

# **Does Mentoring Make a Difference? An Investigation of a Mentoring Program's Impact on First Year Building Principal's Practices and Self-Efficacy**

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## **Introduction**

Decades of research have suggested that the initial years of the principalship are critically important. Existing research has suggested that mentors are key to providing knowledge, time, and commitment to support educational leaders who are transitioning from classroom teachers to leaders of change. The current investigation examines the impact of a yearlong mentoring program developed and delivered through the Educational Services Center of Cuyahoga County, through grant funds provided by the State of Ohio Department of Education. Specifically, the data examines the impact of the programming on first year principal's practices, as measured with the Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), and first year principal's self-efficacy using the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) inventory. In addition to the pre- and post-administration of these measures, participants provided an open-ended personal reflection at the end of the yearlong program. Results of this investigation reveal significant increases in both areas of self-efficacy and leadership practices. Qualitative responses support the programs positive impact on first-year principal's performance and experiences. Suggestions are provided for maximizing the effects of similar future programming.

## **The Impact of Mentoring on First Year Building Principal's Practices and Self-Efficacy**

Leadership is one of the most difficult terms to define in education today, but much emphasis is relegated to it in terms of instructional leadership's critical importance in raising student achievement. Katzenbach and Smith (1992) stated that "leadership has traditionally been synonymous with authority and authority has traditionally been understood as the ability to command others, control subordinates and make all the truly important decisions yourself" (p. 129). So, we have become enamored with the traits, characteristics, behaviors, roles, styles, and abilities of leaders who have obtained leadership positions and we continue to know little else about the term. Rost (1991) analyzed a total of 587 works that referred to leadership in the titles, yet found that roughly half of the works failed to define leadership. While there is a plethora of instructional leadership research, there is little agreement on a concise definition of instructional leadership (Higginson, 2011). To add to this dilemma, it appears that while there remains an absence of a solid definition for the leadership in education, the meaning is changing, and in an attempt to shift to a new paradigm, while the old paradigm has never been truly understood.

In an article titled *How Can We Train Leaders If We Do Not Know What Leadership Is?* Barker (1997) maintains that "knowledges [sic], skills, abilities and traits of the leader which are presumed to be the most successful in getting followers to do what the leader wants them to do" best fits the definition of leadership in the field of education (Barker, 1997, p. 344). Barker indicated that the word leadership could be used to indicate an ability, skill, or relationship. When focused upon as abilities or traits, he intuitively felt that leadership "serves two important social functions: hope for salvation and blame for failure" (p. 348). The result is a cycle of leaders that do not have the time, the energy, or support necessary to effect the change and sustain the effort, drive, and vision that can positively impact student outcomes.

## **Principles of Principals**

Although many elements can factor into the improvement of student achievement, some factors are external and are not within the sphere of what the teacher is able to manipulate. This parallels with the role of the principal and those factors that are not within their sphere of having an effect upon the teacher. According to Tubbs & Garner's (2008) research on the impact of school climate, leadership was considered to be "essential for developing and retaining a quality work environment, and ... faculty and staff consistently rank leadership as the most important factor affecting their work environment at school" (p. 25). In a similar vein, Andrews and Soder (1987) found that there was a positive relationship between quality of leadership and student performance. Specifically, student achievement data revealed that the gain scores of students in strong-leader schools were significantly greater in both reading and mathematics than those of students in schools with average or weak leadership. Andrews and Soder concluded that "the principal is the key to facilitating decisions that affect not only the working conditions of the school, but also those professionals who work in it" (p.49). Merely by "increasing teacher's [*sic*] perceptions of administrative support" in order to "increase administrator's' [*sic*] knowledge" of the standards so they can be applied consistently has been shown to make a significant difference to teachers (Tickle, Chang, & Kim, 2011, p. 34) resulting in a significant difference for the students. If the impact of what positively influences teachers in the classroom can be assessed and related to the principal's behavior, the principal can directly impact student achievement through exhibiting those skills.

