Addressing Challenges Encountered by Leadership Teams in Five Mentoring Programs

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Abstract

This study is the third stage in a continuation of research by Kilburg and Hancock (2006) that investigated 149 mentoring teams in four school districts over a two year period. The current study is differentiated from the published study in that it identifies challenges encountered by mentoring program planning committees, coordinators, and administrators from five school districts over a six-year period. In the last two years of this present study, Critical Friends Group Coaches were added to one school district's leadership team.

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Context for this Study

This study is the third stage in a continuation of research by Kilburg and Hancock (2006) that investigated 149 mentoring teams in four school districts over a two year period. The current study is differentiated from the published study in that it identifies challenges encountered by mentoring program planning committees, coordinators, and administrators from five school districts over a six-year period. In the last two years of this present study, Critical Friends Group Coaches were added to one school district's leadership team.

The primary goal in the first stage of the original study was to identify mentoring teams that were encountering recurring problems, attempts to manage those problems, and assess the effectiveness of those procedures (Kilburg & Hancock, 2003).

From a process of data reduction and analysis eight areas of concern in mentoring programs were identified by the researchers. Those areas identified are: (1) lack of time, (2) mentors and new teachers not in the same building, (3) mentors and new teachers not in the same field or subject, (4) mentors and new teachers not in the same specialty, such as speech therapy and/or specialists working with challenged students , (5) mentors and new teachers not at the same grade level, (6) poor communication and coaching skills of the mentor, (7) lack of emotional support, and (8) personality conflict.

In the second stage of the research study, the mentoring program coordinators from the four school districts and the principal researcher identified three case studies from the aforementioned mentoring teams to represent the eight areas of concern and provide a contextual examination of the events that negatively impacted their relationships. This second phase of the study was conducted over a one year period.

In the third and current stage of the study, the researchers were interested in identifying the challenges that planning committees, program coordinators, administrators and Critical Friends Group coaches from five school districts encountered on a regular basis and how they addressed those challenges. Four of the school districts were also a part of the original study. This study addresses the following research questions:

(1) What types of challenges are encountered by five school district leadership teams (mentoring program planning committees, mentoring program coordinators, administrators, and training teams)?

(2) What impact does intervention procedures have on leadership teams in five school districts that are encountering problems on a regular basis?

It is important to note that the researchers recognize that a majority of mentoring programs are effective and successful and this was the case for a majority of the school districts in this study. The researchers' concern is that regardless of all that a school or school district might do in preparing for and carrying out the implementation of a mentoring program, mentoring practices may still fall short of the ideal (Kilburg & Hancock, 2003; Kilburg & Hancock, 2006; Newton, Bergstrom, Brennan, Dunne et al., 1994).

For the purpose of this study, terms are defined as follows:

(1) CFG: Is defined as a Critical Friends Group and is designed as to be a small

group of teachers (new and veteran) anywhere from 8 to 12 in number that work together in one or two-hour blocks of time each month, preferably during

the school day. CFGs can be found at the district level as well as at individual buildings depending on the willingness of staff to participate. Each CFG is facilitated by a Critical Friends Group Coach who has had training in the CFG protocols. The purpose of the CFG is to define and produce improved student achievement and provide opportunities for professional development for all teachers (Bambino, 2002).

(2) CFGC: Is defined as a Critical Friends Group Coach. The coach is a veteran

teacher who has been asked to participate in a CFGC training. The training is five days in length and is provided by the National School Reform Faculty at the local level. Coaches are trained in a variety of protocols which are designed as problem-solving techniques that address specific types of problems that a member of a CFG might be having (National School Reform Faculty, 2006).

(3) NTC: Is defined as New Teacher Conversations and is a monthly meeting of new teachers in a school district. Each meeting is typically 90 minutes in length and occurs after school hours. The meetings are typically facilitated by the NTC Director and selected CFG Coaches. Each coach that participates is responsible for a small group of new teachers during the monthly meeting as well as problem solving and discussion topics that are building, grade level and district specific. District anomalies: This definition is characteristic of only one of the five school districts in this study. The reason that this district was identified as an anomaly was because of the gross negative behavior that was exhibited by at least one mentor teacher and one administrator. The behavior was caused because of a conflict between members of the school board, the superintendent, several teachers, and one administrator prior to the implementation of the mentoring program.

(4) Push backs: The term push backs refers to those leaders and participants in the mentoring programs who were dissatisfied with some part of the mentoring program. The term also refers to participants who were using the mentoring program platform as a way of complaining about the district's leadership.

Introduction
Developing quality mentoring programs takes a great deal of effort and careful planning on the part of many people. It takes time to build knowledge, support, trust, capacity and a culture where collaboration and redefining of the use of professional time becomes the norm (Portner, 2005). Wheller and Fanning (1989) were convinced that when this system of support is in place, it acts as an effective delivery system and professional bridgework that enables participants to work in a nurturing environment of mentoring.

Without question, participating in this collaborative partnership requires a certain amount of flexibility in the development of the agendas. It also requires surrendering a degree of control of power (Fullan, 2004; Grument, 1989). Collaboration can also mean having to share the credit for any achievements or even letting the beneficiary of the partnership take all of the credit, which can be an uncomfortable position for those who require that the focus is upon them.

