NCSL 2003).

Mentor Confidence

The mentors seem quite confident about their role as mentors even within the context of the changed roles and responsibilities of school principals in South Africa. This confidence stems from the fact that many of the mentors were retired principals and were consequently *au fait* with the job description of the school principal. Owing to their expertise, this led to the mentees readily accepting them. Mr Kelvin articulated:

'The fact that I was a retired principal helped a lot with authority... authority in terms of the confidence in the person standing in front.'

Mr Tesla indicated:

'My involvement in teacher issues at national level as well as serving as principal at a top performing school gave me the confidence as a mentor.'

Further, the fact that some of the mentees, according to Mr Kelvin, viewed the mentors as 'experts' boosted the confidence of the mentors.

Mentor confidence was also enhanced by the fact that in some cases, the mentees were known to the mentor. Mr Pascal indicated: *'I gathered confidence from the fact that the people I was mentoring... were people I was quite familiar with'*.

Stott and Walker (1992) offer a convincing argument that a mentor's greatest strength lay in his/her level of self-confidence. This is supported by Morse (2006) who claims that self-confidence is one of the key characteristics of a good mentor. In this study, the considerable expertise and experience of the mentors as school leaders coupled with the mentor training they received, is sure to have boosted the confidence levels of the mentors.

Matching Mentor and Mentee

All the participants considered the issue of matching of the mentor and mentee as crucial to the success of the mentoring process. This notwithstanding, some participants pointed out that in the ACE: SL no consideration was given to the matching of mentors and mentees. Mentors were simply appointed to a group by the programme co-ordinators. Mr Kelvin remarked:

'We are simply told this is your group of students... there is no sort of growing relationship between mentor and mentee.'

Literature suggests that there is an increasing awareness of the need for the careful selection of mentors and the sensitive matching of mentor and mentee (Bush et al. 2007; Bush and Middlewood 2005; Lumby et al. 2003; Hansford and Ehrich 2006). The mentee must view the mentor as someone who is approachable (Bush and Middlewood 2005). Hall (2008) emphasises that a poor mentor-mentee match stifles the learning for both parties. The NCSL (2003) reports that in the first instance, proper screening and selection needs to be done of mentors in order to examine their suitability for mentoring in general and with a view to establishing a good pairing between mentors and individual mentees. In terms of screening and selection, they assert that recently retired school principals can make good mentors in programmes aimed at developing school leaders (NCSL 2003). The fact that all the participants have served as school principals augurs well for their role as mentors. This notwithstanding, the fact that some of the mentors in addition to serving as school principals also

served as school inspectors also had a drawback and impacted on the mentor/mentee relationship. Mr Pascal indicated that:

'Some of the mentees still felt that an ex-inspector of schools was not welcome to them'.

In the matching of the mentor and mentee, Mr Pascal was of the view:

'The students [mentees] must have a say in this... [it must be] somebody they trust, somebody they value'.

The issue of mutual trust was seen as important for the relationship to flourish. Mr Joule pointed out that:

'The mentor must first build trust if he is going to succeed in mentoring'.

Hall (2008) affirms that trust, among others, is key to sound mentor-mentee relationships and failure to establish a trusting relationship between mentor and mentee can result in the breakdown of the relationship. The core of mentoring is a developmental relationship based on mutual trust (Smith 2007). The mentor should be a trusted advisor who provides a safe space for learning and development to occur.

The issue of age was raised as a factor in the matching of mentor and mentee. Mentors felt that pairing a young mentee with an older mentor has its advantages. Mr Kelvin mentioned:

'If he is old enough to be my father I will probably get very good experience from this person and guidance'.

Others prefer someone closer in age. Mr Tesla added:

'I prefer someone who is closer to me in age... maybe we will be able to get on'.

According to Dever et al. (2000), an age difference of less than six years enables mentors and mentees to function as friends or collaborative co-workers. A greater age difference can create a parent-child relationship characterised by parental behaviours on the part of the older and dependency on the part of the younger.