## **Instructional Leadership**

"Leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning." (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010, p. 3). Leadership and student achievement

are associated, but due to their position, principals inherently influence achievement most directly through the work of teachers. Assessments for how principals impact student test scores and how their performance leads to student achievement and growth (leadership practices, school improvement plans, teacher retention, etc.) are the focus of current evaluation systems. Research has revealed that there is not a “single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership” (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 1). By taking a proactive stance through principal preparation through early supervising, supporting, and mentoring, the impact of first-year principal’s on student achievement can be accelerated.

### **Principals’ Mentoring Program**

There are standout programs that are heavily involved in supporting principals through high-quality, sustained mentoring and professional development. In some arenas, mentoring is provided during pre-service training and into the first years of the principalship (Corcoran, Schwartz, & Weinstein, 2012). The activities are embedded into the district culture and may include several days of collaborative learning with national experts, receiving up to two years of mentoring by highly trained retired district principals, completion of a self-assessment, role playing and simulations mimicking the realities of an actual principalship and providing seminars or group exercises (Corcoran, et al., 2012).

Through these types of activities, the principals gain an understanding of the district tools and practices. The New York City mentoring program seeks to develop a set of personal qualities and behaviors typically associated with leadership effectiveness that are organized into nine competency areas: personal behavior resilience, communication and the context of learning, focus on student performance, situational problem solving, learning, supervision, management and technology (Corcoran et al., 2012). It is subsequently evidenced through research that the

“quickest way to change the effectiveness of a school, for better or worse is to change the principal” (Mendro, 1998, pp. 263-264). The evaluation of principals must be based upon standards, which are linked to student results (Stronge, 2013). According to Stronge, certain behaviors, when implemented effectively, will result in improving student progress (student achievement). The actions include building and sustaining a robust school vision of learning, sharing leadership with teachers, leading a learning community and monitoring and supporting high-quality curriculum and instruction. “Leadership with a purpose” is central to raising student achievement (Stewart, 2013, p. 49).

### **The Study**

This current investigation examines the impact of the Beginning Principals’ Mentorship Program (BPMP, 2013) develop to reflect existing knowledge on effective mentoring of new principals. The BPMP began as an outgrowth of Principals’ Discovery Network in in Northeast Ohio. The Principals’ Discovery Network was a pilot for 10 principals that was initiated at the beginning of the 2012/2013 academic year. The planning process aimed to develop a program that would capitalize on principal expertise, leadership theory, and the mandated practices from the state level. The goal of the programming was to extend what was already in place in existing principal preparation programs. The intention was to form a professional learning community that would expose new administrators to development activities to improve their leadership skills.

The BPMP program delivery was through a coaching model in which trained mentors would focus on the beginning principals’ individual needs, provide feedback on performance, and offer technical assistance in such areas as communication, team building, instructional leadership, family engagement, time management, and the use of data to improve student achievement. Each

first-year principal was assigned to a mentor, and mentors and the beginning principals had specific responsibilities that they were to carry out to completion of the program, including but not limited to ongoing communication, meetings, assigned readings, and feedback on inventories and surveys.

The purpose of the current investigation was to examine the effects of mentoring on beginning principals. The study design is best described as a mixed- methods investigation incorporating an abductive reasoning approach through a multi-phase data collection process. The research questions for the study were: (a) What are the benefits of a mentorship program for beginning principals?; (b) What activities are necessary to provide effective mentoring for beginning principals?; (c) Has the mentoring provided the participants with the support needed to navigate their first year experience?; and (d) Is there an impact on the participants' leadership perspectives as measured by Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practices Inventory?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The selection of participants was made through contact with all 31 counties that were members of the Greater Cuyahoga County Administrators Association (GCCAA), the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators (OAESA), and the Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators (OASSA). All of these organizations were informed of the BPMP program for any beginning principal or assistant principal who wanted to participate.

The participants who volunteered included eight female participants and 11 male participants. Nine were employed as high school principals, five were employed at the middle school, and five were employed at the elementary school. Five were hired as assistant principals, of which, three were at a high school level and two were at a middle school level.