Review of the Literature
This collaborative process of mentoring provides an opportunity to bring people together who have similar mind-sets with regard to the value of mentoring and professional development. Although each person may bring a different set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions to the collaborative process, each is still seen as a person who possesses knowledge, experience and a strong desire for the mentoring process as well as creating an environment for teachers that provides them with numerous opportunities for professional growth.

The value of supporting one another in this collaborative effort can not be emphasized enough, especially when one or more of the participants may be out of their comfort zone and require an extra measure of care (De Bevoise, 1986). The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE) (1999) recognizes that when school districts provide the strong leadership in developing and implementing their induction and mentoring programs, the end result benefits both individual and institutional self-interests.

For administrators, mentoring aids recruitment and retention for higher education institutions, it helps to ensure a smooth transition from campus to classroom; for teacher associations, it represents a new way to serve members and guarantee instructional quality; for teachers, it can represent the difference between success and failure; and for

parents and students, it means better teaching [and learning] (Portner, 2005, p. 83).

Leadership in Mentoring Programs

The leadership role in the five mentoring programs described in this study included the planning committees, mentoring program coordinators and administrators. In the fifth and sixth year of this study Critical Friends Group Coaches were added to one school district's leadership team. These leaders are expected to be passionate and committed to the mentoring process. They not only hold and share the vision but focus their energy on helping others achieve a shared goal in the program. So what do committed leaders do to focus their energy on the vision of mentoring and induction as an important ingredient in a school district's culture?

Visionary leaders give flight to mentoring and induction programs in a variety of ways. They build trust, resilience, and capacity among the participants and the school district by helping teachers to realize their potential (Buonocore, 2004; Clutterbuck, 2002; Wesorick, 2002). They understand that vision without action is really just daydreaming and action without vision can become a nightmare (Portner, 2006). These leaders also understand that being a moral resource is critical in developing a trusting relationship with those they are going to be working with (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Fullan, 2003).

Visionary leaders also pay unwavering attention to sustaining the momentum of mentoring and induction programs by creating a climate of collaboration, protecting mentors from administrative duties, helping new teachers and mentors to manage a new culture, creating capacity within the school district, establishing a culture of professional development that is valued by teachers, administrators, the school board, parents, and students; and cultivating visionary leadership that provides direction for the journey (Kilburg, 2003; MacRae & Wakeland, 2006; Portner, 2005).

It is important to note that these leaders recognize that dissent or disagreement will almost always be a part of the mentoring conversations they have with one another. Dissent for the leadership is seen as an opportunity for the growth of new ideas and opportunity to increase the quality of life with the mentoring program. The leadership understands that not everyone will internalize the vision in the beginning but they also know that the only way to build the visions and ownership of the program is by doing (Fullan, 2004).

Mentoring Program Planning Committee

One of the first steps in designing a mentoring and induction program is to create a planning committee which is composed of leaders from the school district. The committee typically includes veteran teachers, administrators, specialists, the local education association personnel, and curriculum director, among others (Kilburg, 2003; Sherk, 1998). The planning committee is a collaborative partnership that lays the foundation, creates the vision, sets the standard for problem-solving, goal setting, mission, financial support, mentor selection and training, research, program design, and measures of success (Bull, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

It is important to remember that a school district's mentoring program is not a stand-alone program, but part of a much broader professional development picture. In a study by Cross and Rigden (2002), seven school districts reported that the only reform that resulted in student achievement gains were those that not only had clear expectations but also had sustained professional development opportunities over a period of years. C ross and Rigden's study is further supported by Garet, Porter, Desmoine, Birman, et al.'s (2001) study which found that 1,027 teachers learned more through study groups and networking than they did with mentoring. Their report supports mentoring in concert with sustained and intensive professional development for all of the participants. A mentoring and induction program has a greater impact on teachers and students over a longer period of time if coupled with broader professional development efforts.

Unfortunately, some mentoring programs are driven to get the mentoring program up and running without much focus on planning all of the important details that are critical to its effectiveness. When mentoring program personnel do not pay attention to detail or provide adequate planning time, they typically are not able to make those important connections. The end result may be a program that is understaffed, lacks the appropriate funding, and people who take on more responsibility than they may have time for (Sherk, 1998).

Mentoring Program Coordinators

Program coordinators need to become the most passionate advocates of the mentoring program and extol its benefits. They must be people of integrity and moral purpose and be respected by their colleagues. They are typically the heart leaders of any mentoring program and are accountable and constantly strive to develop positive relationships with mentoring teams, the planning committee, administrators, and school board members. However, when a coordinator lacks moral purpose, vision, interpersonal skills, and passion, mentoring program participants can expect to suffer the consequences of the coordinator's lack of commitment to the process and the participants.

Program coordinators recognize the importance of being visible to their colleagues in the mentoring and induction program. They understand very clearly that their leadership is not an arm's length proposition and that new teachers, mentors, and administrators have a right to see and/or hear from their coordinator on a regular basis (DePree, 1992). An effective program coordinator also recognizes that their accountability and willingness to handle the day-to-day issues is crucial to the success of the mentoring and induction program and to the teachers' professional development (Portner, 2001).