Language is a sensitive issue in South Africa. Given the recognition of multilingualism in the country, it was no surprise that the mentees raised the issue of language. Understanding and being able to converse with the mentees in their home language was seen as an important factor in the mentor-mentee relationship. Although Mr Kelvin was of a different race and culture to many of his mentees, the fact that he could have conversations with them in their home language strengthened the mentor-mentee relationship. Mr Kelvin stated:

'I was able to get on with the mentees or the principals... because I am able to speak Zulu and 90 something odd percent were Zulu speaking principals.'

Magdaleno (2006) writing in a Latino context suggests that the mentoring experience is enhanced when the mentor shares a common language and can relate to the specific cultural experiences of his or her mentee. In South Africa, 11 official languages are recognised by the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act*, 108 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996, Chapter 1, sec. 6(1)). Thus finding mentors who are conversant in the majority of the official languages is indeed a challenge more especially when under apartheid only two languages were emphasised – English and Afrikaans.

Gender was also raised as an issue by two of the mentors. In some cultures in South Africa males view females as inferior and consequently do not treat seriously advice and instructions from females. Mr Kelvin remarked:

'In the Zulu culture there is that male-female issue'

In studies conducted in the New York mentoring programme of newly appointed principals, Grover (1994 cited in Hobson 2003) noted that the gender of the mentors and principals appeared to have no impact on the mentoring experience. However, while this may be the case, there is evidence that asserts that in cross-gender mentoring it takes longer for the mentor and mentee to build and establish rapport (Lumby et al. 2003). Further, Stott and Walker (1992) aver that in cross gender mentoring reports of social distance, over-protectiveness and discomfort and 'back-room gossip' may also occur.

Mentee Over-dependency

Mentee over-dependency is seen as a problem in the mentoring process and could undermine the process (Crow 2001 cited in Bush and Middlewood 2005). However, the participants in this study indicated that cases of this nature were 'few and far between'. Throughout the mentoring process they were vigilant with regard to this issue and took precautions to prevent such a situation from arising. Mr Tesla emphatically stated:

'You are there to guide them... not to walk the walk for them.'

Almost all the participants mentioned that they only saw their role as providing advice and support and it was left to the mentees to decide whether they act on the advice and support or not. In other words, mentees were provided the necessary space to reflect on the advice and support and then use the reflection as a basis for action. Hall (2008) asserts that productive self-reflection is an indispensable characteristic that mentors should inculcate in mentees. In order to prevent over-dependency Mr Joule explained to his mentees that:

'You are the principal... I am [only] coming with my experience and advice... I am not running your school... he or she must run the school not the mentor.'

Dr Lux aptly puts it that:

'A mentor never walks the road for somebody... he/she walks the road with somebody.'

Ms Candela prevented the issue of mentee dependency by indicating:

'I explain the procedure... I explain what to do but not do it for him or her.'

Awaya et al. (2003:50) proclaim that a good mentor knows 'when to help and when to sit back'. The mentor must guide but not take control of the mentee's action. The mentees in turn must show a corresponding willingness to assume responsibility for their actions. If this recipe is observed in the mentoring process, as some of the mentors did, then the issue of mentor over-dependency can be obviated.

Benefits of Mentoring to Principals

The participants reported that mentoring made a significant difference to the principal's expertise. In turn, this improvement in expertise had a positive impact on the school the mentees were serving. Mr Tesla spoke of how the mentees transformed their schools technologically. Mr Joule reported:

'There were cases where they definitely improved a lot... where the school was dysfunctional; over two years [of mentoring] there was a complete change in the school.'

In addition, mentoring also had an impact on the leadership styles of principals. The participant's reported that principals began to embrace a more democratic leadership style as a consequence of mentoring. Mr Joule reported that one of his principals remarked, as a result of the change in his leadership style from that of an autocrat to a more democratic style that:

'I did not realise I had so much talent among my staff members ever since I have given them a chance to make input in the running of the school.'