There were two Black participants, one male, and one female. The ages ranged from mid-20s to mid-40s. The majority of the districts were suburban, with two that were rural, and one that was urban/suburban. For the purposes of this investigation, the participants' involvement in the program activities was accomplished via typical case purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used when a specific group of individuals is sought out for participation (Trochim, 2000).

### **Instrumentation**

The current investigation will also include responses from a pre/post administration of the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council Self-Assessment modules (OLAC, 2012) and the Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practices Inventory (2000) and an open-ended questionnaire developed to understand participant's perception of the program activities. The Ohio Leadership Advisory Council Self-Assessment module (OLAC, 2012) is used to help individuals determine their level of self-efficacy useful for school improvement. At the completion of the self-assessment, individuals receive a recommendation regarding which OLAC modules can help address the areas that indicate the least confidence. The self-assessment can be taken more than once in order to improve the score as the individual develops in these specific areas, through on the job training and resources available through OLAC, and, in this case, mentoring. This assessment was administered at the beginning and end of the program.

The Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practices Inventory (Self) (2000) consists of actions selected from the five exemplary practices of effective leadership. The Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) was selected to gather additional information beyond what was required by the original grant program deliverables. In the 30-question survey, the practices are translated into behavioral statements. Although there is an observer-based tool for

leaders and managers, a separate 360° tool that can be used separately during the mentor evaluation phase of the program, it will not be utilized in this phase of the project. The five practices in the LPI (Fullan, 2007) are: (a) Model The Way; (b) Inspire a Shared Vision- Leaders ; (c) Challenge the Process; (d) Enable Others to Act; and, (e) Encourage the Heart - Leaders (Fullan, 2007). The LPI survey was selected to measure the impact of mentoring beginning principals to improve their instructional leadership skills. Reliability estimates for the LPI (Self) have been found to range from  $\alpha. = .75$  to  $.87$  in a number of studies including roughly 350,000 participants (Posner & Kouzes, 2012). This assessment was administered at the beginning and end of the program.

In addition, to allow participants an opportunity to expand or react to specific topics, qualitative, open-ended questions were utilized. These questions were developed in cooperation with the grant stakeholders and were piloted with stakeholders for appropriateness and relevance to the programs goals and the focus of the current research. The goal of this additional questioning is to provide participants with the opportunity to inform how well this mentoring program met their needs, as well as what else might be added to improve the program. They were administered electronically mid-way through the program and included the following items: What mentoring program activities helped you become a more effective principal this year? What are the top three benefits that made this a successful mentoring experience? In your experience, what activities are necessary to provide effective mentoring for beginning principals? What components of the mentoring program do you perceive as beneficial? In your opinion, has the mentoring program provided the beginning principals with the support needed to navigate the first year experience? (If yes, how so? If no, why not?) What activities and/or program components would you include to make the experience highly

successful? What activities and/or program components would you exclude to improve it?

Lastly, on a scale of 1-10, with one indicating not much and ten indicating greatly, how have you benefitted from the program?

### **Program Delivery Procedures**

Mentees were selected based upon the requirement that they are a first year principal or assistant principal. Upon completion of the program, participants are paid a stipend of \$500 for their sustained involvement in this program. The mentors selected were paid a \$1000 stipend for their participation and meeting the hourly requirement (weekly contact of an hour) in meeting with the principals outside of the formal program hours.

During the initial meeting, the beginning principals were expected to share their ideas for personal goals they hope to accomplish during the program as well as specific program goals that they want to have included in the program. Five face-to-face coaching sessions were facilitated by two co-facilitators, the grant coordinator and an assessment coordinator, both of whom are a part of the leadership team to provide the professional development (PD). This PD takes place at the County Educational Service Center. During the months that the group does not meet face-to-face, the mentors communicate with the beginning principals via the phone, email, social media, or face-to-face. Trained mentors focus on the beginning principals' individual needs, provide feedback on their performance of duties, and offer technical assistance in a variety of areas that are aligned to the Ohio Principal Standards.