Coordinators are always in the process of assessing the health of the program and the mentoring teams. When coordinators are proactive in assessing the health of the program two things occur: 1) they demonstrate that they care and value the welfare of the mentors and the new teachers; and 2) they desire to improve the quality of the mentoring experience, by reducing the number of roadblocks which may exist (Ganser, Bainer, Bendixon-Noe, Brock et al., 1998; Gray & Gray, 1985; Janas, 1996; Kilburg, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

It is important that program coordinators be provided with some form of compensation as well as opportunities for continuing education with regard to adult development, research on mentoring practices, and program design among others (Sherk, 1998). It is also incumbent on the planning committee to make sure that the coordinator does not fall prey to burnout by adding another responsibility to an already busy schedule. The end result of a school district adding more responsibilities without taking any away is four fold. First, it reduces the coordinators ability to problem solve issues in a timely way. Second, it

suggests a lack of concern for the welfare of the coordinator. Third, it suggests that the school district is not willing to support the mentoring and induction program in a way that is helpful to all the participants. And finally, taking on more responsibility without the skill level to multi-task may mean the possibility of burnout (Sweeny, 1993).

The Role of the Administrator
Although there are many models of mentoring and induction programs in existence, successful programs share a number of key components, one of which is leadership from principals who are supportive and committed to the notion of helping beginning teachers and mentors find success not only in their relationship, but in their professional development as well (Freedman & Jaffe, 1993; Portner, 2005; Scherer, 1999). It is important for the principal to remember that he/she is a very important member of the mentoring tea m. Unfortunately, many administrators, after the initial in-service prior to the start of classes, excuse themselves from further involvement in the mentoring program. Reasons for this include, but are not restricted, to the following:

(1) Lack of time because of a busy schedule,

(2) Compromise of confidentiality.

(3) They are viewed as an evaluator and not a coach or mentor,

(4) They felt like a 'third wheel'. That is, the principal did not want to get in the way

of the mentor and new teacher while they were establishing their professional relationship.

Whatever the reason might be, those principals fail to understand and recognize their importance as a member of the leadership team and the contribution they could make in the mentoring process (Brock & Grady, 1997; Kilburg, 2003; Portner, 2001).

As an instructional leader, the principal compliments the work of the mentor in a variety of ways from spending time interacting on a regular basis with his or her teachers, to meeting with new teachers regarding expectations and providing resources that are specific to the school. It is important that the new teachers see their principal as supportive and caring as opposed to having an adversarial role. New teachers need to have the

opportunity to get to know his/her principal and to better understand what that person believes, what the principal has done to prepare himself or herself to assist the new teacher, if they can achieve their goals and potential by following and working with the principal, and whether or not they entrust their future to him/her (DePree, 1992; Freedman & Jaffe, 1993; Kilburg, 2003).

It is important that administrators recognize that they can provide opportunities for the mentor and new teacher to observe one another as well as other teachers; they can alter schedules so that mentors and new teachers can meet during lunch as well as common preparation times. The administrator can also allocate discretionary resources, teach a class for either teacher and provide them with opportunities to attend workshops and conferences together, and create opportunities to discuss professional issues (Austin & Baldwin, 1992; Kilburg, 2006; Scherer, 1999). When principals allow these opportunities to occur, they enhance community and capacity within their school (Elmore, 2000).

One area of concern for any administrator who participates in a mentoring and induction program is the boundary which exists between evaluating, coaching and mentoring. When administrators are evaluating, they are looking for weaknesses or challenges a teacher has that needs attention and improvement. When the principal is coaching and/or mentoring a new teacher, the new teacher is typically the person driving the agenda, not the principal (Barkly, 2005). When a principal makes the decision to act as a coach and/or mentor for the new teacher, the new teacher needs to know that they need not be concerned about being evaluated at that time. It is important to remember that if the principal decides he/she needs to switch from a mentor or coach to an evaluator's role during the mentoring process, then all bets are off and collateral damage will be evident in not only the principals and new teacher's relationship, but also in the relationship the principal might have with other mentoring team members.

Critical Friends Group Coaches
In Graves' (2001) book *The Energy to Teach* he states that . . . "It is no easy task to create the kind of environment in which authentic learning communities can take hold. Most schools are not

structured to sustain fellowship" (p. 127). He also states:

If schools are to become places where teachers find community and engage in intellectual work, they need to provide environments that help teachers do these things. If teachers cannot practice intellectual work in schools, they simply fall back on clichés' or on tried-and-true practices that may be ill suited for their students. (p. 126)

Each Critical Friends Group has a least one coach that is trained to create a collegial environment for teachers and provide protocols for problem solving that in the end improves teaching practices and student learning (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000). The protocols provide guidelines that help guide the conversations in the CFGs. Of course guidelines are not enough to safeguard vulnerability. Participants still need to be considerate in their questions and discussions and the coach plays a significant role in helping CFG members carry out those most important practices. Coaches safeguard listening time that is critical to the practice of problem solving. They also provide guidelines that safeguard the vulnerability of the teacher or teachers who put some of their weaknesses on the line; these guidelines make it safe to ask those challenging questions.

According to one teacher, "If I am in a CFG with you, it means that I am as committed to your practice, and to your students, as I am to mine."

Skilled and experienced coaches are essential if the CFG members are to succeed indentifying students learning goals that make sense in their schools, look reflectively at practices intended to achieve those goals, and collaboratively examine teacher and student work. (Dunne et al., 2000, p. 6)

To that end, the coach helps build those bridges for CFG members that are important for their personal and professional development. Those bridges not only increase the ability of the teacher to work more effectively with students, but also helps to increase the capacity and community within the school and district.