These findings are congruent with findings of Stott and Walker (1992) who noted that principals demonstrated improved leadership and management and gained increased confidence. After all, good mentoring practices are about development and nurturing character among mentees. It is about the development of the professional competence of mentees (Orland-Barak and Hasin 2010).

The poor self-esteem and confidence of some of the principals served as a barrier to their development. As Mr Joule puts it *'they doubt themselves'*. He asserts that he spent a large amount of time building the self-esteem and confidence of the principals. He therefore maintains:

'When they are confident they are able to get the cooperation of their teachers.'

Mr Kelvin mentioned:

'The mentee must have confidence in himself or herself so that if you are not there the person is able to stand on his own.'

Dr Lux went a step further and commented:

'If you feel good about yourself you do well... nothing succeeds like success.'

After several mentoring sessions the mentors reported that the morale, confidence and self-esteem of the mentees were raised owing to mentorship. In reviewing empirical studies on mentoring of school leaders, Hansford and Ehrich (2006) note that in about one-third of the studies, improved confidence was one of the specific outcomes identified by school principals as a benefit of the mentoring process.

The job of a principal is indeed a stressful one (see Hansford and Ehrich 2006). However, a benefit of mentoring highlighted by the participants was that it had an impact of reducing the stress levels of school principals. According to Mr Joule, principal stress is related to the problems experienced at school. He added:

'They are stressed because they failed to solve the problem... now and again the school is a headache... once they solve the problem they are happy principals at their schools.'

Further, two of the participants felt that by just being there and serving as a sounding board for the principals was a cathartic experience for the principals. Mr Joule remarked:

'Just listening to what they [the principals] had to say... made a big difference to the principals.'

Further, Dr Lux indicated:

'The good part of being a mentor was that it provided a shoulder to cry on for the principals given that the principal's job is sometimes the loneliest job in the school. This definitely helps to reduce stress.'

The job of school principal can sometimes lead to stress and a sense of isolation. Mentoring can help reduce this feeling of isolation and stress (Smith 2007). He adds that it offers some relief from the pressures and difficulties associated with the job of school principalship. Magdaleno (2006) contends that through the mentoring relationship, mentees claim to have gained a confidante or a sounding board in their mentors.

Improving the Mentoring Model in ACE: SL

The participants were of the view that one way of improving the mentoring model used in ACE: SL is to allow for mentors in the programme to network among themselves. Mr Kelvin indicated that he did try this and it assisted him immensely as a mentor. He indicated:

'I worked with Dr Lux... I used to talk to her a lot... we used to exchange views because some of the problems were common problems... sometimes she will come up with a simple solution [and] sometimes I will come up with a simple solution.'

Almost all the participants indicated that the number of visits to the mentees' school sites needs to be increased. The two visits per mentee per quarter they believed was far from adequate. Mr Pascal suggested:

'I think four visits instead of two per quarter would work better.'

One way they suggested of accomplishing this was to increase the number of mentors on the programme. This they argue would decrease the mentor-mentee ratio and would thus allow for an increase in the frequency of visits to the principals. Studies conducted by Berkhout (2009) on the ACE: SL showed that in terms of budgetary constraints and the availability of quality mentors with educational leadership and management mindsets, it is not always possible to increase the pool of mentors. However, she points out that within the parameters of the existing budget one visit per term (four visits per year) is possible.

CONCLUSION

This study has found that the mentors' understanding of their mentorship role was of a reasonably high standard. The fact that most of them had 'walked this path before' (being former school principals/school inspectors) seemed to be their strongest power base or source of influence. Their experiences gave them the confidence to discharge their mentoring responsibilities effectively. This said there were some sources of tension between the mentors and mentees. It seemed that recruiting former school inspectors as mentors in some instances was problematic. The baggages that they carry as former school inspectors seemed to negatively impact on the mentor-mentee relationship. A limitation of this study is that it only canvassed the views of the mentors thus only one side of the story is told. This notwithstanding, the researchers believe that the mentors' experiences of mentoring in the ACE:SL suggest that mentoring can add value to the leadership development of school principals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For effective mentoring to happen, mentors need to be thoroughly and continuously trained to be able to succeed in both group and individual mentoring. Careful consideration needs to be given to the matching of mentor and mentee. This is a delicate matter requiring consideration of many factors such as gender, age and former relationships. Further, the mentoring process should be one focussed on empowering the mentee and not creating over-dependency.