Activities include content to ensure there is a clear understanding of the challenges of a beginning principal and activities that promote a deeper understanding of the standards for principals and teachers. Mid-way through the program, the mentors meet separately from the beginning principals to collaboratively discuss their mentoring experiences and challenges. At

each of the face-to-face group meetings, mentees are afforded the opportunities of in-basket challenges, case studies, and other activities, with time allowed for discussion around management skills concerning time management/organization, career planning, and implementing Board of Education policies/procedures and handbooks.

Mentors were required to read *Blended Coaching: Skills and Strategies to Support Principal Development* by Bloom, Castagna, Moir, and Warren (2011), and beginning principals read *What Great Principals Do Differently* by Todd Whitaker (2011). One session was dedicated to modeling and discussion to support development in the four primary elements of OPES: (a) goal setting, (b) formative assessment, (c) performance on principal standards, and (d) the development of student growth measures. Mentors were selected and approved by a superintendent, unless they are retired, then other references must be made available. Mentors develop (individually or jointly) a principal resource toolbox that includes strategies and/or current topics such as Student Learning Objectives (SLO). Full details of program activities are available upon request.

## **Results**

### **Demographics**

The response rate for the data collection was 76.3%. Participants included 19 first-year principals from Northeast Ohio. These participants included n = 11 males (57%) and, n = 8 females (42%), with 2 participants identified as Black (10%), 15 participants identified as White (80%) and 2 participants identified as Other (10%). Respondents were asked to give their role assignment according to whether they were housed in a high school, middle school, or elementary school, and if they were head principal or assistant principal. Table 1 represents the role assignments of each of the participants.

Table 1 *Role Assignments of Principals*

Assignment	# in BPMP	Percent
High School Head	3	16%
High School Asst.	4	21%
Middle School Head	3	16%
Middle School Asst.	2	11%
Elementary Head	5	26%

Additionally, participants indicated that 3 (16%) were working for a rural school, 11 (58%) were working for a suburban district, 3 (16%) were working for an urban district, and 2 (10%) were did not identify their district’s topology.

### **Reliability of Responses**

Each subscale of the LPI instrument was analyzed for reliability, independently and globally.

As indicated on Table 2, reliability estimates are presented for all pre-measures, post-measures, and the latent variable measures of the sentence LPI.

Table 2 *Pre-, Post-, and Latent Variable Measures of the Leadership Practices Inventory*

Factor	Pre	Post
Model	.77	.77
Inspire	.77	.86
Challenge	.71	.79
Enable	.57	.75
Encourage	.85	.90

Cronbach’s alpha indicated acceptable reliability on many of the sub-constructs, however, the pre-test of the Enable factor ( $\alpha = .57$ ) demonstrated weak reliability estimates (Field, 2009; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Specifically, Cronbach’s alpha that approximate  $\alpha = .70$  are deemed ideal, with lower levels indicating potential reliability issues (Tinsley & Weiss, 2000).

However, reliability estimates are strongly influenced by sample size, and, it is expected that

the limited sample of responses is impacting these values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Data were checked for any outliers and mis-entries, and the values do reflect the responses of the participants.

### Analysis of Pre- to Post- Changes

T-test results for the LPI pre- to post-testing are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Paired Samples Test Data on LPI*

Factors	Paired Mean Differences	<i>t</i>	CI
Model	-2.55	-4.37*	-3.78, -1.33
Inspire	-4.34	-5.86*	-5.89, -2.78
Challenge	-4.31	-6.70*	-5.67, -2.96
Enable	-1.86	-3.93*	-2.86, -0.86
Encourage	-1.12	-1.31	-2.91, 0.66

Note: \* indicates significance at the  $\alpha \leq .01$

The greatest pre- to post-test differences are found with the *Inspire* factor and the *Challenge* factor, followed by the *Model* factor. Significant differences are found from pre- to post- for all of the LPI factors, with the exception of the *Encourage* factor (when evaluated at an  $\alpha = .01$  level). Additional dependent sample *t*-tests were conducted to assess changes from pre- to post-test on the OLAC Inventory. These results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Paired Samples Test Data on OLAC*