Methodology
This was a qualitative case study investigating the challenges that five school district leadership teams encountered and the intervention procedures that were used to remedy those challenges. All five

mentoring programs were, in part, designed by the Mentoring Institute at George Fox University. The following data collection techniques were used:

(1) Gathering data from fieldwork, that is, spending time in the setting where participants normally spend their time (Yin, 2002a, 2002b);

(2) Using survey and interview data to establish a chain of evidence (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Yin, 2002a, 2002b); and

(3) Providing first hand accounts by the researcher that contribute to the depth of the study (Yin, 2002a, 2002b).

The following questions guide this study:

(1) What types of challenges are encountered by the five school district leadership teams?

(2) What kind of an impact do intervention procedures have on the same five leadership teams in the five school districts that are encountering challenges on a regular basis?

Setting
Data were collected over a six-year period from 60 program planning committee members, 9 mentoring program coordinators, 28 administrators for five school districts and 20 Critical Friends Group Coaches. During the first year of the study, two school districts implemented K-12 mentoring programs. One school district was from a metropolitan community and the other school district was from a small rural community. During the second year, three school districts participated in the study. Two of the three school districts had participated in the study during the first year. The third school district was from another large metropolitan community.

During the third year, three school districts participated in the study and included the two school districts from the metropolitan communities and one new small rural community school district. The fourth year included the small rural community school district from the previous year and a new rural school district. During the fifth and sixth years of the study one new large rural community school district participated in the study. In total, the school districts ranged in size from 45 teachers with 720 students to 1,000 teachers with over 17,000 students.

Data Collection

The data collection was coordinated by the senior researcher who assisted in the design of the five school districts mentoring programs and was also a member of the training team for each district. Each year of the study, planning committee members, program coordinators, and administrators were interviewed a minimum of four times. That process was repeated in each district. Data reduction occurred each year of the study and there was no conscious attempt by the researchers to replicate the commonly occurring themes. The following identifies the four steps used to collect data:

(1) In step one of this study, data were collected from administrators, planning committee members, and program coordinators in October, February, April, and June of the first four years. During the last two years of the study, data were collected each month for nine months during each school year and Critical Friends Group Coaches were also included as members of the rural school district's leadership team. Both formal and informal interviews were used at each collection point. Additional data were gathered from informal and formal conversations as well as observations by the senior researcher. The interview, conversations, and observations were a part of an ongoing evaluation of the mentoring programs and the leadership teams. There was no intent by the researchers to prompt the participants to answer in any specific way.

(2) In step two, challenges were identified in the surveys by the researchers. Interviews, conversations, and observations were transcribed verbatim and were read one at a time and problems were recorded. The discussions regarding the interviews and conversations were analyzed by reflecting on the data and reducing the data to a manageable form, which allowed the researchers to compile a list of common themes that identified challenges encountered by program planning committee members, administrators, coordinators and CFG coaches.

(3) The third step identified those challenges in step two that were recurring on a regular basis throughout the school year for the leadership teams. The third step identified recurring themes that the leadership teams from the five school districts were encountering on a regular basis throughout the school year. Those themes are identified in Tables 1 – 4. Participants were interviewed again by the senior researcher in small groups and individual

settings over the school year. The objective was to collect additional data through in-depth formal and informal interviews that would provide a more detailed description of the recurring challenges encountered by participants. The interviewer took field notes that provided more detail to the survey data and then transcribed them immediately following each session. Interviews were conducted onsite with program coordinators, program planning committees, administrators and CFG coaches throughout the school year. Interviews with mentoring program planning committee members were 45 minutes on average and interviews with program coordinators were 60 minutes on average. Interviews with administrators were typically 30 minutes in length and interviews with CFG coaches were typically 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted to discuss the types of challenges that were encountered by the various groups participating in the mentoring programs and to help the researchers form a clearer picture of the challenges. From the data gathered in the first three stages, the researchers applied a standard of selection with regard to the challenges leadership teams encountered to determine which recurring problems would be addressed through the implementation of intervention procedures. The standard of selection i ncluded the following: the problem had to occur on a regular basis throughout the first 5 months of the school year and the leadership teams had to identify the problem as a concern that was not resolved within the first 5 months (Kilburg & Hancock, 2006).

(4) In stage four, intervention strategies were selected after the senior researcher consulted with the individual mentoring program coordinators, planning committee, and administrators. The responsibility of the senior researcher was to provide data regarding the recurring challenges and then assist the individual leadership teams in deciding on the type of intervention strategy to implement. After the intervention strategy had been implemented, members of each leadership team were interviewed regarding the strategy for the purpose of determining its success or failure.

Results
In responding to the first research question, leadership team members from five school districts identified a variety of problems that they encountered either as a single event or as an event

that recurred over the course of the school year. Although leadership team members identified a variety of challenges, they did not include all of the problems that they encountered, just those they considered major concerns. The problems identified in each table are a composite of all the school districts problems for the year and are not listed in priority. The data indicated the following findings.

The First Year
Two school districts participated in the study the first year. The two leadership teams were composed of 15 planning committee members, 4 administrators, and 2 program coordinators. All 21 members of the leadership teams participated in the interview process and although they all identified problems that continually impacted the mentoring program, both leadership teams were satisfied with the mentoring program for the first year. In addition to identifying problems they encountered, the members of the leadership teams also identified problems that they encountered on a recurring basis. During each year of the study, each school district began their mentoring program with a group of teachers new to the school district.