REFERENCES

- Awaya A, McEwan H, Heyler D, Linsky S, Lum D, Wakukawa P 2003. Mentoring as a journey. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19: 45-56.
- Berkhout S 2009. Imagining the shaping of reflective deliberative education leaders: The devil is in the detail. *Africa Education Review*, 6(2): 239-255.
- Bush T 2009. Leadership development and school improvement: Contemporary issues in leadership development. *Education Review*, 61(4): 375-389.
- Bush T, Glover D, Harris A 2007. *Review of School Leadership Development*. Nottingham, UK: National College for School Leadership (NCSL).
- Bush T, Middlewood D 2005. *Leading and Managing People in Education*. London: SAGE.
- Cohen L, Manion L, Morrison K 2011. *Research Methods in Education*. 7th Edition. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Daresh JC, Playko MA 1992. Mentoring for headteachers: A review of major issues. *School Organisation*, 12(2): 145-152.
- Department of Education 2006. *Education Management and Leadership Development (ACE: School Leadership)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Dever MT, Johnson FF, Hobbs DE 2000. A qualitative analysis of an intensive mentor-apprentice collaboration. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 33(4): 241-255.
- Duncan HE, Stock MJ 2010. Mentoring and coaching rural school leaders: What do they need? *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 18(3): 293-311.
- Gilham B 2000. *The Research Interview*. London: Continuum.
- Hall P 2008. Building bridges: Strengthening the principal induction process through intentional mentoring. *Phi Delta Kappan* (February), 449-452.
- Hansford B, Ehrlich LC 2005. The principalship: How significant is mentoring? *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(1): 36-52.
- Hobson A 2003. *Mentoring and Coaching for New Leaders*. Nottingham, UK: National College for School Leadership (NCSL).
- Lumby J, Middlewood D, Kaabwe E (Eds.) 2003. *Managing Human Resources in South African Schools*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Magdalen KR 2006. Mentoring Latino school leaders. *Leadership* (September/October), 12-14.
- Merriam SB 1988. *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morse JM 2006. Deconstructing the mantra of mentorship: In conversation with Phyllis Noerager Stern. *Health Care for Women International*, 27: 548-558.
- Msila V 2012. Mentoring and school leadership: Experiences from South Africa. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 32(1): 47-57.
- NCSL (National College for School Leadership) 2003. *Mentoring and Coaching for New Leaders*. Nottingham, UK: National College for School Leadership (NCSL).
- Norton MS 2008. *Human Resources Administration for Educational Leaders*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: SAGE.
- Orland-Barak L, Hasin R 2010. Exemplary mentors' perspectives towards mentoring across mentoring contexts: Lessons from collective case studies. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 26: 427-437.
- Rabiee F 2004. Focus group interviews and data analysis. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 63: 655-660.
- Republic of South Africa 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, 108 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa 2012. *South Africa Yearbook 2011/12*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Riley P 2009. The development and testing of a time-limited mentoring model for experienced school leaders. *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 17(3): 233-249.
- SAIDE (South African Institute for Distance Education) 2007. *ACE School Leadership: Consolidated Materials Improvement Report*. Braamfontein: SAIDE.
- Smith AA 2007. Mentoring for experienced school principals. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 15(3): 277-291.
- Stott K, Walker A 1992. Developing school leaders through mentoring: A Singapore perspective. *School Organisation*, 12(2): 153-164.
- Uys T 2003. Measuring and quantifying. In: D Rossouw (Ed.): *Intellectual Tools: Skills for the Human Science*. 2nd Edition. Pretoria: Van Schaik, pp. 117-126.