Factors	Paired Mean	<i>t</i>	CI
Data Based Educational Reform	-0.22	-7.54*	-.28, -.15
Leadership	-0.22	-4.69*	-.33, -.12
Collaboration	-0.30	-7.56*	-.39, -.21
Teaching & Assessment	-0.21	-3.66*	-.34, -.08
Curriculum	-0.17	-5.48*	-.24, -.10
Differentiation	-0.23	-6.41*	-.31, -.15
Technology	-0.17	-2.94*	-.30, -.04
Community Engagement	-0.18	-2.49*	-.34, -.02
Resource Allocation	-0.26	-5.29*	-.36, -.15

Note: \* indicates significance at the  $\alpha \leq .01$

As indicated in Table 4, the greatest pre- to post-test differences are found with the factors of

Collaboration, Resource Allocation, and the Differentiation factor. Significant differences (when evaluated at an  $\alpha = .01$  level) are found from pre- to post- for all of the OLAC factors, with the exception of the Community and Engagement factors.

### **Qualitative Feedback**

Participants responded to survey questions mid-way through the intervention, which were directly linked to the research questions of the current investigation. The responses to these questions can be provided up request. These responses were aggregated into the final analysis of the data. In addition, at the conclusion of the program activities, many participants provided written reflections regarding their program experiences. A number of themes were identified from these post program reflections, including the mentor/beginning principal relationship, support through communication, and the networking opportunities.

### **Relationships**

The relationships built throughout the course of the program were important as one principal shared, “Having a ‘point person’ to address concerns with was highly valuable this year. It was helpful when meeting with my mentor and sharing my concerns, successes, and failures, to hear from a veteran that I am normal, that my experiences are normal, and that I am working in the right directions.” Another principal stated that following a veteran principal of nine years was difficult, but his reflection about his mentor was that, “He gave me guidance on multiple occasions, gave me direction in dealing with staff members and their issues, and gave me material I could use to deal with the issues I was addressing.”

More than one principal described the program as providing a “safety net” and one went on to say that the “safety net relieved some anxiety for me in my first year. My mentor definitely was!” In looking to the future, another emphasized the importance by saying “I should say [he]

is a great mentor because the relationship will not end any time soon.” Throughout the feedback and surveys, one outlier was clearly not benefitting from the program. I presume this was the same individual, who commented, “Aligning a mentor and mentee appropriately is critical.” This same participant went on to strongly highlight the importance of having actively employed mentors. “Eventually, when you hear ‘I never had to deal with that much at the elementary level’ – you give up on going out of your way to make the call – because you have no more information that [sic] you started with to solve the problem that is in front of you and just killed and hour of your time.”

All other principals said many positives about their experience with their mentor. As one participant shared about her mentor, “she was extremely approachable and understanding when I would ask questions that were so ‘first year.’” It is important to note that there were other comments about the importance of actively employed mentors, but the other benefits of the program outweighed that drawback for the other participants.

### **Support Through Communication**

The support provided to the beginning principals was evident through their comments and was interesting because, clearly, the need for reinforcement was needed. One participant said, “I have continually called on (mentor name) experiences, being able to bounce my ideas for specific situations. This is done with the assurance [sic] we are speaking in confidence and I can continue to develop my leadership style.”

The approach of the mentor taking the lead and jumping in to assist was evident through the words of one participant who stated that his mentor would always ask, “What do you need? What issues are you having? It was this type of conversation that allowed him to diagnose some things that I might need without knowing and he would provide guidance, resources, or both.”

A lack of communication was also evident for one participant who highlighted the absence of the interaction between the meetings. It was stated, “I would have liked to have a group email going with a group of five or six principals throughout the entire program. This would be a great way to ensure dialogue and support.” The comment of one participant who stated, “...having connections like that to call when a challenge arises is comforting!” This indicates the importance of the regularity of the meetings and/or interaction with the mentors through phone calls, emails, texts or in person meetings to sustain the relationship between the mentor and beginning principal.