The lack of time was typically the common factor in all of the problems. Figure 1 identifies the common problems that the leadership teams in both school districts encountered as well as those problems which continued throughout the school year.

Figure 1. Recurring Problems Encountered by Leadership Teams, Year 1

Planning Committees

(1) Funding

(2) Issues that need to be addressed as a result of evaluations by mentoring team members and program coordinators.

(3) Lack of time

Program Coordinators

(1) Lack of time

(2) Not all problems are visible

(3) Push backs

(4) Daily details

Administrators

(1) Lack of time

(2) Conflict of interest

(3) Money

(4) Majority of administrators were not included in the mentoring program.

The Second Year
During the second year, four school districts leadership teams participated in the study. A total of 10 administrators, 4 program coordinators, and 31 planning committee members were interviewed.

Figure 2. Recurring Problems Encountered by Leadership Teams, Year 2

Planning Committees

(1) District anomalies

(2) Funding

(3) Issues that need to be addressed as a result of evaluations by mentoring team members and program coordinators

Program Coordinators

(1) Lack of time

(2) Push backs

(3) Daily details

(4) Not all problems are visible

(5) No compensation

Administrators

(1) Dealing with conflict

(2) Lack of time

(3) Funding

The Third and Fourth Year
Only two school districts leadership teams participated in the third and fourth year. The two school districts included one metropolitan and one rural school district. The small rural school district was new to the study. Six administrators, two program coordinators, and six planning committee members were interviewed. All of the planning committee members were from the small rural district.

The problems encountered and the recurring problems were essentially the same for both years, with a few minor variations. As we have considered whether or not this finding of consistency could be

an artifact of our scoring, we could not identify any confounding or biasing factors.

Figure 3. Recurring Problems Encountered by Leadership Teams, Year 3 and 4

Planning Committees

(1) District anomalies

(2) Funding

(3) Issues that need to be addressed as a result of evaluations by mentoring team members and program coordinators

Program Coordinators

(1) Lack of time

(2) Not all problems are visible

(3) No compensation

(4) Difficulty with some staff and administrators

(5) Push backs

(6) Daily details

Administrators

(1) Lack of time

(2) Lack of financial support

The Fifth and Sixth year
During the fifth and sixth year of the study, only one new rural school district participated in the study. There were eight members on the planning committee, one program coordinator who was also the Director of Student Assessment, eight administrators, and 20 Critical Friends Group coaches participating as the district's leadership team. During the sixth year of the study, the program coordinator became the assistant superintendent at the beginning of the sixth year and a new coordinator was hired from within the mentoring program. The leadership team was also expanded to include eight literacy and peer coaches, as well as a Director of New Teacher Conversations.

This district's mentoring program was unique in comparison to the four other mentoring programs in this study, in that it was for all teachers instead of just teachers new to the districts. This mentoring program had four levels where the other districts had only one level where a mentor was paired with

a new teacher. The four levels that were part of the mentoring program for all teachers included level one which was a mentoring program for teachers new to the school district and included a School Support Person (SSP) that was responsible for mentoring from 1 to 3 new teachers in their building. The second level was a group of 8 mentors that had been trained as Critical Friends Groups Coaches (CFGC) and facilitated the monthly New Teacher Conversation (NTC) workshops. The third level of mentoring involved any veteran teachers and new teacher that wanted to participate in a Critical Friends Group in their school. The fourth level was established during the second-year of the districts mentoring program and included coaching services provided by Literacy and Peer Coaches to all teachers in the district.

It is important to note that the problems and reoccurring problems which were identified were essentially the same with a few exceptions for the fifth and sixth year of the study.

Figure 4. Recurring Problems Encountered by Leadership Teams, Year 5 and 6

Planning Committees

(1) Funding

(2) Issues that need to be addressed as a result of evaluations by mentoring team members and program coordinators

Program Coordinators

(1) Lack of time

(2) Push backs

(3) Not all administrators were willing to set time aside for CFG

(4) Not all problems are visible

(5) Topics for NTC

Administrators

(1) A few unwilling to participate

(2) Lack of time

(3) Funding at building level

CFG Coaches

(1) Time (Cancelled CFGs)

(2) Push backs

(3) Not all administrators were willing to set time aside for CFG

(4) Reasons for participating in CFG

Teachers' Reponses to Intervention Procedures
Once a recurring problem had been identified as negatively impacting the mentoring program, intervention procedures were introduced by a planning team, a program coordinator, or an administrator from the school district. The senior trainer and researcher from the Mentoring Institute consulted with each school district regarding the intervention procedure that was to be implemented.

After an intervention was introduced, the senior researcher and trainer for the mentoring programs surveyed and interviewed the mentors and new teachers before and after workshops, as well as by email. The mentoring program coordinators as well as the facilitators for the workshops, played an important role in providing additional information through regular meetings with the senior trainer regarding problems that mentoring team members were encountering. Confidentiality was maintained during these meetings. The senior researcher found all of the participants in the study to be quite candid in their conversations, giving both positive and negative feedback. For the purposes of confidentiality, the terms coordinator, planning committee, administrator, new teacher and mentor have been substituted for the individual's names. The following are responses by the mentoring teams and the program leaders to the intervention procedures.