### **Networking**

Networking was the third theme that stood out as vital as a sustainer for the participants more than the program. As one participant shared, “The establishment of a network of other beginning administrators is highly valuable as we face challenges typical of entry year administrators.” One noted that just being with people outside of district proved especially enlightening, “This allowed me to hear fresh perspective on the content taught in college. This widening of perspective was one of the highlight [sic] for me of this mentorship program.” Others stated that “I also was able to network and form new relationships with other administrators”; “the large group meeting allowed for new principals to not only create a social network, but helped us in creating an outlet for issues” and finally the gratitude that they were able to “network with so many talented, knowledgeable professionals.” To sum it all up, one participant said, “If I had to choose only one benefit of the BEGINNING PRINCIPAL MENTORSHIP PROGRAM, it is that the program exposed me to a support system that includes other ‘rookie’ administrators being led by seasoned veterans who are thriving and surviving in the profession.” It is evident that many of these participants will continue reaching

out to one another and networking due to the implementation of this program.

### **Mentor Feedback**

Mentors also provided a self-reflection about the program. Most mentors indicated the benefit of being a mentor. Several statements addressed this mutual benefit from the mentors' point of view, as they indicated:

- *Worthwhile endeavor for both the mentors and mentees;*
- *these opportunities were beneficial for both of us;*
- *I had the opportunity to ask how he handled some of the things I had questions about;*
- *I learned many new strategies....the networking is invaluable;*
- *I hope that we can continue our relationship;*
- *I believe that I grew as a building principal....a new perspective...to grow as a leader;*
- *It allowed me to reflect on my practices....learned a few new ideas; and,*
- *The discussions and sharing of information benefitted all members of the program.*

This feedback from the mentors provided evidence of an unexpected consequence of their program participation. Their reports that mentoring was both a positive and reciprocal experience may facilitate the acquisition of new mentors in the future.

### **Discussion**

The general purpose of the current investigation was to examine the effects of mentoring on beginning principals. The year-long investigation examined the impact of a mentoring program for beginning principals. Data indicates a number of benefits of the mentorship program for the beginning principals. Participants indicated the greatest pre- to post-test difference in the area of collaboration on the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC, 2012). On the Leadership Practices Inventory, the greatest pre- to post-test difference was in

the Inspire a Shared Vision factor. This factor is exhibited by a leader who shows passion about making a difference and inspires everyone about the possibilities for the future. Every participant indicated that communication, including collaboration and group discussion, was beneficial on the open-ended questions. Additionally, the participants stated that having an actively involved, currently employed mentor was important. These results are consistent with the findings of Hipp and Bredeson (1995) when they reviewed items that indicated those that could influence a difference within the classroom. Some of those influential items were communication, which was highly rated on the OLAC as well as the open-ended questions when combining collaboration and communication. Another influential item was empowering staff, which is similar to the LPI factor, Enable Others to Act. This factor is exhibited by a leader who fosters collaborations and builds spirited teams. A third item that Hipp and Bredeson indicated was inspiring group purpose, which has the same characteristics as the Inspire a Shared Vision factor.

These researchers also noted that modeling instructional expectations (similar to the LPI's Model the Way factor) resonated with participants. When leaders Model the Way, they model the way goals should be pursued and how people should be treated. They went on to say that the principal could be "the key to facilitating decisions that affect not only the working conditions of the school, but also those professionals who work in it" (p. 49). Herein lies a connection between principal actions and teacher application.

Walker and Slear (2011) also denoted the importance of communication and collaboration as key for principals to retain teachers as well as keeping them satisfied. Finally, Marzano (2012) cited cooperation and collaboration as one of five domains for principal actions and behaviors. Several respondents indicated that networking with other beginning principals was

vitaly important and beneficial to the mentoring experience and beyond. This is contrary to previous research as indicated by Davis and Hensley (1999) who reported on the politics of the principals' evaluation. They focused upon the importance of principals developing interpersonal relationships with school stakeholders, negating the importance of collegial networking. Unlike other notable mentoring programs previously mentioned, the Beginning Principal Mentoring Program was funded with plans and a program for only one year. Therefore, certainly the beginning principals would believe that the support of the mentors and the networking of other colleagues would purportedly end when the program ended. They articulated the importance of this networking so that perhaps it would continue formally versus informally. While no plans were in place to ensure that participants and mentors continued to maintain their communication and network, building in this mechanism could be a recommendation for future mentoring programs. The format of this would serve the members of each cohort specifically.

Notably, the only LPI factor not shown to be statistically significant was Encourage the Heart. When leaders Encourage the Heart they accomplish extraordinary things by keeping hope and determination alive and people feel good about themselves. It appears, based upon participants' post-survey responses that this is not as important, which contradicts the findings of Goodnight (2004). Goodnight suggested that a democratic leader acknowledges that each person has worth and esteem, open communication should be fostered, and the environment is highly positive and motivation-oriented. Similarly, Depaul (2006) stated that communication is the foundation to an evaluation system that will aid the principal in the development of those skills that are necessary to lead a school. Principals are more focused upon raising test scores and sometimes forget to reward members of the team for their efforts and to celebrate the good

things that are done that test scores don't show.

### **Beneficial Activities**

This research sought to understand what activities are necessary to provide effective mentoring for beginning principals. Participants indicated that the activities that were necessary were a meaningful agenda, an actively employed mentor, on-site observations, face-to-face meetings, and, above all, collaboration/communication. In addition, they enjoyed sharing and listening, guest speakers, and discussion. Activities are not just miniscule components of a principal's dossier as Davis and Hensley (1999) noted. The importance of composing and documenting professional activities within the portfolio of a principal's evaluation is critical. These activities are professional in scope to improve leadership capabilities, not just a series of fun and games. These types of activities are consistent in programs researched by Corcoran, et al., (2012), where mentoring is provided during pre-service training and into the first years of the principalship so that they are embedded into the district culture and the activities. These standout program activities could include completion of self-assessments, role-playing, simulations, mimicking the realities of an actual principalship, and group exercises. This type of pre- service training did not reflect the implementation of activities in the Beginning Principals' Mentoring Program, which were coordinated after the principals were hired.

Unlike the implementation features of the BPMP, the New York City (Corcoran, Schwartz, & Weinstein, 2012) mentoring program sought to develop a set of personal qualities and behaviors typically associated with leadership effectiveness, and only two of the nine competencies from that research were directly focused upon in the current program: communication and situational problem solving. Whereas, the other five areas: personal behavior resilience, learning, supervision, the context of learning, a focus on student performance, management, and

technology, were not targeted. This counters the importance that previously was placed upon instruction by earlier researchers as important for principal training and behavior/characteristics that they should exhibit in order to be effective (Heck,1992; Hipp & Bredeson,1995; Marzano, 2003). Again, these inconsistencies may be due to the current political landscape which sole concern is test scores.

Seventy-six percent of participants indicated that mentoring provided the participants with the support needed to navigate their first year experience. Two respondents had mixed reviews about the program with one stating that the program would have been more supportive if the mentoring would have been on-site and added that it would have been better to have the elementary and high school principals meet separately. Additionally, one principal said the mentor was a sounding board and someone to turn to when things got overwhelming. These comments are aligned with earlier research regarding the support that is necessary to ensure principals are successfully navigating the early years of their tenure.

The Wallace Foundation (2012) extensively studied and cited their findings in a publication entitled *The Making of a Principal, 5 Lessons of Importance*. Two of these lessons were about the support needed before hiring and after hiring: providing pre- service training for aspiring principals, first year assistance for high-quality mentoring, and professional development tailored to individual needs. Mendro (1998) maintained that “for better or worse” there is a correlation between the effectiveness of the principal and the effectiveness of a school. Therefore, it logically follows that providing the new principals with good support is critical. Only one principal answered no, the program was not supportive. This result may have been due to the fact that the mentor assigned was not a currently practicing administrator, therefore he was not “experiencing the same challenges” which the mentee thought as important.

The Vanderbilt Assessment for Leadership in Education (2009) stated that learning-centered leadership behaviors should be assessed during principal preparation (Porter, Murphy, Goldring, Elliott, Polikoff, & May, 2008). This is contrary to the process with the BPMP participants. The BPMP worked with principals already hired, not those in college preparation or programs to get hired. A best practice would be the mentoring of educators in their final year of securing a principal license. Activities could include shadowing a principal to see first-hand their job duties.