Planning Committees
One of the most important resources in planning a mentoring program is funding. Unfortunately, three of the five district planning committees were unable to produce all of the funding necessary for the implementation of the mentoring program during the first year. The seed money that was used to implement these programs came from a small grant to each of the districts from the state department of education and a limited amount of staff development monies from each school. Despite the lack of funding, the planning committees in the three programs made the decision to move forward and implement their programs, even though mentors and program coordinators received no stipend and there was no release time for observation.

The intervention strategy for the three districts was to apply for additional grants from state and private organizations and request an increase in the district budgets for staff development, as well as identify the mentoring program as a new line item.

Another issue planning committees faced on a regular basis was addressing problems or concerns mentoring team members and program coordinators had as a result of data collected through surveys and interviews. Those problems or concerns that negatively impacted the program included, but are not restricted to:

(1) Determining topics that new teachers to the district would need to know

(2) Trying to find time for meetings to occur for both new teachers and mentors

(3) Release time for observations

(4) Getting the school boards to provide the appropriate funding for the mentoring programs

(5) Convincing two administrators that they needed to provide staff development monies and time for the mentoring teams in their schools

(6) One building administrator would not support the mentoring program

The intervention procedure that was introduced for determining the worthiness of the topics was to survey new teachers and determine topics that would increase their knowledge and skill level with regard to their professional development. It is also important to note that the planning committees realized that not all of the new teachers to the district would see the importance of some of the topics in the beginning and only time and experience would provide that insight.

Having enough release time was another problem that all of the mentoring programs faced. The intervention strategy introduced by all of the planning committees was to seek funding for release time. The rule of thumb, according to leadership team members, seemed to be "something was better than nothing." The planning committees were very aggressive in trying to provide release time for those important mentoring conversations. In some circumstances, the district found staff development monies to pay for the release time. In other circumstances, building administrators volunteered to create release time for mentoring

teams by taking one of the team member's classes in order for members of the mentoring teams to observe one another.

One school district's planning committee was confronted by a veteran building administrator who said he was willing to participate in the new mentoring program for his school but then didn't. He did not provide opportunities for mentoring teams to meet, nor did he willingly assist the new teachers or mentors or willingly provide staff development opportunities for the mentoring teams in his school. He was also found to continually complain to the teachers in his building and to the community about the school board and the superintendent, who was also the program coordinator, about the mentoring program, along with a number of other issues. In this situation, the planning committee felt that the superintendent needed to intervene. The superintendent, with the school board's approval, dismissed the principal from his position during the school year and replaced him with another administrator who was supportive of the school district and the need for continued professional development at all levels.

Program Coordinators
The mentoring program coordinators felt that time was one factor that negatively impacted not only their work, but the mentoring teams as well. When asked for further explanation, their responses were similar. Program coordinators felt as though they were always on the "fast track" in answering questions in a timely fashion, providing appropriate resources, and in general, meeting the needs of "everyone" in the mentoring program. In a majority of cases, the coordinators were able to meet the needs of the mentoring teams through immediate call backs and/or meetings with the mentoring teams within a 12 hour period. One new teacher characterized her district's coordinator's intervention in the following way:

I've really appreciate how quickly the coordinator has been able to respond to questions that my mentor and I have had. I know that they are extremely busy with all of their responsibilities, but it's real obvious that she is committed to providing a quality environment for mentoring to take place.

Unfortunately, no matter how hard some of the coordinators worked to provide time for new teachers to meet on a monthly basis, there were

usually at least two or three new teachers in each district who were critical of the time spent in meetings. They argued that some of the content wasn't as helpful as they would have liked, their daily schedules were already pushing the limits of their endurance with preparing lessons, grading, meeting with parents, and attending other meetings.

The issue of time also impacted many of the coordinators' work schedules. Each coordinator was working in either a full-time teaching or administrative position, and the coordinator position was in addition to their contracted position. The intervention that was introduced by two planning committees prior to the start of the second year was to provide financial compensation for the extra duty assignment as mentoring coordinator. The following comment by one of the two coordinators reflects the response to the districts willingness to support their work by providing an increase in salary.

It was really wonderful to know that the district was willing to recognize the importance of the work I was doing. I feel like they appreciate the efforts that I'm making on behalf of the teachers and I hope that they continue the effort. . . I know that one of the reasons that have been so supportive is because of the work that the assistant superintendent has done on our behalf.

One school district had a most unusual problem that was considered an anomaly by the senior researcher in that he had never seen or experienced this kind of behavior before in a school district that was developing and implementing a mentoring program. After a series of formal and informal interviews with the superintendent and several teachers, the researcher found that the problem was related to a lack of trust, which had been exacerbated by a series of disciplinary actions by the school board and superintendent prior to the start of the mentoring program. Collectively, these seemed to be a death threat to the success of the mentoring program the first year.

In trying to remedy the problem, the superintendent felt that establishing a mentoring program could provide healing within the district and hopefully bring a positive response to the existing problem between the leadership and the teachers. After the planning process for the mentoring program had been completed, there was a sense of relief on the part of those teachers and administrators who

participated in the planning. However, during the mentoring program's first in-service at the beginning of the school year, the senior trainer was confronted by one of the mentors who was very upset with the administration and wanted to spend the time talking about his concerns in the presence of the new teachers and the other mentors. The following excerpt shows some of the senior trainer's thoughts during the first couple of minutes of complaining.

I can't believe what I'm hearing. I can't believe this guy is grinding his axe in our first meeting. You'd think this guy would know better. This can't continue. This guy's going to ruin everything we've worked for.

After the in-service was over, the senior trainer met with the coordinator who was also the superintendent, to assess the impact of the in-service. The senior trainer shared that the in-service in general had been successful based on the evaluations by the mentoring team members and by his own reflections at the end of the day. However, the trainer also shared with the program coordinator that he felt "blindsided" in the first activity and then went on to explain what happened. The coordinator had the following response:

I'm sorry I guess that I should have told you that you could have run into this problem, but I didn't want to have you worry about that before the in-service, and I also didn't want to contaminate how you might look at some of the veteran teachers, and in particular, the mentor that was giving you a hard time.

As a result of that conversation, the mentor was "relieved of his position because of the negative comments that he made regarding the principal and the school board" (Kilburg & Hancock, 2006, p. 1331). When the new teacher found out that his mentor was being relieved of his position and another veteran teacher who was a positive force in the school was volunteering to mentor him, he was elated. The new teacher felt the mentoring coordinator was looking out for his best interests and he considered that as a positive step, not only for him, but also for the mentoring program.

For a majority of the program coordinators, push backs were another problem that they had to deal with on a regular basis. Most, if not all of the interventions which were employed in these

situations, involved one-on-one conversations with the individual about how they were going to resolve the situation. The problem solving process worked very well for almost all of the coordinators. Unfortunately, two of the coordinators were not able to encourage or persuade two principals who were unwilling to provide the time needed for participants in their building to meet on a regular basis. The principals' argument was that time was at a premium and they only had so much time to advance their own agenda.

Program coordinators also encountered problems that were not always on their radar screens. The coordinators understood that as much as they might try, they were not going to be able to identify all of the problems in the beginning and that was part of the learning curve. In all but one situation, the coordinators were able to effectively manage those unforeseen problems. Typically, the problems encountered included miscommunication between mentoring team members, personality conflicts, concerns about the lack of time, and the lack of emotional support. For the most part, all of these situations were managed through one-on-one conversations with the mentoring program coordinator and mentoring team members utilizing coaching and problem-solving strategies.

In one specific case, the mentoring coordinator was not informed of the problems that one new teacher was encountering at a middle school with regard to classroom management. Although the mentor and principal made every effort to assist the new teacher, in the end the new teacher resigned because he was not able to cope with the problems he was having with classroom management. After talking with the mentoring coordinator about the circumstances, the response was:

This was really an unfortunate circumstance. I wish that I would have known about it earlier. I think that we might have been able to provide additional assistance, although that might not have guaranteed his success.

After meeting with the coordinator, the senior researcher met with the new teacher to hear his perspective. The following is part of the conversation that the new teacher shared with the researcher.

I don't blame anyone for what happened. My mentor tried to help me as much as she could but I

just never seemed to get comfortable with the classroom management. I knew that I would probably have problems with that but I thought because of my age and my life experiences that I might not have that problem . . . I've never been much of an authoritarian and the kids picked up on that right away and I never seemed to recover. . . I think it's time to retire and do something else and that's okay with me.

Administrators
Time was a problem for approximately 50% of the administrators. Since the planning process for three of the five mentoring programs did not take place until four months before the mentoring program was to be implemented, administrators did not have time to create teaching schedules that permitted time for the mentoring teams to meet during the school day. The intervention strategies that the administrators agreed upon, but only half of those building administrators were actually able to carry out, was to provide a substitute and/or the administrator would take a class for one of the mentoring team members. Although in retrospect this intervention strategy had merit and did provide release time, it also took away time from the administrators' busy schedules. Unfortunately, there were numerous times when an administrator had committed to providing release time, but because a parent or student needed immediate attention, they were unable to substitute for the teacher.

In several districts, veteran teachers who were not part of the mentoring program volunteered to assist the new teacher and mentor by taking one of their classes during their own preparation period. In both cases where the building administrator and the veteran teacher provided release time, mentoring team members appreciated the thoughtfulness and the willingness of other staff members to help.

Funding at the building level was also a concern for building administrators, because the budgeting process for the new school year had already been established prior to the implementation of the mentoring programs and no money had been allocated for the implementation of the mentoring program that year. The intervention strategies that 95% of the administrators used to provide funding for the mentoring teams in their buildings included use of staff development monies, discretionary funds, as well as Title II funding. Although the administrators were not able to provide all of the

funding the mentoring teams needed, they still had a sense of satisfaction in knowing that they were able to provide release time for observations that the district did not have the funding for during the first year.

During the fifth and sixth year of the study, the building administrators typically had to deal with two recurring problems. The first problem was trying to provide staff development time for the Critical Friends Group monthly meetings. Four of the eight schools had built time into their monthly staff development schedules for the CFG meetings during the school day. However, there were four schools that had not built in time during the school day for the CFG meetings, so the teachers were meeting on their own time without compensation. It is important to note that none of the teachers voluntarily participating in the CFG ever requested compensation, but were still willing to attend those monthly meeting as time permitted in their schedules. The intervention was to have the program director and the assistant superintendent contact the individual principals and have a conversation regarding the value of the CFG and the potential positive impact that it could have on the students. This conversation is still ongoing at the present time.