The International Summit on the Teaching Profession (Stewart, 2013) examined several countries that were considered excellent in teaching lessons about defining the role of school leaders. They emphasized that best international practices target four areas in making a difference: purposeful recruitment, continual development of skills through high-quality training, intensive mentoring with ongoing job-embedded coaching, and systematic feedback.

Only one of these tools, intensive mentoring, mentioned at the Summit was emphasized during the Beginning Principal Mentor Program. Unlike the Summit data, the Beginning Principal Mentoring Program was not involved in the recruitment of principals, and the program did not focus on continual development of skills, nor provide participants with systematic feedback until the end of the program. These tools are critically important to the success of leadership development of the principal. As such, job-embedded coaching may have happened inadvertently only as a result of the participants' requesting the presence of the mentor at their school.

### **Kouzes & Posner's Leadership Inventory Results**

What impact did the BPMP have on the participants' leadership practices, as measured by Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practices Inventory? As evidenced by the improved pre- to

post-test ratings on the LPI results, there was a positive, significant impact found for all factors except the Encourage factor. In the open-ended questions, participants mentioned an improvement in their leadership skills due to their involvement in the program. This is consistent with research focusing on leadership skills as the priority, primarily due to the high stakes accountability mandates that are part of the new evaluation system for principals in the state of Ohio.

The Leadership Practice's Inventory assesses the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. These practices focus on the leader and the followers' relationship. The Inspire factor was highly rated. This is likely due to the importance of leaders having a clear image of the possibilities of their organization, if they persuade others to foster their belief in a common goal. Leaders step out in faith to accept the position, and the Challenge factor is about not accepting the ordinary, but striving for the extraordinary.

During this era of accountability, the leaders cannot be in charge and alone, but with group purpose, they challenge others to "get with the program" and make a difference. First and foremost, the leader must be credible if she/he is to going to be effective. Credibility occurs as principals Model the Way through example and commitment to the task in an effort to create progress and build the momentum to reach the highest goals achievable. The principals cannot improve student achievement, but they can Enable Others to get the job done. When the building administrators are on cue with this factor, they will foster collaboration and strengthen others. Confidence will build, risks will be taken, growth will occur.

The area that was not significant in the current investigation was Encourage the Heart. For example, when a group of people are forever identified by a decline in scores on an annual test and/or an increase that is miniscule, the group can give up hope for the lack of progress not

made. A leader must show appreciation and create a climate of camaraderie through celebration. This feeling of community spirit can carry a group through the toughest of times and keep them motivated and focused on the work that must continue for the future.

Additionally, a principal evaluation was highlighted in the research conducted by Lyons (2002), who asserted that a solid evaluation system must be aligned with the leadership skills of a principal to be effective. Leadership was found to be second only to classroom instruction in influencing student learning, based on a decade-long study by Louis et al., (2012). Leadership was further identified as pivotal to student success by teaching staff as important to their development and retention (Tubbs & Garner, 2008). These staff rated leadership as the most important element to affect their teaching environment.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of the current investigation was the limited number of participants. The invitation to participate was open for up to 40 participants; however, this program only served 19 beginning principals who volunteered to participate. However, this small sample provides a representative sample of new principals in county. Likewise, the participants were nearly all from the inviting county; therefore, generalizing these results beyond this area of the state should be done cautiously.

### **Conclusion**

Hipp and Bredeson (1995) stated “the principal is the key to affecting not just the work conditions, but also the professionals in the building” (p.49). Walker and Slear (2011) postulated that when implementing key behaviors for individual teachers, the potential exists to unlock tremendous positive advances for the teacher and students. When the principal is able to exhibit a model of leadership, the performance of the followers can be elevated to a height that

would not be expected (Barnett, Marsh, & Craven, 2005). Mentoring can make a difference in providing support through communication, networking and building relationships as they improve their instructional leadership skills, thus having positive impacts on student achievement.

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