Critical Friends Group Coaches
The fifth and the sixth year of this study were the only years that CFG Coaches were part of a school districts' mentoring programs. Without question, time was the biggest problem for the coaches for a variety of reasons. Not all building principals had scheduled staff development time during the school day for the CFGs to meet. At least half of the schools in the district did not have release time during the school day and so the teachers met after school hours in order to have the time needed to work together in the CFGs. The district is currently working on requiring their principals to include the CFG as part of the regular staff development during the school day, once a month. However, not all of the principals are in agreement with providing the time for the CFGs because it takes time away from their agendas and that is not a practice some administrators are willing to let go. At the present time, the program coordinator and assistant superintendent are continuing to dialogue with those administrators who are unwilling to commit the time for the CFG.

Some CFGs continue to struggle with finding time to meet because of the teachers' busy schedules. Unfortunately, parent conferences, coaching, single parents with children, planning, grading, among others commitments, compound the amount of time not available for some teachers in the CFGs. As a result of this problem, one veteran teacher, who was also a CFG coach, had this to say:

It's great to have the time set aside during the school day to meet once a month, but a few of the schools aren't provided with that opportunity because of the resistance by the principal, which is too bad.

It seems as though the principals who are currently participating in the Leadership CFG, which is led by the assistant superintendent, are the ones who make the release time available for the CFGs; and those principals that don't participate are the ones typically that don't provide the release time because of their own agendas.

Several other CFG coaches had this to say regarding principals who were not willing to provide the release time for the CFGs to meet.

Although it is discouraging that we have to fight so hard for the release time, we know that the assistant superintendent, who helped design the mentoring program, and the mentoring coordinator will continue to encourage the principals to include the CFG meetings as a part of their school day once a month . . . all we can do is keep working toward that goal.

It is interesting to note that in several of the schools that provide dedicated release time for staff development, CFGs are just one of the optional professional development activities that teachers can choose to attend during that time period. Because there is a choice, some teachers will select the CFG because it is the least invasive as far as the menu of activities. The coaches who facilitate these CFG recognize that is "just the way things are going to be for some of the teachers." In the end, the coaches hope that the conversations teachers have in the CFGs are ones which will lead them to a better understanding of the need to examine problems from a variety of perspectives as well as demonstrating the value of working with a community of lifelong learners.

Conclusion

This study seeks to illuminate some of the problems leadership teams encountered on a recurring basis and the responses to intervention procedures that were introduced. By reflecting on and verbalizing the challenges that they encountered on a regular basis, all of the leadership team members were better able to understand many of the problems encountered and deal with them more effectively. The potential value of reflecting and verbalizing the challenges provides university personnel and school district personnel with another lens through which to view the challenges encountered by leadership teams and how they manage those challenges in a way that is helpful to participants in the mentoring programs.

The researchers believe that the real value of this study rests upon documenting a more complete account of problems mentoring program leaders encounter as they work through the transitional process of developing and sustaining new mentoring programs.

Planning and carrying out regular conversations with mentoring teams regarding their practices helps build confidence and a professional culture that values relationships, reflection, and collaborative practices. Some of those conversations, which are included in the recommendations, need to explore self-assessment as a regular part of the reflective process. Part of managing the health of any mentoring program is developing an assessment process that is in the best interests of all the participants.

Finally, our data show that school district personnel and education faculty need to share the results of their investigations build on the limited research base that currently exists in the professional education literature. As educators learn more about the problems leadership teams encounter, they will be in a better position to more fully explore those intervention strategies that are so important to the professional growth of the participants and the program. It is important to monitor the progress of our efforts through well-designed research for the duel purpose of informing practice and policy and discovering those questions that have yet to be asked.

Recommendations for Future Research

The significance of this study does not rest on these results and conclusions, although they are helpful in providing insight into the types of remediation strategies that are being used by the five leadership teams in this study. This study's real significance lies in creating a research agenda that examines in greater depth the intervention procedures, the idiosyncratic behavior of leadership team members and mentoring team participants, and

what the structure of effective leadership in mentoring programs should look like. Based on this study, the following is recommended for future research.

First, leadership teams who encounter problems on a recurring basis should more closely examine and continually assess their methods of problem solving with regard to intervention procedures. The purpose of examining their own practices is fourfold: (1) to make sure that mentoring teams receive the assistance they need in a timely manner; (2) to carefully monitor and receive feedback on their own actions; (3) to help all participants in the mentoring program understand that they are valued; and (4) to provide a more detailed account of the effectiveness of the leadership team.

Second, there should be a closer examination of how mentoring program leadership teams positively and negatively impact mentoring team relationships and the management of the mentoring program.

Third, there is a need for more understanding of the idiosyncratic behavior of some members of the leadership teams. This has specific implications for the preparation of members of the leadership team.

Finally, the researchers recommend the use of a quasi-experimental time series design with regard to the four recommendations. The time series design would examine intact leadership teams that were encountering problems on a recurring basis at each school district over a period of one to five years, which of course, is dependent on the length of the mentoring program. Intact leadership teams would be assessed repeatedly to determine the types of problems encountered and the intervention procedures that were used. After the intervention had been completed, the intact groups would be repeatedly assessed to determine the effectiveness of the intervention procedures.

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